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OCTOBER 1998 • ISSUE 183

The #1 PC Game Magazine

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We'll Tell You p. 90

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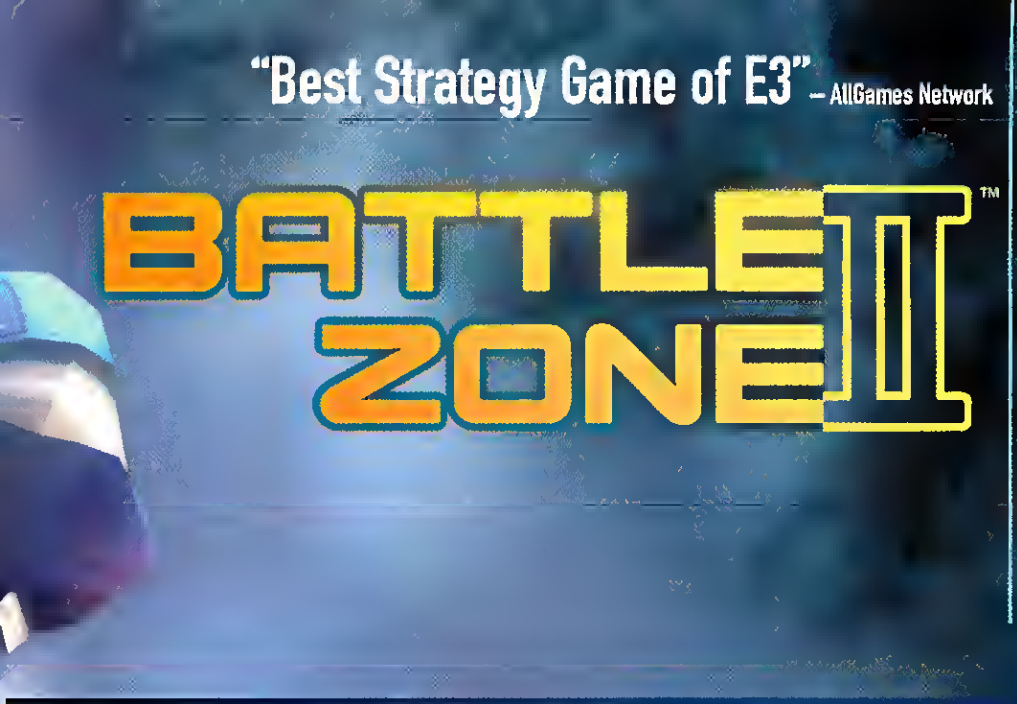

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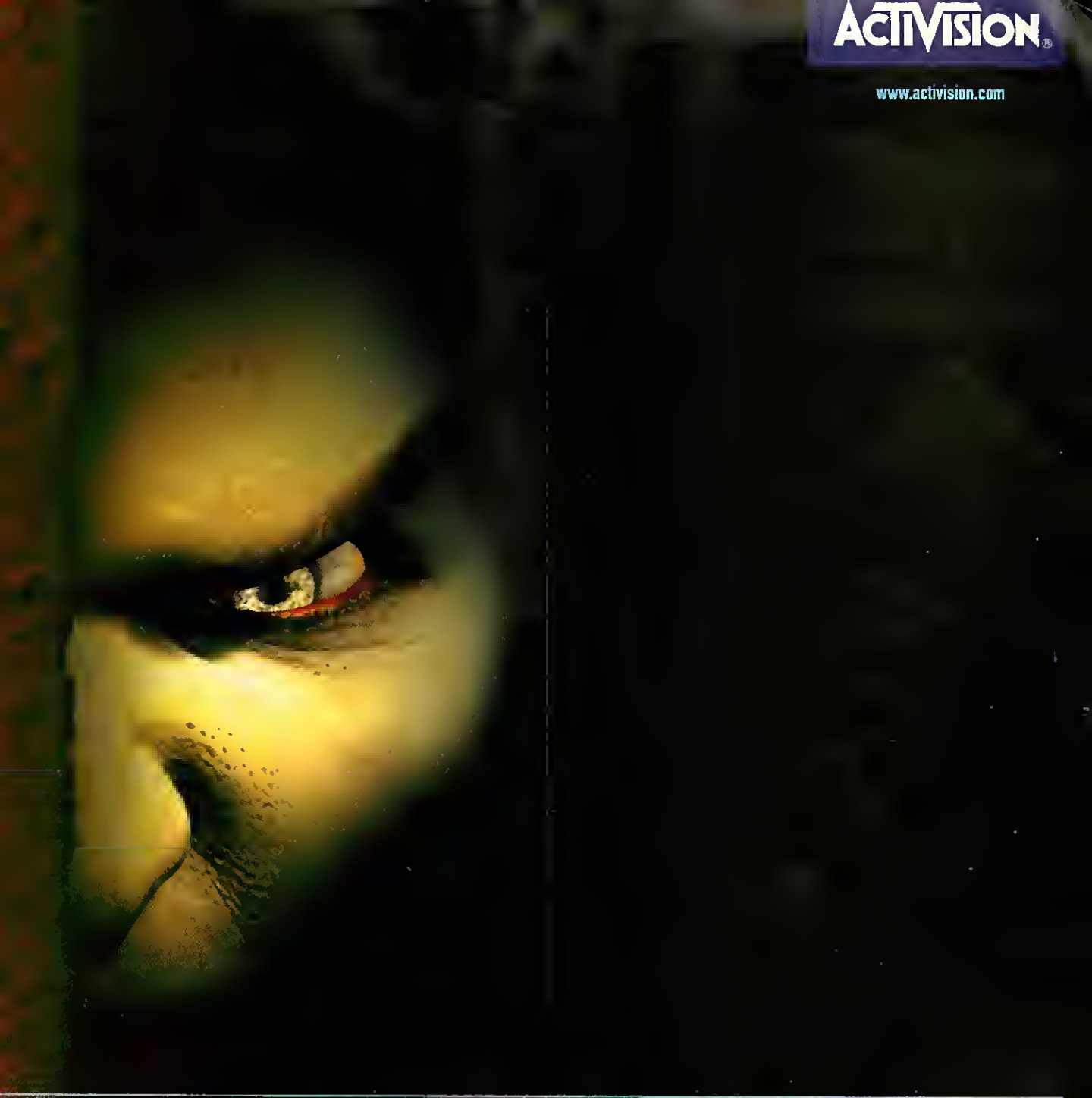

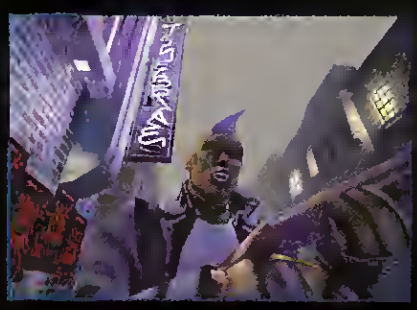

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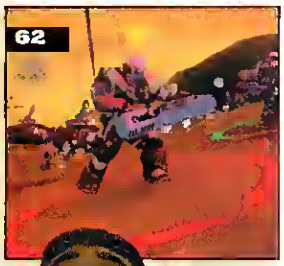

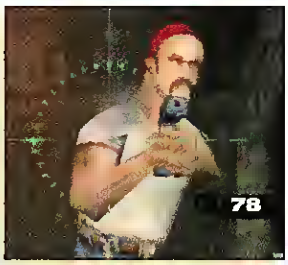

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

OCTOBER 1999 • ISSUE 183

COVER STORY

Hands-On Report!

Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun

We sent our boys Robert Coffey and Tom Price to Las Vegas for a choice mission: Play the hell out of COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN and give us the skinny on this long-overdue, highly anticipated game. **90**

FEATURES

Tactical Simulations Situation Report **110**

The special-operations shooter exploded onto the gaming world in a big way last year with Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX. Now, a brand new wave of spec-ops games are upon us, all promising the ultimate in combat realism. We assembled a team of real-life commandos to check out DELTA FORCE 2, ROGUE SPEAR, SPEC OPS II: GREEN BERETS, and SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE and tell us what it's *really* all about.

Football Roundup **126**

It's kickoff time at last for the new NFL season, but George Jones is nowhere near a TV. Why? Because he's been checking out the latest generation of PC football games, and he likes what he sees.

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Dark Reign 2
The first game got lost in the glut, but this sequel hopes to break out of the RTS rat pack with a new 3D engine. 62

Theme Park World
Design and ride your own theme park attractions, and then send them to your friends 68

Prince Of Persia 3D
A much-loved side-scroller returns to the PC in 3D. 72

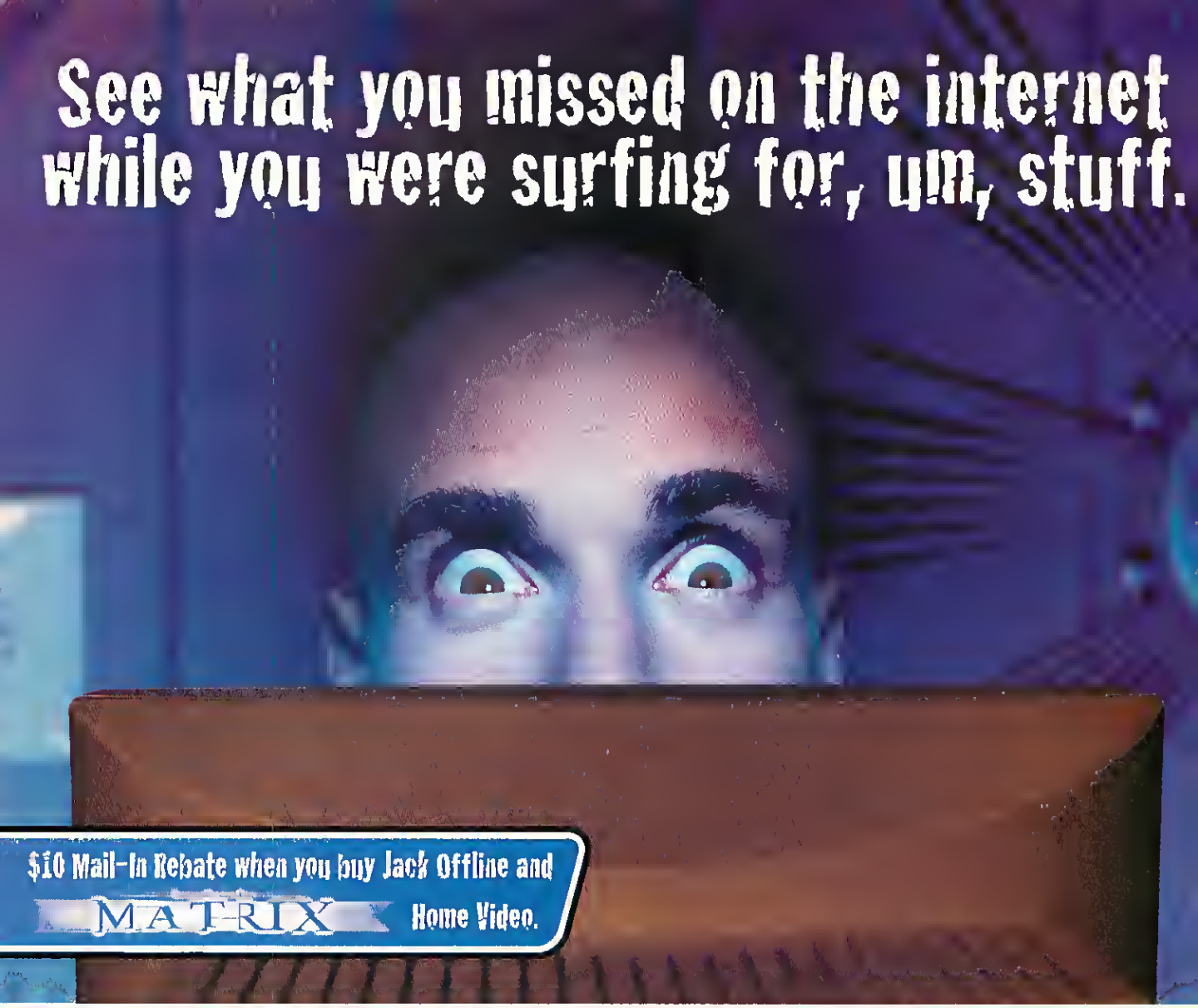
Soldier Of Fortune
Kill. Reload. Repeat. 78

Warlords: Battlecry
WARLORDS in real-time? Yet another omen of the apocalypse. 80

Asheron's Call
Big Bad Bill Gates wants a piece of that multiplayer RPG pie. With this tasty morsel of a game, he may just get it. 82

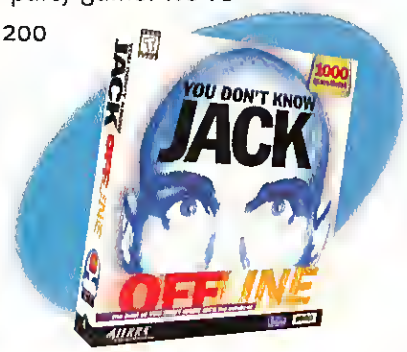
Nox
A DIABLO-alike with a strong, original multiplayer angle. 84

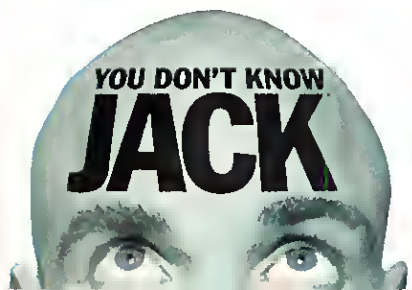
See what you missed on the internet while you were surfing for, um, stuff.



The best of the Net Show and a whole bunch more.

While you were in some dark corner of the internet, you missed a really good time. YOU DON'T KNOW JACK®– The Net Show is the award-winning online version of the irreverent quiz show party game. We've taken 800 of the best questions from the Net Show and combined them with 200 more to create YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Offline™. It features the same nuclear-powered attitude as always, but with new gags, new graphics and a whole new category of question—the Pissed About A Question Question. JACK fans tell us how we screwed up, and we use their letters to ridicule them in classic JACK style. As usual, nothing is sacred. So the next time you're looking for fun, forget the rubber gloves. Get YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Offline.





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ON THE CD

Check out this month's CD for all the hot new demos!

Nocturne
Desert Fighters
Jack Nicklaus Golf
Panzer General 3: Assault
Outcast
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Starfleet Command
Warhammer 40k
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- **Jane's A-10 Crashes and Burns**
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- **No Naked Pictures of Lara in London**

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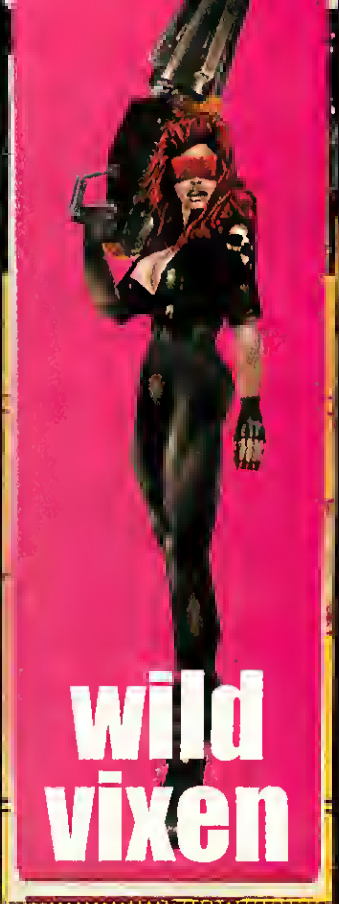

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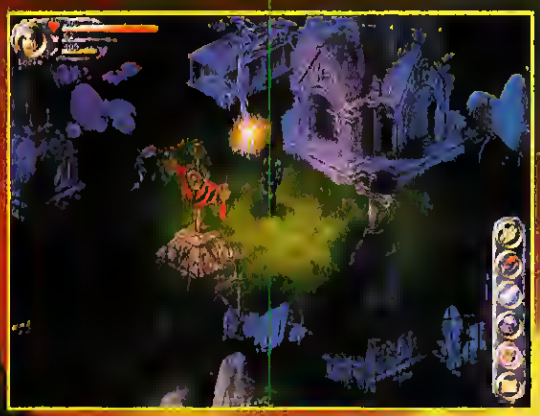

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Computer Gaming World 6.0

Four months ago, the combined editorial might of *Computer Gaming World*—which, when properly harnessed, has been known to make small children spontaneously burst into tears—locked themselves into a windowless conference room in the basement of the local Hyatt to talk about The Future. We came up with about 363 different ways to improve the look of the magazine. We laughed, we cried, we held hands, and we talked—a lot—about our hopes for a dreamy-looking *CGW* 6.0. And then we turned it all over to Art Director Steve Wanczyk, and waited anxiously to see the results.

Steve, to his credit, considered all of our ideas...and then threw them out. You know why? Because editors have no aesthetic sense whatsoever. How are a group of guys who have the collective artistic mind of an almond going to make a magazine look better? To us editor-types, the most beautiful-looking story in the world is text with a stamp-sized screenshot. No, if Steve had listened to us, the new and improved version of *Computer Gaming World* magazine you now have in your hands would be neither new, nor improved.

"...editors have no aesthetic sense whatsoever. How are a group of guys who have the collective artistic mind of an almond going to make a magazine look better?"

To Steve's credit, he has been extremely patient. When we talked about things like "white space" and "gutters"—words editors use when we have no idea what we're talking about—he shrugged his shoulders, smirked, and went back into his office. In fact, with the exception of that one time when he crushed Editorial Assistant Tom Price's head between the elevator doors, it was smooth sailing.

For all the appealing aesthetic changes inside, our core mission is not changing one iota. In fact, with the addition of our Inside Gaming section, which offers opinions and analysis on all the major game genres, I hope you agree with me when I say that *CGW* is now even closer to our goal of being the ultimate, definitive word on PC gaming.

Want to comment on the redesign? Interested in writing for CGW? Let George know at george_jones@zd.com. CGW

George Jones

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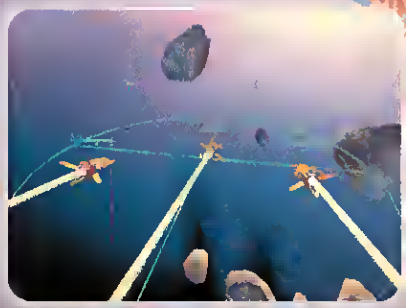

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Count Geiger's Blues

It's About Time, Johnny Wilson!

Sometimes, you have to take what Kierkegaard termed the "leap of faith." Sometimes, for your own personal growth and satisfaction, you have to leap the chasm of the unknown – even though you don't know what awaits you on the other side. I've been writing for *Computer Gaming World* for more than 17 years. I've done everything from pasting address labels on envelopes, manually entering Top 100 data into a spreadsheet, and cleaning toilets to speaking around the world at conferences, on television, and on radio on behalf of *CGW* and computer entertainment. I've been privileged to visit the world's top designers in order to bring sneak previews and behind-the-scenes stories. Most importantly, I've had a wonderful tenure in determining the editorial content of the world's oldest and finest computer-game-specific magazine. With its founder, Russell Sipe, I helped to shepherd the magazine in your hand from 5,000 subscribers and about 15,000 readers in the early '80s to its current status of over 300,000 paid readers.

In the process, I saw the PC game industry move from square, blocky images of light on a black, amber or green screen to its current spectral panoply of color depth. I saw PC game marketing move from the days when Mom-and-Pop computer stores carried game disks and monochrome manuals in ziplock bags to the period where you can buy games in discount superstores. I saw the market broaden from predominantly wargamers and role-players to a variety where there is something for everyone.

I was chastened by my own myopia and naivete, even as I admonished designers, executives and readers for their own lack of vision and understanding.

●●●

Few people laugh anymore when I talk about computer gaming becoming a mass market entertainment experience. Even though we've been through Round One and Round Two of the so-called media convergence, I think there are more rounds to go, and I don't see as many eyes glazing over when I talk about the connected household of the future. We're headed for exciting times in online gaming, and I'm opting to become part of it. I'm stepping into a new position where I can serve on the boards of directors of companies who are making these exciting games, and I'm hoping that I can feel as much like a pioneer in the next generation of gaming as I felt like in the last.

So, I'm leaving *CGW*, and I wanted to say a few words to all of you, including those of you who feel that I've cast aspersions on your favorite gaming genres, publishers, or designers, and those of you who felt that I was cramming an unwanted dose of pretentious, pedantic castor oil down your throats. To everyone who remembers my blunders or thinks I pontificated too much in these pages, I'd just like to say the following. There have been many times when I was chastened by my own myopia and naivete, even as I admonished designers, executives and readers for their own lack of vision and understanding. A lot of people over the years have believed that I was arrogant and out of touch. I can only say that I worked very hard to stay in touch with this industry and I *never* believed that I knew *enough* about it. I will still be learning about this industry until the doctor fills out the death certificate. I really do care. Perhaps, I care too much.

I started writing for *CGW* as a gamer first and a writer second. I'll leave *CGW* as a gamer. When I first met many designers, executives, and technicians in this industry, it was as a fan. I wrote about these people because they fascinated me, and I wanted to share them with all of you. I'll continue to be a fan. I wrote my sometimes pompous editorials because I'm a true believer in interactive entertainment, and I wanted to do what I could to make it better. Even as I leave the best pulpit in computer gamedom, I leave as a true believer.

I recently read a marvelous science-fiction novel by Michael Bishop. *Count Geiger's Blues* is the story of a critic who becomes a hero, someone who becomes a doer instead of a commentator. At one point, the critic writes his farewell column to his readers. My eyes and throat went through the kind of emotional calisthenics that might cause onlookers to doubt my manliness. I determined that when I wrote my farewell column to you, I would use a portion of it. How I resonate with the sentiment expressed here!

"*But, most of all, I thank the would-be artists who strive to show us the rainbow, and the beholders among us who seek to see as rainbows the jury-rigged arches winched into view by their hopeful makers. Sometimes the noise is horrible. Sometimes the guy-ropes are harder to see than threads. Sometimes the sky is afire with color and light and passion. Sometimes...*"

Here's to all of the design teams that try to show us the rainbow. Sometimes, we can't see the colors for the clipping problems. Sometimes the frame rate seems like a PowerPoint presentation. Sometimes, we are swept into virtual worlds afire with conflict and love and passion that are seamless enough to make us forget our everyday problems and experience the ecstasy of victory.

GAME OVER, MAN! Or maybe, this last column from the old geezer of computer gaming is just the beginning – for all of us.

Johnny leaves us to become Publishing Director at Wizards of the Coast. We wish him the best. CGW

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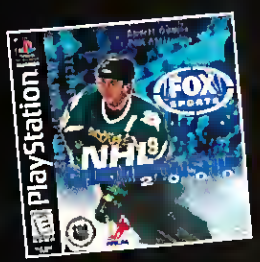

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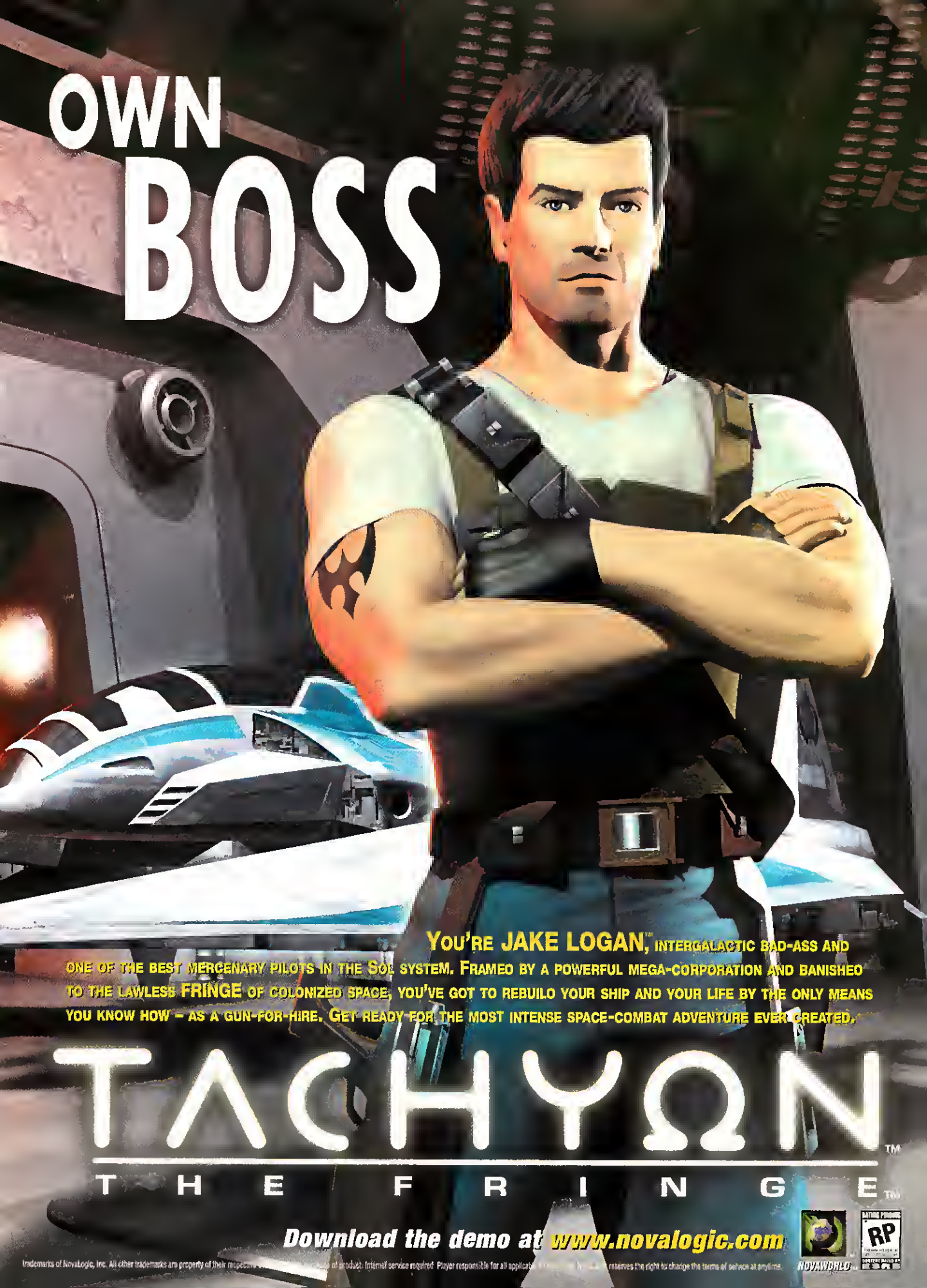
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Bad Taste?

In your August issue, you represented a five-star rating with a Three Musketeers bar, and a four-star rating with a Snickers. How can you possibly prefer the limp and overall boring flavor of the former with the hardy nuttiness of the latter? I know when I need a chocolate fix, nothing satisfies like a Snickers. No, I don't work for Snickers; I'm simply a concerned reader who feels it is his duty to point out the grave lack of taste on the part of the individuals responsible for that section. For shame!

Jason Rabin
Montreal, Canada

Most of us couldn't agree with you more. The individual responsible for the gaff has nougat for brains. Which, to our surprise (and hist), we found quite yummy.

Atriarch's Matriarch

I'm really excited to see ATRIARCH mentioned in your magazine (August "Pipeline"). Unfortunately, none of the information is correct. The company name is World Fusion, and the release date has not been announced yet. ATRIARCH is a massively-multiplayer, online, persistent game based on an original science-fiction universe. It is currently in development. Thanks.

Serafina, Lead Game Designer, World Fusion

Thanks for the clarification. We received a ton of letters asking us to cover your game. Call off the spamming campaign and we'll take a closer look in the next month or two. In the meantime, interested gamers can peep at www.atriarch.com.

Oni Baloney

In your August issue you state that the upcoming third-person-perspective game, ONI, sports "sharp anime style—inspired by *Ghost in the Machine*..." I think not! *Ghost in the Machine* is a cyber thriller chroni-

With respect to the violence in gaming issue, I would first like to say that I don't want to be anyone else's parent. As Charles Barkley once said, "I am not a role model." However, I do believe that just to say that it is the parent's sole responsibility to regulate what their children are watching or playing is a little naïve.

The point is that there are boundaries that most people would not like to cross. You can call these whatever you like–moral, ethical, political, religious, legal, whatever. It really doesn't matter what you call them, they do exist. If they didn't, a game where the object was to push human beings into an oven in 1940 Germany and Poland would not be met with outrage. There are times when things go too far or are just plain wrong.

It seems that in today's gaming world most publishers and developers are always trying to push that envelope. How violent can it be? How graphic can it be? How sexy can it be? How far can we go?

Look, I don't want to build a bridge. I don't want to start a village. All I want is that maybe we should be trying to push that envelope in the other direction just a little.

Tony Travers
San Diego, CA

We agree, Tony. The concept of parentel responsibility does not free game publishers of their own rasponsibility. And gama publishers can go too far. Deciding what "too far" means, though, is a really sticky mattar. We do know that we don't want some entity in Washington meking the call. And parents taking more interest in their childrens' medie consumption can only help matters.

Ultimataly, the best we can do is talk about the issue, to keep a constant dielogue between game publishers, the gaming press, and game players. We're glad to get letters like yours and we encourage othars to write to us and to publishers. The publishers push the violence envelope because thay think gamers want them to. Well, do you?

Walk the Talk

I am a long time reader and fan of *CGW* and find it unfortunate that the hypocrisy of your July issue requires comment. As Johnny Wilson notes in his eloquent editorial on violence and gaming, "*CGW* has advocated content labeling for all games since 1990." You also advocate the ESRB rating [*actually, it's*

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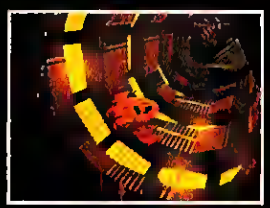

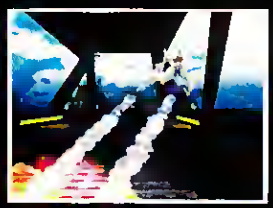

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the RSAC] approach because of its emphasis on evaluating the content of games. Bravo! I have enjoyed games that I felt are inappropriate for younger gamers, and feel that this is the correct approach to help parents monitor the content of the games for their children. I am also very aware that most individuals are able to play these violent games and enjoy them in context. The sick individuals who commit heinous crimes will do so whether the catalyst is a video game or 10 years working for the United States Postal Service. It is slightly different when discussing the adolescent psyche, however. In no way, though, should these games be banned. The need for self regulation of the gaming community is articulated very well by Mr. Wilson.

With that said, how the heck could your magazine package extremely violent crap like KINGPIN in your CGW July CD. There was no warning I could find, and this program is available to millions of children through your magazine. If any game needs an "R" rated label, it is this program. It is just not appropriate for younger gamers. Please be more careful in the future, and if you advocate content labeling try to practice it. With that said, off to play more HEROES III.

Colin Linehan
Maryland

Great point, Colin. As something of a "publisher" of game demos, we're just as responsible for content labeling as the game publishers are. We did include a warning with the KINGPIN demo, but it obviously wasn't prominent enough. We'll do better in the future.

cling the story of a single mother tormented by the computerized ghost of a serial killer. This, to all of you who aren't animation fans, is known as a live action. The movie that inspired ONI is none other than Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, based on the manga by Masamu Shirow.

Although this small mistake is deemed trivial, I don't think that anyone should get credit for another person's success. Thus, I am quick to point out this mistake

Nathaniel Plain

Can't Beat It

I just finished playing the BEATDOWN demo from your July '99 issue, and it really stank! What sort of criteria do you use in selecting the demos that go into each issue?

Josh

We charge a buck a meg. Just kidding, it's two bucks.

We allocate space on the disc based on gameplay quality, with preference towards interactive demos over non-interactive movies. But if we have extra space, we try to include every new demo we can get. Not all are winners, but that's the point of a demo, no?

Vox Populi

I'd like to thank Loyd Case for his article on voice communication software (July, page 90). I am a frequent player of TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC (ain't we all) and communication is the hardest thing about it. But, today I picked up Roger Wilco on the advice of a clan member. We played two hours straight, and it was pure bliss. It never broke up too heavily, but I did have to ask for a couple repeats because his voice was kind of muddy. But it was pure bliss. I'd like to thank you guys, and the folks at Resounding Technology, makers of Roger Wilco.

Joey Garrison

Madness

In our Hot List 2000 feature last month, we mislabeled Electronic Arts' NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY as NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY MADNESS. Clearly, a case of E3 psychosis. Also, in last month's READ.ME Reality Check, we listed the C-Net GameCenter review ratings as having a 5-point scale. They use a 10-point scale.

The Ugly Truth

Joystick and graphics accelerator card makers probably think that gamers are a bunch of idiots. Just look at the depiction of their product "users" of the joystick/soundcard/graphics accelerator (choose one, they're all unoriginal) on the packaging. Most of the pictures show some doofus with his mouth open almost as if he's drooling and eyes looking real shocked at the screen. Some even show the gamer with hair standing on end as if electrocuted.

What about the ones where the gamer just looks as if he's trying to stop himself from peeing in his pants. (Go ahead. Imagine the face you'd make.)

Yes, all they want to do is sell their stuff and convey the excitement the product would bring. But they should come up with some original ideas. The mouth-wide-open depiction doesn't cut it anymore. If you don't believe me, just take a look at the packaging at your favorite gamer peripherals shop. This, however, does not apply to Thrustmaster which seems to have done the opposite and taken a laid back approach to marketing, right down to recommending other people's programming utilities on their own Website.

Furthermore, other people have come up with better utilities than Thrustmaster. Shame but they seem to be happy with that. But the pilot and plane picture on their boxes is enough to tell you what a joystick does.

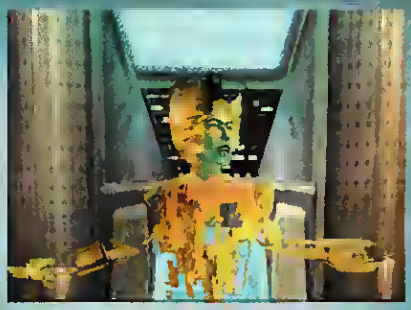
Colin J. Smith

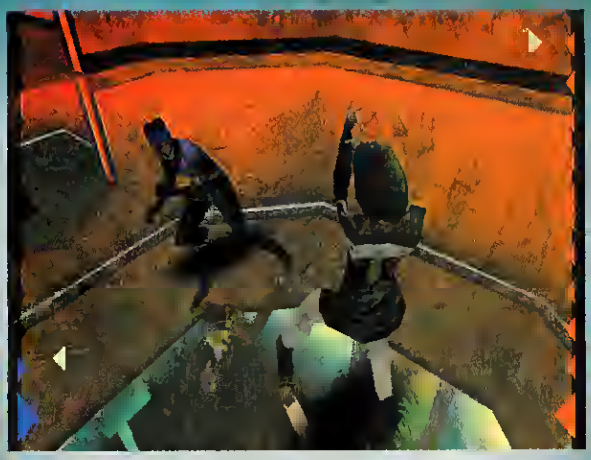
Yeah, the bug-eyed gamer is getting a little old. But just think of the horror of a truth-in-advertising approach. Or see a sample in this month's READ.ME, page 56.

Contact the editors at cgwletters@zd.com.

For subscription service questions, address changes or ordering information, call (303) 665-8930 within the U.S. and Canada or write cgw@neodata.com. All other countries call (303) 604-7445 or write to Computer Gaming World, PO. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80322-7167.

YOU THINK.





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If you think you've figured it all out, think again. Parallel universes, virtual reincarnation, Zen-like odysseys. It's all new. It's all Omikron. Embark on a spiritual mission to save souls from the dark seductions of a decadent dimension. All without falling prey to countless temptations yourself. Adventure, exploration, combat and role-playing. And that continues to happen even after you die. Omikron, is not just a great game. It's an experience <Correction> It's an out-of-body experience.

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omikron
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RATING PENDING
RP
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Discover why thousands of gamers worldwide are silently sneaking through the darkness. Journey through night, as Garrett, a master thief, cloaked in the darkness of a sinister medieval realm where shadows are your only ally, trust is not an option, and confrontation can bring very grim results. Thief Gold takes you beyond the smash stealth hit, Thief: The Dark Project. With three treacherous new missions and fine-tuned gameplay, Thief Gold delivers breathtaking new levels of stalking, stealing and survival!

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▲ Beware stepping into the light of the Sun Room.

◀ A stealthy entrance is necessary to prevent alerting the guards.

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graphics with skin and 3-D texture mapping that even bring the dead characters to life. Along with diabolical new puzzles and a totally new inventory control system that make this the most incredible Tomb Raider ever. So while Lara may be back in Egypt, expect the Last Revelation to take you to a place you've never been before.
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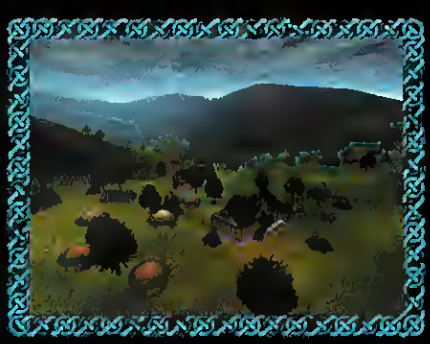

ICON

Paramount

20th Century Fox

Developed in Scotland

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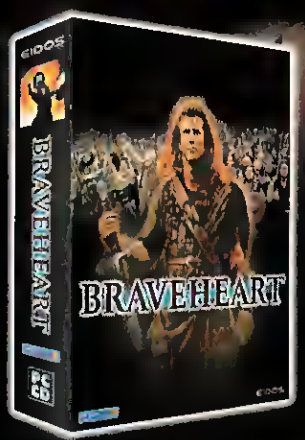

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NEXT GENERATION

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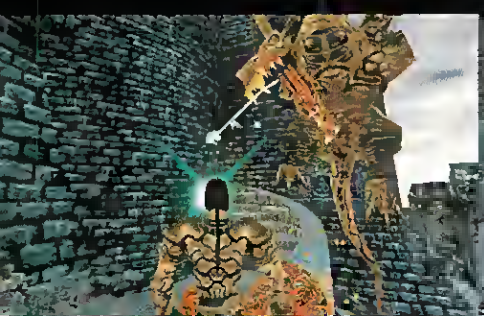

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Read.Me

The Latest News From Around the Gaming World • Edited by jeff_green@zd.com

EA Scraps Jane's A-10

Another Month, Another Flight Sim Bites the Dust

Electronic Arts' highly touted JANE'S A-10 WARTHOG is the latest sim to get shot down in a recent wave of cancellations. Pile A-10 onto the heap that now includes Dynamix' ACES OF THE PACIFIC 2 and X-FIGHTERS, and Eidos' CONFIRMED KILL. Does this mean flight sims are going the way of the dodo?

That's certainly the impression some had after hearing of A-10's cancellation. Although Origin claimed that WARTHOG was cancelled because it didn't match the company's new focus on online-only games, sim enthusiasts were quick to accuse EA of backing away from its commitment to hardcore flight sims. A petition urging EA to reconsider attracted more than 600 comments within days of the announcement (www.limech.com).

While it may be true that EA wants higher sales than a typical flight sim achieves, sources close to the development team say A-10's cancellation was due to serious problems on the project and not to lack of commitment.

"A-10 was in very bad shape graphically,"

Quake 3 Arena Update

Reporter Vic Long Visits id Software and Takes a Bullet for the *CGW* Team

When your goal is to design the new benchmark in multiplayer action, perfection takes more than progremming skill and design sevvy. It takes dedication and perseverance...and lots end LOTS of deathmatching.

Deathmatching is about all I've done in my recent visits to id Software. The design team's daily, frenzied DeethMatch and Capture-the-Flag sessions are invariably followed by e central office gethering to breathlessly recount incredible long-distance rail gunnings, cowerdly escapes and dirty tricks. It may look like a bunch of goofs screwing off, but this is how designing the ultimate multiplayer splatterfest is done.

From what I've seen, the id team is well on its way to yet another smashing success. The latest QUAKE 3 test release adds many subtle improvements. The higher-level menus now incorporate a mouse-driven cursor. A new circular tergeting reticle (customizable in the final release) changes from white to yellow to red as your health declines. The server menu contains a Zone option for helping players find servers. And a Sprite option allows players to squeeze even more 3D performance out of their systems.

On the design screp heap are the three charecter classes and the flamethrower weepon, es originally conceived. Why? They simply did not edd enough to the gamepley. Also nuked was the chainsaw because it was chewing up too much network bendwidth. The current weepons list includes the gauntlet, machine gun, grenade launcher, rocket launcher, greppling hook, lightening gun, plasma rifle, rail gun, and a BFG of some sort. This new BFG (still in the works) is more like a Heckler & Koch 40mm machine-gun than the BFG of DOOM or QUAKE II. The new king of weaponry will crank

said a former member of the team who asked to remain anonymous. "It was highly unlikely it was going to be released this year. There were serious speed issues—even on a Pentium II 400 with a Voodoo 2 card. EA wanted to do that game, but A-10 kept missing all of its milestones."

A-10 executive producer Andy Hollis and producer Will McBurnett had worked together on the award-winning JANE'S LONGBOW and JANE'S LONGBOW II. However, there is some doubt as to whether Hollis was able to devote enough attention to the project. Hollis says that the game was making progress, but had to be cancelled because it began to conflict with Origin's new focus. "It's hard to focus on online when you've got other things going on," he said. "If those things are going on for a little while, it's not a distraction. But the longer those things go on, the more they become issues."

Electronic Arts still has a number of flight/combat games in development, including JANE'S USAF (which includes an A-10), JANE'S WORLD WAR, and JANE'S F/A-18, for release later this year. But it appears that EA is shifting its

continued on page 46

Flight Sim Sales

A sampling of flight sim sales including key Jane's titles. While these numbers suggest that the games have been profitable, they may not have done as well as EA would like. JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS, released concurrently with Microsoft's COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR, appears to have been murdered by Microsoft's brand recognition.

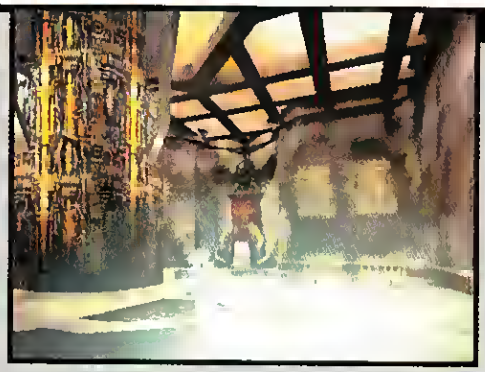
Title	Publisher	Units Sold	Sales Revenue
Jane's AH-64D Longbow	EA	106,423	$4,787,187
Jane's AH-64D Longbow II	EA	99,430	$3,880,245
Jane's F-15	EA	126,461	$5,079,476
Jane's WWII Fighters	EA	80,943	$2,582,181
Falcon 4.0	Hasbro/MicroProse	116,776	$4,579,246
Combat Flight Simulator	Microsoft	260,708	$10,810,313

Source: PC Data

out vicious explosive rounds, and its power will be limited only by the sparsely distributed ammo.

The id team's current plan is to include at least 30 distinct maps, including those specifically designed for free-for-all DeathMatch and team-oriented Capture the Flag. In addition to the Quad damage power-up, there will be several new goodies like Flight, Regeneration, Invisibility, and Haste. Whenever a player nabs an upper, a voice message will be broadcast to everyone in the arena.

Many new characters will be added. The few I've seen include the Orb, a bizarre mutation of giant eyeball and ET doing handstends; the Hunter, a female warrior who looks hotter than Leeloo from *The Fifth Element*; and Lucy, a homely and squat wearer of abused stockings.



My favorite new character is Uriel, the winged gargoyle, but only because it's as ugly as I am. Several characters from id history make an appearance. Tank Junior is the offspring of the Tank from QUAKE II. Artemis, the female soldier from QUAKE II, makes a comeback. The original QUAKE marine returns with a spiffier look. Even the DOOM guy gets a role.

Bots, or computer-controlled players, will be an important feature in the final release. The bots are intended to provide a multiplayer experience, even for those playing solo, and to help newbies train for matches against other humans.

As always, id will release QUAKE 3 ARENA "when it's ready" – which will be a long time after we are. *–Vic Long*

5, 10, 15 Years ago in CGW

15

Sept./Oct. 1984

A star studded issue. Featured designer Jon Freeman (ARCHON) with words of encouragement for would-be game designers ("...the median royalty for a published game is around $1000."); Richard "Lord British" Garriot describing his new game, ULTIMA IV, as having characters that you could actually talk to, and combat in which the monsters could move individually; and Sid Meier who thought that there might be something to this "modem gaming" thing. The issue's low point: An ad for a t-shirt bearing the slogan, "Programmers BYTE, PEEK and POKE, then RAM it to the CORE."

10

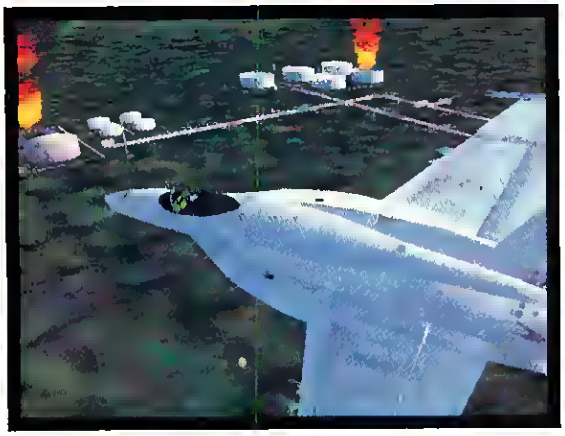
October 1989

It was a decade ago that John Madden's ugly mug first graced the front of a computer football game. And he wasn't just the spokesmodel; he actually got credit as a game designer. Wyatt Lee (aka Assistant Editor Johnny Wilson) gushed over the sophisticated statistical engine which rated each player on a scale of 0 to 9, but then complained about the AI because it could never defend against a reverse. He was deeply distrustful of the new "action feature" which allowed you to actually control your players with a joystick.

5

October 1994

How big was multiplayer gaming just 5 years ago? *CGW*'s "Opponents Wanted," a free classified ad section for gamers seeking other gamers for modem games, ran just 20 ads. We also previewed a quirky little game, a "real time" strategic game, called WARCRAFT and wet ourselves over LucasArts' TIE FIGHTER.



continued from page 45

focus from hardcore sims to other properties. Where last year there were three teams developing Jane's sims—San Mateo (WWII FIGHTERS), Austin (LONGBOW 2, A-10), and Baltimore (F-15, F/A-18)—only the Baltimore group now remains. The forthcoming USAF and JANE'S WORLD WAR (a persistent online multiplayer game) are being developed by Pixel Multimedia, an external studio in Israel. Meanwhile, both of EA's high-profile executive sim producers, Paul Grace and Andy Hollis, have either left the company (Grace), or are no longer involved in flight sims (Hollis). The San Mateo team that had worked on JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS is now rumored to be working on an EA Sports game; former members of the Austin Skunkworks are rumored to be working on an online WING COMMANDER.

Sources within EA suggest that the company isn't pleased with the return on its sims; they claim that EA's producers are required to earn four to five times as much money on a game as they spend in development. Judging by the sales of WORLD WAR II FIGHTERS, which sold less than 100,000 units and earned about $2.5 million, EA may be disappointed with its sims versus sports titles. Only time will tell if this is merely a cyclic low for the genre. We'll be sure to watch what happens at Jane's last remaining development house when F/A-18 ships. – *Ken Brown*

CGW Cover Curse?

JANE'S A-10 WARTHOG is the letest game to appear on our cover that hes sunk into computer gaming's Bermuda triangle. Other games that never reached their destination include Sir-Tech's WIZARORY 8 and Virgin's SWOROS & SORCERY (Octobar, '98), Eidos' CONFIRMEO KILL (May, '95) and Hero's CHAMPIONS (April, '92).

While we're at it, notable mentions for games that shipped but stank include TRESPASSER (March, '97), JOHNNY MNEMONIC (February, '95), and BATTLECRUISER 3000 (May, '94). BATTLECRUISER 3000, after a year of petches, is now playable (we're told). If anyone cares.

PIPELINE

Send notices to: cgwpipeline.com

Age of Empires II	Microsoft	Q4 99	NHL 2000	EA Sports	Q4 99
Age of Wonders	GOD	Q4 99	Nox	Westwood	Q1 00
Allegiance	Microsoft	Q2 00	Oni	Bungie	Q1 00
Anachronox	Ion Storm/Eidos	Q1 00	Orcs: Revenge of the Ancient	Berkeley Studios	Q4 99
Asheron's Call	Microsoft	Q4 99	Panzer General 3D Assault	SSI	Q4 99
Axis & Allies Exp.	Hasbro Interactive	Q4 99	Pharoah	Impressions/Sierra	Q3 99
Babylon 5 Space Com.	Sierra F/X	Q1 00	Planescape: Torment	Interplay	Q3 99
Black & White	EA	Q4 99	Quake III Arena	Id Software	Q4 99
Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge	Atomic/SSI	Q4 99	Reach for the Stars	SSG/SSI	Q4 99
Comanche 4	Novalogic	Q4 99	Revenant	Eidos	Q4 99
Comanche/Hokum	Empire	Q2 00	Risk II	Hasbro	Q3 99
Conquest: Front. Wars	Digital Anvil/MS	Q2 00	Sanity	Monolith	Q4 99
Creatures 4	Mindscape	Q4 99	Shadowpact	Blue Byte	Q4 99
Creatures Adventures	Mindscape	Q4 99	Sid Meier's Civ.	Firaxis/MicroProse	Q4 00
Dark Reign II	Activision	Q3 99	Shogun: Total War	EA	Q1 00
Desert Fighters	Dynamix	Q4 99	Silent Hunter II	SSI	Q4 99
Deus Ex	Ion Storm	Q2 00	Silver	Infogrames	Q3 99
Diablo II	Blizzard	Q4 99	SimMars	Maxis	Q3 00
Duke Nukem Forever	3D Realms	Q2 00	The Sims	Maxis	Q1 00
F/A-18E SuperHornet	Interplay	Q4 99	Soldier of Fortune	Raven/Activision	Q4 99
Final Fantasy VIII	SquareEA	Q4 99	Starlancer	Digital Anvil/Microsoft	Q4 99
Flight Simulator 2000	Microsoft	Q3 99	Star Trek Armada	Activision	Q4 99
Flight Unlimited III	EA	Q3 99	Star Trek Insurrection	Activision	Q4 99
Force Commander	LucasArts	Q4 99	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	Activision	Q1 00
Freelancer	Digital Anvil/MS	Q4 00	SWAT 3: Close Quarters	Sierra Studios	Q4 99
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	Q4 99	Tachyon: The Fringe	Novalogic	Q4 99
Half-Life: Opp. Force	Sierra Studios	Q4 99	Team Fortress 2	Valve/Sierra	Q4 99
Halo	Bungie	Q4 00	Theme Park World	EA	Q4 99
Harpoon 4	SSI	Q2 00	The Sims	Maxis	Q1 00
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2	GOD	Q2 00	Tomb Raider IV: The Last Rev.	Core/Eidos	Q3 99
Indiana Jones/Infernal Machine	LucasArts	Q3 99	Tom Clancy's Rogue Spear	Red Storm Ent	Q4 99
Interstate 82	Activision	Q3 99	Tribes 2	Sierra Studios	Q2 00
Jane's F/A-18	Jane's/EA	Q4 99	Ultima Ascension	Origin/EA	Q4 99
Joint Strike Fighter	Novalogic	Q4 99	USAF	Jane's/EA	Q3 99
Loose Cannon	Microsoft	Q2 00	Vampire: The Masquerade	Nihilistic/Activision	Q4 99
Madden 2000	EA Sports	Q4 99	Warlords: Battlecry	SSG/SSI	Q1 00
MiG Alley	Empire	Q4 99	Werewolf	Dreamforge/ASC Games	Q4 99
Motorcross Madness 2	Microsoft	Q1 00	Wheel of Time	Legend/GT	Q4 99
NBA Inside Drive 2000	Microsoft	Q4 99	Wild, Wild West	SouthPeak	Q4 99
Need for Speed: Motor City	Electronic Arts	Q4 99	You Don't Know Jack Offline	Berkeley Systems	Q3 99

PLAYBACK

The Month in Review By Michael Mullen *Gamespot* News Editor

3D Chip War Heats Up

The now-seasonal war of graphic chips is bound to heat up again as nVidia offers more information on its NV10 chip. The chip may output three to five times as many triangles as a Pentium III, which outputs five million triangles. Looking to diversify, nVidia has created the chip with the ability to output HDTV quality images. As we received word of what the NV10 could do, Silicon Graphics (SGI) announced that it had dropped a pending 3D graphics infringement suit against nVidia. Both companies have since licensed parts of each other's 3D technologies. To top it off, nVidia will be working with SGI to develop new 3D technologies. Sound fishy? Now that nVidia is the only independent developer in 3D graphics' top-tier, allying itself with SGI could bear retail fruits soon. Expect 3dfx to volley a return in September with the announcement of its Voodoo4 (code-named Napalm) chipset with 32-bit color and more memory. The Voodoo3 has been popular, but the current breed of TNT2 chips has caused many gamers to leap to nVidia's option for 32-bit instead of 3dfx's 16-bit solution.

Pouring Gasoline on the Flames

'Tis the season for controversy. Following on the bloody heels of Interplay's ultra-violent KINGPIN comes Activision's equally ultra-violent SOLDIER OF FORTUNE – a sure magnet for heavy mainstream press attention. Graphically, the title looks very impressive atop the QUAKE II engine, with victims' bodies performing "bullet dances" and losing limbs with unbelievable (and some would say too much) realism. A violence filter can help keep kids away from the game's more gruesome aspects, but how the public *and* press deal with those gruesome aspects is something that everyone in the industry will be watching closely.

"HALO looks like it may blow the doors off *anything* graphically"

Blame it on EVERQUEST

In the "please just finish it" category, Westwood's COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN remains in production with no release date. Almost five years have gone by since the last major showing of a C&C title, and gamers are begging for a release date. Rather than build a fully 3D C&C, Westwood has kept to the 2D basics and enhancing gameplay. Will it be enough as other companies have blitzed through at least two generations of RTS titles? See our hands-on preview in this issue.

In the same category, DIABLO II ads are running, but the title still has no firm release date other than "1999." Blizzard is known for tweaking its titles to death at times, but gamers have been less apt to complain since the release of STARCRAFT. Word has it that while the development team is tweaking the game, it has also been struck by the current ailment plaguing other game companies trying to finish their products: EVERQUEST.

Bungie Strikes Again

Bungie consistently pushes the envelope with its game designs (MARATHON, MYTH) and always surprises gamers with its visions of what games should be. Although the company began developing on the Macintosh, it has grown into one of the few companies to offer high-caliber hybrid games on the same CD. Its upcoming squad-based action powerhouse, HALO, looks like it may blow the doors off *anything* graphically. First shown to speechless editors behind closed doors at E3, Halo was finally unveiled to the public during Steve Jobs' keynote address at the MacWorld Expo in Boston. Bungie developed the game on the PC first using OpenGL and then ported it over to the newer G3s. Considering the new G3 has the powerful ATI Rage 128 as its default card, the game should look astounding. HALO'S engine could be ripe for licensing out to other developers in the near future.

The GOOD...

PERFECT PAC MAN SCORE! We have a new hero. This July, Billy Mitchell, a 30-year-old from Hollywood, Florida, accomplished the impossible: he got a perfect score on Pac-Man – the first one ever. During a competition at an arcade in New Hampshire, Mitchell attained the maximum score of 3,333,360 points by playing through 256 screens without losing a single life. Mr. Mitchell: we bow down to you sir. Truly, we are not worthy.

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 AT LAST Those lucky Germans have been playing and raving about this turn-based tactical strategy game for months, but everyone else has been chomping at the bit while Sir-Tech worked out a publishing deal with TalonSoft. Now it's here, and it was worth the wait. Our real review is coming next month, but here's the

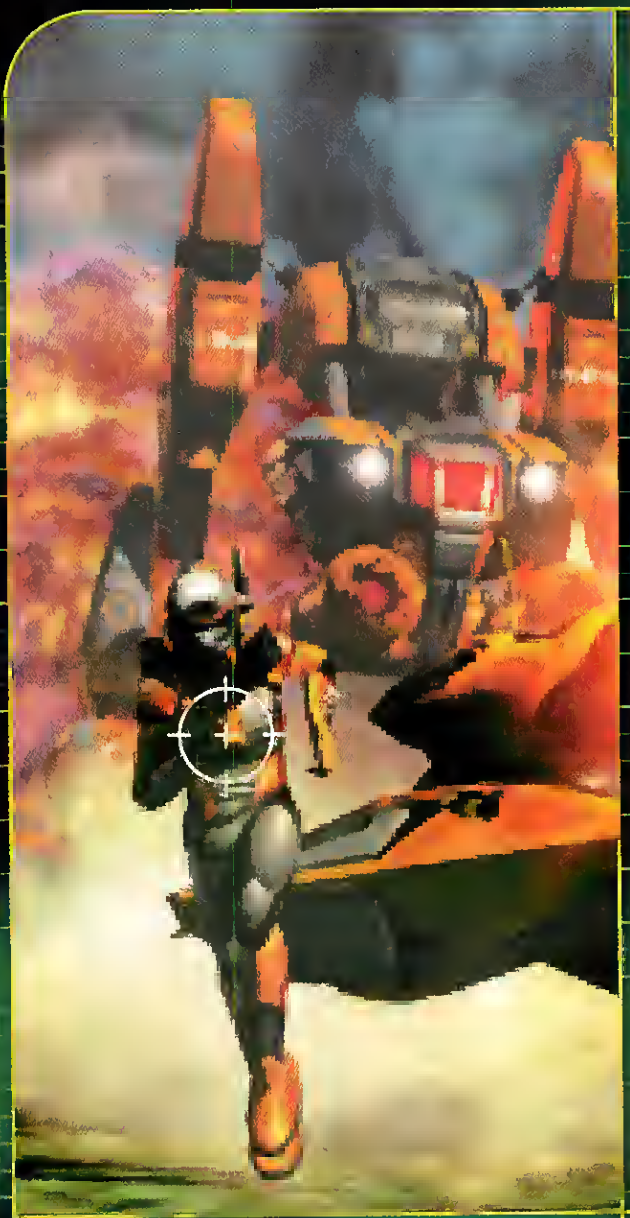
the BAD...

THRUSTMASTER BAILS OUT Another month, another monumental change for the gaming industry – and another acquisition by the French. Thrustmaster is selling its game and all its gaming controller assets to the France-based Guillemot Corporation for $15 million. Why get out of a business in which they have played such a huge role for so long? Why else? To focus on Internet-based products. Sigh. Change: we don't like it.

and the UGLY...

COPY PROTECTION WOES We understand the gaming companies' position. They don't want their games pirated. That's fair and good. However, some of the copy protection schemes we've seen lately have been an unbelievable pain in the neck for gamers to deal with – in the worst case scenario making it impossible to play the game. When no less than three experienced *CGW* editors can't get a game to boot because of copy-protection glitches, you know something is wrong. Protect your software, but please make sure your protection works!

Look for Battlezone II™ this fall. Screenshots courtesy of Pandemic Studios.



THE "KILL-ZONE" AS SEEN BY A STANDARD 350 DPI MOUSE.

THE "KILL-ZONE" AS SEEN BY THE 1000 DPI RAZER™ BOOMSLANG™.

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[dead player index]

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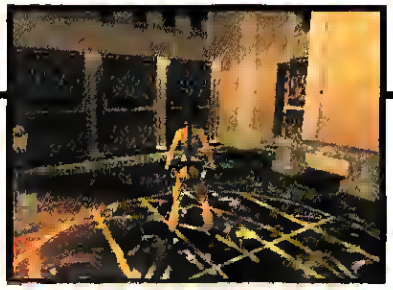

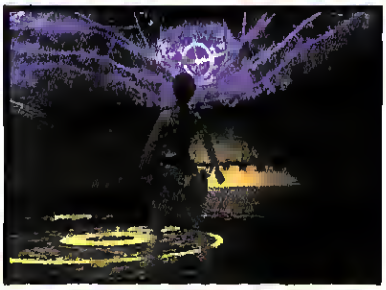

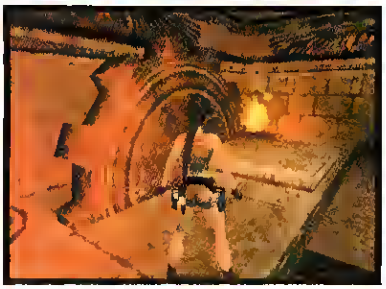

Core Design has revealed its plans for Lara Croft's fourth TOMB RAIDER game. Called THE LAST REVELATION, it will be set in Egypt and sees Lara unwittingly unleashing a terrifying force when she opens a previously unexplored tomb.

Based on ancient mythology and the alignment of stars at the millennium, the story will take Lara through a series of Egyptian locations and pit her against a host of native and mythological enemies.

As predicted, THE LAST REVELATION will employ a new game engine, and for the first time there will be a dedicated PC version that will not be constrained by the limitations of the Sony PlayStation. The PC version will make use of hardware-specific features, thus ensuring that it will look up-to-date, technology-wise.

To add to the atmosphere, lighting effects such as spotlighting have been added, and surfaces can now reflect and react to light sources. Locations and enemies will be a lot more detailed, while Lara herself has been remodeled and given a whole range of new moves that will be central to solving the puzzles and avoiding traps.

Unlike TOMB RAIDER III, which was made up of five separate adventures, THE LAST REVELATION will focus on a single objective, and while the plot will contain several unexpected twists, your goal will always be in sight.

Another key difference is that the game will be based entirely in Egypt instead of taking place in different locations throughout the world. While it should take a comparable amount of time to complete as its predecessors, individual locations will be smaller and tighter to convey the claustrophobic atmosphere of the tomb, and there will be less time spent travelling between areas.

"The philosophy behind THE LAST REVELATION is much more akin to the first game in terms of its puzzle mechanics, ancient locations and atmosphere," said Core Design's operations director Adrian Smith. "In some ways, THE LAST REVELATION is a prequel to the trilogy, but the technical advances will make it far more detailed and atmospheric."

The inventory system has been completely redesigned. The familiar inventory rings have gone to make way for a new system in which objects can be combined, collected and stored. Accessing the inventory will also enable you to read Lara's diary (which will hopefully be full of hints and tips rather than how much she weighs and whether her boyfriend called or not) and a location map that will help you find your way through the tombs and labyrinths.—*Alan Dykes*

No Lara for Playboy

And now, in the irony Department, wa tind Eidns getting upset about the exploitation of Lara Crnft's body. In luly, Eidns succeeded in injuncting *Playboy* megezlne in tha U.K. trom printing the brand names "Lara Croft" and "Tomb Raider" on the cover ot the magazine, which teatures ex-Lara mndel Nell McAndrew in a nude photo spread. The ruling required *Playboy* to sticker cnvers already printed that contained the name and lngo. McAndrew's contract with Eidos tinished in April this yeer end she has no current associetions with the TOMB RAIDER brand. Good for Eidos! We wouldn't want impressionable gamers to get the wrong idae ot what that wholesome tamala role model is all about, now would we?

Reality Check

We here at *CGW* accept the fact that we are part of the larger computer gaming community. And like all communities, differing opinions circulate within. Some are sensible, rational and well considered (like ours) and some are completely wonked (like anyone who disagrees with us). Here's the latest roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system. ■ *Yellow indicates an editors' choice game*

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CG Strat+ (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Aliens vs. Predator	3	79%	*	8	9.3	6
East Front II	3.5	85%	*	*	8.2	9
F-22 Lightning 3	3.5	72%	*	*	8.2	5
Magic & Mayhem	3.5	78%	*	*	6.3	9
Mechwarrior 3	3	86%	4.5	9	8.3	8
Midtown Madness	4	90%	3.5	7	7.7	7
MS Baseball	3	58%	*	6	6.8	8
Operational Art of War II	3.5	93%	*	*	8.7	9
Star Wars Episode I: Racer	4	76%	3.5	7	8.2	9
Star Wars Episode I: TPM	1.5	71%	*	5	4.3	8

you
know it's
coming...

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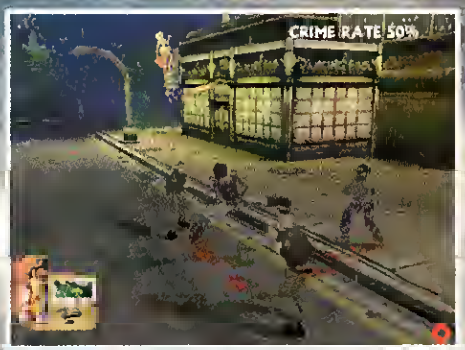
Good cop or ex-cop? The choice is yours as either the youthful, hand-to-hand combat super-sleuth, Officer D'Arci, or disgruntled, street-smart weapons expert, Roper McIntyre.



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EIDOS INTERACTIVE

For a closer look go to eidos.com

In the "HOW THINGS REALLY ARE" Category...

...we present to you the registration page from Hasbro Interactive (www.hasbro.com).

Notice the perfect complexions of the "gamers." Notice the happy, joyful experience they have playing a game (a Hasbro game, of course). Notice the nice threads and the fact that the two guys are actually interacting with women.

Well, we at *CGW* felt the ad didn't quite represent what we consider a "typical" gaming experience, so we went out and found a few "models" of our own to present a sadder, but far truer, picture of the situation.

photo by Michael Falconer

Tchotchke of the Month

GUS GUTZ

Occasionally, promotional items come across our desks that are so indescribably weird that we must work them into print regardless of any connection to computer gaming, whatsoever. So this month we bring you Gus Gutz, a plush-toy man filled with plush-toy entrails that are obtained by ramming your fist down his 100% cotton gullet. For future serial killers, ages 3 and up.

CGW DESIGNER PROFILE

He's 24 and the CEO of Relic, Makers of HOMEWORLD. Lucky Bastard...

Alex Garden

Q. You know the drill.
A. Alex Garden, CEO of Relic Entertainment, makers of the upcoming HOMEWORLD.

Q. CEO, eh? What is it you actually do?
A. Glad you asked. I'm in charge of three things: Creative direction (working with the programmers and artists), press relations, and business development issues

Q. What's it like being the CEO of a 40-person company at the age of 24?
A. It's great. Much better than being an unemployed CEO at the age of 24. Besides, I feel like I'm 50.

Q. You like fast cars and motorcycles. Any scary moments?
A. Yeah, I bought a '98 Honda CBR 900, and the first week I had it, I wasn't used to the power. I took a curve and saw a pothole and swerved to avoid it, and just then a car appeared out of nowhere. I had to go off road and almost laid the bike down in a patch of gravel. Glad I have those RTS reflexes. I hate to think what would have happened if HOMEWORLD was turn-based!

Q. Speaking of HOMEWORLD, what was the inspiration for it?
A. I was having a conversation with a bunch of friends about games, and suddenly it flashed in my mind how to make a convincing 3D world in a flat 2D monitor. I left Electronic Arts and founded Relic, and we had the basic engine banged out in a month and a half. The rest of the time we've spent working on the "details."

Q. Was it always called HOMEWORLD?
A. The original code name was "Spaghetti Ball." We like HOMEWORLD better. Any other game company is welcome to use "Spaghetti Ball." We release it to the public domain.

Q. What are some of your favorite games?
A. TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY, FALLOUT, and TOTAL ANNIHILATION are some. Believe it or not, I also love SOLITAIRE--there's a mystique about that game.

Q. You've been working in the game industry since you were 15. How did you swing that?
A. When I was 15 I saw a guy pull up in a black Lamborghini Diablo. He was Don Mattrick, then President of Distinctive Software (now with EA). I told him I wanted to do whatever it was he was doing. We talked a bit and he told me to contact him in a couple of years. I went home that night and cooked up a bogus resume and had it delivered to his desk the next day. He hired me as a part-time summer tester. That was where I met Chris Taylor of TOTAL ANNIHILATION fame. Since then Don and Chris have been my respective business and creative mentors.

Q. HOMEWORLD is in the homestretch. Are you going to Disneyworld when it's finished?
A. Actually, I think I'll just go to bed.

Target sited 600 meters out
wind - 5 knots
out of the west
2 rounds left in
the MAGAZINE
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the 2nd one WON'T

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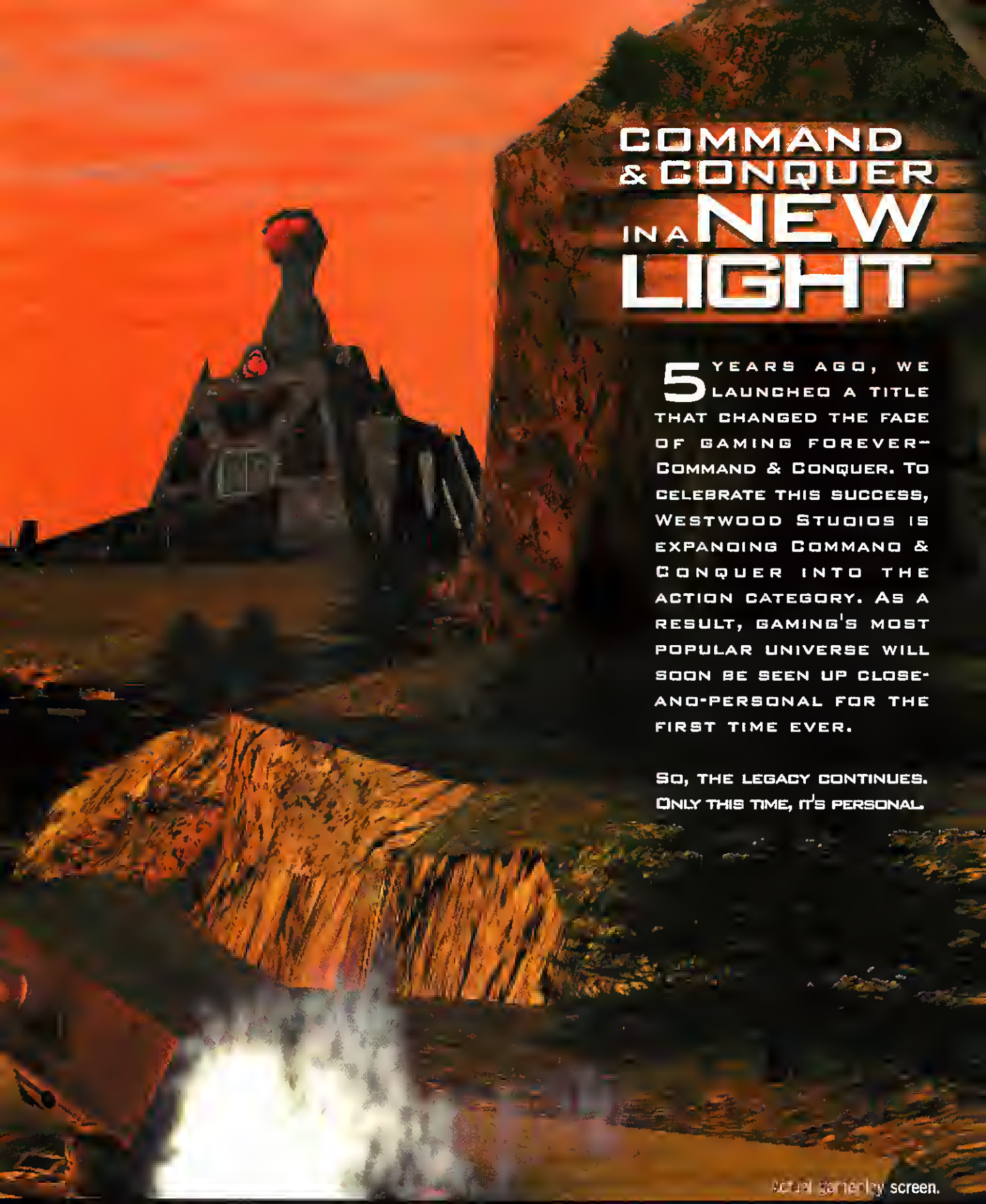
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RENEGADE
This time it's personal.

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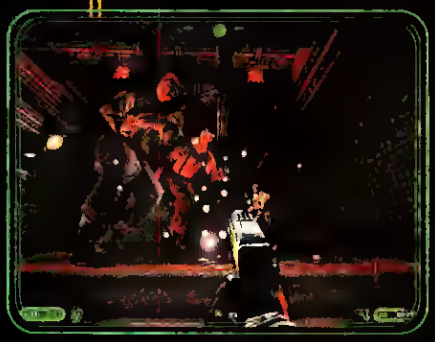
Siberian Military Base



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Dark Reign 2

Pandemic Pushes the RTS Into the Third Dimension

by George Jones

The third dimension can he a frightening place if you're a real-time strategy gamer (or a Picasso fan). Exciting, but scary. I am used to plotting strategies by scrolling around flat maps viewed from a fixed, isometric perspective. I am used to certain types of interfaces, and the prospects of the upcoming 3D revolution worry me. Don't get me wrong; 3D views and effects and terrain make for gorgeous games. But I worry—oh, how I worry—that it also means awkward controls and swiveling, rotating, maddening interfaces.

Recently, my worries were eased by the guys at Pandemic Studios, the developer working on the sequel to DARK REIGN for Activision. A highly innovative title that kind of got lost in the deluge of real-time strategy games two years ago, DARK REIGN was one of the first games to incorporate such modern efficiencies as unit queuing, waypoints, and even rally points. From the look of things, they're about to bring the same level of innovation into the 3D environs of DARK REIGN 2.

DARK REIGN 2
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios

Think Phantom Menace

DARK REIGN 2 is a prequel, with a story that explains the conditions of the universe existent in the original game. This game is set in a time when the human race is just leaving an Earth poisoned by the waste products of war. Some of Earth's populace live in sheltered domes that are protected by a militaristic government known as the Jovian Detention Authority (JDA). Most people, however, still live outside these domes in tribe-like communities scattered about the world. Collectively, these tribes are known as the Sprawlers. As you may have guessed, they don't get along very well with the soft, protected dome-dwellers.

The story begins on Earth, as the Sprawlers—who are actually the unorganized precursor to the Freedom Guard in DARK REIGN—are trying to break into the domes. From here, the battles move into space onto a variety of colorful, exotic alien worlds and even space stations that showcase the game's HEAVY GEAR II-based 3D engine. Part of the joy of playing DARK REIGN 2, in fact, is enjoying the exotic beauty of the different worlds, and using the terrain features, geography, and even the time of day to your advantage.

The Action

Much like its predecessor, DARK REIGN 2 emphasizes infantry units over vehicles, which gives the game an immense amount of personality---especially given the scaleable 3D graphics, which get more and more detailed as you zoom in. Watching grunt infantry units like the Sprawlers' Rumblers grimace and grin as they wage war on the front lines gives the action an extra kick of entertainment, particularly when you're winning.

Some absolutely monstrous vehicles also come into play as you craft prerequisite buildings. The Sprawler's humongous Zeppelin, for example, doubles as an air attack craft and as a unit transport, while the Big Brother is a cool, long-range artillery vehicle. On the JDA side of the battle are vehicles

like the Growler, a slow-moving, frontline vehicle with a massive gun.

Take all these units, pit them against each other, and the advantages of using a 3D engine in this type of game are instantly obvious. Colored light-sourcing, when combined with the 3D terrains, make for some impressive, dramatic battle scenes. During one dramatic mission, my troops were trying to break through a massive gate that protected the JDA encampment. In an epic battle scene, my artillery hammered away at the gate with orange and purple bursts of light, while my infantry units fought it out at the bottom of the gate. This battle drove home the key advantage of 3D terrain: You can move your camera anywhere you'd like at any time, which can make you a better commander.

Padded Landing

After the first few warm-up missions, you'll engage in the usual variety, from all-out slugfests to smaller puzzle-like quests. In some cases, you'll encounter both types of play within a single mission. You might have to figure out how to free up some prisoners at the start of a mission, and then use the units to set up traditional base-on-base combat.

In most base-on-base missions, your Landing Pad—base headquarters—is the holy of holies. Through the Pad, you order new units, extra buildings, and base improvements that arrive from space via shuttle. One nice touch is the way buildings and base improvements pop out of the shuttle as tiny vehicles and then expand into their full size once they're placed.

The Landing Pad adds an extra dimension of strategy to the game. Because your shuttle has to take the time to go into space to retrieve any goods you've ordered—larger loads take longer to retrieve—you're forced to make tough decisions. Do you wait that one crucial minute you need to gather enough resources to purchase that Repair building? Do you want your shuttle to make a quick run to get the units to defend your base—foregoing the buildings you'll need to gain access to new and better units—in exchange for a faster delivery time?

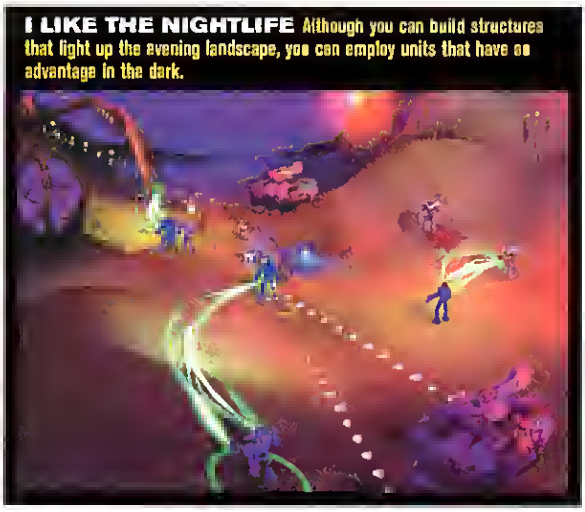
The game's currency is a resource named Taelon, which players of the original DARK REIGN may remember. A molecular byproduct of terraforming that will be more fully explained this time around, Taelon is gathered with the usual slow-moving, vulnerable Harvester-type units.

Although your units arrive from space, the function of buildings in DARK REIGN 2 doesn't differ too much from other real-time strategy games. New structures serve to provide defense for your base, high-powered attacks for your offensives, and to help you gain access to newer, better units. The JDA Air Tower, for example, enables you to call in air strikes at any map-revealed location.

But the Landing Pad is key. In addition to serving as the centerpiece of your base, this building will often be the focal point of your efforts against your enemies. Since taking out this structure means "game over," you'll have to make sure yours is well defended with a variety of turrets, defensive structures, and units.

(DARK REIGN was)... a highly innovative title that kind of got lost in the deluge of real-time strategy games two years ago ...

LIKE THE 4th OF JULY These dramatic battles brought to you courtesy of the Heavy Gear II engine.



I LIKE THE NIGHTLIFE Although you can build structures that light up the evening landscape, you can employ units that have an advantage in the dark.

It Don't Mean a Thing...

Snazzy graphics that permit more cerebral tactics and more enjoyable gameplay mean jack squat if a game's interface is no more useful than a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. Realizing this, Pandemic has put as much design effort into how you play DARK REIGN 2 as they have into how the game plays.

The biggest compliment I can pay to the game is that when I first sat down to play a few levels, I didn't need much time to get used to the 3D setting. In fact, I was able to play the game much as I would play any other non-3D game in the genre. I scrolled the map in the appropriate direction by moving my mouse to the edges of the world. I selected units and simply clicked on where I wanted them to go, and they did it, even if it was way out on the map. Gamers not into rotating, zooming camera angles will probably be able to successfully play the game from the default fixed perspective.

The true masters will take full advantage of the interface's more powerful features. By zooming in and out, you can get a more strategic view of the action. You can also use the full screen strategic-overlay map, or the game's smaller mini-map, to get a two-dimensional look at the land and command your units. Furthermore, you can set hop-to keys and flag markers around a level that will allow you to jump to certain locations with the press of a button.

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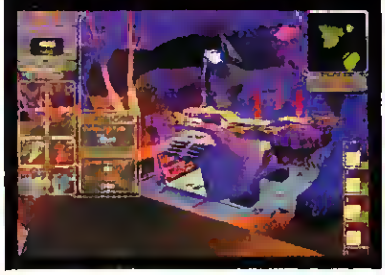
And then there's the Squad Manager, the most innovative chunk of interface I've seen in the genre. You know how most real-time strat games allow you to create squads by drag-selecting a group of units and control-choking the numbers one through zero [illegible] allows you to set orders for squads directly from this interface. If you want to order your second squadron to explore their surrounding area, click on their button on the right side of the screen and issue the appropriate orders; and—while you're at it—set their tenacity level and check their health, without even moving to their location. The real kicker is the unit AI in DARK REIGN 2, and it's too early to tell how this will pan out. Subpar pathfinding intelligence will render this feature useless. But if the AI comes through at the level the designers are shooting for, the Squad Manager will allow real-time strategy gamers the ultimate luxury—the ability to easily fight battles on multiple fronts.

Night and Day

An extra touch that makes DARK REIGN 2 feel like a real, living 3D world, rather than a two-dimensional map that's had some three-dimensional air blown into it, is the presence of day and night cycles in the [illegible] giving each mission [illegible] the circadian cycle.

LONG SHOT At times, you'll want to switch to a traditional top-down view to get a more strategic look at the action.



ONE TOUCH SHOPPING DARK REIGN 2's interface allows you to quickly perform a number of tasks, from commanding your squads to ordering new buildings and units.

5 THINGS

Five Multiple Game Variants in DARK REIGN 2

1. Capture the Flag:
Each player has a flag they must protect. Lose your flag and you're out.

2. King of the Hill:
The first player to get to the top of a hill in the center of the map and control it for four minutes wins.

3. Co-op Play:
Several players control the same base and fight against another team of humans, or work together as one large team against a massive computer opponent. You'll also be able to play through the single-player game in this mode.

4. Blood Bath:
The first player to pick up [illegible] wins.

5. Control Freak:
There are a number of regions spread out around the map. The first player to control all of these regions at the same time wins.

are used to give special abilities to units. The Sprawler's Sub unit (a sniping ground unit used to spending time underground) will have better range and accuracy in the evening hours, and will be able to use a Sniper rifle. Similar is the JDA's Watchman unit, a walking robot with a Seeing Eye weapon that can increase the nighttime line of sight for all JDA units.

Depending on the mission type and scale, day and night will cycle periodically at a varying rate throughout the game. Epic battles will see many moons pass, while shorter, more task-oriented missions may take place during the night entirely.

Are RTS gamers ready to embrace the 3D future? We'll find out in November, when DARK REIGN 2 competes directly with the two biggest real-time games in the genre, AGE OF EMPIRES 2 and COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN, both of which are rooted in the two-dimensional world. CGW

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THEME PARK WORLD
GENRE: Strategy/Builder
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
DEVELOPER: Bullfrog
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts

Theme Park World

Like Walt. I Wish I Could Be Like Walt.

by Chris Lombardi

In my real life, the distinction between work and fun is easy to make. Getting Jeff Green to turn in his articles: work. Launching pointy projectiles et Jeff Green with the Cavedog catapult tchotchke: fun. But in my gaming life, this distinction isn't so clear, especially when we're talking about a typical "builder" game like Maxis' SIMCITY or Bulldog's original THEME PARK. Building e gorgeous city of my dreams and then setting it aflame: clearly, a blast. But laying 12 miles of sewer pipe? Building my own theme park from the ground up, designing roller coasters, and watching little computer kiddies romp: a good time. Ordering supplies for my concession stands and cleaning up the vomit of queasy kids? This is *entertainment* software, right?

Designing these games well is a real challenge. You went a game that offers enough flexibility and depth to engage the player's creativity, but not a game that gets bogged down in details and monotonous activity. You want fun work, recreational labor, the joy of creation without the pain.

The team behind Bullfrog's THEME PARK WORLD has been plugging away at this fun-work equation for many years now. In addition to the original THEME PARK, they've done THEME HOSPITAL and THEME AQUARIUM (released in Japan). For their next project, THEME PARK WORLD, they've taken all they've learned and created a game that nails the work-play balance to the wall. THEME PARK WORLD is pure game-design gold. Or, in this case, a gold ticket.

Midas Touch

The gold ticket is what you're after in this completely remodeled game, the reward you earn for designing a park well and the pass key to more of the game's features. THEME PARK WORLD offers four different motifs for your park design palette: Space, Halloween, Lost World (19th-century explorers and natives), and a "land of the giants" theme right out of *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. Succeed with one motif and you earn a gold ticket and the right to move to the next.

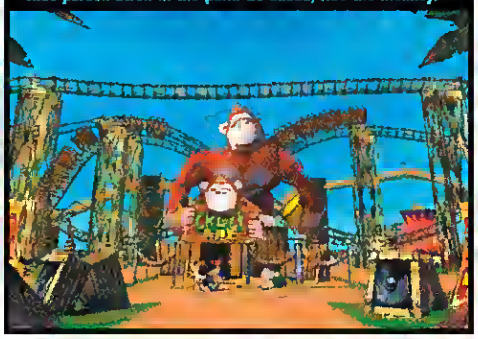
Success in perk construction is measured in various ways. There's the thrill factor, of course. Do you have a variety of rides to keep your patrons on a constant adrenaline high? Do your coasters keep them screaming? There are practical concerns: Do you have enough potties and trash cans, and are they accessible yet tastefully tucked away from view? There's the value equation: Do your patrons feel they're getting their

"Ordering supplies for my concession stands and cleaning up the vomit of queasy kids? This is *entertainment* software, right?"

dollar's worth from your burgers, balloons, and stuffed animals? And then there's the bottom line. Are you raking in enough dough to finance your R&D and pay your staff of entertainers, maintenance workers, and ride engineers? As in all builder games, you must juggle all of these concerns at once, along with the crises that invariably arise.

Fortunately, you've got lots of help. First, there's a little "assistant" guy, a cross between the Microsoft Office paper clip and Marvin the Martian, who pops up to teach you about new game features and to help you troubleshoot your park's problems. And if you don't want to deal with every last detail of park administration, you can play the game in a simplified mode that eliminates a great deal of the economic and management concerns.

MONKEY SEE The payoff for your hard work is a first-person stroll in the park. Go ahead, ride the monkey.



Even more helpful is the interface itself. If you played the original THEME PARK, you know what a nightmare of poor design and option overload it was. Fortunately, Bulldog has learned a thing or two. In place of endless menus and windows, you have a slick little interface widget that sits in the corner of the screen and expands and contracts to display your options. It's very slick, facile, and helpful. Setting the dozens of simulation variables—ride duration and speed, food prices, balloon quality, staff training, security level, and so on—is handled with simple slider bars. In addition, Bullfrog has trimmed away some of the tedious and uninteresting game elements from the original THEME PARK design—features like ordering supplies for your concessions, the senseless stock market simulation, and the abstracted competition with other parks.

BOUNCY DINO!!! The kids are queued to ride the bouncy dino. Their thought bubbles say that they're hungry, thirsty, and they gotta go wee-wee.

But the best part of the interface is the roller-coaster design component. No advanced editor is needed to build your coasters; just find a free space for the next track support pylon and plop it down. With just a keypress or two, you can raise or lower the track elevation and add twists, banks, and turns. Advanced track segments like loops and corkscrews must be researched by your engineers, but once in your design repertoire, they can be added to your coaster with a click of the mouse. You can have a functioning coaster in minutes. Of course, building a good coaster that gracefully wends its way through your park will take some time, experimentation, and testing.

CRUISIN' FOR AN OOZIN' The graphics are oozing over with cute. Here are the Ooze Cruze flume ride and the vertical Jaw Dropper from the Halloween theme.

Testing your coaster is definitely the coolest aspect of THEME PARK WORLD, because you can get into the car and ride the coaster in a nauseating first-person perspective. In fact, you can ride every ride in first-person, watching the world spin on a coaster corkscrew or bouncing up and down with the other brats on the Bouncy Dino. It was all in my head, of course, but I swear I could feel my stomach torque as I hit the bottom of a large coaster dip. You can also just wander the park at will, getting lost in the sea of happy little faces. You'll feel like Walt walking hand in hand with Mickey down Main Street.

The Happiest Place in Cyberspace

Half the pleasure of creation is the act itself, and half is sharing your work with others. Communities of players have spontaneously formed on the Net around many builder games, but Bullfrog is not going to leave this to fate. They will actively support the player community with a THEME PARK WORLD Web site that will be the place to go to share your parks with other players. You can upload and download parks, stroll around in other people's worlds, and then vote on the best designs. You can even create postcards featuring scenes from your park, and email them to friends without leaving the game. Prizes will be awarded for the best overall designs, the best coasters, the parks with the most visitors, and the most prolific designers.

Bullfrog plans to release new themes and rides online, and may even publish their ride design tools so that dedicated players can get even more creative. The exact details of the design tool plan are vague as yet, which worries us, since we've seen these kinds of after-the-game promises fall through again and again. But all we can do is hope (and send plenty of pleading postcards to the game designers).

Knockout graphics, painless interface, online support, and a design that's up with the fun stuff and down with the tedium: Bullfrog has a builder game here against which all others will be compared. How *your* park compares to others remains to be seen. Show me yours, and I'll show you mine. CGW

5 THINGS

Five Worst Headaches of the Park Proprietor

1) Bad Weather
Visually, stunning. Financially, crippling.

2) Those Damn Unions
You've got to keep your employees happy. If you don't, they'll strike and picket your entrance. And there's nothing worse for business than your Dinky the Dinosaur mascot spitting on scabs in front of the kiddies.

3) Ruffians
Bored troublemakers will hassle other kids and knock over your entertainers. Security guards and cameras may help.

4) Broken Rides
Nothing's sadder than a Bouncy Dino that's lost his boing. All rides have life spans that can be extended through research, investment, and maintenance.

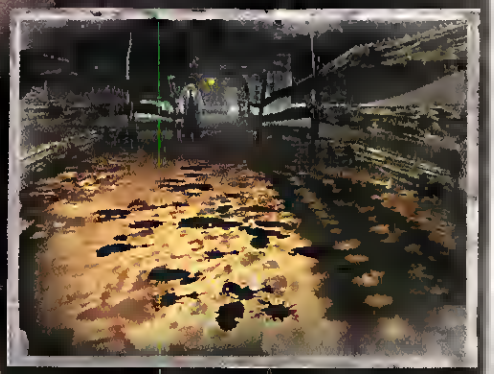
5) An Empty Park
The price has to be right for the quality of your park or the kiddies won't show. Nothing's sadder than a Bouncy Dino with no one to boing.

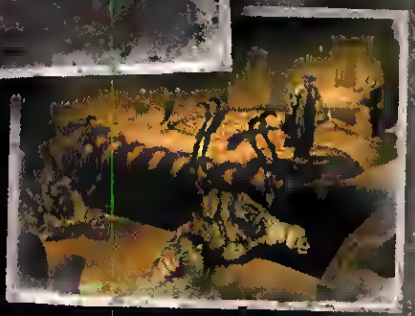
"...the ghouls overwhelmed the hero, clubbing him with their own severed limbs before feasting on his guts. And that was right about the time we knew we couldn't wait to play Nocturne. This game will be causing some hellacious nightmares later this year."

- Computer Gaming World

"It is unforgettable, astonishing, and teeming with riveting visual realism. Yet behind the rich lighting and gossamer fog is a timeless sense of adventure. This is gaming at its best."

- Adrenaline Vault





It is 1933, and in the shadowed world around you there exists an ungodly evil: werewolves, vampires, ghouls and flesh-eating zombies that wait just outside the light's unlocked door to feed upon innocence. There also exist guardians of the good and just, tireless vigilantes capable of tracking down this evil and turning it upon itself. You are one of them. And you hunt, as your vile quarry does, by night.

NOCTURNE

In the womb of darkness, a new genre of game is born.

UNLEASHED HALLOWEEN 1999

created by

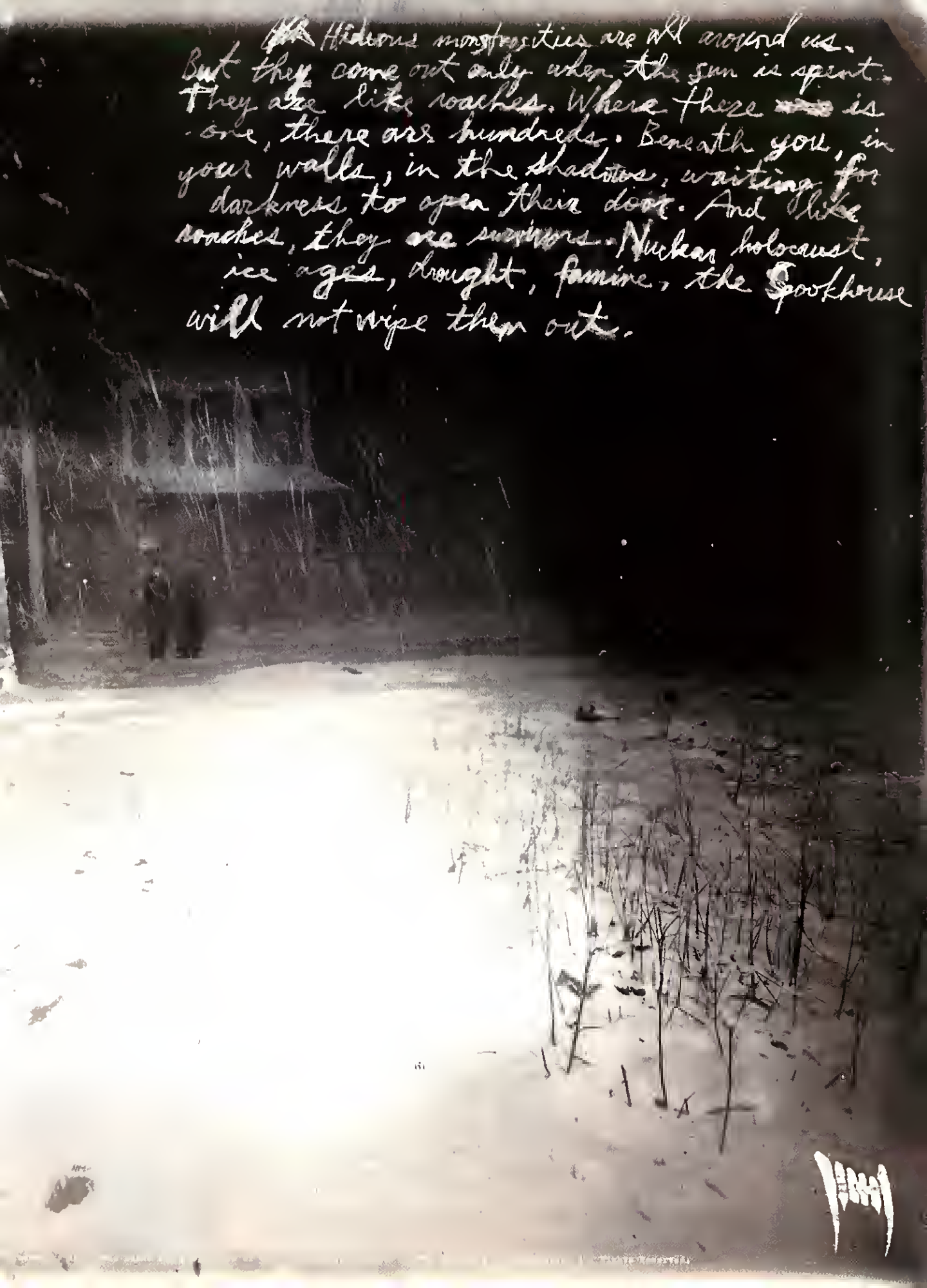
TERMINAL REALITY

published by

GATHERING DEVELOPER

WARNING!
This game contains strong scenes
animated violence, language and nudi
Suitable for mature audiences only.

Hideous monstrosities are all around us. But they come out only when the sun is spent. They are like roaches. Where there is one, there are hundreds. Beneath you, in your walls, in the shadows, waiting for darkness to open their door. And like roaches, they are survivors. Nuclear holocaust, ice ages, drought, famine, the Spookhouse will not wipe them out.

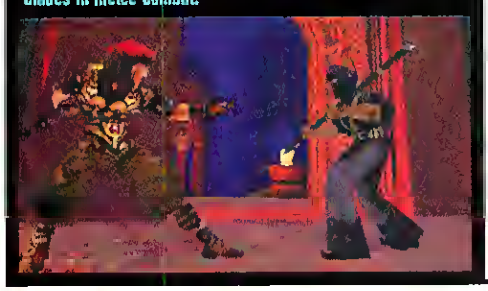


Clone Princes Beware—The Original Swashbuckler Is Back and Better Than Ever by Robert Coffey

Prince of Persia 3D

If Red Orb's smart, they'll ship PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D with a complimentary pair of steel-toed shoes. That way they won't be liable for the broken toes resulting from gamers' jaws dropping as they ogle the drop-dead gorgeous graphics, the richly imagined environments, and animation so incredibly fluid that it should set a new standard in the third-person action/adventure genre. As for what will almost assuredly be insanely addictive gameplay, well, there's always methadone.

The PRINCE franchise has grown from a simple sidescroller to a full-blown 3D extravaganza, with a corresponding growth in the design team. About 25 artists, animators, and level designers are working on the title, a far cry from the creative "army" responsible for every aspect of the landmark 1989 game: one-man band Jordan Mechner. While having the input of so many creative voices has its obvious benefits, the danger is in losing the singular vision that enchanted gamers 10 years ago. Fortunately, that doesn't seem to be the case as PRINCE 3D is blossoming into one of the most fully realized gameworlds burned onto a CD-ROM.



FIGHT SCENES Combat against the host of enemies in PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D takes place in a more traditional fighting-game perspective. In addition to the sword and staff shown here, the prince will also wield a pair of wicked blades in melee combat.

Magic Carpet Ride

And what a gameworld it is, taking place across seven sweeping environments, all of them beautifully lit and painted in a wash of almost impossibly saturated colors. As the beggar prince, gamers will scamper across starlit city rooftops, execute harrowing jumps over a series of jagged cliffs, and escape from a dank prison. Great stuff to be sure, but what promises to be the game's real showstoppers are the dirigible levels in which the prince must tenuously work his way up a palatial airship borne by three mammoth balloons, negotiating the dizzying assortment of ledges, tethers, and whirligigs while the dirigible whizzes along at a heart-stopping altitude.

No less striking is the game's animation. While a gymnast was

Prince of Persia 3D

GENRE: Action/Adventure **RELEASE DATE:** Q3 '99

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: Red Orb Entertainment

CONTACT: www.mindscape.com

The Prince franchise has grown from a simple sidescroller to a full-blown 3D extravaganza

YOU CAN CHECK YOUR IMAGIN
IMAGINATION AT THE DOOR...

AMA SUPERBIKE

YOU WON'T BE

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- Practice Tracks – Practice On A Track Prior To Entering A Race

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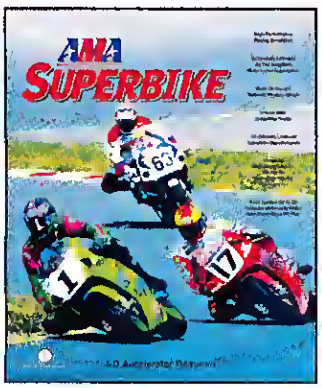

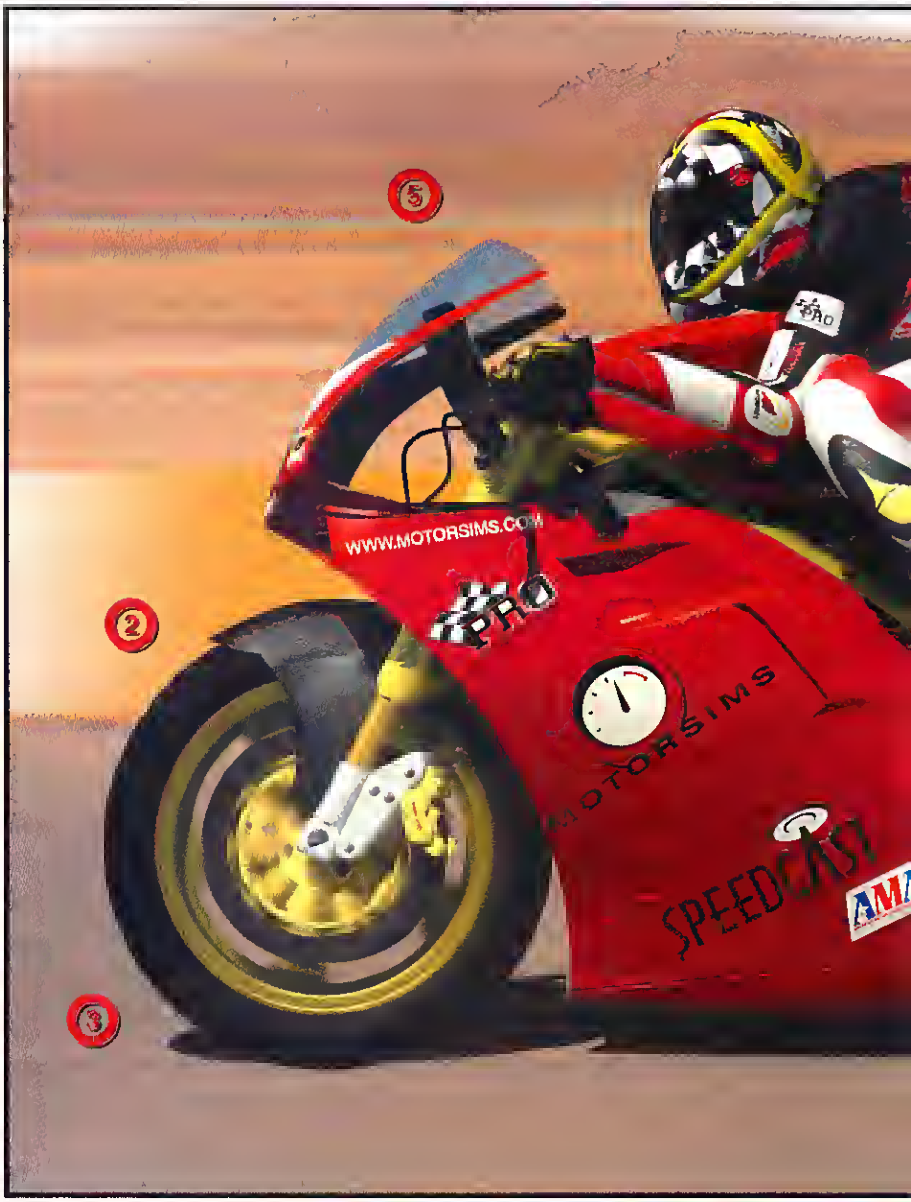

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– Gamas.nat

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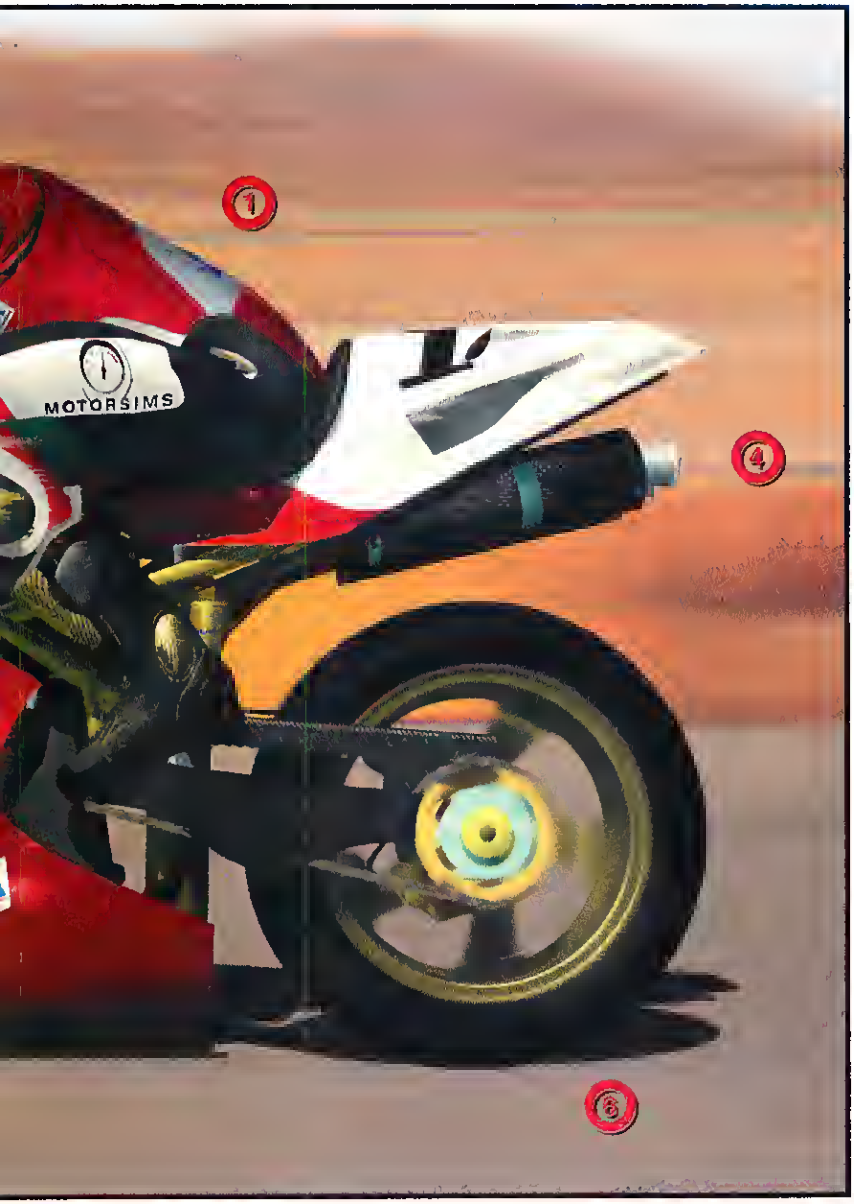
- *Next Generation Online*

"A very true-to-life physics model and all of the elements you would find in an AMA event."
- *PC Gamer*

System requirements: Pentium II and 3-D accelerator card required.

E NEEDING IT.



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GARGOYLE MOHEL Watch out for these swinging blades! Traps like this sword-swinging statue are everywhere in PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D.

LEAP OF FAITH Leaping over hazards like this bed of spikes will make up a large portion of gameplay and is a direct carryover from previous PRINCE games.

motion-captured executing various moves, none of that motion capture is being directly used in the game, instead, it's being employed as a template for the Prince's actions. This lets the designers create a character who moves realistically—turning by leading with his head, for example—but also with the flair and embellishment that are inherent in traditional animation. The end result is a character who can leap with incredible realism while enjoying the incredible unrealism of a five-foot vertical jump.

The combination of gameworld and animation really shine in the combat sequences. The prince will have four weapons, including three close-combat weapons (sword, staff, and double blades) and a bow. The control scheme is remarkably simple, especially for a game that stresses the strategy of sword fighting over simple twitch ability. Gamers will have to pick the appropriate weapon, then sculpt attacks, feints, and blocks into a piece of strategic combat art. Each combat weapon has combos to learn and each also features up to five different finishing moves (see sidebar).

The exception to this rule is the game's only long-range weapon: the bow. But while it has no combos or finishing moves, the bow does have an arsenal of nine magical arrows at its disposal. The Water Freezing arrow, the Blue Fire arrow, and the Lifestealer are not only weapons but also keys to solving puzzles. The Charmed Lights arrow has no offensive capabilities at all, but it can be used to draw the attention of enemies, allowing you to sneak past them.

Arabian Knights

Picking up where the last game left off, PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D opens with the Prince's new bride being kidnapped by the evil Hassan in order to marry her off to his corrupt son Ragnor. Thrown in prison, the prince must escape and, of course, rescue his love. True to the spirit of the series, the prince starts out unarmed and must find a weapon while dodging the diabolical traps that fill the game.

You'll never be stumbling blindly through the levels; be it through brief cut-scenes or other clues, you'll always have an idea where you need to go and roughly what you'll need to do to get there. This approach carries over to the trap design as well; while there are loads of hazards like guillotine doors, decapitating blades that spring from walls, and pillars that suddenly drive up from the floor to impale you on spikes set in the ceiling, the cautious player can pick up clues to avoid the traps. It's a happy break from the school of game design that alerts you to trap location by killing you.

There is no inventory system, though there are items such as keys that must be found and used. But instead of forcing you to fumble through an inventory screen to use the key, the game will know that you have it and just unlock the door.

The only drawback we see to the lack of inventory is in the handling of the potions. These magical elixirs pepper the gameworld and give the gamer temporary powers such as camouflage, featherfall, and increased attack power. While these will most likely be placed right where gamers will most need them, the inability to carry healing potions for later use could rankle some gamers. It's the only potential weak point in a game we are frankly dying to play. CGW

5 THINGS

Five Best Finishing Moves in PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D

1. The Backhead Plunge
The prince slashes his enemy with his sword and then, turning away from his opponent, drives the blade with a backhead move into his gut.

2. The Neck Twister
The prince wraps his staff around his opponent's neck, turns, and shakes the guy like a rag doll until things start snapping.

3. The Tear
With the double blades, the prince stabs both blades into his opponent, gives them a little twist, then tears them apart.

4. The Chest Thrust
The prince tosses his sword in the air, catches it, and drives it down into his opponent's rib cage. Then, in a very nice animation touch, he has to brace his foot on the guy in order to pull his sword out again.

5. The Back Shower
The prince spins toward his opponent, hitting him multiple times with the staff in the process, and finally smacks it into the base of his spine with a satisfying snap.

IF YOUR HEART ISN'T RACING BY NOW, CHECK TO SEE IF IT'S BEATING AT ALL.

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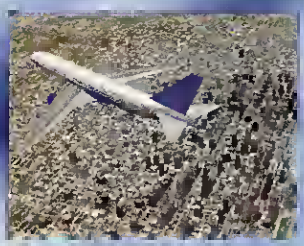

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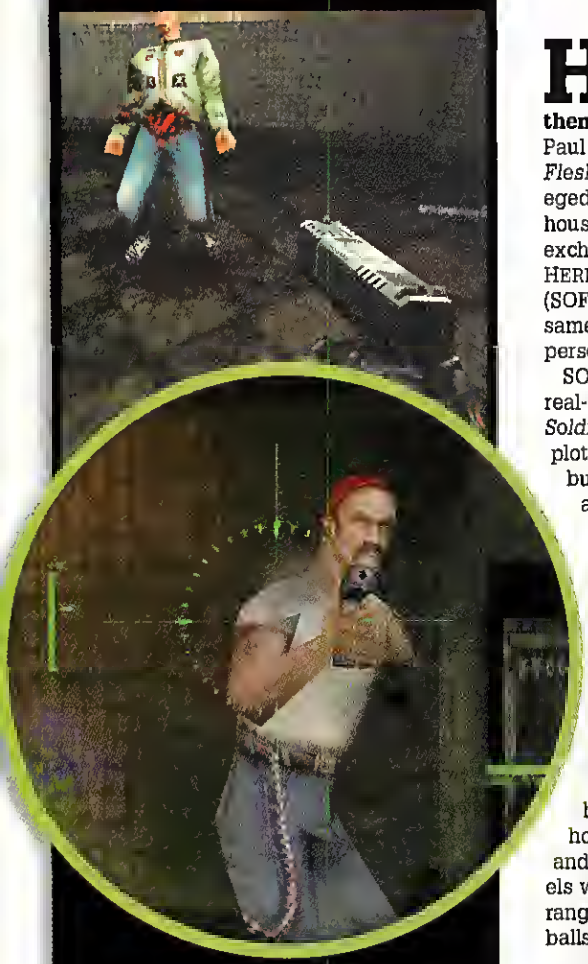
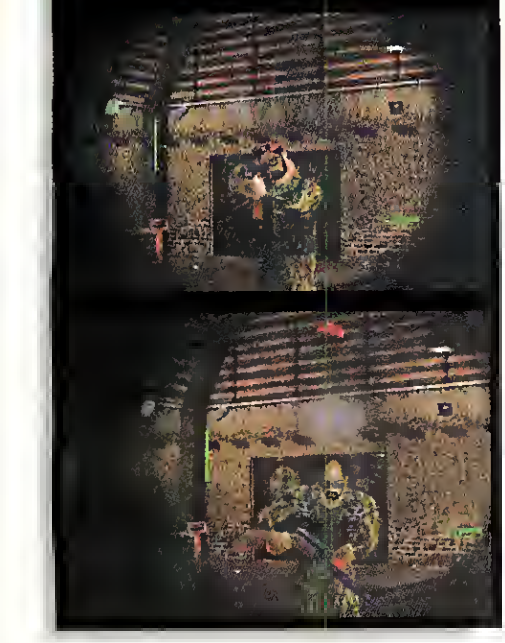
THEY'VE GOT GUTS This intestine-intensive shot demonstrates Raven's no-holds-barred approach to graphic violence.



STYLISH GUYS ACCESSORIZE The hit-location modeling is so sensitive that you can shoot accessories such as hats, sunglasses, and even guns out of enemies' hands.



Soldier of Fortune

Raven Pushes Gaming Violence and the QUAKE 2 Engine to Extremes

by Thierry Nguyen

WARBIRDS: BATTLECRY
GENRE: 3D Action RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software

Hard as it may seem, it is entirely possible to switch from a medieval fantasy theme to pulse-pounding action. Paul Verhoeven went from the obscure *Flesh & Blood* to *Total Recall* and managed just fine. The Raven development house has done a spells-for-guns exchange program in their shift from HERETIC II to SOLDIER OF FORTUNE (SOF), all while hoping to retain the same fast-paced gameplay that first-person shooter fans are looking for.

SOF casts you as John Mullin, the real-life mercenary consultant from *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. The exact plot details are still being worked out, but essentially, you'll be hopping around various hotspots—Iraq, Siberia, Kosovo, New York?—to take on terrorists. Raven is going for the feel of a blockbuster military action movie like *The Rock* or *Navy SEALS*, and the focus of the gameplay is the fast-paced firefight. Mullin consulted on the project to make sure the tactics of the enemy opponents and the general feel of the game were accurate, so expect high risk (one or two shots can kill both you and your enemies) and fast and furious gunplay. The various levels will have different mission goals, ranging from sneaky assassinations to balls-out showdowns.

Just a Flesh Wound

The character design is the most drastic improvement Raven has made on the QUAKE II engine. Just because you're fighting other humans doesn't mean you'll be fighting endless armies of clones, as in WOLFENSTEIN 3D or even HALF-LIFE. The character body type will be the same, but there are a variety of different clothes, weapons and faces to differentiate the enemies. What really makes the enemies stand out are the injury and animation systems. Wound location is modeled to an uncomfortably accurate degree. Not only can you individually target body parts, but the hit location system even allows you to shoot between an enemy's legs. For the character animations, Raven has motion-captured sequences for each wound location; hit someone in the neck, and he'll clutch the wound in agony, or go for a groin shot to watch him writhe in misery.

The wound modeling and animation will surely be controversial. Even I was shocked the first time I saw a shot that severed an enemy's leg at the thigh, and could actually see the shattered bone stump sticking out. In deference to the current controversy over violence in gaming, Raven will include a special parental lock. At press time, they were still deciding whether the lock will be "all or nothing" or have gradual settings. At its maximum setting there is no blood, dismemberment or screaming, resulting in enemies literally rolling over and dying. Also, there will be civilians in some of these missions, and you will automatically lose if you accidentally shoot one.

The weapons list includes several standard real-world weapons that you've seen in countless magazines and movies. At press time, there are some licensing issues with the names of the guns, so while you may not be officially using, say, the Desert Eagle, you'll be using a differently-named gun with similar characteristics. Also in your arsenal will be two AI mercenaries who will provide support in key missions.

Multiple Ways to Play

For multiplayer, Raven is thinking of adding a variety of new game types to stand beside traditional deathmatch. There's Assassin, where every player is given a specific player to kill, and upon success is given a different player, until everyone in the game has been fragged. There's also Arsenal, where the winner is the first person to score a frag with every weapon (no more rocket hogs).

While SOF may have deviated from the original design concept (as reported in April), it still looks like a very solid game. It's a direct foil to the military sims featured in our cover story, but if you're craving some hard-boiled, movie-style military action—and have the stomach for extreme gore—look for SOLDIER OF FORTUNE when it hits shelves this November. CGW

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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

PC CD-ROM

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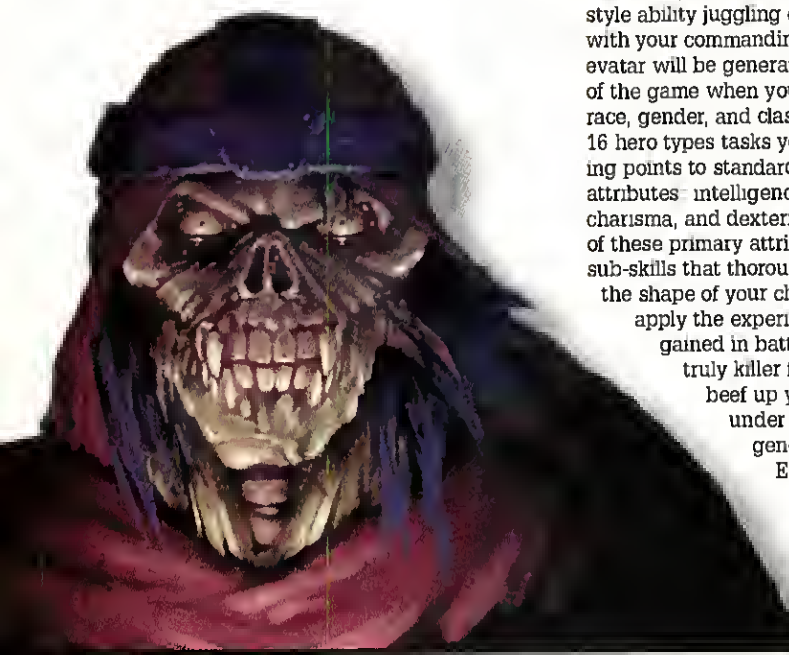
SSG's Turn-Based War-horse Gallops Into the World of Realtime by Robert Coffey

Warlords: Battlecry

BLOOD AND SAND Battles will take place in a variety of environments, including desert oases like this.

SPELLBOUND While spell effects will be suitably snazzy, it's the little sparkly deals collecting above your troops that should draw your attention. Each little icon above a unit shows how many and which spells it is currently influenced by.

KNOW THYSELF This guy greets you before every BATTLECRY campaign. You begin by deciding on a hero character to lead your troops. Gameplay will be influenced heavily by the attributes and abilities of the hero you create.



Sometimes, in order to grow, you need to branch out. If you're Mel Gibson, you direct; if you're Jennifer Lopez, you sing; and if you're Gary Coleman, you become a rabid, fan-bashing mall cop, enduring an endless chorus of shoppers shouting "Watchoo talkin' 'bout, Willis?" as you safeguard the sanctity of the Orange Julius. Obviously, moving away from the tried and true is fraught with both inherent dangers and rewards—precisely the challenge facing the designers of WARLORDS: BATTLECRY as they move the venerable, turn-based Warlords franchise into the brave new world of real-time strategy.

Something for Everyone

A funny thing happened in focus testing—Red Orb found out that next to the WARLORDS games, their very loyal fan base rated the real-time AGE OF EMPIRES as their favorite game. This inspired SSG to fold everything that makes WARLORDS what it is into a real-time format, complete with harvesting resources, building structures for troop upgrades, and churning out armies made up of the game's 56 units. What will separate BATTLECRY from the real-time pack will be robust RPG elements.

While your individual units improve with every battle won, the real RPG-style ability juggling comes into play with your commanding hero. Your avatar will be generated at the start of the game when you select your race, gender, and class. Each of the 16 hero types tasks you with assigning points to standard character attributes—intelligence, strength, charisma, and dexterity. Under each of these primary attributes lie four sub-skills that thoroughly determine the shape of your character as you apply the experience points gained in battle. Want a truly killer fireball? Then beef up your fire ability under your intelligence rating. Experience points are also used to purchase new spells after battle, adding another strategic level to gameplay. Do you go for that nifty ice spell, or pump up your charisma for a morale bonus?

With all the options players will have, experience points are bound to be precious. Happily, SSG is using the quest feature from the turn-based games in BATTLECRY. This will let gamers go on subquests during campaign missions, managing their troops from afar as they seek to garner even more experience points. This should add another tactical layer to combat as gamers weigh whether their troops can manage without the bonuses and spells hero leaders provide.

Graphically, BATTLECRY is shooting to be as pretty as AGE OF EMPIRES II. They're off to a good start, but the units could still use a little work. However, the terrain already looks nice thanks to a very large tile size that allows the level designers to create worlds with much more detail and significantly less repetition than your average RTS title. Real-time lighting and weather effects such as rain won't have any effect on play, but should add lots of ambience.

Will WARLORDS' name recognition be enough to launch BATTLECRY to the top of the real-time heap, or will its turn-based legacy hamper it in the marketplace? It's tough to say, especially once 500-pound gorillas like HOMEWORLD and TIBERIAN SUN are on the shelves. Ultimately, it may come down to how well it fits its fantasy niche and matches up to TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS and the upcoming AGE OF WONDERS. CGW

WARLORDS: BATTLECRY
GENRE: Strategy RELEASE DATE: Q1 '00
PUBLISHER: Red Orb Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Strategic Studies Group
CONTACT: www.redorb.com

5 THINGS

Five Other Fantasy Strategy Games Worth Checking Out

1. HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC II and III
2. MASTER OF MAGIC
3. DUNGEON KEEPER 2
4. FANTASY GENERAL
5. MAGIC & MAYHEM

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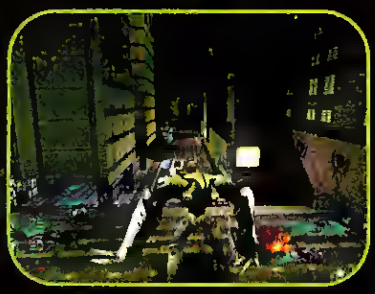
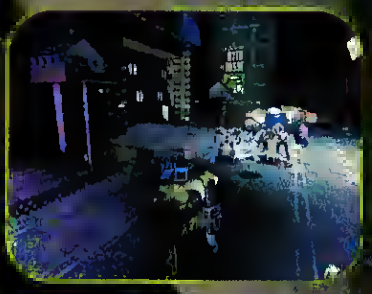


SLAVE ZERO



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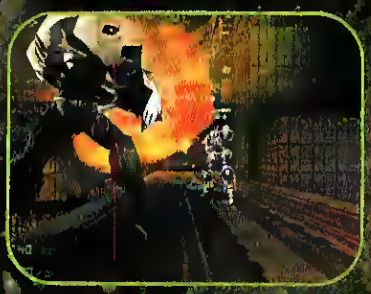
-GameSpot



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How Does a 500-Pound Gorilla Design an Online Role-Playing Game? Any Way it Wants To.

by Thierry Nguyen

Asheron's Call

You know you're onto something hot when the Evil Empire wants in on the action. After the success of Origin's and Sony's online role-playing games, it wasn't long before Microsoft made its play. Just as I was ending my EVERQUEST binge, an ASHERON'S CALL (AC) beta landed in my hands. While Microsoft's RPG has many trappings of a traditional RPG, it is by far the most original of the three big massively-multiplayer RPGs.

Character generation is similar to other games, but here there's an additional level of detail. While other games let you pick your character's face and clothing colors, AC lets you pick all the individual components of the face and clothing. The AC design team wanted to make sure that every gamer has a chance to make a truly unique character, rather than a cookie-cutter clone. Characters are skill-based rather than class-based; gamers can use either a default template like "warrior," or choose which skills the character will focus on.

You then pop into Dereth, the game world. One of the big features being touted in AC is the lack of zones; you can walk from one end of Dereth to another without seeing a load screen. And don't expect a short walk either, as Dereth has over 500 square miles of terrain. For faster travel, there are teleportation portals scattered around the landscape. Entering dungeons will be the only time you'll have pause for data transfer, and it's barely noticeable. Since all dungeons are small downloads, it'll be simple for the design team to seamlessly add new acreage.

ASHERON'S CALL
GENRE: Online RPG • RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Turbine Entertainment Software

Murder, Madness, Mayhem, Microsoft

ASHERON CALL's combat will make some innovations. The design team is straying from the traditional "click-until-your-mouse-dies" style of combat by adding additional tactical elements. Your enemies will vary in height, so your combat menu will have additional buttons denoting high, medium, or low attacks. You'll have to deal with high-flying wasps, and you'll have to decide whether or not that Drudge's head is less protected than its chest. In addition, you'll have a slider bar that determines how fast and powerful your blows will be. Speed and power have an inverse relationship, so that you can opt for quick, weak attacks or strong, slow ones.

The design will also breathe new life into the death experience. There are Life Stones scattered throughout Dereth, and you can bind yourself to any of these; once you die, you'll be resurrected at the last stone you were bound to. Upon resurrection, you'll lose half your money and your most valuable item. Finally, you'll suffer a five percent penalty to all your skills and stats. This penalty fades as time goes by, but if you die *again*, well, those penalties start to add up. It's an interesting compromise, in that while you do get penalized, it's not as harsh as other games where your items are with your corpse and you must retrieve them.

FEE FI FO FUM This giant Monouga is an example of the unique creatures in ASHERON'S CALL, as the design team has eschewed traditional fantasy critters in order to be original.

VORPAL BUNNY SLAYER Combat is more than just point-and-click. You need to weigh factors such as target height, and speed versus power of your attack.

5 THINGS

Five ASHERON CALL Commodities Most Likely to Be Sold on eBay

1. A 100th level character with a rank of High King.
2. A character with a complete list of spell formulas.
3. A complete set of annotated dungeon maps.
4. A complete list of portal locations.
5. A million pyreals in trade notes.

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As for player-killing (PK), everyone will start in non-PK mode. In order to become a PKer, you need to go out on a specified, medium-difficulty quest. Once that is done, you can only attack other PKers. If you then change your mind, you'll have to finish a harder quest in order to return to non-PK mode; be committed to whatever choice you make.

HAVE PORTAL, WILL TRAVEL For those of you who abhor hiking and want a fast shortcut, seek out these teleportation portals.

Merlin Sells Amway

The magic system is also unique, in that it will allow for player experimentation, and creation, of their own spells. Spells are based on physical components, player gestures, and incantations. Spell power is drawn from a general worldwide pool, so that the more people who cast a spell, the less power it has—it's advantageous for a player to keep his or her new spells secret.

Finally, if you had to name one thing that makes AC truly unique, it's the Allegiance system. Think of it as a medieval pyramid scheme, where players can be patrons and recruit vassals; each vassal can become a patron by recruiting more vassals under him. Each vassal will add to his patron's rank within the Allegiance, in addition to generating experience that will be given to the patron. In a way, level-one character Joe Fairy's slaying of a rat will generate experience up the chain, all the way to his King. Now, whenever a character leaves, all vassals under him leave also, so patrons need to keep their vassals happy (by giving them rare items, for example). In the Allegiance system, higher-level players attempt to recruit newbies, rather than try to kill them.

All in all, Microsoft isn't entering the online field with a hack job; it's committing to a truly unique game within the genre. If nothing else, it will be interesting to see the social dynamic of the Allegiance system at work once the game hits the shelves this winter. CGW

NOX

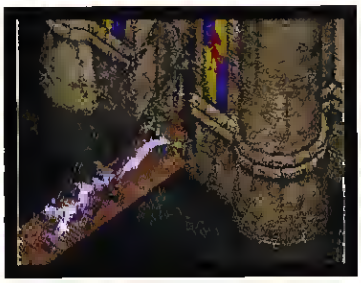
Westwood's Multiplayer May Challenge DIABLO

by Thierry Nguyen

To our jaded eyes, NOX looks like a simple DIABLO ripoff. But after playing a few multiplayer sessions, we have to say that NOX has plenty to distinguish itself from the DIABLO-clone masses.

GENRE: RPG
RELEASE DATE: Q1 '00
PUBLISHER: Westwood Studios

The backstory here is that your name is Bob, and one day you're zapped into another dimension. After choosing to be a Warrior, Conjurer, or Wizard, you embark on an 11-mission crusade against the evil Hecubah. Each character class has a different set of missions, with 33 total. Westwood is now tweaking the single-player campaign to make sure it feels different depending on your class.



When NOX really shines is during multiplayer. The three classes are well-balanced against each other; the Warrior is the straight "point-and-click attack" fighter, who can use his shield for protection against magical spells. Meanwhile, the Wizard has an array of traditional spells, complemented by those that focus on teleportation. Lastly, the Conjurer has a spell arsenal concentrating on summoning monsters, and can also wield some ranged weapons.

While the character balance is very well done, what's even better are the spell traps and combinations. Both the Wizard and the Conjurer can string three different spells together to create a particular combination–such as a Wizard teleporting the target into an open fire, blinding it, and then dropping a giant stone fist on it. With about 40 spells to choose from for each class, there will be lots of opportunities for new and more devious combinations. This feature alone makes NOX multiplayer a great ride. Not only will there be deathmatch, but there will be specific multiplayer scenarios, such as King of the Hill or Capture the Flag, all supported on Westwood Online.

There are other features that make NOX a standout, but what really drew us in were the spell combinations and character-class balance. While there will be many DIABLO clones, we'll probably be too busy dropping giant stone fists on each other—in NOX—to notice. CGW

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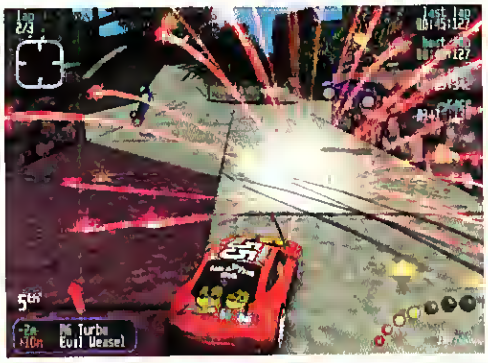

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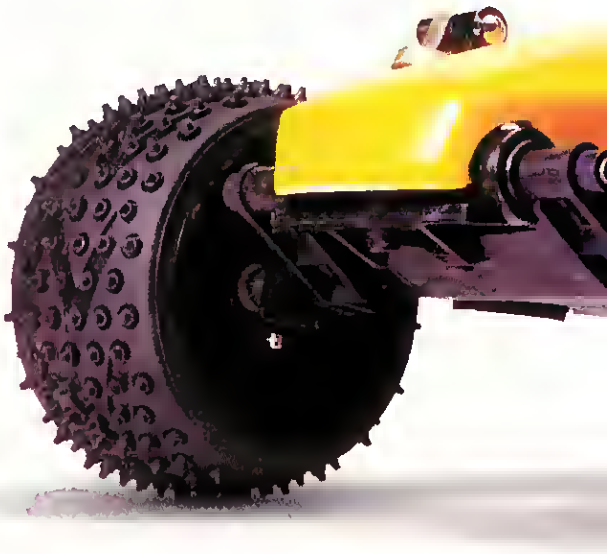

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Raising

Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun

Kane

We visited Westwood Studios and **locked ourselves** into a tiny, dark room for days with **just one purpose—to play the hell out of C&C: TIBERIAN SUN** and find out if it **will live up** to the **hype.**

by Robert Coffey and Tom Price

The most hotly anticipated real-time strategy title of the year, COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN will hit shelves burdened with the crushing weight of the high expectations of gamers. After the enormous popularity of both C&C and RED ALERT, what could Westwood do to top themselves, let alone to stand out in the most crowded genre in gaming? What will set TIBERIAN SUN apart from the pack?

The world is huge and dangerous, an active player in the game.

The action is blistering.

The units are alternately brutal and devious.

So will it be worth the wait? The answer is a resounding "yes."

After days filled with nothing more than the relentless playing with a days-from-finished build of TIBERIAN SUN, we can report that while it won't be the huge leap forward in the RTS genre that STARCRAFT was, it's a solid, compelling game in its own right and on its own terms.

KANE LIVES IN DEATH. NO, REALLY, HE DOES.

It turns out that Nod's megalomaniacal leader Kane may not have actually died at the end of the last game. That's bad news for the law-enforcing Global Defense Initiative, who are now faced with suppressing another NOD assault. This conflict is played out over two entirely separate campaigns which can run anywhere from 12 to 19 missions, depending on how many optional missions a player takes on. Unlike other games which try to tell one huge story through numerous mini-campaigns, TIBERIAN

SUN tells two distinct stories, with each side successfully driving toward victory. Elaborate video cut scenes between missions tell both stories with Hollywood stars like Michael Biehn and James Earl Jones slumming in key roles. As well done as they are, it can be a little hard to take the videos seriously, what with hordes of Nod true believers chanting "Kane lives in death!" and a chesty, cross-eyed mutant named Umagon with tiberium sprouting from her forehead.

While there are a slew of new features in the game, players will find much that is familiar. The iconic construction interface is still fundamentally the same, though up to five units of both infantry and vehicles can be queued up for production. Unfortunately, although TIBERIAN SUN sports an incredibly robust waypoint system, units still simply spill out and collect at the door of their production center, since you cannot set rally points.

The campaigns are broken up into both production and non-production missions, with a few hybrid missions that ask you to seize an area with limited forces and *then* build a base. The GDI undertake more non-production scenarios than the Nod; for example, one GDI mission charges you with destroying a dam, following a fairly-fixed winding path through the map. After clearing each big Nod defensive position, a transport arrives bearing fresh units. This mission is also indicative of the branching structure of the campaigns—completing it makes a subsequent mission easier. These missions aren't required; you can choose to skip over them, but the following missions are so difficult that most gamers will want the edge that completing the optional scenarios gives them.

The campaigns are well-designed and consistently challenging, with frequent surprises. For example, one Nod mission asks you to employ your new-found mutant allies to eliminate a small GDI presence before setting up a base to prepare for a larger assault. Typically devious Nod planning results in a royal backstabbing of the mutants who then turn on you, suddenly forcing you to deal with an enemy that is more than likely hovering around your base. A few of the non-production missions fall flat, unfortunately; in particular, one Nod rescue mission hinges more on stumbling across the right path than on tactical ingenuity. Still, we expect most players will be happy with both the length and challenge of both campaigns, as well as a cunning AI that is as likely to launch a full-scale assault as to distract you with a distant skirmish so it can surreptitiously capture your base structures with engineers.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR Heated battles on bridges not only look cool, but destructible bridges mean you can cut off access routes or even drop your enemies into the drink.

MOTOR POOL Even though TIBERIAN SUN features a great waypoint system, the game's lack of rally points means your vehicles and infantry still bunch up outside the buildings that produce them.

HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT With all the nasty Nod stealth units, mobile sensor arrays (next to the reticle in this shot) are an absolutely essential part of safeguarding your base and masses of units prior to an assault.

DEEP IMPACT As if dealing with the Nod and GDI forces weren't hard enough, random events like this devastating meteor storm make the gameworld even more dangerous.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

More than ever, there are significant differences between

WHAT'S NEW?

- Unit veterancy rewards players for keeping units alive with better attack and occasional special abilities.
- Robust waypoint system allows for multiple patrol and guard routes.
- Terrain reflects battle damage and lets players strategically blow up bridges and collapse tunnels. Ice floes spanning rivers will crack under the weight of heavy units, sink the units, and then refreeze over time.
- Random map generator for multiplayer action.
- Random ion and meteor storms that damage or shut down units add another layer of strategic complexity.
- Mobile sensor units detect cloaked or burrowed units.
- Subterranean units allow for devious base assaults.
- Tiberium-based plants and animals present new hazards.
- Blue tiberium, more valuable than the standard green variety, lets players collect money faster. The unstable nature of the substance means that firefights taking place on blue tiberium fields can end in devastating explosions.
- While other infantry units take damage in tiberium fields and can eventually turn into vicious tiberium-based creatures, cyborg commandos actually heal in tiberium fields.
- Unit production queuing.
- Base cloaking technology lets Nod commanders hide in plain sight.
- Includes both hostile and friendly mutant units and civilian vehicles.
- Colored lighting makes for a much more visually-interesting battlefield.

the Nod and GDI unit sets. The GDI leans heavily on massively-armored units capable of dealing punishing amounts of damage. Mech-like units such as the Wolverine, Titan, and the vicious Mammoth Mark II make for devastating assault forces in numbers. The GDI is all about classic tactical stratagems, relying on pincer maneuvers and straightforward, withering assaults to beat their opponents. Even their infantry units are powerful, with grenade-lobbing Disc Throwers and Jump Jet Infantry that can hover across the rivers and streams that lace game maps.

The Nod, on the other hand, are just plain evil. Relying on stealth and surprise, the Nod units will probably hold the most appeal for gamers. Burrowing units like the Devil's Tongue Flame Tank or Subterranean APC let Nod commanders pop up in enemy bases to wreak havoc, while Stealth Generators can be built to conceal entire Nod bases. We found that hit-and-run tactics that disrupt enemy production are an especially effective tact to take in multiplayer games; in fact, the Nod can win multiplayer matches without ever launching a typical full-scale assault, thanks in large part to their devastating Chemical Missile. By harvesting veins of tiberium, Nod forces can create warheads that unleash clouds of horrible tiberium waste, mutating enemy forces, destroying their buildings, then spreading a toxic vapor that turns its victims into mutated visceroids that attack anything near them, including former comrades. Few weapons have said "Screw you" more effectively.

The visceroids are just one part of a landscape that is as much a part of the game as other players or the AI. Bridges can be blown to shut down avenues of attack; tiberium-tainted creatures and mutants will attack both sides; huge sucking maws (like DUNE 2's sand worms) gobble forces that try to cross plains veined with tiberium; frozen rivers can be crossed by lighter units; and fields of tiberium will poison human troops or, in the case of blue tiberium, explode under fire. Ion storms shut down technology-based units while showers of tiberium meteors re-seed the land with tiberium, but could contaminate or wipe out entire bases. All of these things add challenges for gamers both to avoid and to exploit, especially in multiplayer.

BALANCE AND POWER

We went into our marathon playfest with some skepticism. First off, we couldn't understand why flying units couldn't penetrate unrevealed portions of the map. Westwood's reasoning was that airborne units can scout out too much of the map in multiplayer games and throw the balance out of whack. While we fully expected to hate this choice, we found that it wasn't really an issue—flying units are far enough down the technology tree that if you hadn't done extensive scouting by the time you were ready to build them, you were probably dead anyway. While this will still infuriate some gamers, we're now convinced it shouldn't be too important.

We were especially heartened by the efforts being made to halt the tank rushes that plagued previous C&C's in multiplayer. The most significant change comes in unit production—multiple production buildings no longer supercharge your production rates. While you'll get a slight production bonus with a second war factory, anything after that is just a waste of money. Also, Electromagnetic Pulse Cannons will literally halt a tank rush in its tracks. With every unit having a counter on the other side, players are going to have to develop new tactics and constantly re-evaluate their strategies in order to crush their opponents.

Unit veterancy is an interesting new idea, with units gaining improved attacks and, in some cases, new abilities after inflicting so many enemy kills. But this cool idea may turn out to be irrelevant. As cool as it is to have your veteran Rocket Bikes suddenly gain the ability to attack aircraft, the "expendable horde" play that dominates RTS games

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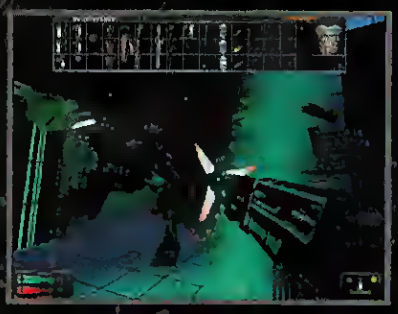

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LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS

may lead this feature to be largely overlooked.

As much fun as the campaigns were, the real test of this title will be in the multiplayer game, and at the time of our visit it wasn't quite up to the test, crashing whenever more than two players joined a game. While we expect this to change, we have a few concerns about the game balance in the multiplayer arena. As powerful as the GDI units are, they're slow and seem to be at a distinct disadvantage against the stealthy and disruptive NOD forces, especially the Chemical Missile. In at least one-on-one contests, a well-fortified Nod base hurling Chemical Missiles seems assured of winning almost every time. As much as Westwood seems to want to avoid rushing, it would seem the GDI might have to lean on early assaults to stay in the game.

In spite of our concerns on these points, TIBERIAN SUN seems assured of a long, healthy life on the hard drives of gamers. The single-player game is looking extremely solid, with a pair of bruising, incredibly addicting campaigns highlighting the strengths of both factions. Multiplayer contests might be cause for some small worry as the Nod seems to have an edge over the GDI, but the great assortment of units on both sides, a fantastically customizable random map generator, and the hardcore, militaristic flavor of multiplayer combat should create a nonstop flood of games on Westwood Online.

The bottom line is simply this: Just days before completion, COMMAND &CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN is a stronger game than most RTS titles after 15 patches. You're definitely going to want this one. CGW

RED SKIES AT NIGHT Deformable terrain and colored lighting may not impact gameplay, but dang it, don't it look good.

GROUNDHOG DAY Nod's burrowing APCs let them easily breach GDI defenses to dump forces inside enemy bases.

MECH WAR Thanks to their vicious firepower, small strike teams of GDI walker units can quickly obliterate entire bases, if there's little resistance.

BIG GUNS Both the Ion Cannon and Obelisk of Light are back to decimate your friends and loved ones in multiplayer skirmishes.

The Final Hours of Tiberian Sun

On a sweltering July afternoon off freeway exit 82B in Northwest Las Vegas, producer Rade Stojsavljevic walks into conference room three at Westwood Studios, bug list in hand. Once 40 pages long, the list now contains only a few dozen items. To lead designer Adam Isgreen, and designers John Archer, Michael Lightner, and Patrick Pennullo, it's the telltale sign that COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN is almost ready to ship. "We just fixed the bug where the GDI Orca Carryall could use its grappling hook to pick up enemy troops and transport them," says Stojsavljevic with a slight grin on his face. The designers all crack up, their laughter spilling into the building's corridors.

Down the corridor in his office, Executive Producer Brett Sperry sums it up: "We're probably going to be done within 48 hours. It's just surreal—four years of our lives and it's all coming down to this." For Sperry and his team, building TIBERIAN SUN has been a "Herculean task," commencing just days after the original COMMAND & CONQUER shipped in 1995. Since then, a talented group of programmers, designers, and artists challenged themselves to build a sequel worthy of the C&C name. "Even the smallest call, like whether the Jump Jet Infantry should be able to be fired upon by Nod lasers, is an incredibly important balance decision," explains Sperry. "We really wanted to reinforce the whole Achilles' heel concept so that every single strategy has a counter strategy others can figure out."—Geoffrey Keighley

Excerpted from GameSpot's Behind the Games: Tiberian Sun. For more on the chaotic final 48 hours of TIBERIAN SUN's life, including exclusive interviews with the game's designers and a few hints about the future of the C&C series, check out: www.gamespot.com/features/btg-tsun.

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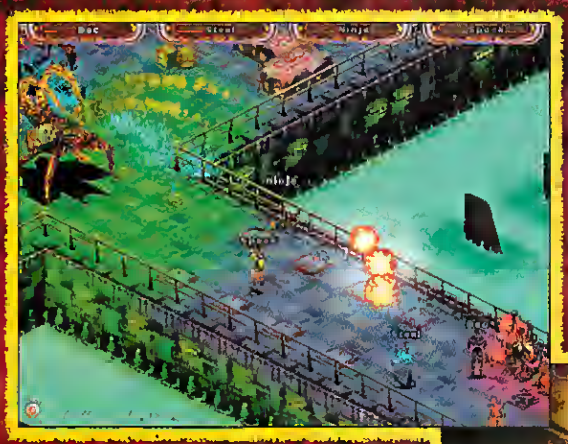

ABOMINATION

Action Strategy Mayhem

EIDOS

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PROPS to the Spring '99 Winners!

THE GUILLEMOT CHAMPIONSHIPS OF THE AMD PROFESSIONAL GAMERS' LEAGUE, the live finals event for the PGL's Spring '99 season, took New York City by storm. Thousands of spectators attended the two-day event at XS New York in Manhattan's Times Square, and 20,000 more followed the action via the live Webcast!

IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUNDS OF COMPETITION, Guillaume "X'Ds-Grrrr" Patry overcame the notorious Wayne "Soso" Chiang to take the Strategy (Starcraft) title, and Bon "Kuin" Danan captured the Action (Quake II) crown by beating out Erik "Vorador" Spoor. Kuin and Grrrr took home $10,000 in cash apiece, and more than $4,000 in prizes – all told, more than $100,000 in cash and prizes was distributed among the top 64 players in the Spring '99 season!

IN ADDITION, KUIN RECEIVED AN AWESOME BONUS PRIZE: an all-expense-paid trip to id Software's headquarters in Mesquite, TX, courtesy of id and Activision!

Quake II champ Bon "Kuin" Danan receives his $10,000 winners check from PGL Commissioner Nolan Bushnell.

The finalists in each of the Spring '99 categories placed as follows (with city of residence):

Quake II

Bon "Kuin" Danan: Montreal, Canada
Erik "Vorador" Spoor: Amsterdam, NY
Sebastian "Sybek" Lenart: Mississauga, Canada
Kurt "Immortal" Shimada: Pleasanton, CA
Alex "bad-habit" Pogozelski: McLean, VA
Gordon "K9-Gloucester" Luk: Los Angeles, CA (tie)
Jason "Jmaster" Siquig: Fremont, CA
Eric "DH-SaboTaj" Manfredi: Mundelein, IL (tie)

Starcraft

Guillaume "Grrrr" Patry: Beauport, Quebec
Wayne "Soso" Chiang: San Jose, CA
Dave "BOO!" Howell: Gander, Newfoundland
Christopher "Pillars" Page: Andover, MA
Patrick "Kain-the-Feared" Chapelsky: Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada
Stephen "taurus" Chan: Culver City, CA (tie)
David "DeepBlue" Magro: Rochester, NY
Dennis "-WarAngel-" Lee: Grand Prairie, TX (tie)

Starcraft champion Guillaume "Grrrr" Patry is all smiles as he receives his winner's check while PGL commissioner Nolan Bushnell (left) and Starcraft co-producer Rob Pardo of Blizzard Entertainment (right) look on.

Fans packed the massive gaming arena, XS New York in Times Square, to see the top players in North America do battle for $100,000 in prizes!

Registration for the Fall '99 Season is Now Open!

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Tactical Advantages

There are general strategies for attaining victory in COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN that will work no matter which side you're playing on, and there are other strategies that take advantage of the unique strengths and abilities of each force. Here's a look at a few tactics and their respective counter-tactics that will have your multiplayer opponents wishing they could join Kane in the land of the living-in-death.

THE CIRCLE OF STRIFE [NOD & GDI]

This tactic works well as a cheap and flexible defense system, as well as early in a war. Loop a waypoint system around your base and link it up using the shift key. Build a lot of low cost units, machine gunners, disc throwers, and rocket troops. Space groups out evenly, then press [ctrl-alt] to put them in guard mode and send them along on the patrol route so that your base is completely surrounded by troops ready to fire at will. Activating guard mode will make them aggressively assault any nearby enemy. Just telling them to move means they'll ignore enemies. Avoid large gaps in the procession; your opponent can time a desperate engineer dash for a vital resource when your guys are clumped on one side of the base. Also note that when a repair bot or a medic is placed on a waypoint system, they will heal and repair your troops as they make the rounds.

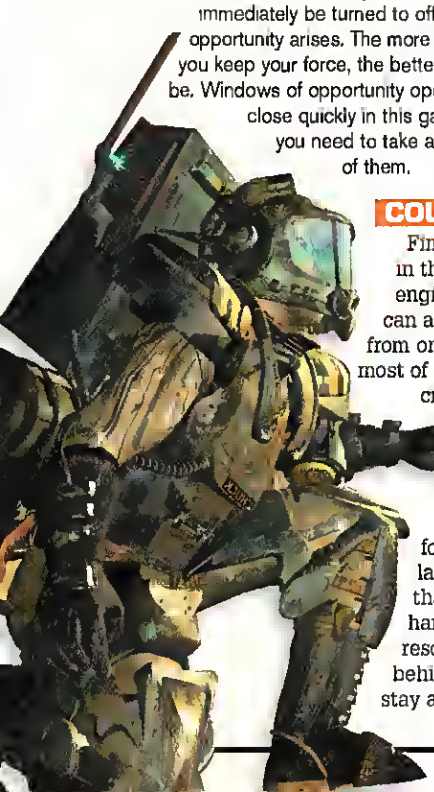
RING OF FIRE
Set up your waypoint system in a tight ring around your base; you don't want units patrolling large empty areas.

SPREAD OUT
Try to avoid leaving big gaps in your "circle of strife," for your enemy is sure to exploit them.

The tactic works well at the beginning of the game when attacks tend to be more exploratory than all-out assaults. As your enemies climb the tech tree and confront you with more advanced and powerful units, you'll probably be forced to build the more effective permanent ground defenses to repel the attacks.

One added benefit to this tactic is that it serves as an early defense system that can immediately be turned to offense if an opportunity arises. The more flexible you keep your force, the better off you'll be. Windows of opportunity open and close quickly in this game, and you need to take advantage of them.

ON GUARD
Setting your troops to guard mode will ensure that they attack intruders, instead of just continuing on their merry way.



COUNTER

Find gaps in the circle and rush an engineer though. You can also try attacking from one side, until all or most of the members of the circle are concentrating on your diversion, then rush an engineer in on the exposed side.

You can also refrain from attacking at all for a while. The circle requires spending a large amount early on for cheap units, money that could have been spent on refineries and harvesters. If your opponent devotes time and resources to the circle, he'll probably fall behind in his development and you'll be able to stay ahead on the tech tree.

ABOMINATION

PROFILE

Name: Karl Wagner

Call Sign: Creepy

Skill: Camouflage

Personal Details: Recruited by Project Nemesis in 1998, Karl is the son of a German Diplomat living in London. Karl joined the army and then moved into the SAS in 1993. He was transferred to a special attachment unit and seconded to a SEAL unit out of Kinmore Field in 1997. Karl's entry into Project Nemesis was a result of his never ending quest for adventure; he volunteered for assignment to the project.

Download the demo:
eidos.com

DISCIPLES

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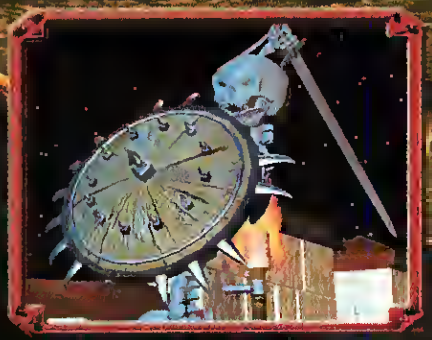

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SPECIAL DELIVERY (GDI ONLY)

The Orca Carryall is one of GDI's most useful units, if you know how to use it. Build a Mammoth Mark II and airlift it right next to your enemy's construction yard. It can lay waste to the yard in three or four shots of its rail gun. Another good way to use the Carryall is to airlift in an APC full of engineers and take over a base en masse. The Carryall can also place sensor arrays in spots normally unreachable.

Efficiently using Carryalls can torment an enemy to no end. Just make sure you know where any SAM sites are and avoid them like the plague. Also, you can't land on a spot that is still cloaked, so some early scouting will be needed. A well balanced air force of Orca fighters to scout an area, Orca bombers to suppress anti-aircraft weapons, and Orca Carryalls to deliver ground units to the landing zone can be formidable indeed.

NEED A LIFT, BIG BOY? The Carryall can drop heavy units like the Mammoth Mkll into the middle of the Nod camp, where a single mech can wreak some serious havoc in short order.

COUNTER

SAMs, SAMs, and more SAMs. The best way to make a Carryall-dependent enemy pay is to infest your bases with SAM sites and to knock the Carryall and its cargo out of the sky. Putting SAMs in unexpected places can hamper your opponents' attempt to avoid the flak field above your base by landing close by, and moving in on the ground.

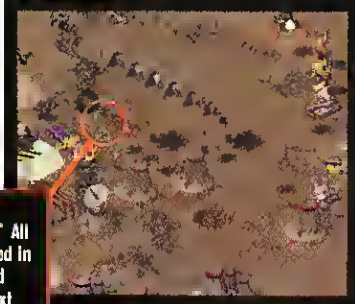
Rocket troops and other anti-air units are useful, but nothing does as much damage to a flying unit as a SAM site.

Cloaking your base helps as well. After you cloak your base, move your Construction Vehicle so that your Carryall friend won't know where to attack with his Mammoth Mark II.

THE DAVID COPPERFIELD (BOTH SIDES)

At some point during a battle with Nod forces involved, the Stealth Generator will come into play. It's a frustrating device that makes everything your enemy owns invisible within a certain range. You can uncloak a cloaked base with sensor arrays, or you can take out power generators until the thing turns off.

Whatever you do, don't kill the Stealth Generator. If you can commandeer it with an engineer, all of your troops will become cloaked and all the enemy buildings visible. Then you can attack with a huge force that's just become invisible. Executing the maneuver successfully is one of the most satisfying moments in any multiplayer game.



NOW YOU SEE, NOW YOU DON'T All it takes is one engineer ferried in by Carryall to take over a Nod stealth generator, and the next thing you know, that leveling force has vanished, and your once-invisible structures are exposed like a raisin in the Tiberian sun.

COUNTER

Immediately destroy all sensor arrays. Without sensor arrays, your attacker should have no idea where your stealth generator is. As an added precaution, build a bunch of laser turrets around your stealth generator so that any engineer who gets anywhere near it will be quickly torched.

Sensor arrays have a wide range, so you'll have to make sure you know what's going on around your base. Aircraft on a large waypoint patrol route will keep you updated on what is where.

ABOMINATION

PROFILE

Name: Matt Lansing

Call Sign: Savage

Skill: Extreme Strength

Personal Details:
Matt served in the US Marines for 8 years, mostly in "police" actions around the world. He was retired from the service in 1995, after he broke his spine in a helicopter crash in the Middle East. He spent the next three years paralyzed from the neck down. Project Nemesis offered Matt the possibility of a surgical solution to his chronic disability; Matt volunteered for the team immediately.

Download the demo:
eidos.com

THE GENERAL CUSTER (BOTH SIDES)

So, you've finally been able to build up a large assault force, but you're terrified your enemy's EMP cannon will turn your battalion into a fleet of Yugos. The EMP cannon shuts down all mechanized weapons for about two minutes, rendering them useless and vulnerable to attack.

Instead of rushing in, go in a few units at a time. Fire up the edges of the base. Attack and withdraw. Keep the torment up until he finally fires the pulse cannon. The cannon takes about four to five minutes to recharge, giving you enough time to rush in and start reducing his beautiful base to rubble.

HOOK, LINE & SINKER That incoming force might bait to get you to fire your EMP cannon. The real invasion is coming from the other direction.

COUNTER

Don't fire that EMP until you absolutely have to. Have patience and wait until his most powerful units are descending upon your base—then let him have it. Build walls and conventional defenses while he's toying with you and make him pay for the time he's wasting.

His massive force is probably nearby, waiting to strike. Find it with air patrols and assault it with weapons like the multi-missile and chemical missile.

This might also be a good time to attack his base if he's concentrating all his efforts on yours. With all his big weapons out in the field, it would be good to tunnel over some flame tanks if you're playing Nod, or Orca Carryall over an APC full of engineers if you're GDI.

SPREAD IT AROUND (BOTH SIDES)

Build a second or third Construction Vehicle as soon as you can. Move them to key points and deploy them. Throw down defenses, refineries, whatever. Then move the Construction Vehicle to another spot and repeat. Put SAM sites under flight lanes. Put a couple obelisks in a choke point. Put a refinery right next to a nice patch of blue tiberium in a remote area of the map. Open as many branch offices as you can and all will be well.

COUNTER

Construction Vehicles are expensive and not well-armored. Take them out as soon as you see them. Also, second and third bases are rarely defended as well as base number one. They are incredibly susceptible to take over with engineers. So, let your expanding friend do all the work for you. Just commandeer his weaker satellite bases; not only will you deprive him of resources, but you'll pad your own coffers as well.

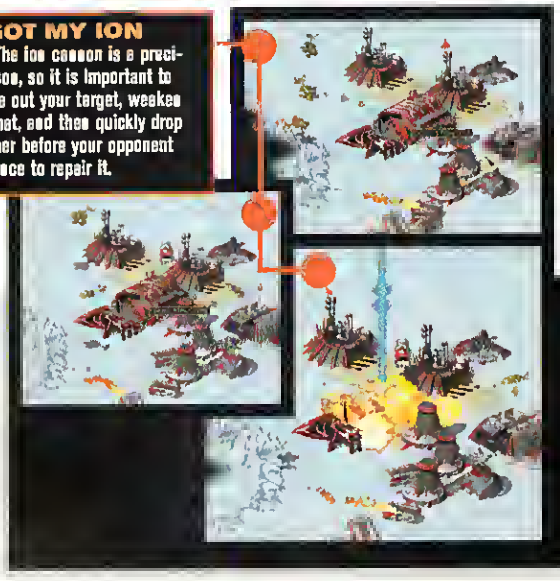
ION CRUSH (GDI ONLY)

The Ion Cannon is immensely powerful, but don't waste it. One blast will not quite destroy crucial buildings like construction yards. Soften structures with conventional attacks, then finish them off with a mighty blast. This is a good rule of thumb that can be applied to any long-range, ultra-powerful weapon for both GDI and Nod. Buildings and units can be repaired, so just causing some damage is not good enough. Use these weapons in conjunction with a ground attack or an air raid to make them count.

COUNTER

An engineer running inside a friendly building repairs it completely. If you sense an enemy is softening up a building so he can finish it off with an Ion Cannon, run an engineer inside between the ground assault and the Ion blast. Repairing buildings to full health with an engineer is sometimes more cost efficient than using the conventional repair command.

I'VE GOT MY ION YOU The Ion cannon is a precision weapon, so it is important to first scope out your target, weaken it somewhat, and then quickly drop the hammer before your opponent has a chance to repair it.

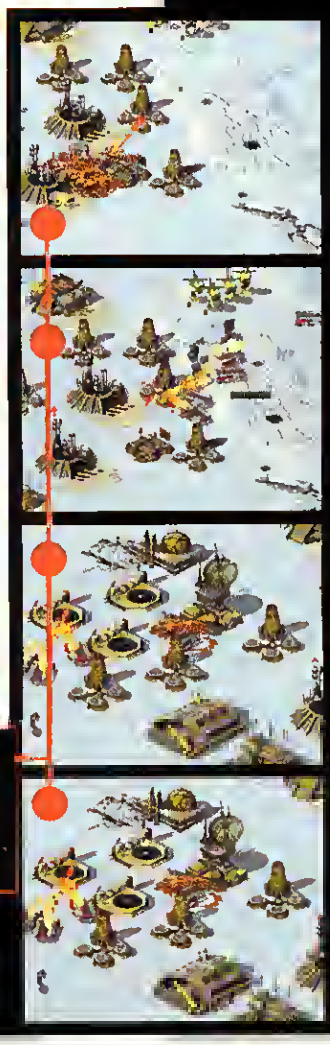


TUNNEL OF LOVE (NOD)

When using tunneling units, don't just pop them up and let them take fire. Once trouble arrives, burrow below the base and pop up somewhere unexpected. Attack one side of the base, and once you start taking fire, tunnel under and head to the other side. Find the weak spots. The flame tank and the APC don't have the best armor, but the enemy can't hit what's just tunneled underground.

COUNTER

One word: concrete. Tunneling units can't come up through concrete, so build a lot of it around your crucial buildings. If you pave over enough of your property, you'll find that you can funnel the tunneling units into areas you have heavily defended. Don't forget to build plenty of sensor arrays. They see below ground and act as an early warning system for incoming moles.



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN Burrowing tanks can easily slip under your sentries for a direct attack on your base, and once detected can easily burrow away and pop up somewhere else.

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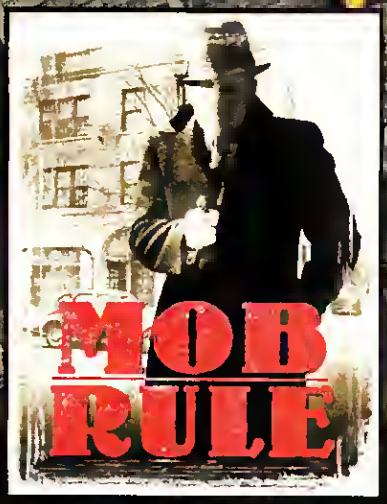
MOB RULE



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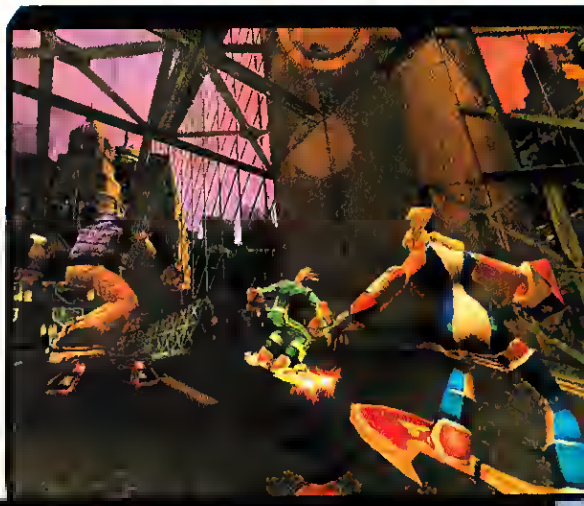

actual game screens

EVERYONE
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3dfx

GRAPHICS BY rage 128

POWERED BY makon

S3

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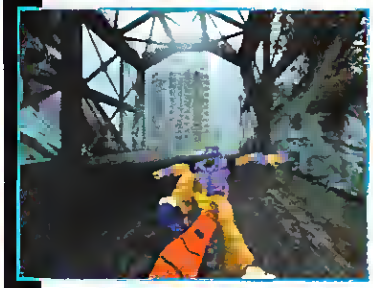
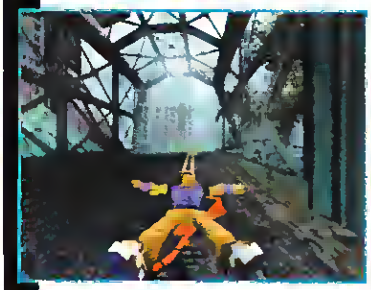
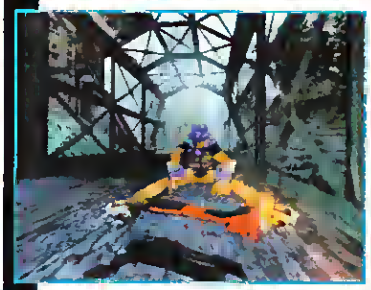

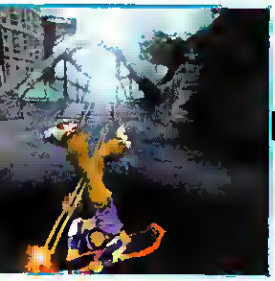
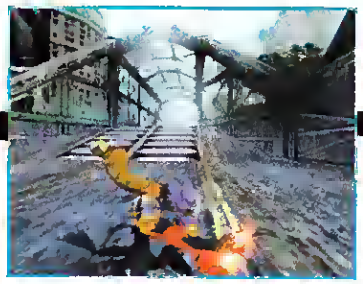
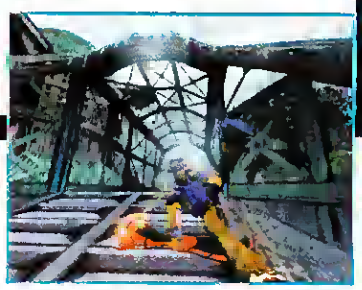

Clockwise from the top right.
Bronx slam. Zak T. lays down the sick heelflip luge into a luge 360 and finishes with a headspin flip.

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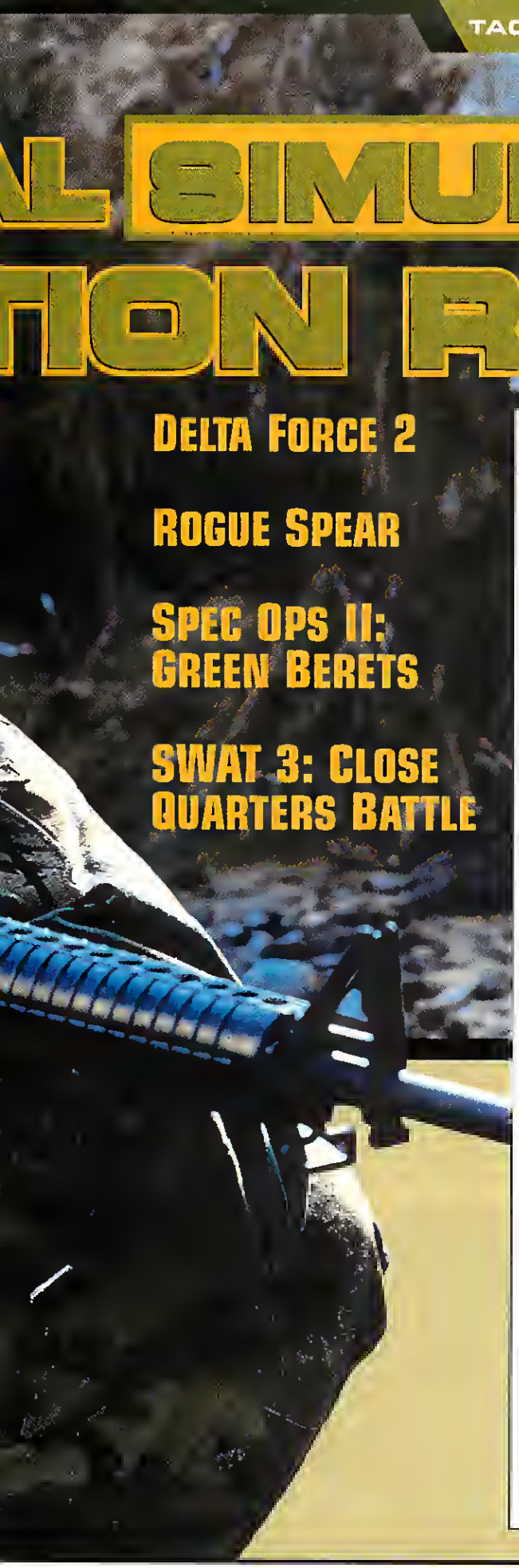

by Raphael Liberatore,
Army Special Forces, retired

Last year, the special-operations shooter took the gaming world hy storm. These games hrought realism, special tactics, and true teamplay to a genre that was desperate for new ideas and greater depth of play. Witb their gritty blend of military-grade weapons and equipment, accurately-modeled ballistic effects, and real-world small-unit commando tactics and missions, games like RAINBOW SIX, SPEC OPS: RANGERS LEAD THE WAY, and DELTA FORCE led the rush toward an exciting new subgenre of action games.

In computer gaming, success breeds sequels and imitators, so it's no surprise that Fall will bring several more games into the tactical simulation battlefield. With NovaLogic's DELTA FORCE 2, Red Storm's ROGUE SPEAR, Zombie's SPEC OPS II: GREEN BERETS, and Sierra's SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE all in development, there will be plenty of special-ops options for the arm-chair killer. We took these games out into the field and tested them with a team of genume special-operations guys to see which had what it takes to survive the battle for gamers' bucks.

OPERATIONS OVERVIEW

What set RAINBOW SIX apart from the throng of first-person shooters crowding the market? Red Storm would say it was the realistic combat model. After playing a beta version of ROGUE SPEAR, the sequel to RAINBOW SIX, we can report that the combat model is still the strong point. ROGUE SPEAR's refinements of the original include improved artificial intelligence, better graphics and sound, realistic ballistic effects, an improved interface, and an observer mode. Not only do computer-controlled team members move and support your actions with more effect, but nearby terrorists actively seek you out during a raging battle. Add some really awesome ballistic and wound effects, like shooting through windows and doors, or taking a round in the leg that will leave a trail of blood, and it's clear that ROGUE SPEAR is on track to becoming a more true-to-life game.

The same goes for SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE, the latest addition to the already popular Sierra Studios SWAT adventure series. Based on real-life SWAT missions of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), but set in the year 2005, the game casts you as the leader of a five-man team in either career or single-player modes. SWAT 3's dynamic missions focus on high-intensity close-quarters combat instead of the puzzle-solving of its predecessors. Most of the game's develop-

OPERATIVE: ROGUE SPEAR

Operations Center: Red Storm Entertainment
Deployment Date: Q3 '99
Area of Operations: Counter-Terrorist Tactical Simulation
Last year's benchmark game returns to action completely polished with a brand new AI, improved interface, and more realism than ever before.
Mission Capabilities: Realistic combat model, ballistic effects, saved replay feature, improved observer mode, full sniper support, weather effects, 3D environments and sound, multiplayer.
Mission Shortfalls: Team AI mode.

OPERATIVE: SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

Operations Center: Sierra Studios
Deployment Date: Q4 '99
Area of Operations: Paramilitary Tactical Simulation
The SWAT series loses the popular Police Quest adventure mode in favor of CQB realism.
Mission Capabilities: Dynamic AI, CQB realism, gorgeous lighting and 3D environments, physics modeling, ballistic effects, score based point system.
Mission Shortfalls: Separate multiplayer release.

SWAT 3

QUICK DRAW In SWAT 3, good reflexes and sound tactics will be crucial to surviving standoffs like this one. You'll also have to deal with the added challenge of not shooting-first-and-asking-questions-later, since you're prohibited from shooting civilians.

ROGUE SPEAR

SNIPER CROUCH ROGUE SPEAR has added crouched movement and sniper support for a more comprehensive team assault.

SPEC OPS II

WHERE'S THE LIGHTS? SPEC OPS II's Viper engine will spice up the game action with its realistic but ominous environments.

ers trained with the LAPD SWAT; the resulting tactical realism is apparent, for example, in the way your team systematically sweeps an aree for suspects.

In DELTA FORCE 2, you continue to serve as a member of the elite U.S. Army Special Forces unit known as SFOD-Delta. DF2 now uses a true 32-bit Voxel Space graphics engine so players can actually see the enemy, instead of nondescript pixels, et 200 meters. The upgraded graphics are smooth and crisp, though the buildings pixelate up close and would benefit from 3D acceleretion. Still, the vast outdoor environments are second to none in subtle detail and now have tall grass, trees, and other objects useful for stealth maneuvers.

According to Mark Long, head honcho of SPEC OPS developer Zombie, "We want players to feel like they're ectually Green Berets." To that end, Zombie completely rebuilt its SPEC OPS Viper engine while adding a fluid in-game control for a more dynamic team-oriented combat experience. There are over 30 real-life special-forces missions stressing Green Beret teemwork for direct action, special reconnaissance, and hostage rescue operations. SPEC OPS II follows its predecessor in using teams of two and three members to enhance gameplay, even though a U.S. Army Special Forces "A" team has 12 men. The simulated men do, however, train and fight like real Green Berets, with obstecle courses modeled after real Army training courses, and their skill development in weapons, demolitions, recon, and sniper tactics shadow the real deal.

All these titles share one common gameplay element: missions based on reallstic military or paramilitary commando operations et the tactical level, aimed at direct action, counterterrorism, hostage rescue, and special reconnaissance. One thing is certain—all the developers have done their homework, as the level of authenticity is quite high. Whether it's SPEC OPS II's co-op mission with the British SAS to address a Pakistani nuclear situation, or SWAT 3's terrorist takeover of the control tower et LAX, the action is gritty and authentic.

TEAM SELECTION

Team command and control is an important element in these games, since most operations depend on support from your computer-controlled teammates for success. The flewed AI in ROGUE SPEAR has been measurably improved. "There were a lot of rough edges to the original AI," says Greg Stelmack of Red Storm. "We took the lessons learned from the original AI, scrapped it, and rewrote it from the ground up. The computer-controlled members navigate much more cleanly, and their combat routines have been improved. They'll duck for cover, run away, try to avoid grenades, and generally act much more human than the original AI." DELTA FORCE 2 and SPEC OPS II have also beefed up team AI to better support you (your SPEC OPS teammates shouldn't wander into your lme of fire anymore).

SPEC OPS II

IT TAKES TWO To kill tangoes, that is, SPEC OPS II has distilled the usual 12-man Green Beret teams to smaller units for more manageable gameplay.

All four games have refined their team command and control screens for better team response during the heat of battle. Each approach is unique. SPEC OPS II uses a single keystroke to dispatch operatives to a location, without your heving to micromanage their maneuvers. DELTA FORCE 2 uses a Commander's Screen and waypoints to control AI teammates. ROCUE SPEAR has streamlined its team mission screens for better planning and rule-of-engagement management. And SWAT 3 lets you split your five-man element into two smaller elements to better sweep an area for bad guys.

Only DELTA FORCE 2 won't allow you to select team operatives.

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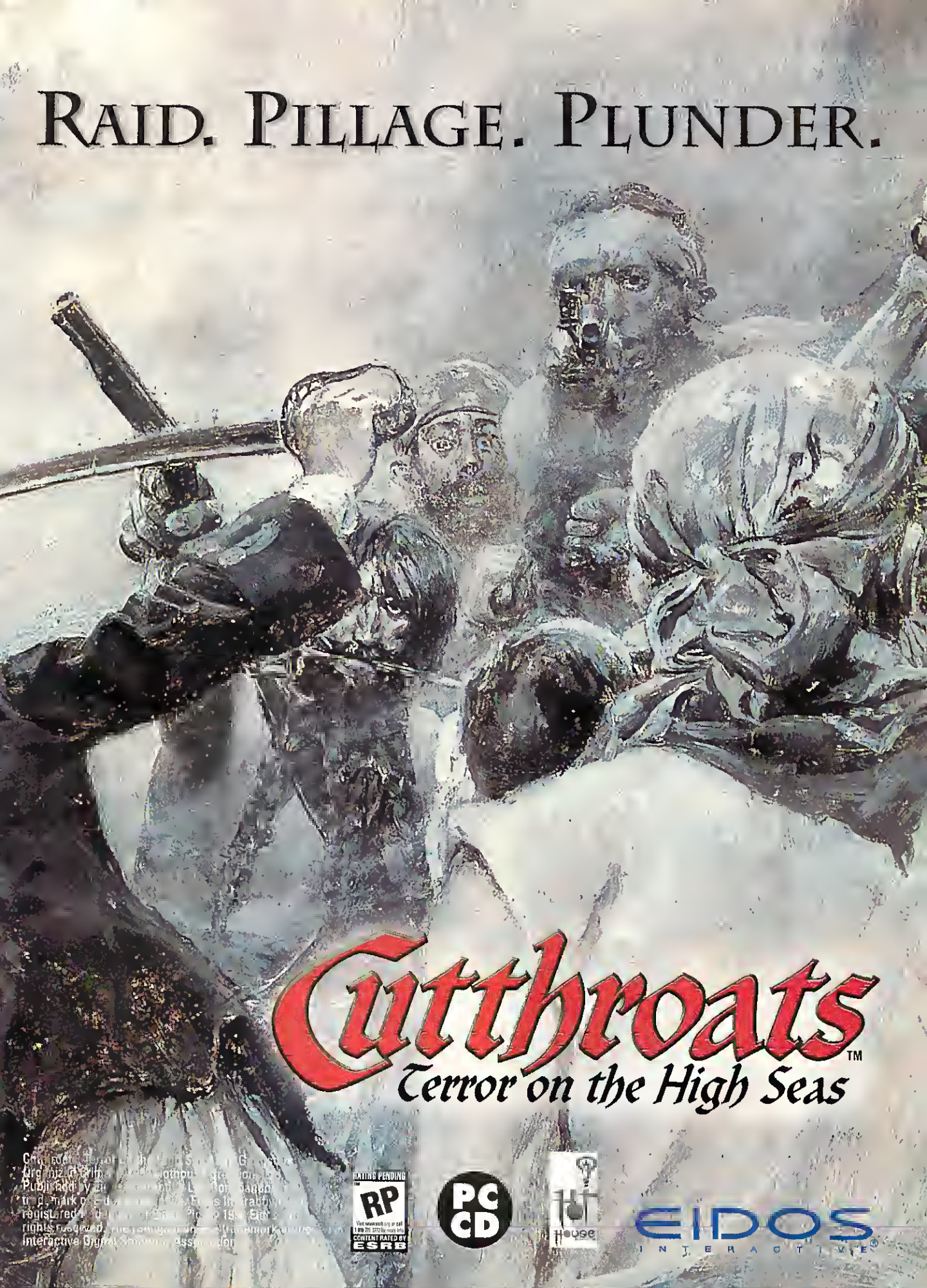

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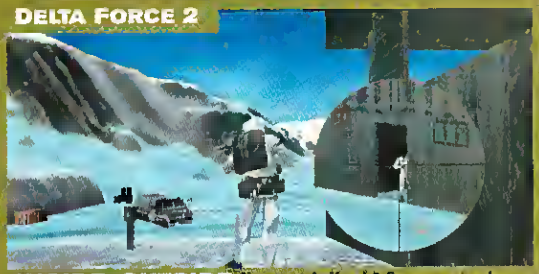
OPERATIVE: DELTA FORCE 2

Operations Center: NovaLogic
Deployment Date: Q3 '99
Area of Operations: Commando Tactical Simulation
Delta Force returns with better graphics, improved command and control interface, and voice technology.
Mission Capabilities: Voice-Over-Net technology, Improved Voxel Space 32 graphics for unlimited outdoor environments, commanders screen, weather elements, ballistic effects, new weapons and equipment, mid-level save and replay, multiplayer on NovaWorld.
Mission Shortfalls: Frag-fest multiplayer.

OPERATIVE: SPEC OPS II: GREEN BERETS

Operations Center: Zombie
Support Agency: Ripcord Games
Deployment Date: Q4 '99
Area of Operations: Commando Tactical Simulation. The original Spec Ops shooter competes with the big boys in a game inspired by real life Special Forces weapons, equipment and missions.
Mission Capabilities: Enhanced training environments, 3D lighting effects, character skills, armory, fluid interface, 3D dynamic missions, mission editor, team command and control.
Mission Shortfalls: Underdog operative.

DELTA FORCE 2



INSIDE, OUTSIDE NovaLogic's Voxel 3 Space engine has been upgraded to offer true 32-bit graphics. The payoff is even better outdoor environments and weather effects, and missions that move the action indoors.

ROGUE SPEAR

FIRST CLASS TICKET TO HELL Hostage rescue is a ROGUE SPEAR mission specialty. Note how both commando elements move through each side of the aircraft for a more realistic sweep.

SWAT 3 provides a roster of over 60 SWAT members and 12 element leaders from which to assemble your five-man team. Each operative will improve his skills mission to mission, so success will hinge on training your key players and assembling the right team for each mission. Same with SPEC OPS II, where you'll choose from among a machine-gunner, grenadier, sniper, rifleman, and more for your teams.

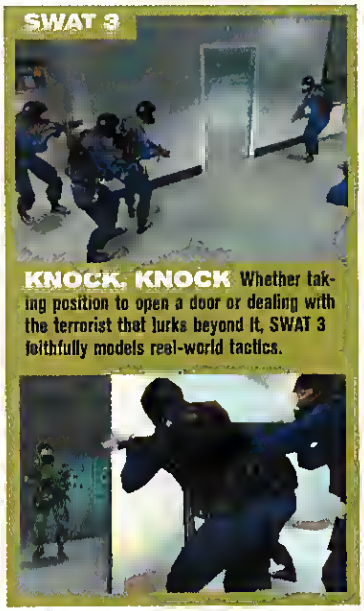
AREA ASSESSMENT

From a graphical standpoint, these games are a marked improvement in physics, lighting, and 3D environments; little wonder, with each game engine being rebuilt from the ground up. ROGUE SPEAR and SWAT 3 look really sharp, SWAT 3 having the edge with more impressive graphics and physics modeling. Sierra used over 500 motion-capture videos for very lifelike character movement.

SPEC OPS II's updated Viper engine powers its ominous outdoor environments, 3D sounds, and outstanding lighting effects, including realistic searchlights that seek to pinpoint your position and alert the enemy.

DELTA FORCE 2 has improved the most, thanks to a move from a 16-bit voxel graphics engine to a new true-color, 32-bit model. Of the four, DELTA FORCE still uses the largest outdoor environments for endless patrolling maneuvers; the new game employs indoor environments as well, for hostage rescue and reconnaissance.

SWAT 3



KNOCK, KNOCK Whether taking position to open a door or dealing with the terrorist that lurks beyond it, SWAT 3 faithfully models real-world tactics.

SWAT 3D is the lone holdout on the inclusion of weather effects, but since the game takes place indoors, it's not an issue. The other games add most of their weather touches for ambience, but DF2's use of fog should help balance sniper-favoring multiplayer matches.

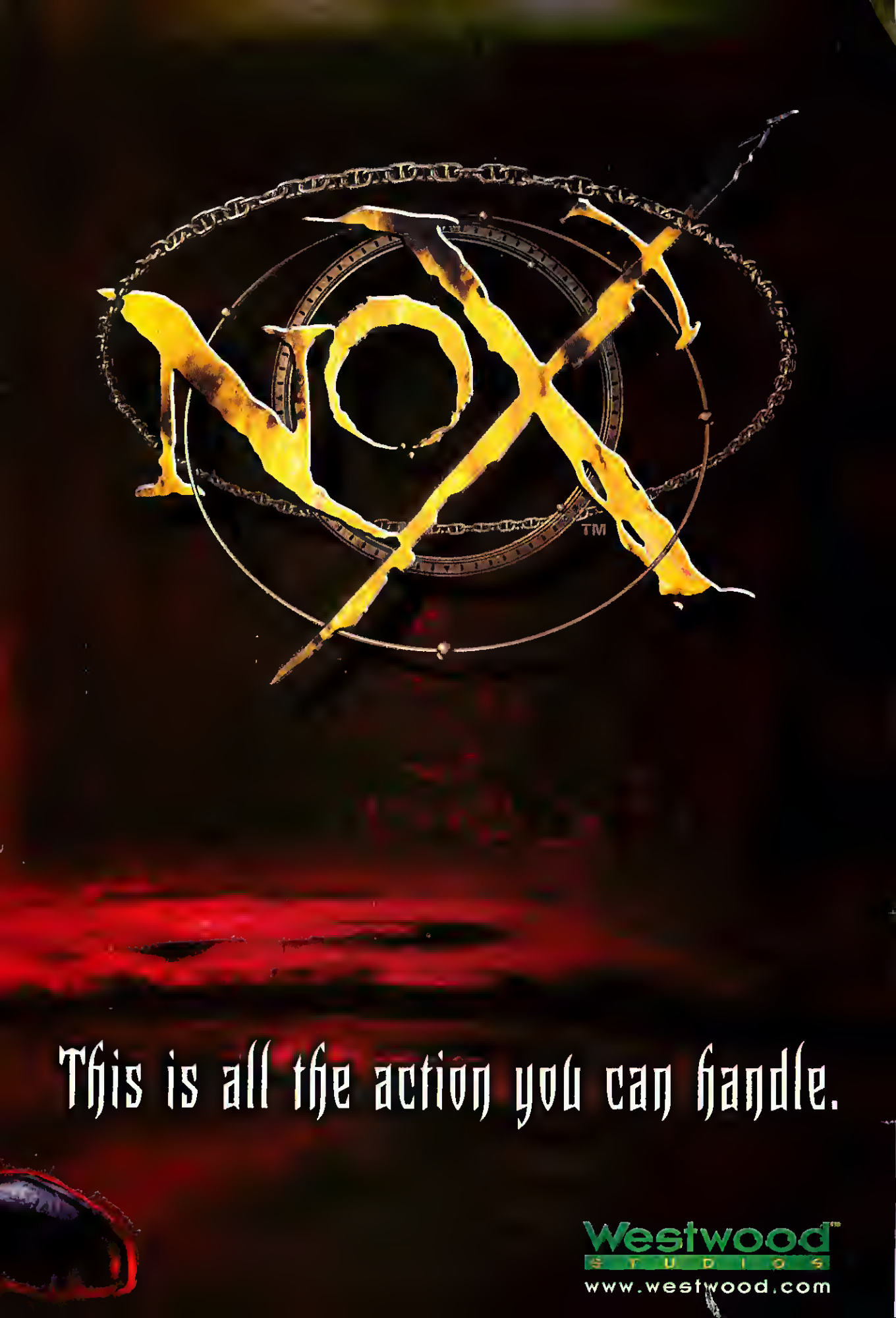
BATTLE DRILLS

The arsenals from these games are bulging with more weapons and equipment than ever before. ROGUE SPEAR adds full sniper support with weapons like the M-14, Enfield L85A1, and the big, bad, .50-caliber Barrett Model 95 sniper rifle.

SWAT 3 uses the traditional LAPD arsenal of MP5s, CAR-15s, and 1911 pistols, while adding new technology like the Kevlar tactical helmet. DELTA FORCE 2, on the other hand, adds unique weapons like the H&K P11(which fires flechettes underwater), an M4 with shotgun, and fixed weapon emplacements sporting mini-guns. SPEC OPS II added some unique weapons like Chicoms, M270s, Steyr Augs, and some of the heavier stuff like grenade launchers and machine guns.

Picking your team's flashlights, light sticks, binoculars, tac vests, and grenades add to game strategy. DF2 now uses equipment slots in addition to primary weapon slots so you can choose Kevlar vests, rebreathers for underwater action, and field surveillance cameras for watching your back. SPEC OPS II allows you to pick up and drop objects during the game, which is good if you run out of ammo and an AK-47 happens to be laying nearby, but bad if you get too greedy and weighed down.

Shot placement and ballistic effects are heavily emphasized in all four games. Not only do most weapons have a choice of rounds, but bullets now penetrate doors and walls (and DELTA FORCE's previously bulletproof tents). ROGUE SPEAR handles ballistic effects by assigning modifying values to weapons, so you can't snipe with an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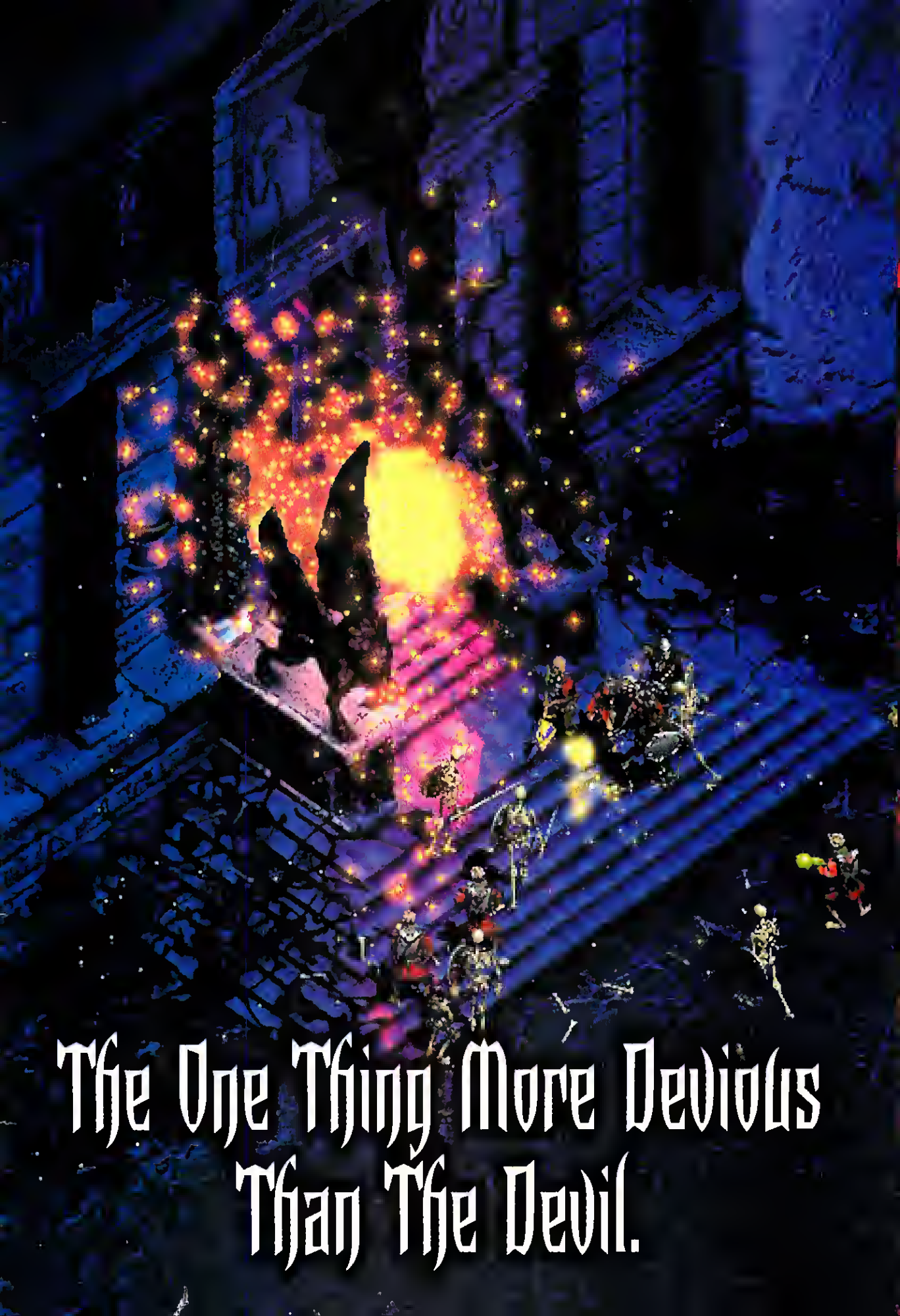
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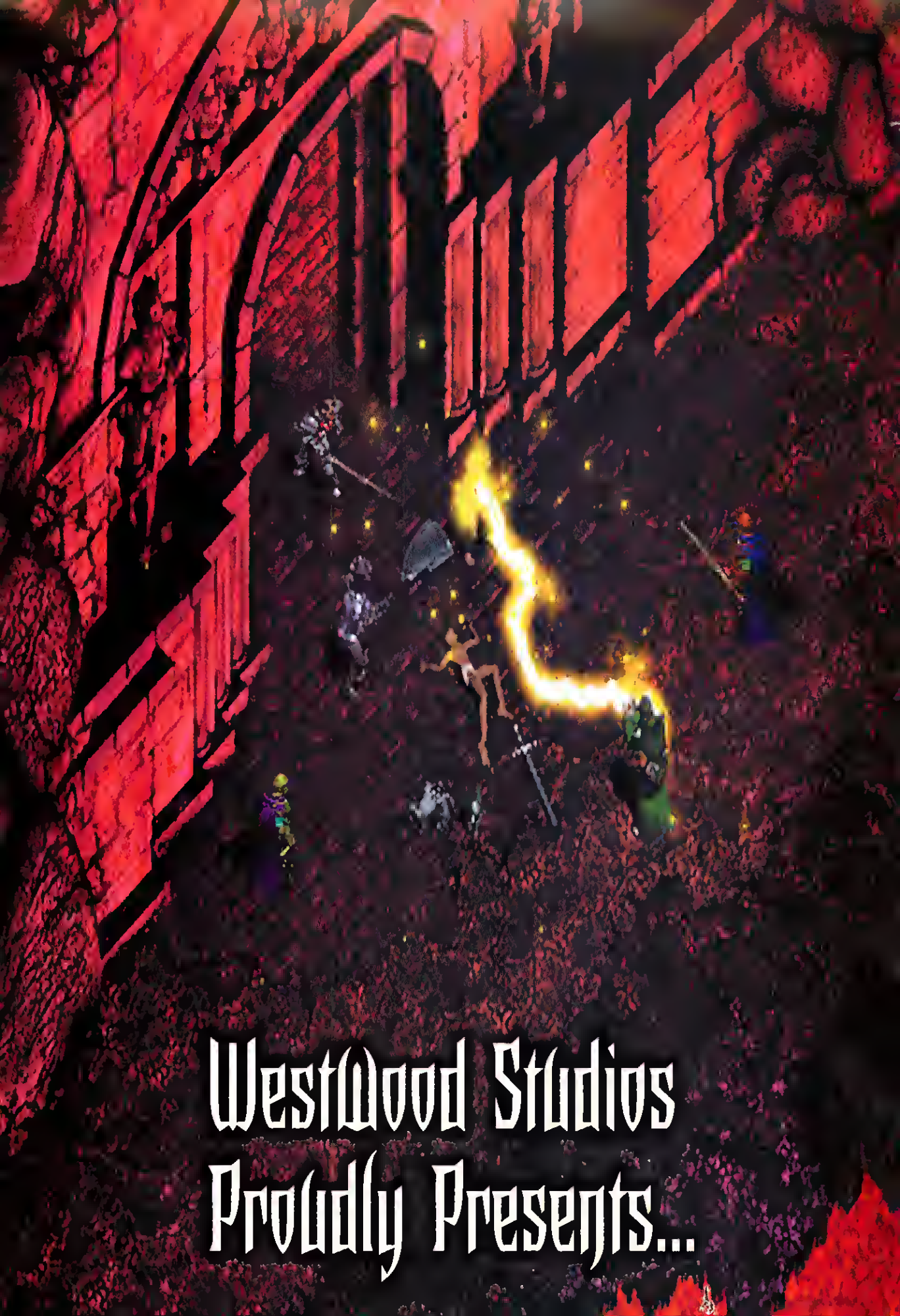
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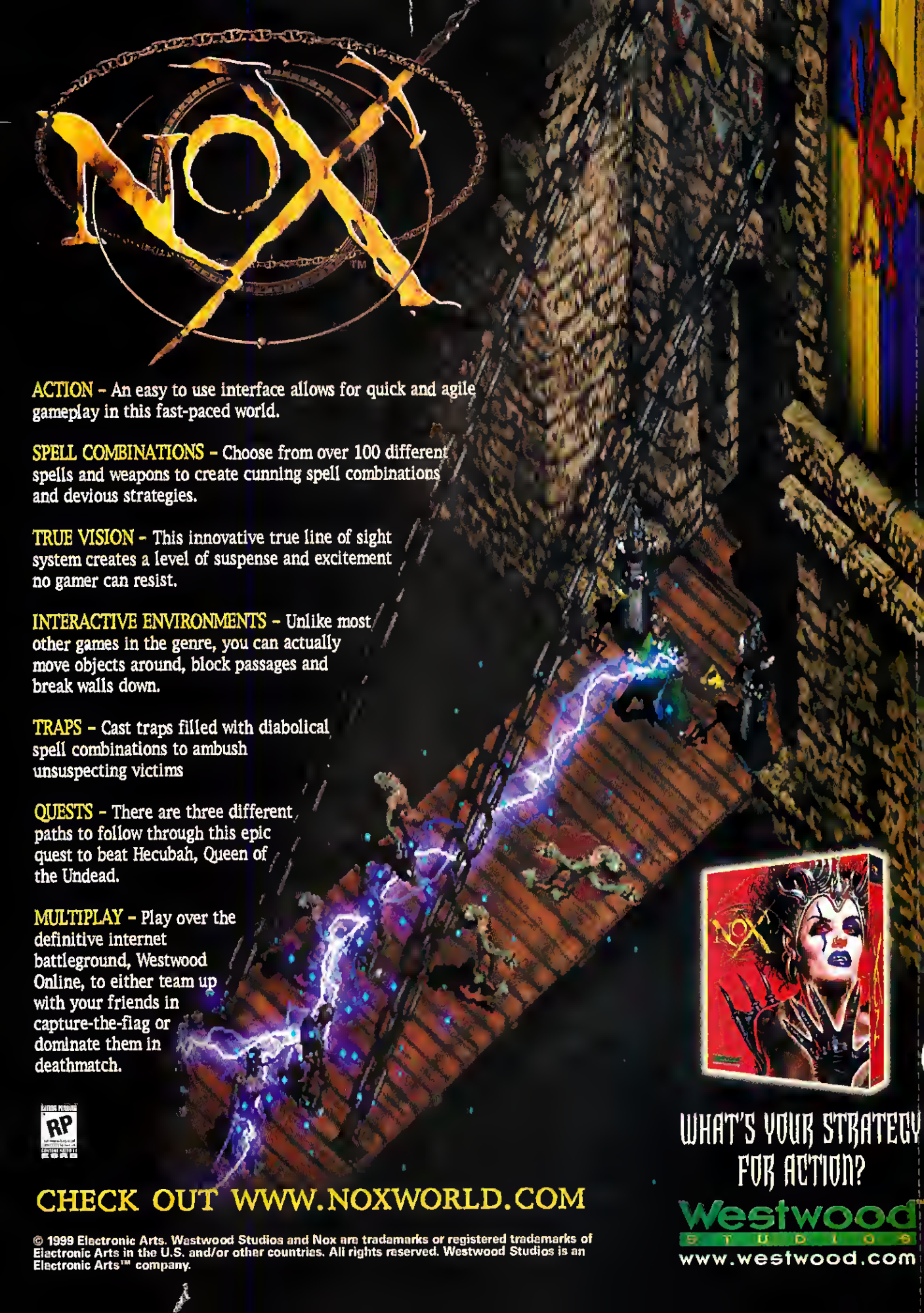
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CGW'S ELITE SPECIAL FORCES TEAM

OPERATIVE: SF COMMANDO

SPEC OPS EXPERIENCE: Retired U.S. Army Special Forces Commo and Weapons Specialist. Currently pursuing graduate work in low-intensity conflict.

EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HIM: Make sure your teams are set in position before giving the "go" signal for an assault. Teams in place make for a more fluid and coordinated attack on the objective.

OPERATIVE: BLACKHAWK

SPEC OPS EXPERIENCE: Retired U.S. Army Special Forces Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, and police arson-explosives investigator. Served with U.S. Army SF during the Vietnam War. Current investigator for a large metropolitan district attorney's office.

EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HIM: Place flash bangs in a room by edging as close to the opening as possible without compromising yourself, and then drop them inside the door for more effective placement.

OPERATIVE: DDG SOLDIER

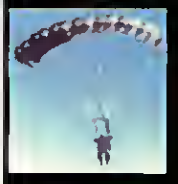
SPEC OPS EXPERIENCE: Current U.S. Army Special Forces Commo and Operations and Intelligence Sergeant in the Army National Guard. Qualified for spec-ops tactics and target interdiction.

EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HIM: Engage moving targets by leading them slightly ahead of their movement direction with your firing reticle. Also, try not to silhouette yourself along a hilltop or skyline.

OPERATIVE: SWAT GREEN

SPEC OPS EXPERIENCE: Retired U.S. Army Ranger and Special Forces Weapons Specialist. Current SWAT operative for a major metropolitan police force.

EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HIM: Clearing a stairwell is one of the more difficult CQB ops. The element should move at a quiet and cautious pace, using mirrors when possible, while stacking tight in anticipation of an attack.



OPERATIVE: MAD DOG

SPEC OPS EXPERIENCE: U.S. Army Ranger and Special Forces Medic Reservist.

EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HIM: Snipe 600+ meters from target. Moving closer only narrows any chance of escape once the enemy pinpoints your emplacement.

NOVALOGIC TEAM

WRAITH: LEAD PROGRAMMER

WHIPASS: ARTIST, MINISTER OF PAIN

STINKY: ARTIST, WAR PIG

OL' PAINLESS: PRODUCER, TOKEN TARGET

SNAKE IN THE GRASS DELTA FORCE 2 adds hip-high grass to provide a more stealthy way to creep up on enemies.

MP5 from 200 meters without the 9mm round losing energy at point of impact. You'll need to use the right weapon for the job at all times.

Likewise, wound effects will force you to aim your shots more accurately. Each game models wounds according to their location on a character; if the hit is in the arm or leg, the character limps and leaves a trail of blood.

H-HOUR

Multiplayer is where these games really shine. If you're looking for a frag-fest, look to DELTA FORCE 2 and SPEC OPS II, both of which support 50-player matches. ROGUE SPEAR and SWAT 3 can be played as a realistic tactical simulation, because team command and control and support are vital to mission success.

SPEC OPS II will allow you to pick up a fallen enemy's weapons and equipment, while DF2 is adding the option of an armory for its online action. The armory will let the gamer restock weapons and ammo and will be the only destructible building in the game–expect to see teams lead armory-destroying charges against their enemies.

Typing commands during battle takes too long and leaves you vulnerable, so voice support is on most gamers' wish lists. SWAT 3 and SPEC OPS II have no plans to support voice right now–not surprising, considering how hard it is to do it right. Hopefully, Red Storm will improve the shoddy voice technology of RAINBOW SIX. NovaLogic has the leg up on voice technology with its Voice-Over-Net, already working well on the NovaWorld servers, but it's not the ideal solution; it allows communication with only one player at a time rather than your entire team.

AFTER ACTION REPORT

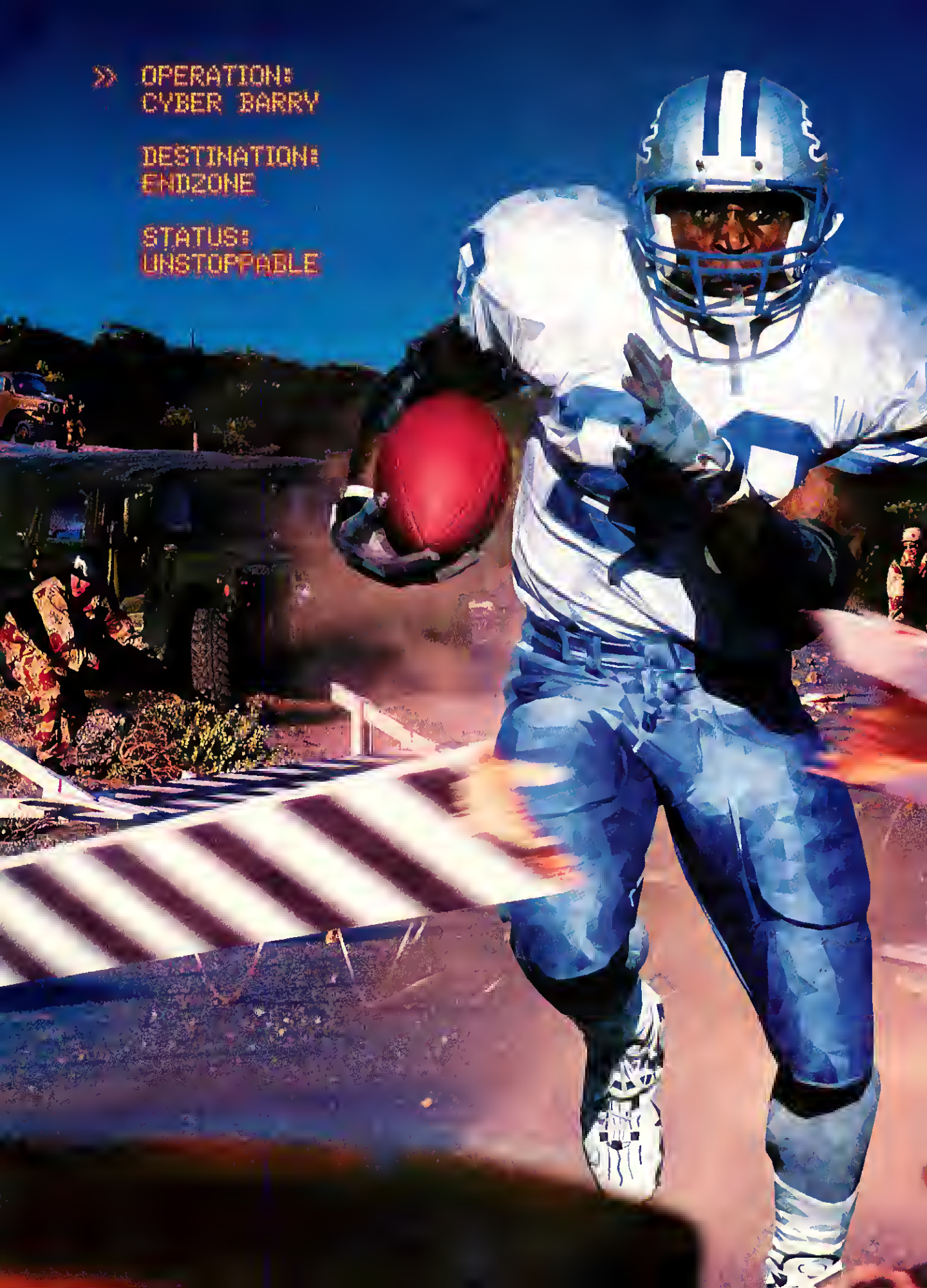
Without a doubt, all four tactical simulations are looking sharper and more immersing than the originals, and at this point there seems to be no clear victor emerging from the trenches. But I'd bet a few weekend passes to Vienna that ROGUE SPEAR follows in RAINBOW SIX's footsteps as the benchmark game of this new crop of tactical sims, while DELTA FORCE 2 will come in a close second. The popularity of NovaWorld gives DF2 a huge boost for quick action seekers. When SWAT 3's multiplayer feature gets released—several months after single player—the game should be a heavy-duty combatant due to its realistic environments and COB combat. SPEC OPS II is the underdog of the bunch, having to fight its way out of the bad reputation earned by its lackluster predecessor. However, don't count this game out. Its interface and AI upgrades are a huge improvement, and besides, it's a game about Green Berets. What more could an armchair commando ask for? CGW

MESS WITH THE BEST, DIE LIKE THE REST

Through versus a real Green Beret – who wins? It's this kind of question that led us to match up our team of real-life, battle-hardened, special-forces veterans against the development teams of DELTA FORCE 2 and ROGUE SPEAR.

With four commandos at my side – and over 50 collective years of real experience under our tac vests – I felt somewhat confident squaring off against the NovaLogic team. However, after the first team deathmatch it was obvious that NovaLogic was having a field day, dropping real-life commandos like fattened ducks on the first day of hunting season. While ISP and communication problems hampered the effectiveness of the pros, there's no way to candy-coat the fact that our team got whomped, 50 kills to 20. Still, there was some satisfaction in knowing that any one member of our team could easily kill all four members of NovaLogic's squad with his bare hands.

More IGP trouble prohibited two of our spec-ops operatives from joining in the ROGUE SPEAR confest, but SF Commando and Mad Dog did their best in holding off a skilled Red Storm team. At one point, Mad Dog took out an entire four-man team rushing through the door. The results of this matchup were much better than the odious NovaLogic battle, with our team winning four out of six matches, even though outnumbered four to two. It's a great testament to the authenticity of the game that our real-world training and tactics gave us the edge over the twitch skills of the game developers.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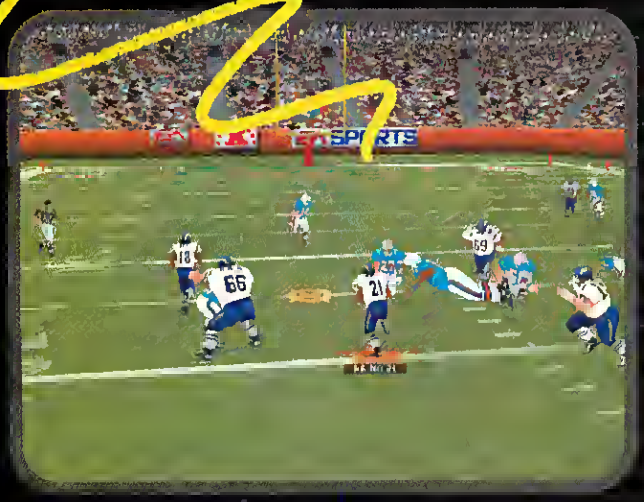

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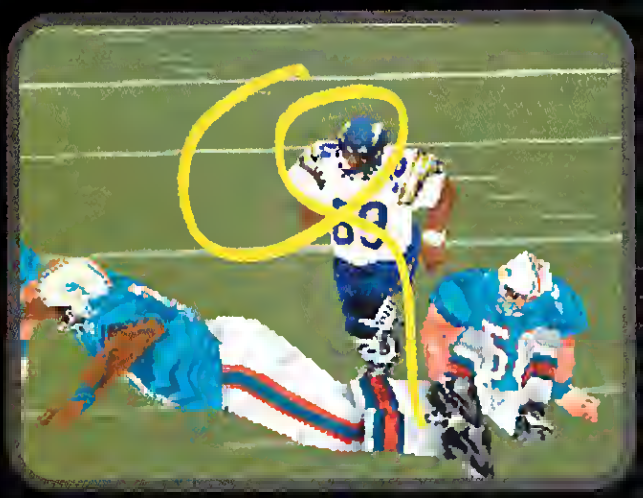

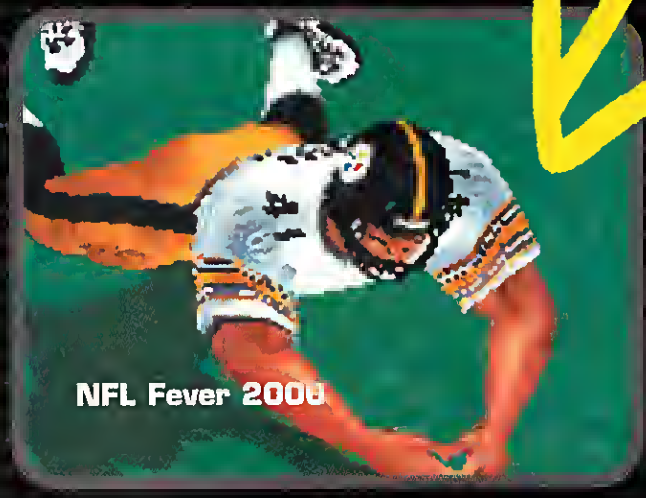

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BY GEORGE **JONES**

IS FOOTBALL

The year 1999 marks the beginning of the fourth era of PC football games. In the first era, we talked about text football games, and which ones best simulated the real deal. The second era—the era of FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL—had us gushing over pretty graphics and great coaching options, while simultaneously complaining that if only the controls weren't so cruddy, we'd actually be able to play the game. Then we entered the third era. Here we could finally *play* football games on our PC, but the graphics missed the 3D boat and the gameplay was still a long way off from that of the best PlayStation games.

With the upcoming release of MADDEN 2000 and NFL FEVER 2000, we have now entered the football Age of Aquarius, marked by a harmonious blending of visuals, animations, and gameplay. It's a groovy time to be alive, brother.

ST. JOHN THE MADDEN

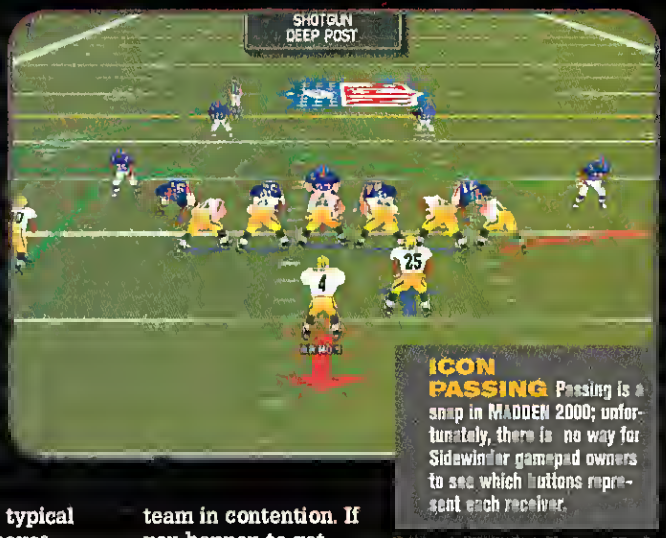
After eight years on the market, tha MADDEN FODTBALL series remains the crown jewel of football games. The 2000 edition—which opens with an excellent hip-hop fusion of monstrous, bone-jarring hits and rap lyrics that celebrate the franchise's dominance of the market—quickly sets a tone for what is easily the finest PC MADDEN game evar.

Even easier on tha ayas than last year's version, the game's 3D-accelerated graphics (Direct 3D or Glide drivers, although a nonaccelerated version is available) result in hig, haefy characters that move with grace and speed. Microsoft's NFL FEVER 2000 has hetter animatlons, hut In MADDEN, the players are more responsive to your gamepad commands. This means that when Terrell Davis sees a hole in the line when moving laterally on his pitch-out, he can actually make the cut and exploit it.

The lifelike animations also mean that when players get tackled, they get dragged to the ground or knocked off their feet in a varlaty of ways. In some casas, particularly strong players can visibly shrug off tacklers and keep on chugging. The high fidelity of the visuals, combined with John Madden's lagendary commentary, takes computer simulation one step closer

toward the TV viewing experience.

This year's game strikes a perfect balance between arcade action and strategic play by offering several different game modes. The Arcade mode gives you a run-and-gun shootout, while the Exhibition and Season modes allow for a more authentic simulation. The previous few incarnations of the game featured tough run-stopping defenses, but MADDEN 2000 makes the running game more viable. While I wasn't breaking away for 10 yards a carry, neither was I consistently stuffed for a loss every time my backs touched the ball. The passing game and defense are excellently handled, as usual, with the typical set of special moves enhancing your game. I've always been a fan of the responsive controls in MADDEN, and this version does nothing to change my opinion. You can juke with the special juke buttons, or you can throw fakes at the defender with a little jiggling of the control pad.



ICON PASSING Passing is a snap in MADDEN 2000; unfortunately, there is no way for Sidewinder gamepad owners to see which buttons represent each receiver.

Madden NFL 2000

Pros: Amazing visuals and animations; superior gameplay that strikes the right balance; a myriad of cool new features like the Great Games and Franchise modes; LAN and Internet play.

Cons: The passing mode doesn't visually display the Sidewinder buttons (A, B, C, X, Y, Z), it just spits out numbers instead.

Publisher: EA Sports
Price: $50
www.easports.com

NFL Fever 2000

Pros: Beautiful, true-to-life graphics; unsurpassed animations; realistic gameplay.

Cons: Game animations sometimes create an unresponsiveness that hinders play.

Publisher: Microsoft
Price: $50
www.microsoft.com

No matter what game mode you're playing in, you can customize the game in many ways; quarter lengths, graphics, and AI are all fully configurable. You can even change the size of the players from teeny to gargantuan.

For an added thrill, you can manage your team over the course of 32 seasons, building a powerhouse franchise by negotiating contracts with free agents, signing the most talented rookies, and making the management calls that will keep your team in contention. If you happen to get fired, you can get picked up by another franchise...if anyone wants you.

THE LONGEST YARD

MADDEN 2000 anticipated our wishes and added one of the coolest features I've ever seen in a sports game: The Great Games mode allows you to replay key moments in 10 different legendary games. The first is the 1981 overtime game between the San Diego Chargers and the Miami Dolphins that saw the Chargers score with less than three minutes left in overtime (and carry legendary tight end Kellen Winslow off the field). As you win each scenario, you gain permanent access to the two teams involved and you move on to the next Great Game. It's kind of like beating "bosses" in a fighting game. At the end of the day, gameplay rules over all, but it's these little touches that keep MADDEN consistently ahead of the pack.

From the look of things, MADDEN will head that peck again this year. And, for what some may argue is the very first time, MADDEN 2000 for the PC will make console owners green with envy.

THE FEVER

The words "Microsoft" and "underdog" go together about as well as mayonnaise and Kool-Aid. But this has been the lot of the Redmond giant ever since they broke into the sports-game game.

NFL FEVER 2000 leans toward a more realistic style of play than MADDEN. From the moment you take the field, it is an eyebrow-raising experience—the game's graphics are as close to TV quality as we've ever seen. Whereas EA Sports' graphics are more muscularly exaggerated and beefy, NFL FEVER's players resemble human players. And the player animations are absolutely stupendous.

NFL FEVER, which uses a default camera angle that is a little further behind the line of scrimmage than most games, successfully mimics the pacing of football. When a play begins, it takes some time to develop, but once it does, the action comes swiftly. For example, on a roll-out pass play, I was able to make the proper reads on the defense and my receivers, but I couldn't hold onto the ball forever—the pass rush was on me in no time.

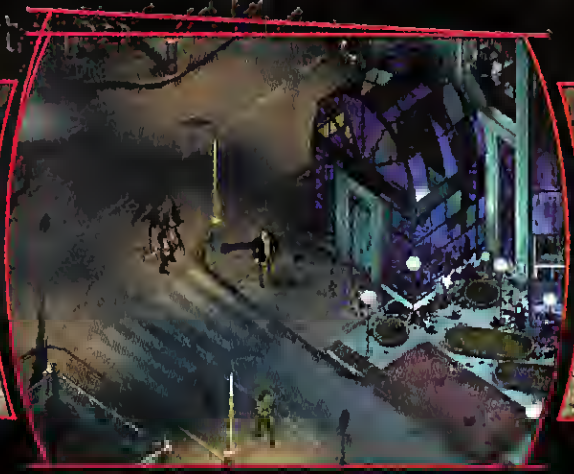
The game boasts amazing, highly detailed ani-

the secret hides.
the truth consumes.

odium™

n. def. - hate coupled with disgust

In a time of chaos, in a city on the brink of destruction, only you can discover the truth.



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SEE THE HOLE, EXPLOIT IT NFL FEVER'S running game is appropriately realistic–it's easy to gain a few yards up the middle, but hard to gain more than that.

mations, to the point where if you're on the run with the quarterback and throw the ball, you actually see an animation for the QB dumping the ball on the run. This extends to running backs, too. You'll see them get flipped, tossed, clothes-lined, and even pile-driven by beefy defensive lineman and linebackers. You can fight back, though—in addition to the usual turbo button (which can only be used once per play), NFL Fever also has a "lower your shoulder and put a hit on somabody" button.

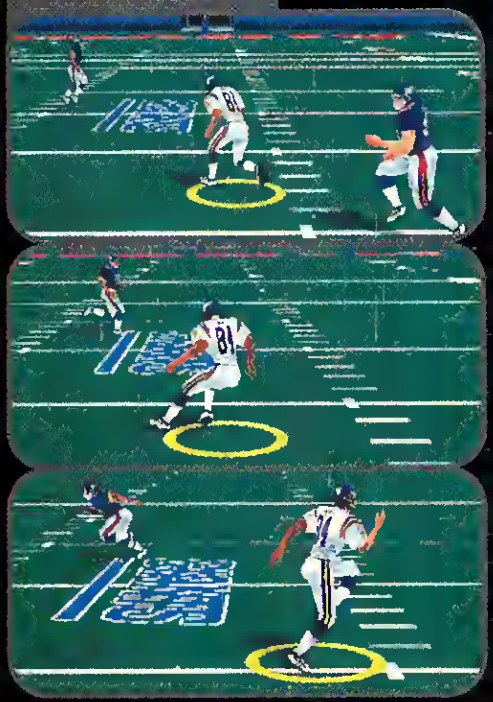
The rushing game is accurately difficult, meaning that you'll have a hard time gaining huge chunks of yardage up the middle. Running outside the tackles seems a little bit easier–I was able to break off significantly bigger gains in this fashion. Unlike MADDEN however, it's difficult to perform small jukes on the defenders by jiggling the gamepad, which isn't sensitive enough in the game.

PASSING GLANCE

As you get used to the play style of NFL FEVER, the action starts making a whole lot of sense. The game's passing model is remarkably strong. Getting a quick read on the pass coverage feels great, and it's much easier to get the ball to a player at the right point in his pass route, because the receivers' strong cuts let you know when it's time to throw the ball. Just like real life.

The play-calling mechanism of NFL FEVER features two very helpful and elegant design touches. The play-calling screen has an option named Millen's Call, after the TV announcer Matt Millen. Selecting this box will spit out several recommended plays, given your down situation. Very helpful for less-experienced players or when you need to call a quick play.

MAKE LIKE ELWAY Passing has never been easier in a PC football game. By making hard cuts on their pass routes, receivers signal you when it's time to chuck the pig.



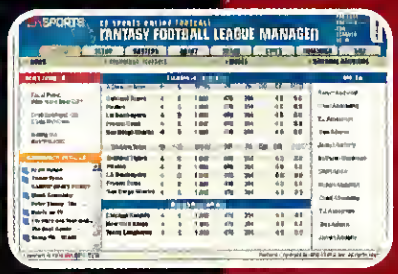
The second bit of play-calling goodness occurs when you come to the line of scrimmage against a computer opponent. By pressing the C button on your controller, you can see all of your receivers (like MADDEN, sans the receivers' passing icons), but more importantly, you can see the diagram for the play you're about to run superimposed in the bottom-left corner of the screen. Even better, if you audible, pressing this same button will show you the schematic of the audible play.

NFL FEVER does lack some of the frills that MADDEN boasts. You can practice with your team, play through a complete season, or jump straight into the playoffs, where the game seems to get more intense. But the game lacks LAN play, career mode, and the Great Games mode of MADDEN.

Still, NFL FEVER is a remarkable first effort and a fine game. It's strong enough that the contrast in style between it and MADDEN should make for some interesting debates. *CGW*

FOOTBALL FOR THE COORDINATION-IMPAIRED

There was a time when you could play a football game without any of those fancy arcade reflexes. That was a simpler time, a time when a man's brain was more important than the size of his thumbs. Thankfully, there's hope for the coordination-impaired coming from the most unlikely of places: EA Sports.

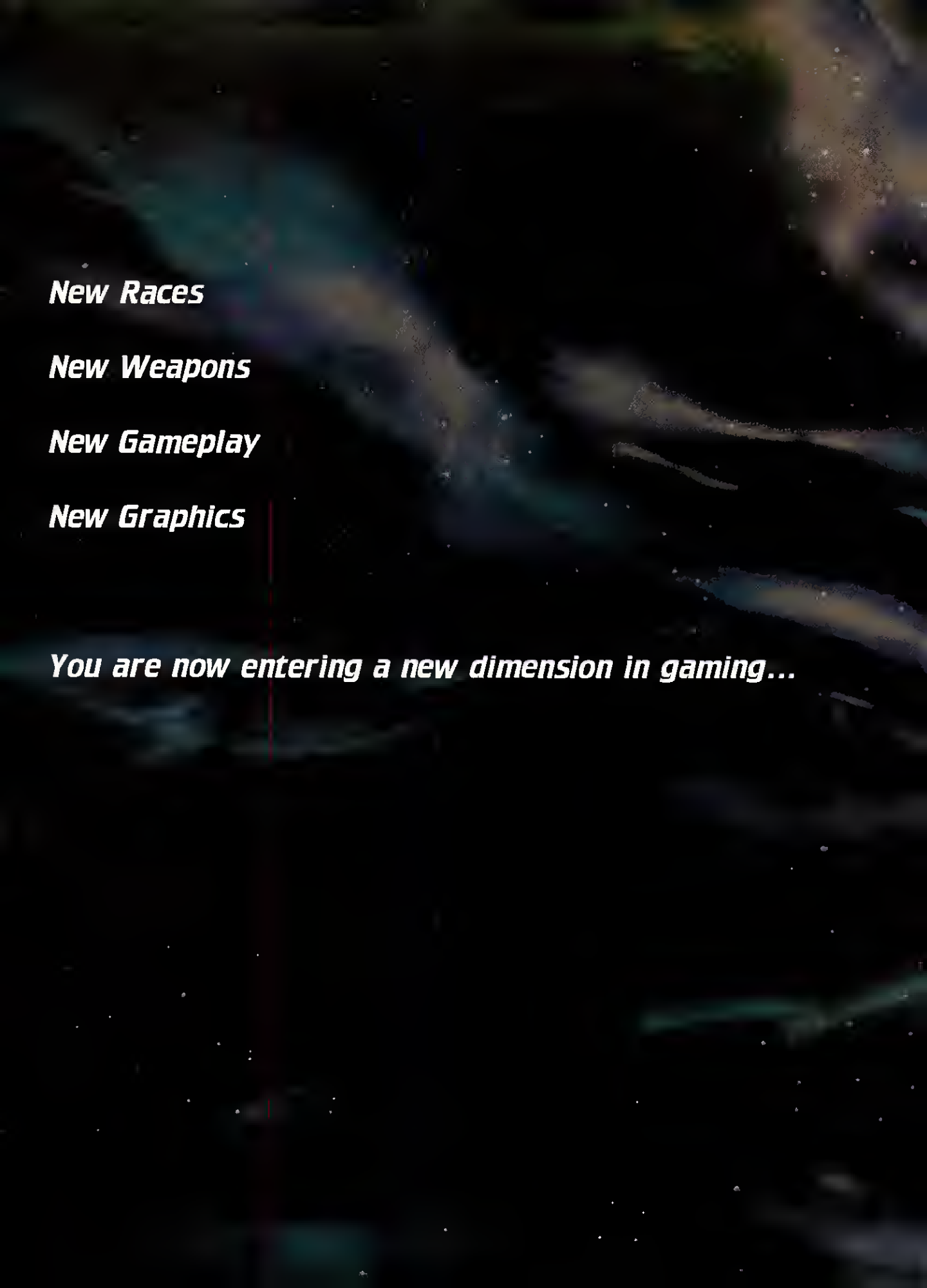


FANTASY FOOTBALL transcends the typical ESPN Sportscenter.com rotisserie-league fare by combining all the niftiness of a Web-based fantasy league with some innovative new twists. Most fantasy football leagues pit human-drafted teams against each other every week, relying on the players' cumulative statistical performances to determine the winners. EA's version, hosted entirely online, allows you to draft your own teams and then simulate their performance rather than to rely on real-life stats. The Simulator mode, which uses MADDEN's sim engine, also allows you to make halftime adjustments and tweak your offensive strategies. The FANTASY FOOTBALL site will feature expert advice and analysis, as well as public leagues with national rankings and major prize packages.

FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2000 (FOF), the sequel to the finalist for *CGW*'s 1998 Sports Game of the Year award, emphasizes business management over X's and O's. Playing as a General Manager, you are responsible for setting ticket prices, negotiating player contracts, and even managing the TV contracts and concessions prices for your franchise over the course of many years. Thanks to EA Sports, which purchased the game earlier this year, FOF is licensed by the NFL, meaning that you'll be managing authentic NFL teams and real-life players. EA Sports will be making this surprisingly engaging, highly cerebral game available this fall.

Fantasy Football
EA Sports, $20 sign-up
www.easports.com/fantasyfootball/

Front Office Football 2000
EA Sports, $20 sign-up
www.easports.com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- GameFan Online

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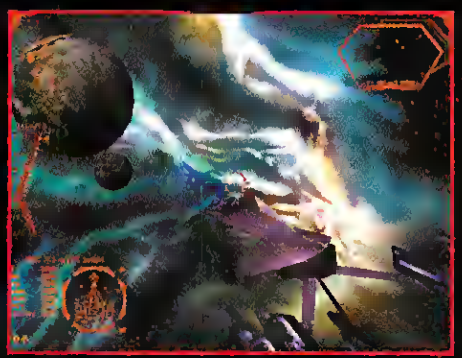

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RATING PENDING RP ESRB

Windows 95/98/NT

REQUIRES 3D Acceleration

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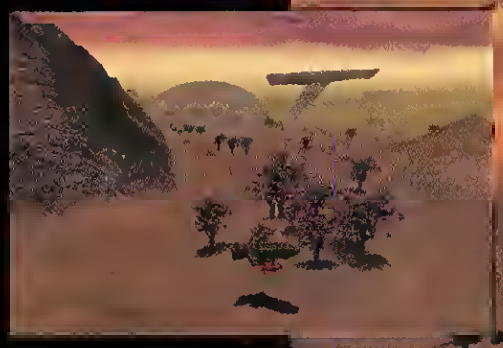
Paramount



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It's the year 2292. A Romulan experiment gone awry has launched several previously undiscovered worlds, rich in mineral resources, into the cosmos. Playing the Federation, Romulan or Klingons, you'll counter a flurry of confrontations, territorial disputes and aggressive advances as the race heats up to colonize these worlds before your intergalactic nemeses gain a stronghold.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MADE BY ASYLUM

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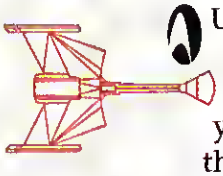
Finally, a starship naval combat game worthy of the name

Star Trek®



Klingon Command Cruiser (K-D7C)

4 Disruptors
3 Phaser 1s
6 Phaser 2s
3 Tractors
6 Transporter
Size Class 3

Using data from the best-selling strategy board game, Star Fleet Battles, Starfleet Command™ puts you in the captain's chair for the most amazing real-time space combat experience ever created.

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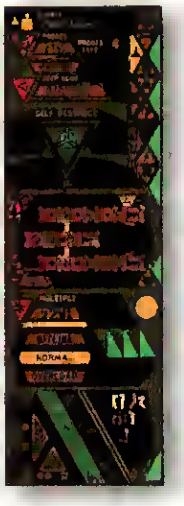

Lyran Tiger Heavy Cruiser - Prowess

4x Disruptors
2x ESGs
4x Phaser-1s
6x Phaser-3s

Experience a 30 year campaign that takes you from Lieutenant Commander of a Frigate to a Rear Admiral in control of a task force including Destroyers, Heavy Cruisers, and Dreadnoughts.

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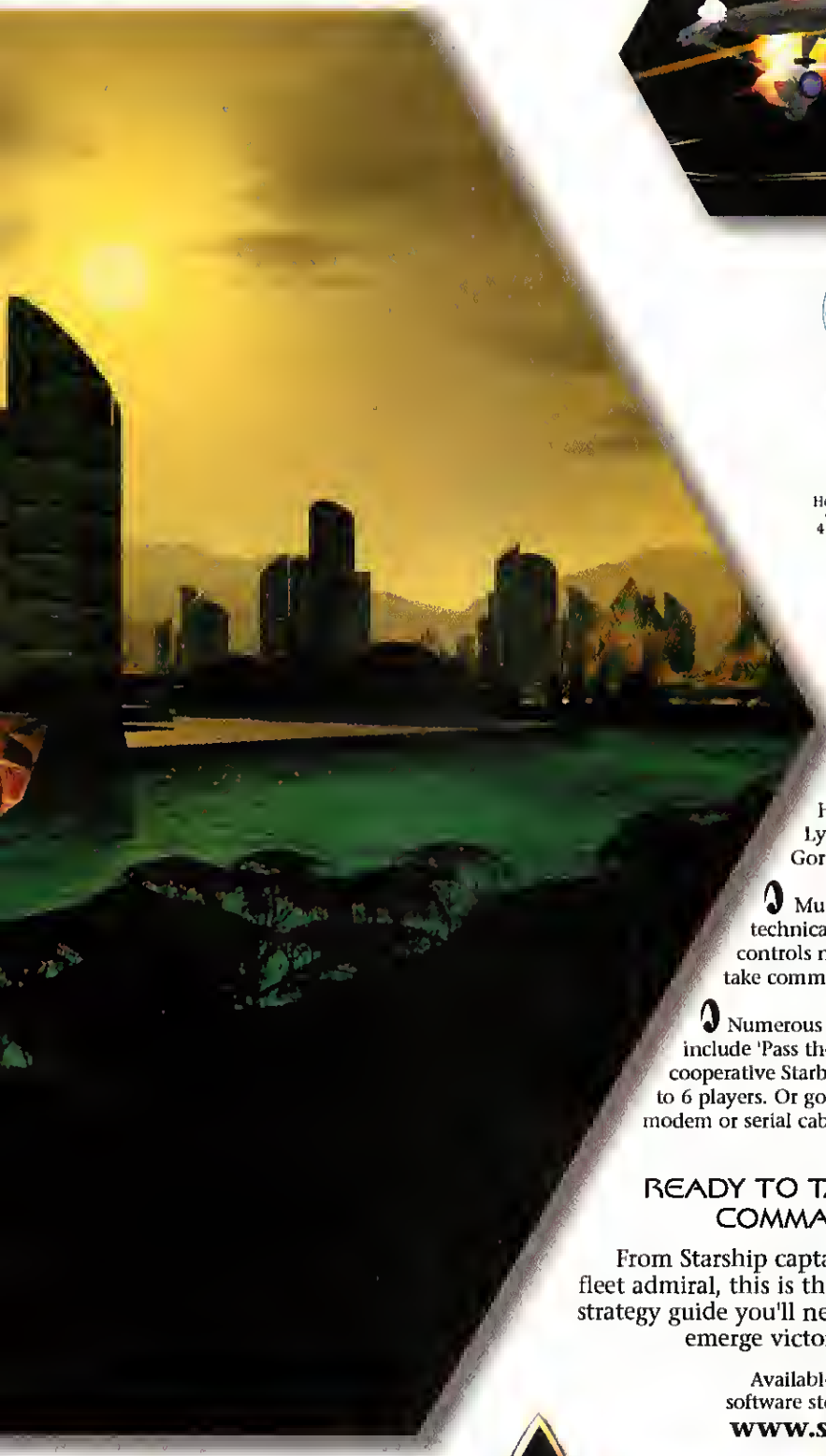
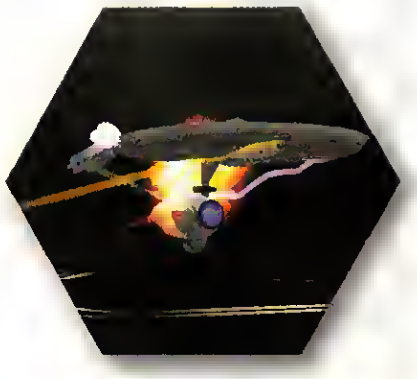
All shots are actual gameplay screens.





Federation
Heavy Cruiser (F-CA)

4 Photon Torpedoes
6 Phaser 1s
2 Tractors
3 Transporter
Size Class: 3

- Pledge allegiance in the Klingon Empire, the United Federation of Planets, the Romulan Star Empire, the Hydran Kingdom, the Lyran Star Empire, or the Gorn Confederation.
- Multiple tutorials and technicals will introduce the controls necessary for you to take command.
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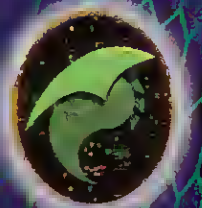

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Featuring over 80 different units including infantry and 22 playable tanks.

Germans Do Realism
With over 30 realism settings, Panzer Elite accommodates the distinct needs of novice and hard-core players. However, Germans only play while using the highest realism settings.

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Supports up to 6 players over LAN, modem or serial link, 4 players via Internet.

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OCTOBER REVIEWS

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

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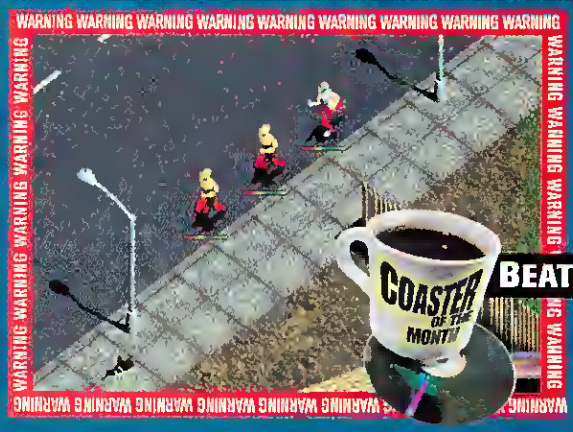
QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"...the handful of animated cut scenes intended to stitch the game's sections together sound like a David Mamet play as performed by someone with Tourette's..."

Charles Ardai, reviewing KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES
Another checkered flag!



BEATDOWN

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.

★★★★½ **Very Good** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★½☆ **Average** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★½☆☆ **Weak** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★½☆☆☆ **Abysmal** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

PHARAOH

Build A Kingdom. Rule The Nile. Live Forever.

From Impressions Games, the makers of Caesar™ III, comes Pharaoh, the most impressive city-building game ever made.

Immerse yourself in the grandeur of ancient Egypt, the mysterious kingdom beside the river Nile. Build a civilization for the centuries as you pass along your legacy from generation to generation, creating an empire and a bloodline built only for a Pharaoh.

CITY BUILDING SERIES
IMPRESSIONS

Oarsman
Can't...move...arms...slowing...down. How many ships do they think we can ram in one day? That's it, I'm taking this up with the union.

Priest
Stop! Thief! My God Ma'at gives me the power to strike you down where you stand! Feel lucky punk?

Thief
The Pharaoh's palace is filled with loot. They'll never notice if a little is missing! I might anger the Gods, but you won't catch me rowing in a galley all day. Next stop, the Beer Maker's. Stealing is thirsty work.

Beer Maker
Shay whatya will, I gotta keep tashting my brew. The Pharaoh demanshed the beshr. And that's what heesh gonna get. Hail Oshirish, may the barley crops grow shtrong!
Watch the largest monuments ever made assembled brick-by-brick. Never has a city-building game been so beautiful!
Adjust the difficulty – from easy to expert – and use the same point and click interface as Caesar III.
Nile Farmer
Nobody told me that when the Nile floods I have to work on the pyramids. Why didn't I go to embalming school like Mom wanted?
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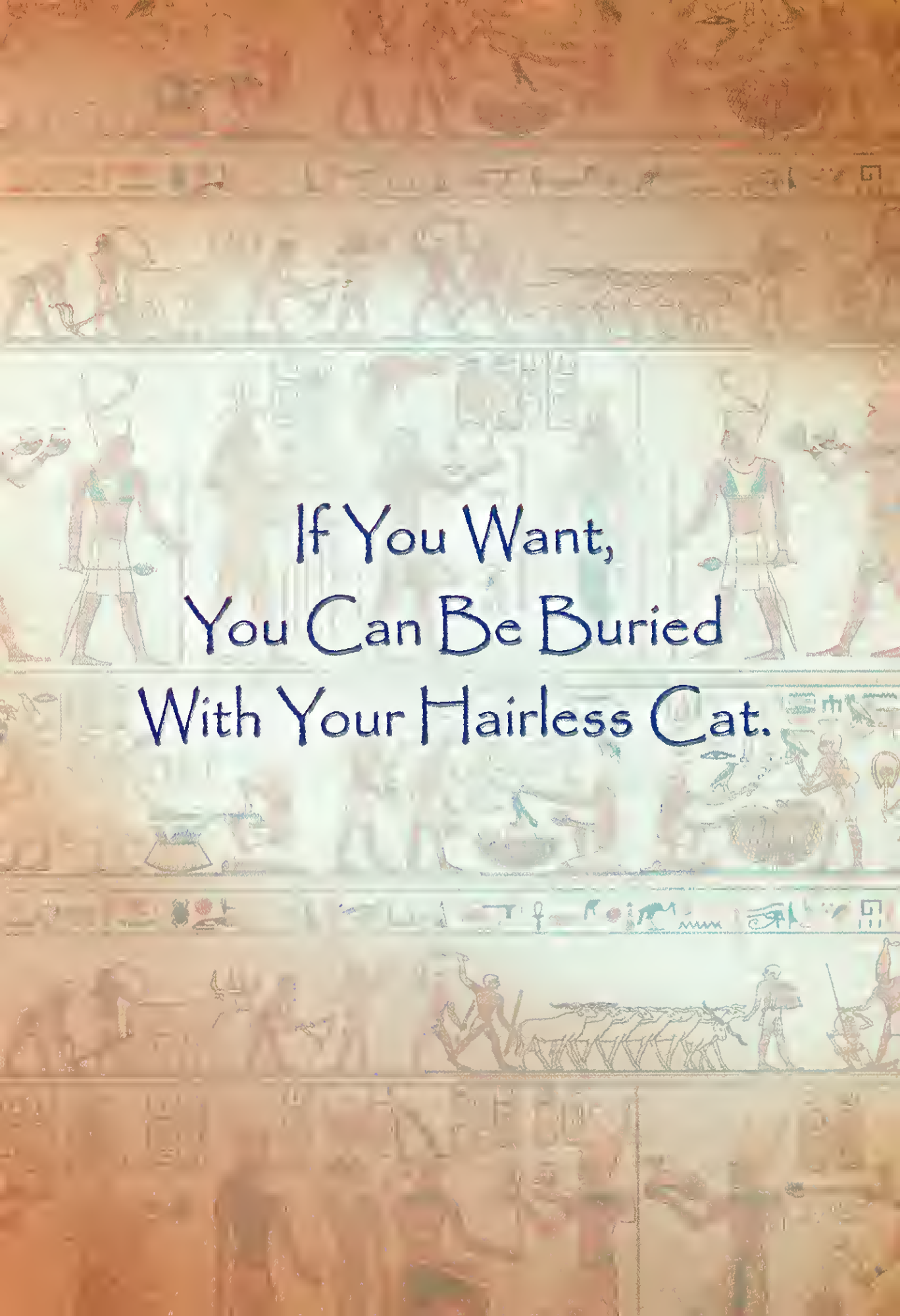


If You Want, You Can Be Buried With Your Hairless Cat.

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES Is a Dream of a Racing Game

Auto Eroticism

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES is a racing enthusiast's dream. With a new financial model, new exotic cars, over a dozen tracks, and more racing modes than a Ferrari has gears, this game truly has something for everyone. Sporting an absolutely beautiful engine that is balanced nicely between arcade and simulation, NFS:HS is a blast to drive. With a number of new single- and multiplayer enhancements, it's easily the best version yet of this stellar racing series.

SLIPPERY WHEN WET Driving with the weather turned on can be quite a challenge, especially with all the eye-candy distractions.

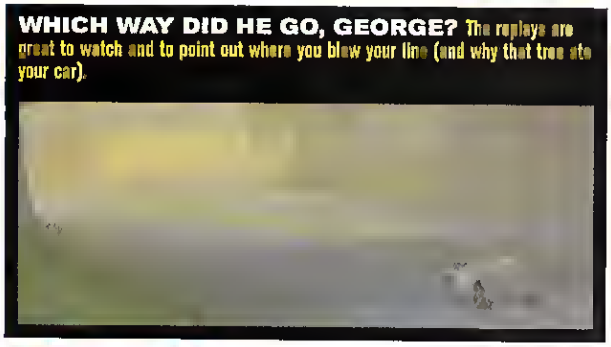
NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES

reviewed by Greg Fortune

Awash in a Sea of Options

HIGH STAKES offers so many different racing modes it borders on ridiculous. There are well over a dozen tracks that can be run normally, backwards, mirrored, or mirrored *and* backwards. There are 13 cars to choose from, with new cars available for download on the Web (www.earacing.com).

The new career mode is an awesome addition to single-player gameplay, featuring a financial model that requires you to win circuits of several races to advance. As you win, you'll earn money that you can use to repair your vehicle or to upgrade to a better car. The Hot Pursuit races (introduced last time around) are still a blast, especially when the police use coordinated tactics to trip you up. Then again, I really enjoyed *being* the police and getting to drop a spike strip in the path of a $100,000 McLaren F1. Call it envy if you like.



WHICH WAY DID HE GO, GEORGE? The replays are great to watch and to point out where you blew your line (and why that tree ate your car).

Honestly, I could think of only one race that was left out – a demolition derby – and using a Ferrari for that seems pretty stupid anyway. The good news, in any case, is that you *can* damage these cars now – though the effect is more a cosmetic one than one you'll notice on the track.

All of the single-player modes are also available as multiplayer options, so you can get online with your friends and play "cops and robbers," run a single race or a tournament, or race for pink slips. The game is supposed to let you participate in a beta test for EA's upcoming Internet racing, but as of press time in late July, EA still hadn't gotten that running.

Let's Rock

The most amazing thing here besides the tremendous selection of racing modes is how well they are all executed. There are no turkeys here. Whether you want to outrun the police, be the police, race alone or in a pack, you will not be disappointed. The AI opponents are challenging, but not invincible. The tracks are beautiful, well designed, and fun to race again and again. The cars' driving model is a perfect blend of a simulation and an arcade game – made even better with stellar force feedback effects. The result is cars that behave the way you'd expect them to in varied conditions, without being so pure that the game is inaccessible to novice drivers.

A note to the purists out there: You aren't going to be able to micromanage your cars in NFS:HS. You can buy upgrades to your cars to affect acceleration, braking and handling, and that's about it. But as far as I'm concerned, if I wanted to adjust the toe-in on my front wheels, I'd be out working in an alignment shop – not playing computer games.

The Final Lap

Where other publishers would have split this much gameplay into a game and two expansion packs, EA once again delivers a product that offers more than anyone could have expected. The only thing I wish EA had included is a bag of coffee. This is one of those games that will have you up at two in the morning, with your significant other screaming at you to come back to bed. Mine did. I didn't. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful engine; awesome track selection; lots of cars; more racing modes than you can shake a stick shift at.

CONS
Creates unhealthy desire for cars we can't have.

Cool Links

lamborghini.itg.net/ Official Lamborghini site. Well-designed and informative.

www.needforspeed.com/hs_pc/v_vanityplate.asp Create an NFS vanity plate for your wallpaper!

Requirements: Pentium 200 (or P166 w/3D accelerator card), 32MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** P266 (or P233 w/3D accelerator card), 350MB hard drive space **3D Support:** Glide, Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** modem, serial play, IPX network, Internet, 1 CD per player.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Electronic Arts • **Price:** $49.95 • **Contact:** www.needforspeed.com

ESRB Rating: Everyone

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Blood on the Streets

KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME

reviewed by Charles Ardai

The role of brutality in art and entertainment has been argued over at least since Plato, and the phenomenon itself is, of course, older still. Nothing in *Saving Private Ryan* is more brutal than the descriptions of battle in *The Iliad*, heaven knows. And nothing in a modern computer game is, either.

Yet the arguments rage on, especially in the wake of e senseless modern tragedy like the shootings in Littleton, Coloredo earlier this year. Games like Xatrix's KINGPIN do little to calm things down. Set in an urben environment peopled with thugs and junkies, KINGPIN is one long killing spree punctuated with occasional puzzle solving. The plot is opaque at best – a throwaway about one thug seeking revenge against a bunch of others – and the action is bloody in the extreme. Toss in a soundtrack by bad-boy rappers *Cypress Hill* and lots of explicit, gory visuals and what you've got is a poster boy for the anti-DOOM crowd.

But here's the snag: the game is actually quite good. Not perfect, no – but so much better than the average first-person shooter that no objective observer could fail to see it. So what is a gamer to do? If the level of gore disturbs you more than the quality of the game entices you, you don't heve to put the disk in the drive, and you don't have to let your kids play it either. (There's also a "low violence" mode, if you're the sort of person who likes halfway steps.) But for the many of us, KINGPIN has enough to offer that it more than makes up for the more egregious excesses of which the game is guilty.

STREET SMART The NPCs may not be the brightest thugs on the planet, but they will help you take down enemies like this.

THAT'S GOING TO LEAVE A MARK A sample of the game's most extreme violence. Sent to rescue a mobster's kidnapped girlfriend, you find her with her head chopped off.

Pipe Dreams

To set the tone, the game opens with not one but two savage beatings. The first you receive; the second you inflict. Your first weapon is a length of lead pipe, found in an alley. With money scavenged from your victims' pockets you buy your second, a crowbar, which you then use to beat up a couple of rent-a-cops guarding a warehouse. This gets you a shotgun, which you use inside the warehouse. And so on, through level after level of increasingly fast-paced combat against foes ranging from ordinary street toughs (with end without pit bulls) to well-protected mafiosi.

The environment in which this all takes place is astonishingly rich, and the combal itself is correspondingly detailed. There are no generic locations here – every brick wall, tunnel, tenement rooftop, sewer, and dock is rendered with great care – and the combat is not generic. Every shot you fire that hits an enemy hits him or her somewhere specific, and the impact is reflected in the wound that results. A pistol shot to the thigh will result in a bloody leg and a crimson trail on the ground as your victim limps away. A machine gun burst to the head from up close, on the other hand, will leave a decapitated corpse on the ground and lumps of flesh scattered for some distance around.

Not all of the fighting is left in your hands. In each of the game's seven sequences you heve the opportunity to hire fellow thugs to follow you around and do your bidding. Without fail they end up dying, but before they give up the ghost, a combination of your orders and some rudimentary AI enebles them to fight on your behalf, giving you a chance to prevail in some of the game's otherwise lopsided bettles.

And fighting's not all there is to do in KINGPIN (although it is the

CGW RATED

PROS
Suspenseful and engrossing gameplay in a novel setting; great visuals, atmosphere, and level design.

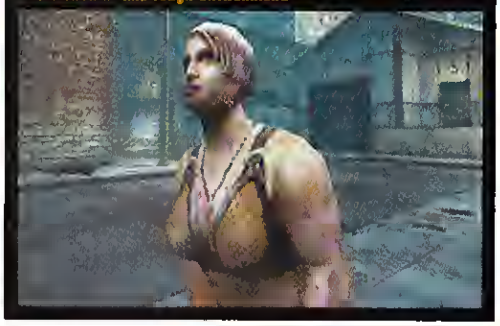
CONS
Four-letter words slathered on with a trowel; violence so graphic it makes Saving Private Ryan look like Mary Poppins.

Requirements: Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM, 570MB hard drive space, 3D acceleration required. • **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 300, 128 MB RAM, 570MB hard-drive space, 3D acceleration required. **3D Support:** Most Glide and Open GL cards • **Multiplayer Support:** Most Glide and Open GL cards.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Xatrix Entertainment • Price: $49.99 • Contact: www.interplay.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore and violence; strong language (low violence version included)

vast majority of what you do). Each sequence contains goals beyond the killing, and attaining those goals requires creativity on the player's part. Whether it's as simple as manipulating water pumps to uncover a sunken corpse or as complicated as shutting off the electricity in a refinery to enable a safecracker in your employ to get past the fence guarding a safe, the puzzles here are well integrated with the story. Although it's not always clear why your character agrees to go on the quests other characters send him on ("Won't you rescue my kidnapped brother?" asks one complete stranger, and you do), the quests add structure and drama to the game in a way that the game's overarching plot never quite does.

KEEPING IT UN-REAL For all its gritty realism, KINGPIN does stray from the real world with some of its lowlifes–a hard life and drugs have scarred this girl's arms with countless sores but her tremendous breasts have miraculously flourished in this rough environment.



Thug's Bugs

The absence of a stronger top-level plot is a shame, but it's not a serious problem; after all, how many shooters have any real story at all? More of an issue is the game's dialogue, which was scripted by someone with a tin ear for, but also a love of, profanity. Everyone you meet, friend or foe, greets you by cursing in your face, and the handful of animated cut scenes intended to stitch the game's sections together sound like a David Mamet play as performed by someone with Tourette's Syndrome. How many times can the word "fuck" be used in a single sentence? More than you can imagine.

The only reason it's not offensive is that it sounds so silly.

Other problems include AI limitations for the NPCs: your men sometimes get stuck on objects (one of mine spent ten minutes hopping around, trying to follow me out a window I'd just jumped from), and they often make stupid mistakes in the middle of a firefight. There are also various problems with the graphics (enemies vanishing into walls or hovering in mid-air, characters' skin rippling like a waterbed) as well as with the load times – restoring a saved game can take forever. And how does it add to the realism of the game for every woman in it, from pumped-up assassins to strung-out crack whores, to have identical enormous breasts?

But this sort of micro-criticism, though valid, is a distraction, much as abstract criticism of the game's level of violence is.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH Whether it's vats of molten steel, sweeping twilight skies, or just the convincing granularity of the brick textures, KINGPIN is one of the most graphically striking and believable games you've seen.

What makes KINGPIN so satisfying is that it succeeds in immersing you in an environment, much more than most other games have. As stunning as HALF-LIFE is, for example, I've never felt as deeply immersed in its locations as I did in the impeccably rendered and convincingly familiar city streets of KINGPIN. And as scary as HALF-LIFE's headcrabs are, KINGPIN's filthy rats and vicious dogs and even more vicious humans gave me a more visceral jolt.

KINGPIN offers an effective and memorable thrill ride, well paced and well designed. More than that I don't believe is fair to demand. When did we start expecting to get our models of moral conduct from our computer games? All I can say is that you won't find any here. But if what you're looking for is a compelling piece of entertainment, that you will find. Assuming your stomach is as strong as your trigger finger is fast, KINGPIN will blow you away. CGW

On The Defensive

How scared are game designers and publishers about the new anti-violence backlash? Plenty, judging from this "editorial" by KINGPIN designer Drew Markham which all new users must read before completing their installation:

In light of the recent acts of youth-related violence that have taken place across America we thought that you should know how KINGPIN was initially conceived. KINGPIN was never intended for children. This is a game with mature themes made for a mature audience. There was never any attempt to market or influence children to buy KINGPIN. In fact, magazines in which advertisements ran were carefully selected to only have an adult audience. We also took special care to insure that the "Mature" rating appeared very prominently on the package as well as within the game.

As the creator of KINGPIN I sought to make something that would appeal to a mature audience. My influences in making this game were mostly cinematic, and I wanted to explore those themes and share them with other adults who have similar tastes. As a parent, I also realize what my role is in protecting my child from influences that might have a disturbing effect. I certainly do not consider KINGPIN appropriate fare for my child, but I cannot sit back and hope that the government or some public interest groups will protect her; that responsibility is up to my wife and myself alone. As soon as we as a society abdicate our personal responsibility towards protecting and caring for our children we give up our basic freedoms as Americans; freedoms that have been hard fought and even harder won.

As parents, we must look into our own backyards and see what our children are doing and become more personally involved with their activities, ideas and friends.

Cool Links

www.planetkingpin.com
The premier news site for KINGPIN-related happenings.

kingpin.pcgame.com
A central location for KINGPIN mods, cheats, tweaks and strategies.

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New World Computing Chooses Story Over Looks

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

MIGHT AND MAGIC VII: FOR BLOOD AND HONOR

reviewed by P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki

New World Computing's MIGHT AND MAGIC series soared back to prominence in early 1998 with the release of MIGHT AND MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN. While it provided gamers with an expansive world, dozens of quests, and addictive character development, it lacked a compelling plot, and ultimately became tediously combat-intensive.

Instead of going back to the drawing board, New World Computing opted to weave a more involving storyline and to tweak the game's engine in response to gamers' most common complaints. The result of NWC's machinations is MIGHT AND MAGIC VII: FOR BLOOD AND HONOR, a successor that offers significant gameplay improvements, but graphics that look a bit dated

R2-D2 HE AIN'T As in previous games in the series, science fiction elements pop in towards the end. Intriguing or misplaced?

Archie and the Ironfists

Picking up after the end of the wars depicted in NWC's spin-off HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III, the plot of FOR BLOOD AND HONOR also wraps up a few loose ends from MIGHT AND MAGIC VI. With good King Roland Ironfist presumed lost in Enroth, his wife Catherine has established unstable peace on the neighboring continent of Erathia. While her subjects suspiciously watch the forces of the bordering elven nation, Roland's brother Archibald has become the guildmaster of the death-worshipping necromancers; he has resumed his scheming ways by hatching a plot against the realm's virtuous sorcerers. Each of the leaders has an agenda, giving MMVII a more complex plot than its predecessors

After completing a tutorial set on a small island and winning a title of nobility, you can freely explore Erathia at your own pace, undertaking quests and either assisting or thwarting one of the political factions. Ultimately you'll have to align with either the forces of light or darkness–but you can put off this decision until well into the game. Once you've made your choice, the game's interface will change to reflect your moral inclinations, and the game's plot will kick into high gear as the inhabitants of this world respond in kind. The different ethical paths also affect character development and significantly improve the game's replayability.

Long Live the Evolution

While the developers clearly worked to make the background plot more relevant and involving in this episode of the series, MIGHT AND MAGIC VII is still primarily a hack-and-slash game, at least in comparison to more story-driven RPG fare such as the FALLOUT games. Gameplay essentially consists of stomping monsters in order to gain enough experience points for your characters to evolve to god-like levels.

While virtually all role-playing games emphasize character development to some degree, the MIGHT AND MAGIC games require players to drastically enhance their characters' abilities in order to succeed. Killing tons of monsters to transform your characters from puny spark-tossing neophytes into two-handed sword flailing titans of destruction will occupy the bulk of your time.

That said, character development and creation options have been beefed up by the addition of a new "grandmaster" proficiency level for skills, and by several non-human character races. Monks and thieves are back, and you can have goblin, elven or dwarven party members, which should appease series veterans who were dissatisfied with the limited party member choices in MIGHT AND MAGIC VI. The character classes are also more distinctive this time around, due largely to skill proficiency restrictions imposed upon the classes, which prevent all of them from eventually evolving into formidable archer/warrior/magic-user hybrids.

Only a few spells and skills have been changed since MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, but the new additions vary the gameplay notably. Several of the new spells, such as Invisibility, Stun, and Berserk, give players additional options for dodging imposing confrontations, and grant a welcome reprieve from the wall-to-wall combat that otherwise dominates exploration.

ALL THE PRETTY HOUSES The automap now allows you to get the names of buildings, but the names aren't as descriptive as you might like. What goes on in the "pretty house"?

CGW RATED

PROS
Expansive gaming world; involving story; solid traditional-style RPG with some new interface tools.

CONS
Outdated graphics; mediocre 3D support; interface could use tweaking; some areas are tediously combat-intensive.

Requirements: Pentium 133, 32 MB RAM, 375 MB hard drive space, DirectX 6.1 compatible video card. **3D Support:** Direct 3D. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: The 3DO Company • **Developer:** New World Computing • **Price:** $50 • **Contact:** www.3do.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

Money is much easier to come by in MIGHT AND MAGIC VII than it was in THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN, and even if you run low on funds you can now do some trading or resort to stealing. The addition of creature vs. creature battles, which are occasionally scripted but can also be instigated using the Berserk spell, adds some entertaining depth by giving you fortuitous NPC allies, and by allowing monsters to devour the cardboard townsfolk that otherwise meander aimlessly through your realm.

Interface Consistency or Stagnation?

When MIGHT AND MAGIC VI added smoothly-scrolling 3D graphics and the option for real-time gameplay, veterans of the series were pleased to discover that the new game played much as the previous installments. Since MIGHT AND MAGIC VII adds the ability to move in turn-based mode, the game feels more than ever like the older games in the series – which is both good and bad. In some ways, it's a shame that the series hasn't evolved to allow players to move individual characters separately, as even when performing dangerous tasks – such as scouting or lock-picking trapped chests – you'll expose vulnerable characters. It's also impossible to view the gaming world without the obstruction of the interface sidebars, even though there are keyboard hotkeys to access all interface items. There is still no option to allow you to view and navigate the 3D world more conveniently with the mouse, even though this has become standard in first-person perspective games, and was incorporated several years ago by RPGs such as Bethesda Softworks' DAGGERFALL.

MIGHT AND MAGIC VII has, however, incorporated a few subtle but significant interface improvements. You can now access the inventory of your party members while inside a shop, allowing you to identify, repair or sell items using the party member with the highest merchant skill. You can now right-click on the automap to identify the names of buildings – which unfortunately can be non-descript (and you can't add your own annotations). The auto-notetaking function has also been enhanced, as it now records the locations of master and grandmaster (but not expert) trainers if you're informed of them by other characters, but not – inexplicably – if you happen to bump into those trainers on your own.

Colored Lighting or Visible Colors?

Although initially promised, 3D graphics hardware support proved to be too impractical for the development team to incorporate into MIGHT AND MAGIC VI. Direct 3D support has been included in MIGHT AND MAGIC VII, but it isn't implemented very well. While the Direct 3D version adds some nifty colored-lighting effects, it makes the colors of characters and creatures look less detailed and distinguishable than they appear in the software version. The software version is quite good, but looks outdated compared to recent hardware-accelerated offerings, such as Verant's EVERQUEST. Sound effects have been completely recycled from MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, but the new musical score is excellent. There are no fatal bugs in the game, but there are a few graphical quirks with the Direct 3D version that can cause textures to display incorrectly. The game occasionally crashes with EAX 3D sound enabled, although that problem may be attributed to Creative Labs' drivers.

In spite of the lack of groundbreaking improvements, FOR BLOOD AND HONOR is definitely a high point for the MIGHT AND MAGIC series. Although the game is still very combat-intensive (even for a role-playing game), there aren't as many creatures to contend with as there were in MIGHT AND MAGIC VI. Battle-adverse gamers can take advantage of the new spells and skills that allow gamers to minimize fighting and enjoy other activities.

The game has been well designed with varied environments and lots of little rewards for diligent explorers. The development team has even thrown in an enjoyable, although not particularly challenging, *Magic the Gathering*-type card game. Although the game's dated graphics and rigid interface may limit its appeal beyond fans of the genre, the fact that virtually every aspect of MIGHT AND MAGIC VI has been improved upon should more than satisfy fans. All told, MIGHT AND MAGIC VII is a strong installment in a great RPG series. CGW

Burn your accelerators, people! You've been deceived!

SOFTWARE VERSION

Notice how the colors are actually more detailed and less washed out in the software version verses Direct 3D.

DIRECT 3D VERSION

FRIEND-O-GENIE These stacked lamps can raise attributes, resistances or give you gold or skill points, depending upon the month they're used.

Cool Links

www.xmission.com/%7Epflick/mm7/ Magic Grounds, a great all-purpose MM7 site loaded with info.
www.arabin.com/arcostructure.htm Amazingly obsessive site about the built-in Arcomage card game.
www.angelfire.com/ca2/cooljerk/cooljerk.html Cool Jerk's RPG center. Good maps, hints, tips.

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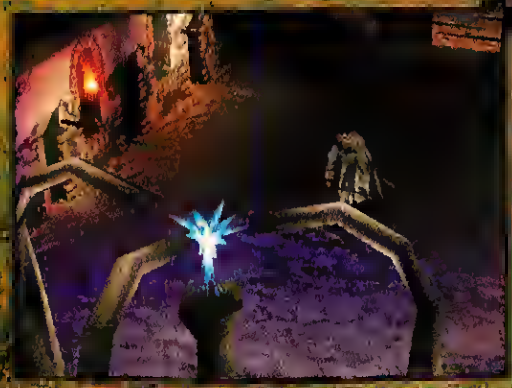

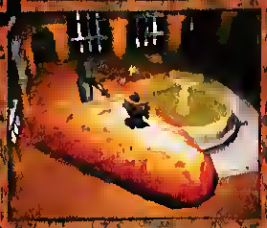

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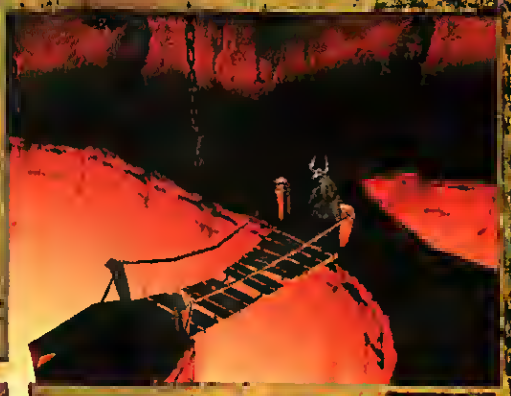

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DUNGEON KEEPER 2 Is a Demonic Delight

Devil's Advocate

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
reviewed by Robert Coffey

Let's face it: You're evil. Just good, old-fashioned bad. But because you don't want to do serious time or have your mom get really, really mad, you don't show it. You swallow all those cutting remarks, return that lost wallet, and when you're stranded on a mountain with your soccer team and with no hope for survival, you deceptively assent that *of course* you should wait for someone to actually *die* before you cannibalize them. And swallowing all that nastiness has left you with an achy-breaky, cold, black heart.

Well, my amoral friend, what you need is DUNGEON KEEPER 2. Reveling in all that's good about being bad, DK2 is the best time a budding little monster can hope to have. And for all you goody-two-shoes out there, be warned: This game is so unbelievably fun you may find yourself slipping over to the dark side.

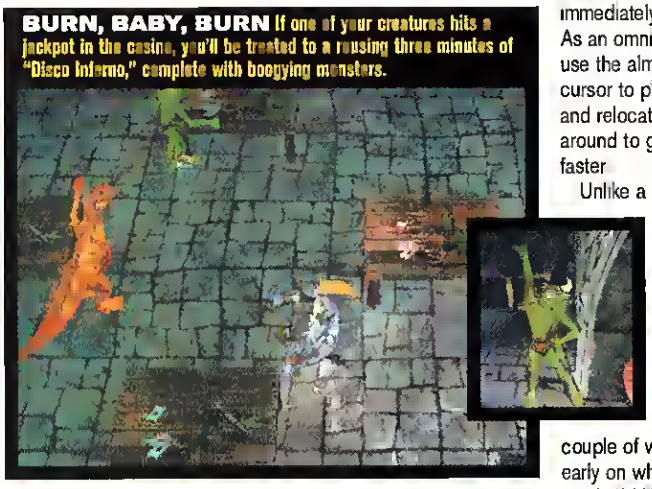
FACE TO FACE Possessing a creature lets you take the fight into your own hands. Possession is the only way you can make your creatures perform specific actions.

Movin' on up!

With equal parts SIMCITY-style management and traditional real-time combat, DK2 is a hybrid game similar in some ways to CAESAR III but with a significantly more infectious and demented sense of fun. As a dungeon keeper, it is your job to carve out underground chambers, mine gold, and wage war against the self-righteous forces of good as you strive to work your way up to the sunlit world above. By "zoning" parts of your twisting subterranean keep as torture chambers, libraries, casinos, and more, you are able to attract creatures through magical gateways called portals.

Managing the dark angels, rogues, and warlocks you attract is part of the game's challenge. Every creature has basic needs that must be met: You'll mine gold to pay them, and build lairs and hatcheries so they can rest and eat. But the creature management goes deeper than that, with every creature having specific needs, desires, and antipathies. For instance, you'll need to keep your voracious bile demons housed near a hatchery and away from skeletons, unless you want to run the risk of their abandoning your dungeon and your unholy cause. Fortunately, a handy little "flower" above every creature's head quickly updates you as to the creature's mood, current needs, hit points, and experience level for easier management. Additionally, the game will alert you to any dissatisfied creature so that you can immediately address its problems. As an omnipotent being, you can use the almighty hand that is your cursor to pick up troublemakers and relocate them or just slap them around to get them to do their jobs faster.

BURN, BABY, BURN If one of your creatures hits a jackpot in the casino, you'll be treated to a rousing three minutes of "Disco Inferno," complete with boogying monsters.



Unlike a more traditional RTS like STARCRAFT, DK2 gives you no control over the creatures you have in your army. You have to build rooms and hope that you can attract the critters you're looking for. This affects strategy in a couple of ways: You have to decide early on what your priorities are (do you build libraries so warlocks come and upgrade your spells?), and it forces you to adjust your approach when you attract a mix of creatures that don't exactly fulfill your wish list. While the lack of control over unit generation may frustrate some gamers, more adaptable players will welcome the unpredictability.

Fighting the Bad Fight

But what's the point of having a pack of rat-visaged vampires if you can't go wreak some mayhem? Fortunately, DK2 has ample opportunity for battling the forces of good.

Combat is a very unusual affair insofar as your lack of direct creature control extends to the battlefield as well. While all your dungeon denizens have different strengths and weaknesses in a fight (dark elves are great at long-range defense but vulnerable to melee combat), you can't really tell them

MOVING IN A horde of creatures invades an enemy room. Note the "flowers" above the creatures' heads indicating their health, skill level, desires and disposition.

CGW RATED

PROS
Great balance of management and combat; evil to its nasty little core.

CONS
Can't replay missions; shortish campaign; can't play as good guys; plodding multiplayer.

Requirements: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 266, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator.
3D Support: Direct3D. **3D Support:** Most Glide and Open GL cards. **Multiplayer Support:** Modem (2 players), Internet, LAN (2-4 players); 1 CD per player
Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Bullfrog Productions • **Price:** $39.95 • www.dungeonkeeper.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

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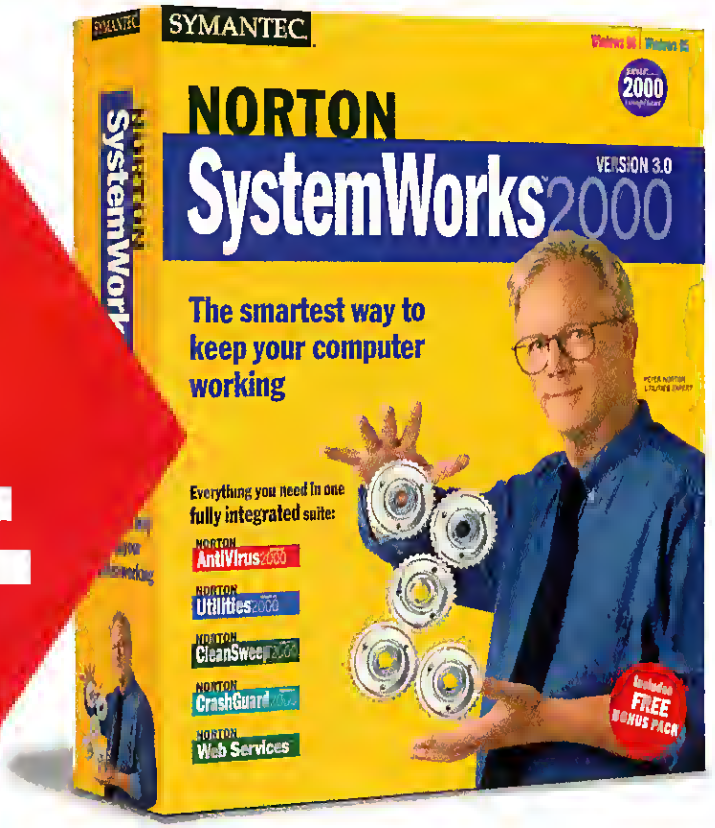
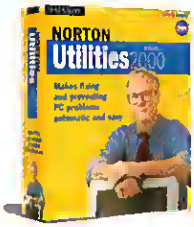


"If you want the best defense against system problems, turn to the granddaddy of all utility packages, Norton Utilities."
Smart Computing, 3/98



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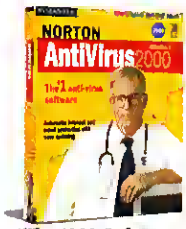
could have wiped away a year's worth of work. It could have screwed up your data. It could have tucked its deadly digital infection deep inside your hard drive. It could have, and would have...but you had Norton AntiVirus.™



"The 1999 Software Product Of The Year!"
Windows Magazine, 7/99

We've inoculated more computers than any anti-virus software ever inveuted.

And our new 2000 version packs even stronger antidotes. It automatically scans all incomiug e-mail attachments. It stops ActiveX and Java code assaults. It even updates itself without having to restart your system. With 100,000,000 computers on the Internet, it's a big, contagious, wired world out there. To keep your PC in the pink, fight infectiou with Norton protection.

Clean Up The Clutter On Wednesday.

Sure you bought the biggest, baddest hard drive in the store

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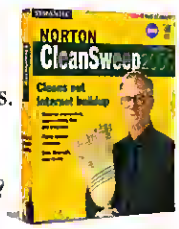
Before whiz-bang plug-ins so you could visit one site...once.

Before MP3.

Before video grabs and digital photos.

Before the hottest Sim game needed 8 CDs. Isn't it time to throw open the window, and toss out all that clutter!?



"Our first choice in its field"
PC Magazine, 5/99

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Catch A Crash On Thursday.

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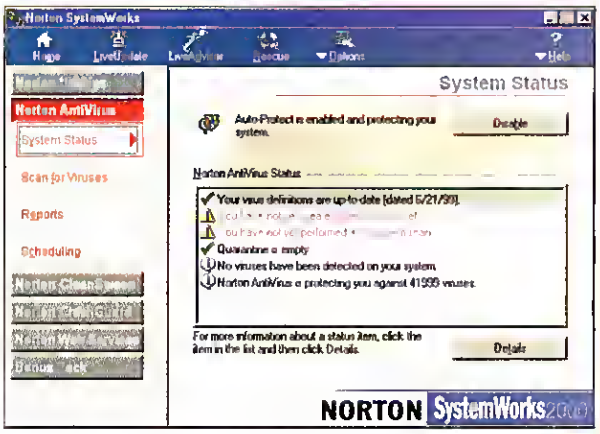
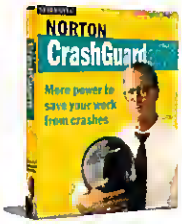
And generally it happens when you can least afford it. Like when you haven't saved your work for over an hour. Or just after you've entered the last address in a 385-persou mailing list. Or the fiual numbers into a tedious spreadsheet.

We thiuk the best defeuse is a stronger offensive. That's why Norton CrashGuard™ jumps right into the path of an oncoming crash. It protects your work first, even creating a SafeOriginal,™ then guides you step-by-step through recovery

Crashes happen. Just make sure you're uot crushed by the next one.



Start any or all of Norton SystemWorks from one screen. No rebooting!



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InternetWeek, 3/99

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"It's The Obvious Choice."

–PC Magazine

"Norton SystemWorks brings together several best-of-breed utilities for significantly less than you'd pay to get them separately. For one-stop shopping for system utilities, it's the obvious choice."

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—PC Week 4/99

"...a seamlessly integrated suite of utility and antivirus software...an exceptional value."

—InternetWeek 3/99

"...other programs offer similar features but fall far short of what Norton has."

—Knight Ridder Newspapers 1/99

PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE™ 1999

WINLIST Windows Magazine 1998

PC Computing 1998

PC WORLD 1999 WORLD CLASS

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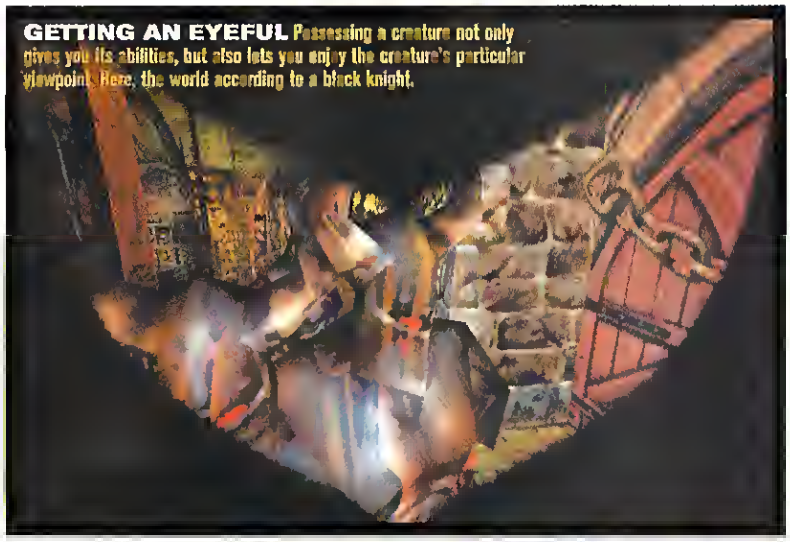
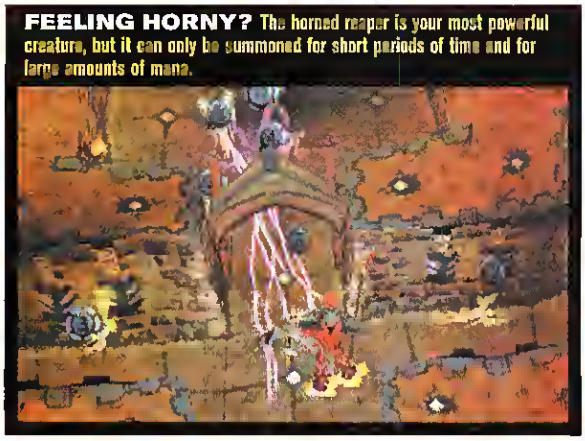


GETTING AN EYEFUL Possessing a creature not only gives you its abilities, but also lets you enjoy the creature's particular viewpoint. Here, the world according to a black knight.

where to go and what to do. You can pick them up and drop them where you want them to be – trolls up front, skeletons behind the enemy – but you surrender control at that point. It can be frustrating at times, this powerlessness.

But there are ways you can influence a battle. You can cast thunderbolt spells to knock down the enemy, you can heal your troops, or you can set off a devastating inferno if you've claimed enough land to accrue the necessary mana to cast the spell. By keeping your troops healthy and in charge of a fight, you can prevent the morale lapses and chaos that will result in their fleeing.



FEELING HORNY? The horned reaper is your most powerful creature, but it can only be summoned for short periods of time and for large amounts of mana.

But the most efficient way to take charge is to possess a creature. Casting a possession spell transforms *you* into the creature, taking you to a first-person view. In this mode you enjoy combat and morale bonuses, though you lose the ability to cast any spells other than those that the possessed creature may have. Possession is also a great way to penetrate and destroy enemy defenses prior to a full-scale invasion.

About those defenses: You've got a number of them yourself, and their skillful deployment is frequently crucial to victory, since you're not the only tunneling terror. Spike traps impale invaders, lightning traps electrocute them, and magic doors attack them while denying entry. The catch is that the traps dip into your mana reserves for maintenance.

Some 20-odd missions comprise the single-player campaign, a great mix of simple invasions, timed missions, and some special-objective scenarios as well. For example, one late mission asks you to capture, torture, and convert to your side three hero princes; the catch is that you have to take them all simultaneously or the others will escape. It's a delicate mission that hinges on planning and timing and is unlike anything in any other game. Unfortunately, you can't go back and replay missions after completing the campaign, a real shame considering there are points in the game where you must select one mission from a set of three to advance. Multiplayer games are great fun, if a little long to resolve, but you still can't play as the good guys. A skirmish mode lets solo players enjoy multiplayer games alone.

What really makes DK2 a joy to play is the design of the game, an unmitigated triumph of dark humor and creativity. Even in software mode the game is gorgeous, with beautiful lighting and spell effects and funny creature animations. But the real highlights are all the little things: The imps dragging fallen enemies back to your prison, the dominatrix mistresses torturing themselves to pass the time, the outstanding voice work of your dungeon-keeping mentor, the monster dancing when a casino jackpot is hit, and the sounds of the creatures, especially the maniacal cackling of a horde of homicidal skeletons. You could spend your time just *watching* this game and have a better time than you would playing a host of others. I haven't had a better time playing a game all year. CGW

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- Pluck higher-level enemies out of your prison and torture them. Keep them alive with heal spells until you convert them. This is a great way to augment the limited number of creatures your portals can generate.
- Bring a couple of imps along on big invasions so they can claim enemy rooms, allowing you to cast spells as you enter enemy territory.
- Expand your dungeon in one direction at a time. Nothing is worse than having to divide your forces because you've stumbled onto enemies in multiple locations.

- Before breaching rooms packed with enemy units, build sentry or lightning traps outside your planned entry point. Then knock out two sections of wall so your traps can attack more enemies, especially those support troops in the back.
- Don't use your thunderbolt spell offensively. You're better off using your spell points on healing your own units during battle so they survive and earn experience. Instead, use thunderbolt defensively to knock down ranged troops until your forces can reach and attack them.

Cool Links

www.gamespot.com/features/dungeonkeeper Hints for the original DUNGEON KEEPER
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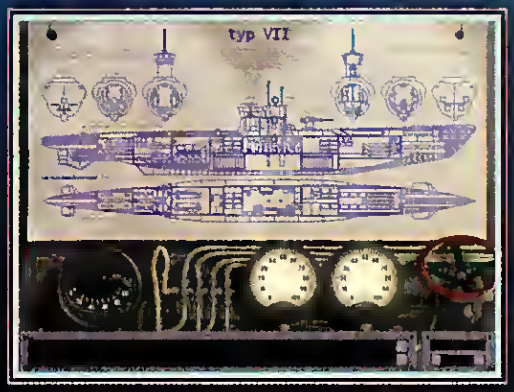

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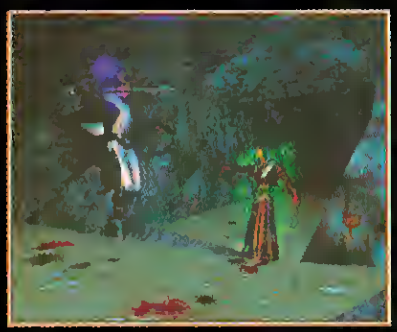

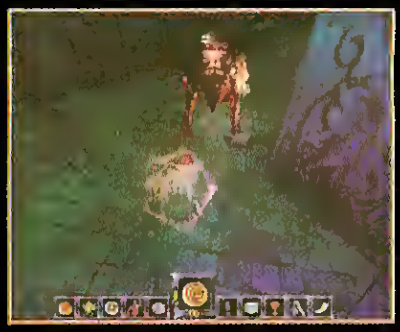

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Silver - Begin the quest, become the hero...

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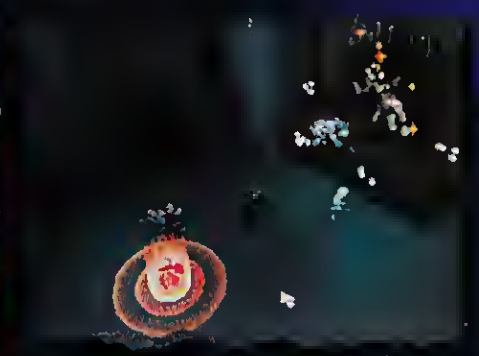
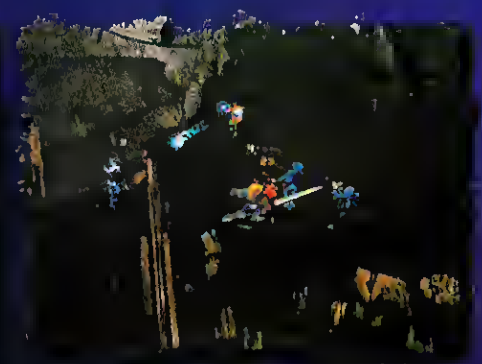


Morvel ot vivid speciol effects, powerful magical spells, ond the mighty weoponry that you'll ocquire on your journey



Your mouse is your sword. Use it in real time combat to vanquish foes, including demons, dragons, ond other insidious creotures

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A Realistic WWII High Seas Slugfest

Battleship Brawl

The Designer's Notes for FIGHTING STEEL (FS) make it clear that this is a game with focus. The focus is naval surface combat – no aircraft or submarines. The focus is the beginning of World War II, before Allied numbers and technology began to tip the scales. The focus is also tactical – battles start at the moment of contact.

FIGHTING STEEL
reviewed by Bob Proctor

With such a narrow focus, you'd expect FS to do its thing really well. Indeed, the design succeeds in accurately portraying the major factors: visibility, weapon systems and damage. However, the game feels rushed and incomplete. There are many bugs and glitches. For single player they are minor and don't affect play, but the multiplayer problems are more serious.

PREPARE TO FIRE The Bismarck turns to bring all guns to bear on the Yamato. Camera controls are at right, navigation controls at bottom.

By the Rockets' Red Glare

FIGHTING STEEL's 3D engine gives you a panoramic view of the action. The ship models are accurate and the effects – explosions, smoke, fires and splashes – are good. Watching the turrets turn and belch forth a broadside is exciting, and the sound is superb. One wishes for a greater variety of effects, but that merely underscores the quality of what's here.

PREPARE TO DROWN A few minutes later, the Bismarck, surrounded by 16-inch shell splashes, rolls over and sinks. Size does matter!

The 12 historical scenarios are either UK vs. Germany in the Atlantic or USA vs. Japan in the Pacific. For additional play, there's a Battle Generator that creates battles for instant play, as well as a Scenario Editor. Both have date for 97 classes of warships from the four nations, ranging from battleships to destroyers.

Both the Editor and Generator create historical or fantasy battles. Historical means that you can't use a ship that wasn't actually available at the time of the scenario, and that factors like crew quality, damage control, and dud rates follow historical patterns. In a fantasy battle, all restrictions are off and you can do anything you want. Want to see how Bismarck would fare against Yamato? Have at it! Unfortunately, due to the strict focus on the period before 1943, many of the USA's best designs are missing – including Iowa-class battleships, Alaska battlecruisers, Baltimore heavy cruisers, and the large Sumner and Gearing destroyers that came late in the war.

The interface works fairly well, but it uses too much screen space and requires more button clicking than it should. The camera control panel, for example, could easily be half as big. The control window takes up the bottom one-third of the screen, and forces you to switch among six command stations and from orders to status. There are several little annoyances that can slow you down but don't affect play. Views don't stay centered when zooming; messages are lost once they leave the screen; and the Ship Viewer (database) does not open to the currently selected ship.

Finally, there is Division Commander mode. This means that you command a single division of ships instead of all the divisions. In some of the larger battles, a force may be divided into four or five divisions, so many friendly ships may be out of sight, as well as beyond your control. This mode is best-suited for multiplayer, adding the elements of teamwork and identification to the mix.

Will it Have Critical Mass?

Potentially, FS could be as successful as SILENT HUNTER, another realistic game that had a scenario editor and sold a couple of expansion packs. However, FS has had a much less auspicious start and may not generate the sales to get the ball rolling. Let's hope SSI gets on top of the bugs quickly, as this could be a fun game in both single-player and multiplayer modes. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Exciting battles; good graphics and sound; open-ended design; a decent manual.

CONS
Very narrow focus; weak campaign game; assorted bugs.

Cool Links
welcome.to/markgame
Information tables and scenarios.
www.fightingsteel.com
The official site.
www.german-navy.de/games.htm
History and photos of WWII warships.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 3D card with 4MB memory, 175MB free space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 266MHz, wavetable soundcard. **3D Support:** DirectX. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to four players over Internet or LAN; modem and direct cable.

Publisher: SSI • **Developer:** Divide by Zero • **Price:** $60 • **Contact:** www.SSIonline.com
ESRB Rating: E; animated violence.

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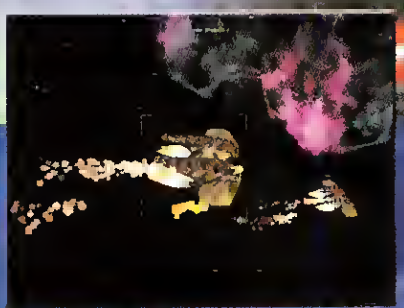

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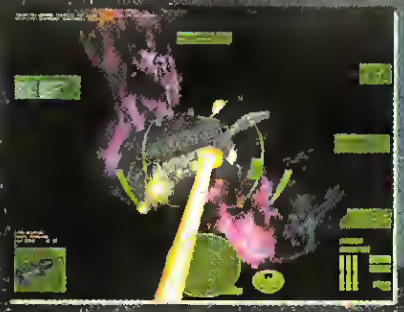

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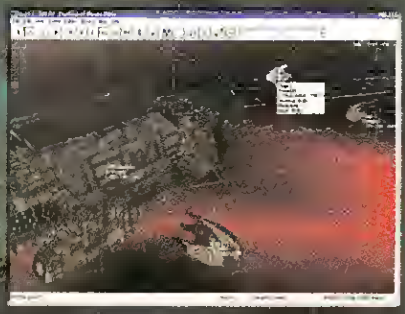

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PGA Championship Golf 1999 Edition Gives Us a Great Mouse-Swing but not Much Else

Par for the Course

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 1999 EDITION

reviewed by Brett Todd

For the longest time, I was afraid that Sierra's PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 1999 EDITION had been lost in the shuffle. After all, the Sierra Sports division hasn't exactly been the poster child for corporate stability of late. Considering how FOOTBALL PRO '99 bit the dust in January, I wouldn't have been surprised if this promising release had also vanished into the ether.

My worries came to naught when the game finally shipped in late May. But now that it has arrived, I realize my concern was for nothing. PGA CHAMPIONSHIP is one of those titles that is so nondescript it's hardly there. You'll play the game a lot, maybe even incessantly for a few days – as I did – and then completely forget about it. This is the computer equivalent of the solid character actor who is instantly recognizable by face, but not by name. If ever there was a game that needed the American Express card, this is it.

CAN YOU TELL I MISSED? Some interesting animations await, depending on how you play. Here, I suffer a brain aneurysm after missing an easy tap-in from two feet.

Swingers Only

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP goes out of its way to be different. While all the standard golfing options are available –12 types of play from medal through Ryder Cup format, an offline tournament mode, Internet multiplayer (restricted to www.won.net), varied difficulty levels, seven courses including notables like Sahalee and Royal Birkdale, and so on – Sierra made some interesting tweaks to try to set its game apart.

For starters, forget about lining up your shot via an aiming pole; here, shots are readied by rotating the golfer's feet and choosing a proper setup. Strategy is very important. To succeed in this game, you'd better know what a draw is. I had a tough time dealing with this approach. Even as a student of the game, I found this intensive and limiting. It also turns golf into too much of a strategic challenge. Maybe that's how it is for the pros, but most of us are recreational duffers who are doing great just to hit the ball straight.

Another noteworthy addition is the TrueSwing 2000 mouse-swing option. A dramatic advancement on the "move mouse/swing club" concept introduced in FRONT PAGE SPORTS GOLF many moons ago, the revamped swing interface feels more natural than anything else on the market. Although it's still nothing like swinging a real golf club, it affords you unprecedented control over the computer equivalent.

A remarkably easy-to-use course architect is also featured. Instead of building courses hole-by-hole, you start with a quick sketch of all 18 and can then fuss with the details to your heart's content. This program might not be as powerful as that bundled with JACK NICKLAUS 6: GOLDEN BEAR CHALLENGE, but it is far more user-friendly.

Physics are quite good, if not up to the exacting standards of the LINKS LS series. My one major qualm is with the lack of real breaks on the greens. Even the most pronounced slope doesn't require much in the way of compensation. I hit almost every putt either straight or a fraction to one side with great success.

In the Rough

While crisp and clean, the distinctive graphics are too cartoony for my taste. Golfers are little more than animated mannequins, devoid of any facial features. Is that Tom Lehman or an extra from Pink Floyd's *The Wall*? Only Sierra knows for sure. Courses are nicely drawn, yet plain. Giving us seven to choose from was a good idea; giving us seven that are more or less identical was not.

ANY OF YOU FOLKS NAMED CLETUS? It takes a lot of skill and patience to drain a putt like this in front of a crawd of slack-jawed yokels.

Audio effects are missing in action. There's no satisfying clunk as the ball drops into the cup, and the crowd's reaction to shots is a static-like murmur. Play-by-play is provided by Nostradamus and Jeane Dixon – uh, make that Mark Lye and Grant Boone – although the mistaken identity is forgivable since the twosome have an uncanny knack for predicting where your ball is going to drop. When one says that you might be heading for the rough, that's exactly where you're going. This proves to be very annoying and kills the suspense of watching the ball in flight.

Unless you absolutely, positively can't leave home without a fantastic mouse-swing shot option and a honey of a course architect, there are better golf games out there than PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF. JACK NICKLAUS 6 offers a far more attractive package along with a comprehensive course designer. LINKS LS 1999 offers an unsurpassed physics engine and gameplay. Sierra hits par with this game, but against excellent competition, that may not be enough for everyone.

CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent mouse-swing option; easy-to-use course architect.

CONS
Different shot setup might not be appreciated; cartoony visuals.

Cool Links

wonswap.won.net
Official site for new courses.

www.sahalee.com
Official site of the game's best course.

www.golf.com
Mammoth all-purpose golf site.

Requirements: Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 60MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM, 110MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** None. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 64 players (in tournament mode) via won.net (TCP/IP), LAN, modem.

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Sierra Sports • **Price:** $30 • **www.sierra.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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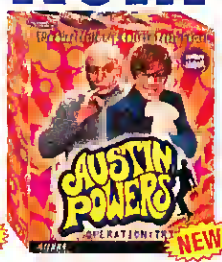

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SIERRA STUDIOS VALVE gearbox software RP

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F-16 Action Without the Brutal Learning Curve

Falcon Lite

F-16 Aggressor won't impress the hard-core flight sim group. The flight and weapons modeling, enemy artificial intelligence and linear campaign layout can't hold a candle to the detail of other F-16 games like FALCON 4.0. On the other hand, F-16 AGGRESSOR is a well-designed title for less demanding fliers, especially those just beginning to experiment with flight sims.

F-16: AGGRESSOR
reviewed by John Nolan

Africa On $900,000 A Day

The storyline casts you in the role of Reyas, commander of a mercenary F-16 squadron under the direction of a shadowy CIA operative known as Icarus, who uses the Aggressors against Maldonado, the typical evil drug lord bent on world dominance. A mercifully few clicks will get you past the introductions to select your game type, arm your aircraft and get you launched. The four linear campaigns with 10 missions each are all based on the African continent. You must successfully complete each mission before you can move on, and targets are always in the same places, shortening the learning curve. Given that you are a mercenary, success is rewarded with cash and another mission. But this storyline is never fully developed. There are no cut-scenes, just some congratulatory text to move you on to the next sortie. The cash you earn is simply a means of keeping score; you can't buy better weapons or repair your aircraft. The mercenary storyline could and should have been used to give this sim depth and atmosphere.

EYE-BALL IT Although you're on the Instrument Landing System, you really don't need it. The weather is always good, and putting the flight path marker on the end of the runway will get you down safely.

Passive Aggressor

Once in the cockpit, you'll find this F-16 incredibly easy to fly. Most players will blitz through each of the five training missions in a single pass. The landing phase is especially easy to master; touchdowns that would fold the gear in FALCON 4.0 result in smooth "squeakers" here. Despite that, the manual speaks of "the highest level of realism and accuracy" in a military specification flight model, and it does have a nice feel overall. The plane is suitably sluggish at low speeds, exhibits a good relationship between angle of attack and power on approach, and shows some decent lift/drag relationships. At "corner velocity" and higher (450 knots +), it seems very pitch sensitive and twitchy. It's tough to get a "guns kill" in this sim until the turn-fight slows way, way down. And the weak enemy AI pilots accommodate you here, bleeding their energy to the point of stalling to turn on to your six, rarely extending or using the vertical. With missiles on your rails, the AI planes are easy meat. Saddling up on their six for guns is no challenge, but hitting them is, due to the twitchy pitch characteristics. A joystick scaling routine would help a lot, but is missing from the simplified game interface.

Weapon employment/effectiveness presents a similar situation. The basics are all here in an overly simplified form. All of them use "high

GAS ATTACK! This tanker is taking a Maverick amidships. The Mavericks are the weapons of choice for most ground targets; they almost never miss and will destroy nearly every target.

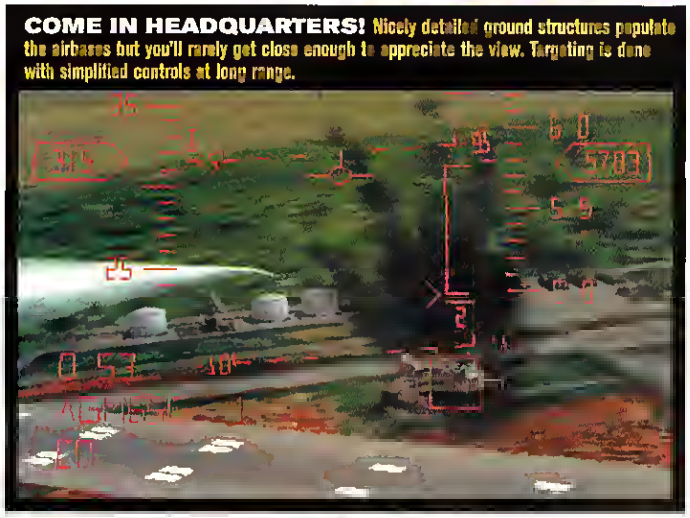
CGW RATED

PROS
Nice graphics and simple game interface; forgiving flight model and simplified controls for novices.

CONS
Good story setup wasted by weak execution; cockpit views lacking; weak enemy AI; impossibly accurate/powerful weaponry.

Requirements: Windows 95/98, Pentium 133MHz, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 2MB DirectX 6.0 compatible video card, 50MB free hard drive space, plus 200MB for swap file, 28.8K modem for internet play. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 8 x CD-ROM drive, 2MB DirectX 6.0 compatible video card, 4MB 3Dfx card, 350MB free hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D or software DirectDraw. **Multiplayer Support:** TCP/IP over Internet, IPX over LAN, serial via null modem cable.

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks • **Developer:** General Simulations, Inc. • **Price:** $39.99 • **Contact:** www.bethsoft.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated violence.



COME IN HEADQUARTERS! Nicely detailed ground structures populate the airbases but you'll rarely get close enough to appreciate the view. Targeting is done with simplified controls at long range.

power" modeling; a single Maverick will kill most ground targets. Forget the many modes of the radar; all you need to do is change the range now and then. While targeting key controls is a bit clumsy, once you're pointed at the target area it's easy to lock-on and kill. The only concern is to be well inside your particular weapon's range when you shoot; you'll rarely miss. If you're not a hard-core flight simmer, these features make the game fun to play, with a high level of success in moderately difficult situations.

F-16 AGGRESSOR does a particularly good job with graphics. The cockpit gauges are easy to read, the HUD is sharp and clear, and the terrain is realistic despite the occasional "seam" in the tiling. Target objects in the game, like tanks, are light on detail, but exterior views of your aircraft are beautiful. Enemy plane sizing is unrealistically small (a mistake common in almost every flight sim), but you can "zoom in" on the HUD to compensate. The one major gripe against the visuals is the pilot's view options. There are a slewable view and nine "keypad" fixed views that, with the exception of the HUD view, focus mainly inside the cockpit. The lack of "snap views" to quickly scan outside the aircraft is a major oversight. This "straight ahead through the HUD" emphasis once again underscores the entry-level aspect of this sim, since most vets keep their heads on a swivel.

Debriefing

Taken as an entry-level flight sim, AGGRESSOR gets the job done. The interface is simple to navigate, the aircraft is easy to fly and fight, success is not difficult to achieve, and multiplayer options allow the competitive instinct to run free. These are the things that will draw a beginner deeper into the realm of flight. But other elements—more interaction and depth in the storyline, a dynamic campaign, and greater emphasis on the economic aspects of a mercenary operation—would more fully absorb the player. F-16 AGGRESSOR's weak flight and weaponry modeling and enemy AI won't cut it for veterans. But hey, that's why we have FALCON 4.0. CGW

Cool Links

www.janes.com
The source for aircraft data.
allserv.rug.ac.be/~svhastel
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www.totavia.com/imagearchive
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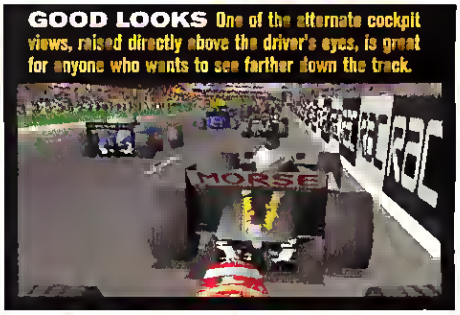
Eidos Keeps Apace With a Decent Rookie Effort

Strong Start

Time was when officially licensed Formula One racing games were rare indeed. Lately, however, the FIA has been issuing licenses faster than Mark McGwire gobbles Creatine. The latest F1 game is Eidos' OFFICIAL FORMULA 1 RACING, a decent affair with lots of interesting features and a strong fun factor.



GOOD LOOKS One of the alternate cockpit views, raised directly above the driver's eyes, is great for anyone who wants to see farther down the track.

OFFICIAL FORMULA 1 RACING

CGW RATED

PROS
Reasonable sim experience; great sound; lots of graphical treats and a wealth of camera positions.

CONS
Quirky opponent behavior; sensitive wheelspin; unrealistic damage modeling.

The game turns back the clock one year, showcasing all teams, drivers, and circuits of the1998 Formula One season.

It also sports several other simulation trappings: race and championship modes, believable environments, real team and event sponsors, a reasonably authentic driving model, and a garage facility. It is a challenging exercise far removed from racing's more forgiving "arcade" sub-genre, but lacks the detail and subtlety of the more hard-core sims.

The game presents a solid and precise ride that is nicely responsive, but doesn't fully come to grips with the nuances of physics. Wheelspin, for instance, though fine when braking hard into a skid, is erratic when accelerating, and just plain wacko should the car leave pavement.

The AI opponents have moderate skills but somewhat questionable collision avoidance. Bright enough to steer clear at speed and in certain unforeseen circumstances, their corner braking is inconsistent and sure to result in surprising rear-enders.

Graphics are impressive, with clean lines, light-sourced cars, textured roadways and well-worn racing lines. There's an incredible array of viewpoints, superb replay, variable fog levels, and TV-style picture-in-picture views of on-track action.

The game's even better audibly. Engines sound like F1 engines and are accurately source-sensitive, tires squeal when you need them to squeal, and the underside scrapes the ground with a grating clamor. In a true flash of brilliance, the designers introduced hissing wind, which changes in pitch and level when you're riding in the draft of another car.

Bottom line? This is a low-priced journey into racing sims that, while far from perfect, brings the sport to the masses without getting silly.

– *Gordon Goble*

Requirements: Pentium 133Mhz, 16MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space **3D Support:** Direct3D, 3dfx Glide **Multiplayer Support:** Serial, modem, IPX or TCP/IP

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Lankhor • **Price:** $20.95 • **Contact:** www.eidos.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Settings, Characters Add Color to 8-BALL Gameplay

Hustler's Paradise

A smoky bar with leather-clad bikers and their babes bent over a stained pool table. An elegant, chandelier-lit pool room. A crappy coin-fed table in the back of a bowling alley. ULTIMATE 8 BALL allows you to play in any of those venues (as well as in some you'd never imagine) against a cast of wildly colorful characters.

HEAVY METAL This neon and chrome table is a far cry from that Brunswick in your basement.

ULTIMATE 8 BALL

CGW RATED

PROS
Wide variety of game styles, opponents, and tables.

CONS
No real interaction with opponents; tables are unusually fast.

Don't expect VIRTUAL POOL 2 realism in the ball physics. The low table friction makes you feel as though you're playing on glass, with balls rolling far further than expected. The action off the rails can also seem a bit odd, and english effects can be exaggerated. Still, the play feels good enough to convey a fairly realistic game of pool.

The most appealing aspect of ULTIMATE 8 BALL is the playing environment. You can play a single match, a tournament, or a "hustle" against up to 20 computer characters. The 14 game variations mix standards like Eight Ball with oddities like Speed Pool. Your selection of opponents and locations is initially limited, requiring you to succeed in the "hustle" to make further options available.

The intriguing assortment of opponents, including Elvis look-alikes and New Wave girls, is both a strength and a source of disappointment. Although each player has a unique home table and playing environment, the characters have absolutely no interaction with you. No taunting, no teasing, no conversation, and no visual response to anything that occurs during the game. It's a real letdown.

Still, it's a blast playing in the unique and often bizarre pool halls and bars against the equally distinctive AI characters. Add in the 14 game variations, and you've got a game that provides a lot of fun for the money. – *Jeff Lackey*

Requirements: Pentium 166Mhz, 16MB RAM, 5MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 40MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** IPX or TCP/IP, modem, serial connection

Publisher: THQ • **Developer:** Mirage Ltd. • **Price:** $19.95 • **Contact:** www.thq.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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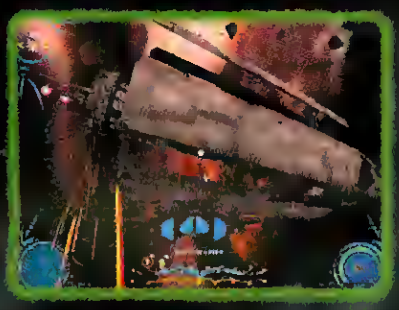

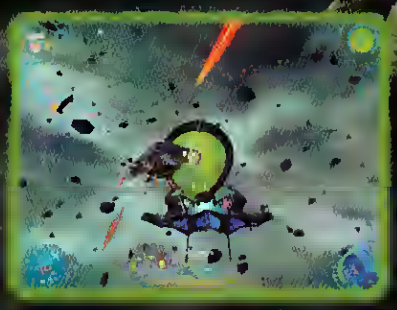

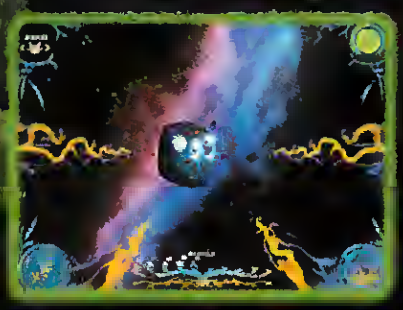

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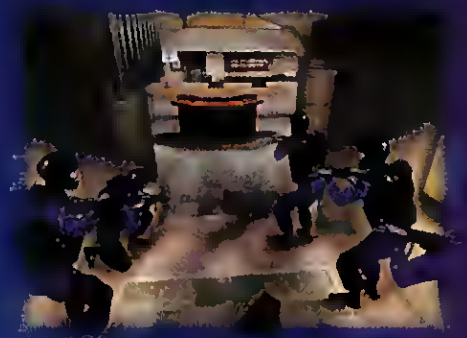

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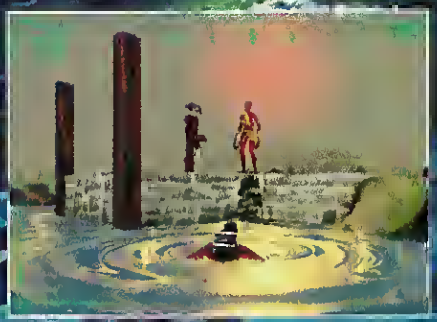

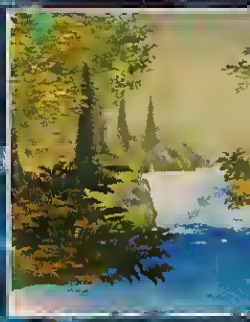

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UNREAL MISSION PACK: RETURN TO NA PALI

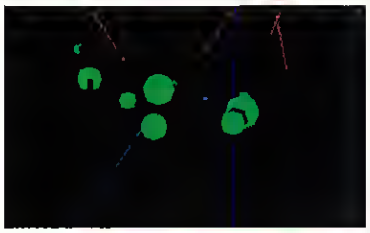
Last year's best-looking shooter just received an upgrade. Not only does the NA PALI expansion pack patch UNREAL for stable multiplayer gaming, it's also compatible with UNREAL TOURNAMENT. Survive 17 beautifully rendered levels, including one particularly challenging mission that takes place on a downed Terran Spacecraft. Take on new aliens – like the spidery Spinners and reptilian Predators – with a new arsenal of weapons, including the blistering combat assault rifle, devastating rocket launcher with smart bombs, and a cool new potent grenade launcher with remotely detonated grenades. If you're still playing UNREAL, NA PALI is a no-brainer. – *Raphael Liberatore*

★★★½☆

Genre: Action • Publisher: GT Interactive • Developer: Legend Entertainment • $25 • www.unreal.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; intense violence.

ATARI ARCADE HITS 1

Genre: Puzzles/Classics • Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • $30 • www.hasbro-interactive.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



Gamers who fondly recall lining quarters across the screens of games like TEMPEST and MISSILE COMMAND will enjoy this faithful revival. Sure you can get illegal bootlegs for free off the Net, but do they come with the original cabinet art, not to mention clips of Atari founder Nolan Bushnell waxing philosophic about inventing PONG? SUPER BREAKOUT, ASTEROIDS, CENTIPEDE, and the venerable PONG itself round out a package intended for 30-year-olds just discovering nostalgia.

★★★★☆

– *Charles Ardai*

AUSTIN POWERS: OPERATION TRIVIA

Genre: Puzzles/Classics • Publisher: Havas Interactive • Developer: Berkeley Systems • $30 • www.sierra.com ESRB Rating: Teen

It must have seemed like a winner of an idea to cross-breed the spy spoof *Austin Powers* with the game show spoof YOU DON'T KNOW JACK.

Both exist to make fun of the pop-culture excesses of the '60s and '70s, after all, and they share a similar taste for scatological innuendo. Who better to freshen up the JACK formula than the year's most shagadelic swinger and his hapless adversary, Dr. Evil?

★★☆☆☆

Well, judging by the results, almost anyone. Disappointment sets in quickly when you realize that the Austin Powers and Dr. Evil voices in the game are handled by someone other than Mike Myers, and while this impostor's impersonation isn't bad, it's not quite right, either.

Gameplay hews close to the venerable JACK model – opponents buzz in to answer multiple-choice questions – but some of the new question types introduced are just poorly designed. Some questions rise to the inspired level you expect from Berkeley Systems ("Pale Rider": Clint Eastwood movie or brand of condom?), but many fall flat. And the ones that actually require knowledge of *Austin Powers* trivia rather than of general pop-culture arcana will please only hard-core fans of the films. It's a drag, baby, and should have been left in deep freeze.

– *Charles Ardai*

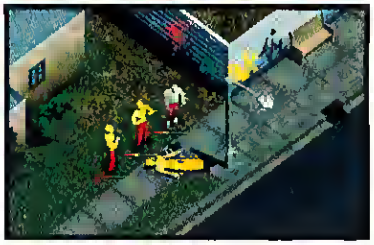
BEATDOWN

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Hot-B • Developer: Soar Software • $30 • www.urbanconflict.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

Hot-B has busted the proverbial cap in their own asses with the dismal BEATDOWN, a tedious and overly-simplified attempt at a real-time strategy game set in the 'hood. It is one of the worst games we have seen this yeer.

★☆☆☆☆

A real-time stretegy game aet in a modern, urban, gangland setting (the box proclaims it a new genre: Urban-Action/Strategy) has potentiel. The resource management (pimping ho's and selling



crack) is novel, at least. But BEATDOWN isn't much more than dragging a group of color-coordinated hooligans around a boringly, repetitive, isometric map, looking for another group of color-coordinated badasses to kill. Add a clunky interface, moronic AI, and extremely un-fly graphics and you've got the recipe for some wack shizzat.

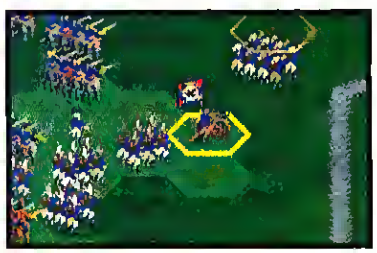
– *Tom Price*

DRAGOON: THE BATTLES OF FREDERICK THE GREAT

Genre: Strategy/War • Publisher: Art of War Publishing • Developer: Boku Strategy Games • $40 • www.boku.simplenet.com

Never quite receiving the press Napoleon got, Frederick the Great's military evolution is just as interesting. Art of War's definitive set of his battles accurately portray Frederick's career in this highly enjoyable regiment-level, turn-based title. Meant to emphasize Frederick's tactics

★★★★☆



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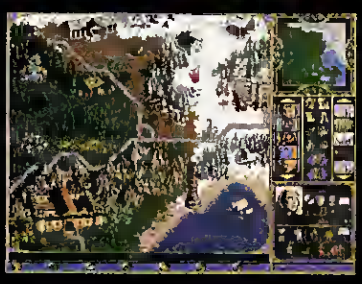

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and command control, DRAGOON covers the years 1757 to 1760 over the course of 16 scenarios. The game improves upon the graphics, sound, and interface of the previous games in the series, but the aesthetics are still far from state-of-the-art. In spite of this, DRAGOON will remain the definitive work on this subject, even if it does lack play-by-email and net-play capabilities.

– *Jim Cobb*

MAN OF WAR II

Genre: Wargame • **Publisher:** Strategy First • $30 • www.strategyfirst.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

The most touted new feature of MAN OF WAR II is its first-person perspective. Such a view would seem ideal for portraying the chaotic scene aboard a man of war during the Age of Sail. Unfortunately, MAN OF WAR II's "full-immersion view" can be both confusing and antiseptic, voiding its advantages.

MAN OF WAR II's full-view shows the decks of five types of warships. Using the cursor, you move your view from the stern up to the bow. The graphics show nearby vessels well, but something is noticeably absent: everything. You're on a ghost ship! There are no guns, no crew, and no standing rigging, which might be acceptable if other aspects of the view worked well. Unfortunately, maneuvering around the deck and down the companionways reminds me of a bad first-person game with the mainmast as obstacle. Worse, the control console surrounds the view, diminishing the "immersion" effect. Finally, the virtual captain is invulnerable, immune to shot and impervious to boarding actions.

The game is not entirely without merit. The gunnery model, multiplayer game, and fleet actions are handled quite well. But MOWII makes it only halfway to a decent sequel. It is an improvement on its predecessor, but the designers are still hampered by the original game engine.

– *Jim Cobb*

RAILROAD TYCOON II: THE SECOND CENTURY

Rail fans should love RAILROAD TYCOON II: THE SECOND CENTURY. Not only does this comprehensive expansion set offer new industries to service and a campaign of 18 scenarios (six representing wartime and the post-WWII era, six representing the technology shift from steam to diesel, and six representing the near future), but it also offers new locomotives, easier track-laying, and better cargo-handling.

This add-on doesn't quite reach the coveted five-star status we'd like to give it, because the game still lacks an UNDO command. Even with the improved interface, it's possible to click in the wrong place and spend unnecessary money on track that must immediately be bulldozed. Still, RAILROAD TYCOON II: THE SECOND CENTURY enjoyably expands the horizons of its predecessor, much like railroading expanded the world's economies in the early to mid-century.

– *Johnny Wilson*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** PopTop Software • $40 • www.godgames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

STUKA DIVE BOMBER

Genre: Simulations • **Publisher:** Data Becker • $30 • www.databecker.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

One of the most vivid images to emerge from World War II was that of the JU-87 Stuka diving out of the sky, swooping down on its target like a hawk screaming down on a terrified rabbit. Data Becker has provided a taste of what it was like to pilot these unique planes with STUKA DIVE BOMBER, an add-on package for MICROSOFT COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR (MSCFS). The program provides ten variations of the Stuka, including versions which were re-equipped for tank busting and oddities like the carrier variation and the ski-fitted "Snow Stukas." Also included are five Berlin airport scenery files. The manual claims that a utility to allow the Stukas to be flown in campaigns is on the disk – it isn't, but it can be downloaded from the Data Becker Web site.

The new aircraft are fun to fly in ground-pounding missions and appear to be modeled correctly. However, given the limitations of the Stuka, they're best used in single missions, as the campaigns will have you flying inappropriate sorties like CAPs against Spitfires. Still, this is a package worth looking at if you're a MSCFS fan.

– *Jeff Lackey*

JEFF GORDON XS RACING

Genre: Driving • **Publisher:** ASC Games • $40 • **Developer:** Real Sports • www.jeffgordonracing.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Despite the stock car racer's name attached to it, JEFF GORDON XS RACING is about as far from real racing as you can get. Instead, it's set in the future, where race cars are capable of speeds over 300 mph and can morph back into pristine condition after a collision, within seconds. Gameplay is very fast and very simplistic, and the arcade-like action is funneled into a pretty but constrained environment that will likely grow dull and repetitive within the first dozen hours.

Although the 11 fantastical circuits are interesting – with tunnels, crossovers, raised ramps, ungodly jumps, hairpins and wide sweepers, enormous loop-the-loops, teleportation devices and alternate routes – they're just too short at this kind of speed. With lap times often under 20 seconds, and sometimes closer to – get this – *10* seconds, I was able to run all of them twice

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and win the XS Championship in the span of a single afternoon.

With no pits, garage, or upgrade shop, don't expect things to get more interesting off the track. A little something called Jeff's Racing School sees Mr. Gordon tutor in various aspects of racing, but his pearls of wisdom are more hurl than pearl. Add a lack of multiplayer support and you have a game that, despite the relentless Pepsi ads (among other shameless sponsor ads throughout the game), is far from the Choice Of A New Generation.

– *Gordon Goble*

PRO 18: WORLD TOUR GOLF

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** Psygnosis
$40 • **Developer:** Intelligent Games
www.psygnosis.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

It takes balls of Surlyn™ to release a golf sim today, with perennial heavyweights LINKS LS and JACK NICKLAUS continually adding features to already proven systems. So how can a new player like PRO 18: WORLD TOUR GOLF hope to compete? Frankly, it can't.

★½☆☆☆

PRO 18: WORLD TOUR GOLF introduces an innovative twist with its 4-click swing system, in which a second gauge measures your virtual wrist snap. It sounds strange but works very well, allowing significantly more ball control than 3-click systems. A promising start, but things go downhill quickly. Graphics are flat and crude, with golfers and terrain having the pasted-on look of three-year-old golf sims.

Once you hit, you're rewarded with a long pause and screen freeze before switching to a reverse view of the ball landing. Long pauses also occur while

waiting for the computer golfers to swing, eventually causing the less patient among us to scream at the screen like hecklers in other golf sims. Ball physics are less than stellar, and trees are mere holograms for your ball to pass through.

The best thing that can be said about PRO 18: WORLD TOUR GOLF is that is has no obvious bugs. There's absolutely no reason to select this game over the high quality golf sims already on the shelves.

– *Jeff Lackey*

WEST FRONT BATTLE PACK 1

After all the uninstalling, installing, and downloading of patches needed to get running, you'll feel that you truly deserve the add-on riches TalonSoft offers in WEST FRONT BATTLE PACK 1. Not only does this expansion pack give you 50 new scenarios covering all the various theaters from 1940 to1945, it also provides nail-biting, balanced entertainment that will give fans of the game more than their money's worth in both single and multiplay.

★★★★☆

TalonSoft didn't make many changes to the original game system, save for some AI tweaking to improve the units' ability to handle indirect fire and the capacity to retreat more intelligently. But once beyond the installation difficulties, this add-on is a tactician's dream come true.

– *Jim Cobb*

Genre: Wargame • **Publisher:** Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** TalonSoft • **$30** • **www.godgames.com** • **RSAC Rating:** Violence 1; damage to realistic objects.

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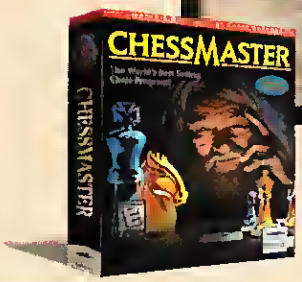
SOMEWHERE, GEORGE HAD MADE A MISTAKE. His Catalan opening had been flawless. Yet, somehow, his opponent had forced his retreat and now held him in check. With his only remaining rook lured out of position and pinned, the situation appeared hopeless. This isn't Chessmaster, he thought, there is no replay option in this game. His mind raced back to the magnificent chess sets of Chessmaster. The lessons learned. The gambits and endgame strategies. The Chessmaster opponents against whom he had matched wits and sharpened his game, as he progressed through tutorials in various levels. The voice of the Chessmaster, coaching him. And suddenly, in his hour of need, he heard the voice again: "Counterattack in the center... N-Q4." Why hadn't he seen it before?



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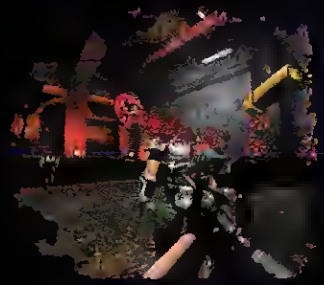

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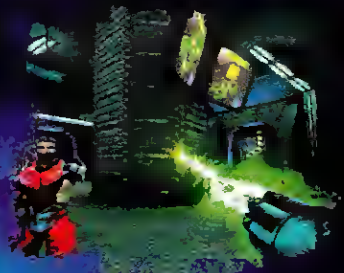

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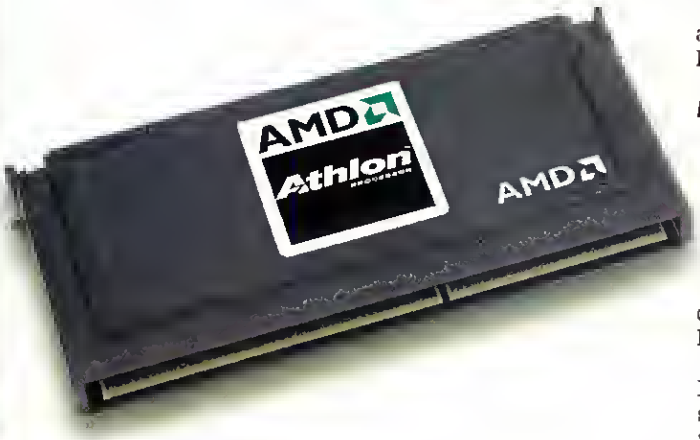
CPU Shoot-out

Intel Pentium III vs. AMD Athlon

by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

It's high noon in the fight for the fastest chip in gaming. Backed by its posse of standards and computer manufacturers, Intel's got lots of muscle. But it no longer has the fastest gun.



The landscape was littered with the burnt CPU chips of those who dared challenge the mighty Intel. National Semiconductor had thrown in the towel, selling off Cyrix, its CPU-making arm. IDT and Rise struggled to gain a foothold at the low end of the market, where Intel's Celeron could squarely outgun them in price/performance. Finally, one last challenger remained that posed any kind of threat: AMD. AMD's K6-2 and K6-III processors had fared well against the juggernaut, but always lacked comparable floating-point performance, a key consideration for gamers seeking optimal 3D performance. But AMD had a trick up its sleeve: the K7, AMD's 7th generation chip. And for the first time, Intel had a fight on its hands.

The K7 has arrived under a new banner, Athlon, and this new CPU is taking no prisoners. Bloodied by repeated price wars with Intel's Celeron and Pentium II, AMD is hoping to use Athlon to reverse its fortunes and start dealing some blows of its own. AMD is in a must-win situation, since it cannot afford another war of attrition with Intel, whose manufacturing and market share leave it in better stead to wage such war. But even if Athlon can win the performance battle, it hasn't won the war. Intel, who sits on 80 percent of the CPU market, is not going to go down easily. Intel is firmly entrenched with system makers—not only with its CPUs, but also with system chipsets, motherboards, and numerous industry standards that it defines (PCI, AGP, USB). AMD faces the challenge of besting Intel's chip performance, and also of delivering CPUs in quantity, along with stable, compatible system chipsets and motherboard reference designs.

But we must now set these weighty issues aside and address the biggest question of all: Who now has the best gaming CPU out there?

And the Winner Is...

Fellow gamers, we find ourselves at a historic moment. This shoot-out marks the very first time that Intel hasn't come out on top as the best gaming CPU. That's right folks, read it now and let it sink in later: Athlon bests Pentium III clock for clock. For those in the love-to-hate-Intel camp, it is a time of much rejoicing. For Intel devotees, it's time to sit back and ask "what the hell happened?"

For over a year now, Intel has been using their Pentium II core to cover the three main CPU market segments: low end, mainstream, and workstation/server. The Pentium III brought us SSE, those special instructions that help make 3D games go faster, but that aside, this CPU core hasn't fundamentally changed since Pentium Pro.

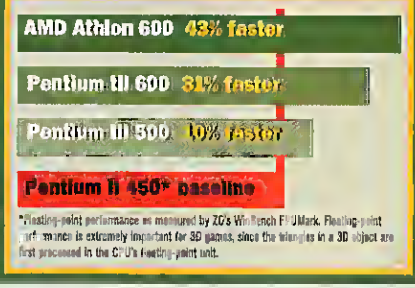
Meanwhile, AMD has introduced two generations of CPUs. first the K6, and now Athlon. With Athlon, AMD is going for the jugular with a CPU that outguns Pentium III on integer and, more importantly,

There Can Only Be One

Guns were drawn, bits were fired, and when the smoke cleared, there wes only one chip standing: the AMD Athlon. The Athlon matched or exceeded the Pentium III's parformance in nearly every benchmarking face-off. In one of the most important areas of chip performance for gemes, floating-point math, the Athlon posted significantly better marks than the Pentium III.

But speed is not everything in tha chip game: There's the price, and then there's delivery of the chip in sufficient quantity to match demand. Intel is sure to best AMD in prica, end there's some doubt about AMD's ability to deliver chips in quentity. So if you want the ultimate chip for geming perfomence, look to tha Athlon, but expect to pay a premium and to do some hunting around.

How Much Faster Is It?



*Floating-point performance as measured by ZD's WinBench FPUMark. Floating-point performance is extremely important for 3D games, since the triangles in a 3D object are first processed in the CPU's floating-point unit.

floating-point mathematics performance. As you'll see from our tests, the results are faster benchmark scores and, most importantly, faster game performance. In just about every game we threw at these CPUs, Athlon was either faster than or equal to Pentium III at the same clock rate, which is no small feat for AMD.

So AMD has taken Round 1, the performance battle. But it must also win the war of delivery, manufacturing these speedy CPUs in quantity along with solid chipsets and compatible motherboards. And that, despite Athlon's superior performance, could still trip up AMD.

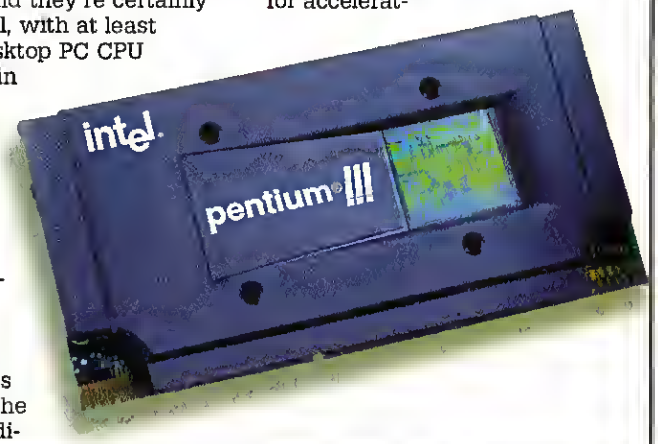
Intel's Pentium III 600MHz: Still a Strong Contender

Intel, despite being bested this round, is still a very ferocious competitor. And they're certainly not sitting still, with at least three new desktop PC CPU architectures in development simultaneously.

The Pentium III still has the Level 2 (L2) cache separated from the chip, running at half speed (300MHz). This will likely be the last of the traditional Pentium III CPUs, since Intel's next generation Pentium III—code-named Coppermine—will have 256KB of L2 cache right on the chip running at the chip's full clock speed, and it's rumored that Coppermine will use a socket format.

The current Pentium III's cache bus and system bus are actually separate (Intel calls this design Dual Independent Bus), allowing cache access to be executed separately from system memory access. There is 32KB of Level 1 (L1) cache, separated into a 16KB instruction cache and a 16KB data cache. Contrast this with Athlon's 64KB instruction cache and 64KB data cache, for 128KB total L1 cache. Like the Athlon, the 600MHz Pentium III uses a 0.25-micron manufacturing process, so cooling fans are a must at this frequency.

Intel's instruction set for accelerat-



GADGETS FOR GAMERS

It's not Kit, The Talking Trans Am, but Clarion's AutoPC is another step closer to the computing car. This AM/FM/CD in-dash stereo sports a 35-watt, four-channel amp, as well as 16MB of RAM and a Hitachi SH3 processor running Windows CE. Want to change tracks on your CD? Just tell the AutoPC, and it will confirm using speech synthesis. You can even look up addresses via voice without removing your hands from the wheel. Add-ons include a cell-phone cradle with modem, a wireless receiver that accesses data like real-time traffic reports, and a six-disc changer that attaches via a USB port. Best of all, with the optional GPS receiver, it saves you from the ultimate embarrassment of giving in to your spouse and pulling over to ask for directions

AutoPC

by Denny Atkin

Clarion AutoPC, $1,299, www.autopc.com

INSIDE HARDWARE

Loyd Case 200
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Plantronics Stereo Headset
Asus MEW Motherboard
Madcatz PantherDX Digital Joystick
Turtle Beach Montego II
Entrega USB Hub
CH Products USB Gamepad

ing 3D graphics transformations and lighting goes by the sexy acronym SSE (Streaming SIMD Extensions). SSE works with single precision (32-bit) floating-point instructions and can operate on up to four pieces of data in a single cycle. Some of the new instructions also speed up memory transfers, particularly transfers of graphics data.

The Road Ahead

Until now, Pentium II/III's strong suit has been its X87 floating-point performance. This fast floating-point unit (FPU) handles transform and lighting (T/L) calculations in 3D graphics, making Intel CPUs optimal for gaming. Despite the existence of fast 3D cards and even SSE, it's been the FPU that's done the transform and lighting calculations in 3D games. With respect to floating-point performance (once Intel's ace in the hole), Intel now trails Athlon's new and improved FPU.

The now-venerable 440BX chipset is another limitation. The entire front-side bus—both access to the North Bridge (the circuitry through which the CPU talks to system memory) and from the North Bridge to the system memory bus—runs at 100MHz. AMD's chipset accesses its North Bridge at 200MHz. By this time, we expected to see both the Coppermine CPU and Intel's 820 chipset on the market, complete with faster bus access and RAMBUS DRAM (RDRAM), but the 820 chipset has been delayed. Rumors have it that RDRAM performance hasn't met expectations.

Beyond Coppermine, Intel is working on its 7th generation architecture, code-named Willamette, but it isn't due to surface until the second half of 2000. Rather than just another incremental evolution, Willamette will involve a substantial rearchitecting of Intel's CPU core. It will still be a 32-bit architecture like current chips (called IA-32) but will likely deliver great increases both in integer and floating-point performance. Intel will be more than a year behind AMD in delivering their 7th generation chip, giving AMD a fighting chance. More near term, we've heard that Intel will be adding its SSE instruction set into a lower-cost Celeron product, though Intel is still keeping mum, so we don't have a release date as yet.

The Price War

CPU	Street Price
AMD Athlon 600MHz	$950
AMD Athlon 550MHz	$725
Intel Pentium III 550MHz	$625
Pentium III 500MHz	$405
AMD Athlon 500MHz	$500

Note: At press time, Intel was gearing up for yet another round of price cuts, so check the Web or your local dealer for the latest prices.

Source: PriceWatch

AMD Athlon 600MHz: Welcome to the Winner's Circle

We had been hearing rumblings about Athlon's performance potential, and we wanted to believe. But given our past experiences with AMD CPUs, we were skeptical as to whether AMD could really pull it off. Well, they did. And as it turns out, not only do they beat Intel at the same clock rate, but they'll most likely have a 650MHz Athlon shipping before Intel ships a 600MHz Pentium III. What really impressed us wasn't just AMD's clock-for-clock performance versus Intel, but the system's stability as well. Not one of our test games crashed or ever

How We Tested

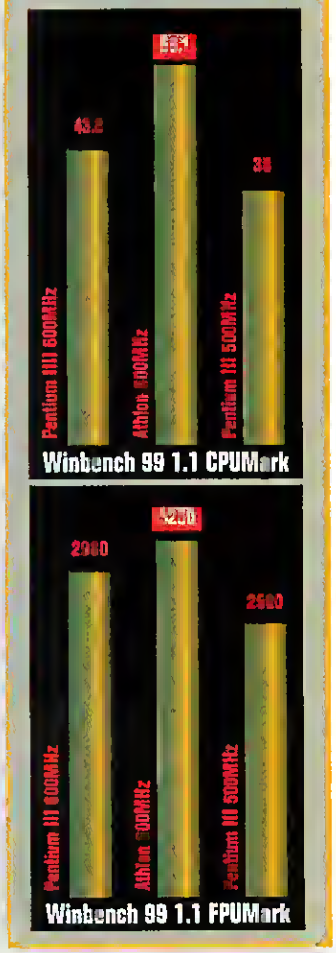
In testing CPUs, there are three performance areas to consider: integer (whole numbers), floating-point (decimal numbers), and floating-point SIMD (the ability to work on multiple pieces of data at once). To test integer performance, we ran WinBench's CPUMark99, which simulates the integer workload generated by leading business applications. To evaluate floating-point performance, we used a combination of tests: WinBench's FPUMark and our own 3D GameGauge, which uses games that make heavy demands on the CPU's floating-point unit to do transform and lighting of 3D graphics. To evaluate FP SIMD (Intel's SSE versus AMD's 3DNow), we again used a combination of tests. 3D WinBench has two tests to evaluate CPU performance running Direct3D's transform and lighting (T/L) engine. One tests the speed of doing just transforms, while the other tests both transform and lighting performance.

But there's a technical issue that we need to cover here, so brace yourself. If you're not into techie detail, just know that Athlon still wins the FP SIMD contest and move on.

Direct3D has a feature called guard-band clipping, a process that determines which part of an object at the edge of the screen is on or off the screen. We tested with guard-band clipping enabled, so that this function was performed by Intel's SSE and AMD's 3DNow. The two architectures delivered roughly the same performance, though AMD is a bit faster. But in transform performance alone, AMD is much faster, to the tune of about 65 percent. This is important, because games are more likely to use the transform part of D3D's T/L engine, rather than both transform and lighting, since lighting in a game is what gives it a distinct look and feel. Game developers in the past have written their own T/L engines to achieve their own unique look. But of the two, lighting is what brings the unique look/feel, where as transforms (the movement of polygons from scene to scene) is a more generic process.

How They Stack up

Performance Results for Athlon vs. Pentium III



©1999 Council on Computing Power

brought Athlon to its knees.

In each of the three main performance categories—integer, floating-point, and FP SIMD—Athlon scored a knockout. In the 3DNow versus SSE battle for FP SIMD superiority, AMD once again bested Intel. We used 3D WinBench's Transform and Transform and Lighting tests, which measure the CPU's ability to crank out triangles in Direct3D (see *How We Tested*). We then turned to three games that have been optimized both for SSE and 3DNow. POWERSLIDE, DESCENT 3, and EXPENDABLE. Running at a lower resolution of 640x480 to shift the workload more onto the CPU, Athlon trounced Pentium III by 20 percent on average. And in looking at 3D GameGauge results running at 1024x768 (our standard test resolution), Athlon was still 10 percent faster.

So now Intel finds itself in the unusual position of giving up the performance lead across the board (integer, floating-point, floating-point SIMD). Since it can't win this round on performance, Intel will no doubt play the price card, dropping prices on the Pentium III to maintain a price/performance advantage, a strategy that has served it so well in the Celeron-versus-K6-III battle. So the 64-gigabyte Question is. Given that AMD now has the performance edge, what will their pricing look like? As you can see from *The Price War* table of press-time street prices, AMD is pricing Athlon slightly higher than a Pentium III of the same speed, but not substantially so.

At press time, there was some concern that AMD might not be able to meet consumer demand for their new performance champ, leaving gamers and system makers scrambling to lay hands on this hot new chip. AMD is in the process of building a new "fab" (chip factory) in Dresden, Germany, but it's not yet online. We'll keep you posted on availability as we hear more news on this front. CGW

Rome Wasn't Built...

What if you had the hottest CPU in town, but nobody could use it? AMD's situation won't be quite that bad, but the company faces an uphill battle with motherboard makers and systems suppliers if they want Athlon to have a wide market penetration. Intel currently ships about 60 percent of all motherboards in the world. Companies like Dell, Gateway, and others depend on Intel motherboards in their high-end systems. If you're talking about the kind of volume a Dell generates, you're talking a lot of motherboards.

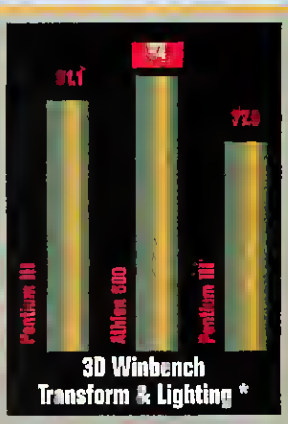
AMD's new chip fits into a slot, much like the current Pentium III line, but the slot is different. The slot is called Slot A; the A stands for Alpha, since it is based on DEC/Compaq's Alpha CPU bus and socket. AMD is dealing itself a better hand by developing a chipset that motherboard makers can deploy into Slot A motherboards. However, whenever a chipset is built, it needs to be extensively tested to make sure all of the 12 zillion expansion cards on the market will work with it properly. Via, Ali, and others have run into problems with their chipsets. Being the market heavyweight means that most peripheral manufacturers will design to Intel's chipset. It will be up to AMD and other chipset makers to make sure that the motherboards and core logic work with the huge combinations of cards that are out there. There can't be a repeat of the AGP 2x fiasco, when several alternative Socket 7 chipsets didn't work correctly with AGP 2x graphics cards.

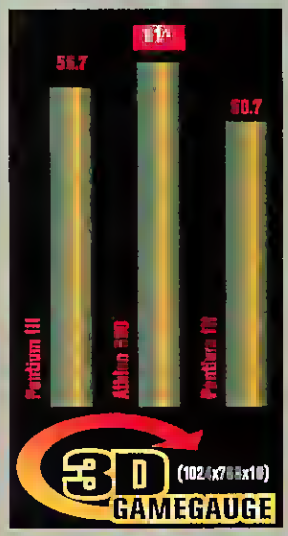
If you are thinking about upgrading to the Athlon, make sure the gear you want in your gaming rig will work on an Athlon motherboard. The Athlon looks like a very good CPU, so the extra upgrading effort may be worth it, but don't ignore the need to check motherboard compatibility with your add-in cards first.

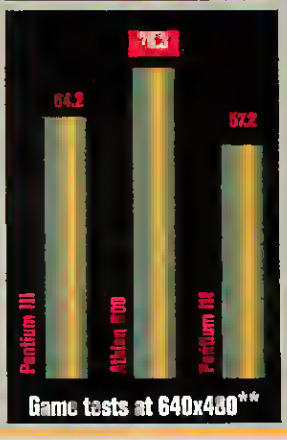
How We Tested (continued)

We then did a series of game tests at a lower resolution (640x480x16), because the 3D card becomes much less of a bottleneck at this resolution; it draws the scene much faster, and shifts the processing burden back toward the CPU. We also tested using six games, including three (POWERSLIDE, DESCENT 3, and EXPENDABLE) that have optimizations build into them for both FP SIMD architectures. To round out the mix, we added QUAKE II, HALF-LIFE, and BATTLEZONE 2. Athlon again won the day, its performance about 19 percent faster on average.

Our test systems were as identical as we could make them, except for motherboard and CPU. Common components included a clean install of Windows 98SE, DirectX 6.1a, 128MB of SDRAM, a 32MB TNT2 Ultra graphics card (chip clock 150MHz, memory clock 183MHz) running nVidia's 2.04 reference drivers, a Soundblaster Live sound card, and EIDE storage components. We included Pentium III results to serve as a baseline for comparison.







*GUARD-BAND CLIPPING ENABLED

**GAMES USED: POWERSLIDE, EXPENDABLE, DESCENT 3, HALF-LIFE, QUAKE II, BATTLEZONE 2

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Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

A Day in the Life

Walking the Line Between Technology Heaven and Hardware Hell

You may think that a game hardware reviewer's life is non-stop parties and helping supermodels optimize their gaming rigs, but the reality tells a different tale. This month we give you a peek behind the closed door of columnist stardom, and show you a typical day on the never-ending quest for the best gaming hardware out there. Of course, all names, genders, companies and entire industries have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent, the guilty-as-hell, and, most of all, me.

With my wife and kids out and about starting their day, the house had suddenly grown quiet. It's the eye of the hurricane, I reflect, as I fill an oversized mug with coffee, lace it with cream and sugar, and head downstairs to my lair. The coffee is much needed, as I had been up pretty late running benchmarks.

It takes four power switches to turn everything on. One for the network hubs, two for my production system, and one for the Pentium II testbed, which pulls double duty as my server. I sit back, suck down some caffeine, and watch the SCSI adapter initialize its BIOS. Ah ...

So Much for Serenity

The phone rings, shattering my contemplative repose. It's a marketing guy for a small maker of PC speakers. He asks me, "Have you received the speakers you requested for review?"

We're off to a bad start. This marketing guy is the type that gives his profession a bad name. He had been very pushy about sending the speakers, so I'd reluctantly given in. The speakers were small, electric blue, and terrible. I feel my annoyance meter creeping up into the red. "They're up and running now," I say, keeping my tone noncommital.

"Great," the guy gushes on. "Say, can we get a quote?"

I unscrew the phone receiver from my ear and stare at it incredulously, then put it back to my ear. "Excuse me?" I say.

"A quote. We'd like a positive quote from you, ya'know, something we can put on the side of the box."

Again, I stare at the phone. Several choice phrases flash through my head, but I muster some semblence of tact and inform this clown that I'm not in the business of generating quotes, and certainly not in the business of uncritically endorsing products.

"But I've seen your stuff quoted," he whines.

"What you see are snippets from real reviews that companies quote. I have no control over that, and I don't write reviews with the intent of getting quoted. Now, I have some deadlines, so I've gotta go."

I hang up the phone. The day is off to an inauspicious start.

Testing, Testing...

There are three more graphics cards to run through the testbed in yet another big graphics card roundup. It used to be that *CGW* only had to test one batch of 3D accelerators once a year, but now it's up to three. I check the manufacturer's web site for a new driver, but there's none, so I install the latest driver from the product setup CD. Five minutes and one reboot later, WinBench 99's Business Graphics WinMark test is zipping along.

While WinBench is running, I check my email – 39 messages have arrived since 11 o'clock last night. I sigh and begin wading through the mail. Many of the letters are from readers seeking some kind of technical help. I answer a few, and file ewey a few more for my new technical Q&A column. It's a sad statement about product support that people are reduced to emailing a magazine editor for answers.

> **"It looks really cool and incredibly expensive. I'm momentarily glad I get stuff like this on loan."**

I check the testbed. WinBench is finished. I change the color depth, reboot, and fire up 3D WinBench, and launch the quality tests.

Mail Call

The doorbell rings. I bounce up the stairs and open the door. It's the FedEx guy with two boxes for me. One is huge, and contains a PC system. "I'll get the other one," he says, as I sign for them. He goes back to his truck, drags something out, and staggers up the steps. The box is smaller than the PC box, but heavier. "Here," he gasps.

I take both boxes downstairs. The mysterious, heavy box contains a complete flight control panel and yoke. It looks really cool and incredibly expensive. I'm momentarily glad I get stuff like this on loan.

I check the testbed and find that 3D WinBench has halted; the refresh rate it needs doesn't match the one detected. I swear and change the setting to 100Hz.

While the 3D WinMark test runs, I fire up the Killer Rig and install the mini-cockpit. I discover that it's USB, and smile. Five minutes later, I'm airborne in a P-38 dishing out Allied justice. Then I surface, jot a few notes for a future review, check the testbed, and record benchmark results.

Turning off V-sync for 3D GameGauge testing requires a registry hack, so I run REGEDIT and make changes. It takes about two hours to complete one series of 3D GameGauge tests, even with everything pre-installed. I start some of the game tests, and hope to return to my P-38 for a while. But sure enough, the 3D card being tested is showing corrupted textures. So, I fire off an email to the product manager who had been promising new drivers.

The doorbell rings again. It's my daughters, back from camp. I look at my watch: it's 4:30. They had left over eight hours ago. I realize that I've forgotten to eat lunch. I smile at them.

"Want a snack?" CGW

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When you're ready to put your dream rig together, check out www.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop5/index.html for Loyd's step-by-step guide to getting your Ultimate Gaming Machine up and running.

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Throttle Thrustmaster TQS • $115 • More control than anyone needs.

Keyboard Logitech Newtouch • $45 • In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural.

Monitor Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u • $1,300 • Perfectly flat; good USB support.

Optiquest V95 • $420 • Solid 19" monitor at a budget price.

CD-ROM Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD • $180 • New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD.

Pioneer DVD-103 • $130 • Slot drive DVD.

Case In-Win Q500 full tower ATX • $115 • New improved model.

Elan Vital T10-AB • $82 • The case for upgraders.

Speakers LFT-11 • $500 • Beautiful imaging, clean sound.

Boston Acoustics BA-635 • $99 • Went back to our favorites.

Joystick Thrustmaster F22 Pro • $129.00 • It just feels right.

CH Gamestick 3D USB • $55 • Solid stick.

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P2B-F	$135	Back to the future.
CPU	Pentium III / 600	$800	It's on top of the heap, for now.
Memory	256MB of PC133 certified RSDRAM	$398	Just think, a quarter-gigabyte.
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940U2W	$349	80 megabytes per second.
Primary Graphics	Hercules Dynamite TNT2	$245	Fastest TNT2 card around.
Secondary Graphics	3Dfx Voodoo2/1000	$99	Single Voodoo2 for Glide compatibility.
3.5" floppy drive	Teac	$20	Still gotta to have one.
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$825	Runs a little warm, but it's way fast.
Backup	Iomega Jaz 2	$300	2 gigs of backup.
Hard Drive cooler	PC Power and Cooling Bay-Cool	$49	Keep that Atlas 10k cool!
Primary Audio	Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla	$99	For four speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX.
Rear channel speakers	Jamo CS-5	$420	Ultimate rear channel powered speakers.
Modem	Copper Rocket DSL modem	$400	DSL at long last.
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$70	For fragging your buddies.
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer and DSL modem support.
Power Supply	Turbocool 300	$129	More power, Scotty!
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Mouseman Plus	$49	Off the leash.
Action Game Controller	Gravis Gamepad Pro USB	$60	Great sports controller, too (get two).
Rudder Pedals	Thrustmaster Elite RCS	$79	Nearly perfect foot placement.
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,129	Drivers wanted.
		Total	$8,209.00

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

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Abit BX6 rev 2.0
CPU	Pentium III/450
Memory	128MB Corsair PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Voodoo3/3000
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Western Digital Expert 91
Primary Audio	Diamond Monster Sound MX300
Secondary Audio	NA
Modem	Diamond Supra 56a
Network Card	D-Link 10/100 Ethernet
Power Supply	Built-in, 235W
Keyboard	Logitech Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech PS/2 Wheel Mouse

"Which 3D Card Should I Buy?"

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So, you've got the question, we've got answers. Look for this 3D card guide every month here in *CGW*.

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. So we have two recommendations for you.

Choice A. If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo2 1000 board. At about $100, it will do a very good job with current games, and a pretty good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo2 board to the new setup.

Choice B: If your computer's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Hercules' Dynamite TNT2, which is currently the fastest 3D gun in the West. At about $180 street price for the 32MB version, this card is actually quite a deal. Even if you're running a Pentium II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade your motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the card into your new setup, and it's got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate it with.

Product Watch

Intel's Next CPU and System Chipset Delayed

If you ask Intel, the official line is that the yields at high frequencies of the next generation Pentium III have been lower than expected. The next Pentium III, code-named Coppermine, will have 256KB of Level 2 cache built onto the chip itself, running at the full clock speed of the processor. It will also be made using the new 0.18-micron process, much tighter than the 0.25-micron currently being used. The new manufacturing process will make for higher clock rates without causing a heat wave.

Also slipping is Intel's next core logic chipset, the 820 (code-named Camino). If you ask around, the Camino is the real reason for the Intel delays. Camino will support a new type of memory called RAMBUS DRAM (RDRAM). Rumors abound that RDRAM hasn't been hitting the performance targets Intel wants. With AMD and alternative chipset vendors taking a very close look at PC133 SDRAM and double-data rate SDRAM (DDR SDRAM), this is a real problem for the CPU behemoth. If RDRAM can't deliver a substantial performance premium over the alternatives, Intel will have to scramble to find an alternative, something they're not accustomed to doing.

Expect both Coppermine and Camino to ship later this fall, or even early this winter.

–Loyd Case

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Tech Medics

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

We get mail. Lots of mail. Huge quantities... Well, you get the idea. Readers send us all kinds of intriguing techie questions. We answer as many as we can directly, but because we find that you're often asking similar questions, we figured we'd answer the most frequently asked ones here. If you've got a hardware headache, send us mail at cgw_hardware@zd.com.

Do Pentium II Motherboards support Pentium III processors?

Not in all cases. Pentium II systems using the older 440LX chipset don't support Pentium III. These are typically in systems with 333MHz Pentium II processors or slower. If you have a 350MHz Pentium II or faster, you may be in luck. Even then, though, not all motherboards will work with a Pentium III. For example, the original Intel SE440BX (not the 440BX-2) doesn't support Pentium III. Also, if you have an off-the-shelf system from Dell, Gateway, or other major suppliers that use Intel motherboards, you may also be out of luck, but check your motherboard manufacturer's web site to be sure.

Q **I just installed Windows 98 SE and noticed a yellow exclamation mark in the Device Manager next to "Advanced Power Mangement Support." I found this just after my PC spontaneously rebooted. I also noticed that the power fan stopped working. So I looked at the properties sheet for Advanced Power Management and forced it to use APM 1.D mode. That got my fan sort of working (I think that could be the problem) and the yellow exclamation sign disappeared beside the power management support device. Was this the problem?**

A You don't want to enable APM 1.D, as it's an older standard not widely supported. What you need to do is to enable the ACPI (Advanced Configuration and Power Interface) setting in your BIDS setup program. The exclamation point will disappear from the Device Manager, and your ATX power supply will behave properly.

Q **I have a Pentium III 450 on a SE44DBX motherboard (latest BIDS), and I get a "Serial Presence Detect (SPD) device data missing or inconclusive" whenever I boot up. This occurs after the computer performs the memory check. What does this mean? What can I do about it? I have PC1DD certified memory, which I bought back when I owned a Pentium II/266.**

A You're probably fine. You probably purchased early PC1DD memory, which lacks the tiny SPD (serial presence detect) ROM that all memory modules now have. All the ROM does is tell the system what type of memory it is, and what parameter settings (such as CAS type and so on) should be used.

Q **I just bought Diamond's Viper V77D Ultra card, hoping to improve the looks of the games I play. However, I'm quite disappointed. First, QUAKE 2 will only run in software mode. The game won't change to DpenGL (as if it doesn't see my hardware card). Secondly, I also bought KINGPIN, but it won't load DpenGL, saying it didn't detect my hardware card. The card installed okay, as per the instructions. Both UNREAL and HALF-LIFE look great, though. I have a Pentium III 500 MHz Aptiva 731 running Windows 98. I updated the drivers from Diamond's site. The support at Interplay could not give me any direction to fix my problem.**

A You're most likely running your desktop resolution in 8-bit color mode. TNT and TNT2 chips slave their DpenGL color bit-depth off the desktop resolution, so if you bump your desktop color-depth up to 16- or 32-bit, both KINGPIN and QUAKE II will run with 3D acceleration, since they require at least 16-bit color to run in DpenGL mode.

Q **I am planning on building a new computer and I have a question about the video card(s) I am planning on putting in it. For my main video card I am buying a Diamond Viper V770 Ultra. I was also planning on putting in a Creative Lab's 3D Blaster Voodoo2 for Glide support, but do I really need to spend the extra money for its support of Glide? I am not a die hard first-person shooter, and I don't live and die for frame rates. But I have heard some games will only run on 3dfx video cards.**

A It's true that some 3D games only support 3D acceleration if there's a 3dfx-compatible card present. But there are relatively few of these (something like 22). A few games used to run better in Direct3D on 3dfx hardware, but that's rapidly changing. We suggest waiting until you have a compelling reason to add a Voodoo2 card before you buy. CGW

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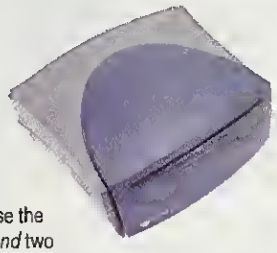
Reviews

ENTREGA MULTIFUNCTION USB HUB

Requirements: Windows 98 or Windows 95 OSR2.1 system.
Price: $140 Manufacturer: Entrega Contact: www.entrega.com



When Reach Exceeds Grasp

The Entrega 7-port multifunction hub is a way cool idea: Use the 12Mbit/sec throughput of the USB bus to add four extra USB ports *and* two serial ports *and* another parallel port.

★ ★ ½

I just wish it worked. The four USB ports work great. But the parallel and serial ports are problematic. Some devices, like a modem I attached, worked fine. But I couldn't get a Wacom ArtZ graphics tablet to even detect the serial port. I also attached an HP 722C inkjet printer to the parallel port. Both the USB parallel port and printer were detected fine, but I could never actually *print* anything. Also, Windows 98 detected the printer as a new device every time the system booted. Given that this was a clean install of Windows 98, I'd say it was problematic. Now, the 722C is a "dumb" device that depends on the PC to do the actual print rendering. It's possible that a printer with its own RAM and controller would work fine, but I wouldn't bet on it. Don't expect to use another parallel device like a Zip drive, either; there's a "For Printers ONLY" warning sticker next to the parallel port connector. USB devices, such as a Microsoft Freestyle Pro gamepad, a USB mouse, and a keyboard, all worked fine.

I've used other Entrega hubs with good results, but if you're hoping for additional connection options for traditional serial or parallel devices, take your business elsewhere.

–Loyd Case

PLANTRONICS HS1 STEREO HEADSET

Requirements: Sound card. Price: $80
Manufacturer: Plantronics
Contact: www.plantronics.com

It's All on Your Head

It's midnight, your family's asleep, and you've finally got some time to jump on your rig for some serious gaming. But as you prepare to do battle online, you realize that you're going to have to play your game audio at whisper level so as not to traumatize the wee ones. What to do? Headphones seem an obvious choice, but now that voice communications is getting big, not to mention voice recognition packages like Game Commander, maybe you should consider a complete headset.

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

Telephone headset maker Plantronics has decided to jump into the "hi-fi headset" market, and their HS-1 headset deserves a serious look.

The HS-1 uses 45mm neo-dyium speaker drivers and delivers very solid sound across the spectrum. Low-end response was beefy, and mids and highs were nicely defined as well, both for music and gaming audio. And these things could handle plenty of volume. The HS-1 also has a noise-canceling microphone that worked well with the Game Commander speech recognition utility. When not in use, the microphone nests neatly in the headphones and stays out of the way.

About the only thing missing from this solid offering is a splitter for your sound card's audio output where you'd plug the headset into one output and your speakers into the other. But that's a shortcoming that a quick trip to Radio Shack can mend.

–Dave Salvator

Plantronics HS1 Stereo Headset

Photo: Michael Falconer

MADCATZ PANTHER DX DIGITAL JOYSTICK

Requirements: Joystick port or free USB port.
Price: $39 Manufacturer: Madcatz
Contact: www.madcatz.com

Great Expectations

Madcatz enjoys a unique honor among first-person shooter fans. Their Panther XL controller – a joystick/trackball combo controller – is the only shooter controller to have any real fans. Others have tried, and others have failed, but Madcatz has cultivated a following. Building on that success, Madcatz has now released their Panther DX digital joystick, which nixes the trackball in favor of five well-placed buttons. The DX can connect via USB or your joystick port, and there's even a port where you can connect your rudder pedals. On paper, this looks like one slick stick, but in actual play we came across some glitches that kept the DX out of the winner's circle.

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Panther DX Digital Joystick

I took the DX for a spin through ENEMY ENGAGED: APACHE/HAVOC and FIGHTER SQUADRON, and while the stick was connected via the joystick port, it fared well, with smooth movement and response during gameplay. The dial-a-throttle configuration isn't my favorite, but it gets the job done, and allows minute adjustments. The "paw-pad," upon which your left hand rests, is comfortable, and the five buttons (three for fingers, and two for your thumb) are easily accessed.

The trouble began when I tried connecting the DX via USB. The controller was recognized and appeared happy, but after about a minute it would lose its connection and become unresponsive while appearing to be connected in the game controller control panel. Disconnecting/reconnecting brought it back to life, but after a minute or so, the cycle would repeat itself. And whether connected via USB or joystick port, my Thrustmaster Rudder Control System pedals were never usable despite repeated calibration attempts. A driver update may address these problems, but the extras that make this controller interesting don't appear to be ready for prime time.

–Dave Salvator

TURTLE BEACH MONTEGO II QUADZILLA

Requirements: Free PCI slot; Windows 95 or 98; Pentium 75 or better with 16MB or more RAM.
Price: $99 Manufacturer: Turtle Beach
Contact: www.tbeach.com

Fashionably Late

The battle for the ears of gamers rages on, and the latest entrant into the audio hardware fight makes the choices even harder. Last year's

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

photos: Michael Falconer

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Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla

Montego, based on the Vortex 1 audio chip, was a smash success. So a lot of us waited for Turtle Beach's spin on chip-maker Aureal's much more capable Vortex 2 chip. We waited...and waited.

Well, the wait is over. At first blush, the Turtle Beach Quadzilla hardware seems almost as physically awkward as the product name. The full package includes a primary card and a small daughterboard that adds four-speaker support and digital audio output, but takes up a slot panel in the back of your PC to do so.

The MIDI quality was on par for the Vortex 2 chip; that is, good, but not stellar. The 3D audio sounded good through two speakers and even better through four, but the best 3D audio rendering came through headphones. Using *CGW*'s Pentium III/500 testbed, Audio Winbench reported a 2.95% CPU utilization streaming 16 voices through DirectSound3D at a 22KHz, 8-bit sampling resolution. Turtle Beach uses 18-bit D/A converters for cleaner output, so there was little ambient hissing at high volumes.

The software utilities are slick, especially the audio diagnostic tool. If you've ever struggled with sound problems, this little gem is nearly worth the price of the card.

The Montego II is one of the best Vortex 2 boards I've seen to date. The only drawback is the daughtercard, which eats up a precious slot. But if you have the slot to spare, then check this card out. Your ears will love you for it.

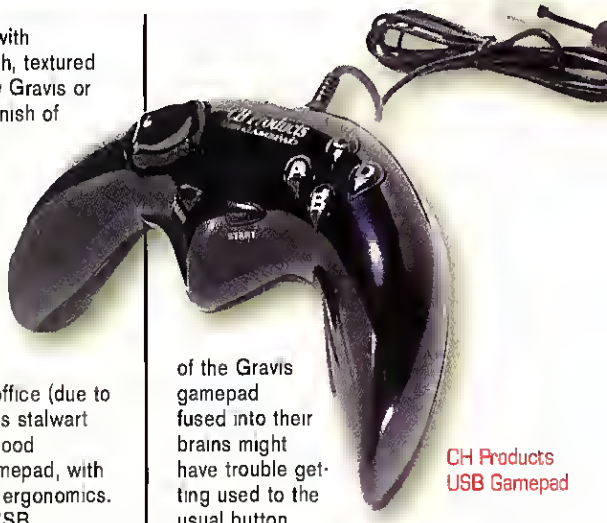
–Loyd Case

CH PRODUCTS USB GAMEPAD

Requirements: Windows 98, USB port.
Price: $30 Manufacturer: CH Products
Contact: www.chproducts.com

Slick as a Greased Weasel

I have a problem. It's not an uncommon problem, but one I am loath to admit. When playing games with a gamepad, my hands sweat. Profusely. This is generally not a problem with gamepads that have a rough, textured surface, like those made by Gravis or Microsoft. But the glossy finish of CH Products' new USB Gamepad can cause the controller to slip out of my hands like a greased weasel at the most inopportune times (like when Johnny Wilson is serving up a crushable curveball in HIGH HEAT 2000).



CH Products USB Gamepad

The "batarang" as we've been calling it around the office (due to its resemblance to Batman's stalwart utility belt item) is quite a good Gravis/Playstation-style gamepad, with a lot of thought put into its ergonomics. In fact, the CH Products' USB Gamepad is comfortable almost to a fault. Your hands are pretty much locked into position, which might be good for your tendonitis, but it presents problems for those who fidget. The controller fit perfectly into my hands, but mine are bigger than average.

Those gamers with the button layout of the Gravis gamepad fused into their brains might have trouble getting used to the usual button placement of the CH pad, but this Sidewinder devotee had no problem. Overall, the CH Products USB Gamepad is a very solid game controller–you rarely go wrong with USB–but it might not be for everyone. Maybe just those with a towel handy.

–Tom Price

ASUS MEW MOTHERBOARD/INTEL P810-DC100 CHIPSET

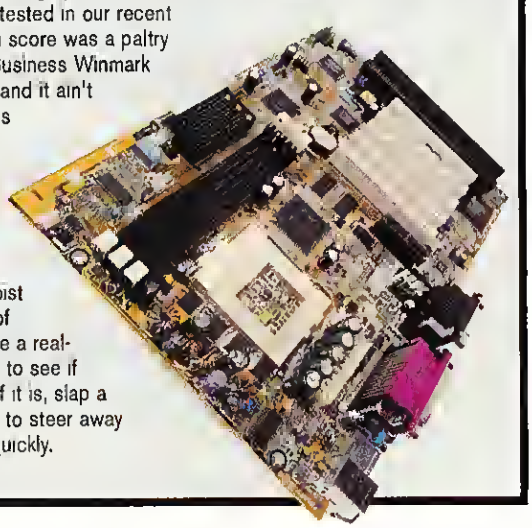
Requirements: Socket 370 Celeron Price: $165 Manufacturer: Asus Contact: www.asus.com

What Were They Thinking?

This is a slick little motherboard. As motherboard installations go, it was a piece of cake. The only installation hassle I had was to make sure that the custom INF file (a driver, of sorts) for the Intel 810 chipset was properly installed. But after actually testing the thing, I have only this to say: if you're a gamer, run like hell.

I'd probably feel that way about *any* motherboard using the Intel 810 chipset. In its infinite march for increasing profits and greater world domination, Intel has built the graphics controller into the motherboard chipset. But Intel has used its old i740 core as the graphics chipset, which even in its heyday was a weak performer. It also has built-in audio, but most of the audio chores are actually done in software, with just a hardware CODEC (compressor/decompressor) chip onboard.

I tested the MEW with a 466MHz Celeron CPU – certainly no slouch in performance. However, 3D GameGauge performance was an anemic 15.9, less than half the average score of cards tested in our recent roundup. The 3D WinBench score was a paltry 349, and WinBench's 2D Business Winmark was 91. Something smells, and it ain't the fish. The only good news about this graphics chipset is that you can deactivate it and replace it with a PCI card. Voodoo2/2000 anyone?

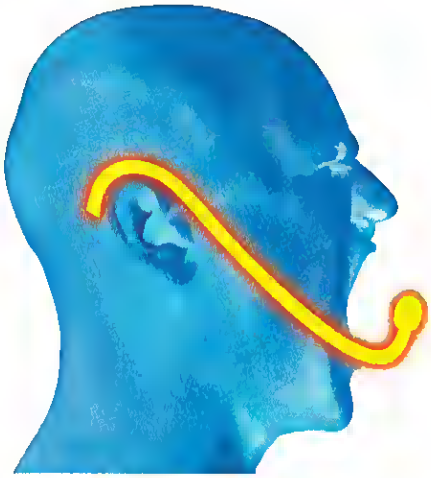


Asus isn't really to blame here, Intel is, for trying to foist off such a mediocre piece of crap on the world. If you see a really cheap PC for sale, check to see if it's using the 810 chipset. If it is, slap a warning sign on the system to steer away other gamers and leave – quickly.

–Loyd Case

HOW TO GET AN UNFAIR GAME ADVANTAGE.

Option #1: Painful, exotic surgery.



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— Loyd Case July 1999
Computer Gaming World

April 30, 1999

TOP PICK
June 1999

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Might And Magic VII

Blood, Honor, and Some Really Weasely Tricks

by P. Stephen "Desslock" Janicki

Might & Magic VII is a game for the party animal – the role-playing party animal. Your success hinges upon picking the right party members, developing their skills, and prepping them for battle.

Picking Your Party

Since each character class has distinct advantages, choosing your party members is a major decision. Race doesn't matter, so feel free to choose whichever races you'd like, but character classes are extremely important. The default party comprised of a Knight, Thief, Sorcerer and Cleric may not be particularly original, but it's actually one of the better combinations. A Sorcerer is nearly essential, since the Lloyd's Beacon and Starburst spells and the identify skills are so useful. A character capable of disarming traps is also important, unless you're willing to have an expensive NPC tag along with your party. Archers are useful all-around characters, as they can cast many powerful spells, are extremely good with missile weapons, are decent melee fighters, and can disarm most traps. The grandmaster spell abilities of a Cleric are also very useful, as they can render your party immune from instant death spells and can heal the entire party. Druids and Rangers are widely skilled if you want to use them as substitutes for a core character class. Knights are naturally the best melee fighters, but the additional magical abilities of a Paladin are handy.

LORDY

Hand-to-hand combat is sometimes a really bad idea. Unless you have grandmaster-level protection from magic, use missile weapons and spells (including slow) to take Minotaur Lords out from a distance.

Exploration and Character Development

Once you clear out the Harmondale area, go to Erathia or the Tularean Forest, which are both considerably less difficult than Barrow Downs. Nighon is only accessible through the mountain entrance underneath Stone City, and you can reach the Evenmorn Islands only through the Tatalia docks, after you complete the Priest elevation quest. The barrows in Barrow Downs and the maze in Nighon are great places to pick up gold if you're running low.

Elevate the primary skills of your characters as soon as possible. There are two expert trainers for each ability, but only one master and grandmaster trainer. Only one character in your party needs to develop the Merchant, Identify item, Identify monster, Disarm trap, Stealing, Alchemy and Repair skills. Perception, Learning, Body building, Meditation and Armsmaster are good secondary skills for all characters to concentrate on once their primary skills have been raised to the master level.

Save items such as cloaks, rings, boots, amulets and hats that give bonuses to your primary attributes (might, intelligence, personality, endurance, accuracy, speed and luck), even if none of your characters are going to wear the items on a regular basis. They'll allow you to increase your ability scores to net skill points by completing the burning pillar contests, located throughout the realm. They're also handy for meeting the elevation requirements of some master trainers (ability bonuses will count, but temporary bonuses granted by fountains and wells will not).

Use NPCs effectively. If you're going into a new area where you'll be earning lots of experience points, pick up NPCs like teachers that will boost your experi-

GET PUMPED UP

Don't rely solely on your natural abilities; stock up on attribute-enhancing items and resist the temptation to sell them.

COOKING THE BOOKS

If you really need to exploit the abilities of an expensive NPC, avoid picking up gold or looting corpses until you dismiss them.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Meteor Swarm, which can be cast by both archers and sorcerers, and Starburst are extremely effective spells outdoors, especially when your party is flying out of range of melee weapons.

ence points, and then dismiss them (or pick up a banker NPC) prior to collecting gold and looting corpses. If your characters are inept at disarming traps, pick up an NPC thief, but avoid aquiring any treasure until you've disarmed all the traps in the area and dismissed the NPC.

When playing Acromage, use cards that boost your Quarry, Magic and Zoo level (and reduce your opponent's ratings) before any others, unless you need to quickly elevate your tower to avoid destruction. Once you start outproducing your opponent, you'll be able to win easily by building your tower or by just accumulating resources.

Combat Tips Pick up the bow skill for all of your characters right away. In real-time mode, your party will be able to take out almost any opponent with missile weapons (even the dragon on Emerald Island), but you'll have to learn to master the keyboard "ranged combat rumba": launch arrows, turn 90 degrees, and move your party forward to dodge incoming fire; turn to face your opponents again and launch more arrows. The strafing keys are too slow to be effective. Once you get the Fly spell, you can dodge incoming fire in turn-based mode by moving upwards and downwards.

When outdoors, Starburst and Meteor swarm spells are extremely effective at wiping out armies of enemies. You can maneuver into position to launch a fly spell to great effect, and can also retreat quickly from pursuing enemies.

Avoid hand-to-hand combat with monsters like Minotaur Lords that can kill instantly. Instead, hit them with slow, paralyze and berserk spells, and then pick them off with missile weapons or offensive spells. Effective spell casting can clear out areas such as Nighon's Maze, which otherwise would be too deadly for lower-level characters. For a low-level spell, Sparks can be very effective at close range.

Prepare for major battles by casting all of the defensive spells you have, such as Bless, Heroism, Haste, resistance spells, Protection from Magic, Regeneration and Stoneskin. Melee weapons are often the most effective way to quickly take down enemies indoors, but ensure that your characters are as well protected as possible before charging into battle.

Trading Places

If you're hard up for gold, you can always earn some by lugging around a big, ugly crate of goods to a prospective buyer. Since the crates take up so much room and the reward for completing a delivery isn't significant, trading wouldn't be worth your time if you didn't have the trading table on this page, which specifies exactly where to make your deliveries. There are two separate delivery chains, each with three stops, but one is ten times as lucrative as the other and will cost you ten times as much for raw materials. Using the Town Portal or Lloyd's Beacon spells, you can quickly rack up as much money as you need.

Buy Low, Sell High

Location	Buys	Sells
Barrow Downs (Rivenrock Residence)	Sand	Glass Bottles (2,000 gold)
Tatalia (Calindra's Home)	Wine	Sand (2,000 gold)
Avalee (Inferno's House)	Glass Bottles	Wine (2,000 gold)
Erathia (Hillier Residence)	Arrowheads	Griffin Feathers (200 gold)
Tularean Forest (Kerlid Residence)	Griffin Feathers	Wood (200 gold)
Harmondale (Farswell Residence)	Wood	Arrowheads (200 gold)

Key To Genie Lamps

Genie lamps are extremely useful items; they are found lying around in barren areas such as Bracada Desert and Nighon. Genie lamps bestow different powers depending upon the date of their use. Avoid using them on weekends, as characters will be turned to stone on Fridays, killed on Saturdays, and eradicated on Sundays (some day of rest!). The benefits granted by a genie lamp will be different each month, as you can see from the Year of the Genie table, and will get successively stronger during each week of a month. Skill points are probably the most useful benefit, at least early in the game. CGW

Year of the Genie

Month	Effect of Genie Lamp
January	+1 to +4 Might
February	+1 to +4 Intelligence
March	+1 to +4 Personality
April	+1 to +4 Endurance
May	+1 to +4 Accuracy
June	+1 to +4 Speed
July	+1 to +4 Luck
August	+ gold pieces
September	+5 to +20 food
October	+2 to +8 skill points
November	+ experience
December	+ to one random resistance

DEALING FROM THE BOTTOM?

Acromage is easy, provided that you focus on increasing your Quarry, Magic and Zoo scores.

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I AM THE CAPTAIN OF MY SOUL.
CAUGHT IN A BITTER FEUD BETWEEN SPITEFUL GODS, YOU FIGHT FOR MORE THAN YOUR LIFE. ENLIST HERCULES, ACHILLES, ELECTRA, AND THE MIGHTIEST OF HEROES IN YOUR EPIC STRUGGLE FOR AN ETERNAL SEAT ATOP OLYMPUS.
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IN THE SHADOW OF OLYMPUS

IN THE FELL CLUTCH
OF CIRCUMSTANCE

I HAVE NOT WINCED
NOR CRIED ALOUD,

UNDER THE
BLUDGEONINGS
OF CHANCE

MY HEAD IS BLOODY,
BUT UNBOWED.

WWW.INTERPLAY.COM/INVICTUS

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EverQuest

The Journey of a Thousand Hours Begins With Your First Character

by Andrew Park

THIS BEETLE AIN'T FROM LIVERPOOL
Be sure to set your hotkeys for some combat options before picking a fight.

If you value your social life greatly, then the best advice I can give is to avoid EVERQUEST altogether. Otherwise, you may catch the addiction, and find yourself forsaking food and real-world social interaction in favor of monster slaying, treasure hunting, and meeting the other people who happen to be there for the monsters and treasures as well. If you still want to game on, then by all means stay and read this guide. I know how hard it is to start out in the land of Norrath; the only items out of the box that will be of any real use are the CD and the reference card that describes the keyboard shortcuts (with which you should familiarize yourself as soon as possible). The thoroughly uninformative game manual and the game's own quirky user interface won't do much to help get you started, so I will.

GIMME SOME PALE ALE
While your initial water and bread cakes are fine for now, try to get some more food when you can.

Momma, I Wanna Be a Hero

It wouldn't be en RPG without character creation at the beginning. You heve a pool of 12 races and 14 character classes to choose from Seven primary statistics make up the rest of your character: strength, stamina, agility, dexterity, wisdom, intelligence and charisma. Don't take the choice of deity lightly, as religion determines both your sterting point, and how the various fections treat you.

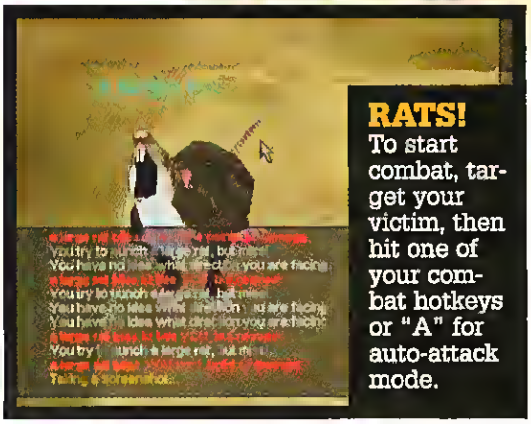
All the races have innate abilities and quirks that make them suitable – or unsuitable – for certain classes. Erudites, being the smartest rece in Norrath, have the high intelligence points needed to make them good spellcasters. Agile Halflings have innate abilities to sneak and hide, so their best bet is a career in roguedom. There's no "best race/class combination," as just about any combination will work to an extent.

However, et some point in your EVERQUEST career, you'll want to develop a mainstay character. Good test cherecters to get accustomed to the besics of the game ere either a half-elf warrior based in Freeport, or e halfling warrior based in Rivervale. Both of these race/class combinations have the ability to see in the derk (infravision); and they begin in sefe, well-populated areas with plenty of easy monsters to fight, minor quests to perform, and other pleyers with whom to interact.

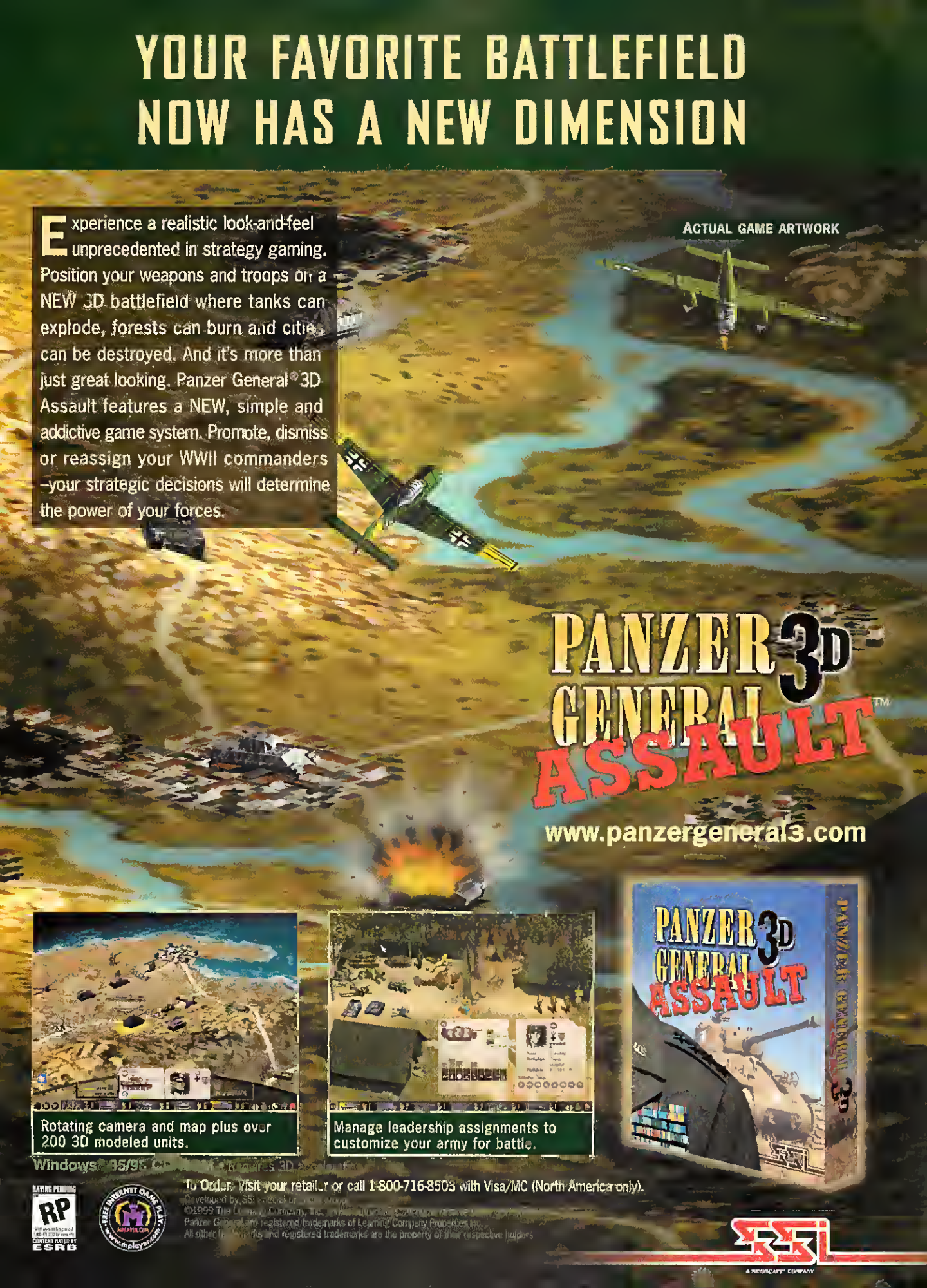
The (Hot) Keys to Success

After you've created your first character, get ready to jump into the world of Norreth. The first thing you should do is look around; use the F9 key to change your perspective to one of five different camera angles. F10 will choose between the default minimized-view (which you should use at the beginning), half-screen view (which you should stick to after you've familiarized yourself with the hotkeys), and full-screen view. Now, bring up your inventory (if you didn't play the tutorial to learn how to open it with the mouse, then just press "I" on your keyboerd). You should have five bread cakes, five water skins, a weapon, a note, and a book of discord. The bread cakes end water are essential; run out of these, and you'll eventually become so hungry and thirsty that you'll suffer continual exhaustion and become unable to recuperate from your wounds. Equip your starting weapon (a short sword, a dagger, or e club) and then have a look at your note; this is the slip of peper you turn in to your guild mester. Right-click it once to read the contents and find the name of your guild master, then seek him out.

Lastly, you should get into the habit of assigning hotkeys to important actions, such as fighting. You can do this by left-clicking and holding down over an important action button, then dragging it to your hotkey box in the lower left-hand corner of your screen. You can now access that ection by pressing the corresponding keyboard number, if you assigned melee attack to the first slot, you can toggle it on and off by pressing "1." You'll want to hotkey all your important abilities; for instance, warriors and monks should hotkey kick; barbarian, ogre and troll characters should hotkey slam (both examples are for use in combat).



RATS!
To start combat, target your victim, then hit one of your combat hotkeys or "A" for auto-attack mode.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How to Pick up Elves

Now that you've gotten used to the basics, you can get to the meat of the game–meeting other people. Just press Enter and type whatever profound wisdom you have to say, in a conversational tone. Use the /tell command for direct and discreet messages for specific players; respond to /tells with the /reply command. There are also three general channels that can be heard by anyone in the area: /shout (for calls of help, warnings or group requests), /auction (for buying and selling goods), and /ooc (for out-of-character discussion). Thankfully, excessive chatter can be filtered out using the options menu.

Interacting with computer characters is slightly different. It's often a good idea to /consider them first (either press the "C" key, or press Enter and type in /con, or right-click on them); this will reveal how tough the character is, as well as how they regard you (with respect to faction standing). If a powerful character regards you threateningly or is ready to attack, it's best to turn and run.

Of course, when you get past the city gates, you'll find monsters that won't be too interested in chitchat. Before you engage, /con the monster to make sure you can handle it. At lower levels, a green, blue, or even a black/white con should be all right, but more dangerous yellow and red /cons should be avoided.

COMPUTER SOLILOQUY
After hailing NPCs, pay attention to what they say, and ask questions containing the words within brackets.

After combat, there'll be a body to loot (either your target's or your own). Right-click on the corpse first, then loot by right-clicking on the items. You probably gained some experience from the battle; the orange bar in your persona menu will indicate this. Once all five bars are filled, you'll gain a level. Thumping on weak monsters yields less experience, so you'll soon need to seek out tougher opponents. In order to tackle the nastier beasts, you should band together with some like-minded adventurers of a similar experience level; a well balanced party of healers, magic users and fighters can collectively bring down monsters several levels higher than their own. CGW

For more tips, check out www.gameguides.com/guides/evrquest for GameSpot's comprehensive Game Guide.

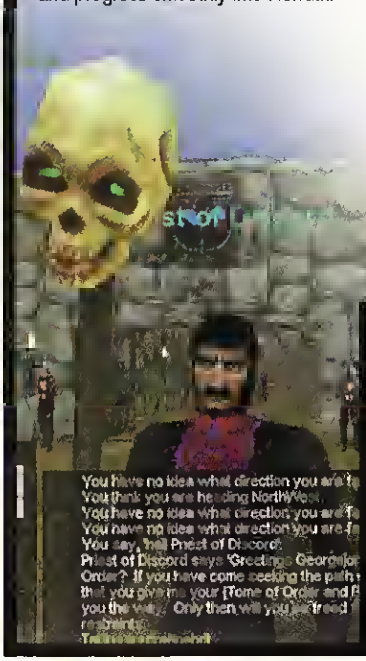
GAMESPOT

ONE MEAD TOO MANY Use the F9 key to get additional camera views of your drunken self.

Career Changes

EVERQUEST may focus on combat, but there are NPC-related quests, trade skills, and player interactions to break it up. Trade skills allow characters to become proficient in such formidable arts as pottery, brewing, smithing and tailoring. There's no Heald Institute in Norrath, so being a successful tradesman requires your character to purchase the appropriate "How To" book and materials, and have at it. Trade skills, like all other skills, will only improve with repeated use.

One thing to remember is that the land of Norrath is constantly changing. The next time you log in, don't be surprised to see a patch with a number of minor tweaks or fixes added by the designers. Since the beta test, several things have changed; level requirements for skills (at press time, bash has been lowered from a level 9-12 skill to level 6; dual wield has been lowered from a level 15-17 skill to level 13-16), faction shifts and quest completions have been changed. This sort of constant flux has the unfortunate side effect of outdating the information, but also serves as the designers' dynamic set of checks and balances to keep the playing field as level as possible and, ideally, to make the game as enjoyable as possible. Hopefully, you'll now be able to make some sense of the gameworld, and progress smoothly into Norrath.



BRING IT!
If you get bored of being mortally bound, give your book of discord to this Priest to turn on the player-killing mode.

In 2015 war is declared.

YOU ARE THE U.S.

- Intelligence reports a Chinese ground unit.
- Switch to tactical mode. Ready helicopters.
- Command Head over a Chinese tank platoon.
- Destroy two tanks. Helicopters are damaged.
- Move to strategic mode and set way points on the map.
- Engage artillery to the North. Launch an air strike to the East.
- Switch to platoon commander of an electronic warfare unit.

VICTORY IS IMMINENT.

YOU ARE CHINA

- Mobilize armored unit into Kazakhstan.
- Lay minefields in tactical mode.
- Move to maps. Conduct reconnaissance.
- Mobilize antiaircraft weaponry. Launch air offensive to the North.
- Two tanks are destroyed by U.S. helicopters.
- Return to maps. View U.S. artillery enter minefield.
- Switch to helicopter platoon commander. Head East.

VICTORY IS IMMINENT.

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WINDOWS 95/98 CD-ROM

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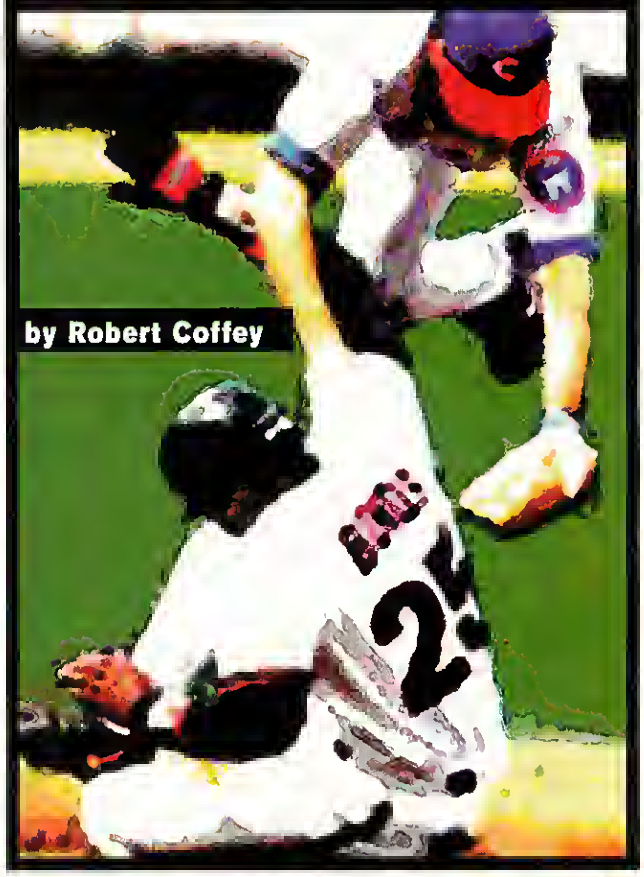
The Art of Drafting: Building a Winner

An Obsessive-Compulsive's Guide to Drafting a Killer Fantasy Sports Team

by Robert Coffey



So you've joined a computer sports league, draft day is quickly approaching, and you still don't have a clue how to sort through the rabble to craft a team that will crush your rivals and break their spirits. Well, don't be frightened, success is simply a matter of preparation. Follow our suggestions and Draft Day will live in your memory as a day to remember, not as a day of shame.

Reading Is Fundamental

Since the odds are you'll be drafting for a sport when that sport's season starts in real life, check newsstands for annual pre-season reports. Given the huge popularity of rotisserie leagues there ara loads of magazines that can be useful, and you should get more than one so you have at least two different perspectives. Since every worthwhile publication has comprehensive stats, look for publications that rate every player not just by position, but also by how they stack up with everyone else. There are many good online options, but keep in mind you'ra going to want hard copy come draft day.

Don't forget to take a look at the game's stats/scouting reports as well. You'll find useful nuggets of info there as well, especially behind the numbers. For instance, every pitcher's delivery is described in HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000, allowing you to pick up a player whose numbers may not be spectacular, but whose unusual sidearm delivery could be very effective in relief situations against human opponents.

Know Thyself

Before you start your player wish list, think about what kind of team you'll want. In football, do you want to amphasize a running or passing game? In baseball, do you want a team that clobbers opponents with the long ball, or would you rather humble your foes with dominating pitching? While you obviously need some sort of balance, these early decisions are crucial since they'll dictate the early picks that will determine your star performers.

Deep Thoughts

I don't know how to tell you this, but you're not the only guy who's heard of Mark McGwire or Terrell Davis. As you start to compile your list of hopefuls, make sure you look beyond the superstars at every position. The best of the best won't be around long enough for you to snag more than one or two.

Looking at player depth for every position will also help you shape your general strategy. For instance, if there's an abundance of quality first basemen but only a couple of top-notch second basamen, you might want to grab your starting second baseman early and hold off on selecting a guy for first base until later in the draft.

Darwinian Principles

Adapt or perish. Evan with all this prep work, some of your short list guys might well be taken by others, but thare's an upside – you might predict wrongly and Brett Favre may still be available come your turn. So expect the unexpected.

One final note: If you're ever totally unsure whom to draft, just pick the best player available – he can't hurt you and you might be able to trade him later. Also, later in the draft, if your team is looking good but you see glaring holes in other teams (someone only has two guys in the bullpen) you might want to consider drafting players that can fill *their* needs. A desperation trade that favors you is a good thing. CGW

Reality Check

Now you're ready to start planning your picks in earnest. Look at your dream list; odds are you won't get them all, but with planning you can come close.

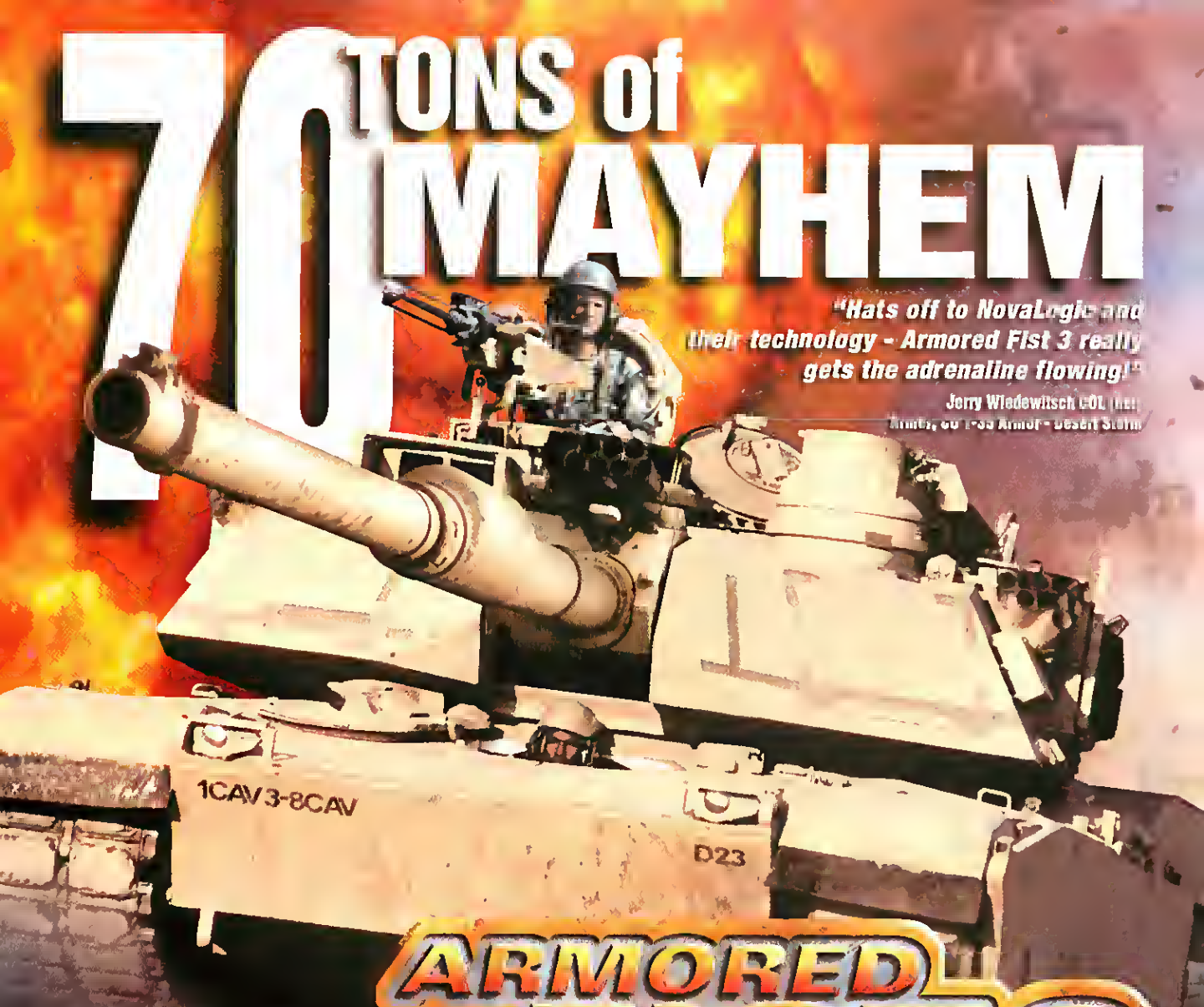
First, look at your position in each draft round since this will shape your game plan. If you pick early you'll probably get exactly who you want in the first round, but if you're further down the line, you'll need make a guess as to who will be available when your turn comes. In a baseball draft, expect elite pitchers to go early in the first round with merquee offensive players starting to get picked in the middle of the round. In football, the best quarterbacks will go early, then the top runners and receivers. Look at your short list again: Who can you reasonably expect to get based on your draft position?

All this preparation should lead up to a short list of five to seven guys that you have a great chance at acquiring. These guys will be the foundation of your team, so take a last look at them to make sure they're filling your most basic needs. For example, in a baseball draft you'd want that list to include your top two pitchers, your number three and four hitters, and your closer. After that, your picks should fill out your starting lineup and starting pitching before filling your bench.

70 TONS of MAYHEM

"Hats off to NovaLogic and their technology - Armored Fist 3 really gets the adrenaline flowing!"

Jerry Wiedewitsch COL (Ret.)
Armor, CO 1-33 Armor - Desert Storm



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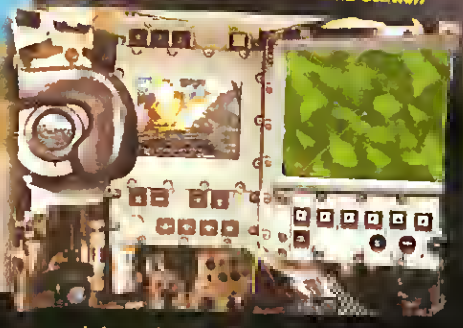
Actual photo of M1A2 command station



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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

Kingpin

Tip If you're not playing KINGPIN in god-mode, the secret to survival is having some friends willing to take a bullet for you. The crowbar vendor in the opening scene is the first sucker you can hire, and while he has no chance against the gun-toting thugs by the stairs, he'll increase your chances of getting through the encounter alive. After that, you'll find most of your friends in bars. Hire all you can – it's by far the best use of your cash.

Codes Start the game with the command line "+developer 1" (i.e., "c:\Kingpin\kingpin.exe +developer 1"). Then use the "~" (tilda) key to bring down the console during the game and type the following codes:

Name	Effect
IMMORTAL	God-mode
NOCLIP	No-clipping mode

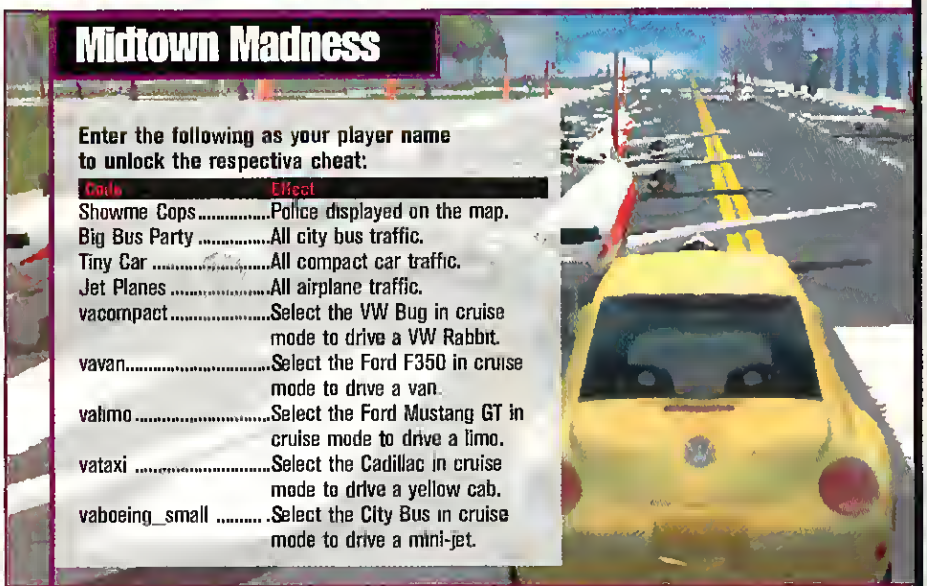
Use the following commands with the GIVE variable (i.e., GIVE ALL, GIVE CASH, etc.):

Code	Effect
ALL	Gives you all items (except cash).
CASH ###	Gives you ### dollars.

MS Baseball

To access bonus teams, click on Help then About... When the developer's splash screen appears, right-click twice on the word "Wizbang" on the second line of the copyright statement. Bonus teams include Robots, Microsoft and Wizbang.

Midtown Madness



Enter the following as your player name to unlock the respectiva cheat:

Code	Effect
Showme Cops	Police displayed on the map.
Big Bus Party	All city bus traffic.
Tiny Car	All compact car traffic.
Jet Planes	All airplane traffic.
vacompact	Select the VW Bug in cruise mode to drive a VW Rabbit.
vavan	Select the Ford F350 in cruise mode to drive a van.
valimo	Select the Ford Mustang GT in cruise mode to drive a limo.
vataxi	Select the Cadillac in cruise mode to drive a yellow cab.
vaboeing_small	Select the City Bus in cruise mode to drive a mini-jet.

CODES

F-22 LIGHTNING 3

While playing, press [ctrl]+[enter], enter any of the following (in all lowercase letters), then press [enter] after each one:

Code	Effect
Black oil	Refuel
fight the future	Replenish ammo
Ghostpit	Invisible plane
I want to believe	No crashes
the truth is out there	Unlimited ammo
this isnt happening	Repair damage
trust no one	God mode

REQUIEM: AVENGING ANGEL

Press [enter] for console, then enter one of the following:

Code	Effect
csmilton	Enable cheats
csyhwh	God-mode
csstigmata	All guns, ammo, health, essence, angelic powers and items
csrosary	All angelic powers
cshealth	Full health
csshroud	Full armor
csessence	Full essence
csitems	All items
csguns	All guns
csammo	Ammunition
cshost	No gravity (flight mode)
cswire	Wireframe level map
cshalt	Stops time
csvanish	Kills all enemies

SOUTH PARK

Press [esc] during game play and select Options. Click in the lower left corner and enter one of the following codes to activate the corresponding cheat function.

Code	Effect
EGOTRIP	Big enemy heads
BEEFCAKE	Invincibility
SWEET	All weapons with unlimited ammo

DELTA FORCE

Press the "~" key to bring up the console, then type in these codes for the desired effect:

Code	Effect
Iwillsurvive	God-mode
Raindropskeepfallinonmyhead	Call for artillery strike (5 shots). Can be re-entered for more
Takeittothelimit	Unlimited ammo
Closetoyou	Enemies do not see you
Letmego	Level selection

FALCONS BEWARE: There's a NEW bird of prey on your tail.

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WING LEGENDS™

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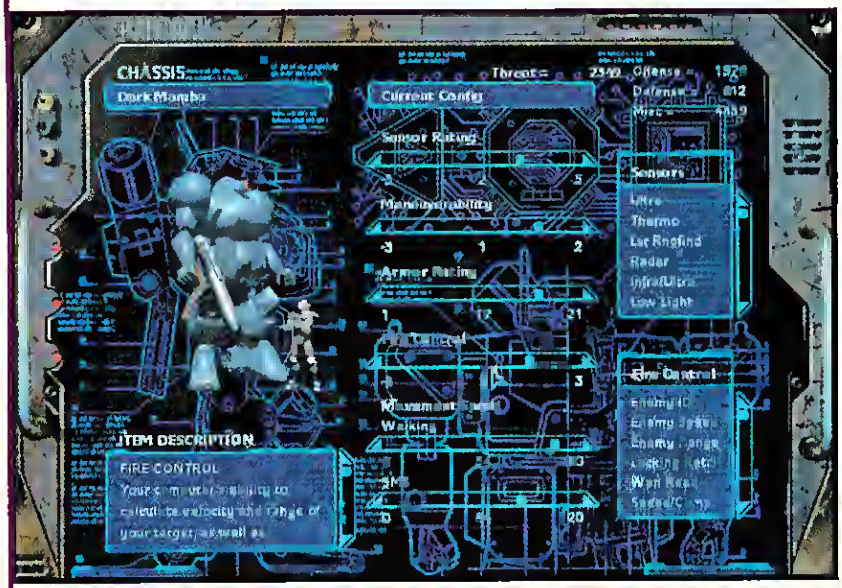
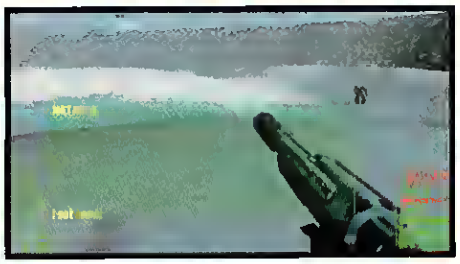
Heavy Gear II





If there is one thing that affects Gear power more than anything else, it's fire control. When modifying your Gear, always try to get a Fire Control rating of at least two, or even higher if you can get the Threat Value low enough. One way of doing this is to only take light weapons that fire rapidly and carry lots of ammo (such as autocannons). Fire Control not only gives you valuable targeting information, but it also enhances the damage your weapons inflict. A Gear with a Fire Control rating of three with *only* a medium autocannon is significantly more lethal than a Gear with a Fire Control rating of zero or one who is equipped with heavy bazookas, guided mortars, and so on.

If being a Black Talon is still too much for you, then you might consider cheating outright. First, bring up the console by pressing the "~" (tilda) key, then type either one of these codes to achieve the desired effect.

Code	Effect
set camti	God-mode
set mission	Auto-complete mission

For more in-depth information, you can always check out the Game Guides on *GameSpot*. Here's a guide to the latest Guides.

KINGPIN
www.gameguides.com/guides/kingpin/

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
www.gameguides.com/guides/dk2/

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES
www.videogames.com/features/psx/needspeed3hs_gg/index.html

HOMEWORLD
www.gameguides.com/guides/hw/

FINAL FANTASY VIII
www.gameguides.com/guides/ff8/

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**Prizes won't actually be fabulous, more along the lines of crap we don't want anymore. Anyone sending in "nude raider" codes will be mocked relentlessly, once we've fully tested the code, of course.*

NFL BLITZ

On the Versus screen, press Turbo, Jump, and Pass to change the respective icons below the helmets. The numbers in the following list indicate the number of times each button is pressed and the direction in which the d-pad must be pressed to activate the code.

Code	Effect
2-5-0 Left	Fast passes
1-2-3 Left	Super field goals
5-0-0 Left	Turn off stadium
2-1-0 Up	No first downs
3-4-4 Up	No interceptions
1-5-1 Up	No punting
4-3-3 Up	Invisible
5-1-4 Up	Infinite turbo
0-4-5 Up	Super blitzing
2-3-3 Up	Power-up teammates
3-1-2 Up	Power-up offense
4-2-1 Up	Power-up defense
0-3-0 Down	Fog on
0-4-1 Down	Thick fog on
2-2-3 Right	Unlimited throw distances
0-5-0 Right	Big football
3-1-0 Right	Team tiny players
1-4-1 Right	Team big players
2-0-3 Right	Team big head
4-0-4 Left	Power-up speed
4-2-3 Right	Super passing
2-2-2 Right	Night game
0-3-2 Left	Fast turbo running
3-2-1 Left	No head
1-2-3 Right	Headless team

NHL '99

Enter these codes during the game:

Code	Effect
MANTIS	Gives players elongated arms, legs and necks.
NHLKIDS	Makes players kid-size.
HOMEGOAL	Gives home team a goal.
AWAYGOAL	Gives away team a goal.
PENALTY	Causes a penalty.
INJURY	Causes an injury.
ZAMBO	Puts the zamboni on the ice.
VICTORY	Starts fireworks over the rink.
FLASH	Camera flashes from the stands.
SPOTS	Turns on the pre-game spotlights.
CHECK	Every player automatically body checks an opposing player to the ice upon contact.
GRAB	Similar to CHECK but with a stick hold instead of a check.

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INSIDE
ACTION

by Thierry Nguyen

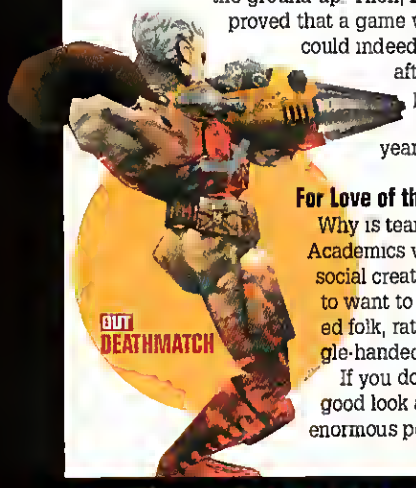
Deathmatch Is Dead

Just as Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* was the last great western, so will QUAKE III: ARENA be the last great deathmatch game. After Q3A, deathmatch can be safely declared dead.

Sure, there will be plenty of post-Q3A shooters that will include deathmatch, yet the very feature that made shooters so successful is starting to wear thin. Honestly, how many of you are living and breathing the deathmatch experience behind HALF-LIFE, SIN, SHOGO, or UNREAL? Who's salivating at the prospect of deathmatch in STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE, AMEN: THE AWAKENING, or even the infamous DAIKATANA?

The Killer App for Shooters Has Run Out of Ammo

Chances are, not a lot of you. It's a sign that deathmatch is rapidly being eclipsed by teamplay. Teamplay has always been around, even since the DOOM days when it was limited to co-op mode. When the QUAKE games came out, one of the first things to happen was the clan-phenomenon: people were unofficially dividing themselves into teams during deathmatch. The real catalyst was Robin Walker, John Cook, and Ian Caughley's creation of the TEAM FORTRESS mod for QUAKE. Due to its incredible success (at any given point, there were more TF servers than traditional DM servers), designers started rethinking teamplay from the ground up. Then, Dynamix's STARSIEGE: TRIBES proved that a game with teamplay as its foundation could indeed be successful. What was once an afterthought is now becoming the principal focus, if there was a trend in action design in this year's E3, it was teamplay.



For Love of the Game

Why is teamplay dethroning deathmatch? Academics will say that humans tend to be social creatures, we can't help it. It's instinct to want to accomplish a goal with like-minded folk, rather than to take on the world single-handedly.

If you don't trust academia, then take a good look at popular culture, specifically the enormous popularity of team over solo sports. People identify with sports teams, whether it's because of ideology, geography, acquaintance—or due to the simple fact that most of us know what it's like to work with others to achieve common goals. Track-and-field's focus on the individual hampers its popularity (except during the Olympics, when the athlete is working for the ultimate team—their country), while the Super Bowl and the World Cup are two of the most revered events in sports. How do I explain golf, then? Frankly, I don't think anyone can.

I'll put myself on the line and say that by this time next year, the prospect of deathmatch play will excite no one. There's just too many titles in the pipeline that are tapping into our basic love of teamplay, and deathmatch will be relegated to an occasional break, rather than remain a productivity-killer. With titles like TEAM FORTRESS II, TRIBES 2, and one game I'm still not allowed to talk about coming out this year (stay tuned next month), Q3A will be deathmatch's chance to go out with a bang, rather than a whimper. CGW

IN TEAMPLAY

CGW: A Case Study in Teamplay Dominance

In what could be considered an omen for the whole "print vs. web" debate, the *CGW* staff had a friendly game of Q3ATEST with our online brethren over at *GameSpot*. It seemed to be *GameSpot*'s lucky day, as their staff – surprisingly – had the high scores for the match.

Then again, we've already embraced the teamplay phenomenon with frequent games of STARSIEGE: TRIBES and TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC. We're so focused on teamplay that our deathmatch skills have suffered. That's our story. Think of us as poster children for teamplay design. If we had a *team* match against *GameSpot*....

Jumping off Q3A

At press time, one of id Software's level designers, Brandon James (better known as "Killme" within the online community) abruptly left the company. James is probably best known for designing "The Longest Yard," the infamous jump-pad level in Q3ATEST. James wouldn't comment on why he departed, but Paul Jaquays (a fellow designer) posted to a message board saying that James left of his own accord, and wasn't fired. As for development Jaquays said that James' remaining maps and responsibilities would be divided among the rest of the team. It's the second major blow to id, following the departure of Brian Hook to Verant.

Everyone Can Hear You Save

After vehemently defending the lack of an in-game save, Fox Interactive and Rebellion finally caved in to public pressure and released a patch for ALIENS VS. PREDATOR that includes in-game saves (it's also on our CD to save you some download time). But before you pat yourself on the back for another victory against The Man, be aware that the patch allows only a limited number of saves per level, depending on what difficulty you're playing. Then again, something is better than nothing, and Fox should be applauded for finally listening to their customers, even though the result is less than perfect.

INSIDE
RPG / ADVENTURE

by Desslock

Breaking the Rules

On the Woes of Translating Pen-and-Paper RPGS

Sheriff Brody snarled defiance at the awesome denizen of the deep bearing down upon him. "Smile, you son-of-a...." Brody screeched as he fired his rifle and exploded the air tank perched within the Great White's gaping maw, blasting the beast to a watery grave. —Peter Benchley, Jaws

Anyone who read Peter Benchley's pulp classic knows that director Steven Spielberg took a few creative liberties with the author's work. While Benchley labeled Spielberg's flashy ending "ridiculous," the movie became the biggest box office success of its time. Apparently there's at least commercial justification for making changes when crafting a movie adaptation of a book. What works well on the page doesn't necessarily work best in a visual medium.

So what changes are justified when a computer game developer adapts a pen-and-paper role-playing game? Even the most hardcore RPG ideologues would admit that some changes are inevitable due to technology limitations. The most formidable computers available today still can't create a malleable and non-linear milieu as well as an experienced, creative, and suitably demented game master.

But what about rules that could be put into a computer game, but would rarely be used or appreciated by gamers, such as AD&D's religious tithes, or the stats for dozens of obscure medieval weapons, such as vouges and glaives? It's understandable that most developers include only those features relevant to the game they present, rather than shallowly trying to include all the expansive rules of a gaming system.

Adaptations should also emphasize the strengths of the new medium and avoid the limitations of the old. A film adaptation of a play shouldn't needlessly restrict its setting to a handful of rooms. Similarly, a computer RPG shouldn't hesitate to rely on visual cues, as opposed to statistical abstractions. For example, AD&D relies upon dice rolls, or saving throws, to simulate a character's ability to dodge spells. The BALDUR'S GATE expansion pack didn't banish AD&D's saving throw system, but it allowed characters to dodge spells by moving out of the targeted area. Those types of changes enhance gameplay by adding features impossible to implement in a tabletop game.

But game developers often make rule changes simply because they feel that aspects of the original game aren't balanced, or just don't work well. While I feel some sympathy for game designers, who are typically too creative to want to rigidly adapt a system without adding their own embellishments, those are the kinds of changes I feel should be minimized.

Veteran AD&D players know that certain character classes are initially more powerful than others, and that some spells, items and abilities are so powerful that they occasionally unbalance the game. But that's part of the charm of a system that's been successful for over 20 years.

I want "hold person" spells that take powerful enemies out of a fight; I want to feel threatened by the level-draining abilities of undead creatures; I want my thief character to be able to use a ring of invisibility to clear out a dungeon single-handedly. Even though developers are trying to reach a broader audience than hardcore RPG fans, they should do so by offering compelling gaming worlds and stories and intuitive interfaces, instead of second-guessing the decisions made by a game's original designers. Give us faithful adaptations, and only make changes when they are necessary or enhance a game in ways previously impossible. Anyway... Spielberg's ending was ridiculous. CGW

For the latest RPG news and comprehensive strategy guides, development team interviews, previews and other features, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

AD&Daptations

How faithful should a designer be when adapting a paper RPG to a computer game? We went straight to the source to get a few different viewpoints.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

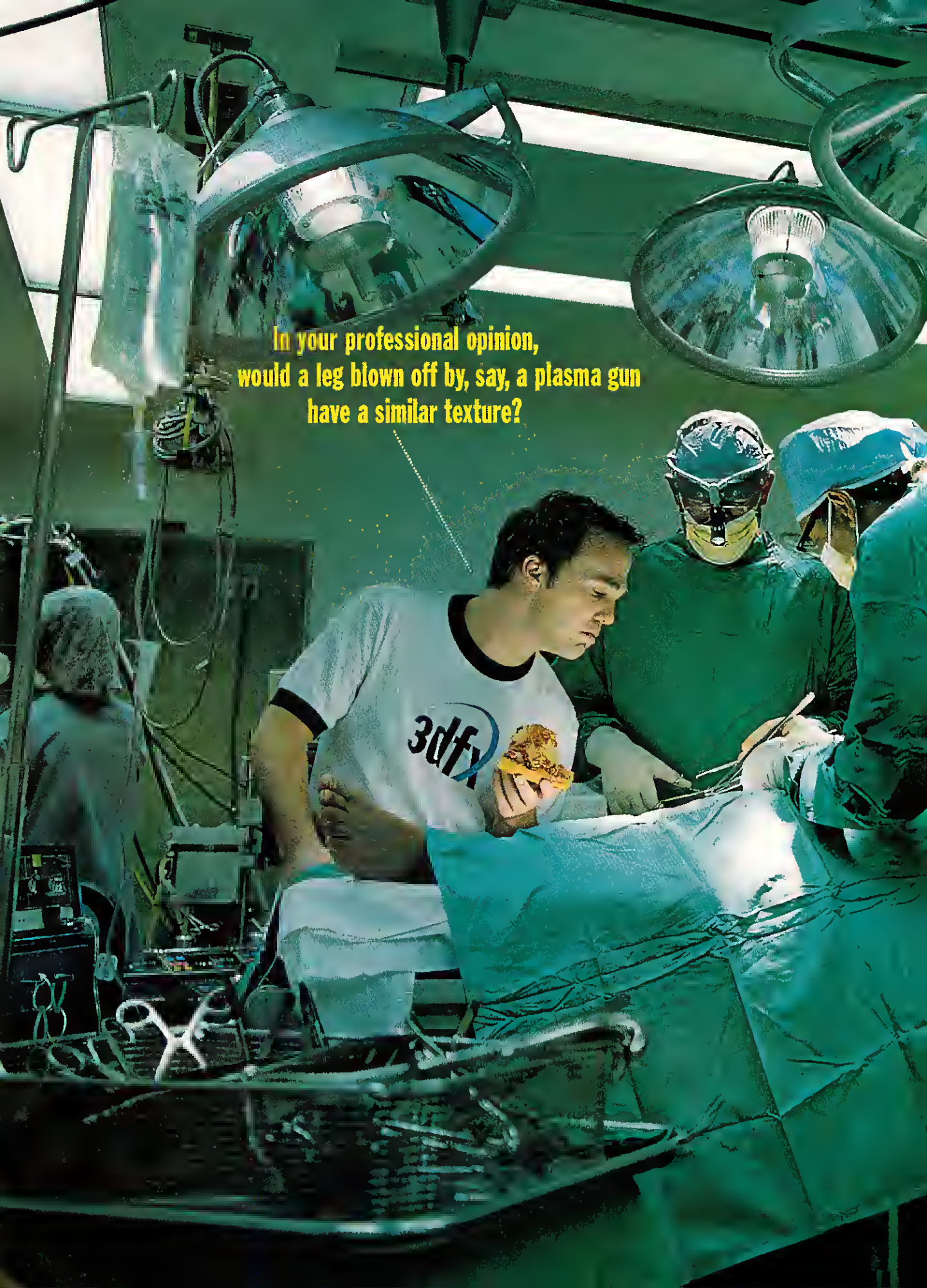
Chris Avellone, Designer: "Changes should be made to the pen-and-paper rules when the rules don't follow any sort of programming logic. The *AD&D* spell system has a number of spells and items that are hard to quantify. Try to sit down with a programmer and explain how the combinations of rings of protection, cloaks of protection, magic armor, bracers of defense are *supposed* to work when someone is wearing all of them, and you'll both be driven mad within minutes. Basically, you pick and choose what is implementable or not, and try to keep the flavor of the pen-and-paper game as much as possible."

BALDUR'S GATE: TALES OF THE SWORD COAST

Ben Smedstad, Producer: "[Follow the rules] as closely as possible without sacrificing gameplay, which is more or less what we did with BALDUR'S GATE. We followed the rules 'to the letter' and only strayed when the game mechanics were not adequate or when a spell, for example, seemed to be too powerful and/or unbalanced. With a limited time frame in which to work, you can never put everything you want into a game's programming, design, or art. As soon as you vary the rules from the original game, you [jeopardize] the balance that its developers worked so hard to maintain. It is up to the designer of the computer RPG to maintain gameplay balance while still being able to make a fun and interesting game setting for players."

VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE: REDEMPTION

Ray Gresko, Producer: "Obviously the most important aspects that define a license are the background/world and the game mechanics. The 'world' of the license is the most sacred, and the designer should be devoted to a faithful representation. Whether the core mechanics transfer is dependent upon the type of game you're doing, but a computer RPG based upon a paper RPG should do its best to be true to the license's inner workings. Any good RPG will have a fine rules balance that can be upset dramatically if you start tinkering around too much with it.


In your professional opinion,
would a leg blown off by, say, a plasma gun
have a similar texture?
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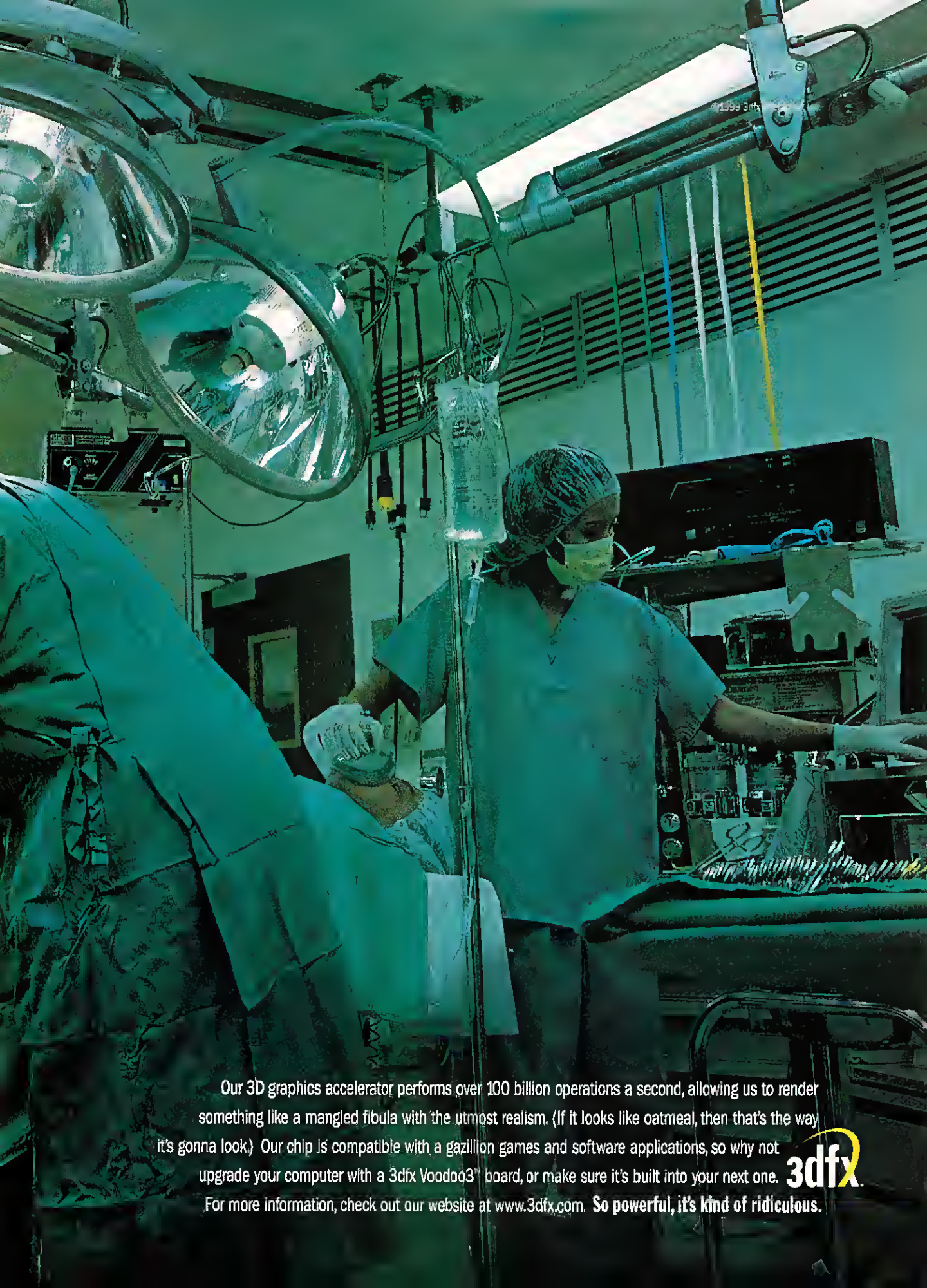

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INSIDE
SPORTS

by George Jones

The Perfect Sports Game?

Only three PC sports games have ever gotten it absolutely, totally, 100% right:

1. GBA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL (Gamestar, 1986) Full court two-on-two basketball action with season play.

2. FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO (Dynamix, 1992) The first great PC football game. Boasted amazing graphics for its time and a career play mode with rookie drafts.

3. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 (3DO, 1999) Because it stays true to the game while playing up the most enjoyable aspects. And because I'm winning the *CGW* league.

The difference in the success of console sports games when compared to their PC counterparts is dramatic.

The common element running through my top three is season play. This has been the strength of the PC sports game for years. But when you combine the PC platform's strengths around season play with the console platform's strength—human opponents at your side—magical things happen. I still remember the fanatical devotion to SNK's BASEBALL STARS for the Nintendo my friends and I had in college, and I see the crowd of CGW editors that gather whenever a league game of HIGH HEAT 2000 is under way.

So when are we going to see the holy grail of sports games—the game that takes season play and places it into an Internet environment where you can play in a league online against human beings?

From the sound of things, it's only a matter of time. I had a chance to talk to John Vifian, Executive Producer of MADDEN FOOTBALL, and Marsh Gardiner, producer of several Fox Sports Interactive titles, about this topic. I came away from the discussions with the belief that PC sports game designers are ready to embrace the future.

The difference in the success of console sports games when compared to their PC counterparts is dramatic. In 1998, four sports games were among the top 30 console games sold. On the PC side, the number of sports titles on the list was zilch.

This discrepancy can be chalked up to one primary dynamic: human interaction. You could play NHL HOCKEY on the Sega Genesis for hours at a time because, in most cases, you were playing against a friend. This type of social dynamic is hard to find on the PC. "With console games, you and your friends can gather in the living room," says Marsh Gardiner. "It's been hard enough to connect two controllers to a PC, and Internet bandwidth just isn't there yet."

But the bandwidth will get there, probably in the next five years. In John Vifian's mind, "Online play is a given. The next step is a community on the Net that is all about the gaming experience, including stats, stories, and match-making."

Does this mean you'll eventually play in 22-player football games that let you play as a lineman? Probably not. "It would be extremely challenging to make the parts of the game that don't involve the ball fun," Gardiner argues.

But, assuming that bandwidth gets there, multiplayer games that featured human-controlled receivers, quarterbacks, and running backs could work. If the team approach works for games like TRIBES and TEAM FORTRESS, why not MADDEN?

Whenever the next great game arrives, you can be sure that excellent gameplay will be at its core. "The perfect game would still have to [illegible] frame-dropping graphics, accessibility, and depth of play," Vifian reminded me. "And that alone is no small order." CGW

Hitting Logic

The *CGW* baseball season has resulted in more excuse-making and abuses of logic than a presidential campaign. The successful hitters among us argue that it's all skill, while the .220 hitters in our group argue that when Sammy Sosa grounds into a double play yet again, it's not their fault. But it begs a bigger question. How do baseball games calculate play results? Michael Roca, a HIGH HEAT 2000 programmer demystified his game's batting voodoo for us.

"In HIGH HEAT 2000, the results of a hit pitch can be boiled down to a few simple steps.

First, we measure whether a swing is going to make contact with the baseball. Since it wouldn't be fair to place the bat at very specific coordinates in space—this would make hitting way too hard—we use a zonal approach. It's almost like you're swinging a tennis racket through the zone you select. From here we determine three things. First, we check how good your timing was, which is based mostly on your reflexes. Second, we measure how good the contact is on the ball, which depends partially on your skills and partially on the pitcher's and batter's. Finally we measure how hard the ball is hit, which is almost solely based on the batter's statistical abilities.

Sammy Sosa in Red Sox garb? ...Yep

"Complicating matters a little bit, each pitcher has various ratings for certain pitches that will effect the kind of contact a batter is capable of making with each pitch he throws. It's almost as if a pitched ball has properties attached to it. So a Randy Johnson fastball is extremely hard to make good solid contact with. But, given its high velocity, if you do connect with one, you have a higher chance of hitting a homer.

"The bottom line is this," Roca finished up. "If you do everything right, and the pitch is hittable, you will probably get a hit. The only exception would be in cases when a Clemens faces a backup catcher."

CGW Baseball League

Quick results from the CGW HIGH HEAT 2000 baseball league: While holding off staff mutiny, George Jones' Boston Red Sox sat on top of the standings with a stunning .889 winning percentage. Fighting for second place in the AL East, each with records that would put them in the lead in the AL Central, were Robert Coffey's Yankees and Steve Wanczyk's Baltimore Orioles. The AL central, otherwise known as the Homerun Derby, featured a tight race going into the mid-summer months of the season, with Jeff Green's White Sox, Dave Salvator's Indians, and Tom Price's Tigers all within a single game in the standings. The most stunning event of the still young season: Steve's Orioles lost Ken Griffey, Jr. for 30 days. Wow, rough luck, Steve. We feel for you, big guy.

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INSIDE
STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

Stop Making Sense...

Simple goals. Simple means. Complex options. These are the building blocks of successful strategy games. If the game looks good and offers something new, that's even better. But the fact is, if gamers have to bend over backward to understand a game because it's loaded with too many "features" or is just flat-out obscure, then, with few exceptions, the game loses out in the marketplace. Even if it rocks.

...And You Start Losing Gamers

Reinventing the Wheel

No matter how steep the learning curve, if there aren't hand-holds along the way, the game is going to lose players as they skid helplessly down that curve. Even a legendary designer like Sid Meier can fall victim to this—just take a look at ALPHA CENTAURI.

As deep and challenging as CIVILIZATION II, ALPHA CENTAURI is an intimidating package, even though it successfully alleviates much of the micromanagement of its unofficial predecessor. A huge part of CIV's appeal is how incredibly accessible it is—pretty much any goon on the street can tell you what inventing the wheel is all about. But what the hell is nerve stapling? Or the Gaia Project? Profoundly nonintuitive, ALPHA CENTAURI forces gamers to tack the tech tree up on their walls while reading the manual with a Sidspeak-to-English dictionary.

Gaming shouldn't be work, and our own polls seem to bear that out. Since its February release, ALPHA CENTAURI hasn't even managed to crack the CGW Top 100 list, a list compiled from the input of the very core gamers targeted by the game. While it's too early to give sales figures a lot of weight, it's worth noting that ALPHA CENTAURI released strongly—hitting #2 in PC Data's sales chart for February—but then dropped sharply in its third month of release, barely exceeding those of the over-a-year-old STARCRAFT. Of equal interest is that the inferior CIV sequel, CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER appears on track to match ALPHA CENTAURI in number of units sold.

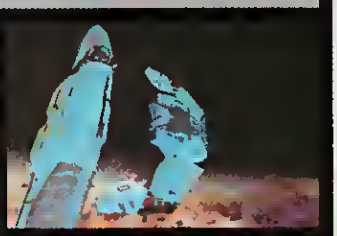
Focus!

Does this mean the gobbledygook that's part and parcel of science-fiction games prevents them from succeeding? Of course not—look at STARCRAFT. In STARCRAFT, mixed in with the Mutalisks, Dark Templars, and Corsairs, is the very straightforward concept of "Wipe out the other guy." While there are tons of strategic options and choices to be made in any STARCRAFT game, its tight conceptual focus is easily grasped and makes the game tremendously accessible in spite of the overwhelming alienness of the units. It's the same clear-cut gameplay design that keeps the fantasy trappings of the HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC series from crippling it—play for 10 minutes and you'll have a pretty good grasp of what needs to be done, if not the minutiae of gameplay.

Sadly, it seems that some developers seem intent on muddying their focus by obscuring their game with too many features that don't directly help gamers play the damn game. It's the Death-by-menu-buttons syndrome that whacked GANGSTERS and worries me about BRAVEHEART. Conversely, the slew of AI features promised in CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS has me excited simply because they offer a better way to play the game, a way that simply makes sense. CGW

HOMEWORLD BOUND

We got our hands on some beta builds of Sierra Studios/Relic's much-anticipated HOMEWORLD and took them for a multiplayer spin. The game is still gorgeous and creates a mood unlike any other game. And it emphasizes the kind of spatial thinking that Khan from *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* lacked. We have some concerns, though, as a lot of the game is spent on a far-out radar view, where your beautiful ships become mere dots on a 3D plane. Also, the multiplayer pace is on the slow side; we'd sit and construct our fleets for a long time, and then have to hunt opponents in the large 3D space arenas before ever seeing any action. We still have faith in Relic and in the single-player game, but as of now, multiplayer HOMEWORLD seems a bit plodding. Perhaps we just need to lay off the coffee.



Putting Time Into Real Time

It would seem that making time pass in a real-time strategy game would be a no-brainer: Time's going to pass while gamers play, so that should take care of it. But the actual mechanics of time in a real-time title are more complicated than that, since designers have to juggle little issues like game balance and playability.

Take DUNGEON KEEPER 2, for instance. Underneath the continuous stream of onscreen activity is a counter-based system chugging along, allowing the designers to ensure that things happen at an appropriate pace.

Certain game events are set to occur after so many "ticks" of this internal clock. This approach also allows the game to determine unit abilities (100 ticks to research a new spell for a first-level warlock, just 50 ticks at fifth level), how deep into a mission you must go before enemies begin breaching your dungeon, and more.

Along with giving the designers more flexibility in game design and balance, the big payoff is for the gamer: by not using the CPU's internal clock to keep time, gamers with slow machines will still have appropriately paced games.

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INSIDE

SIMULATION & SPACE

by Gordon Berg

Playing Favorites

Our New Sim Guy Takes His Virgin Flight

Allow myself to introduce...uh, myself. I'm Gordon Berg and I'll be taking over the flight sim column here at *CGW*. It won't be easy following the likes of my predecessor, Denny Atkin. After all, I'm a huge fan of his and know what a wonderful job he has done. So why me? Well, I got my start covering flight sim newsgroups on the Internet for Gamepen.com ("Flight Sim Therapy"), and here at *CGW* there must be a minimum quota of writers with beards at all times. To help you get to know me a little better, the editors at *CGW* thought my first article should be about my favorite sims. So, without further ado...

RED BARON: Ah, the sim that started it all for me. In fact, Dynamix's RED BARON (1990) was why I bought my very first computer, a 486/33. The graphics at the time were amazing, the missions were truly random, and the flight models were realistic enough so that tactics mattered. There was also the discovery of multiplayer RED BARON on The Sierra/Imagination Network. My life has not been the same since.

Trivia note: RED BARON creator Damon Slye took a sabbatical of sorts after ACES OVER EUROPE. He finished school, attained his pilot's license, and gained an expert rating in chess. He currently has plans to come back this Fall and start work on a new game (make it a flight-sim, Damon).

WARBIRDS: Bar none the best multiplayer dogfighting on the Internet today, this sim is where I often spend my free time. None of the recent retail WWII sims on the market hold a candle to WARBIRDS when it comes to flight modeling. Put 250+ players in the Main Arena with great lag code and consistent updates, and you have one hell of a good time. Although not perfect (drag at low speed is way too forgiving and don't even get me started on proper six views), WARBIRDS is premium value for your entertainment dollar.

Did you know: Offline AI has been introduced with the latest version (v2.7) of WARBIRDS. Now you can simulate the chaos of the Main Arena for free!

LONGBOW 2: I never got to experience the joy of the original Longbow or the critically acclaimed FLASH POINT KOREA add-on—my computer back then simply refused to run it. By the time I had a system up to the task, LONGBOW 2 had arrived and opened up a whole other world for me. It had nice tutorials, was accessible to both beginner and expert alike, and offered a dynamic campaign that allowed for cooperative multiplay, a feat accomplished by few sims since.

Easter Egg: Type iwannasee during the end credits and see some interesting "comments."

RED BARON 3D: Hang on, didn't I already mention an earlier RED BARON product? Isn't that cheating? Maybe, yet I'm still flying RB3D to this day, not the original one. Yes, the AI is barely adequate and the flight models found in the final patch are questionable, but God help me, I love this sim. The campaigns are varied and fun, the dogfights are tense, and RB3D does a great job at conveying a "you are there" feeling. Better still are the endless user hacks that continually breathe new life into this aging product.

About those hacks: Denny mentioned how you can change the graphics in the August *CGW*, but there's more. Check out Sygrod's page at home.golden.net/~ksharman/rb/Main.html.

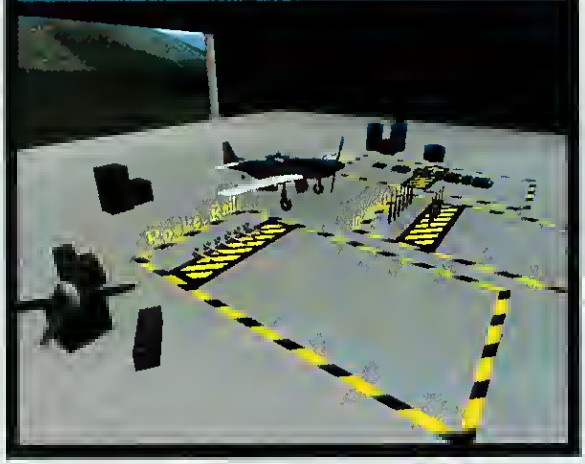
Now, I realize at this point that some of you are asking, "Where are the jets?" I'm not saying I'm not a fan of modern air combat, I'm just not listing any in my top picks. I love the idea of FALCON 4 and hope it one day truly becomes all that it can be. I found JANE'S F-15 a bit too realistic for my taste (missions were a little long), but I loved its atmosphere and flight model. I'm also eagerly looking forward to the upcoming JANE'S A-10.

Nonetheless, I'll admit that shooting at my opponent with guns instead of missiles is what excites me most; not because I abhor modern weapons, but because I enjoy the thrill of earning that spot behind their six. CGW

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

On the Radar: ACES HIGH

ACES HIGH, the new WWII online simulator from WARBIRDS creator Dale "HiTech" Addink, should be in open beta by the time you read this. This time around Addink is insisting on no distractions (can you say RAIDER WARS?), and has committed the next three years towards bringing more of a "real world" experience to the flight sim enthusiast. Says Addink, "It's the development of the little nuances that will make big differences between ACES HIGH and other games." ACES HIGH plans to incorporate more user interfaces within a 3D environment; a new communication scheme; greater scalability; and fewer game limitations than those found in previous efforts. Point your browser to www.hitechcreations.com to check it out.



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'QUAKE III- ARENA' One of the 1st games created as multiplayer only. Improved network play, new graphics (true curved surfaces, dynamic shadows, volumetric fog). Weapons include: Mace, SuperShotgun, Grenade/Rocket Launcher, Flame Thrower, Machine/Plasma/Lightning Gun, & more. Many new levels & classes with support for dozens of players at one time.

Activision (Action)
Release: 11/99
PC CD
$48.99

'DRAKEN: ORDER OF THE FLAME' Aerial & ground-based gameplay in a beautiful 3D world. As Rynn, a warrior-heroine with an attitude & quick sword arm you team up with Arokh, a powerful dragon. Played in 3rd person perspective, Drakan combines hand-to-hand combat with over 50 weapons & unique flight engine to battle other dragons. Six dragon attacks & 7 spells round out your arsenal.

Psygnosis (Action)
Release: 9/99
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$39.99

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Eidos (Action)
Release: 12/99
PC CD
$38.99

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Psygnosis (Simulation)
Release: 10/99
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Nintendo (Adventure)
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N64
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Squaresoft (Roleplaying)
Release: 9/99
PSX
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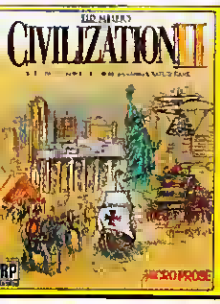

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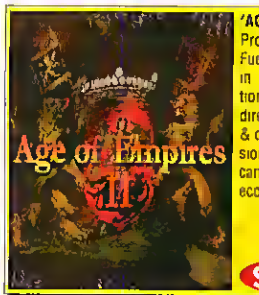

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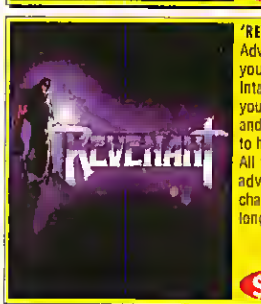

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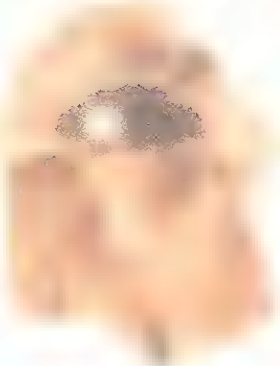

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by Jeff Green

I Got The Scoop!

My World Exclusive Preview of the Greatest Game of All Time

It's not often in life that you get a chance to knock on the door of genius. But that's what was going to happen to me, quite literally, when—with a mixture of pride, trepidation, and a sweaty back—I traveled to the home of legendary game designer Sid Meier for my exclusive hands-on world-premiere scoop of the new CIVILIZATION game. Unfortunately, as it turns out, I wrote the address down incorrectly, and when I knocked on the door of what I thought was Sid's house—located under a freeway, with a dismembered tractor on the front lawn—a very scary-looking man in a blood-stained undershirt pointed his shotgun and Rottweiler at me and asked me to get off his property.

Undeterred by this minor setback, I returned home and began working on Plan B. This, unfortunately, never materialized.

Plan C, however, was a doozy, and would almost undoubtedly have reaped a slew of international journalism awards and fawning nekkid female groupies; but in another frustrating setback, I was unable to convince the rather uptight (I must say) Powers That Be around here that breaking into the Firaxis office and stealing all their equipment was the right thing to do.

In any case, it's now 3:00 a.m., the story is due tomorrow morning, and I still have nothing. Our new managing editor, Chris Lombardi, kind of scares me. What if he hits me? I could sue, of course, but would it be worth the pain? I don't went to find out. No, I must simply turn in a CIVILIZATION scoop—no matter the cost.

And so, dear reader, I present you with Plan D.

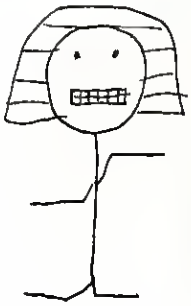
• • •

The next game in the legendary, award-winning CIVILIZATION series, as I envision it, is going to be the best one yet. Though it's hard to guess exactly what they have in mind, I think it's safe to say that the new game will remain faithful to the franchise, while branching out in bold new directions.

To appeal to many different kinds of gamers, it will probably incorporate a number of exciting new modes. The ability to switch from the standard isometric perspective to a fully 3D first-person perspective will be key, of course. Now, not only will you have the ability to build civilizations, but you'll be able to actually walk around and *live* in them as well. Running out of food at your granary? Well, now you can switch to first-person mode, pick up a fully interactive wheelbarrow, and grab yourself some hearty grain!

First-person mode will be even more meaningful in light of some of the game's new units and buildings. The brothel, for example, key to any successful civilization, will be a fully functioning environment made even more realistic by the expected support for Thrustmaster's unannounced (another scoop!) teledildonics peripheral.

As far as new units go, you can definitely expect to see some. Shown on this page, in a world-premiere exclusive scan, is a stick figure sketch of the Egyptian Guy, which I drew based on my concept of what the unit, if I could convince Sid to include it in the game, might look like. Other cool units are no doubt in the planning stages.



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Although the single-player game will be as robust as ever, the expected massively multiplayer component is, of course, the feature that many gamers are anticipating the most. Imagine logging into an online CIV game and being part of a functioning civilization, a single unit, without the pressure of doing it all yourself. As your civilization evolves, so will you. Thus, a food gatherer in the Stone Age becomes a serf in the Feudal Age, an indentured servant in Colonial times, and finally, a cubicle worker in the Modern Era, complete with unfiltered air and flickering, cancer-inducing fluorescent lighting. Now, you'll be able to sit in your office at your real job, and play your online job while ignoring your real job. Maybe you'll even be able to get your online "boss" to yell at you too! Just kidding!

Our new managing editor, Chris Lombardi, kind of scares me...No, I must simply turn in a CIVILIZATION scoop – no matter the cost.

Of course, all this gaming goodness will come at a price. The expected minimum system is a Pentium 500 with the as-yet-announced Voodoo 4 chip with 300MB RAM, though the company is likely to announce that it will be possible to play it on a 286 machine in DOS.

As you can see, the new CIVILIZATION game is already shaping up to be one of the monster gaming hits of the next year. I'll be keeping you up-to-date on this project as it develops, including some hands-on exclusive beta-testing, assuming I still have a job.

I am literally foaming at the mouth in anticipation!

What Jeff doesn't realize is that interactive brothels go all the way back to 1985's SIMGONORRHEA. Give him the clap at jeff_green@zd.com.

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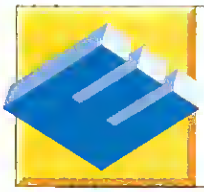

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