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Slave Zero
Giant robots are cool. We know that, you know that—heck, even your mom probably knows that. That's why we set our sights this month on Accolade's upcoming SLAVE ZERO, a thrilling, action-packed giant robot game unlike any you've seen before. CGW takes a hands-on exclusive first look at what promises to be one of the most memorable action games of 1999.

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Let's Get Physical

Reality Versus Fun: The Debate Continues

What could possibly be more satisfying than performing that perfect Immelmann and shooting down an expert enemy pilot who had just been sneaking in on your tail for the kill? Well, for many gamers, it would be knowing that they had stretched the endurance of their plane to the max, performing a difficult, barely possible maneuver within the limits of real life. What could be sweeter than cruising past the finish line in the Monaco Grand Prix? For some of us, it's knowing that our superior attention to detail in tire compounds and aerodynamic set-up had made our win possible. What could be more exciting than fanning your opponent for the last out of a hard-fought World Series? To many gamers, it's knowing that they had read the split-statistics correctly and smartly gone against the standard percentage call.

Let's face it. In many genres, it is more satisfying to win if you've been able to use logic and knowledge gleaned from your experience in the real world to gain the winning edge. It feels better to win when it looks right, feels right, and acts right from a real-world perspective. We want to feel like our prowess on the computerized fields of battle is reflective of our cleverness, our experience, or our

calculate the exact speed and arc of a chandelier for your hero to swing from, but if the calculations for the physical model of the chandelier hit the CPU like an unchivalrous kick to your hero's groin, you'll never win the design duel. Frankly, I love it when a game adds new elements of realism to the mix. I loved the rippling cloth demo (okay, so I have a low threshold of excitement). However, I feel I have to say, on behalf of gamers everywhere, that there needs to be a corrective. Game designers and publishers shouldn't get so excited about physics that they forget about gameplay. If you're going to invest so much effort in creating a physical world, make sure it's

It's not going to be fun if the action seems viewed through a strobe light.

I game such as GRIM FANDANGO, we don't care that directional signs don't really spin like weather vanes in order to help us out of a forest maze. We fully expect strange experiences in an imaginary land of the dead (no letters from those of you who have undergone near-death experiences, please). In most first-person shooters, we don't want realistic weapons. Sure, you can put a .357 Magnum with a perfect ballistics model in the

important to all of us will be the scenario design and opponent AI. Adding physics to a game is great, but physical properties alone will not make a good game. You can perfectly model the materials, weight, and density for the beer stein that your hero is about to throw at the Cardinal's guard, but it's no fun if the action seems as if it's viewed through a strobe light after he launches the stein from his hand. You can systematically

accessible, interesting, and balanced once we enter that world. Get some real play-testers to check out that world and shake it down. See how your abstractions work against real gamers' assumptions. If you're aiming at reality, invest more time in getting feedback from real gamers. Let's hope the move toward more physics and realism doesn't circumvent the age-old quest for playability. The game is still the thing.

TRESPASSER

The game would be great if you could get under these crates and move them, just the way Roger Gonzalez showed us on his Web site (http://dpsault.com/brwse/e?folder=rg/games/trespasser). Unfortunately, the physics don't hold up. Here, we try to crouch below one of the crates and lift it up. Oops! No luck! Rather than thinking outside the box, we're existing inside: We are one with the box.

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A decade ago, EA Sports jumped started the 16-bit console market with its tremendous sports line. This is not legend, but fact: Just ask anyone who remained addicted for years to the easily playable, frantically paced, and incredibly fun *MADDEN FOOTBALL* for the SEGA Genesis. EA followed this success with domination of the PlayStation sports market, and after a few early setbacks, it looks as if it could do the same in the PC market (if you don't believe me, check out the Premier finalists for Sports Game of the Year in this issue’s READ ME).

For all of you who are whining about the relative lack of balance and variety in the PC sports market, here's a free membership to the Michael Jordan's Dominance is Bad for the NBA club (redeemable only at the joint whim of His Ainess and commissioner David Stern—not valid in Hawaii and Montana; some restrictions may apply). Face it: Fans love an unstoppable force—with the exception of tennis' Pete Sampras—and EA is as close as we have to the Denver Broncos in all of PC sports.

**Coach of the Year?**

Because EA is so good at piling up winning seasons in franchises such as NBA LIVE and FIFA, the company doesn't get credit for all of the obscure sports for which it produces games. Of course, some of these, like RUGBY, are so remarkably ill-conceived and poorly executed that it's little wonder EA Sports conveniently fails to market them worldwide. On the other hand, EA's CRICKET 97 is one of those surprisingly charming experiences that can bring a smile to even the most jaded of computer-gaming journalists.

So, now that I've bragged on EA for several paragraphs—no doubt, executives will be checking underneath my desk at CGW for the alien pod—it's time to assume my other sports persona. Like any spoiled fan who expects his team to win the Super Bowl every year by three touchdowns, it is my sacred duty (especially since I dissed the NBA earlier in this article) to make unreasonable demands of EA Sports.

Yes, I know that Ric Neal and his team are a lock to win the Comeback of the Year Award for the best *MADDEN FOOTBALL* in years. And, yes, I'll admit that FIFA '99 is the best PC sports game I've played since Sierra's *FRONT PAGE FOOTBALL* PRO was in its prime (somewhere around the time that the Daytona 500 was still a real race). But, doggone it, I—and other PC sports fans—have a right to expect even more from folks as talented as those at EA. Surely, one of the three soccer games that EA Sports released in a 10-month period could have given way to a groundbreaking tennis game. If Andre Agassi is too busy emulating Jackson Pollock, throwing paint around in all those camera commercials, surely Jimmy Connors, John McEnroe, and Bjorn Borg still have enough marketing life left to hit a few cyber-smashes. Hell, you could toss in Rod Laver, John Newcombe, and the ghost of Big Bill Tilden for a lot less money than it takes to license the NBA or NFL. Earlier this year, the industry was all abuzz about *GAME, NET AND MATCH*—a title which nearly matched the gameplay of 1991's *PRO TENNIS TOUR* on the Amiga. Stop the fun. Please.

**Wishful Thinking**

I'm sure that pro basketball fans are consoling themselves during the real-world lockout by running endless seasons of NBA LIVE 99. But that's no excuse for not giving us a good college hoops game, EA, especially since you've had the best one for years on consoles. How much longer am I supposed to keep Haffner's *COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL* on my laptop?

How much **longer** am I supposed to keep Haffner's *COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL*—a text-based sim that had its last major upgrade (to color) in 1994—on my laptop? Then again, this would give me a reason to keep that old 486 I'm currently using as a doorstop....

Don't let me get you wrong, guys. I can't wait for *KNOCKOUT KINGS*, or *FOES OF AU*, or *THRILLA IN MANILA II*, or whatever it's called this month. I just hope that *NBA LIVE 2001* and *Rocky VII* don't beat it to the punch.
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CGW Is Bigger

Congratulations on making this magazine the best in the United States today. I have been reading your magazine for years and it has changed a lot. First it has grown in size. I mean look at these reviews and reviews sections. They’re huge! You beat PC Gamer in contest in size. Second, you now look at the late-breaking news, not just past news and future news but now in the far beyond. You also have good strategies in “Gamer’s Edge.” Anyway, your magazine is the greatest, and I have just renewed my subscription again for the fourth time. I will continue my subscription forever or till you are gone in some lawsuit or something.

Wayne Yee
Via the Internet

Sound Off

If there was ever an award for best soundtrack in a computer game, it should go to Half-Life. I had FlexiCD installed and the music plays from the CD-ROM after the computer reboots. I think the music is the best that was ever composed in a computer game, echoing its dark, sinister, and terrifying background.

Mickey Yong
Singapore

Who cares what you think? Just kidding. Actually, we often give a special award for music in our annual Game of the Year awards, and the honor may indeed go to your favorite game. Tune in next month for our annual Best and Worst Awards issue.

Bogus System Requirements

I recently purchased Sierra’s Grand Prix Legends, after reading your review and on my previous experiences with their software (IndyCar Racing, NASCAR Racing, etc.). Now I admit that my PC is not the “state of the art,” it is merely a Pentium Pro II 233 with 32MB RAM and a Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 Pro with 4MB. However, the review and the package state that a Pentium 166 is the minimum system.

I wonder what “minimum” means? With all the details in the software turned off, the

Jurassic Barf

I just wanted to say that it shows again why you’re #1 in my book. Ever since the first previews I had TRASHPASER: JURASSIC PARK on my “must-have” list. When I finally saw it released last week, I turned the box for probably five minutes and what I saw didn’t feel right. Luckily in the same store I spotted RAILROAD TYCOON II and decided one “must-have” is enough for one day.

Yesterday I got your January 1999 issue with the 1-star rating of the final TJP version. Thanks for saving my butt (again) and showing continued integrity! Life’s too short to play crummy games.

Martin Mathis
Phoenix, AZ
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PGL Player Trading Cards
562 Mission Street, 5th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105

Make check or money order payable to:
Total Entertainment Network
Rage 3D Rage

In your February article ("Stronger, Faster, Better") on building "The Power Rig" and "The Lean Machine" you suggested using a Diamond MX300 and a ThrustMaster Rage 3D controller on the Power Rig. When I upgraded my system with the MX300 sound card I found my Rage 3D incompatible. Were you just picking parts out of a catalog or did you actually build this and test it? If you did build this system how did you get it to work?

Scott Conaway
Via the Internet

Loyd Case replies:

After much wailing and gnashing of teeth, I did finally get the Rage 3D game padded working. I had to delete the gameport device several times, reinstall the drivers and perform a few hacks. Even then, the system sometimes refuses to recognize the pad and only a reboot fixes it. To be honest, I'm not sure I could replicate the steps to make it work. Oddly, the Attack Thrrottle, which also uses ThrustMaster's Direct Connect technology, seems to work fine.

So far the new Power Rig, I'm using the Microsoft Freestyle Pro, which works quite well. But if you really like the Rage 3D, ThrustMaster has just started shipping the USB model, which should work great in any Windows 98 system with USB ports.

Better Simming

Bravo to Denny Atkin for his column, "Campaign Promises" (February, 1999). As an avid flight sim pilot, I can not agree more with all of his comments and suggestions for creating more enjoyable campaigns. The best part? All of his suggestions are do-able now. No fancy, brand-new technology needed, just a new breed of programmers and campaign designers who are not so hell-bent on physics realism and 3D effects. I couldn't care less whether I can see the reflection of my knee in the canopy, if only something unexpected would happen in the mission.

Campaign missions seem to be designed by ex-Dungeon & Dragons players. Having to find the one-and-only way to "beat the level" is for Nintendo & Dragons players. Allowing the pilot to fly the mission, and either succeed, or fail and suffer the consequences, and move on.

Bob "Hedgehog" Sabaste
Hammerheads Squadron
Via the Internet

Your lament is unfortunately a familiar one. GPL is merely the latest game to under-report system requirements. We apologize for not warning you, but we don't have the resources necessary to test each game's requirements, and different people have different levels of tolerance anyways.

We can offer some advice. Part of the reason for the slow frame-rate on your system is that your video card is not supported by most 3D games. (Just because a video card has the word "3D" in it doesn't mean it's a true 3D card.) GPL would run faster and look better on your system if you had a 3D card supported by the game. The game supports 3Dfx (Voodoo) or Rendition-based (Vrnet) 3D accelerators. In this case we'd recommend a Voodoo card because it is supported by more games than Rendition and has more RAM to speed things along.

Douglas Peck
Via the Internet
Blood was the gift.
Life eternal the promise.

But every gift comes with a price.
## ON THE CG-ROM

### Return to Krondor And Shoot Aliens

**March CD Titles**

Get the CG-ROM
CGW has a new, lower price CD-ROM subscription! It’s only $29.97 a year for 12 issues with 12 CDs. To subscribe to the CD-ROM version of the magazine, call (303) 665-8900 or send in one of these annoying cards that fall on the floor. If you already subscribe, you have to wait until your current sub expires before receiving the CD version. We're not sure why, except to say that it appears technology hasn't quite permeated mailing houses yet. If you have an address change or complaint about your sub, email cgw@neodata.com. Good luck, good reading, and play on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCT NAME/ GENRE</th>
<th>EXECUTABLE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: MARINE DEMO</strong></td>
<td><code>lwpsetup.exe</code></td>
<td>Play as a Marine against the Aliens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESCENT 3</strong></td>
<td><code>descent3\descent 3 demo.exe</code></td>
<td>Play through a massive level in the newest Descent game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GAMEGUIDE</strong></td>
<td><code>gameguide</code></td>
<td>A few sample guides from GameSpot's GameGuides.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RETURN TO KRONDOR</strong></td>
<td><code>rktsetup.exe</code></td>
<td>Exclusive demo lets you play the first chapter of this epic RPG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROGUE SQUADRON</strong></td>
<td><code>rogue squadron\roguedemo.exe</code></td>
<td>Play the first level (Tatooine) of this Shadows of the Empire-style arcade game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SLAVE ZERO</strong></td>
<td><code>slavezero\slavezero. avi</code></td>
<td>An AVI video preview to complement the cover story. Look for a full playable demo next month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEN</strong></td>
<td><code>tenissetup.exe</code></td>
<td>Front-end for TEN, where you can play a variety of multiplayer games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEST DRIVE: OFF-ROAD 2</strong></td>
<td><code>ytdor2\tdor23\offroaddemo.exe</code></td>
<td>Race down Santa Cruz in a Hummer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE AXE</strong></td>
<td><code>theaxelin\axelinстал\exe</code></td>
<td>With three instruments, make your own little tunes and ditties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THUNDER BRIGADE</strong></td>
<td><code>thunder brigade\setup.exe</code></td>
<td>Play three scenarios and some Instant Action from this hovertank action game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOMB RAIDER III</strong></td>
<td><code>tombraider\tr3\india</code></td>
<td>Run and jump through a portion of India in Lara's newest game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAKE SURE THEY NEVER FINISH IT.

COMING SOON FROM LUCASARTS.

© Lucasfilm Ltd. & ™. All rights reserved. Used under authorization.
Technically, it's still a

It's a simulator of unparalleled realism, graphics, and intensity. You can control everything in the F-16. Every button, every switch, every aspect of flying the real thing. Falcon 4.0 uses the most realistic flight model, avionics, and weapons systems available in any flight sim. Plus a real-time war campaign, multi-user play featuring online dogfighting, and an Instant Action mode with a simplified flight model.

There's combat. Lots of it. Falcon 4.0 is the only flight simulation with a completely real-time campaign. Just like war, this campaign carries on while you plot your next move. It's multi-player compatible, so your pals might be dogfighting MIG 29's while you're bombing a nuclear power plant.

Dogfight action will give you even more combat, man to man. You can duke it out in the skies one on one, or with multiple pilots over the internet. And if you don't have any pals to paint the skies of cyberspace with, Falcon 4.0 will line you up with plenty of AI pilots.

Even if you're new to flight sims, you can jump into battle with Instant Action gameplay. Using a simplified flight model, you'll have unlimited ammo, fuel and enemies. No briefings, no missions to plan. Just action.
Is it experience you need? Falcon 4.0's Tactical Engagement is the most extensive mission builder and training system in this corner of the solar system. You'll have dozens of training missions to hone your skills in all aspects of flight. If that's not enough, you can create your own missions with the aid of the Falcon 4.0's mission editor. The ultimate computer aviation experience awaits you.

FALCON 4.0
The challenge awaits.

Go to www.falcon4.com for more information.

www.falcon4.com
www.microprose.com
Available on Windows 95/98/CD-ROM. Visit your local retailer or call 1-800-355-2345, anytime (U.S. and Canada).

alt 19832 computer game.
Games of the Year

Announcing the 1999 CGW Premier Award Nominees

At the turn of the new year, CGW's editors gather in our secret star chamber to declare the best games of the previous year. As you'd expect from a group of seasoned, contemplative gaming professionals, the experience is a smooth one. Game merits are discussed, names are called, tastes are criticized, looks are made fun of, fists are exchanged, pizza files, and Wargames editor Terry Coleman pile-drives the first editor to make a joke about first-person Civil War shooters. This year featured one of the more impressive lists of games in recent history, which made the process smoother—nobody was hospitalized, and Managing Editor Joe Vellina should have his back brace removed any day now. (Ed. Note—You should see the other guy.)

The nominees for each major category follow. The winners will be announced in the April CGW, but ZDTV viewers will be able to see coverage from the official awards ceremony on GameSpot TV. (First showing on Saturday, March 6, 1999 at 7:30 a.m. EST. See your cable guide for other airings.)

Action
Battlezone Activision
Half-Life Sierra Studios
Heretic 2 Activision
Rainbow Six Red Storm
Thief: The Dark Project Looking Glass/Eidos

Strategy
Populous: The Beginning Bullfrog/EA
Railroad Tycoon II PopTop/G.O.D.
Starcraft Blizzard
Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate SSI

Wargames
Aide De Camp 2 Harris Simulations
Great Battles of Julius Caesar Eidos/Interactive Magic

Operational Art of War TalonSoft
West Front TalonSoft

Hardware
Monster Sound MX300 Diamond
Mouseman+ Mouse Logitech
Sidewinder Force Feedback
Steering Wheel Microsoft
Xterminator Gamepad Gaviss
YST-M28s Speakers Yamaha

Add-on
Age of Empires: Rise of Rome Ensemble/Microsoft
Diable: Hellfire Sierra
StarCraft: Brood War Blizzard
Total Annihilation: Core Contingency Cavedog

Be sure to see next month's CGW for the Premier Award winners! The April issue goes on sale March 2.

Hot Tunes from Rio

Okay, you can't play games on it, unless you're a huge fan of "Name that Tune." But Diamond's Rio is by far one of the coolest pieces of entertainment hardware to come down the pipe since the invention of the joystick. The Rio MP3300 (for Portable Music Player) is a pager-sized gadget which plays back MP3 (MP3G Layer 3) music files. MP3 is a digital format that compresses songs to a fraction of the size of their original CD or WAV formats, with very little loss of quality. Its sound is a little less crisp than that of a Sony CD Discman, but dramatically better than that of a cassette Walkman. And because the Rio has no moving parts (other than its control buttons), it's perfect for heavy activities where a CD player might skip.

Its 32MB of RAM can hold about half an hour of music, and you can add additional 16MB or 32MB cards. A pass-through cable attaches to your PC's parallel port and lets you send the Rio MP3 files from the Internet or your CDs. The one downside to this otherwise superb $199 device is that it includes shareware CD ripper software which must be registered after you've converted 50 songs, so plan on spending another $30.

Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of Rio, though, is that it's likely to piss off the Recording Industry Association of America, which unsuccessfully attempted to keep the device from store shelves. DENNY ATKIN
Activision Sinks Its Teeth Into **Vampire: The Masquerade**

Activision is working on a game of gothic bloodlust based on the popular *Vampire* role-playing games from White Wolf Publishing. *VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* will be an action/role-playing game based on an original script chronicling 800 years in the life of a medieval vampire. CGW got an exclusive early look at the game, which looks so amazingly cool we’ve decided to bring you a full in-depth preview next month.

The game tells the story of Christof Romuald, a knight in 12th Century Prague who is embraced into the Brujah Clan of vampires. You’ll follow Christof’s assimilation into the World of Darkness starting in Prague and Vienna, and advancing to scenes in modern London and New York. In addition to controlling Christof, players will be able to control a party of up to four vampire characters who join him during the game.

From what we know of the story, Christof and his allies are caught up in the wars between different clans and must stop an evil Vampire Lord who intends to dominate the world. Players will defend themselves using a variety of weapons, including swords and shields in medieval times and automatic weapons in modern times. Players will also get to experiment with vampiric disciplines, which will give them spell-like effects.

The game boasts a new engine, called the Nod Engine, which was created by Nihilistic. The Nod Engine is fully 3D, and will support D3D, Glide, and OpenGL. Level design is done with existing QUAKE Level design tools. Activision claims the engine is the most advanced engine ever used to build an RPG. It supports 3D soft-skinned skeletal models, specular lighting and volumetric fog to enhance the atmosphere, and exquisite graphic detail in both 3D models and 2D textures.

---

**Playing Lately**

**CGW Survey** Here's what our readers are blowing the most time on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game Title</th>
<th>Last Month</th>
<th>Months on Chart</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. StarCraft (Blizzard/Maxent)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Might and Magic VI (3DO/New World)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fallout II (Interplay)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Half-Life (Sierra/Maxent)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Heroes II: Price of Loyalty (3DO/New World)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Curse of Monkey Island (LucasArts)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Need for Speed III (Electronic Arts)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. People's General (SSI/Mattel)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Rainbow 6 (Red Storm)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Final Fantasy VII (Squaresoft/Eidos)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on a monthly survey mailed to CGW subscribers.

This differs from the readers' overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100

**PC Data Best-sellers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game Title</th>
<th>Last Month</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Barbie Riding Club (Mattel)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Deer Hunter II (GT Interactive)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Barbie Photo Designer of Digital Camera (Mattel)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Barbie Nail Designer (Mattel)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Half-Life (Sierra/Maxent)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lego Island (Learning Company/Mattel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wheel of Fortune (Hasbro)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator (Microsoft)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Frogger (Hasbro)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The top-selling PC games as of December, calculated by PC Data (Reston, VA)*
Mars Reacts
Maxis Readies Two Fresh Game Ideas

Will Wright doesn’t build games the old-fashioned way. It’s not about winning or losing, violence or destruction. Wright’s software toys, such as SIMCITY, have been unconventional, but his games have nonetheless sold over seven million copies.

Wright looks to turn interactive entertainment on its ear once again with his new game, THE SIMS. The SIMS can be an interactive situation comedy, soap opera, or wide-open experiment in artificial life. Everything depends on whether you want to play open-ended or complete scenarios, which range from bringing couples together, acquiring possessions, or inviting the neighbors over to see your lampshade stunt. The SIMS offers several pre-coded families or lets you build a simulacron of your own family. Play is handled by monitoring the way emotional and physical needs are met in the course of the life of the artificial neighborhood.

Another new title in development at Maxis, SIMMARS, will at once be familiar and fresh to SIMCITY fans. The goal is to build a Mars colony with reduced- or nondependency upon Earth. Working closely with NASA to ascertain the realistic probabilities concerning space colonization, Maxis hopes to give SIMMARS more depth and accuracy than even the much-heralded SIMCITY series. The company has hired the talents of former Industrial Light & Magic artist Ron Cobb to create the concept art for the buildings and vehicles. Cobb was the conceptual designer for Alien and The Abyss, as well as conceptual artist for Total Recall, laser-technology specialist for Real Genius, time travel consultant on the Delorean for Back to the Future, and director of The Last Starfighter. He is renowned for conceptual vehicles and buildings where every aspect of the drawing has a realistic functionality. Cobb’s artistry adds a marvelous credibility to the look of the game and ensures that gamers will not experience another empty science-fiction experience like OUTPOST. SIMMARS seems clearly marked to be the best game to come out of Maxis since SIMCITY.

Johnny Wilson

Will Wright’s THE SIMS will allow gamers to set up their own Sim Soap Operas or Sim-Disasters.
It's a Falcon Miracle!
5 Years in the Making, FALCON 4.0 Finally Flies

When I walked over to my desk on December 11 and saw FALCON 4.0 sitting on my chair, I was tempted to jump over to www.weather.com and check the temperature in Hell. But I wasn't hallucinating, and it turns out the whole “FALCON 4.0 shipping is the Seventh Sign of the Apocalypse” thing was just a rumor. In fact, divine intervention may have come into play, because not only did the sim ship before Christmas, but it did so in a remarkably stable and playable condition. It’s far better than FALCON 3.0 was when it initially shipped, although we have uncovered a few bugs in the campaign, some of which have been patched already.

It will be next issue before we can provide the full review—after all, the sim ships with a 600-page manual, the first 200 of which are devoted to the 31-mission training sequence designed by F-16 pilot Pete Bonnani. Our initial impressions are very positive, although it will take a month or so to wring out every feature from this F-16 simulation.

Although this is by far the most elaborate jet sim I've played, it shouldn't intimidate new pilots or casual gamers. A wide selection of skill and AI levels let you tune the game from hard-core to arcade. You can also vary the realism in different portions of the sim; for instance, you can set the flight model to accurate, but use simplified radar targeting.

If there's a downside to this sim, it's that it takes some real hardware muscle to get the most out of it. You can turn down details and get it running smoothly on a P200 with a 3D card, but with everything cranked up, a Pentium II/400 can bog down accessing the drive in the campaign mode unless you have 128MB of RAM. Still, FALCON 3.0 sent many users scurrying to the store to upgrade to hot 386 PCs. With its impressive dynamic campaign, unprecedented system detail, scalable gameplay, and quality visuals, FALCON 4.0 should cause a spike in memory sales, and probably result in a few Pentium II upgrades as well.

Watch for our in-depth look next issue—if we graduate flight training by then.

DENNY ATKIN

SIMNEWS

Apache-Havoc Finished, Yet Not Finished
Net-savvy gamers will notice that APACHE-HAVOC, the combat-helicopter sim from Empire and Razorware, has been released in Europe. Don't be tempted to buy a gray-market copy to get the jump on your friends, however. The U.S. release, due in March, will have significant enhancements, including a more substantial campaign mode.

End of I-Magic Sim?

Interactive Magic recently laid off approximately 20 staffers from their North Carolina headquarters, including the principles of the iFA-18 CARRIER STRIKE FIGHTER development team. This, combined with the recent departure of top staffers from I-Magic Online, calls into question whether the company has abandoned the simulations market. It's unfortunate that this would happen, since the company nearly got it right with iFA-18. The design was sound, and the next patch promised to fix the major bugs. However, with most of the iFA-18 team gone, it appears that patch went out the window with them.

www.computergamingw.com • MARCH 1999
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FLANKER™ 2.0 straps you into a brand new carrier-based Su-33 for

Campaign mission module includes resource management, realistic enemy engagement and save now/play later mission save system.

Mission editor lets you create your own realistic theater of operation.
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**FLANKER™ 2.0** features stunning graphics and streamlined playability — without compromising the technical excellence of its famous predecessor! Using previously classified Russian satellite imagery and a new 3D graphics engine, this state-of-the-art combat sim provides photo-realistic terrain. Improved flight dynamics, a new 3D sound system, and accurate damage modeling create a true combat experience. Novice users will be delighted by the intuitive menu system. From the interactive training sessions to the ultra-realistic flight model, this premier combat flight sim is truly a rare Russian RUSH!

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Create your character from six AD&D® races and 26 different classes and subclasses. You control every attribute, down to skin and hair color, weapons, and armor - all accurately depicted on-screen.

Forgotten Realms

Baldur's Gate

Tales of the Sword Coast

COMING SOON

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Dying To Play Online

What's Going On With Online Gaming

If the Internet is the primordial soup of start-up ventures, online game companies are some of the first organisms that crawled onto the beach. Some of these creatures were too weak to survive, while others evolved trying to better their chances. It's still a young market and a bit early to declare winners, but we thought it was time to check up on the players.

One cautionary note: Subscriber numbers can only be obtained from their respective companies, and some of these companies were unwilling to release them. We were not able to independently verify usage numbers. Incidentally, the term "subscriber" is used rather liberally in the industry; for the purposes of this article, we'll refer to gamers who play the free stuff as "users" and call "subscribers" those who pay to play.

DWANGO Goes Down

DWANGO pioneered the concept of multiplayer pay-to-play. In 1994 DWANGO (Dial-Up Wide Area Network Game Operation) set up country-wide DOOM servers long before people had even heard of the word "cyberspace" much less make it the buzzword du jour. DWANGO allowed players to dial into their network and play the latest multiplayer games for a nominal monthly fee. But it wasn't long before gamers figured out how to play on the Internet for free, despite having to tolerate higher latency.

Even with a monthly charge of as low as $7.95 and a recent deal with Microsoft, DWANGO had to shut its doors late last year. Founder and CEO Robert "DWANGO Bob" summed it up simply by saying, "We built it, and they didn't come."

Engage too, while not officially "dead," is not the Engage we knew two years ago. "We got out of the Destination Site business," notes Scott Hartsman, VP at Engage, "and got into the Content Distribution business, which is a hell of a lot more lucrative."

Fighting For Life

The Total Entertainment Network (T.E.N.) could be the next casualty. In the last two years the company has failed to attract more than 35,000 paying customers at any given time. While T.E.N. claims that the total number of subscribers is in "the hundreds of thousands," many of those...

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Top Online Gaming Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Total # of Users</th>
<th>Total # of Active Users</th>
<th>Peak Simultaneous Users</th>
<th># of Games</th>
<th>Web Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Zone</td>
<td>3+ million</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>22,716</td>
<td>50</td>
<td><a href="http://www.zone.com">www.zone.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle.net</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
<td>1.2 million (last 90 days)</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><a href="http://www.battle.net">www.battle.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultima Online</td>
<td>200,000 units sold</td>
<td>100,000 paying</td>
<td>19,700</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><a href="http://www.owo.com">www.owo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOL</td>
<td>14 million</td>
<td>3 million visitors a month</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>36</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aol.com">www.aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN</td>
<td>100's of thousands</td>
<td>30,000 paying</td>
<td>5,100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ten.net">www.ten.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpath</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>105</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mplayer.com">www.mplayer.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sony Station</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><a href="http://www.station.sony.com">www.station.sony.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEAT.NET</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>80</td>
<td><a href="http://www.heat.net">www.heat.net</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Top Online Games

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Game Site</th>
<th>Simultaneous Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>StarCraft</td>
<td>Battle.net</td>
<td>22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultima Online</td>
<td><a href="http://www.owo.com">www.owo.com</a></td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diablo</td>
<td>Battle.net</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spades</td>
<td>The Zone</td>
<td>4,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Empires</td>
<td>The Zone</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Players visit the site to play free games, such as spades. Despite being an early, aggressive player, and absorbing more than $30 million in venture capital, T.E.N. has been on the selling block for more than six months, according to industry sources.

Both T.E.N. and Mplayer have changed their business plans drastically since they began. Both have created a large, free component to their lineup, including such mainstream titles as spades, which also happens to be both company's most popular titles. Mplayer has been successful in selling advertising, which now accounts for about one-third of the company's total revenue.

Notes Mplayer founder Brian Ager: "While I think pay-to-play Winter works, I think an advertising-supported model works the best with retail, shareware, and mass-market classic games." But even with an advertising-based model, T.E.N. and Mplayer have failed to generate the dollars or even the number of players that they'd hoped. Mplayer recently received an infusion of offshore venture capital, which along with the income generated from their technology licenses through the Mpath Foundation, should keep them afloat for a while longer.

The older and slightly more successful Kesmai's GameStorm takes a different tack. They focus on the "massively multiplayer" niche, and have seen the occasional profitable quarter for their efforts. Still, GameStorm's CEO Chris Holden thinks that the full potential of online gaming is years away. "I think it's very, very early in the building of this market," he says. "I think it'll be another three to five years before we really begin talking about mass-market numbers here." Holden also thinks that the optimistic predictions floated to the industry should be taken with a grain of salt. "You see projections right now where online gaming is going to be a billion dollars plus by 2001, and I just think that's a little aggressive."

Free of Fees

Considering that the online gaming services cater to a culture that expects free information via the Web, it's not surprising that the most popular services are those that don't charge anything to play. The free communities on T.E.N., Mplayer, Battle.net and Microsoft's Gaming Zone are far more popular. In fact, Blizzard brags that it's only online gaming operation that is profitable, relying strictly on banner advertising revenue. AOL too, while not usually considered a haven for gamers, is a major player, drawing three million users to its Games Channel a month.

While still not profitable, Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone has managed to register well over three million users to their site (where their most popular title is, surprise, spades). Numbers for their pay-to-play component, however, aren't nearly as good. And while they may technically have the advantage, far be it for Microsoft to sit on their competitive edge and wait for the others to catch up. They recently overhauled the site, which now offers gaming news, reviews and tips, as well as the option to purchase the latest games.

"We wanted to provide more for our users," noted Product Unit Manager, Adam Waalkes. "Kind of a one-stop shopping sort of environment." While not getting nearly as much press as TEN, Mplayer or The Zone, HE.A.NET has managed to accumulate over 600,000 users, and freely admits that 90 percent of those who visit stay within the free area. However, HE.A.NET spokesman Greg Chiemingo is quick to point out that "both TEN and Mplayer had a year head-start on us and have rumbled through a number of business models while we have remained dedicated to our core beliefs," namely a model based on advertising and e-commerce. "We are committed to offering our users fast free online gaming on the best action and strategy multi-player titles and are counting on advertising and sponsorship as our main revenue stream."

Money To Be Made

This is not to say that there isn't money to be made by actually charging players to play within an online gaming community, as the success of ULTIMA ONLINE has proven. With 200,000 copies sold (about 150,000 more than EA originally predicted) and 100,000 active, paying subscribers (at $9.95 a month), obviously Origin is doing something right. As GameStorm's CEO notes, "You are a large, persistent universe community that goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with or without you. It's something that you can charge for, and historically, people have shown a willingness to pay for this kind of experience."

It's this same belief that drives the pay-to-play portion of The Zone, which is attempting to offer massively multiplayer, online-only games as well, though they say that it's too early to expect profitability.

New Contestants

Meanwhile, new combatants have recently joined the fray: Sony has launched The Station at Sony.com, which now boasts over 2 million users, and Cavedog has introduced a Battle.net-style service called Boneyards (see our January story in Read.Me). Clearly, the promise of gold in online gaming hasn't lost its luster.

So who will be left standing when the dust settles? It's still too early to tell, but obviously you should never bet against Microsoft. And Blizzard and UO have also proven that you can make money by offering premium games you can't play anywhere else.

One day the survivors of this battle will reap big rewards, but the biggest winner will probably be the one who, as EA's Ring Gordon predicted, is "the first to lose a billion dollars." —Shane Moonen

It'll be another three to five years before we begin talking about mass-market numbers [in online gaming]." —Chris Holden, GameStorm
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The AI engine is so sophisticated that it allows you to recycle the experience of your field units into bigger, better and even more fierce war machines. Over time, combat units become more accurate, command units command larger groups of troops and repair units repair faster and more efficiently.

FULL 3D BATTLEFIELDS
Warzone 2100 slams the door on other top-down 2D strategy games. It showcases a lightning fast, fully functional 3D game engine with a rotatable and zoomable camera for fast and furious gaming action. Not just eye candy, you'll experience true line-of-sight and fog-of-war effects. Strategically placed radar units warn you of hidden enemy units and allow you to lob mortar shells over mountain obstructions.

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STRATEGY BY DESIGN

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Teen

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Interstate '82
New Wave Hot Wheels With Guns

by Robert Coffey

For every gamer whose road-rage—fueled brain has just about popped, Scanners-style, after some inbred half-wit in a battered pickup with Playboy mud flaps and wheel wells slaked with road-kill splash has swooped through the breakdown lane to cut them off, take a deep breath and repeat after me: INTERSTATE '82, INTERSTATE '82, INTERSTATE '82.... Slated for a late 1999 release, Activision's sequel to INTERSTATE '76 might provide just enough fast-paced vehicular combat to prevent you from flooding the accelerator and plowing through that rusty heap until you punch out that Yahoo's gap-toothed grin with the sparkling chrome of your front grille.

This Year's Model

The first thing you should know is that the design team has totally overhauled the game, retaining the vehicular focus of gameplay while drastically changing it. This is apparent the second you get behind the wheel. Gone is the instrumentation tracking the condition of your ride's various systems. In its place is a health bar reflecting the status of your total hit points, a health bar that is similarly displayed over targeted enemies. For gamers who loved 1'-76's challenge of coping with failing weapons or handling an increasingly damaged and unresponsive car, 1'-82 may not be the ride they're hoping for.

As disappointing as this may be to fans of the first game, the designers feel strongly that moving to more stripped-down, fundamental action is the road to wider success. To that end, they've also simplified mission goals, paring down the action to fewer, less complex objectives. This isn't to say that missions have degenerated to little more than "kill 'em all" free-for-alls. On the contrary, you'll still have plenty to do. For example, one early mission has you seriously outnumbered. To have any hope of success, you must create a distraction to draw the bad guys out of their cars, where they're easily picked off. After that, you must follow a fleeing enemy to his hideout while fending off reinforcements. This mission also spotlights one of 1'-82's other major additions—pedestrianism.

Foot Traffic

The ability of both you and your enemies to abandon your cars and hit the ground running impacts gameplay tremendously. 1'-82 will measure mission success by whether you've killed the driver, not his car. As long as your enemies live they're a threat, even if their car is a heap of smoldering slag. You'll have to eliminate them to move on.

Luckily, it's a two-way street. If you see your car's health meter getting perilously low, you can hop out before it explodes and take on the bad guys with nothing but a pistol and your good looks. Fortunately, once on foot you have the option of commandeering other vehicles. For instance, in that same sample mission, I successfully created the distraction but failed to take out my opponents quickly enough. I left my sports car just before it blew up and jumped into one of the vehicles I'd lured my enemies out of, then successfully completed the mission. The addition of gun-toting pedestrians should also significantly alter the multiplayer gameplay, with combatants getting fewer kills as their adversaries flee near-dead cars for the fresh vehicles dotting the landscape.

Under the Hood

INTERSTATE '82's game engine will require 3D hardware, but the
payoff will be improved, shimmering graphics and more varied missions. By handling the game environments as huge 3D objects, the designers can create landscapes much more complicated than I-'76's flat wastelands. Missions will take place in cities and inside buildings, and will even delve into underground caverns where narrow landbridges provide your only route over rivers of steaming magma.

Visually, I-'82 should be a treat. While all the effects weren't implemented in the early build I played, the reflections of lights and objects on the cars were impressive. The final version will include texture maps to reflect damage, light maps for headlights, ricocheting bullets, and the addition of water and weather. For gamers with some serious horsepower and lots of disposable income, I-'82 will also allow you to set up multiple monitors to create a "virtual driver's seat" of sorts.

In addition to multiplayer-specific maps, all of the mission maps will be available for multiplayer contests. Deathmatching in I-'82 should be significantly different from the first game since the full 3D world will add a new vertical element, with drivers battling in tiered parking lots, hiding in tunnels, and exploiting moving terrain elements such as elevators and drawbridges.

Used Parts

So what has carried over from I-'76? More than you'd think. If anything, the story is even more front-and-center, with close to 30 minutes of rendered cut-scenes featuring the returning Skeeter, Groove Champion, and Taurus (your player character). New characters include Groove's little sister Skye, and John Hinckley—yes, that John Hinckley—in a government conspiracy plot worthy of a particularly over-the-top X-Files.

You'll still be able to customize your car, purchasing weapons, armor, and special items, though you'll have more choices. The most interesting new weapon has got to be LARS, an SDI-type device that players can seize control of. In the interest of game balance, all the weapons will have countermeasures—for instance, chrome shielding will reflect and negate energy weapons.

Finally, while I-'76's funk-filled soundtrack would be out of place in the skin-tie '80s, I-'82 will still feature a very cool, tongue-in-cheek collection of tunes. This time around the music will mimic New Wave acts like Soft Cell, Killing Joke, and The Cars. Even better, three recently discovered, unreleased Devo songs have been remastered and prominently included on the soundtrack.

With a muscular game engine capable of delivering state-of-the-art graphics and frame-rates, INTERSTATE '82 seems certain to deliver a more varied and prettier experience than its predecessor. The real question is whether its simpler, more action-oriented gameplay will be able to draw new fans while satisfying those who enjoyed INTERSTATE '76. Until it rolls out of the garage later this year, we'll just have to wait and see. CGW

Robert Caffey has killed 28 fat, groisy slugs while temporarily living in a dark basement. Life is as sweet as licking nectar off a supermodel on a brilliant spring day.
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Aliens vs. Predator
Three Intense Characters in One Scary-ass Game

by Greg Fortune

All of the Alien and Predator movies had one thing in common: Extraterrestrial killing machines that you just couldn’t help wanting to see more of. Now, who hasn’t thought about pitting the two races against each other to see just who’s the best? Well, that’s precisely what you get to do in ALIENS VS. PREDATOR. The concept of bringing the Alien and Predator races together for a little Celebrity deathmatch is not a new one. There’s a very cool comic book series based on the subject, and if you look closely at the wall of the last set in Predator 2, you’ll see an alien skull mounted in the Predators’ trophy room. There was even talk of a movie featuring both races, but apparently nobody was willing to loosen their grip on the licenses long enough to do it.

So, if you ever wanted to jump into one of these movies and show them how to do it, here’s your chance.

In ALIENS VS. PREDATOR (AvP), you get the chance to play one of three races—the Aliens, the Predators, or the Colonial Marines. Single-player and deathmatch levels are provided for all three types, although the beta I’m playing right now has only some of the levels and a partial weapons list for each character. The single-player missions I’ve gone through are tough—really tough. None of your opponents is going to give you a second chance if you make a mistake.

BAD EGGS Stumbling across Alien eggs never bodes well, unless you’re looking for a nice kiss o’ death from a face-hugger.
I've Got a Bad Feeling About This...

The first thing I noticed about the level design in AvP is that everything is really dark. Remember in Alien how it seemed as if anything could be hiding anywhere in the corridors of the Nostromo? Well, thanks to the minimalist lighting, creative use of textures, and the use of ambient noises, AvP is positively creepy. Some of our favorite movie locations are here, including the derelict ship from Alien and the penal colony from Alien 3. There are military installations for the Predator to hunt in, and some standard “Let’s get the hell out of here” levels for the Marines. The deathmatch levels also show promise with lots of places for crossfire, stalking, and hiding.

Stop Your Grinnin’ and Drop Your Linen!

The most striking feature in this game is the extreme power of all the combatants. It’s almost redundant to talk about how lethal any of the three are. What it boils down to is that you’ll get no second chances here. Aliens descend on you with blinding speed, and the Predators’ shoulder cannon will blow a hole in you so big that you’ll need a manhole cover to plug it. Just so you don’t think that the Marines are fodder in this one, remember Vasquez’s smart gun? You know, the big cannon mounted on a swing arm? That baby will cut through an alien like a samurai sword through cottage cheese. Just be sure none of that acid splatters on you!

Despite the very different abilities and extreme power of each of them, the three races seem oddly balanced here. In my play-testing, none of them seemed to have any huge advantage over the others. The deathmatch potential alone makes this a game to keep on your motion tracker.

Let’s Meet Our Contestants

**ALIEN**

Unlike the Predators and the Marines, the Aliens don’t have weapons and don’t need power-ups. They can crawl along ceilings and walls, drop down behind you, and tear you to pieces in a second. Their attacks are incredibly fast, and their very appearance can send a squad of Marines into a panic. Playing as the Alien race is a dream come true, and playing against them is

**PREDATOR**

Do the Predators in AvP have that cool cloaking field we all saw in the movies? You bet. In the limited beta we have, they also have their wrist blades, a spear gun, the shoulder cannon that tracks with head movement, and a medical rig. Also present is the glowing green blood that marks where the Predator was injured, both on the walls and on the

**MARINE**

The Colonial Marine personifies overt firepower. Everything about the Marine screams destruction. From the pulse rifle with attached over/under grenade launcher to the smart gun, which tracks your target and makes it damn hard to miss, arsenal is the operative word here. We’ve got grenade launchers, flame throwers, miniguns, and rocket launchers. We’ve also got one of the key tools of the Colonial
ALIENS VS. PREDATOR

Let's Dust Off and Nuke the Site From Orbit...

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR shows a lot of promise, even at this stage of its development. With a little spit and polish and a gamma control to fix some of the locales (a few are way too dark), this game could be one of our all-time favorites.

Don't take my word for it—play the exclusive ALIENS VS.

PREDATOR Marine demo on this month's CG-ROM! I'm sure you'll agree that, barring any major mistakes as the game is finished, this is going to be a must-have title for a lot of us. CGW

ALIEN

...a nightmare. You even have to be careful how you kill them, since they spray acid blood during their death throes and can kill you by bleeding on you. Of course, the main disadvantage of the Alien species is their lack of a ranged attack. But what they lack in long-range fire, they more than make up for in speed and ferocity. Add to that the Aliens' uncanny ability to spot either of the other races—cloaked or not—by the fiery blue halo around them and you have one nasty killing machine. If you like sneaking up on people and scaring the hell out of them, this is the race for you.

PREDATOR

Predator. The Predator has another useful tool in his grappling hook, which allows him to gain easy access to high places. From there, his cloak- ing and ranged weapons give the Predator excellent hunting opportunities. The "medicomp" is also well done, which offers the Predator unlimited healing as long as it has energy. When used, the medicomp provides the Predator with a pair of barbed syringes, which he can jab into his stomach. This, of course, is painful and causes the Predator to scream, giving away his location to interested parties everywhere. The Predator's use of stealth combined with his cool high-tech weaponry make him the favorite of those who prefer to hunt their prey for sport.

MARINE

Marines: the motion tracker. Sensing motion in a 180-degree arc in front of you, this baby tells you direction and range. So while you won't be able to conceal yourself on the roof like an Alien or cloak like a Predator, just let one of those suckers move and we'll see some fireworks. To help them gain access to higher ground and break long falls, the Marines are equipped with a jetpack that gives basic vertical functionality. Don't expect to be flying around the levels wasting enemies, however. Your boots will still be your main source of transportation. If you like walking into a room knowing that you're packing the biggest gun around, we've got a job for you in the Marines.
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Revenant

Eidos Brings Some Fighting Moves to the Fantasy RPG

by Jeff Green

As much as it must annoy Eidos to have its upcoming fantasy RPG, REVENANT, compared to DIABLO, the fact is you can't look at Eidos' game without thinking of Blizzard's hack-and-slash phenomenon. And there are far worse fates than being compared to one of the best-selling games of the decade. If we said REVENANT was a NAM clone, well, you'd probably stop reading right here.

That said, REVENANT, developed by Cinematix and due for release in mid-1999, looks like more than just a DIABLO clone and has enough differences to justify its existence. Yes, it is a real-time hack-and-slash with an isometric perspective, but the comparisons end there, sort of.

In My Time of Dying
First of all, REVENANT promises to be more story-oriented than DIABLO, in that it actually has a story (DIABLO's plot was outstanding, but 90 percent of it was just in the manual). You play the role of Locke D'Averam, a "revenant" (one who has returned from the dead), who has been summoned, with no memory of your former life, to do the bloody bidding of Tendrik, a warlord on the island of Akhulon. Tendrik's daughter has been kidnapped by an evil cult of priests, and it's your job to rescue her. Along the way you'll encounter tons of enemies, and a more complex plotline than you first realized, as you learn about your past and the crucial role you play in the fate of Akhulon.

In the game, you'll explore multiple environments in a nonlinear fashion, including forests, catacombs, towns, castles, wastelands, and dungeons. The hand-painted backgrounds, developed with the help of Den Beauvais, an acclaimed fantasy/sci-fi artist, are evocative and colorful, and the Direct3D enhanced spell and lighting effects are appropriately vivid. Unlike DIABLO's sprites, REVENANT's characters are 3D polygons, which greatly affect the nature of the combat engine, which, when all is said and done, is the heart of the game.

Over the Hills and Far Away
REVENANT also promises to be more action-oriented than DIABLO. If you're looking for a dialogue-heavy RPG of yore, look elsewhere. In fact, combat plays such a huge role that you're better off playing with a gamepad than mouse or keyboard.

The combat resembles that of a console-style fighting game more than a hack-and-slash click-fest. To manipulate Locke against myriad creatures, you'll need to learn button combinations to launch attacks and defenses. As you gain in experience, you'll learn more spells and forms of attacks, which you're going to need to fight the game's rogue's gallery of goblins and demons. An early beta revealed a depth to the combat that was quite fun, and quite different from DIABLO.

Learning how to attack and retreat, block and parry, and more, adds another level of action skills not usually seen in this type of game. The game's monsters aren't really anything we haven't seen before, but there are a lot of them, from the stealthy, quick-striking Lurkers to the combat-savvy Monks to the gigantic Ogros. More than 25 weapons and 20 spells will be at your disposal, and as you progress through the game you'll learn combinations for creating deadly spells such as the Chain Fireball.

Ramble On
In addition to single-player mode, REVENANT will feature multiplayer mode, letting you play characters other than Locke. Plans are to include deathmatch, dungeon hunt (a DIABLO-like search), and a storyline mode in which up to four players will follow REVENANT's single-player storyline. But plans change, so don't take this as gospel.

Eidos has a promising-looking action-RPG on its hands, graced with cool artwork, a deep storyline, and a complex but fun combat engine. It won't stop anyone from wanting DIABLO II, but it might carve out its own territory.

When not getting his butt kicked in multiplayer HALF-LIFE, Jeff Green is knee-deep in THIEF, REDGUARD, QUEST FOR GLORY V, and KING'S QUEST VIII. Life is tough.
TAKE THE HILL. THE EARTH TREMBLING. BLACK WITH BLOOD. HEAVY FOOTSTEPS DISSOLVE INTO A STEADY RHYTHM OF THUNDEROUS BLASTS. MINDS AND LEGS NUMB. GET TO THE HILL. FIERY ARROWS RAINING FROM ABOVE, BLACK WAKES WEAVING A SUFFOCATING BLANKET OF FEAR. MY MEN CHOKEING THEIR FINAL BREATHS. JUST MAKE IT TO THE HILL. SCREAMS FROM BEHIND? ARE WE FLANKED? SHADOWS ADVANCING LIKE A DEATH SHROUD. THE HILL. GET TO THE HILL.

6 December
The Beachhead at Tyr

In Myth II: Soulblighter, panic is your greatest enemy. It's up to you to remain calm and focused during the frenzy of battle. You devise the strategies. You make the crucial decisions. And everything comes into play. With Myth II: Soulblighter's real-world, 3D environment, ground positions become critical. Archers shoot farther from hills and bluffs. Dwarf grenadiers roll down hill. Trees block arrows. You either use the terrain to your advantage or suffer the consequences. And with Myth II: Soulblighter's rotating battlefield camera, you can watch the combat unfold from every angle. Everything that made Myth: The Fallen Lords 1997's Game of the Year is here. With better game play, graphics and a whole new storyline with new units and new levels. Plus an editor that lets you make your own maps, modify units and even change the force of gravity. And of course, there's bungie.net, the world's best free* site for multi-player gaming. Fully redesigned and ready to host worldwide carnage. The question is... Are you ready for Myth II: Soulblighter?

To order Myth II: Soulblighter call 1-800-895-0660 or visit our website at www.bungie.com.

*Access to bungie.net is FREE. Player is responsible for all applicable Internet fees. Myth II Soulblighter is available now. © Bungie Inc. The Fallen Lords ©1997, 1998 Microsoft Corporation. © 2000. All rights reserved. All art is ©2000. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners.
IF REALITY HAD A PATENT
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There's nowhere in this world you can't go. Real-time moveable sectional charts and interactive vector maps allow accurate navigation across 16,000 navaids in 200 countries, including over 13,000 runways at 9,500 airports.

The aircraft you are about to fly is fully operational. The game features accurate cockpits and avionics, all in the correct proportions and layout of the original aircraft. Every gauge, switch, and knob in the cockpit is ready for interaction, thanks to the most meticulously detailed cockpit to date, with multiple interactive interior views.

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Descent 3
An Old Dog with Radical New Tricks
by Chase Dahl

The original DESCENT destroyed precedents set by other first-person shooters of its time. It plunged the player into a fully 3D world of twisting mines and mysterious caverns instead of the 2.5D worlds of DOOM and its clones. Never before had players experienced the vertigo of the game's six degrees of freedom; nor had their computerized opponents shown such intelligence in ensuring their destruction.

That was four years ago, however, and DESCENT has grown somewhat long in the tooth. Its sequel added new weapons and opponents, but little else. Last year's FORSAKEN, while faithfully cloning DESCENT's gameplay, raised the ante with gorgeous, pyrotechnic graphics and mission structures beyond DESCENT's repetitive "blow up the main reactor, then get out" scenario.

But it was an updated DESCENT that fans really wanted, not just a console port with a picture of a nude woman on the box...and this spring Outrage seems set to deliver just that.

Descent: Confined Space
Gamers put off by the use of the DESCENT name in the space-shooter DESCENT: FREESPACE can rest assured that DESCENT 3 is the real goods. Once again, we're plunged into the confines of underground chambers and hallways, with relentless robots tracking our every move.

Outrage has obviously acknowledged FORSAKEN with DESCENT 3. Players must now accomplish varied goals beyond "find the key and exit." Along with its new mission structure, DESCENT 3 has been updated with a graphics engine (dubbed "Fusion") that puts all of its predecessors to shame. DESCENT 3's levels are rich with dynamic lighting and environmental effects (like smoke and rain) that run smoothly on even midline machines. It also supports action outside of the mines, although only a sample of this was in the build I played. This new power has its costs, though—DESCENT 3 requires 3D hardware acceleration. What DESCENT 3 has not taken from FORSAKEN is the latter's insane difficulty, color-saturated environments, and sluggish multiplayer.

Dramamine Cubed
The build I played provided just a taste of the full game, but it's enough to see that the vertigo-inducing action has changed very little. The player still pilots a small craft that has complete freedom of movement to explore the levels. DESCENT fans will be right at home with the controls, but newer players will definitely experience a learning curve steeper than that of other first-person shooters. Fortunately, DESCENT 3 has an admirable key-configuration utility that, along with a little practice, will have newbies zipping through the levels in no time.

Along with your craft—one of several that will be included in the full game—you're provided with a variety of death-dealing devices, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Naturally, the ammo and energy required is also scattered about, or left behind by destroyed opponents. Your old friend, the GuideBot, will also make an encore.

Multiplayer brings DESCENT 3 to an entirely new level. Internet play is provided through Outrage's Parallax Online (PXT) server. Skeptics of DESCENT: FREESPACE's lackluster Internet performance will be pleasantly surprised with DESCENT 3. Even with mediocre pings on 28.8 modems, DESCENT 3 played smoothly, with a minimum of warping and lag. Games are extremely easy to set up and play, allowing dynamic joining and exiting. Multiplayer gameplay, whether it be a capture-the-flag match or straight Anarchy, is incredibly fast and furious. DESCENT 3 also takes the extra step of providing continual stats on each player beyond simple frag counts.

DESCENT 3, while adding little more to its genre than FORSAKEN, does everything with a panache and polish not seen in the games before it. The wait should be worth it, and soon we'll be able to descend on software shops for this promising title.

Chase Dahl has been playing computer games since 1980, when he broke an Apple II playing the Star Wars adventure. He's been playing games, and breaking computers, ever since.
Dear Mrs. Johnson,

The melted remains I sent in my last letter were not those of your son. Our condolences. Your son, Joe, is attached above in this little baggie. Please return the previously sent melted Private at your earliest convenience.

Deepest regrets,

Sarge

P.S. Although there will never be another Joe, you’ll be glad to know we’re already molding others in his likeness.
Imagine that you get a giant, mech-like robot for your birthday. Do you:

A. Carefully read the manual before safely practicing complicated precision maneuvers in a parking lot?

B. Leisurely stroll down to your local 7-Eleven for a refreshing cherry Slurpee?

C. Show your friends the cool gauges and instruments that monitor every aspect of your giant robot’s performance?

D. Burn the manual, crush every car in sight, and show your friends how disruptive a missile-spitting death machine can be at the Ice Capades?
Time's up. If you answered A, B, or C, you probably thought that all those messy combat games in the way of the really cool heat management, waypoint setting, and customization features in most giant robot games. But all of you right-thinking, blood-lusting rampage-hungry disciples of destruction who picked D, Accolade has come up with the game you've been waiting for. It's called SLAVE Zero, a new harbinger celebration of the annihilation capability that only a 60-foot biomechanical beast armed with guns as large as grain silos can possess. Finally, a game that lets you play hackey-sack with pedestrians.

With all the subtlety of a fuel tanker smashing into a skyscraper, Accolade's SLAVE ZERO stands ready to give third-person action gaming a thunderous makeover.

See the demo preview on the this month's CD and be the first to play SLAVE ZERO on next month's CG-ROM.
Freedom Fighter
While the story behind SLAVE ZERO isn't likely to hit the New York Times bestseller list anytime soon, it sets up the action nicely. In a bleak future world, the city S-19 is ruled by the evil, Big Brother-ish SovKhan. In order to secure his absolute rule, SovKhan has created the Slaves, enormous biomechanical beings that keep the populace of S-19 suitably oppressed. Inevitably, the people chafe under this heavy hand and a rebellion breaks out; you, as a particularly intrepid rebel, take control of a Slave to start the dirty work of freedom fighting, eventually taking the battle directly to the palace of SovKhan himself.

While the Slaves are 60-foot, armored behemoths of destruction, they differ significantly from the giant robots of other games insofar as they aren't made so much as grown. No one pilots a Slave; instead they become one. Through an elaborate process, men are bonded to their Slaves, abandoning their humanity and evolving into something not quite human, not quite machine. Aside from giving the Slaves an anthropomorphized look and feel that is utterly unique, this bit of fiction actually affects gameplay. Bonded to your Slave, you're not just fighting oppression, you're literally fighting for your life: There's no eject button, no salvaging spare parts, no repair bays, no commanding another Slave to save your butt. By eliminating the simlike aspects of other MECHWARRIOR-type giant robot games and emphasizing this "kill or be killed" mindset, SLAVE ZERO focuses its gameplay squarely on action.

Doom With A View
SLAVE ZERO's third-person perspective moves the game even further away from the classic robot-sim model. While a first-person perspective is generally the default choice for a shooter, the design team felt strongly that an exterior camera would best serve this game. I was skeptical at first, but I quickly came around to their way of thinking after playing an early build of the game. If nothing else, a first-person perspective would rob the gamer of the wonderful Slave animation, which best displays the manmachine dichotomy. Moving with a brutish grace, the Slave resembles nothing so much as an enormous, metallic ape as he leaps over bridges, hoists himself atop skyscrapers with a pull from one massive arm, or snatches ammo power-ups with his long, beautifully articulated fingers. All of this rich detail would be lost in a standard, QUAKE-like perspective.

A standard first-person view would also muddy the game's overwhelming sense of scale. The swirling mayhem that typically surrounds your avatar would be reduced to just so many darting targets in a typical FPS view. But by
allowing the gamer to see the Slave straddling a freeway that cuts through a city of soaring buildings and blasting away at enemy behemoths, as tiny cars desperately try to avoid the battling giants, the enormity of the Slaves and S-19 is driven resoundingly home.

The gameworld is one of SLAVE ZERO's most notable accomplishments, and it is easily one of the most vivid gaming environments I've seen. The city absolutely teems with life. It's not uncommon to find passing bus and show that enemy Slave what throwing hard heat is all about. Spot a personnel carrier approaching to unload ground troops? Drop one of those tanks that's pestering you on it. Feeling artistic? Make your own Jackson Pollock masterpiece by hurling pedestrians at a wall. This is what being a giant robot is all about.

**Moving On Up**

SLAVE ZERO takes place across 16 increasingly large and complex levels as you literally climb higher in the city. You'll move from the gritty, sulfuric Lower City, through the towering Middle City, until you finally reach SovKhл's cloud-sheathed palace. Gameplay will grow increasingly vertical deeper into the game, but you'll be eased into it. You'll fight on one horizontal plane in the early levels, with plenty of room to maneuver as you face smaller, ground-based bipedal units. As you progress through the sewers (known as the Suck) and into Middle City, you'll fight multi-legged and flying enemies who carry multiple weapons. Fighting them will require you to employ

---

Every level has its own set of mission objectives. In one mission you'll have to destroy three separate generators, while another may ask you to escort refugees through S-19's enormous sewer system. Several missions will have secondary objectives that, while they won't need to be completed in order to succeed, will reward the gamer with more power-ups, weaponry, and challenge.

Of course, SovKhл will be doing everything he can to stop you, and
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that means you'll be facing enemy Slaves. A lot of them. You'll square off against speedy Piranhas, who'll attack you head-on; yellow Regulators, who fire missiles and roll to avoid your counterattacks; airborne packs of harassing Firefly units, who'll attack with "Ripper" machine guns. Damage taken by enemy Slaves is graphically represented by having the specific body parts flash with each hit. Designers for SLAVE ZERO haven't yet decided whether or not arms and legs that take sustained fire will actually get blown off. We're hoping they do. In any event, the Slave death animations are very cool, with the fallen enemies crumbling to the ground before they dissolve inside a cocoon of crackling electricity.

While enemies will be positioned throughout the city, several will arrive suddenly via the Sentinel Delivery System, a sort of gargantuan pneumatic tube system. Many of these tubes will be one-way, capable only of delivering enemy reinforcements; however, some tubes will be available to you, allowing you to take the fight to the enemy or to escape a battle that's going badly.

Breaking up the parade of enemies will be unique minibosses on perhaps half the levels. The first you'll face is Titan, a unit with heavy armor on his limbs and head. When attacked, he tucks himself into a ball, protecting his vulnerable midsection. Not all minibosses will be Slaves, either. The third level forces you to take down an enormous battle cruiser that keeps releasing flying Jammer troops until you destroy it.

Of course the biggest battles will come against SLAVE ZERO's five bosses. Accolade has gone for a more traditional, console feel with the bosses, making them unique arena-type levels in which you're trapped with the boss until one of you dies. The first boss you'll meet is Argillus (see the "Evil-ution" sidebar), a Slave who hasn't quite finished gestating in SovKhan's labs. After an opportunity to stock up on weapons, you'll come upon Argillus trapped in his gestation vat, whereupon he'll attack with a titanic, sweeping energy beam. Later bosses include an enormous, mechanical wolf spider that explodes into several smaller spiders, and a sewer boss you'll have to fight while dealing with steadily rising water.

**Evil-ution**

As the first boss you face in the game, Argillus typifies Accolade's approach to designing the bosses in SLAVE ZERO. Each boss possesses unique attributes to challenge the gamer in a different way and, to some extent, to prepare him for subsequent levels in the game. In the case of Argillus, designers decided that he would be basically stationary, forcing the gamer to utilize more strafing and dodging than the game had required up to that point. With that fundamental idea in mind, concept sketches were then drawn and refined. The first sketch was too human, while another concept looked too much like Slave Zero himself, and was not in keeping with the overall game design. After deciding on the second sketch, the designers made a wire-frame model, rendered it with flat, shaded textures, then completed it with the final textures. From there, designers began the difficult process of tuning the boss for gameplay.

**Sound and Vision**

Visually, SLAVE ZERO is stunning. Accolade spent the first several months of the development cycle creating the Ecstasy game engine. SLAVE ZERO presented the designers with a complicated set of problems; most troublesome was how do you create a huge, open city, crawling with life, without absolutely tanking the frame rate? The end results are impressive, with virtually anything in the game capable of animating. Slave Zero himself is the best example of this. Like all the game's creatures, Slave Zero has body parts that are capable of individual animation, allowing your alter ego to move and act in an organic, less-scripted way. In
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SLAVE ZERO • ZERO HOUR

KILL BUGS DEAD Mechanical wolf spiders will pose the greatest threat to your escort mission through S-19's enormous sewer system. Every-time-the-same animations in most shooters. Cut-scenes between missions are rendered using the game engine, as well. Since SLAVE ZERO will require 3D hardware, it should come as no surprise that the game supports all sorts of full-color lighting effects. In addition to precalculated lighting for smooth, realistic shadows, the real-time lighting support allows for rockets, spotlights, and spectacular explosions to illuminate surrounding buildings and characters. The support for lighting effects extends to the enemies themselves, some of whom will have light sources on their bodies that will shine at you during a fight. Finally, the real-time lighting lets the designers incorporate the effects to affect gameplay—expect at least one dimly lit level that will require you to pick up a vehicle and use its headlights as an impromptu flashlight.

ROBO-ROADBLOCK Out of missiles, low on bullets? It's a good thing there are lots of cars around to throw at that menacing Slave at the end of the bridge. But hands down, the coolest sound effect is Slave Zero's deafening roar—a skyscraper-rattling bellow of rage that spikes the Richter scale. Unfortunately, while Accolade's designers have decided to leave the roar in, as a gamer-triggered action, they've vacillating on whether it should have any effect (such as causing a tremendous shock wave) or simply be nothing more than a dramatic taunt in multiplayer games. We're hoping for the shock wave.

DARK LIGHTS, BIG CITY A dwarfed Slave Zero showcases the towering heights of the city. Eventually, you'll work your way from the grim depths of S-19 to lofty points well above the top of the skyscraper in the background. Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots SLAVE ZERO will definitely support multiplayer options, though precisely what will be available to gamers was still being hammered out at press time. Obviously, there will be deathmatching, but everything else—cooperative play, capture the flag, and other variations—is still pretty much up in the air. There are tentative plans for a deathmatch game that will remove all the weapons from play, forcing gamers to hurl buses, cars, trucks, and the odd schoolteacher at each other. This idea seems like such a natural, it's hard to imagine it not being implemented.

POWER OUTAGE His body crackling with electricity, an enemy Sentinel dies after taking one rocket too many to the head.

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE Human soldiers are more of an annoyance than a real menace in the early levels of the game.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD • MARCH 1999

Robert Coffey is currently struggling to leave the Edge of the World in GRIND FANDANGO when he isn't getting swept in the World Series in BASEBALL MOGUL 99.
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It's been a few months since we checked out the graphics-card scene. Back in December, we reviewed more than a dozen new 3D accelerators. Since then, some fresh players have arrived, and several cards that weren't quite ready then are now on your local store shelves. So it's time to strap in, hold on, and put another set of contenders to the test.

Two clear leaders have emerged in the past couple of months. The RIVA TNT from cycle-time king nVidia and the Banshee chip from 3dfx grace many a gamer's system. A number of card-makers have jumped on the bandwagon, supporting either TNT or Banshee, or both. But over that same period, a new horse has entered the race: ATI's Rage 128. We'll put them all through their paces and see if we can reach some conclusions as to which card is best for you.

One other trend has emerged: The number of games that support only 3dfx's Glide API is diminishing. We've seen quite a few titles that had been Glide-only games pick up support for either Direct3D or OpenGL—or both. This is welcome news for gamers who resisted having more than one card in their system, due to cost constraints or slot limitations. OpenGL is getting more attention now as well. ATI will showcase its OpenGL driver in its upcoming Rage Fury and Rage Magnum cards, which use the new Rage 128 chip. Still, most games that support OpenGL either are still based on one of the QUAKE engines or support more than one API (for example, Direct3D).

Now, without further ado, let's dive into the card reviews.
Hercules Dynamite TNT

We've struggled with Hercules products in the past. Whenever we'd get a driver release from the company, it would cause more problems than it solved. I'm happy to report that Hercules hasn't strayed too far from nVidia's reference drivers, and stability on our 400MHz Pentium II testbed was rock solid.

And the news gets better. Hercules' performance was right up there with the competition. It edged out all the other boards to take top honors, with a 3D GameGauge score of 452.6. The 3D WinBench score was a decent 473, also up there with the other cards.

The Dynamite TNT is a no-frills board without a software bundle. The card is very compact and has a fan attached to the nVidia RIVA TNT chip to keep it cool. There's no TV out, and the control panel is a bit limited.

I've seen the card for under $150, though. Given the performance of this board, we give it a big thumbs up.

Dynamite TNT. $147 (street). Hercules, (510) 623-6030. www.hercules.com

PROS: Relatively inexpensive for a TNT board; stable.
CONS: Mediocre 3D GameGauge score for a TNT board.

AOpen Navigator PA70

There's finally another Savage3D board available in the United States, from Taiwanese component-maker AOpen. The PA70 is pretty much a generic, SDRAM-based board with TV-out and very generic drivers.

There's very little you can do in the way of tweaking in the AOpen's control panel. In fact, there was no discernible way to disable V-sync, so we set the refresh rate to 100Hz and hoped for the best.

The board's 3D GameGauge performance was mediocre. Part of the problem may have been that flip-on V-sync was still on. But I also suspect the generic nature of the drivers came into play. For example, the card barely eked out 81 Business WinMarks—by far the lowest 2D score we've seen in recent testing. MOTORHEAD at 1280x1024 was almost painful to watch, and its 3D GameGauge score was very underwhelming.

The bottom line? If you're desperate for an AGP 2x board and can't afford anything else, the PA70 may be a good fit. But if I've only got $90 to spend, I'd rather go out and get a Banshee board.

Navigator PA70. $90 for 8MB. AOpen, (888) 852-6736. www.aopen.com

PROS: It's cheap.
CONS: It's generic; it's slow; it's not a good deal.

Diamond Monster Fusion AGP

The Monster Fusion is one of the few boards now shipping that uses SGRAM in place of SDRAM. It also comes with a fan—the Banshee runs a bit warm, especially since Diamond clocks its board higher than does the competition. Be warned also that its 2D WinMark score is deceptive. Diamond supports only 24-bit color for the normal Windows desktop. But we tested all the other boards at 32-bit color, so the Diamond's higher score is partly attributable to the lesser color depth.

The SGRAM and higher clock rate show up in the 3D GameGauge tests. The Fusion pumped out the higher score of the two Banshee-based boards we tested. The Voodoo Banshee chip is 3Dfx's low-cost, 2D/3D part. Unlike Voodoo2 (or the upcoming Voodoo3), the Banshee lacks a second texture-mapping unit (TMU), meaning that games such as Quake II and other multi-texture games will run slower than they would with Voodoo2.

Still, the Fusion AGP can be found for around $120, and as of this writing there was a $30 rebate offer on retail versions.

It also has a software bundle: the full MOTOCROSS MADNESS and a limited, 11-level version of UNREAL. All in all, not too shabby for less than a hundred bucks.

The Monster Fusion is just about the fastest Banshee board you can get. It doesn't quite rank up there with Voodoo2 or TNT, but neither does its price.

Monster Fusion. $120 (street) for 16MB. Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468-5846. www.diamondmm.com

PROS: Polished utilities; good performance.
CONS: Control panel not that useful.
Wicked 3D Vengeance

Despite having a product name that could have been inspired by the limber Lara Croft, the Vengeance proved somewhat cranky to get running. Earlier driver releases ran pretty well, but the latest driver release, coupled with a new BIOS, crashed our 3D WinBench 99 several times before it finally ran. We also saw some odd image shimmering in Quake II, although the card ran without a hitch on our Direct3D test titles.

The coolest thing about this board is its control panel. You can set any combination of horizontal and vertical resolution. Want a 16x10 aspect ratio? Go into the control panel and set it for 1024x640. But be prepared for the fact that games may look a little odd at settings different than their native aspect ratio.

The Vengeance isn’t quite as speedy a board as the Monster Fusion, though, and there’s no software bundle. However, the drivers do support stereoscopic shutter glasses, and Wicked3D will sell you a set if you’re interested.

You can buy the card direct from Wicked3D or from Electronics Boutique. If you’re really hankering for 3D glasses or oldball resolutions, the Vengeance may be a good choice. But you can find cheaper, faster boards out there.

**Wicked3D Vengeance.** $119. Wicked3D, (510) 494-4700. www.wicked3d.com

**PROS:** Flexible control panel; 3D glasses support.

**CONS:** Performance is only average; slightly more expensive than other Banshee boards.

Number Nine Revolution IV

There’s not a lot you can say about a card that claims to have full OpenGL compatibility but won’t run Quake or Quake II in OpenGL mode. That’s the main reason for the Revolution IV’s abysmal 3D GameGauge score. To add insult to injury, this card simply would not run 3D WinBench 99 on our Pentium II test-bed.

Not long ago, the Revolution series ranked as about the best 2D card around, but even that’s no longer true. The 2D WinBench scores are pretty low compared to the competition’s, and the competition has caught up in terms of 2D image quality.

**Pros:** Supports 32MB of RAM.

**Cons:** Mediocre 2D; spotty Direct3D support; no OpenGL game support.

The Distant Future Is Nine Months Away

We’ll see the next generation of 3D accelerator chips by October 1999. Most of the companies are keeping mum, but it’s likely that products from Rendition, 3DFx, nVidia, Matrox, and others will hit the streets. But will there be games to use all that horsepower? The 3D chip-makers are adding features like mad and increasing the transistor count along the way. But if there are no games out there that use some advanced feature, then it’s not of much value to gamers.

Rendition has shelved the V3300 (Redline) and is busy working on its next-generation part. The company has vowed to make its schedules this time. Not much is known about the detailed specs of the 4400, but it may have up to 16MB of embedded memory.

The next-generation part from nVidia may well support rendering methods other than triangles. This means that nVidia will have come full circle since its original, ill-fated NV1, which used quad patches for rendering. The world may finally be catching up with them.

With Voodoo2 behind it, 3DFx will be playing catch-up in the features game. The company cannot afford to miss the boat on 32-bit rendering, stencil buffers, and other features. If 3DFx loses the affection of high-end users, its cachet will vanish, and it will be just another chip-maker. It’s a tough position to be in.

There are also signs that Matrox is hard at work on something. It fell just a bit short with the G200, but it’s certainly not as far behind as the original Mystique was. Maybe Matrox can pull even with the rest of the pack in its next-generation part.
Actual Game Screen

Game of the Show E3 1998 - CGU / Winner of UGO's Best Real-Time Strategy Game of E3

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if (gunCanShoot(ship, gun))
switch (gunstatic->guntype)
case GUN_MissileLauncher:
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading, ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
vecDotProduct(*trajectory, shipheading);
shotguns = TRUE;
ALL GAME
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
missileShoot(ship, gun, target);
case GUN_MineLauncher:
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading, ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
vecDotProduct(*trajectory, shipheading);
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
missileShoot(ship, gun, target);
It's a dark cave. Inside your head, you hear your heart pounding.
Damp **echoes** resonate from the slow **drip** of water. A low **rumble**.

**Click** — a gun is being cocked to your right.
Bullets tear past you and **ricochet** from every angle.

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---

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ASUS AGP-V3400TNT

The V3400TNT differentiates itself by offering TV-in as well as TV-out. However, while you can perform video capture with the TV-input, the capture rate will be limited since there’s no hardware compression. You can capture still frames as well.

The 3D GameGauge performance of the V3400TNT lags slightly behind the top TNT performers, but it’s certainly not bad. The 2D and 3D WinBench scores are pretty typical for a TNT product. The card ships with Rage Software’s INCOMING and a set of video capture and playback tools. The only odd behavior I noticed was in F22ADF’s opening splash screen, which showed some image corruption. There were no other apparent image-quality issues with the card. The most recent drivers seem very stable, and the control panel is a somewhat cleaner variant of the RIVA TNT reference panel.

ASUS has done a good job of offering driver updates on its past graphics products, which gives us a greater level of confidence than in the past. While you can use the nVidia reference drivers, they would disable the TV functions of the card. Given the feature set and price, the V3400TNT is a good deal.


PROS: TV-input and -output; good price. CONS: A tad slower than other TNT boards.

The 3D API Wars: News From the Front

The 3D API Wars: News From the Front

OpenGL made its way into the gaming space thanks in large part to the fact that John Carmack and the crew at id decided to use it for QUAKE and QUAKE II. Most chip-makers have developed OpenGL ICDs (installable client drivers), but we have not heard of any current games planning to ship that are OpenGL-only. Some titles, like Jane’s WWII FIGHTERS, run on OpenGL but also on Direct3D and Glide. Still, OpenGL will be around, and since OpenGL drivers have arrived from most major chip- and board-makers. OpenGL-only titles may yet materialize. OpenGL and Direct3D will begin to merge in Microsoft’s FAHRENHEIT, which should arrive with DirectX sometime in 2000.

Meanwhile, Microsoft has poured tremendous resources into improving DirectX, and to the company’s credit, DirectX6 has come a long way indeed. We’ve seen games of all genres run well on it. Microsoft is now working on DirectX7, due out probably about the middle of this year. New features will include extensions, a longtime feature of OpenGL. This will allow a chip-maker with a new, killer rendering effect to expose that feature to games via Direct3D. This lack of extensibility has been a sore spot for chip-makers; in the past they had to wait for Microsoft to revise Direct3D in order to get their features implemented. In addition, DirectX7 will have transform-and-lighting (T/L) acceleration. In other words, if a chip-maker wants to take T/L work off the host to make it go faster, that will be possible. Another cool effect due in DirectX7 is environment mapping, whereby a game can take an entire scene and turn it into a texture to be used for reflections in, say, flight-sim cockpit canopies.

Even though the 3D API field has narrowed to three, you still need to read those system requirements on the box. Most cards support Direct3D and OpenGL, which covers the majority of games currently shipping, but some titles are still Glide-only. —Dave Salvador
SPEED KILLS.

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- Computer Gaming World (1999)

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Almost There

The following cards were not quite ready as we went to press, but they will definitely warrant consideration when they ship. And when these cards are priced to hit the market, you can bet we'll be the first to put their feet to the fire.

ATI Rage Fury

ATI's new Rage Fury falls into the category of "missed it by that much." The Rage Fury is based on ATI's Rage 128 accelerator, which is not just a warmed-over Rage Pro but has been redesigned from the ground up. It has dual texture-mapping engines and will ship with Direct3D and OpenGL drivers. The Fury will support most of the 3D features that its competition does, including stencil-buffering, bump-mapping, and 16-, 24-, or 32-bit z-buffers. About the only thing it lacks is anisotropic filtering, which isn't commonly used today.

I'd hoped the card would be ready for review in this round-up, but it wasn't quite there. Still, what I saw looked very promising. Even with beta drivers, the card installed without a hitch, and it posted just about the fastest 2D performance we've seen. In fact, many of these cards score so high on the Business WinBench 99 that we're fast approaching the limits of the benchmark, and the Rage Fury cranks out Business WinMarks like there's no tomorrow.

The WinBench 99 score was also the highest we've ever seen, but its game performance trails a bit. The curious thing I noticed was that 32-bit benchmarks ran only marginally slower than 16-bit game tests. Either ATI has really tweaked the 32-bit performance or the drivers need more tuning—maybe both. At any rate, until we see more 32-bit source textures and multilayer games, 32-bit rendering won't be prevalent in games. But MOTORHEAD looked beautiful in true-color mode. Unfortunately, we couldn't get MOTORHEAD running at 1280x1024 due to driver problems. I suspect there's a lot of horsepower unused by the current state of the drivers.

The Rage 128 also supports DVD acceleration, including motion compensation and fast MPEG2 decoding. Overall, the card looks extremely promising, and we'll write it out thoroughly once we get final drivers. We're already seeing prices for $250 Rage Fury cards well under $180 on the Internet, so it's not far off.

If ATI can work out its driver issues, the Rage Fury may well be the fastest performer in games as well as synthetic benchmarks.

3Dfx Voodoo³

At last November's Comdex, 3Dfx announced its Voodoo³, which is essentially Banshee with a second TMU, running at up to 183MHz (depending on the model). Because of the tight, single-chip integration and high clock rate, Voodoo³ can achieve Voodoo³ SLI speeds in 3D graphics but can run at higher resolutions than can Voodoo³ SLI. Its 2D speed should be as fast or faster than Banshee.

What Voodoo³ promises is raw speed, but it gives up some features in the process. Some of the signature features of the competition are missing, such as anisotropic filtering, bump-mapping, and stencil buffers. Voodoo³ supports only 16MB of onboard RAM. Although it supports AGP 2x speeds for moving data over the bus, it does not texture out of system memory—it still needs to copy whole textures over the bus. Also missing is 32-bit 3D rendering output. The marketing spin from 3Dfx is that users don't need it, most games don't support it, and it would slow things down anyway. Voodoo³ smells like a stopgap product; other offerings give users a choice of running at 16-bit color or true color. If nothing else, this relegates the card to consumers only, since 3D modeling users on a budget will want the true color output of an ATI or TNT board.

From the gamer's perspective, though, Voodoo³ is interesting. AGP 2x transfers of vertex (polygon) data will help keep the chip from being idle. By the time it ships, we may see the first Katmaí systems. For users who have been shot limited, Voodoo³ promises high performance while taking up only a single AGP slot.

Making the Right Choice

Looking at the cards in this round-up, my personal favorite of the shipping cards is the Magic TNT. It's simple and unpretentious—and damned fast. Of the rest, the ASUS TNT board offers the best value in a TNT card, while the Monster Fusion is the best of the Banshee boards.

As you read this, the ATI Rage Fury is shipping. I wanted to like this card a lot, but can't really pass judgment because of the beta drivers. I suspect it will be a strong contender, though.

Of all the cards we've reviewed in the past four months, the ones to beat remain the STB Velocity 4400 and the Canopus Spectra 1500. The Spectra is more expandable, but pricey. The Velocity 4400 remains a solid performer and a great value. Recent price drops have resulted in Velocity 4400s at less than $140 on the street. Of course, for the ideal setup, you should consider adding a Voodoo² card to the mix—but with fewer Glide-only games coming out, that may not be as necessary as it once was.
### Benchmark Tests

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### 3D GameGauge

| AOpen Navigator PA70         | 64.6           | 42.4                    | 40.1             | 44.6             | 47.3             | 277.4        |
| ASUS AGP-V3400TNT            | 124.2          | 70.2                    | 70.0             | 56.2             | 72.8             | 419.3        |
| Creative 3D Blaster Banshee | 118.5          | 64.4                    | 55.9             | 37.3             | 45.3             | 44.4         |
| Diamond Monster 3D II        | 102.0          | 58.5                    | 55.6             | 33.7             | 44.4             | 363.8        |
| Diamond Monster Fusion AGP   | 130.4          | 70.0                    | 62.0             | 36.6             | 41.3             | 44.4         |
| Hercules Dynamite TNT        | 102.0          | 58.5                    | 55.6             | 33.7             | 44.4             | 390.9        |
| Hercules Terminator Beast*   | 135.5          | 69.7                    | 65.6             | 42.8             | 64.0             | 443.2        |
| Wicked3D Vengeance           | 101.8          | 61.1                    | 56.0             | 39.5             | 47.9             | 427.3        |
| Number Nine Revolution IV    | 67.8           | 34.3                    | 25.9             | 25.3             | 25.9             | 355.7        |
| Skywell Magic3D TNT          | 132.2          | 75.4                    | 72.8             | 58.2             | 68.7             | 449.5        |
| STB Velocity 4400**          | 125.6          | 72.3                    | 72.8             | 57.7             | 74.5             | 450.8        |

*The slowest board from our last graphics roundup
**The fastest board from our last graphics roundup
N/A = Can't run this test
DNR = Failed to run this test

### How We Tested

All the testing took place on CGWS's 400MHz Pentium II reference system, which has an Intel 5440B8X motherboard and 128MB of SDRAM. A Turtle Beach Montego handled audio chores. We tested each card with a clean Windows 98 installation and with only Direct3D, ZD benchmarks, and test games installed.

Our test suite consisted of 3D WinBench 99, WinBench 99 Business WinMark, our own 3D GameGauge, and Motorhead 2.2. 3D GameGauge 1.0 consists of six game tests: Quake, Quake II, F22ADF, Incoming, Turbok, and Forsaken. The average frame rates are calculated by the game, and the 3D GameGauge score is the sum of the averages.

We ran the games at 800x600x16, except Motorhead, which we ran at 1280x1024x16. Interestingly, despite having 16MB of RAM, the Banshee boards could not run with trilinear filtering enabled on MOTORHEAD at 1280x1024, reporting an "insufficient memory" error, so all the MOTORHEAD tests were run with trilinear filtering off. The Business Graphics WinMark tests were at 1024x768x32-bit color unless the board supported only 24-bit color. We ran 3D WinBench 99 at 1024x768x16-bit, triple-buffered. With the exception of the Number Nine board, all the shipping cards could run all the tests.

Because we used a different test-bed and current versions of MOTORHEAD and the ZD benchmarks, it's tough to go back and compare to previous roundups. To make it a bit easier, we restested the Velocity 4400 and the Hercules Terminator Beast. These were the top and bottom performers in our last roundup, and should give a frame of reference. We also tested the Monster 3D II in 3D GameGauge as a reference point.
PRAISE for Seven Kingdoms

"If you missed Seven Kingdoms last year, you missed the best strategy game in a long time."

— PC Gamer
(Review Score: 90%, Recipient: Editor's Choice Award)

"Like Chan's Capitalism, Seven Kingdoms is deep, complex, and challenging.

★★★★

— Computer Gaming World

"The detail in Seven Kingdoms makes Age of Empires look like checkers."

— GamePower

★★★★

— Computer Games Strategy Plus

CREATE civilizations out of thin air. Choose from 12 nationalities, each with its own unique culture. Construct amazingly detailed buildings, including new military camps, espionage colleges, and special training centers. Each time you play will be a fresh experience, thanks to the new Random Campaign Generator.

Trevor Chan is the creator of advanced strategy games like Capitalism, Seven Kingdoms, and Seven Kingdoms Ancient Adversaries. Although only 25, Chan operates his own game design studio, overseeing all aspects of production at Hong Kong-based Enlight Software (www.enlight.com).
SEVEN KINGDOMS II
THE FRYHTAN WARS

GOVERN your society your way. Micro-manage your resources, establish trade routes and set up diplomatic relationships. Research new technologies and military methods in the Towers of Science. Prepare bold plans of attack, and watch your back with spies trained at your Espionage College. The streamlined interface makes it easy to run your empire.

SLAY monsters, hire them, or become them. 7 horrifying Fryhtans: Unleash their savagery on others, or find yourself as the target of their wrath. New Fryhtan structures include incubators (for producing weapons) and centers for transmitting magic power. Plus: thrilling new Heroes, introducing their own special magic into the game.

Slay Twice!

ADVANCE PRAISE for Seven Kingdoms II

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Ultimate PC

"If you didn't buy Seven Kingdoms when it first came out, don't make the same mistake twice."

PC Games

"Seven Kingdoms II is shaping up to be everything its predecessor was and more."

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HARDWARE
IN SEARCH OF THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

3Dfx Jilts Diamond, Creative

There's never a dull moment in the graphics business. 3Dfx recently announced its acquisition of board-maker STB Systems. For 3Dfx, the deal creates an entrée into the lucrative system-maker (system OEM) graphics market, which represents the lion's share of the PC graphics business. 3Dfx has had some success in this area, with both Voodoo* and Banshee, but it's looking to expand its prospects. Taking a cue from the industry's volume leaders, 3Dfx is looking to join the ranks of ATI and Matrox, both of which are integrated chip/board-makers. Future 3Dfx products will carry 3Dfx branding, and the chip-maker will tightly integrate its chip production with STB's board production facilities to achieve faster time to market.

Not everyone is jumping for joy over the deal, however, since it means that 3Dfx will no longer supply chips to other board manufacturers. Diamond, Creative, Hercules, and others have been successful selling 3Dfx-based cards. As to how 3Dfx smoothed over this abrupt change, one 3Dfx official said, "Have you ever broken up with a girlfriend?"

Chip-maker nVidia can't be pleased with the deal, either, since STB has been the No. 1 mover of nVidia chips, including the RIVA 128, the RIVA 128bxx, and, most recently, the RIVA TNT. While STB will continue to sell TNT boards, it's highly unlikely that any future STB boards will use nVidia chips. The 3Dfx/STB deal still needs to be approved by both companies' stockholders and by regulatory bodies, including the Federal Trade Commission.

The mood at nVidia in the wake of the announcement was actually very upbeat. A spokesman there said that the deal leaves nVidia in a stronger position because it will now be the top contender in the chip-maker business. Further, it's probable that companies like Diamond and Creative—all bracing for life without 3Dfx—will be keen to shore up their relationship with nVidia.

We gamers have yet to feel the full implications of the 3Dfx deal, but one advantage of the former arrangement for consumers has been that board-makers using the same 3Dfx chipset have had to compete with one another on price. While 3Dfx will still have to compete against other boards using other chipsets, the self-generated price pressure factor will disappear. Stay tuned to 3D IronWorks for more about this acquisition and details about Voodoo³.

Dave Salvator

TechWatch

Rendition RRendline Multimedia Accelerator
This product was originally slated for arrival sometime in Q1 '99, but Rendition has scrapped it. Instead, they're going back to the drawing board to design an entirely new part, whose name will most likely be V4000. Not much is known about the V4000 as of yet, but it appears that it will have embedded video memory, which may provide a performance advantage. ETA: Unknown.

AMD K6-3 AMD's next CPU, the K6-3, will retain AMD's 3DNow! for accelerating transform and lighting for 3D rendering. K6-3's biggest improvement will be its onboard 256KB Level 2 (L2) cache, which will run at the CPU's core clock speed. Initial clock speed will mostly likely be 400MHz, and with its onboard L2, K6-3 will be even more competitive than a Pentium II. ETA: Q1 '99

AMD K7 AMD's revamped high-performance CPU, K7 will feature a 128KB Level 1 (L1) cache, a 32KB L2 cache, and will support main memory speeds up to 200MHz. K7 has a revamped floating-point unit that features three superscalar execution units, and is fully pipelined. 3DNow! support is still present, and will help move Direct3D games along. AMD's new instructions. Read: MMX2. ETA: Q1 '99

Intel Katmai Intel's next round of CPUs is expected to offer clock speeds of 450-550MHz. They will feature new instruction-set extensions dubbed "Katmai instructions." Read: MMX2. ETA: Q1 '99

Intel IA-64 Intel's next generation of processors after Katmai will be a substantial departure from the traditional x86 CISC-based architecture. The new 64-bit CPU will use a new set of MMX (very long instruction word) instructions and a technology termed EPIC (explicitly parallel instruction computing) to execute instructions in parallel. ETA: 2000

www.computergamingworld.com

Intel: Headin' Back to Socketville

Sometimes there's a way of coming full circle. Intel took its Pentium II processors over to the Slot 1 single-edge connector (SEC) design to accommodate its Level 2 (L2) cache design. But with plans for most of its future processors to have onboard L2 cache, which obviates the need for the slot design, Intel will be returning to a socket form factor, currently dubbed Socket 370.

Intel went to the Slot 1 design in order to run the Pentium II's L2 cache at half the internal clock speed of the CPU and to give the L2 cache its own bus so it wouldn't have to share bandwidth with system memory. Both steps helped improve overall performance. But because Intel is planning to move its production to 0.18 micron process, it will have room to put the L2 cache on the chip itself and run the cache at the CPU's full clock-speed, which should further improve performance while reducing overall chip cost.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, AMD will be bringing out its Slot A design just as Intel begins moving many of its chips to the Socket 370 form factor. But Slot 1 motherboard owners can breathe a sigh of relief, since most new Pentium II offerings, including Katmai, will be introduced in both slot and socket form factors. What's more, this transition back to sockets won't be completed until sometime next year.

Dave Salvator

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Yamaha Speakers

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In fact, Yamaha speakers are the music industry reference standard; they’re used in nearly every recording studio in the world. In addition to the excellent sound, the YST-MS28 gives you two stereo inputs, a headphone output jack, magnetic shielding, convenient controls and total compatibility with all computers and game systems.

Your ultimate computer system is incomplete without Yamaha speakers. And you can own the YST-MS28 for under $60, or choose any of Yamaha’s other award-winning speakers and subwoofers. Because as good as they sound on paper, hearing them is an absolute blast!
Why not Racing Sim?

With Jeff Gordon on board, we had one decision, Racing Sim or not? Fortunately, everyone agreed -- the world didn't need another Racing Sim.

First of all, if you've seen Jeff on the racetrack, you already know that he's all about action and excitement. So it came as no surprise to hear that the game he wanted to make was action and excitement times 10. It's not that he didn't have an interest in doing a racing simulation, but even the average gamer knows that simulations never really capture the full, real life experience - whether it be racing, flying, or battle games. Well, if this is the case, imagine how much less a racing simulation mimicked the actual racing experience for a professional race car driver who also happens to be a three-time Winston Cup Champion.

Also, keep in mind that simulations don't always equal fun. For example, the few racing simulations that came the closest to being 'realistic' were loaded with...the small details such as tweaking a car's performance to shave a fraction of a second off lap times. While this helps to create a more realistic experience, it doesn't necessarily make a game fun.

So, if we were possible to capture the excitement of professional stock car racing in a video game, than we would have gone that route and created the best racing sim ever. However, since it's almost impossible to simulate the experience that Jeff feels behind the wheel of his own race car, we decided to create a game that makes up for it in other ways by providing a whole new racing experience.

For us, it was about being a smart driver and thinking on your toes at 300 MPH.

You see, Jeff always felt that racing simulations never really captured the speed, the competition, and the pulse-pounding exhilaration of jockeying for position while flying by another car at over 200 miles an hour - We totally agreed.

In the end, that's what it came down to: Racing Sim vs. Fun Arcade Racer. So, the direction we decided to take was to keep it somewhat grounded in reality with a physics model that players could actually feel, while giving them a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, but at the same time, making the game easily accessible.

To accomplish this and get the level of competition we all wanted, it quickly became clear we must heighten the experience. Oval tracks and straightaways are always exciting when you've got a screaming engine over your shoulder and howling wind rattling both windows, but on a computer screen - that just won't cut it.
The more outrageous we made the tracks, the more fun - not to mention fast - the game became.

So why not another Racing Sim?

Simple.

Sims have limits.
JEFF GORDON® XS RACING™ DOESN'T!
The 100,000-Mile Mark

Does That Pentium 166MHz Still Have Another Season Left in It?

Let's talk about living within your means. I drive a 1992 Ford Explorer with 83,000 miles on it. I say this not to brand myself as some kind of aging yuppie—though I probably am—but to point out that this vehicle is now seven years old. Seven years ago, we were barely into the 486 era in personal computing, and most of the people reading this are probably not using a computer that's seven years old.

Still, I've beaten on the issue of fast-moving technology many times. I'm confessing to driving a seven-year-old car to point out that I have a budget for cars. As much as Detroit or Japan might like it, I can't buy a car every two years. Luckily, cars are a relatively mature technology, and I can happily continue cruising well past 100,000 miles.

Lately, I've been getting a flurry of emails like the one below, so this month I'm going to try to collectively answer all of your tweaking/upgrading questions.

---

Dear Mr. Case:
I own a lowly Pentium 166 (no MMX) and would like to know if UNREAL will run with all the options? Thanks very much.

Horsepower-Challenged

Dear Horse,
First off, not even my daughter's friends call me "Mr. Case," but I do feel your pain. Will UNREAL run on your Pentium 166 with all the goodies turned up? Well, in a word, no. But with some trade-offs and system tweaks, it will run with an acceptable frame-rate. Here are some things for you to try.

Cheers,
Loyd

---

Since computers are a big part of how I make my living, upgrading fairly often makes sense for me. But like anyone, I have a budget for computers; mine just happens to be bigger (the wonders of business tax deductions help). Most of us don't have big budgets, though, and many of us have to live with hand-me-downs or used computers. Or it could be a matter of choice—spending a memory can work wonders in Windows games. Memory, at least, is fairly cheap now. In most Pentium systems, though, more than 64MB doesn't do you any good, and may even slow down your system. So don't get more than 64MB.

Beyond dropping more dollars, you can spend some time tuning the performance of your system. All the usual tricks work well.

To begin, create a fixed-size swap file. Assuming your disk budget is as tight as your dollar budget, make it a relatively small number, such as 64MB. You do this in the Windows system control panel, under the Performance tab. The virtual memory button will take you to your virtual memory settings.

Next, make sure you're not loading unnecessary programs on startup. This eats into both (MSCONFIG.EXE) to manage your AutoStart programs. With MSCONFIG you can also manage the stuff in your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files.

Better than DOOM
DOOM, that breakthrough shooter from id Software, ran pretty well on a 66MHz 486. So it stands to reason that a CPU that's 100MHz faster and has other optimizations should do far better. One thing you need to ask yourself is "How much better can I afford?" Frame-rate is life in an action game or flight sim, so eye candy becomes a fairly low priority in your budget.

What's useful is to use a game like DOOM or DUKE NUKEM 3D (which looks a little better) as a point of reference. Let's assume you get decent performance out of DUKE NUKEM 3D. Let that be

---

Think about how to maximize tomorrow's purchases when you're making one today!
Tech Tips

Here are a couple of frequent email questions I've been getting.

I just got a system with a PCI modem in it, but the ping times are much slower than with my old 28.8 modem. What gives?

It is a sad truth that PCI modems are slower than their ISA counterparts. There's only one PCI modem chipset out there, and it is a "Winmodem," meaning that the CPU does most of the actual work. The PCI modem simply provides the connection and translation to the phone line. My advice is, don't get a PCI modem. If your system comes with one, get an ISA modem or, better yet, an external modem. Better still, get a cable modem or DSL.

I've heard that AGP 2x boards (like the RIVA TNT) don't work well with K6-2. Is that correct?

The problem wasn't the K6-2, but the so-called "Super 7" motherboards. The latest AGP drivers seemed to have fixed most of the problems, though you may have to actually get a new version of the motherboard itself. Check also with your graphics card vendor for recent drivers. In most cases, the new motherboard AGP drivers and graphics card drivers have fixed the problem. (All can be found at www.acerlabs.com. VIA is at www.via.com.tw. SIS is at www.sis.com.tw.)

different resolutions. So start at 320x240 and work your way up until your frame-rate starts to tank. Remember, 320x240 was good enough for DOOM.

Don't forget to tweak your game's audio as well. You may get a surprising frame-rate boost by going to four audio streams rather than eight, assuming you can dial that down in the game. The loss in ear candy is often less noticeable than reduced graphics goodies.

RTFB

One way to avoid the frustration of games running deathly slow on your rig is to read the system requirements on the game's box before you buy it. I know it sounds dopy, but it can save you much pain and suffering. Some turn-based strategy games might run fine, despite the difference in system performance between what's recommended and what you have. You may just have to wait longer between turns while the AI moves. But if it's a real-time strategy game or an action game, it's best to get something else. Part of budgeting is setting priorities, and an important priority is to avoid things that won't work. I may be able to put 15-inch-wide slicks on my Explorer, but it won't make driving in snow any easier.

When You Do Buy

When you buy an add-on, buy with an eye to the future. We tend to get seduced by new technology. If a reader asks me if he or she should get a RIVA TNT board for their Pentium 200, I tend to steer them to a Voodoo² card instead. The RIVA TNT is a great chip, but if you're upgrading in the future, your new system will almost certainly have a fast AGP card (maybe even a TNT-based board). But the reliable Voodoo² will come over to a new system just fine. So think about how to maximize tomorrow's purchases when you're making one today.

That rule applies for any component purchase. Buying a new hard drive? Get one that supports UltraDMA/33. Looking at a new monitor? Get a big one—a 17-inch or 19-inch monitor. Need a sound card? Get a good PCI sound card if you have a free PCI slot. To save in the long run, get a component upgrade that will play well with a future upgrade.

The Performance Dilemma

Living within a performance budget is sometimes frustrating. Think of it as a learning process. As you tweak your system, you may learn more about configurations. Windows, and the Device Manager than you ever wanted. But knowledge is a good thing. So when a hot new title comes out that screams for huge system requirements, don't despair. If you're willing to make a few sacrifices in eye candy, audio fidelity, and resolution, you may find that game playable. CGW
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Name</th>
<th>Millennia HE 350</th>
<th>Millennia 450</th>
<th>Millennia MAX 450</th>
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<td>Hard Drive</td>
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<td>6.4GB Ultra ATA hard drive*</td>
<td>12.8GB Ultra ATA hard drive*</td>
<td>12.8GB Ultra ATA hard drive*</td>
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<td>Monitor</td>
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<td>BUS/CD-ROM</td>
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<td>SVGA graphics</td>
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<td>Sound System</td>
<td>PS/1 16-bit speakers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Software</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also Included</td>
<td>New Microware case</td>
<td>New Microware case</td>
<td>New Microware case</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3D4 enhanced keyboard</td>
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<td>Microsoft Virtual Machine</td>
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<td>Price</td>
<td>$1,399</td>
<td>$1,599</td>
<td>$1,999</td>
<td>$2,499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order Code</td>
<td>60002</td>
<td>60003</td>
<td>60010</td>
<td>60009</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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*) Contact with outside Internet Service Provider required. Internet service functions must be resolved by ISP and is not included.
# KILLER RIGS
## TWO RECIPES FOR THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

### NO HOLDS BARRED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
<th>THE SKINNY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>ASUS P2B-L5</td>
<td>$295</td>
<td>It's cheaper than a stand-alone Ultra2 SCSI card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPU</td>
<td>Pentium II 450</td>
<td>$450</td>
<td>It's the top of the heap, for now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>256MB of Corsair PC100 SDRAM</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>Just think, a quarter-gigabyte.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disk Controller</td>
<td>Built-in Ultra2 SCSI</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>80MB/sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Graphics</td>
<td>Camus Spectra 2500</td>
<td>$175</td>
<td>The reverse pass-through slots, not to mention 3D and 2D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Graphics</td>
<td>Quantum 3D Obsidian X24</td>
<td>$499</td>
<td>The ultimate, single slot Voodoo2 card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD Decoder</td>
<td>Quadro Cinemast</td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>For the DVD movie buff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floppy Drive</td>
<td>Teac</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>Still have to have one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Drive</td>
<td>Seagate Cheetah 18</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>It's big, it's fast, it's loud... two out of three ain't bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backup</td>
<td>Ionema Jazz 2</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>2GB of backup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM/DVD</td>
<td>Pioneer SC5 DVD</td>
<td>$179</td>
<td>Taking the DVD plunge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Sony 500PS</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
<td>Sharp, crisp, bright and flat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Audio</td>
<td>Diamond Monster Sound MX100</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>LET-11</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>Beautiful imaging, clean sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rear-channel Speakers</td>
<td>Audio-Lab ACS-43</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>Just for the rear channels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modem</td>
<td>3Com ImpactIQ</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>Faster than 56K... Now if I could only get DSL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Built-in 10/100 ethernet chip</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td>For hanging my buddies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>In-tell 2800 full tower AX</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>New improved model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Supply</td>
<td>TurboCard 300</td>
<td>$499</td>
<td>More power, Scotty!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>Logitech Newtouch</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mouse/Pointing Device</td>
<td>Logitech Cordless Wheel Mouse</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>No后悔.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Game Controller</td>
<td>Microsoft SideWinder Freestyle</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>TWF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height joystick</td>
<td>thrustMaster EZ2 Pro</td>
<td>$129</td>
<td>It just feels right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throttle</td>
<td>thrustMaster TS</td>
<td>$115</td>
<td>More control than anyone needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudder Pedals</td>
<td>thrustMaster Elite RCs</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>Nearly perfect foot placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Controls</td>
<td>EECI CDS 4000</td>
<td>$1,399</td>
<td>For the serious sim driver.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** $7,436

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### LEAN & MEAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
<th>THE SKINNY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPU</td>
<td>Pentium II 450 + Ian</td>
<td>$325</td>
<td>Not far from the 500...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>64MB PC100 SDRAM</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>The only thing better would be 128MB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disk Controller</td>
<td>Built-in UDMA33</td>
<td>$130</td>
<td>It's fast, it's soakable, and it's under $150.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Graphics</td>
<td>Guilest Maxigamer2</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floppy Drive</td>
<td>Teac</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>You still gotta have it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Drive</td>
<td>Seagate Medalist Pro 6539</td>
<td>$199</td>
<td>Fast and now more affordable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM/DVD</td>
<td>Pioneer DVR-704</td>
<td>$69</td>
<td>36x, and it's cheap to boot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Optiquest V75</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>Amazingly sharp for under $400.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Audio</td>
<td>Diamond Sonic Impact 590</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>A3D and Clean audio for a under a cent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Audio</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Boston Acoustics DA635</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>The best speakers for under $200. Period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modem</td>
<td>Diamond Supral express external</td>
<td>$106</td>
<td>Solid performance, great price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Elan Vital T10-AII</td>
<td>$90</td>
<td>The case for upgrades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Supply</td>
<td>Built-in, 230W</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>Logitech Newtouch</td>
<td>$49</td>
<td>In with the now, out with the Natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse/Pointing Device</td>
<td>Logitech PS2 Wheel Mouse</td>
<td>$18</td>
<td>More frames per second???</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joystick</td>
<td>CH Games Stick 3D</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>Still the best balanced flightstick around.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** $1,930

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We have made every effort to ensure that this information would be timely and accurate. However, new hardware is constantly being released, and magazine production and distribution involves an 8- to 10-week delay. In cases where new products were close to release at press time, we have kept our current top choice so that we recommend only finished products we have tested. Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.

www.computergamingworld.com
You're Making Me Hot

Heat can kill PC components. As the temperature rises above acceptable levels (over 110 degrees Fahrenheit), it begins to cook semiconductor components. In the short term, you may just experience occasional lockups. In the long term, electromigration may occur, whereby actual molecular elements within the chip move, creating unwanted gaps or unwanted merging of the ultrafine lines that move electrons within a chip. This can permanently damage the microscopic traces inside of CPUs, memory chips, and other semiconductor chips.

Needless to say, it's important to manage heat, and there are two ways to do it: locally and globally (no, this isn't about the ozone layer).

On the local level, you can cool components that get hot. Most people are aware of CPU fans, but we're now seeing cooling fans on graphics cards. If you have a high-performance hard drive (7,200RPM or higher), you can find hard-drive cooling kits that move hot air away from this critical component.

But where do you want all that hot air to go? Most ATX power supplies have a fan that sucks air out of the case. That's a good step, but adding a little muffin fan (one of those cheap black fans) to the front of your PC case definitely helps. These cost only a few dollars. Orient the fan so it exhausts air out of the case (if there are nearby holes).

One last tip: Don't run your rig with the case open, unless you have a big fan blowing directly on the motherboard. Even then, it's not a good idea. Systems are designed to cool most efficiently with the case closed. Running with your case open can actually create local hotspots. Also, make sure all your I/O device shelves have either cards or blanks inserted for the same reason. With the addition of these few low-cost items (are you listening all you overclockers out there?) you can beat the heat and keep your rig lockup-free. —Loyd Case
**Rumble from Redmond**

by Loyd Case

slowly but surely, Microsoft is expanding its hardware reaches, entering markets that will push technologies it wants enhanced. The DSS 80s are a good example. As with all Microsoft products, the company adds its own twist to the idea of computer speakers, and they are superbly executed. But it comes at a cost that may be too high for many folks.

The satellites look vaguely like black versions of the tentacle creatures from LucasArts' DAY OF THE TENTACLE adventure game. The bass unit, which contains the amplifier, looks very much like a car battery. However, that "car battery" hides a 76-watt amplifier—44 watts for the bass unit and 16 watts per channel for the satellites. Bass is provided by a 5-1/2-inch bass driver and a 5-1/2-inch passive radiator.

The DSS 80s are fully digital, meaning you can run them without a sound card—provided you've got a working USB connection and Windows 98. In fact, it was a pleasure to install them, as Windows 98 auto-configures the speakers. The right satellite has buttons along the top to control the main volume, bass volume, and a mute switch. The speakers have an auto-power mode, meaning they sleep when there is no audio playing, but lack a headphone jack.

The overall tonal balance is pretty good, but with the equalizer bypassed, they show a definite tendency to sound bright on musical material. They can get loud, but at really high volumes you can sense that they're straining. The software equalizer, which works with or without a sound card, can hide a multitude of sins with careful adjustment. The stereo imaging was quite good; instrument placement was easy to pick out. Also, when pumping out sound from a Diamond Monster Sound MX300, these speakers had very clear A3D audio imaging.

If you do use digital audio mode (i.e., play audio through the USB port to be rendered by the speakers), expect to take a huge performance hit in DirectSound3D. In Audio WinBench with 16 audio streams at 22KHz, 8-bit resolution, the DirectSound3D test produced CPU usage of 19.6 percent—higher than most PCI sound cards. But the "3D audio" is laughable, and it was often impossible to get a sense of anything beyond front/left or front/right.

The DSS 80s sound pretty good, but cost a bundle. They're in the same category as the Cambridge Soundworks MicroWorks, but take up less room. But at that price, they're in heady territory, and that may be too big a bite for most users.

---

**REVIEW • GAMESTICK 3D USB**

**Stick It**

by Loyd Case

sticks like the Gamestick 3D are inevitably a compromise, but the CH spin on the 3D joystick is better than most. And what's more, CH is now shipping a USB version, which makes installation a bit easier, though at the cost of DOS compatibility.

Installation was a snap, though the stick wasn't detected automatically on bootup like other USB devices I've tested. When I would plug it in while the system was running, though, the device was detected. The drivers installed cleanly and calibration was a snap. There are "only" four usable buttons, and no programming tool. The Gamestick 3D is a symmetric stick, meaning it should be equally comfortable for either left-handed or right-handed folks. Being a USB device, it doesn't work in DOS. In fact, it wouldn't even work with REDGUARD, a recent, Windows-friendly DOS release, when run in a DOS box under Windows 98. I tested the Gamestick on a system with a USB keyboard and mouse, and all three devices played together nicely. In addition, the Gamestick 3D USB ships with CH's utility set, including a spiffy Windows-based calibration tool.

I took the Gamestick for a tour through EUROPEAN AIR WAR, FORSAKEN, and QUAKE II. EAW worked great, though the throttle slider seemed too short for delicate adjustments. What's worse is that throttle placement is very awkward, and the throttle slider seemed hard to reach for my stubby fingers. The rotational axis, used for the rudder, didn't offer really fine control for lining up shots. It also suffers from the "walking-and-chewing gum" effect. Sometimes you'd inadvertently shift the rudder or the yank the stick left or right when you really only wanted to adjust one parameter.

QUAKE II lets you configure the stick, and it was handy using the "throttle" for sliding left and right. But the best game I found for the stick are six-degree-of-freedom games like FORSAKEN, where after some experimentation, I was able to set up the Gamestick 3D to work very intuitively. This may be just the thing for the upcoming release of DESCENT 3.

If you're willing to work within the stick's limitations, then it may serve you well. But with other lower-cost offerings on the market from Logitech, ThrustMaster, and Microsoft, you might do better to shop around.
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DVD—Straight, No Chaser

by Loyd Case

Anyone who has ever shopped for a DVD drive knows that they’ve been much slower than the fastest CD-ROM drives... until now. The third-generation DVD drives are now shipping, and most sport up to 5x DVD performance and 32x CD-ROM performance. Among these new entries is Toshiba's third-generation drive, the SD-M1202.

The 1202 wasn't entirely unfamiliar to me. I'd just completed testing a host of off-the-shelf PCs, and almost all the rigs that came with DVD drives came with this one. There's a good reason: It's fast, stable, and well-mannered.

The 1202 is an ATAPI device that connects to the standard EIDE port on most motherboards. Although it supports mode 2 DMA transfers, it's not an UltraDMA device. However, since it can handle DMA transfers of data, the CPU usage is pretty low.

It does suffer from one problem common to most high-speed CD-ROM drives: It spins down after a few minutes and has a spin-up delay that can be annoying in some games (although the delay doesn’t seem as severe as in other IDE drives).

We ran the WinBench 98 CD tests on our 400MHz Pentium II test rig.

The CD WinMark came in at 1,590, right about on par for a $25x CD-ROM drive. The data transfer rate at the outer tracks measured at 4,877KB/sec, or 33x speed. Access time was 115ms—slightly slower than the best CD-ROM drives, but certainly respectable. CPU usage came in at 4.29 percent.

Toshiba is offering a kit with a Reelmagic hardware DVD decoder board, but you won’t find it under the Toshiba name. Look for it under names like Hi-Val or Pacific Digital. The full kit will probably run a bit more than $100.

At these prices, there’s almost no reason not to make the move to DVD. Its performance is nearly as fast as the fastest CD-ROM drives, it works well, and it isn’t terribly expensive. That’s a tough combination to beat.
the secret hides.
the truth consumes.

Odium
n. def. - hate coupled with disgust


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Go to #139 @ www.computergaming.com/infolink
Force Feed-Lack

by Dave Salvator

It seems the computer hardware industry moves in swarms. A technology gets hot, and suddenly a pack of companies are building products around it. Force feedback is just such an animal, and the swarm has converged on force-feedback wheels, with products coming from Microsoft, Logitech, ThrustMaster, SC&T, ACT Labs, and Saitek just to name a few. Well, enter yet another offering, this time from Guillemot International. Dubbed the Race Leader Retour de Force (where it’s returning from I have no idea), this wheel developed by Guillemot unfortunately lacks a lot better than it actually works.

The initial warning sign is the flimsy clamping system, which doesn’t do a very good job of actually holding the wheel in place. Four suction cups on the bottom of the unit do an adequate job of holding the wheel, but they don’t combine well with the clamps. The result is that the wheel wiggles around at the most inopportune moments, which often leads to spectacular wrecks. The unit also arrives with the abominable wall-wart power supply, which eats most of an AC socket. The driver installation is pretty straightforward, although it requires two reboots for the wheel to be ready.

As for the game performance, the news doesn’t get much better. Taking the Retour through NEED FOR SPEED III and VIPER RACING, both force-feedback driving titles, the wheel’s force rendering was barely discernible, and what forces could be felt were very weak. The wheel’s all-plastic construction felt very flimsy, and its unwieldy pedals made quick braking and returning to the accelerator more difficult than it should be. One cool thing the unit does have is a view-hat that can be very handy in titles like INTERSTATE ‘76, in which you have to worry about where opponents are and may want to quickly look behind or to the side. In addition to working with DirectInput titles, the Retour also supports Immersion’s 1-Force standard, so force-feedback gaming titles that have been written using 1-Force will work with it.

In a crowded field of products, the Retour fails to deliver the goods. Its price-point might make it appealing compared to the Microsoft force-feedback wheel, but the money you save isn’t worth the performance you lose.

YAMAHA YST-MS28

Back in Black

by Dave Salvator

Yamaha is no stranger to the audio world, and has been in the PC speaker market for several years, delivering competent, although not outstanding speakers. With the arrival of the YST-MS28s, that has changed. Here’s a pair of solid speakers for about $60 that deliver more volume than Cambridge SoundWorks’ venerable PC Works low-cost units, and have audio quality on par with Boston Acoustics’ BA-635s. That they come in black is gravy.

Setting the 28s is a snap, and because the power transformer is built into the woofer unit, there’s no wall-wart to supply the unit power. The 28s use the non-conventional small satellites (each has a 2-inch driver rated at 5 watts per side) and woofer unit, which has a single 5-inch driver that gets 15 watts. The bass unit has two line-level inputs, and both satellites also plug into the bass unit. The only downer here was Yamaha’s decision to put the 1/8-inch headphone jack downstairs on the bass unit rather than on one of the satellites.

The 28s are yet another pair of small speakers that seem almost to defy the laws of physics by producing a lot of volume from a very small package. Frequency response is good across the board, with punchy bass and clean mid-range and high-end response. Music CDs sounded excellent, with only one complaint being that on some recordings the stereo imaging felt a bit narrow. But with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, a band infamous for making speakers beg for mercy, the 28s held their own. Gaming audio sounded equally impressive. A spin through NEED FOR SPEED III and HALF-LIFE produced very good sound throughout, and neither explosions nor weapons fire ever sent the speakers into distortion. In fact, the 28s develop very good volume level before going into audible distortion, and while they may not get you an eviction notice, they’ll still do an adequate job of annoying your neighbors in the next apartment.

I tested the 28s on a Dell Dimension R450 that has a Vortex2-based Turtle Beach Montego II, and the 28s produced good 3D imaging in HALF-LIFE, which supports the A3D positional audio standard. I also ran them through Audio WinBench, and again the 28s produced good 3D imaging in DirectSound3D tests. If you want to spruce up your sonic setup—and want a great bargain—Yamaha’s YST-MS28s are a serious contender.
DEMONSTRATION #2:

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2. Smash into pieces.
3. Toss over your shoulder.

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Go to #161 @ www.computergaming.com/info/ink
In the Flat

by Dave Salvador

The trend in PC speakers has been headed in two directions: smaller and cheaper. But Gallant Computer has a different approach: Use flat-panel technology and couple it with a Dolby ProLogic converter to try to entice would-be home entertainment buffs and gamers. A different approach it is, and it works pretty well, but for gamers it seems like trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

Setting up the MT7s is pretty straightforward, although the fact that the center channel and bass unit speaker are permanently attached means you wind up either screwing the sonic imaging or having to place a bass unit on top of your monitor. We opted for the latter configuration and, to the unit's credit, didn't see any interference on our test monitor's image.

The MT7s include a "universal audio adapter" (UAD), which converts two-channel stereo input to 4.1 Dolby ProLogic output. One problem with any multispeaker array setup is cable clutter, that is, having to trip over the cables used to feed the rear-channel speakers. The other downside is a clumsy UI found on the UAD, which controls individual channel volumes, balance, and imaging mode. The MT7s also have a "Surround" imaging mode and can add different reverb settings. But most audio we ran wound up having a "slap-back" echo effect that sounded awful. Staying in ProLogic mode got rid of this effect.

The sound quality isn't bad overall, but it isn't great either. The MT7s don't produce good top-end volume, and when they go into distortion it really isn't pretty. Frequency response for both music and gaming audio is mixed, with weak low-end response, but both mids and highs are pretty well defined. As for 3D audio, the units produce good imaging, although there was something of a phase-shifter effect when running in ProLogic or Surround modes.

Gallant has produced a pretty good offering in the MT7 F/X, but for gamers, these speakers probably aren't the ideal choice, mainly because of their home-theater design bias. If you watch DVD movies on your PC and play some games, these might be worthwhile speakers, but there are better pure gaming speakers to be had for less money; this makes the MT7s a less than optimal choice.

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Bass Hit

by Dave Salvador

Now, most of us have a "subwoofer" at our feet when we sit at our PC. Of course, these units aren't true subwoofers, but rather are bass speakers that handle low-end frequency chores for our audio. A small satellite/woofer on-the-floor config has become de rigueur among low-cost speaker offerings. But if space is at a premium, you may not want a woofer on the floor. Aiwa, Sony's premium home-audio subsidiary, may have what you're looking for in its new SC-C78U speakers. These units feature a built-in bass speaker in the left channel, and they sound great. But there are a few gotchas to consider.

Setting up the units is stupid simple, and, because the power transformer is built in to the left-channel speaker, there's no wall wart to wrestle with. The 78s also feature a QSound "spatializer" that widens the perceived stereo field and a headphone jack that mutates the speakers when used. These speakers feature a four-inch bass driver that gets 14 watts, and each satellite channel gets 7 watts.

Aiwa brings a solid reputation from the home-audio world into the PC speaker market, and for pure sound quality these speakers don't disappoint. In fact, with some minor adjustments to tone down the bass volume, these units didn't clip even while playing punchy audio CD music tracks at full volume. And they sound very solid across the spectrum, from low-end frequencies to high and everything in between. Gaming audio sounded equally impressive.

But there are two flies in the ointment—one minor, the other not so minor. At higher volume settings, the units do give off some audible hiss when sitting idle. A bit more troubling is that the speakers' magnetic shielding doesn't prevent the their bass driver from causing some distortion of the monitor's image. This is one of the perils of bringing the bass driver upstairs. This wasn't a problem at lower volume levels, however.

If you're an apartment dweller not looking to rattle the rafters that often, Aiwa's latest offering might be just the ticket with their solid sound and readily accessible headphone jack. These guys will also kick out higher volume levels without a complaint, though your monitor may not be so happy. Still, this distortion occurs only at very high volume levels; the units are stellar performers otherwise.
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This Month CGW Editors' Choice Games Are Indicated in Yellow

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The Game Genres

- **Action**: Games that emphasize fast gameplay over story or strategy.
- **Adventure**: Games that require you to solve puzzles or wander through a story line.
- **Classical/Puzzle**: Classics are old standbys such as Chess and MONOPOLY. Puzzle games emphasize problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a story.
- **Role-Playing**: A subset of adventure games, these stress character development through attributes. The game world tends to be large, the plot less linear.
- **Simulations**: Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective, including flight sims and space simulations.
- **Sports/Racing**: A broad genre encompassing action sports games, such as NFL KICKOFF, strategic sports games, such as NBA LIVE, and driving games, such as NASCAR RACING.
- **Strategy**: Problem-solving and planning are the keys here. These games emphasize resource and risk management. Includes conflict-based sim and fantasy games, as well as construction programs like SimCITY.
- **Wargames**: A subset of strategy games, these re-create historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic.

How Do We Rate? We review only finished products—no betas, no patches.

- **Outstanding**: The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.
- **Very Good**: Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.
- **Average**: Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or simply vanilla.
- **Weak**: Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.
- **Abysmal**: The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.
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King’s Quest
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Download the demo today.
The Sequel To The Best-Selling Adventure Series is Here.
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Three Month’s Worth of Games We’ve Loved and Hated

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<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>War Along the Mohawk Empire Interactive</td>
<td>January 362</td>
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<td>Enemy Infestation Ripcord</td>
<td>February 236</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>Warlords III: Darklords Rising SSRD Off 3</td>
<td>December 417</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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It Takes a Thief

THIEF Slips Into the Shadows for One of the Freshest Experiences in Gaming

by Lance A. Larka

When I was growing up, I had a very active imagination that sometimes got me into trouble. But it also led me to read some very good books that delved into, oh, shall we say, darker aspects of society. Among my favorite book series of the time were the adventures of Gord the Rogue in the city of Greyhawk. Gord was a thief, an exceptional thief, and I yearned to be like him. But since my fear of incarceration was stronger than my fantasies, I abandoned my plans of being a superthief...until I found a package on my doorstep emblazoned with the title THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT.

In THIEF you play the part of Garrett, an established thief of no small skill. Garrett is one of those rare individuals who has the ability to remain utterly unnoticed in a crowd. This raw talent was honed to mastery by the Keepers, a shadowy organization dedicated to keeping society balanced between the opposing sides of the righteous, quasi-religious Hammerites and the sinister forces of the Trickster. After taking advantage of their training, Garrett turned his skills toward the noble pursuit of lining his pockets with the valuables of the wealthy. Formerly wealthy, that is.

SUICIDE 101: This is how not to succeed in THIEF—stepping from the shadows and leaving dead bodies in plain sight. One guard may be down, but the one rushing to the scene is certain to kill you.

Obviously, stealth is your most valuable asset, so slipping along walls and lurking in the shadows is absolutely essential. It's easy to determine how well-hidden you are thanks to a jewel that visibly darkens according to your degree of concealment. Still, should you find the need to eliminate a set of eyes, knocking them unconscious with your blackjack or a well-placed arrow to the neck from the shadows is always an option.

The world you prey upon is dark and foreboding, a tantalizing mixture of magic and 19th-century technology. The charcoal-drawing cut-scenes that go with the mission briefings and the surprisingly well-done voice-overs set the mood for the evolving storyline perfectly. The maps are realistically vague, sometimes even nonexistent. The in-game 3D graphics are seamless, and the audio is simply amazing. With directional noises and haunting

Night Stalker

Let's be clear on one thing: This is a first-person perspective game. It is not a shooter. Your goal as a thief isn't to kill things, it's to liberate other people's property—preferably without them ever knowing that you were there. Running around killing people and making lots of noise isn't conducive to that goal. Actually, this sort of behavior would more than likely lead to your ending up a corpse, since you aren't a heavily armed marine equipped to fight off hordes of alerted enemies.

EYE ON THE PRIZE: Successful slinking leads you to treasures like this booty-filled chest.

MEAN STREETS: Dark, dank, and beautifully rendered, the city streets are heavily shadowed to help conceal you from enemies.

www.computergaming.com
ing “background” effects you are plunged into Garrett’s shadowy world and left with a pounding heart and twitchy nerves.

What Do You See When You Look My Way?
The game’s missions range from liberating mansions of their riches and taking revenge for a failed assassination attempt, to bizarre missions bordering on the supernatural. Each is distinctly different and requires a variety of tactics to deal with your foes, from the mundane human guards and undead zombies to the mutant ratmen and exploding frogs. Yes, frogs. Even the dead pose a threat, as the corpses you leave behind will lead guards to sound an alarm if they’re discovered. Fortunately, you can pick up and dump the bodies in dark corners or nearby sewers, washing up the telltale blood with a handy water arrow. A nice collection of other items (see sidebar) is also at your disposal.

Each type of enemy has a different AI routine. Poorly paid human guards won’t investigate a sound too closely, while zombies will follow you till you’re in your own grave. There are traps, puzzles, mazes, underwater tunnels to swim, and much, much more. You won’t get bored playing this game to the end.

Something that really impressed me was the variable difficulty levels. Instead of just piling on more enemies to fight through as you go up in difficulty, your mission objectives become harder. At the normal level you might have to steal a magic sword and 1000 gold, but at the expert level you might have to steal the sword and 2000 gold AND do it without killing anyone. No mean feat, let me tell you.

Sounding an Alarm
I have a few complaints about the game that mar its otherwise gleaming surface. Play balancing is a definite issue. The missions are big and tough! It makes for a steep learning curve to climb. And while the dark environment is quite well suited to the nature of the game, sometimes it’s just too dark to the point where some critical areas are pitch-black with no way to light them. At times I had to max out the gamma correction and set my monitor to its brightest setting just to see the barest details. Adding a shuttered lantern to see by would have been a definite plus.

THIEF is one of those games that excites me because it isn’t just kill, maim, and destroy. You’ve got to scout your objective, be sneaky and instantly deadly, and generally be, well, a thief. If you’re tired of DOOM clones and hungry for challenge, give this fresh perspective game a try. I was pleasantly surprised.

Lance A. Larka is thinking that he hasn’t seen the sun enough and is contemplating turning off his computer and going for a walk...if his atrophied legs will carry him.

**Tools of the Trade**

- **Sword** Styled after the Roman Gladius, this is the defensive weapon of choice. Use it to block attacks while you try to get away or to slice through the critter blocking your path. Also works as a door opener when your lockpicks fail and you don’t have the key.
- **Blackjack** This weighted club is the best way to remove a guard silently. Crush his skull from behind, then hide the body, and no one will even realize you’re around.
- **Bow** Your best weapon...and tool. Use the aiming sight as a primitive set of binoculars.
- **Broadhead Arrow** A killing tool. With good aim one of these babies can slip through armor and kill with one shot.
- **Water Arrow** Used to douse torches and fires and wash away bloodstains. When filled with Holy Water, your best weapon against the undead...the ones you can kill, that is.
- **Fire Arrow** The medieval equivalent of the rifle grenade, it’s another weapon that will hurt the undead. Can also be used to light torches.
- **Moss Arrow** Used to spread a carpet of moss over noisy terrain to let you sneak past half-alert guards.
- **Gas Arrow** Contains a powerful knockout gas to incapacitate guards.
- **Rope Arrow** Sometimes there are no stairs where you want to go. Use this baby to string a rope up to that ledge. It’s reusable if you can recover the arrow itself.
- **Noise Arrow** Sometimes you just need to get a guard to look the wrong way. Fire one off and scot by while he’s distracted.
- **Flash Bomb** If that guard refuses to look the other way, blind him for a few seconds with this little gem. In a pinch these can be used instead of Fire Arrows against the undead.
- **Explosive Mine** Drop these behind you to remove pursuers from your trail...and the limbs from their torsos, too.
- **Gas Mine** Similar to the Explosive Mine, but nonlethal.

**TEMPLE OF DOOM** Survive long enough and eventually you’ll make your way to the Maw of Chaos itself.
"So Skip picks up this Jake, he's a pebble picker with a all over him. But in the first drills a cushion shot for a for a tweener. Last AB, he faces their radio ball to a gopher! gives it the one flap down. The

Don't pull a Merkle

(1) short for Skipper - the manager. (2) a player who fakes illness or injury to avoid playing. (3) New York. (4) the ball club's advance scouts. (5) an error-prone infielder - always groping for an excuse - "a pebble made the ball go through my legs." (6) an injured throwing arm. (7) bench jockeys - noted for a steady flow of insults. (8) inning. (9) wild young pitcher. (10) line drive off the outfield wall. (11) a base hit. (12) a sharp low hit. (13) a ball hit between players - usually in the gaps between outfielders. (14) at bat. (15) best pitcher on the staff. (16) a fastball that you can hear but can't see. (17) home run ball. (18) a solid bat with black wood. (19) home run trot with one arm stiff at the side. (20) an infallible player. (21) a bone head play.

www.highheat.com
from the Zoo. The Bird Dogs told lame soup bone, right? The barbers are stanza he faces some Lowdermilk, and bingle. Then he hits a blue dart meal ticket and transforms a He drops Black Betsy and dude's a legit Bill Klem!”

(Sure you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?)

"If you love baseball...this is the only game in town." - GamerzEdge

3DO
Skeptics No More
Raven Reinvents Third-person Action/Adventure, Leaving Lara in the Dust

by Scott A. May

Having been a big fan of Raven Software since 1993’s SHADOWCASTER, I’ll admit to being predisposed to liking anything brothers Brian and Steve Koffel dare to conjure. Yet nothing could have prepared me for the dizzying highs, terrifying lows, and outrageous fun of HERETIC II. This game is a blast.

A conceptual follow-up to Raven’s original HEXEN and HERETIC titles, this is one of the few games of its kind to actually enjoy genuine plot history. Once again, you play Corvus, the tall Elfin hero in nifty lizardskin tights, who was exiled to the Outer Worlds after winning his battle with the evil D’Sparil. Seemingly doomed to wander in endless desolation, Corvus has miraculously found a way back. But things don’t look the same.

Your journey begins in the walled city of Silverstar, dubbed the City of the Damned. The entire land is beset with a plagues of dark, magical origins. In Silverstar, your brethren, horribly mutated and insane with bloodlust, stalk the eerily deserted streets and buildings. From here you’ll run, jump, swim, climb, and creep your way through myriad locations, solving puzzles and invoking magic while fend ing off cursed inhabitants, all in your quest to cleanse the land.

This Is No Tomb, Raider
HERETIC II is rendered in third-person perspective, à la the Tomb RAIDER series, but that’s where the comparison ends. Lara Croft wouldn’t last a day in this nightmare. Not only does Corvus have cooler weapons, he also has access to a variety of dazzling magic spells that ignite the screen with some stunning special effects.

More importantly, Corvus blows Lara away in the areas of character animation and player controls, both of which are far above average. Optional autotargeting takes the guesswork out of dispatching ghouls, while the fully customizable keyboard, joystick, and mouse controls make Corvus seem like second nature. With the exception of inventory management and weapon/spell selection, you can easily handle all fighting, movement, and attack commands with the mouse.

Just as Raven’s HEXEN II in its day utilized the original QUAKE engine, HERETIC II uses a modified version of the far superior QUAKE II engine. Fantasy artist Brom lends his considerable talents to the game’s level designs, which are thoroughly responsive, fantasy-rich, though realistically rendered, and enhanced by thoroughly creepy ambient sounds. The game doesn’t require 3D hardware, but you’ll need it to experience the game at its fullest. Running the game on a Pentium 233 MMX machine with Diamond Monster 3D II card, I found the 3D effects and frame-rates extremely smooth.

Other cool features in the game include a drop camera, stationary look-abouts via MouseView, a formidable enemy AI, and breathtaking in-game cinematics. Raven also includes the level editor used to create the game, which runs as a stand-alone Windows app. Alas, neither the publishers nor the designers offer any support for this potentially fun accessory.

Solo Mio
The game’s only weak link is its multiplayer deathmatches. Third-
Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

To hell with the past... here's the future!
Join The Team

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"No lag, easy connects, and friendly people who are really great to play with and against. You've just made HISTORY!"

SkierX>> This game is BA
Pyromancer>> BA?
MrPaste >> Beyond Awesome?
SkierX>> BA=BAD ASS

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FROM PRESS

Word: BRILLIANT
"FireTeam is easily one of the most brilliant online action games around." - Gamesdomain

Word: FUN
"Ground-breaking new technology to make collaborative play work layered on top of a fun and addictive game." - Online Gaming Review

Word: SUITS think its cool
"Combat on a conference call." - Business Week

Word: Greatest
"One of the greatest concepts ever created for PC gaming!" - Gamerz Online

Word: HELL
"Highly addictive. It was hell trying to rip myself away long enough to sleep." - gameworlds.com

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DARK VENGEANCE Casts a Worthy SWORD AND SORCERY Shooter

by Raphael Liberatore

DARK VENGEANCE deviates from the typical kill-or-be-killed shooter by combining the best elements of a fantasy RPG with hack-and-slash adventuring. Using 3rd person perspectives and true 3D environments, DV spins its unique action by offering three player characters, each with a distinctive background, combat style, and special mana induced skills. This game rocks, but my biggest disappointment with DV is how quickly the game can be played to its conclusion...it's more on par with the speed of an interactive comic book than that of a fantasy action game.

Gladiators, Tricksters, and Warlocks Galore

One of DARK VENGEANCE's highlights is the ability to choose one of three very different characters. If you crave gratuitous violence, Nanoc the Gladiator is your man. The easiest of the three to play, Nanoc possesses the best strength, weapons, and defenses for straightforward combat. For an indirect, sneaky approach, Kite the Trickster possesses the necessary agility and stealth for elaborate, quick strikes. If casting spells from a distance gets your blood a-titting, then Jetrel the Warlock should be your choice. He's the weakest and most difficult to play, but if kept a safe distance from an attacking monster he's devastating.

Adapting to a character's unique combat style is the more challenging part of DV. Hacking and slashing is easy with Nanoc, but doing the same with Kite or Jetrel will have you restarting the game often. Mastering a character's special abilities is equally crucial: Nanoc can stomp undead or use his berserker's rage against ferocious Fire Drakes; Kite can set traps, go invisible, or blind demons; and Jetrel can create explosive infernos or protective shields to aid him against legions of Dark Elves. Thirty very cool character-specific weapons make the game even more of a hoot.

Each DARK VENGEANCE scenario is modified according to the character you choose. Since revenge is the name of the game, Nanoc, Kite, and Jetrel possess different motives for adventuring in the underworld of Amagar. For added gameplay, the High Council, a group of images once feared dead, intervenes on your behalf, guiding you along your quests. Short FMVs describing encounters with the High Council add to DV's already intriguing storyline. Like most action games, DV's missions are linear, but a hint of progression surfaces when a particular goal or secret item is uncovered.

Nice Torture Chamber You Got Here

DV supports both 3Dfx and 3D sound. Visually, the game has fantastic lighting and coloring effects created by Reality Bytes' own RIVET engine, but some of DV's environments lack the richness and depth of 3D games like UNREAL. DV also suffers from the clipping problems associated with several 3D engines.

DV's biggest disappointment lies in the limited number of missions for each character. If you play all three characters however, DV plays like a complete game. Another of DV's faults is the default keyboard interface that follows a nonintuitive "chording" system. Attacking requires multiple key combinations that are inextricably linked to your movement keys, and jumping requires hitting both the Z and I keys in unison. No amount of remapping the keys ever feels right, and on a gameplay (the obvious control choice for this type of game) it feels even worse.

Mutliplayer is one of DV's strongest features. Hacking and slashing other Warlocks and Tricksters in deathmatch and capture the flag modes is loads of fun. Finding weapons in multiplayer is part of the chaos since the weapons are character-specific.

Despite minor glitches and short character missions, DARK VENGEANCE plays smoothly, making this a game well worth playing in either single or multiplayer. Replay value is high, so grab your Thunder Hammer, Acid Brew, or Lightning Rod and seek revenge against the Dark Elves of Rankur. It may be you who saves the day as Amagar's Chosen One.

Raphael Liberatore is a former U.S. Army Special Forces soldier who is currently enjoying an equally challenging stint as "Mr. Mom."

www.glinteractive.com
"The game has robbed me totally of a social life and I am beginning to deeply resent anything that takes me away from playing it."

9 out of 10
- Games Mania

"Don't be surprised if you dream of stimpacks and frantically searching for ammo for your submachine gun."

8.5 out of 10
- Online Gaming Review

"Fallout 2 is undeniably entertaining. In fact, it's addictive."

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐
- Computer Games Online

"With a great depth of gameplay, lots of clever additions, and some really worthwhile plotlines, Fallout 2 is a terrific sequel."

- Next Generation Online

"It has been quite some time since I have played a game that I am so enthusiastic about. Check this one out —you'll love it."

- Happy Puppy

www.interplay.com/fallout2
She Got Game

TOMB RAIDER III Is a True Sequel, Not a Glorified Expansion Pack

by Jesse Hiatt

The quandary that faced the developers at Core after the phenomenal success of TOMB RAIDER was similar to that of a rock band after a chart-busting first record: Should they give the public more of the same and face charges that they're a one-trick pony? Or should they follow their hearts, put out something fresh and different, lose all but the most die-hard fans, and languish in obscurity? Tough choice. Much to their publisher's delight but many gamers' dismay, Core stuck to the winning formula in TOMB RAIDER II. However, Core has really come through with TOMB RAIDER III (TRIII), a true sequel and one that improves on every aspect without corrupting the spirit of the original.

The Whole Wide World

One of the most immediately recognizable improvements in this third-person action/adventure is the scale. What was once an entire level would now only qualify as an antechamber. Some of the outdoor levels are as stunning as they are gigantic. The selections of locales (London, the South Pacific, Nevada, and a jungle) provide your inner explorer with something new at every turn. The traditional switch, door, boulder, and spiked-pit routine is well represented. (Did the ancient cultures all around the world shop at the same tomb supply outlet?)

But there are plenty of new additions to the level designer's palette this time around. Laser-activated machine-gun turrets, piranha-filled rivers, subway trains, and electrified fences all add to the depth of the levels, keeping them interesting all the way through. Puzzles are more frequently integrated seamlessly into the levels, with switches that radically alter entire rooms instead of simply opening a door.

The dynamics of the power-ups and secret areas have evolved as well. They now provide a sort of fluid in-game difficulty setting. Many areas can be extremely challenging to those searching for a secret, but easily bypassed by those who’d rather move on. Overall, the game is much more nonlinear, with the player free to make use of some great vehicles and to take radically different routes to complete an area.

LONDON BY MIDNIGHT Lara takes to the rooftops of her hometown in an episode that really shows off the game's enhanced 3D graphics.

Mutilate Monkey Meat

The TOMB RAIDER games have consistently emphasized exploration and gymnastics over combat. The opponents, with few exceptions, are mostly there to keep you on your toes. Tigers, monkeys, vultures, poisonous snakes, and sewer rats are just a few of the critters that will provide you with periodic wake-up calls. All of the animals sport vastly improved appearances and behavior. For example, I enjoyed watching the monkeys in the first level: they minded their own business, foraged for food, and pretty much left me alone. Later, I was shocked to learn they were stealing my medpacks—that's when the monkey killing began. I ran over them on the quad bike with glee.

Human opponent AI has been beefed up as well, with guards now sneaking up behind you and using cover. Unfortunately, some of the critters and bad guys (even some early bosses) occasionally get stuck in corners or on walls and thereby provide no challenge whatsoever. Any glitch-free opponent that is causing serious trouble can be dispatched quickly with the MP5 or the Desert Eagle. For this reason it's recommended that you complete the desert episode first, where Lara will pick up these weapons.

The bottom line is that if you liked TOMB RAIDER, you'll love TOMB RAIDER III. Core has done a great job of making the TR universe a visually compelling place to explore, with cinematic, situational music plus diabolical traps and bad guys thrown in for excitement. For those who can dig it, TOMB RAIDER III is by far the biggest and baddest of the series.

When Jesse Hiatt isn't shooting down Messerschmitts in WWII FIGHTERS, he's spray-painting a big blue skull and crossbones on his multiplayer victims in HALF-LIFE.

PAINTED DESERT

Lara moves through the desert on her way to a mysterious government facility: The sweeping outdoor areas are new to the series, as is Lara's fetching outfit and navel ring.

APPEAL: TOMB RAIDER fans thirsting for a bigger, better game.
PROS: Larger and prettier than the first two games; improved AI for enemies; good puzzle integration; a variety of usable vehicles.
CONS: Occasional collision detection problems; gameplay hasn't changed in any substantial way.
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166MHz, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 2MB hard-drive space, 4MB SVGA video card, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card.
3D SUPPORT: Direct3D.
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.
Price: $49.95
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
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Splatter Fest
BLOOD II Delivers Plenty of Gore, Less Innovation

by Jim Lynch

Monolith Productions is on a roll. First it released SHOGO: MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION, and now it has struck again with BLOOD II: THE CHOSEN, the sequel to the original BLOOD. Picking up where the previous game left off, BLOOD II features the antihero Caleb as he continues to wreak bloody vengeance on the Cabal. Players may play as Caleb or one of the other "Chosen." The game lets you waste everything in sight, and gives you the standard action fare of finding the right switch or key to progress to the next level.

Plenty of Ways to Kill...

BLOOD II offers a wide variety of weapons including a sawed-off shotgun, a Howitzer cannon, and a voodoo doll. All provide a satisfying array of effects, with body parts being blown all over the place and blood spurting copiously.

One of my favorite weapons was the flame gun—there's just nothing like setting your enemies on fire and hearing them scream "It burns, it burns!" In addition to the usual weapons mayhem, you can also play soccer with the heads of freshly killed opponents.

You can carry only 10 weapons at a time, so you'll need to make careful choices. Deciding can be tough, though—I kept wishing I could build a weapons stash somewhere in the game, just in case.

...And People Who Need Killing

Innocent bystanders can be killed throughout the game (they can replenish your life force), and there will be times when you'll definitely want to thin their ranks—especially when you run into the woman with the nasal voice that keeps bleating, "Please, spare my life." It took me only about a half-second to designate her "Most Annoying Bystander" and blow her to smithereens.

Not all the bystanders are so innocent, though; I'm still wondering which one of them nailed the guy in the washing machine. Unlike the first game, BLOOD II is a fully 3D shooter, using Monolith's hot new LithTech engine. The graphics are gorgeous, with lush textures and spectacular lighting effects throughout the game. Monsters are creepy and well detailed, particularly the bosses. The people look good and have a fully fleshed-out feel to them. The levels themselves alternate from dark and gloomy to well lit. The twin standouts of the level design are the airship and the cathedral.

Sound is great, with the music suiting the atmosphere of each level (especially if you've got a surround sound setup). The sound effects are top-notch, with each weapon making an appropriate and satisfying sound as you waste anything that moves.

It's Not All Blood and Roses

Unfortunately, BLOOD II has a few problems. The AI is very erratic at times, with enemies sometimes simply standing there while you shoot them. At other times, your enemies will freeze the second you leave their line of sight, making it easy to pick them off.

Multiplayer support wasn't highly functional in the initial release. No doubt Monolith will be releasing a patch to improve performance, but it wasn't a pleasant experience over a modem connection to the Internet. However, once performance improves, BLOOD II should be a deathmatch romp thanks to well-designed multiplayer levels and weapons that spill lots of blood.

BLOOD II also has a bit of an identity problem. The original had a much darker, horror-oriented slant. The sequel has moved that toward a more traditional corridor-shooter environment (with humorous elements). This isn't a fatal problem by any means, but it does make it harder for BLOOD II to distinguish itself from other action games.

BLOOD II is still a genuinely fun game, however. Shooter fans will want to give it the once-over just to see the graphics, gore, and weapons. Don't expect anything new or earth-shattering in terms of gameplay, and you won't be disappointed.

Jim Lynch has written about software and games for PC Magazine, PC Week, Brainplay.com, and MSN.
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A Bug's Death
This Arcade Tribute Gets It Half Right

by Dawn Jepsen

For those waxing nostalgic for the '80s, it's been a pretty good year. Software companies have cashed in on the ever-profitable market of recapturing lost youth with re-releases and new adaptations of classic arcade games. While ASTEROIDS is essentially a color copy of the original, Hastro Interactive, creators of BATTLEZONE, altered the original CENTIPEDE into a completely different (and greatly underappreciated) new game. CENTIPEDE 3D attempts to bring gamers the best of both worlds by offering a new take on the arcade game as well as a completely new "adventure" mode.

Aside from the annoyingly angled 3D screen, the Arcade mode is unremarkably true to the original. While true CENTIPEDE devotees may find the remake initially amusing, the experience is undermined when timing and smoothness of play is hampered by slow response times and the need to lift the mouse just to move all the way across the game screen. So, the arcade experience is, unfortunately, not duplicated. Players reminiscing over the days of blaring Joan Jett and pockets full of game tokens will, no doubt, be happier with the much more authentic version found in Microsoft's ARCADE.

A New View
What redeems CENTIPEDE is its addictive and challenging, if misnamed, Adventure mode. Really more a level-based action game, it has you act as reluctant defender of your people in a stylized, 3D world cleverly based on the monsters and mushrooms of the arcade game. Your enemy, in addition to some new and nasty bugs, remains the deadly centipede.

Play begins in Weedon, where the centipede weaves its way through a small village and blows up anything it touches. Aside from destroying the centipede, the gamer must defend the houses of the town and rescue its wise people. After you kill a few centipedes, a bridge to the next level will open up. Complete six levels, and it's off to a new land—the ice, lava, and sea worlds are especially challenging. Things are kept interesting through the introduction of new insects, with various destructive properties, as well as special power-ups (the flame thrower is a personal favorite). The levels aren't just shooting—there are puzzle elements and some rather annoying platform-jumping sequences. With 3D odd levels, the Adventure mode offers plenty of play.

There are a number of ways to view the action. The most useful is an overhead, angled view, but other views put you behind, or even in the cockpit of the centipede-killing vehicle. CENTIPEDE's 3D support is limited to 3Dfx Glide. With a non-3Dfx card, you're likely to find the graphics a bit blocky.

Without 3D acceleration, the game was sluggish even at 512x384 on a Pentium II-300. At 320x200 on the minimum recommended Pentium 133, it was too jerky to be fun.

Team Destruction
CENTIPEDE's Adventure mode can be played with two players, either split-screen or via a LAN or Internet. Gameplay is cooperative. You can't shoot each other, but you can compete for best score.

While CENTIPEDE's Arcade mode will likely cause you to turn off the computer in frustration and head to a real arcade, quarters in hand, the Adventure mode is worth a look. Its fast, original, challenging play, and is a worthy tribute to the arcade classic. CGW

Making the only serious dent to Dawn Jepsen's arcade MILLIPEDE marathons is the opportunity to destroy her loved ones in YOU DON'T KNOW JACK: THE RIDER.

www.computergaming.com
Speed Kills...Go Faster
DETHKARZ Takes the Road Rage Exit Into Heavy Traffic

by Pete Scisco

The title of this speed-demon blastfest suggests a radical combat mix of Mad Max (publisher Melbourne House is from down under, after all) and West Coast gangsta rap. But in reality this action racer is a 3D grown-up version of MARIO KART 64 with a nod to the classic WIPEOUT.

DETHKARZ players climb behind the wheels of futuristic rocket sleds on wheels, then race to the finish line; along the way they grab power-ups and weapons to help beat the clock, wreck their opponents, and take the chequered flag.

There’s plenty of "pop" to this game, but that doesn’t make this some "Coca-Cola 600." You won’t spend any of your time in the garage adjusting spoilers, brakes, or any of that other fancy stuff.

Who needs to change gear ratios or aerodynamics when you can eliminate your opponent’s competitive edge with a pulse cannon?

Get Your Motor Running
Instead of customizing your car for weather, track conditions, or other variables, you start out by picking a car that suits your racing style (or your level of road rage). You don’t need the fastest car to win; nor do you absolutely need the most heavily armored. What you do need are control, nerves, and good aim.

If you sustain damage because of missile fire or collisions, you can drive through pit row to boost your car’s energy level (don’t stop—you don’t even have to slow down). Alternatively, you can pick up a repair booster for an instant fix.

The 12 cars featured in this game fall into four classes, each designed along a different strategy, with its strength balanced against a weakness. For example, the fastest-accelerating car can careen out of control in the corners. Likewise, driving a heavy “killer car” that can take a lot of punishment is like steering a lumber truck through a Grand Prix road track.

FREE-FALLING The imaginatively designed racetracks are great to look at, but if you fall off too frequently, you’ll be bringing up the rear of the pack in no time.

After you pick a car, you can choose a quick race in arcade mode or practice laps in a time trial—each is a great way to try out new wheels. The actual racing season takes place over four courses, each of which has three different lengths. You start with short races and unlock the longer tracks if you finish on top in the season standings.

Head Out on the Highway
Tracks vary in difficulty. The Pole track is probably the easiest. The fact that you’re racing on ice doesn’t seem to affect your traction (nor does it eliminate the squeal of tires). The Red Planet track is the most difficult, with a wicked jump and a hard-to-read track that makes it tough for you to anticipate curves.

Through it all, DETHKARZ sticks to its arcade action like your grandfather sticks to the seat of his Olds. Careening off the track won’t kill you; instead, you’re reconstituted back in place with only a small loss of time.

Speed and handling are essential to winning, but a lot of the real fun comes from putting a torpedo missile up the tailpipe of a competitor. When you see your opponent disappear in a beautiful iridescent blue mushroom of an explosion, you feel like a winner no matter what place you’re currently holding.

The sound effects, the 3D video-accelerated graphics—all are designed to totally immerse you in the experience and make DETHKARZ irresistibly addictive. Whether you win or lose, you’ll find yourself back at the starting line, eager to improve your standing and earn hidden cars and unlock other tracks. Go ahead. Take your best shot.

Pete Scisco’s wallet and insurance agent have conspired to keep him off the go-kart circuit—but you ought to see his Hot Wheels track.
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Try as it might, O.D.T. can’t escape being a weak TOMB RAIDER clone

by Kenneth Johnson

What hath Lara Croft wrought? Store shelves crowded with wheezing TOMB RAIDER aspirants, hoping to capture the minds and wallets of gamers, that’s what. Into this jumble you can toss O.D.T., another action/adventure, third-person, platform-jumping game. O.D.T. does distinguish itself by providing multiple characters and by incorporating character experience and skill development systems.

Special Delivery
The game’s atmosphere borrows heavily from Jules Verne’s 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. The opening FMV depicts the flight of the dirigible Nautilus as it struggles through a storm over uncharted territory. In its hold, in a glass container, the Nautilus carries a magical, glowing green pearl that may hold the cure to an epidemic. But magnetic interference makes the pearl go wacko, causing the airship to crash into a tower-like structure. The tower teems with mutants who kidnap the captain, steal the pearl, and shatter its container. It is up to you to find the pearl, restore the container, and collect 30 bottles of gas to power the airship’s escape.

The moody atmosphere around the mysterious tower is effective, but there are gaps in continuity. For example, the storm rages fiercely on the rooftop levels, but if you descend a bit into the structure you can look out from a ledge into a clear, moonlit sky.

There are four crew characters to choose from, each with different ratings in armor, weapon control, and magic skills. As you progress, you gain experience that you distribute among the skills. In addition to affecting your performance, skill levels determine when you can use certain power-ups that increase the strength of your weapons or give you access to magical spells. Once you learn a spell you will need to find mana power-ups to cast it. Other power-ups include ammo for your weapons, weapon and armor upgrades, and energy.

As in TOMB RAIDER, your character is best controlled with a gamepad. Jumping from platform to platform isn’t hard. Although I died many times due to a fall, I could not blame it on poor character control—sometimes I was forced off a platform by crew members who wouldn’t get out of my way. You’ll have to be careful if you expect to get through all eight levels to restore the pearl.

For a game aspiring to be TOMB RAIDER, O.D.T. suffers from less fluid character animation, uninspired visuals, and technical glitches like visible seaming. At times, the camera view will be blocked if your character is too close to a wall. Several times I missed a jump or fell due to the view being blocked in this way. Save points are few and far between, leading to repeating sections of a level ad nauseum.

Enemy AI is lacking as well. Monsters will stand still until you fire upon them. Their reactive attacks can be nasty—until you step over an invisible “triggering” line. After that they’ll leave you alone until your next onslaught.

O.D.T. will much likely appeal mostly to hard-core fans of third-person platformers. It is way better looking than SPACE BUNNIES MUST DIE but beyond the character development and spell casting features, O.D.T. is Otherwise Distinctly Tired.

Kenneth Johnson

was made into a vampire in the late 14th century. When he’s not searching for his family underneath the cemeteries of Paris he’s playing TENCHU STEALTH ASSASSIN.

DON’T PUSH! Some limited character interaction will fill you in on objectives and net you a power-up or two, but the same characters can get in your way and force you off a platform.

BIG AND STUPID O.D.T.’s monsters are adequately big and threatening, but their AI is so poor they’re easily dispatched.

SEEN IT BEFORE? O.D.T. gives the requisite nod to all those 3D buzzwords, but the sterile, uninspired effects, textures, and environments make you wonder if the third D is Dull.

Price: $44.99
Publisher: Psygnosis
Foster City, CA
6552-287-6500

www.psygnosis.com
"I noticed Starsiege running and went in for a closer look. Oh my God... what I saw was breathtaking."

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H.E.D.Z
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: $29.95
www.hedz.com

Although H.E.D.Z is a third-person over-the-shoulder shooter, I hesitate to even invoke the names of other well-known games that use this vantage point because they don’t belong on the same page as a discussion of this game. H.E.D.Z. has a long list of things that are not very good. It seems that Hasbro believes that you and I will buy just about anything, and this turkey fits in perfectly with that strategy.

The nausea begins the instant you open the manual. Page two details a tortured, head-thrashing premise so incredibly cheeseball that anyone pitching the idea to even a grade Z Hollywood executive would have been escorted to the city limits in a hearse. It goes downhill from there.

“Gameplay” consists of running around shooting aliens in the “Head Extreme Destruction Zone,” trying to grab their “hedz” as they pop off. The environments (even with a 3Dfx card) look cheesy, the characters look cheesy, and even my four-year-old son, who will play just about anything and really likes cheese, turned his nose up at this one.

In fact, I’ll summarize with a quote from the boy—“Daddy, that game is dumb.”

Son, you got that right. —Greg Fortune

Limb from Limb
Publisher: Interplay
Price: $19.95
www.interplay.com

Die by the Sword was an intriguing action game marred by a short single-player quest and an interface, dubbed VSIM, that was both flexible and aggravating. Now, with the release of the Limb from Limb expansion pack, gamers can engage in more hacking mayhem.

Playing as Maya from the original game, you’ll go on another short (six-level) quest to vanquish the Black Widow. The main additions to the game come in letting you play as different people. Also, Maya herself has a choice of what weapons she wants to use in her quest, whether it be a mace and shield or a pair of daggers. You get two new enemies to fight in the single-player quest, but you can replay the quest as any of the enemies from the original game, which provides for some variety. Of course, the quest doesn’t make as much sense, and you lose a lot of the somewhat amusing commentary, but it’s kind of fun to try to get through the game as either a lowly kobold or a giant mantis.

Also, for multiplayer, the expansion gives a set of new arenas to fight in, in addition to two new modes: King of the Hill and Ogre Hockey. Internet play is still a bit buggy though, so it’s best to use a LAN for these matches.

Ultimately, the expansion is for diehards. The quest is still extremely short, the same quirks with the interface are still present, and the same textures are used throughout the levels. If you liked hacking people to bits in the original, then spend the 20 bucks for this. But if you weren’t into this game very much in the first place, this expansion won’t make you a fan. —Thierry Nguyen

Spec Ops: Ranger Team Bravo
Publisher: Ripcord Games
Price: $19.95
www.ripcordgames.com

The thing I dislike most about single-player first-person shooter is that I have to do all the work myself and constantly having to look over my shoulder is just too much trouble. Spec Ops: Ranger Team Bravo pulls the pin on this heavy burden by adding the much missed multiplayer component to the original Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way (though you’ll need the original game to play the add-on).

The pack expands your arsenal of playability options with the standard free-for-all deathmatch, team-on-team deathmatch, cooperative single player missions, and team vs. team single player missions, in which one side gets to assist the “enemy” AI in preventing the Rangers from completing their mission.

New tours of duty include Bosnia, Iraq, and Vietnam. It’s too bad you can only play these campaigns while connected to the Internet, even in single-player mode. And when you play as “enemy” in multiplayer mode you look and dress just like them—but you’re carrying U.S. equipment.

The in-house player lobby works great for setting up games. Finding opponents and communicating during the game is a breeze. I was coordinating attacks like I had IVS on my desktop. However, some annoying bugs persist, such as sticking your head through objects, and weapon fire frequently fails to track high threat targets when it locks onto faraway enemies. —Lance A. Larka

Targeting: Night
Bang Bang, Shoot Shoot
Action Gaming With None of That Messy Thinking to Get in Your Way

Future Cop: L.A.P.D.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Price: $19.99
www.ea.com

FUTURE COP: L.A.P.D. is for all you gamers who liked the menacing ED-209 robot from the Robocop movies. A fast-paced, arcade-style third-person shooter, FUTURE COP lets you control the heavily armed XG-1 Alpha Walker throughout various locales in future L.A. Don’t scoff because this is a PlayStation port; it’s actually successful and even better than its console counterpart thanks to Direct3D graphics and more multiplayer maps.

You can play this game in either Crime War or in Precinct Assault mode. Crime War is the straightforward action segment where you play through various missions, fighting criminal scum. Precinct Assault is the action/strategy hybrid where you and one opponent each control a base, trying to capture neutral factories and turrets while making units to invade each other’s bases. This multiplayer mode is actually a lot of fun, as you frantically run around the field creating allies and wounding off your opponent’s forces. This makes FUTURE COP feel like two separate games for the price of one.

Montezuma’s Return

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Publisher: WizardWorks
Price: $19.99
www.wizworks.com

If you’re as old as I am (wheeze) you might recall a game called MONTEZUMA’S REVENGE. Well Montezuma’s back in 3D, with improved graphics and sound and a less unfortunate name: MONTEZUMA’S RETURN.

A first-person, 3D platform game, MONTEZUMA’S RETURN challenges you to run, jump, and climb your way through a faux Mayan temple populated by witch doctors, bounding skulls, and leopard people...just like the first game. Winning a level is mostly a matter of logic and well-timed leaps, but you must sometimes whack a baddie. You can kick and punch—you even see your goofy-looking arms and legs flailing around—but that’s the closest you’ll ever get to a weapon. Nevertheless, you must defeat each level’s boss, either by a judicious combination of kicking and running away, or by methods more devious, such as chucking his fireballs back at him.

Rooms are stark, though good-looking, with plenty of colored lighting effects and fine, up-close texturing, at least in 3Dfx mode.

Control was surprisingly squirrely—it felt more like wheeling around on a unicycle than running and walking—and the miserly save games you repeat more of a level than you should when you slip into some lava. Still, MONTEZUMA’S REVENGE delivers good, old-fashioned fun in a shiny 3D package.

—Mark Clarkson

Barrage

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Publisher: Activision
Price: $26.95
www.activision.com

BARRAGE captures the look and feel of an arcade first-person shooter thanks to terrific-looking 3D environments, tunnels, and underwater. Objects are simple but convincing, with clean textures and, in some cases, animation—well, at least on a Voodoo².

Thanks to plentiful power-ups, you’ll take out the endless procession of baddies with cannons, lasers, plasma beams...even pocket nukes. Everything, including trees, explodes with satisfying crash and fireball. Shoot a building in Chicago and you’ll hear glass shattering and see shards flying. Destroy a civilian village and an old man emerges to shake his cane at you.

BARRAGE runs great on Voodoo and Voodoo² boards, but my Voodoo Rush seemed to have some personal issues with the game engine.

Missions are plenty difficult—even on Easy it’s a struggle to complete them before the clock runs out. Unfortunately, there just aren’t enough missions. Luckily, BARRAGE expands its replayability by going head-to-head, if only in deathmatch mode. —Mark Clarkson.
Give No Quarter(s)
Classic Arcade Action without the Hassle of Change Machines

Big Race USA

Publisher: Empire Interactive
Price: $34.95
www.empire-us.com

Empire Interactive has now firmly established its place as the Bally of PC pinball games. PRO PINBALL: BIG RACE USA, isn’t just a pinball game. It’s more a pinball machine simulator.

BIG RACE USA simulates only a single table, but it does so with exacting precision. Ball physics—already nearly indistinguishable from the real thing in previous PRO PINBALL games—have been fine-tuned even more. The ball no longer occasionally rockets across the table at unbelievable speed. Flipper action is superb. You can alter the slope of the table, and even adjust the friction to simulate a new, old-but-well-maintained, or neglected machine.

While this isn’t a recreation of a real table, you’d be hard-pressed to prove it. The 3D-rendered table is viewable in up to 24-bit color at resolutions up to 1600x1200 (stay at 1024x768 or below, though, or multiball play will crawl). The design is excellent, with 44 distinct table elements including pop-up plastic cars, Magno-locks, ramps, loops, and four flippers. Hit the proper combo and you even play a simple video game on the dot-matrix score display.

If you’ve ever wanted to own a real pinball machine, you’ll marvel at the machine’s operator’s menu, which lets you micromanage everything from bonus times to difficulty levels. If you usually play pinball purely by keeping the ball in motion, you’ll appreciate the tour mode, which will guide you through the various bonuses and play modes. There’s even free Internet multiplayer play.

Downsides? The music sounds like it should be backing up a love scene in Emanuelle VII, and the tables feature an electronic plunger, rather than manual—not much to complain about. If you buy only one pinball game this year, buy BIG RACE USA. —Denny Atkin

Microsoft Pinball Arcade

Publisher: Microsoft
Price: $34.95
www.microsoft.com

You might look at Microsoft's PINBALL ARCADE and think it’s a much better deal than BIG RACE USA. After all, you get seven tables on one CD. However, what this collection adds in breadth, it lacks in depth.

If you’re a serious pinball fanatic, you’ll probably dig the chance to experience tables such as the 1931 flipperless Baffle Ball; 1947 Humpty Dumpty, which features rows of flippers along each side of the table; and 1950 Knockout, with its ball-activated mechanical boxing ring. If you’re not a pinball fanatic, however, you’ll probably find these tables mere curiosities that grow boring after a few plays.

The other four tables fare better. The 1963 Slick Chick table and Bicentennial-themed 1976 Spirit of 76 are recreations of the simple mechanical tables we 30-somethings enjoyed in the dark days before SPACE INVADERS. The best tables in the game are the 1982 Haunted House, the first three-level, six-flipper table; and the 1992 Cue Ball Wizard, which features an actual pool cue ball and 8-ball on the table.

Physics are good for the most part, although occasionally the ball takes off at seemingly ludicrous speed. Resolution is adjustable up to 1024x768, although ball movement can get jerky at highest detail even on a fast machine. Although the functionality of each machine is replicated well, you can’t access any of their setup modes.

PINBALL ARCADE includes a few entertaining tables and a few of purely historical value. It’s not a bad collection, but as I said before, if you buy only one pinball game this year, buy BIG RACE USA. —Denny Atkin

Asteroids

Publisher: Activision
Price: $39.95
www.activision.com

It may have 3D graphics, but Activision’s updated version of ASTEROIDS still has gameplay that’s strictly two-dimensional.

Unlike CENTIPEDE and Activision’s own BATTLEZONE, this remake adds little but flashy visuals to the original design.

ASTEROIDS’ plot mirrors the original, with your ship spinning around the screen blasting big rocks into little, while fighting the occasional enemy ship. You fire, thrust, and, when in trouble, activate your shields or hyperspace and risk reappearing inside a rock.

While gameplay is essentially unchanged, there are new features. You can snag power-ups for additional lives or secondary weapons, like homing missiles, mines, or a ramming shield. And the classic saucer is part of a fleet of enemies that includes 11 other ships, each with unique attacks. There’s also variety in the asteroids themselves, such as crystal asteroids that can regenerate. There are 75 levels in all, broken into five zones. Each zone has unique obstacles, such as a black hole or solar-flare explosions, but the levels within the zones are all similar. ASTEROIDS is very fast-paced, and even at the easiest of the three skill levels it’s challenging. Two players can compete on the same PC, but there’s no network or modem play.

The 3D graphics, music, and sound are well done, although more variety in backgrounds would have been nice. However, the minor additions to the game aren’t enough to make anyone but a die-hard fan of the original want to sit through 75 levels of spin-and-fire.

—Dawn Jepsen
Lead a gang, control turf, build a power base and destroy your rivals on the mean streets of BEATDOWN. Real-time, mission-based urban action takes you where no game has gone. Compete head-to-head with up to four players via Internet or LAN.

GET READY FOR A BEATDOWN!
Not Just a Pretty Face

Jane's WWII Sim Offers More Than Dazzling Visuals

by John Nolan

Don't envy it if you will, but first impressions are usually based on looks. And looks are the first thing you'll notice about Jane's WWII FIGHTERS, which sets a new standard in visual excellence. The aircraft exteriors are exquisitely beautiful; the instrument panels are accurate and legible; sky, sun, and cloud effects are superb; explosions, flames, and flak are awesome. Nose art and pieces fly as holes appear in his aircraft. Crashes are spectacular. Nobody does it better.

Of course, dazzling looks don't make for a great game, and WWII FIGHTERS isn't perfect. Its missions have a bit of a canned feel, and even the graphics aren't perfect. Cockpit frameworks don't live up to the very high standards of the instrument panels and exteriors. The terrain is really quite plain, with lots of snow-covered turf and brown pebbly forest texture with a few polygonal trees sticking up. And while the game is a visual feast, you'll need plenty of CPU horsepower and a 3D card to get a ticket to the show.

Better Than You Think

There are seven flyable fighters—the P-51, P-38, P-47, Spitfire Mk IX, BF-109G6, FW-190A8, and the ME-262A—that await your steady hand. In addition, seven computer-controlled multiengined planes flesh out the missions: the B-17, B-24, B-26, C-47, Arado-234, HE-111, and the JU-88.

The adjustable flight modeling spans the range from rookie to pro. The Easy model will continue a slow vertical climb with full power even at 60 knots—welcome to Arcade City. However, the Hard setting is more demanding, with better drag, some torque effect, a bit of inertia, and simple stall/spin characteristics. Here, the aircraft require a gentle hand and begin to show some characteristic distinctions between types. The models are detailed enough to provide challenging play and should satisfy all but the most hard-core purists. Jane's needs to add an input scaling routine for the controls, however, since some joysticks don't allow full control deflection.

The weapons tilt a bit strong in terms of killing power. A 15-round burst from the twin 13mm guns on a Focke-Wulf will tear the wing off of a B-17. Still, kills don't come all that easy, and diving into a multiplane furball often sends you hunting for the Revive key.

The cockpits are stunning, but the frames seem overly wide and block quite a bit of your view of the action. There are numerous visual aids for tracking targets, including a padlock, a mouse-controlled fully virtual cockpit, and snap-view keys. The joystick view hat inexplicably pans the view—useless in combat—instead of snapping it, but that's supposed to be addressed in a patch that should be available now.

Sheep and Wolves

There are four AI skill levels, from Rookie to Ace. At all levels, Lieutenant Intel flies his plane smoothly, maximizing performance and rarely stalling. In fact, the AI pilot control stick skills are nearly flawless, and you'll be hard-pressed to match its golden hands. The AI also seems to accelerate like a banshee no matter which plane it flies, so learn to use lead turns.

The main difference between AI levels seems to be in tactics and

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

APPEAL: World War II air-combat fans—beginner and experienced.
PROS: Superb aircraft graphics and 3D effects; good flight model with variable engine AI; easy fun multiplayer connections.
CONS: Weak documentation; campaigns lack immersive qualities.
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3D SUPPORT: Direct 3D, OpenGL, 3Dfx Glide.
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2-8 players); 1 CD per player.
Price: $49.95
Publisher: Jane's Combat Simulations
Redwood City, CA (650) 623-1900

www.janes.ea.com

MARCH 1999
Deep Multiplayer

If you want to up the immersion factor, you can play WWII FIGHTERS with—and against—humans. Although free-for-all furballs are available, you can actually fly any Quick Mission, Single Mission, or custom mission created in the Mission Builder. This lets you re-create actual historical missions, such as bomber escorts, and fly them from takeoff to touchdown—a welcome change from mindless deathmatch combat.

Jane’s thoughtfully provides an organized Web site matchmaking service at www.janescombat.net. With a few mouse clicks, up to eight players can quickly get airborne, as enemies, squadron mates, or a mix. Best of all, there’s no charge, and the system works well. It’s a great place to meet other fanatics and exchange tips and tricks. You can also bypass the Jane’s site and play over the Internet or a LAN.

Into the Fire

Gameplay modes range from instant action to an extended campaign. The Fly Now mode throws you into a gauntlet-type mission in a P-51, with continuing waves of enemies. It’s fun once or twice, but you’ll soon want to graduate to the Quick Mission mode. Here, you pick aircraft, loadouts, and flight conditions for up to eight flights of four aircraft. This opens a doorway to dozens of different combat situations. The 35 Single Missions include training and operational flights. These help you build experience to qualify for the full campaign.

Campaign mode features air operations during the Battle of the Bulge, spanning about two weeks in December 1944. Both Axis and Allied sides are playable, with about 25 missions in either campaign. Sorties are pre-sorted, although you can edit plane types and a few other details in the Mission Builder before launch. The campaigns are very impersonal; since there’s no way to create a “hero” persona, there’s no scoring, and no medals are awarded. Missions are simply Pass/Fail.

While you’ll fly with wingmen, you can only listen to them—there are no wingman commands. It’s every man for himself, and you’ll wish you could at least scream for help when the Focke-Wulf flight decides to dive on your lonely cay. Overall, the game has a detached atmosphere, clearly lacking the immersiveness that characterizes EUROPEAN AIR WAR.

If you tire of the scripted missions, the comprehensive Mission Builder will let you create your own. It gives you access to all the ground vehicles, aircraft, and victory conditions that the Jane’s designers used for the built-in missions, so some interesting stories should appear on the Net soon.

In fact, because ground units fight it out under AI control, history buffs can choose from the actual units available during the battle and re-create scenarios to their heart’s content. Flying the mission on autopilot lets you watch the battle unfold; the computer will do all the heavy lifting while you enjoy the visuals.

The Jane’s Treatment

WWII FIGHTERS throws in some great historical background info. Video interviews with six aces, a hangar full of interactive briefings on the planes (complete with in-flight videos), a battle history, ground force descriptions, and more are available on the sim’s two discs. Wonderful WWII-era background music is the icing on the cake. The paper documentation tends to be a bit skimpy, though, giving just the bare bones of how things work. Expect to spend a little time stumbling around figuring out the game’s workings.

WWII FIGHTERS has technology legs to carry it into the future—screen size options run up to 1600x1200 in 32-bit color, and the sim supports D3D, Glide, and OpenGL. There’s plenty of room for the sim to grow into faster PCs as they become available. Given the visual artistry, flight modeling, and AI, only the thin documentation and the lack of immersion in the campaigns emerge as significant gripes against this otherwise top-notch simulation.

John Noland firmly believes that “jets are for kids” and that “fox two” should mean “she has a girlfriend.” EUROPEAN AIR WAR and WWII FIGHTERS are about to cause his first divorce.
Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robot Pods

You Can Teach an Old Pod New Tricks, But Can It Learn to Play Alone?

by Chase Dahl

The recipe for fighting-robot games seems to follow the same time-tested formula: Start with big, anthropomorphic machines. Next, provide a cornucopia of weapons and equipment. Finally, toss in the standard torso-twist controls, and let the best robot win. But if you add in a splash of battlefield logistics and supply management, you end up with something a little special.

CYBERSTRIKE 2 is an updated version of CYBERSTRIKE, a venerable, online-only, Mecha-combat game. While CYBERSTRIKE 2 has essentially the same mechanics as its ancestor, it has a new look with enhanced, hardware-accelerated graphics. Solo play is now possible, with two single-player campaigns of 25 missions each. Finally, improvements have been made to the game's multiplayer features.

Guns and Butter

On the surface, CYBERSTRIKE 2's gameplay mirrors other Mecha games, but there are significant differences. The game's vehicles, called Pods, are relatively small but quick and able to effortlessly bound across battlefields. This mobility, combined with rapid weapon rates-of-fire and projectile speeds, results in frantic, fire-and-move combats that rarely degenerate into the cliched MECHWARIOR circle-and-shoot matches.

These nimble furies have their limitations. A Pod's main weapon and shields rely on stored power that is quickly depleted in combat. And, thanks to its small size, a Pod cannot carry many secondary weapons. As a result, even short battles lead to Pods that are drenched and vulnerable.

Fortunately, resupply is available from ships hovering above the battlefield. They can be called in to drop energy towers as well as equipment. In the single-player game, you can only call on resources that you have in stock before the battle. In multiplayer, you must purchase resupply using credits earned through combat.

Having additional equipment on call is useful, but it's the energy tower management that is vital to CYBERSTRIKE 2's strategy. Towers provide an infinite amount of power to nearby friendly Pods, but they are defenseless, and cannot be used once placed.

Most multiplayer combats focus around contested energy towers, giving tactics a tight, territorial flavor as opposed to aimless deathmatching.

More interesting game that requires teamwork and planning. Multiplayer games are easy to set up, can be entered and exited at will, and are fairly lag-free even with a 28.8 modem connection.

Unfortunately, multiplayer is also where CYBERSTRIKE 2 stumbles slightly. To play with other people, you have to use Simutronics' server. In addition, if you want full access to all of CYBERSTRIKE's online features, you have to sign up with Simutronics at a cost of $9.95 a month. Otherwise, you're limited to just a few arenas and 10 Pod modules.

I, CyberPod

Even with its new accelerated graphics, CYBERSTRIKE 2's bland, single-player feel will definitely keep it behind next-generation heavyweights like HEAVY GEAR 2 and STARSIEGE. However, its clever multiplayer action provides enough variety and challenge to keep even jaded gamers interested—provided they're willing to pay.

Chase Dahl has fallen victim to the same HALF-LIFE game-lock that nearly resulted in half this issue's pages being left blank.

**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**

**APPEAL:** Giant robot fans looking for faster action with a twist.

**PROS:** Strong, polished multiplayer module that has a lot of variety; excellent graphics.

**CONS:** Single-player game doesn't show off the game's depth; nonsubscribers get heavy multiplayer limitations.

**DIFFICULTY:** Intermediate.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Pentium 166, Windows 95/98, 32 MB RAM, 70 MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3D card.

**3D SUPPORT:** Direct3D, 3Dfx Glide.

**MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT:** Internet through Simutronics servers.

Price: $34.99

Publisher: 399 Studios and Simutronics

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Prince of Daggerfall

REDGUARD Is an Intelligent, Swashbuckling Action/Adventure

by Thierry Nguyen

Every month, the CGW editors puzzle over where to put the increasing number of cross-genre games. When a new copy of HEROES OF UNREAL, TOMB RAIDER, and JEDI MECHS comes in, we're left arguing about how it's a sim, adventure, action, and strategy game all at once. Such is the case with Bethesda's REDGUARD. Instead of making its usual massive RPG, Bethesda has dared to blur the line between action and adventure this time around. Though it is ultimately a very cool adventure game, there is enough action that it will undoubtedly turn off those adventure gamers with less-than-stellar reflexes.

Back to Basics

The setting for REDGUARD is Stros M'kai, an island in the Hammerfell province in the world of Tamriel. You're playing Cyrus, a Redguard mercenary and the "prodigal son" of Hammerfell. You fled Stros M'kai because you killed your sister's husband in a drunken rage, and you've been wandering the world ever since. Now, a friend of yours writes a letter telling you that your estranged sister, Iszara, has been missing for the past three months. Hence you sail back to Stros M'kai to investigate her disappearance.

Since REDGUARD takes place in Tamriel, the design team had the bonus of a fleshed-out fantasy world to use for the background. The plot starts simply enough, but there's a heavy dose of political intrigue that makes it a lot deeper than it initially appears; overall it's a good break from the hackneyed "evil-demons-sweep-the-land" fantasy plot. Also, more kudos should go to the writers, because they've written some great and intelligent fantasy-style dialogue for REDGUARD. There's a lot of dialogue, too; at times equalizing or even surpassing the amount found in the original GABRIEL KNIGHT.

A True Mix and Match

If REDGUARD were a movie, it would undoubtedly star Errol Flynn. Essentially, it's a semi-traditional adventure game and a heavy dose of swashbuckling action, with the atmosphere of such films as the Zorro series or The Adventures of Robin Hood. It features adventure gaming elements (lots of dialogue and puzzles) mixed in with action elements found in third-person games (jumping and fencing).

Like any good adventure game, REDGUARD is packed with puzzles. There's the requisite "let's trade items!" dialogs and MYST-style logic puzzles, along with more original ideas, such as the Gremlin Speech puzzle. Heck, there's even a treasure map puzzle for pirate aficionados. Also, the game is quite nonlinear. Certain triggers move the story forward, but you can basically tackle the game in any order you choose.

But adventure fans need to know that REDGUARD isn't a game with "a few action elements." It's a true hybrid of both genres. It will help greatly if you have played through the TOMB RAIDER series, as

LOOKING GOOD With 3D acceleration, the gameworld looks much more vibrant and detailed than the earlier Xninge games.

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE? Don't write this off as an action game; there's more dialogue here than you can shake a crystal at.

LEAP OF FAITH Be sure your jumping skills are up to snuff, because they form a major element in REDGUARD's gameplay.

FLASH OF LILANDIRIL

FLAME AT FIRE

ARMIES OF MAGIC

STORM

OLD WINTER

DEMON FIRE

DIMENSIONS

THE EIGHT SEPTA

IVE
there are a lot of jumps to be made. Some are no sweat, like jumping a broken bridge; others, like the Goblin Caverns, will test even TOMB RAIDER veterans. Even the memorable Dwarven Scarab puzzle requires a lot of jumping to complete.

On top of that, there's the swashbuckling combat. Cyrus is a warrior, so there's a lot of swordplay throughout the game. Thankfully, combat isn't that tough, and is usually avoidable. With the exception of a few set encounters, you can just run away from most fights. In the fights you do have to play, there's usually an extra puzzle element in contrast to just more hacking and slashing. The interface is very straightforward, and to help poorly reflexed adventurers there's an auto-defend option that makes parrying a lot easier.

**Act Like You Like It**

Amidst all this coolness, however, there are a few quirks that bring the game down. While this game is very clean and bug free compared to previous Bethesda products, some nasty bugs still creep up. For one thing, REDGUARD uses the XEngine, which is DOS-based. This means that your acceleration options are limited to either 3DFx Glide or ugly software rendering. Also, the game is really finicky for gamers with fancy PCI-based 3D cards; I had no problems with mine, but there have been many tales of woe concerning SB Lives and similar cards on Usenet.

Finally, the game occasionally threw me back to the desktop for no apparent reason.

Cyrus' animation is a bit stiff, and not quite in sync with the background; it looks more as if he's floating rather than walking. While combat is pretty good, sometimes Cyrus becomes a bit hard to control in other activities. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what the problem is, but controlling Cyrus isn't quite as fluid as controlling Lara, or even the Prince of Persia. Also, if there's a lot of activity on the screen, the movement of both the camera and Cyrus slows down noticeably (this is on a PiN400 with 128MB of RAM and a Voodoo2 card). There were also a few technical glitches, such as clipping problems (guards' swords sticking through walls), and some NPCs were either stupidly trying to walk through a wall or magically levitated in the air.

Also, while it's great that the game is generally nonlinear, it's advised that you not return the amulet to Richton too soon. This is a quest that is offered to you the moment you start the game, but if you see this quest through, it will cause every guard to want to fight you. I suggest you try to do as many quests as you can, and then save Richton's amulet for last; otherwise you'll have guards hacking at you throughout the game.

Finally, the voice acting is very uneven. At times, it's perfect (I loved Governor Richton, J'Err, and Nafaalilargus the dragon) or at least very solid (Cyrus and the pirates of the Restless League).

Other times, well, let's say that the Inca games have some competition for horrendous voice acting. Anyone who didn't turn their volume off when listening to Lakene, Erasm, Favis, and Mariah has a stronger constitution for bad acting than do I. Some of these characters ruined the immersion for me.

REDGUARD is a thrilling game, one of Bethesda's best releases in a while. Check it out if you're looking for a swashbuckling adventure with a good plot. Just be ready for the technical issues and jumps that would make Lara quake in her short shorts. Also, keep hand on the volume knob when talking to certain people.

Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen has also played PRINCE OF PERSIA, TOMB RAIDER I and II, and is now playing HALF-LIFE.
Ho, Hum, No Bottle of Rum
THQ's Latest Is All Jacked Up With Nowhere to Go

by Scorpion

With a little swash and a little buckling, REDJACK aspires to be a pirate game, but it's a far cry from SID MEIER'S PIRATES or any of the MONKEY ISLAND games. Our hero, Nick Dove, lives on the small island of Lizard Point. He has a slightly obnoxious older brother and a slightly more obnoxious girlfriend. The girlfriend holds the mortgage on Nick's farm, which she may have to sell to pay her father's debts.

Little surprise, then, that Nick decides to board a buccaneer vessel that just happens to be docked in the harbor. Being a landlubber, Nick of course has to do a few things to prove he's pirate material. That accomplished, he's taken on board, though not all of the crew is thrilled to have him. Nick may not have picked the best ship, either. It's captained by one of the few remaining members of the Brethren, a group of pirates originally gathered under the notorious Redjack, who's long dead through someone's treachery.

Worse, Nick doesn't do much in the way of real pirating—no captured prizes, no boarding or desperate fighting on deck, no real blazing sea battles. Most of what you do as Nick is either escape from someone or rush to rescue someone else.

There are some one-on-one encounters when you get to use a sword, but the DOOM-like view proves very restricting, making it difficult to manipulate your sword via a mouse. You can attack or parry, but there is no movement to speak of in any direction. At times, it's possible to go forward a bit, forcing your opponent to take a step or two back.

Fights are mostly won by trickery, not swordsmanship. This is deliberate, though you may not realize that until the game has been restored a few times. So, while fighting, you also have to look at the scenery and move your cursor around to find whatever it is that just might help you defeat your opponent.

REDJACK descends into the absurd on occasion. A fantasy pirate romp is one thing. But when a flying ship appears, complete with balloons instead of sails, or Nick fights off a small army of assassins with a primitive machine-gun while riding a sort of roller coaster, one has to draw the line.

Seeing Red
Most puzzles aren't particularly difficult; the only challenging one is opening the temple doors. In that respect, the game is (ahem) pretty clear sailing. For what it's worth, REDJACK sports a simple interface, and saving and restoring is very quick. If the game is running slowly, you can switch between 16-bit and 32-bit modes without any real loss in graphic display.

In the end, even though REDJACK tries to combine action and adventure elements, it fails to satisfy—especially given its banal storyline and occasional absurdities. If you were looking for a real, rousing pirate experience, you won't find it here.

For more adventure fare, check out Scorpion's hints for GMT FANDANGO in the Gamer's Edge section in this issue.

Aye, It Be the Ninjas
The Brethren are being hunted down by a group of ninja-like assassins with quasimagical powers, to whom the captain falls victim. Since Nick is nearby, he gets the blame, and the story is terribly predictable from this point on. There's the jailbreak, the daughter of Redjack disguised as a crew member, the cursed treasure, the ancient temple ruins, the mysterious secret enemy in the background...you get the idea.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

APEAL: Aspirate for pirates with lots of patience.
PROS: Technically, it runs well in either 16-bit or 32-bit graphics mode; nice interface.
CONS: bland at best; more often boring and hackneyed.
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.
3D SUPPORT: None.
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.
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Shot on Goal
EA Doesn't Go Much Further With FIFA 99, but It Doesn't Have To

by Joe Vallina

The Major League Soccer season had just wound down and the European leagues were just starting up when the new FIFA game hit my desk. I'm a big fan of the series, and I couldn't wait to see how the EA Sports team had improved upon an almost perfect formula. Well, FIFA 99 does have some great additions, but it also has a few unexpected problems. However, fear not, fellow soccer fans; it's still head and shoulders above any other soccer game on the market.

The first time I saw FIFA 98 on a big monitor, I thought the guy playing it was watching a game on TV. FIFA 99 looks just as good. The player animations are incredibly detailed and realistic, the uniforms are accurate, and the dead-ball animations are at times hilarious. Also, some of the nonaction animations have been removed to make the games flow without as many interruptions (I'm thinking of the now-absent throw-in animations).

There are a couple of glitches in the graphics, though. At times it seems as if the goalie can jump about 30 feet in one lunge when he's gathering up a loose ball (Super Goalie to the rescue!), and the ball sometimes moves unrealistically fast when passed from player to player. But these are the only examples of bad graphics I could find. The player animations are much more fluid this time around, and tackles look so real as to be comical at times.

(Have one of your guys put a snotty Manchester United forward on his ass and you'll get my drift.)

Details, Details

The player details are dead-on, as per the norm in the series. French goalkeeper Fabian Barthez is as bald as a cue ball, for example, and all of the teams' uniforms have been updated. And, in keeping with the FIFA tradition, there are plenty of teams from which to choose—200, to be exact. All have updated rosters for the new season (late trades excepted, of course). You can still include yourself on the roster of any team (or teams) you choose, and now, with the more detailed player attributes, your likeness will be even better displayed. Sorry ladies, still no girls allowed.

The focus of FIFA 99 is on club play, whereas FIFA 98 was focused on the World Cup (duh). Hence, in FIFA 99 club teams are included from the USA (sadly, it's still not the MLS), Spain, England, Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Brazil. Notably absent (still) are Mexican clubs or other South American clubs. It's high time the folks at EA acknowledged that the Americas have great teams, too. Of course, there are plenty of downloads available on the Net (see "What About Poland?" sidebar), but you would think that FIFA 99 would sell like gangbusters in Latin America if it included Latin American club teams. (An insider at EA told me that the company is indeed working on licensing for MLS and possibly Mexican leagues, so keep your fingers crossed for FIFA 2000.)

For years, serious soccer fans have been clamoring for the European Super League. While at press time it's still not clear whether or not it will happen in the real world, in FIFA 99 you do get a superleague consisting of AC
A Manager's Dream Come True

One great new addition to FIFA 99 bears special mention, the IGM (In-Game Management) option. This much-needed tool lets you choose three different formations (and aggression levels for each) that you can toggle through on the fly during a game in progress. Thus, you no longer need to stop play to go to the team management screen and alter your lineup. This option works very well. There were several times when I saw an opportunity for a fast break and was able to capitalize on it using the IGM.

Another addition, which is less useful, is the IGT (In-Game Tactics) option. This consists of four preprogrammed moves (offside trap, attacking press, through-ball run, and wing-back run) that you can also use during the game by hitting a certain key combination. These moves are not available if you use only a two- or four-button controller, but I could never get them to work that well anyway (the offside trap worked once out of about 10 times I tried it).

Of course, there are still gajillions of skill moves you can perform using different button combinations. One new addition, which actually works quite well, is the sliding kick. Or you can go with a rainbow kick or 360-degree spin move to more flamboyant. You can even take a dive to try and draw the card, if you're feeling really dramatic.

Tough Cookie

The AI has been improved in FIFA 99. In previous incarnations of the game, if the AI opponent was down a goal or two near the end of a match, you could count on a "miracle" shot or free kick to equalize or win the match. (I've lost more FIFA 98 matches to last-second corner kick/headers-on-goal than I care to remember.) That doesn't happen in FIFA 99.

However, the three difficulty levels are still too far apart. Amateur is too easy, and professional is too difficult (world-class is for gods or masochists only; thank you very much). But, to be fair, the professional level has been toned down from FIFA 98. Now, you can beat it, it's just frickin' hard to do. (Which can be a good thing.)

Also, regarding goalie control, in FIFA 99 you can actually control the goalkeeper at times, although it's normally better to just let the AI do it—unless your keeper is deaf, dumb, and blind (which some are).

The Final Whistle

All in all, FIFA 99 is still the best soccer game out there—by far. Go buy it right now. There are improvements to be made, no doubt, but it still looks incredible, is superfun, and—the icing on the cake—you can still play for all your favorite teams. It's worth your time and cash.

Joe Valls is an avid soccer fan, and his rec team, Bay United FC, can be found at www.homestead.com/bayunitedfc.
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Time to Die, Bambi: Part II

In a Big Improvement, Our Furred Friends Eat It Like Never Before

by Joe Vallina

When the first DEER HUNTER came out, everyone laughed. Especially the folks at Wizard Works...all the way to the bank, that is. But for all the money it made, DEER HUNTER was still a big step below almost every other game out there in terms of gameplay and technology. You couldn’t even walk around, for Pete’s sake. I mean, you could do that in DOOM back in 1993. And don’t get me started on the crappy map screen. Still, DEER HUNTER only cost $20, so what the hell.

Well, in DEER HUNTER II, you can walk around, the horrible map screen has been replaced by a cool GPS device, and the game looks a lot better, albeit not to the quality of most 3D shooters.

Me: 1; Bambi: 0
One new addition to DEER HUNTER II is the Hunter Screen, where you create a hunting identity that keeps track of your hit ratio and other stats. You can create several different hunters (which will keep little Johnny from screwing up your hit ratio while you’re at work).

There are 12 new places to hunt, and you can choose from nine weapons, including a crossbow, a muzzleloader, and a longbow. All of the weapons are pretty good, but I still prefer the standard bolt-action rifle. The game’s inventory list has expanded to include a deer decoy, a fleece jacket, and the GPS positioning device (which displays your longitude/latitude, shows a localized map of the area, and gives the time of day and elevation). You can also use cover scent, two types of attractant scents, and several other gadgets.

The game does a great job of showing tracks, scrapes, rubs, and droppings. When you do hit and injure a deer, you can follow bloodstains on the ground to round up your quarry. This is one of the best features of the game, and realistically mimics real life.

The game’s graphic details are somewhat mediocre, even with the new facelift. Terrain is still pretty blocky, and trees stand out in the middle of nowhere rather than being formed into convincing forests. The deer animations, on the other hand, can be quite realistic, especially when seen from a distance.

Ahma Goin’ Huntin’!
DEER HUNTER II is much more realistic than the first game. You must sight in your weapons before going on the hunt, which is completely realistic. If your gun’s sights are off, you won’t hit the broad side of a barn, much less a deer. However, this higher level of realism comes back to bite the game when it comes to waiting around for a deer to show up. I had several hunts that seemed as though they would never end, and, in fact, after waiting 15 minutes or more for a deer to show (and yes, I did use the calls and attractants), I had to quit the hunt and start another. This has happened to me on real hunts, too, but when I’m playing a computer game, by golly, I want to kill something.

Overall, though, DEER HUNTER II is a solid, fun game, and is definitely an improvement over its predecessor. Another plus is that, despite all of the enhancements, the game still costs $20.

DEER HUNTER II is a game that, while it won’t appeal to the non-hunting, hard-core gaming crowd, is just right for real-life hunters or anyone who wants a fun diversion between work assignments.

Almost like Half-Life, huh? These bloodstains and tracks are very realistic when you need to find a wounded animal.

www.computergaming.com
3D Glitch Hunter
This Buggy, Unrealistic Game Is a Real Letdown

by Joe Vallina

I really, really wanted to like TNN OUTDOORS PRO HUNTER. It's a hunting game based on the UNREAL engine, for God's sake! When I got the initial press release on it, I squealed with delight. Well, now I'm squealing with disgust. It's slow, boring, buggy, unrealistic, and silent. And guess what, folks? That adds up to a mountain of suck.

The game has options galore. You can hunt deer, you can hunt rabbits, you can hunt squirrels, you can hunt birds; you can even hunt with other real, live humans via the multiplayer option (and over HEAT.net). You can hunt with two breeds of dogs, which is a cool idea. You can use tons of different weapons.

But the game's biggest selling point is that you can roam around in a beautiful UNREAL-powered gamerscape. And you can... one frame at a time on a Pentium II/400MHz machine. This game in handy for once, I guess.) But let's face it, it's so difficult simply to get this game to run that pretty graphics don't come close to making it worth playing. Don't waste your money.

You can hunt much more than deer in this game. But you'll have to figure out a way to get the game to run first.

Locked and Loaded...Finally

If you do get a hunt to work, the game is not very realistic. Rabbits sit out in the middle of an open field (why not just put them in herds while you're at it?). The deer do the same. Now, it's true that deer sometimes venture into the open to forage, but they don't do it all the time, and they definitely don't do it in the middle of the day. (A few thousand years of being hunted has taught them that brush is a little safer when the sun is out.)

The game doesn't look half bad, I'll give it that. The animations for terrain and animals are both pretty good. (The UNREAL engine comes

Unlike most hunting-game reviewers, CGW's Managing Editor Joe Vallina has actually killed a real deer (but he didn't drink the blood).
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Swing Set
New Golf Swings Highlight This Updated Course Leader

by Denny Atkin, Sr.

In last year, LINKS LS 1998 propelled the leading PC golf title from the realm of being a nice computer game into that of a realistic golf simulation. It also addressed the slow screen redraws that plagued earlier versions. So what was left to improve? More than it seemed, apparently. The new LINKS LS 1999 sports 25 new features, more than a few of which are significant enough to make even jaded computer golfers want to swing this new set of virtual clubs.

Two new swing options headline the changes. Previous versions of LINKS offered only a two-click golf swing. Now you can choose a three-click swing or the new PowerStroke swing. The three-click is very similar to the old two-click, but it offers you finer control. You click once to start the swing, click at the top of your swing, and click again when your swing reaches the bottom. Pretty simple, but it requires very precise timing.

In an effort to more closely recreate the action of a real swing, Access has also added the PowerStroke, which uses horizontal mouse movement rather than just clicks. At first this option excited me, since it seemed to emulate a real swing, but I found the movement difficult to master. LINKS offered an unsolicited adjustment to me along the way, almost as if the software sensed my frustration. Happily, it helped. More feedback is available from the postswinging analyzer, which measures club-head speed and the angle of the club as it strikes the ball. Despite the advice of the program's virtual caddie, I found the PowerStroke awkward and chose the three-click.

As a left-handed golfer, I must say I was jazzed to see a "left-handed PowerStroke swing" offered, but I was then dismayed to see the animated visual of the golfer still hitting right-handed. If the game is going to offer a left-handed option, the player should appear that way onscreen.

Tour de Force
It's no longer just you and your buddies out on the course. LINKS LS now sports a tournament environment, with galleries of hundreds of spectators lining every fairway, waiting to cheer a great shot. Crowds react to each shot; additionally, noises coming from other areas of the course, press cameramen and camera towers, vehicles, officials, ropes, and grandstands add to the "you are there" feeling.

All of this, combined with event banners, tents, and leaderboards (not to mention the Goodyear blimp drifting across the sky), give the game a different feel: You're not just a player on a course, but a pro in the midst of a tour event.

Atmosphere is great, but what about gameplay? One of the most significant enhancements is the new Mode of Play (MOP) Game Designer, which lets you develop play styles and share them with friends. The designer includes 30 new MOPs to get you started, including such games as Skins, Match Play, Bingo-Bango-Bongo, and Stableford. It's easy to use, so that anyone can add that variation of golf they developed with their drinking buddies.

You'll find many more 3D objects on or around the course, as I discovered when an errant shot caromed off a stone wall.
The famed deep-pot bunkers of St. Andrews demanded notable improvements to the LINKS LS engine. The ability to feel the depth of a 10-foot bunker brings the 1999 edition to a new level of realistic play. These 3D effects come into play not only with bunkers, but with fences, buildings, and many other objects. Note that LINKS LS still doesn’t support 3D graphics cards, but since the scenery is generally static, 3D support would likely have meant a loss of detail.

**Turf Wars**

To a non-golfer this might sound really trivial, but one of the newest effects of this game occurs each time the player hits the ball. A chunk of turf actually flies forward, and the divot left behind makes a devoted golfer want to take time out to repair it.

There are two new players available, plus Arnold Palmer and the five original golfer animations. Palmer is still featured at his beloved Latribe Country Club, but you can now play while enjoying western Pennsylvania’s beautiful fall colors. New to this version is the birthplace of golf itself, Scotland’s St. Andrews Links Old Course. The rugged links of St. Andrews have been tested for almost 500 years, making it the mecca serious golfers would love to visit.

Also new for 1999 is Entrada at Snow Canyon, in the red sandstone cliffs of Utah. After playing it and marvelling at the beautiful scenery in this game, I’m heading there for real someday soon. Arnie’s own Bay Hill Club and Lodge, in Orlando, Florida, rounds out the new course choices.

The 1999 edition also supports all previous LINKS 386 courses as well as more than 25 expansion courses, sold separately. The next add-on courses, due out sometime in the first quarter of 1999, will be the Phoenix Country Club and Japan’s Seagale Resort.

Since my golfing vacation to Scotland remains only a distant dream, I really enjoyed the multimedia tour of the town and the courses at St. Andrews. I also delighted in the vistas of Entrada at Snow Canyon, but, frankly, the tour of the Bay Hill Club came across like an infomercial. As in the previous version, the game offers a virtual tour in 3D of Arnold Palmer’s office and workshop.

LINKS LS 1999 supports screen resolutions up to 1800X1440 and 16.7 million colors. Position-dependent 3D stereo sound enhances the great visual sensations. The expanded sound script editor lets you change crowd noises and even add your own comments (as WAV files).

Fast rendering was the biggest improvement in the 1998 upgrade. Playing that version last year on a Pentium 133, I was thrilled with the seemingly short five-second delays. In LINKS LS 1999, the rendering is just as quick, and on my new Celeron 333 the wait is almost nonexistent. Now the game moves from shot to shot with only the slightest delay.

**Top of the Leaderboard**

If you already own either LINKS LS 1997 or ’98, Access offers the 1999 version as a reduced-price upgrade for only $29.99. But even at full price, and with more competition than ever, this game proves itself once again to be at the very top of its class. Here’s the bottom line: If you enjoy golf, LINKS LS 1999 is a must-have addition to your game collection.

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Denny Atkin, Sr. is an avid lifelong golfer with a 14 handicap at Tualatin Country Club in Tualatin, Oregon. LINKS LS and FROGGER occupy his time during Oregon’s wet winters.

**Audio Difficulties**

LINKS LS 1999 offers both casual and tournament play over the Internet, and it now sports real-time voice chat. Free matchmaking is available through Mplayer, or you can connect directly to another player if you know his or her IP number. If you are a masochist, Internet spectators and hecklers can watch you in action, give advice, and needle you! For real competition, you can log on to Access’s free Internet tournament site.

Had the Internet play with real-time chat worked perfectly, I would have rated LINKS LS 1999 as a five-star game. I managed to pull my son away from flight sims long enough to try an Internet game between our homes in Oregon and California. We gave it a solid try but gave up in frustration. We were able to play golf and type comments back and forth successfully, but when we tried to introduce real-time voice chat, we experienced numerous lockups.

A patch is available to clear up many of the multiplayer problems, but it should have been solid out of the box, especially considering that for a number of golfers LINKS is their introduction to computer gaming.
Blood Bowl
NFL BLITZ Starts Strong but Fades A Bit in the Second Half

by Brett Todd

Football without rules. It's a great concept, and one that may finally have found its place in the sun now that the National Football League has put shaved monkeys in the striped shirts ("Um, that was tails, right?") and Midway has released NFL BLITZ for the PC.

If you've entered an arcade, pub, or pool hall anytime in the past few years, you undoubtedly know the game already. Like its close relative NBA JAM, NFL BLITZ removes both rules and reality from the authentic sport, leaving behind nothing but pure mayhem. The coin-op edition proved to be a huge hit, earning tons of cash for Midway and giving barflies something to do after they've been cut off. Unfortunately, what works so well when you're out on the town doesn't succeed quite as well on your desktop at home.

Keep It Simple, Stupid
The basic concept is simple: seven-on-seven football with nothing approximating strategy to interfere with crippling your opponents. Each NFL team's roster is complete with the best and brightest on offense and defense. There are no injuries or substitutions, so you'd better get used to seeing an awful lot of folks like John Elway, Deion Sanders, and Ryan "I Love Reporters" Leaf. All the clubs share the same basic playbook, which features generic calls for both sides of the scrimmage line.

Downs and points are all you have to worry about as far as rules go. The scoring system follows that of the actual NFL, but your offense needs to get 10 yards for a first down here (don't worry, that's not as hard to pick up as it sounds).

Once the ball is snapped, anything goes. Holding and hitting are the best ways to cover opposing receivers, since pass interference seems to be a foreign concept here. As you might expect, picks and fumbles occur fairly frequently because of this.

Visual and audio presentation pumps all this up. The 3D-accelerated graphics (a 3Dfx or recent 3D card is required) are bright, blocky, and cartoonish, making it clear from first glance that this is not a sim. Everything is overblown in NFL BLITZ, from the "hip-hop by way of NFL Films" music through the "Vince McMahon School of Broadcasting" commentary ("To Rice!").

Hits are always larger than life, due to the dynamic animations and crunches that'll shake your subwoofer. Once you get out on the field, expect to do things that would make Bill Romanowski blush. Instead of just wrapping Michael Irvin up in a nice, legal tackle, you'll grab him by one arm, spin him around a couple of times, and then drive him and his ego into the turf of Texas Stadium. Rather than merely push Terrell Davis out of bounds like a nice little linebacker, you'll hit him with a flying forearm that leaves him saluting a faceful of dirt.

The mayhem doesn't stop when the play does. Is your opponent helpless? Good. Then I guess it's time to show him that spending all those nights watching WWF RAW wasn't a waste of time: Go ahead and repeatedly body slam and DDT his tackled ass. The game encourages this with hilarious play-by-play lines like "That was totally uncalled for—but a lot of fun to watch!" and "He's going postal!"

There's no learning curve to speak of. Like the arcade title, the PC game is designed so that people will pick things up immediately.
You use just three buttons on the gamepad, for pass, jump, and turbo functions. When you pass, you have to point the D-pad in the direction of your receiver. This method is often very inaccurate, though, and it will take you a while before you can get the ball to the intended receiver a majority of the time. Oh, and the gamepad is the only way to navigate menu screens; there’s no mouse support. I’ve said it before, I’ll say it again: Is it really that big a deal to add mouse support to these console conversions?

This bare-bones philosophy extends into gameplay options. There are no difficulty settings, and you can choose only exhibition games or games that will count under your user name. The idea behind “name” games is that you’ll work your way up a ladder in an attempt to defeat every team in the NFL. Complaints caused Midway to add league play to a recent patch. This adds to the product’s shelf life, but you’ve really got to wonder why the company left it out of the boxed game. The same questions could be asked about Internet multiplayer support. If any game cries out for a multiplayer option, it’s this one. Head-to-head action is great if you’ve always got a friend on hand, but since most of us don’t, we’re stuck with repetitive solo play.

**After the Half**

All of this is fun, but it doesn’t last. While NFL Blitz proves to be enjoyable as a momentary distraction—and I dare you to find a PC game that offers an experience comparable to the satisfaction of beating the hell out of Neon Deion—it falls miserably in the longevity department. Once the initial outrageousness of being able to casually break spines fades, you’ll likely find yourself longing for the depth and complexity of a real football title once again.

Repetition is the biggest culprit here. As exciting as contests are at first, there just isn’t enough variation in the special effects to hold the interest of most gamers. It’s neat to stir dust clouds with a few body slams after the whistle, but it doesn’t take long before you realize that’s all you can do. Extracurricular facial rearrangement is nice, but once you’ve heard “Is thatlegal?” for the hundredth time, you find yourself wanting to get on to the next play as quickly as possible.

At this point you’re left with just the football game, and—as interesting as seven-on-seven action can be at times—the lack of depth won’t keep you around for long. Gameplay almost never varies. All I bother to call when I’m running my offense are long pass routes. Every play, I simply drop back, run around until one of my receivers finds a little daylight, then hit him for a big gain. I’ve even found a couple of money plays. Both “Da Bomb” and “Hail Mary” exploit the defense for 15 to 20 yards every time I call them, since the AI just can’t seem to handle cuts across the middle.

Running the ball makes almost no sense at all. While you can usually pick up 7 to 10 yards with ease, there’s always the chance you’ll get stopped at the line. And since you need 30 yards for that first down, why risk it? A quarterback sneak after sending your receivers deep works best if you’re really committed to the ground game, though.

Playing defense will also see you repeating yourself ad nauseam. I get the best results by trying to hurry the opposing pivot, so every call is blitz, blitz, blitz. Sure, “Blitz” is the name of the game, but I doubt that this is what the boys at Midway had in mind. It’s worth the risk since sacks are plentiful, and even if my opponent does manage to complete a pass, I can usually catch up to the ball carrier before too much damage is done.

**Save Your Quarters**

In a nutshell, the repetitive gameplay and one-note humor that make NFL Blitz a worthwhile alternative to Eight Ball at your neighborhood saloon turn it into a long-term loser on your desktop. Adding league play in the patch helps some, but this title needs multiplayer options (or you need an always-available buddy) to make it truly worth buying. If you luck into a sale, this is a game worth considering, but there’s not enough gaming here to justify paying top dollar.

When he’s not attending the Charlton Heston School of Fine Acting, Brett Todd can be found playing LINKS LS 1999 and GREAT BATTLES OF CAESAR.
The Gods Must Be Lazy

Deities Take Some Time Off and Send In the Shamans in This God Game Sequel

by Denny Atkin

Playing god with the world around you can be quite satisfying. That was proven around the turn of the last decade by POPULOUS and POPULOUS II. Both games not only made your delusions of godhood somewhat real by giving you divine providence over a simulated ancient world, but also were the precursors of the modern real-time strategy game.

Bullfrog originally planned to do a 3D sequel in the mid-'90s, but the limitations of the PCs of the day led the company to use the engine for MAGIC CARPET instead. Now that computer hardware is ready for simulated divinity, the sequel—or, rather, the prequel—to those classics has finally appeared.

A skillfully executed tribute to the original series, it provides a welcome break from today's me-too real-time strategy games.

Shaman on You

In POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING, you're a shaman who must guide your people to victory over the enemy—followers of rival shamans. You accomplish this both through casting spells and building up armies of followers.

In the earlier games, you could directly manipulate the lands of your people, but you could only influence the actions of your followers. (See the sidebar, opposite page, for more POPULOUS-culture trivia.) Here, you can directly command your followers to build and attack, but the landscape can be altered only through the use of expensive spells.

You start most games with only a shaman and perhaps a few followers. From there, you command your followers to begin construction on various buildings and set about expanding your tribe. You gain followers either by using spells to convert wildmen (do this early, as wildmen are amazingly adept at getting themselves killed) or by building huts and filling them with followers who eventually reproduce (odd, considering that the shaman is the only female character in the game).

As your tribe grows, you'll want to build more huts, which not only generate new followers but also increase production of the valuable mana necessary for your shaman's spellcasting. Other early buildings that will come in handy are warrior and priest training huts, as well as guard towers, which not only alert you to enemy attacks but also give your shaman a high vantage point from which to blast the enemy. As you advance in the game, more sophisticated buildings, such as boat houses, spy training huts, and balloon huts become available to you.

Many of these buildings transform your fairly weak villagers into more powerful units. Fire warriors, for instance, shoot deadly fireballs, while priests can charm enemy troops into following your shaman. You'll need to keep some regular villagers around, though, as they're the only ones who can build.

The Followers Panel is a pop-up control designed to let you quickly
select and manage large groups. It certainly makes selection easier than scrolling around the world manually grouping followers, but it’s not overly intuitive—especially with the “Stay Selected” feature active. More than once I accidentally pulled all my firewarriors out varying rates depending on how many villagers and huts you have. There’s no tech tree per se, but mana does a good job of taking the place of it. One shaman may spend her mana charging the Angel of Death (a wonderfully vicious dragon that carries enemies which is replaced at especially when 3D-accelerated, but also plays a large part in strategies. Hills extend visual range on levels that feature fog-of-war and give your shaman longer spell range. In addition, attackers climb hills very slowly. Often, changing the terrain is the key to victory—building a land bridge that lets you bypass enemy attackers, or eroding the land below a hilltop settlement.

Destructivus 1:25

POPOLOSUS: THE BEGINNING features 25 missions. Many of these

You’ve Been Demoted

When POPOLOSUS II was released seven years ago on the late, lamented Amiga, a game that let you take the role of a god was considered somewhat controversial. In today’s world of 3D shooters starring murdering angels, that may seem a bit naive. Still, POPOLOSUS: THE BEGINNING bypasses the issue completely by making you not a god, but rather just a slightly-better-than-mere-mortals shaman.

In a significant departure from the conventions of the original games, you now have direct control over the actions of your followers. In the original games, you could only influence your people’s behavior by loading them into the skies and spits them out) spell, another may decide to save up for a deadly volcano to unleash in the enemy’s town center, while a third might continuously use the low-mana Lightning spell to cause smaller, harassing damage.

Many of the spells, such as the Volcano, Rain of Fire, and Tornado, are destructive weapons reminiscent of your powers in the earlier POPOLOSUS games. Others alter the terrain—building land bridges to enemy islands, or sending coastal settlements crashing into the seas.

The terrain deserves special note. It not only looks really good, of their guard towers, leaving my town’s perimeter undefended.

Stay a Spell

In addition to armies of followers, your shaman boasts some powerful magic. In early games, you may start with only Blast, Lightning, and Converit spells, but eventually you’ll find obelisks, stone heads, and totems that will give you access to additional spells and buildings. In fact, these various spell sites are usually the key to successfully completing missions.

Each spell you cast uses up some of your valuable mana, are of the typical “build your armies and kill, kill, kill” nature. In fact, other than the occasional annoying time-limited mission, the first nine missions have a repetitive feel, with the monotony getting broken up only by the too-infrequent introduction of a new spell or new unit.

Stick it out, though, and you’ll find the later missions have plenty of twists—one starts with the enemy shaman sinking your people into the sea within the first minute of the game, while another begins with your shaman imprisoned and powerless. Toward the end, there’s missions, however, are overly puzzle-oriented, perhaps to make up for the computer players’ AI, which at times seems a bit dense. Still, it’s a fresh entry into a stagnating genre, and even with its limited replay value it’s worth a look for fans of the original POPOLOSUS and newcomers alike. CGW

Denny Atkin was addicted to the original POPOLU, but wasn’t a fan of the bastard-child POWERMONGER. Lately he’s been playing POPOLOSUS II on the WinUAE Amiga emulator, as well as HALF-LIFE, WWII FIGHTERS, and EUROPEAN AIR WAR.
All Aboard!

Hop This Locomotive for Addictive, Cutthroat, Robber-Baron Capitalism

by Bob Proctor

The original RAILROAD TYCOON was one of the first computer strategy games based on building instead of fighting. But unlike SIMCITY, it had a high degree of competitiveness. It's good to see this favorite return in RAILROAD TYCOON II (RT2). The sequel has more of what the original had—more commodities, more locomotives, more maps—but nothing that radically alters the concept I would have preferred to see more new features (see sidebar) but I still think it's a great game.

The first thing you'll notice is that the graphics have been beautifully upgraded. It's a thrill to zoom in from a view of an entire continent to see towns, farms, and factories (with smokestacks puffing). And once the trains get rolling, it's a busy, bustling world. To satisfy the train watcher in all of us, the designers have made sure there's a wide variety of authentic railroad equipment from all time periods. About 60 different locomotives are available, from George Stephenson's Rocket to the TGV and trains that will levitate magnetically in the 21st century.

I've Been Working on the Stock Market

RT2 is a strategy game that uses elements from railroad construction and operations, business economics, and the stock market. The goal of the game is usually to maximize your personal wealth, the value of your company, or both. Because the game allows all the nasty tricks that 19th-century robber barons used, you make 90 percent of your money on the stock market rather than running your railroad. To play RT2 competitively, you must master the market. You can neglect your railroad; you can even run it into the ground to drive the stock price down and make money by selling the stock short. If you find that sort of behavior distasteful, you can tone down the game by selecting from three levels of complexity for both the financial and industrial models. You can't turn off the stock market completely without also turning off the industrial model (an oversight), but you can turn both off. This is called "sandbox mode," and it lets you build to your heart's content without worrying about running out of money or being bought out by Joy Gould.

In spite of the claims printed on the box that RT2 is "completely authentic," knowing how real railroads operate will actually be a handicap. The first concept you must learn is that whenever a train stops at a station, all cars are sold whether or not they are in demand there. Choose your consist (list of hauled cars) and routes accordingly.

Here's another example: The first time I started laying track, I was horrified to see grades of 12 percent. This is impossibly steep for real railroads, where 4 percent is considered extraordinary. I tried to improve things and spent way too much—a big mistake. Locomotives

SURVEYING: Because railroads are so expensive, they must be carefully planned before construction starts. RT2 should at least allow you to undo the last section of track as you build. Even better would be a survey mode in which an entire line could be laid out so that grade and cost could be determined before you make the decision to build it.

www.computergaming.com
in RT2 can handle a 12 percent grade, albeit slowly and with only a car or two.

**Where Do You Want to Go Today?**

RT2 presents you with many interesting decisions. The maps stay the same but the distribution of resources is random, making every game different. You start by finding a demand for a resource and a source for it. Then you lay track on a favorable route and place your stations optimally. The interface for placing things on the map is tricky, and there is no Undo command. Placing is a skill that must be learned: Pause the game and rotate the map to view from different angles before committing to anything. Use the Sandbox mode to practice.

Once you have built your railroad line, it’s time to choose a locomotive. This is an art in itself: Some are better for steep hills, others for flat land. (These generally are faster.) The various models of locomotives differ in cost, acceleration, reliability, and fuel consumption. None of these factors is crucial, but paying attention to each of them will make your railroad much more efficient. Lastly, you have to select a consist and a routing for each train (this must be reviewed periodically as conditions change).

There are a lot of maps to play on. The 12 scenarios included in RT2 mostly represent parts of the United States and Europe, but China and South America are also depicted. The campaign game has 18 different missions, and it includes many maps that are not used by the scenarios, including India, Australia, Japan, and Africa; however, these maps cannot be used for generating scenarios or for multiplayer games.

While victory conditions in the scenarios usually have to do with wealth, the campaigns often have you connecting specific cities or countries. If you get bored with all of this, the game includes a map editor so that you can create new maps or modify the ones provided.

**Here Comes the Caboose!**

RT2 is a nice effort with very high replay value. The game never crashed, the AI plays a pretty tough game (I suspect it cheats to get a fast start, since it always seems to get more loads than I do), and multiplayer mode is a hoot and as vicious as any STARCRFT game.

With so many ways to play RAILROAD TYCOON II, you’re bound to find one that will pull you in and keep you enthralled.

Bob Proctor has it on good authority—his mother—that he learned to say “choo-choo” before “mama.” She finally forgave him earlier this year.

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**ENGINEERING:** The classic trade-off in railroad construction is between the cost to build and the cost to operate. You can keep the grade on almost any railroad to 1 or 2 percent if you are willing to spend money tunneling, bridging, and looping to change elevation. If you don’t pay up front, you end up paying later with higher fuel and maintenance costs and slower, less reliable trains. RAILROAD TYCOON II should give you the option of buying lower grades on any section of track.

**HELPERS:** The economic model in RAILROAD TYCOON II pays big bonuses for longer trips, but this makes it more difficult to choose the right locomotive. You might have mostly easy grades with one or two places where steep grades are unavoidable.

Real railroads cope with this by adding a “helper engine” at the bottom of the hill. RAILROAD TYCOON II should replicate real life by letting you assign locomotives to helper service to boost train speeds uphill.

**SEASONS:** My trains get stopped by bandits all the time, but they never suffer from something far more common in the real world—snow. Lines through the Alps, the Sierra, or the Rockies spend lots of money to operate during winter months. RAILROAD TYCOON II could have modeled this and allowed you to overcome it in two ways. You could buy an upgrade to a section of track (representing snowsheds, avalanche protection, and snow removal equipment) or use a special car, the Snowplow, which you could put on trains the same way you attach a caboose.
Second Front
WEST FRONT Takes the Conflict Farther Than Its Eastern Counterpart

by Jim Cobb

TalonSoft's game systems are a lot like wine: They improve over time, and gamers are advised not to reject them even if the first sip proves a bit disappointing. WEST FRONT is a fine example of this maturation process. Its sister game, EAST FRONT, debuted to mostly tepid reviews and has been patched seven times with increasingly successful changes. WEST FRONT not only incorporates these changes, it moves beyond them and is superior to its predecessor in almost every respect.

My Kingdom for an Action Point
WEST FRONT is a tactical, turn-based, simulation of combat in the

WWII western front during 1940-1945. The scale is 250 meters per hex, 6 minutes per turn, and focuses on platoon/battery-sized units. Combatants include not only the typical forces of Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, but also Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia, and two kinds of Italian and French troops each. The basics of play are similar to EAST FRONT, with units being rated on strength, morale, fire and movement costs, and assault and defense capabilities. Unit capabilities are restricted by a set number of action points. Actions can be ordered from a menu, toolbar, or keyboard. Function keys bring up screens that explain unit capabilities in historic as well as game turns. These screens fit into the luxurious graphics for units and five different levels of maps. Everything necessary for play is clearly visible and accessible through many options.

Gameplay is also similar to the older game in that units can move and fire one by one to their action point limits. Combat results include reduction in strength, retreat, and disruption—a state that limits combat and movement until troops are rallied by a friendly leader. Players can save action points by setting limits to movement so that points can be saved for firing and loading/unloading. Close assault is handled as a function of movement—a nice touch—while fire can be ordered either in your turn or saved for opportunity fire in the opponent's turn. Off-and-onboard indirect fire arrives the turn after ordered and is subject to drift, meaning that you have to plan ahead and anticipate your opponent's movement.

If you're saying that we've seen most of this before—well, you're right. However, WEST FRONT has enough innovations to keep the action sequences hopping. The graphics are upgraded to better show terrain contours. Research into vehicle data explodes myths about some early Allied tanks and shows the evolution of antitank weapons during the war from useless to devastating. You can now set opportunity fire defaults, so that units don't waste their fire on sacrificial junk vehicles only to be overwhelmed later on by the real attackers. Air units used in WEST FRONT like indirect fire, are "smart." If their original target is gone when the planes arrive, they'll look for other targets. The much-maligned line-of-sight system from EAST FRONT has been rewritten to clearly incorporate unit size and concealment value of terrain, making the fog-of-war and extreme fog-of-war options exciting yet understandable. Movement to contact is made easier with two types of organizational group moves at company level. New units and functions include landing craft, gliders, and parachutists. Drifts and possible landing damage will affect your paratroops.

I'm Off to France, Dear
The crown jewels in WEST FRONT's new features are the two types of campaigns. Six linked campaigns (LCGs) start with historical
units and follow the actual course of wartime events. However, replayability is assured because the player faces different engagements based upon his performance. WEST FRONT hits its stride with the dynamic campaigns (DCGs). Here, a player becomes part of the unit mix as either a tank or infantry leader. Although the campaigns start and end on the historic dates, what happens between is wildly variable. The gamer begins commanding a battalion and can place units before the battle. Good results in missions increase both the commander's and his command's experience points, leading to more favorable combat results.

The number of missions per campaign varies, with the percentage chance for a mission changing daily. Too many missions can be hard on an outfit since losses to the player's core units are carried over. Replacements dribble in unpredictably so the only way a player can increase his core force is to be promoted to regimental or divisional command. In fact, you may be stuck playing a number of missions with dwindling numbers of troops, unless you get a "million-dollar" wound and end up on leave until the campaign ends.

During the campaign, equipment may be upgraded automatically. There are seven DCGs but, because the tank and infantry modes are completely different, WEST FRONT actually has twice that number. Fifty-two single scenarios provide an opportunity for quick play.

WEST FRONT has a scenario editor with detailed terrain and unit libraries, so that you can re-create virtually any engagement. For the busy player, there's a scenario generator that creates a battle after the player sets parameters of month, year, region, command size, nationality, and engagement type.

TalonSoft took a drubbing with the skimpy initial documentation of EAST FRONT. The company has not made the same mistake twice. WEST FRONT has a 250-page, well-illustrated manual that explains every aspect and option in
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Jack Nicklaus Productions

HYPNOS

ACTIVISION
Morale Problem

For all of its fine points, WEST FRONT suffers from three rough edges that will irritate serious gamers. First, the infantry is too strong in the early battles. During this period, most infantry was unprepared to deal with armored attacks and tended to withdraw when the tanks came on. In WEST FRONT, infantry stands in the open like a rock against tanks, and swarms of infantry platoons are the most efficient tank killers. As the war progressed, infantry became proficient against armor, but not in 1939-41. Second, and more important, morale effects are too limited. While the morale routine for units being attacked works well, nothing affects adjacent units.

Consider two scenarios: Three units are in the same 250-meter hex; two either die or retreat. In WEST FRONT, the third always stays put. The same applies to three units in a three-hex line: The middle one will hold regardless of its flanks. This system precludes routs, which are really what lose most battles. Limiting morale effects to single units is unrealistic and makes battles too long and bloody.

Finally, the AI is conservative and predictable. On the two lower levels, it doesn’t press home advantages, especially when close assaults would work. It becomes more aggressive at the two harder levels, when it has larger forces and receives boosts in supply and combat resolution, but doesn’t become cleverer tactically. The AI misuses indirect fire by always targeting where mobile units are instead of where they should be next turn, and it makes its own units vulnerable by clustering them at obvious aiming points.

SUPER GRUNTS This many British Matilda tanks should be able to send the German infantry running in 1940, but they don’t in WEST FRONT.

fine detail. Extensive data tables and bibliographies will help scenario designers, while questions are covered in a five-page FAQ. The manual includes a tutorial for experienced gamers, while the README file contains a boot camp for beginners.

WEST FRONT is a worthy entrant into a genre that still appeals to serious gamers, despite a few rough edges (see sidebar, above). One wishes TalonSoft, having polished the detail work on WWII tactical combat, would take a closer look at the large-scale factors and relationships of battle in this era. WEST FRONT is a fine platform for this and is the most entertaining, informative, and accessible product on the subject.

While he enjoys World War II campaigning, Jim Cobb is still waiting for the definitive American Civil War simulation.
Order Triumphant

CHAOS GATE Heralds the Return of Turn-based Squad-level Gaming

by Tim Carter

-COMmies rejoice. After long and oh-so-barren years of bad knockoffs and paltry imitations, at last we turn-based aficionados have a game we can sink our teeth into. CHAOS GATE, SSI's latest venture into the WARHAMMER universe, delivers a solid turn-based, squad-level game engine. Finally, CHAOS GATE puts you in command of large and small groups of space marines on a quest to defeat, basically, an army of other space marines.

While CHAOS GATE owes some inspiration to the now venerable X-COM, the combat system, game story, and tactical battles have a distinctive feel that is more loyal to the WARHAMMER universe than anything else. For instance, the equipment and types of troops available to you in CHAOS GATE are dictated by the fiction underpinning all WARHAMMER games. This, in turn, has a considerable effect on your tactics and long-term strategy.

I must confess, however, that I found myself gravitating away from many of the "true" WARHAMMER solutions to tactical problems in favor of what I thought worked best. For instance, hand-to-hand fighting would appear to be an important component of space marine training and combat. A special assault squad, moreover, comes equipped with mostly short-range weapons. Yet, even when the scenario called for the use of these troops, I found myself leaving them at home in favor of more conventional long-range-equipped soldiers. The reason? At long range it's entirely possible to destroy the enemy piecemeal with little or no risk. Up close, the fighting is a lot more even. Since CHAOS GATE does not allow you much room for losses, fighting hand-to-hand is a bad idea.

Impressive Tactics

At the heart of CHAOS GATE is an impressive tactical combat system. You control each soldier individually, giving him orders to walk, run, shoot, throw grenades, and so on. Unlike many of its competitors, however, CHAOS GATE actually works—and works well. All of the commands are intuitive, and most may be executed with a minimum number of keystrokes or mouse clicks. When aiming at an enemy target you are provided with a considerable amount of useful data displayed in a nice mock HUD.

Before each mission you select and equip a preset number of squads from your force pool. You have a limited number of men and weapons, so you must choose well and guard your forces carefully while in combat. A key to long-term success in CHAOS GATE is building troop experience. While your men can only advance through a few levels, each promotion substantially improves each soldier's abilities. Later missions will be tricky without good troops, and it's important to rotate the duty roster so that your force is more or less balanced when the bigger battles come along.

All of the usual line-of-site, hidden movement, and terrain effects have been modeled into the game and significantly impact tactics. Smart marine commanders will have troopers darting from behind cover, firing, and then ducking back into protected areas before the evil Chaos forces can shoot back (or shoot back much, as opportunity or "overwatch" fire also plays a role both on the offense and defense).

Actually, I rather wish that the Chaos troops took a more progressive attitude toward opportunity fire, as in many scenarios, particularly the randomly generated ones, they don't pop up nearly as strong a fight as they might. The problem (along with their reluctance to leave movement points for opportunity fire) seems to be that each type of soldier acts according to his official "task" as determined by his type and armament. Therefore, assault troops will try to close with you and engage in hand-to-hand combat, while marines with, say, rocket launchers hang back and look for a long-range shot. It's fine in theory, but is usually pretty easy
Given the somewhat dysfunctional proclivities of the AI in Chaos Gate, aspiring marine heroes may want to take a "piecemeal" approach to dissecting the enemy. As the enemy's armor is as good as yours, you can't reasonably assume that enemy troops will die following the first or even second accurate shot (assuming your soldiers have the skills to hit what they're aiming at). Instead, try to isolate individual defenders and gang up on them with three or more attacking marines. If you have time and favorable terrain, sneak one or more marines close enough to use grenades to soften up heavily armored enemy troops or armored vehicles (especially vehicles). Don't be afraid to sit back at long range and pick apart Chaos defenses—no one said that winning had to be pretty. Use heavy bolters and Krak missiles to do your dirty work for you, and move in only when you have to.

Remember: Ammunition shortages become a problem only if you forget to forage. A clever marine commander will know what he is likely to run short of later (like grenades and heavy bolter clips) and pick it up whenever possible.
squared its troops’ strengths. Mind you, this flaw in the computer opponent isn’t so severe that it ruins the game. You’re left with a sense not so much of disappointment as of missed opportunity.

A Thickening Plot
Another opportunity missing from CHAOS GATE is the sense of strategic control. One of the most attractive elements of X-COM was the ability to control the pace and flow of the game’s central story. In CHAOS GATE, you’re presented side missions, but the path to victory is, ultimately, straightforward and linear.

Not that the scenarios themselves are bad; in fact, they offer a pretty wide range of situations and demonstrate that considerable thought and effort has gone into creating a background against which your tactical battles are fought. It’s a good thing, because without a plot tactical games, even with varied maps and objectives, can become repetitive very quickly. (I found this with X-COM as well.)

The scenarios also offer up an interesting selection of nuggets and special events to keep you on your toes. I had troops captured by the enemy. I foraged for needed weapons and ammunition, and I felt genuinely pleased when my C.O. blessed my troops with armored support.

All in all, CHAOS GATE is a fine game. The somewhat weak AI, linear plot, and a few other minor problems (scavenging for weapons and ammo can be time consuming and annoying) keep it from getting a perfect score, but even with these flaws the game is head and shoulders above anything else in the genre. CGW

Tim Carter holds a Master’s Degree in Strategic Studies and is now playing 101 AIRBORNE as well as THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR.
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Corporate Wars

RUTHLESS.COM Unveils the Seamy Underside of Business

by Terry Coleman

All of a sudden, strategy games that revolve around how to run a business are popping up everywhere. A conspiracy theorist could probably trace this trend to subversive elements in the National Teachers Association, Al Gore's election campaign, or some leftover agenda from the Contract with America—the rest of us can just enjoy having something other than orcs and spaceships to fiddle with for a while.

But even in the narrow subset of business games, RUTHLESS.COM stands as a different breed of empire building. Dark and moody, it can be viewed as a biting satire on the state of the computer industry or enjoyed as a challenging game with more than a few welcome twists.

SPREADSHEET WARS

Here we recap the orders issued for the turn, with our blossoming pastel-pictured corporation in the background. It's enough to make you long for those 16-color graphics of GENGIS KHAN II Ugh.

Twists and Turns

The game is turn-based, which seems more appropriate than the real-time action of ENTREPRENEUR. In the course of each turn your CEO can give up to two orders, which may include building new facilities, releasing new products, hiring and firing executives, and restructing the company. Meanwhile, the other CEOs (AI or human) do the same, and the game system executes all the orders simultaneously, resolving any conflicts. Ha, ha, you say. And if this were all there were to the game, you'd be right.

But RUTHLESS.COM also lets you sue the pants off your competitors and engage in hostile takeovers. If traditional methods don't get you the desired results, you can get really down and dirty. During one game, a competitor broke off a crucial deal with me; I retaliated by screwing with his patents, luring away one of his top executives with an obscene amount of money, and introducing a virus into his main center of operations. In another game, I cut to the chase and kidnapped the enemy CEO. By the time his company had found a suitable replacement, I was well on my way to dominating the market in a more ethical fashion.

Hacker's Lament

The scenarios are mostly well thought-out: the option to try again with a CEO who has different special traits—shady, stalwart, whatever—makes them very replayable. Among the memorable scenarios are one in which you try to take down the monolithic "EvilSoft" corporation and, my favorite, Armageddon, in which the decline of the personal computer market means a shrinking pie for all players to frantically divide—a must for cutthroat everywhere.

The game design features a number of other nice touches. If your programmers get bored, they will launch a computer attack (a data raid, a virus, or the like) at some random company. If your security forces get out of hand, they risk bringing the Mafia full-bore into the game. And the richer you get, the more vulnerable your top execs become to potential scandal.

All of which makes me wonder why the game is so clunky (too many clicks and no right mouse button functionality) and why it doesn't look and sound better. Some of the art is fine, but for the most part this game reminds me visually of an early Amiga or late Commodore 64 game. The sounds are tepid and repetitive; if you're going to use a CD, folks, at least put some Redbook audio on it.

RUTHLESS.COM really could have used better audio and visual feedback because, while it's certainly interesting, it's also as painfully dry as a badly mixed martini. No question you'll feel the kick, but you'll also likely have trouble getting your friends to join you in a libation. That's a real shame, since this game deserves to be played.

Maybe with RUTHLESS.COM II Red Storm will have a budget somewhere near what CEO Tom Clancy gets for one of his novels.

Responding to the distinguished senator, Terry Coleman cannot recall at this point in time ever engaging in any unethical activity.

Mr. Gates Goes to Washington

Heads up! Campaign

Lawsuits and hostile takeovers (left) are a way of life in RUTHLESS.COM. But if you overdo it, the Justice Department (above) pays a visit to everyone in the industry.
DOMINANT SPECIES • REVIEW

Darwinian Loser

Despite an Interesting Twist, This Species Should Go the Way of the Dodo

by Lance A. Larka

In DOMINANT SPECIES, the situation is reversed from the usual human-dominated exploitation RTS game; instead, you play the abused and hounded natives just trying to eke out a living by tapping the life-giving anima springs that are unique to the planet. What hasn’t evolved is the standard cycle of collect, build, and destroy seen in most RTS games.

Only the Fittest Survive

The linear campaign casts you as a Hivemind initiate being tested to determine your progress toward becoming a full member when the strange humans are discovered. To be specific: a human mining company. The problem is, the humans want to extract the same anima that makes Hive life possible, and, being greedy humans, they aren’t willing to share. It’s an engaging plot, and the story would be right at home in a space opera from the ‘60s. That is the end of the enjoyment, unfortunately.

Over countless generations the psychic Mindlords have directed their clanlike Hives against each other in shifting coalitions to seek out and control territory and the anima stored in the ground. This competitive nature has had the expected results of producing some very capable warriors to fight and defend against each other. Unfortunately, the imaginatively designed creatures are so alien that their appearance really doesn’t suggest their abilities or usefulness. Further, many of the creatures are distinguished by only minor cosmetic differences; this leads to some real confusion during the heat of battle.

Is that a Firespitter? An Acidspitter? A Lightspitter? Maybe it’s just a spitoon with teeth. The game’s spotty interface bar with its foreign icons doesn’t make commanding any easier.

You! Out of the Gene Pool!

The interface is really trying to be MYTH—but it fails. There are two map screens available that you can use, and you have to use both to be effective. But this eliminates half of the view screen and makes it even less useful than it was—which wasn’t very much. The view screen shows a wedge of the battlefield, but the controls are so cumbersome and the elevation changes so extreme that by the time you get oriented in the right direction, the battle is over. I found that by using only the overhead map to control my forces I had a much better chance at success. This really invalidated the vaunted 3D environment and turned DOMINANT SPECIES into a giant board game.

The map has problems, too. Elevation is extremely important to the inherent tactical considerations, but it isn’t displayed at all well on the map. Nor are certain items critical to play displayed, even after being “discovered” by your critters.

The AI has some mutations as well. Pathfinding is pitiful. For example, units guarding a building won’t even move around to the other side to attack enemy forces pounding away at the structure. And all units attempt to fire through intervening terrain, if they bother to engage at all.

DOMINANT SPECIES is a game with a nice concept and an interesting twist, but its poorly implemented interface, useless maps, and run-of-the-mill gameplay mark this as one species doomed to quick extinction.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS? This line of Firespitters and Lightspitters baffle the human scouts fixed on moving past them—and the gamers tasked with commanding them.

Lance A. Larka is fondly remembering what it was like to spend only $10 on a good toy.
Wheels and Slings, No Arrows
More Quick Reviews for the Classically Inclined

Wheel of Fortune

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: $29.95
www.hasbro.com

Quick, buy a vowel! WHEEL OF FORTUNE is back, and with the exception of some quality announcing by Charlie O'Donnell, Vanna White gets this one all to herself in full-motion video. Otherwise, the game apes the TV show, from authentic sounds and music right down to changing camera angles. If you don't want to watch Vanna and see the videos of the virtual prizes ("It's his-and-hers surfboards!"), you can turn them off, but why else would you buy this?

Solo gameplay is okay, but you're limited to three human contestants for multiplayer; if there are only two, the game injects an AI player to round things out. It's pretty boring when you go bankrupt and are forced to sit back and watch the computer spin the wheel, guess letters, buy vowels, and ultimately solve the puzzle.

When it's your turn to solve the puzzle, remember: Unlike the game on television, spelling counts; if you're off by even a single letter, you lose. (Quick, spell "Arnold r as the Terminator.")

Even more annoying is the game's unseen timer. Hesitate too long, and play unceremoniously (and unapologetically) moves on to the next player. With three people crowded around a PC, it's too easy to get burned by this "feature."

Overall, this game is better than the last PC WHEEL, but you're better off with JEOPARDY or almost any of the YOU DON'T KNOW JACK games. —Mark Clarkson

Slingo

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: $19.95
www.hasbro.com

For any gamer who has ever wanted to play solo Bingo, SLINGO should be a welcome treat. For the rest of us, it's about as welcome as Sominex in your morning coffee. SLINGO purports to be a cross between Bingo and a slot machine, but when you get right down to it, it's just Bingo. Sure, the random numbers are displayed five at a time when you pull a slot machine handle rather than one at a time by a geezer plucking balls out of a cage, but that doesn't affect the underlying gameplay. Your task is still to complete horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines by matching numbers on a five-by-five card.

Instead of winning as soon as you complete one line, you try to complete as many as possible (or fill your entire card) within 20 pulls of the handle.

In other words, the game goes like this: You pull the handle; you check off any matches (couldn't the computer do this for you?); you pull the handle again; you check off any new matches; and so on, 18 more times. In real Bingo, you at least have the fun of racing against other players to be the first to complete a line (and win a prize). At least your neighborhood church doesn't have to lose any sleep over the competition. —Charles Ardai

The Robot Club

Publisher: Southpeak Interactive
Price: $29.95
www.southpeak.com

Novel approaches to logic games are always welcome, and while THE ROBOT CLUB is obviously aimed at teenagers, it's clever enough to keep anyone's attention for a time. The game presents a series of puzzling tasks, which you must accomplish by dint of logic and robot design.

First comes the hardware. By dragging and dropping parts from a catalog, you equip your bot with treads, wheels, boosters, lasers, banana guns, and sensors that detect metal, high-tech machinery, or just the color blue, depending on the demands of the task at hand. The construction window is more of a schematic than a model; very few designs could possibly amble at all, as shown.

Next comes the software. Assembling programs is straightforward, if a little clumsy. Programs consist of color-coded tasks containing one or more instructions. Instructions have two halves: a condition (for example, touching an obstacle) and an action (say, making a U-turn). Programming is drag-and-drop: To make the robot go, for instance, you need to drag its treads into the action half of the instruction and select Go from the pop-up options.

Using the combined capabilities of a robot's sensors, weapons, locomotors, and the rest, you can construct fairly complex programs: "If sensors detect high-technology (such as another robot) nearby, aim weapons, fire, then turn and skedaddle."

You'll design robots to perform a variety of increasingly complex good deeds. Or, if your interests run more toward head-to-head competition, you can pit your design and programming skills against those of the game's designers, and your friends, by letting any two robots duke it out in the dueling arena. THE ROBOT CLUB is overly clunky and a bit clumsy, but budding engineers and logicians could do a lot worse. —Mark Clarkson
Still Smart, Still Game

SMART GAMES 3 Adds New Material in the Old Style

by Charles Ardai

Almost three years after they set the puzzle game standard, the folks at Smart Games are still the only ones doing it right. Puzzle Challenge 3 includes lots of great puzzles, all presented in the famous SMART GAMES style: first, a few seductively easy levels to get you started, then progressively tougher ones until your skull starts to ache. There are 20 different puzzles here, with hundreds of levels, as usual ranging thematically from verbal to spatial to general knowledge. The graphics are simple but charming, the music jaunty.

There is only one problem: Having used up most of the familiar basic puzzle types in the first two volumes, the designers have had to dig deeper into their bag of tricks this time, choosing between offering increasingly subtle variations on old favorites and introducing genuinely novel puzzles that are a little too arcane to "get" at first glance. They've done a little of each, and the latter especially takes some getting used to.

A Puzzling Development

You really have to read the rules this time out if you want to understand just how some of the puzzles work, and that's a shame. Deciphering how to play Gumball or Shopping Cart becomes something of a puzzle itself: You have to familiarize yourself with each puzzle's unique set of controls and rules, and the handful of explanatory sentences the game provides is not always as helpful as it is meant to be.

That said, once you get the hang of a given puzzle, it's generally worth it. All but two or three are excellent, and a couple are simply brilliant. Meteor Mayhem is one of the best, a tricky little number in which you control one or more robot spaceships that have to clear a grid of asteroids in a limited number of moves and/or firings of the ship's laser cannons. It's hard enough when you have to find a way to knock out three asteroids with just two shots, harder still when you start coming across satellites that fire back. Word Loops requires you to fill a grid with words, each differing from its neighbors by exactly one letter. (This is easy enough in a small grid whose first word is "big," but ulcer-inducing in a large grid whose first word is "rangi").

There is some repetition—for instance, both Butterflies and Balloon Kaboom ask you to clear a grid of its contents by moving shapes around until similar ones are side-by-side, and both Gumball and Take A Seat ask you to fill receptacles according to esoteric rules. Even the more straightforward games, such as Paper, Scissors, Rock, have enough special rules to make them quite enjoyable.

Unlike most series, which tend to start running out of steam by their third installment, SMART GAMES' PUZZLE CHALLENGE still has all of its original spirit and most of its creative spark. It's showing its age a little, but no puzzle lover will leave disappointed.

In addition to terrorizing software companies with his reviews, Charles Ardai is a member of the Horror Writer's Association.

### COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

**APPEAL:** Puzzle lovers eager for some challenging brain-twisters.

**PROS:** Some excellent new puzzles presented in the famously addictive SMART GAMES style.

**CONS:** Now that they've used up all the familiar puzzle types, what's left is sometimes esoteric and hard to get the hang of.

**DIFFICULTY:** Intermediate

**REQUIREMENTS:** 486SX, Windows 95/98, 8MB RAM, 5MB hard-drive space; SVGA graphics; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.

**3D SUPPORT:** None.

**MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT:** None.

Price: $29.99
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Beverly, MA
(800) 991-3700

www.hasbro.com
Grim Fandango
Having a Bad Day of the Dead? Scorpio's Here to Help

by Scorpio

GRIM FANDANGO is an extensive adventure, with far too much to cover exhaustively in a single article. Here we'll take a look at some of the puzzles most likely to give you trouble.

At the Office

A First-class Client: You have to get in ahead of Domino to really start the game moving, especially after picking up the low-class poisoning victim. Gumming up the works can do wonders. But you'll need an ace in the hole (or vice versa), and you should insert it in the message center tube downstairs to read Mercedes Colomar's card.

Puerto Something

Demasiado Tarde: Too bad that message from Salvador came in too late to save the ship's crew. Now you have to save yourself and Glottis. In this case, half a loaf (or ship) is better than none. If you hear "Anchors Aweigh" in your head, that's a hint. Just be sure you get off to the right start.

Edge of the World

Vault: If you're having trouble with the tumblers, keep in mind that the four flat sides have to be facing and aligned with the right side of the door. It's best to work from the top down here. When they're set properly, think sharp to keep them from moving when you open the door.

Petrified Forest

Weird Marrow Tree: Okay, Manny, it's time to really rock and roll. You do the rolling, and the tree will rock. It's easiest to accomplish in the center, but timing is definitely essential. And you'll need some help from Glottis at the end; just don't wait too long. Sometimes you have to be naughty to be nice.

Demon Beavers: Blasting from the front just doesn't do the trick. Maybe you found that out already. However, in the right place, with the right belt and the right timing, you can cool these hot little critters in practically no time. First, throw a bone into the pit, then hose each beaver with the fire extinguisher as it jumps in for the bone.

See the Review

FEBRUARY ISSUE • 4.5 STARS
Rubacava

Lots to do, plenty of running around, and many puzzles to solve here. Take your time and scope out the whole area, so you know where all the places are (it was a long time before I discovered that the elevator by the Blue Casket brings you back up to the Calavera Cafe!). The three main goals in this section can be accomplished in almost any order, not just the one given here.

Naranja: No, you don’t have to kill him to join the crew, but it’s better all around if someone thought he was, um, “dead.” Technically, of course, he’s dead already. But in the world of GRIM FANDANGO, there’s dead and there’s dead, as in pushin’ up posies, mari-golds, whatever.

Naranja’s getting tattooed, which makes things slightly easier. After he’s been basted (good for what ales him, and a little distraction helps), you’ll have half of what you need.

Carla can supply the other half, provided you’re flaky enough and fast enough to be detected.

Joining the Union: Chowchilla Charlie is willing to deal: a union card for a suitcase. Sounds easy enough, eh? Maybe. First, you’ll have to shut up the waiter and have barrels of fun. Then, as Yogi said, “When you come to the fork in the road, take it.” Take it right into the elevator. You can probably figure out what to do after that, but be quick about it.

Seabee Tools: ¡Viva la Revolucion! Strike while the iron is hot, or at least the Seabees should. Bet you could write a book about that, but someone else already did, and that’s the start. Unfortunately, you now need a lawyer, and, even more unfortunately, he doesn’t want to help you. Well, a little blackmail in a good cause never hurts. A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when it comes to evidence.

Get Carla on the case, and the way will be lighted for you. Check out with Lupe, and then you’re ready for some tricky tickle work. After that, Nick should be very willing to help get your pal out of the slammer.

Surviving the Crane

The 12-Step Plan

If you don’t want to know—look away now!

1. Set the conveyor belt to move downward, then climb out of the water.
2. Get in the crane and drive it to the other side of the city.
3. Push the down arrow key to lower the crane.
4. Use the Bust-all on the crane.
5. Get back in the crane. It should move the crane slightly and try again.
6. Raise the chain. Go back to the other side of the city.
7. Lower the chain onto the conveyor belt.
8. Get and go down the belt.
9. Set the belt to go upward and then downward.
10. Climb back up the belt, get in the crane, and raise the chain again.

Rubacava Again

Boney wagon: If you’re having trouble with the gelatin setting, check out Toto’s place.

Back Home Again

Disguise: Hot stuff! Too hot to handle. Speaking of which, it’s too bad Manny doesn’t have a third hand. Maybe he can get one. Think flowery thoughts.

Seeing Hector: When you talk to the couple, go against your better instincts. A con job now will be better in the long run.

The Cat Trick

If you’re having trouble finding the second betting window at the track, don’t feel bad—you can’t see this when you come up the stairs. So walk to the left to find the window.

How to Reach Scorpio

Internet: Scorpio’s Domain at www.scorpia.com • Email: scorpia@scorpia.com
U.S. Mail (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope): Scorpio, P.O. Box 338, Gracie Station, New York NY 10028.
Half-Life
Sound Advice for Killing Your Friends

by Jesse Hiatt

If you're fortunate enough to have access to a LAN and some speedy rigs (Pentium 300+), the following maps and strategies will help you to master the Datacore and Stalkyard levels. These are both close-quarter maps in which the action is fast and furious. So saddle up, lock and load, and get ready for carnage.

Datacore

This is a great level for honing your skills on the MP5 and its handy grenade launcher. Note the three places where grenades are available, including the one hidden in the shadows at point A. If you're fond of the crossbow, resist the temptation to lurk under the stairs or at point B—both positions are vulnerable. If you set up shop at point C you won't have as much coverage, but by scooting around the ledge you can maintain the element of surprise. And if you just gotta have 'em, crawl through the duct at point D and jump to a handful of snarks.

See the Review
FEBRUARY ISSUE • 5 STARS
Stalkyard

The main room of this level is filled with weapons and power-ups and is the center of the carnage in most battles. There is a jump assist and a secret door at point E (look for the red glow). This item will make gun shopping amongst all the boxes much easier. A sliding door at point F will grant you access to three satchel charges, and the Stalkyard is rife with opportunities to use them. For you sniping fans, by far the best place to hide is at point G. There's great coverage from this point, no one can see you in the shadows, and there are two health power-ups that you can grab if you get routed. There is a hole in the floor at point H that you can use to drop satchel charges on passers-by in the passage below. An air duct at point I leads to the adjacent passageway and gets you energy weapon ammo.

HALF-LIFE KEY

WEAPONS
1. Rocket Launcher
2. .357 Magnum
3. Satchel Charges
4. Shotgun
5. MP5
6. Satchel
7. Gauss Gun
8. Laser Trip Mines
9. Heavy-Mounted Machine Gun
10. Crossbow
11. Grenades
12. Hive Hand
13. Snarks

POWER-UPS
1. Rocket
2. Energy
3. Medipacks
4. Power Assist
5. Armor
6. MP5 Grenades

STATIONS
1. Armor Station
2. Health Station
Warlords III: Darklords Rising
Our Favorite Units, From Assassins to Wraiths by Samuel Baker II

---

**Bats**
**PROS** Cheap and fast, good scouts; they give flight to heroes from the start
**CONS** Can't fight their way out of a wet paper bag
**USE** In your first or fifth army slot

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**Black Dragon**
**PROS** High strength, acid attacks, flight—the best combat unit in the game
**CONS** Steep cost, upkeep, time to produce
**USE** In your last production slot

---

**Elven Archers**
**PROS** Great missile attack, cheap upkeep
**CONS** Fragile, missile ability negated when facing units with 4 hits
**USE** Great for the “sack stack”

---

**Dark Pegasus**
**PROS** 2-turn production, 2-hit unit; +2 fear, and they fly
**CONS** Upkeep of 10 is painful early in the game
**USE** A good choice for one of the four basic army slots

---

**Blue Dragon**
**PROS** High strength, flight, lightning attack—the second-best unit in the game
**CONS** Steep cost, upkeep, time to produce
**USE** In your last production slot

---

**Red Dragon**
**PROS** High strength, flight, and the highest chaos bonus allowed
**CONS** Cost and upkeep
**USE** In an ally slot, as you need only one of them per stack

---

**Catapults**
**PROS** +2 siege, 2-turn production, +2 attacking cities
**CONS** Weak on attack and defense, quite slow
**USE** Hero backup or city stiffener

---

**Elephants**
**PROS** Strong, 3-hit unit, +1 trample bonus
**CONS** Slow speed and slow to produce
**USE** Hero backup or city stiffener

---

**Fire Elemental**
**PROS** Cheapest flying unit, decent strength, chaos ability, high movement rate
**CONS** A 4-turn unit that’s only +2 chaos
**USE** In your second ally or merc slot

---

**Gnoll Crossbows**
**PROS** +2 assassin
**CONS** Slow, only average strength for a 2-turn unit
**USE** In cities, but only if you can’t afford Gnoll cavalry

---

**Gnoll Crossbows**
**PROS** +2 chaos, 3-hit unit
**CONS** Slow speed, slow to produce
**USE** As a first- or second-slot ally or mercenary

---

**Assassins**
**PROS** +5 assassin ability (50 percent chance to kill anything outright), great for city defense, cool laugh
**CONS** Everything else, especially their 25 upkeep
**USE** In a mercenary slot or as your first ally pick

---

**Green Dragon**
**PROS** All the benefits of dragonhood with the best fear bonus
**CONS** Same as other dragons’ cost and upkeep
**USE** In an ally slot, as you need only one of them per stack

---

**Dwarf Infantry**
**PROS** +3 strength, 3-hit unit, only 1 turn to produce
**CONS** Terribly slow (14 movement)
**USE** Cheap city defense and early hero escort

---

See the Review
DECEMBER ISSUE • 4.5 STARS
**Gnoll Cavalry**  
**PROS**  
+4 assassin, 24 movement, good strength  
**CONS** Takes three turns to produce  
**USE** In the third or fourth army slot, so you can build them in your capital from the start

**Stone Golem**  
**PROS** +1 against cities, +2 trample  
**CONS** Weak for a 3-turn unit  
**USE** Against majority of enemy ground units

**Siege Engines**  
**PROS** +4 siege ability makes them city-crackers without peer  
**CONS** 3-turn production, slow  
**USE** Build only as many as you need until you have a leader with a high siege rating

**Skeletons**  
**PROS** +2 warding  
**CONS** None, given the price  
**USE** To lessen the danger of those nasty Blue/Black Dragon stacks

**Gnoll Infantry**  
**PROS** Cheap, low upkeep, 2 hits, +1 assassin  
**CONS** Weak attack, slow  
**USE** Get what you pay for, but still good for sacking

**Halflings**  
**PROS** Good missile attack, 2-hit unit, cheaper than elf archers  
**CONS** Weak attack, slow, missile attack negated by units with four hits  
**USE** In the first army slot

**Wargs**  
**PROS** +4 warding, fast to produce, fast movement  
**CONS** Weak strength for a 2-turn unit  
**USE** In a flying hero’s stack

**Clay Golem**  
**PROS** +1 against cities, fastest unit with trample ability to produce  
**CONS** Slow, trample affects ground units only  
**USE** Conjure for city defense or casualty replacement

**Rats**  
**PROS** +5 banding ability  
**CONS** Same as peasants; they die easily if alone  
**USE** Cheap city defense

**Iron Golem**  
**PROS** +1 against cities, +3 trample  
**CONS** Weak for a 4-turn unit, trample affects ground units only  
**USE** In one of your basic eight army slots as grunts

**Plague Carriers**  
**PROS** Great strength, fast to produce for its strength, low upkeep  
**CONS** Low hits, quite slow  
**USE** Good unit to produce early to take and defend cities

**Nightmares**  
**PROS** +4 banding ability, fast, low upkeep  
**CONS** Good only if you build lots of them  
**USE** As a rapid response force to protect threatened cities

**Slayer Knights**  
**PROS** +4 chaos, good strength and hits  
**CONS** 4-turn unit  
**USE** Good for city defense, useful if you have trouble procuring Red Dragons

**Peasants**  
**PROS** Effective strength of 4; if your city falls the enemy will get only 1 gold for pillage  
**CONS** They die easily in small numbers  
**USE** Cheap units for static city defense

**Wolfriders**  
**PROS** +3 warding, fast, cheap  
**CONS** Even weaker than Wargs  
**USE** Same as Wargs

**Wraiths**  
**PROS** +3 fear, fast  
**CONS** Slow to produce, weak strength for a 3-turn unit  
**USE** Something to put in your hero stacks until you get Green Dragons

- When he's not out riding Wargs, Samuel Baker II can be found playing Railroad Tycoon II.
**Adventure**

**Fallout 2**

 Fallout 2 is big, and while we're wrapping up our in-depth guide, we thought it would be nice to provide some quick tips to tide you over. In the original Fallout, the average finishing level was usually between 12 and 14 (unless you worked on having a lot of combat). Here, you will certainly go above Level 20, especially if you take time to do all the town quests. That means you should be careful about the Skilled and Gifted traits. If you take Skilled, you'll lose out on at least two perks, since they will come every four levels instead of every three. If you take Gifted, you'll lose about 100 skill points over the course of the game, since you won't get the +5 bonus per level. Players would do well to avoid these traits the first time around.

Speech is a good tag skill to have, even if your character isn't particularly diplomatic. There are situations in which good talking (or bluffling) ability can get you further than a hail of lead. Even with just average (5) charisma, good Speech skill can do a lot for you, especially combined with Intelligence of 6 or better.

The Bonus AP perk is another good choice. It can prove to be very helpful in many circumstances, particularly if you’re running away from random encounters in the wastelands. These extra two steps can literally be lifesavers. Unless you really like difficult fights, set the combat mode to Wimpy. Opponents are much harder to kill than they were in the original game. Even with good weapons, you won’t be doing a lot of damage.

You can also make life a bit more tolerable by setting the game mode to Easy. This gives you +20 percent to all skills from First Aid to Outdoorsman. You can change the mode any time during play to obtain this bonus; it doesn’t have to be done at the start. Conversely, setting the mode to Difficult will reduce all skills by 10 percent from their initial starting values. Not a good idea! —Scorpio

---

**Classics/Puzzles**

**Sentinel Returns**

Sometimes you just can’t see the forest for the whiskers. But what you can do is absorb these “trees” to gain energy.

The leaning tower of victory: A quick teleport to the robot atop that stack of “boulders” (center) and you can take the place of the evil Sentinel (left).

What the hell is that? Well, once this fetal little feller gets jabbed in the head, you'll be on your way to another level (thank goodness!). —Mark Clarkson
Motocross Madness

Always look down the trail. Riders should look about 20 feet down the trail to the path they next want to take. If you look down that smooth line along the left side of those whoops, that’s where you’ll go. Look at that big rock in the trail and you’ll be pulling your helmet out of a tree. The point is that you need to plan which line you are going to take through the next section of the course. It’s a universal rule in all sims, but sometimes it’s easy to forget when you’re catching air and hoping to come down intact. —Greg Fortune

Action

Thief: The Dark Project

- Block doors with crates to ensure some privacy.
- Grab all the gold you can before completing your last objective. You’ll need every bit for your next mission.
- Burrells are slow, deaf, and dumb. If you’re quick enough you can scout past them and get far enough away so they forget to follow you.
- Guards like to talk when they’re on duty. If you listen you can pick up valuable information to help you on your mission.
- Carpets absorb blood. You should wait until the guard is standing on carpet before threading his jugular with your arrow. —Lance Larka

Simulation/Space Sim

WWII Fighters

Here’s an Easter egg for Jane’s WWII FIGHTERS. Actually, it’s more the bird that laid the egg...

1. Set up a quick mission with one Spitfire and no enemy planes.
2. Arm the Spitfire with two 250-pound and one 500-pound bombs.
3. Start the mission. Drop the two 250-pound bombs and fire your guns until your remaining ammo is nine rounds or less.
4. Hit F10 to go to an outside view.
5. Press E to turn off your engine.
6. While holding down both Ctrl and Alt keys, press T.
7. Don’t use any weapons or you’ll lose the effect. Note that even the fight model changes.

Occasionally, you’ll see 3D deer bounding across the landscape, and hunting deer with Spitfires can be quite challenging. If you want to increase the number of potential wildlife targets, edit the wwo2.ini file in the game directory to read NUMDEER=20.

Strategy

West Front

Take your time! All serious gamers will use at least some of the command and fog-of-war options. These features set a premium on organized movement, so don’t charge ahead like a herd of kamikaze turtles. Instead, turn on the “Show Organization,” “Save Points for Firing,” and “Save Points for Unloading” toggles. Have one unit take the point on advance, then follow up with an organized, massed fire or close assault next turn. All missions have enough turns for a planned, thoughtful approach.

Use the big guns. Artillery is always an ace in the hole if you hit something. Check if your target is immobile or in cover. If so, target its present hex. If not, consider if the target will advance toward cover, toward one of your weaker units, or toward a victory hex; then target the anticipated new position. The AI has a habit of stopping in a victory hex instead of moving through it. You can take advantage of this by pulling back from a victory hex and then pounding it in anticipation of a counterattack. Likewise, keep your units moving so the computer’s artillery hits empty air.

Leapfrog your staff officers. Handling battalion headquarters (HQs) is the most important command decision in the game. They are the essential last link to the “sharp end” but have the shortest range: eight hexes. Fortunately, they come in pairs, so you can leave one stationary while you move the other forward. This leapfrogging is essential to coordinated attacks and to keeping your HQs safe from indirect fire. —Jim Cobb
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Each month, 2,000 CGW subscribers are selected at random to rate 150 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your feedback.

### TOP ACTION GAMES

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### TOP STRATEGY GAMES

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### TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

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I've been called a lot of things in my life—Green Bean, Dark Brain, Donkey Breath, The Love Doctor—but one thing I've never been called is naive. I am, in fact, a rather worldly sort. For example, I can speak French. Check this out: "Bonjour, Yves! Est-ce que tu voudrais une baguette?" This translates roughly into: "Hello, Yves! Boy, it sure sucks to be French, doesn't it?"

I bring up my worldliness because I want to talk about a rather old topic, and I want it clear from the beginning that I was not, in fact, born yesterday. The topic at hand is bugs. As in, bugs in computer games. As in, giant bugs in computer games that should never, never have been shipped because they were so pathetically buggy. It's a topic that's been done to death, I know, but unfortunately, another thing I've never been called is "original." So bite moi.

Anyway, why shouldn't I harp on bugs? It's the biggest scandal in this industry. I should write about it every month, listing every single bug-ridden piece of junk by name until the gaming companies start making it a priority to actually finish their products before selling them to the consumers.

Buggy games have become such a part of life that we now consider it amazing, and worthy of praise, if a game actually ships that isn't buggy. This is like praising a restaurant for not having the chef using it. Yeah, sure, I'm happy about it, but why should I even have to mention it?

Like I said, I'm not naive. I know this is an inexact science. I know it's ridiculous and unrealistic to expect perfection out of a software product, given the millions of variables involved. I can live with this. I can live with the fact that a company might have to issue a patch because they found a glitch on the 20th level of an action game when played on a certain computer with a certain video card.

What I can't tolerate—and neither should you—are games that are all but unplayable right out of the box, games that the company knew were riddled with bugs but released anyway. Take, for example, the case of Sin, a game that was so buggy upon release that it required a 19MB patch just to get it into a playable state—19MB. To put this in perspective, that's about 9MB more than Ultima I, II, III, IV, V, and VI combined.

Now, a game can't possibly be so buggy without someone in the chain of command knowing that it wasn't done yet. But someone went ahead and released it anyway, with a big fat $49.95 price tag on the front, to an unsuspecting public. I don't know how to overstate how despicable an act this is. It's greedy, it's cynical, and it shows nothing but utter contempt for the consumer. Hey kids, buy our cool new game! We couldn't get it to work, but—wehatever! Thanks for the money!

I don't know any of the details. Maybe someone on the team spent too much time deathmatching. Maybe the publisher's deadlines were une-

Article not done. Please don't ship this page yet! Thanks — Jeff

Jeff: who cares!

Jeff: what stupid fascist

Jeff: please very your sentence structures!

JEFF GREEN

glitch and unfair. Maybe they were understaffed. Maybe they panicked over Half-Life, and decided to shove it out there before Valve's title hit the shelves.

But, you know what? I don't care. I don't want to hear about it. Someone has to take some responsibility in this industry, do the right thing, and stop these goddamn things from being released, even if it means taking a huge financial hit in the short run. Because if you keep releasing buggy crap, you're going to go out of business eventually anyway. And you'll deserve it.

The alternative, I suppose, is that the rest of us could adapt our work habits to the standards of the gaming industry. It sure would make it easier to make these annoying CGW deadlines.

Rather than delivering my usual sharp, clever ending to this column, for example, I could simply let it kind of, I don't know, keep going until it just sort of petered out on its own in a long-winded run-on sentence and hope that some editor will fix it for me later. Or maybe I could just turn it in unfinished and then email a better ending to people who complain. Or maybe I could just keep going. Need a third idea here. Something funny to tie this together.

CGW

[Note to copy desk: Article not done. Please don't ship this page yet!! Thanks — Jeff]

[Note from managing editor: Sorry, it's got to go now for us to beat the competition to the newsstand. Don't worry, we'll just print a correction next issue.]

What Jeff doesn't realize is that his wife, who is French, is at home right now nailing the guillotine. Say au revoir to Jeff at jhgreen@zdz.com.
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