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Actual Game Screen

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BLOCKBUSTER FALL PREVIEW!

Flight Sim Summer

The last wave in the recent flood of WWII flight sims will soon be upon us. From B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II’s unprecedented simulation of every station of a lumbering bomber to FLIGHT COMBAT’s kitchen sink of features, these prop-driven sims will let you stencil your initials on Wolfgang’s canopy well into the new millennium.
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FORGET ABOUT THE SECOND COMING.
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The days of computer opponents walking around in circles and waiting to be fraged are long gone. A breakthrough in artificial intelligence gives your enemies a realistic, unpredictable quality that lets them improvise during single-player battles. These bastards will hide, retreat, and steal your health to get to the upper hand. Either show them some respect, or get used to selecting "New Game."

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Real Multiplayer Gaming

Baseball fever has gripped the CGW staff in a way that’s almost perverted. It all started back in April when nine of us, each armed with a manila folder full of player rosters, fantasy league advice, and simulated drafts, locked ourselves into our conference room to conduct our player draft. The rest of the staff left us alone thinking we were in “a very serious meeting.”

Our addiction got progressively more out of control as time went on. The low (or high, depending on your point of view) point? I found myself, not playing, but watching a game between editors Tom Price and Rob Coffey. At least wasn’t alone in my darkness—five other editors were right there watching with me.

In a day and age where Internet and LAN play are flourishing, it’s odd that the most enjoyable multiplayer experience we’ve had this year is taking place not over a network, but at a single computer. Why this freakish phenomenon is occurring doesn’t really need much explain-

When are we going to get this kind of socially immersive experience over the Net?

—It’s far more fun to play an opponent who’s in the same room with you. To taunt mercilessly when you’re ahead, and, in the sad case of Technical Editor Dave Salvador, to weep bitter tears and break game pads when you lose on a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth. With a crowd watching, no less.

But this sad case does beg a simple question. When are we going to get this kind of socially immersive experience over the Net? Is it even possible? Can you create an online game environment that successfully straddles the social elements of play without devolving into a chat room?

These are the kinds of questions that will hopefully be answered over the next few years. And who knows—maybe one of the games in this month’s cover story will be the one to break this issue wide open.

What’s your take?

Got an opinion? Want to write reviews for CGW? Contact the EIC at gjones@zol.com. 

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

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

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

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

Thief
The Pharaoh's palace is filled with loot. They'll never notice if a little is missing! I might anger the Gods, but you won't catch me rowing in a galley all day. Next stop, the Beer Maker's. Stealing is thirsty work.
Beer Maker
Shay wharaya will, I gotta keep rastin my brew. The Pharaoh demanded the best.
And that's what heesh gonna get. Hail Osiris! May the barley crops grow strong!

Nile Farmer
Nobody told me that when the Nile flooded
I have to work on the pyramids. Why didn't
I go to embalming school like Mom wanted?
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9 out of 10. "Descent 3 is a must have. Go out and buy it. This may be the best vehicular shooter ever."
- IGN

Editor's Choice Award for Best Shooter.
"Buy it... It is certainly the best game I've played this year..."
- Review Board

**** "Kudos to Outrage and Interplay for a job well done on Descent 3!"
- Thresh's Firing Squad

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* The first 500 people to sign-in at the championship that have pre-registered on-line will receive a free gift (Over $150 Value).
** Contestants are responsible for their own travel, food and lodging. While Interplay does not endorse Seven Seas or obligate contestants to utilize their services the agency is provided as a convenience to travelers.
WHERE'S THE DUKE?

I find no mention of DUKE NUKEM FOREVER in the June or July "Pipeline." Is the game still in the works?

Tom Barrett, St. Petersburg FL, via the Internet

Duke isn't dead, says 3D Realms, he's just been spending a lot of time in training (or detox, take your pick). They say the king is scheduled to battle aliens in Vegas sometime next year (much like the other King). Independent sources say it's amazing, so we're working on taking you deep into Duke country sometime in the spring.

ALL-NIGHT TECH SUPPORT

I just built my version of your Loan Machine (Killer Rigs), and it runs like a banshee. I then built my home network, mostly inspired by the pages of CGW. It is rare to find a bunch of people that care about the end user. Thank you for all the tips, how to's and enriching the life of all us repressed gamers. I want to express a personal thank you to Loyd for answering my email at 3 a.m. in the morning (EST) within 45 minutes. I know that that is not normal. But it was comforting to realize I'm not the only one sitting at the tube late at night when it's finally quiet.

Lester Lammonds, via the Internet

Loyd often goes above and beyond the call, but if he doesn't answer your email at three in the morning, don't despair. Watch for his new technical Q&A section with technical editor Dave Salvador starting next month.

PICK A CARD

I need your help. I want to buy a video card that's going to make games run fast at high resolutions. I don't know which card to buy, either the Diamond Viper V770 Ultra 32MB 4X or the new VOODOO 3500 15MB. Which card do you recommend, or if you know a better card than these two let me know please.

Norberto Ortiz Jr., Brooklyn, NY, via the Internet

Ah, the eternal question: "Which 3D card should I buy?" Beginning this month, we answer it, along with several of gaming's other quandaries, in the "Killer Rigs" section (see page 103). For life's other tough decisions, we recommend: Toyota, brunettes, ESPN, Thai, Aerith, and Guinness.

FLIGHT SIM DROUGHT

Perhaps this flight sim drought will be good for gamers. The publishers and their bean counters can produce all the hunters and shooters they want. I've seen enough of them crammed onto the shelves from CompUSA to WalMart, and guess what? They're still sitting there, and eventually they wind up in those large bargain bins and still sit there. The drought will give me time to finally concentrate on FALCON 4.0 and EUROPEAN AIR WAR—definitely two thumbs-up for MicroProse.

The game developers should use this dry-spell to fine-tune or release add-ons to current sims on the market. Jane's WWII definitely can use it.

Gordon Chiu, via the Internet

DEADLY GAMES

The hypocrisy of our society becomes apparent in an argument I had with one of my non-gamer friends. We were having this discussion in an amusement park about two weeks after the (Colorado high school) shooting. In the middle of lambasting me and my ilk for the violence in our society, she stopped and commented on how cute it would be to put her two-year-old on a ride we just passed. The ride had airplanes with toy machine guns bolted to it. The children were encouraged to shoot each other.

James Stimpfl, via the Internet

IN NEED OF A MECH-OVER

After playing MECHWARRIOR 3 for a few days I've come to the conclusion that the graphics are amazing, but everything else needs a little work. Being a big fan of the BattleTech Universe and the other MECHWARRIOR games, I had really high hopes for MW3. But there are some glaring omissions—the lack of Inner Sphere Mech's (assault-Mechs especially), another MECHWARRIOR game focusing on the Inner Sphere vs. the Clans, only 20 missions, buggy multiplayer mode, among other things. I was hoping that the computer gaming industry has learned that a great graphics engine can't make up for a lack of content. But then again look what the computer gaming industry learned from TOMB RAIDER. I guess for now I'm going to have to go back to my little cardboard cut-out BattleMechs, and paper hex-maps to have some real BattleTech fun.

Chris Greer, Victoria, BC, Canada, via the Internet
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Malice in Wonderland
American McGee Teams With EA For...An Alice In Wonderland 3D Shooter?

Have you heard the rumors about American McGee and Electronic Arts? Recently, an EA-hosted Web site created a flood of gossip on the Internet regarding the possible game offspring of such a union. The site (www.american.ea.com)—which featured bizarre sketch art, creepy children’s music, and a mysterious jack-in-the-box—appeared to be paving the way for some kind of announcement regarding the top-secret game McGee is rumored to be working on.

After checking out the site, the crack team of reporters at CGW got to the bottom of the mystery. By applying skills we’ve cultivated over the years (begging, pleading, sending small dead rodents in the mail, and impersonating janitors), the vaunted editorial engine at CGW broke through Electronic Arts’ cone of silence and finally got the company talking about their highly guarded project involving American McGee.

What we discovered is tantalizing. McGee—one of the top level designers at id Software for years—is working on a twisted 3D shooter adaptation of Alice in Wonderland. Currently titled American McGee’s Alice and scheduled for release late next year, Alice is going to take the Disneyfied version of Lewis Carroll’s story and turn it upside down with a darker, edgier, Tim Burton-esque approach.

The game’s storyline will be based on the classic tale, meaning you’ll probably encounter the likes of the Jabberwocky, the Tweedle twins, the Mad Hatter, and many of the other characters from the book. (How you will play with them exactly has yet to be revealed). Given McGee’s shooter background, we’re sure the game will emphasize action. We do know that the game will be played in the third-person perspective, with the possibility of a first-person perspective multiplayer mode.

Regarding the 3D game engine, all we could squeeze out of EA is that the game will be utilizing an “advanced, next-generation 3D engine.”

Look for more coverage of Alice in upcoming issues of CGW.

S3 to Acquire Diamond

If you can’t stand the heat, get out and buy another company. That would seem to be the message being sent by the graphics hardware industry. In yet another consolidation move, graphics chipmaker S3 is acquiring Diamond Multimedia in a stock-swap deal valued at about $173 million. The deal is a marriage of two troubled companies both trying to return to profitability, and it opens up more questions than it answers. The move now leaves one major chipmaker (nVidia), and one large board maker (Creative Labs) as the only two players without a dance partner at the 1999 Graphics Hoedown.

The Savage! has been successful both with board and system makers. With this new Diamond deal, S3 will be able to diversify their businesses, including sound cards, modems, and perhaps most interestingly, motherboards. Last year, Diamond acquired motherboard maker Micronics, and has been marketing motherboards under the Diamond name. S3 has been working on a graphics chip that will integrate into a motherboard’s “North Bridge” (the interface between the CPU and the memory), and will now be able to market that motherboard for low-cost PCs. But given that Diamond has been losing money despite its diverse product line-up, it’s not at all clear that S3 will succeed in making money where Diamond has failed.

So what does this bode for we gamers? Expect to see Diamond boards use only S3 parts in the near future, since nVidia has stated that it will no longer have dealings with Diamond because S3 is a direct competitor. Creative Labs, who have been shipping a Savage4-based board, is likely to become the preeminent board supplier of nVidia-based boards here in the U.S., though Hercules and Guilmot will give chase as well, both here and in Europe.—Dave Salvador

New Graphics Landscape Leaves nVidia as ‘Last Man Standing’
Revenge of the Faeries

Orcs and ogres in Time magazine? Game characters and items selling for hundreds or thousands of dollars? Star programmers being fired away from high-profile game companies?

With the remarkable success of massively multiplayer games like Origin's Ultima Online and Verant's EverQuest, we may be witnessing a sea-change in the gaming world.

Both Ultima Online and EverQuest have gained huge followings, with approximately 125,000 active accounts each. At nearly $10 per month per account, these games are generating a lot of Britannia gold and Norrathian platinum for their parent companies, Electronic Arts and Sony. Soon they will be competing with another heavy hitter, Asheron's Call, which is being backed by Microsoft. Other companies already fielding games include Simutronics, with the text-based Gemstone and DragonRealms; Ten, with Dark Sun Online; Mplayer, with Underlight; and 3DO with Meridian 59.

And the mainstream media is noticing. Time ran a one-page story about EverQuest in their June 21st issue. "EverQuest thrives on the relationships that develop among players," wrote Michael Krantz. "Players attend concerts, auctions and weddings; bid over everything from wolf meat to scimitars; and pool talents and resources to quest for distant treasures." That's not a bad summary of the action. With national publications jumping on the bandwagon, can it be too long before politicians proclaim they're "proud to be a compassionate conservative and a 12th level rogue?"

Auction Insanity

Another sign of the rabid popularity these games often engender is the recent spate of eBay madness. Several Ultima Online accounts have sold for more than $3,000, and EverQuest items and accounts aren't too far behind. A quick search on eBay pulled up 239 Everquest items up for bid,

Thanks To Ultima Online and EverQuest, The Online Revolution Is Now

Origin Fires Staffer for Auctioning UO Items Online

The wages of Ultima sin are cold, hard cash. In late June Origin issued a press release saying that one of their Ultima Online Game Masters (GMs) had been fired for "engaging in activities that breached the trust that must exist between a company, its employees, and its customers." One of the many Ultima fan sites, Dr. Twister's, then broke the story that the terminated employee was GM Darwin, whose real name is Kevin Roseler, and that he had been fired for creating Ultima Online gold and houses and selling them through eBay. A quick check of eBay records shows that Roseler sold nearly $3,000 worth of Ultima Items. This included over 19 million gold pieces, two castles, and several houses.

Origin declined to discuss specifics or even name Roseler as the former GM who was terminated. When contacted, Roseler's wife admitted that he had indeed sold the Ultima items and that he had used his powers as a GM to create them. All Roseler would say is that he had "made a mistake." Roseler did post a farewell message to the Ultima community in which he said, "I am no longer employed with Origin Systems and thus this ends my time in UO. I hold no ill will toward Origin Systems as my leaving was my fault."

—Mark Asher

www.computergaming.com
Revenge of the Faeries (continued)

including 1,000 platinum pieces with a high bidder offering $306 real dollars and $1,025 being offered for an account with a decked out 42nd level paladin. There were 231 ULTIMA ONLINE items up for bid, with one bid of $1,700 for an account with several houses, 2.5 million in gold, and several advanced characters. The top bidder belongs to GEMSTONE, a longstanding text-based RPG. According to Simutronics, one veteran player sold his items for—sit down before reading further—$35,000. Maf! Maf! We can make money from playing games!

Big-name programmers are also getting caught up in the excitement. Recently Brian Hook, one of Id Software's star programmers and a huge EVERQUEST fan, left id to work for Verant. "Verant is the perfect place for me," he said. "I'm a huge fan of their games. I'm excited to be able to contribute to a product line that will be the benchmark against which all other massive multiplayer games are judged."

Just what is the appeal of these games? Origin's Richard Garriott (Lord British to you) had this to say: "In a solo player game, every feature is seen by each player as created for them to experience uniquely, each and every player gets to be the one person who "wins," who achieves the objectives laid out by the game. But you do so alone. Who hasn't wanted to share the adventure with a friend?"

EVERQUEST's Brad McCauley put it more simply: "The main appeal of these games is that we are really heading towards a virtual world. The ultimate goal is some kind of holodeck situation."

THE GOOD
• Lombardi returns
Yet another prodigal son returns home. Following George Jones' triumphant return to the CGW fold, we now can celebrate the return of writer/editor wunderkind Chris Lombardi, who ran this magazine for years when the rest of us were still flipping burgers for a living. We'll make our deadlines next month Mr. Lombardi, sir—we promise.

• Great fantasy sequels
Your humble editors are currently having a blast with two just-released fantasy game sequels that we couldn't quite finish in time for review. MIGHT AND MAGIC VII and DUNGEON KEEPER 2 both improve heavily over their predecessors. Look for our official word next month.

THE BAD
• Delays, delays, delays
Surprise! It's the same old story for two of the games we most want to play. Both DIALOBO 2 and TIBERIAN SUN are delayed yet again. We want Westwood and Blizzard to take their time to get things right. But why don't they ever think about our needs? We're ready already!

• QUAKE 3 Test
Three years ago, CGW was paralyzed with inefficiency following the release of the original QUAKE test. Now, unexpectedly, we're once again gamelocked, this time by the QUAKE 3 test. Get this out of our hands before Chris Lombardi yell at us.

THE UGLY
• The French Invasion
Don't get us wrong. We love the French. Paris—great city, Baguettes—love 'em. But what's up with the proliferation of French buyouts of U.S. gaming companies? Infogrames buys Accolade, Havas buys the software division of Cendrillon (which includes Sierra and Blizzard), Titus invests big in Interplay. We don't know what it all means, but it can't be good when three major game companies have to go overseas just to stay afloat.
Eidos Jettisons CONFIRMED KILL

Discontinued

Project Looks

For Safe Place to Land

Just two weeks after releasing a playable demo of CONFIRMED KILL to the public, Eidos Interactive pulled the plug on the project. The online-only WWII flight simulation promised a large, multiplayer air combat environment in which pilots re-enacted historical air battles. The game was released to beta testers last fall and had so far met with an enthusiastic reaction. A public beta release was rumored to be imminent.

This is the second flight sim Eidos has cancelled in the last two years. The company stopped production on FLYING NIGHTMARES 2 early last year and transferred the entire team to CK. (An earlier CONFIRMED KILL, begun in 1994 and appearing on CGW’s May 1995 cover, went on to become ICI’s WARBIRDS.)

Rumor has it that the project is being shopped to other publishers and may yet live to fight another day. We wish it well, but don’t hold much hope considering the recent cooling trend in the sims market, and the fact that the game may be a long flight away from delivering on its full payload.

The demo release of CONFIRMED KILL can be found on the August CGW-ROM and can be played on Mplayer at www.mplayer.com.

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CGW’s Reality Check

Do gaming editors all think alike? We often wonder that here at Reality Check. Does a steady diet of junk food, weeks with no natural sunlight, and a profound fear of women conspire to make us all love ROLLEROASTER TYCOON, for example, but hate LANDS OF LORE III? Ah, sweet mystery of life! In any event, here’s the latest roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub’s own scoring system.

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<th>CGW (out of 5)</th>
<th>PC Gamer (out of 10)</th>
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<td>Civilization: CTP</td>
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<td>High Heat 2000</td>
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<td>80%</td>
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<td>Jack Nicklaus 6</td>
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<td>Lands Of Lore III</td>
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<td>Requiem: Aven, Angel</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Triple Play 2000</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7</td>
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*no rating available at press time.  red indicates editor’s choice games

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Web Picks of the Month

The most important thing that happened Web-wise around the CGW office was Danny Atkin’s, Thierry Nguyen’s, and Jeff Green’s avowed moratorium on buying old comic books on eBay. But, like the pathetic addicts they are (“we can quit any time!”), they just couldn’t stay away. Now Danny’s Starman collection is complete, Thierry has the entire coveted early issues of Transmet (which Jeff hasn’t returned yet), and Jeff is making his way through 100 old X-Men.

Danny’s Pick
www.3ffiles.com
The source for the hottest game demos, driver files, and graphics gadgets.

George’s Pick
www.thesagabegins.com
Weird Al Yankovic’s Ode To Star Wars, set to the tune of “American Pie.”

Jeff’s Pick
www.anotheruniverse.com
An online goldmine of all things dorky: X-Files, comic books, Star Wars—all the usual suspects. Some decent articles and lots and lots of junk to buy, like “Mini Me” action figures.

Chris’ Pick
www.playhooky.com
A paragon of game design destined for digital glory. DEER HUNTER and BASS TROPHY, your days are numbered.

Johnny’s Pick
www.alleria.org
THE WORLD OF ALLERIA is a wild and woolly play-by-e-mail game that puts the imagination back into role-playing.

Robert’s Pick
www.xmission.com/~pflick/mm7/
A great resource site for MIGHT AND MAGIC VII players, with detailed quest lists, maps, item lists, and so on.

Scooter’s Pick
distefano.com
A corpse replica store where you can order a custom-made corpse, and even order a manual on corpse replica making. We don’t know what’s scarier: that the OldManMurray guys found this site, or that Scooter asked for it.

Tom’s Pick
www.ganglandnews.com
If you’re tired of waiting for the new Sopranos episodes to get your Mafia fix, check out Gang Land, the best source of mob info on the net, courtesy of New York Daily News reporter Jerry Capeci.
THEY WANT YOU DEAD.

Use the Heads-Up-Display and View Points Monitor to track the war around you.

You choose the target. Destroy entire buildings and rain rubble down on unsuspecting enemies!

Command your Lance mates to ward-off the enemy while Mobile Field Bases repair your ‘Mech.

35 weapons and a new targeting system let you pick away at enemy ’Mechs.

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WHAT DO YOU WANT?

MECHWARRIOR 3

In the 31st Century, there is no mercy. Join the Inner Sphere’s strike team as they prepare the annihilation of the deadly Smoke Jaguar Clan. You’ll have over 20 missions, 18 fully customizable ‘Mechs’ to climb into, and enough weapons to flatten a mountain range. Not only is this the most immersive MechWarrior experience to date, but there’s also an all-new target acquisition system, and more battle environments than ever before. But watch your back! This fight is for survival.

DO or DIE!
In Stores Now!
Will Wright
The Man Behind SIMCITY And The Upcoming THE SIMS
Answers Our Dumb Questions

Revenge of the Faeries (continued)

Just how big can the massively multiplayer market get? "We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg now," said McQuaid. "The potential is in all genres, not just role-playing games." Indeed, by the time you read this, Verant will have announced their next game, a massively multiplayer real-time strategy game set in the near future, tentatively titled SOVEREIGN. Verant is also working on an expansion to EVERQUEST and a couple of other unannounced massively multiplayer games.

Garriott also sees a lot of growth potential in this market. "We see these games going all over the map. We have only just begun to scratch the surface with this style of gaming. Right now all our competitors are doing "me too" virtual world games. We have a list of over 100 announced competitors. The list shows 60 percent Ultima-style games, 30 percent Wing Commander-style games."

So will massively multiplayer overtake single-player games in popularity? Brad McQuaid doesn't think so: "I wouldn't say overtake," he said. "But they can become as large. They provide different experiences. They can co-exist with single-player games." Garriott agrees: "They will at least rival them for dominance to be sure. Single-player games will always be a strong force in gaming though. I still see both styles of game with a great future." What Origin doesn't see, however, are any single-player games in their own plane beyond Ultima Ascension and A-10 Warthog. After that they have only multiplayer games planned, including the all-but-announced Wing Commander Online and Ultima Online 2 games.

More To Come
Other upcoming massively multiplayer games players can look forward to include MIDDLE EARTH from Sierra, set in Tolkien's fictional land; HERO'S JOURNEY from Simutronics, their first graphical RPG; FREELANCER from Chris Roberts' Digital Anvil, a Privateer-like game; and the rumored Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game being developed by BioWare (makers of BALDUR'S GATE) for Interplay.

There is one sticky aspect about these games that may keep some developers away, according to McQuaid: "You need a large company with a lot of funding behind you. These games cost two or three times as much to develop as a traditional game." Maybe they should just auction off some of their characters on eBay.

—By Mark Asher
F-22 LIGHTNING 3
featuring
TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS*

*Hazard suit not included

Also featuring Voice-Over-Net.™ - Talk with over 120 other pilots during intense NovaWorld online multiplayer combat.

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No cure. No hope. Only death.

Abomination: The Nemesis Project

The plague is once again stalking the earth. In six days a superpower has vanished under the heels of the most virulent virus humanity has ever known. As the devastation spread, so did the insanity. A cult blossomed as the body count rose. Calling themselves the Faithful, they preached the demise of mankind and the absolution of the BROOD.

In the bowels of a classified government complex, the eight survivors of Project Nemesis awake to a new world. Genetically augmented volunteers from Delta, SEALS, and Force Recon were engineered to be the ultimate weapons for low intensity conflicts. Now they have to fight a war against a different kind of enemy.

Features:

* Real-time, team based tactical combat
* Powerful Multi-player options: LAN and Internet support for one to eight players.
* Equip your operatives with over 150 different weapons
* Maximum replay value: Proprietary game generator creates unique missions every time you play
Get Your
Motor Runnin' in EA's Online (Elf-Free) Racing World

Attentio online elves and faeries: Your exclusive party is about to be crashed.

If Electronic Arts has its way, the next big "massively multiplayer" gameworld won't be a fantasy realm like EverQuest or Ultima Online, but rather a place much closer to home: Detroit, Motor City—Home of the Great American Hot Rod.

Need For Speed: Motor City, due later this year, is the next, natural, but utterly revolutionary step forward for EA's signature racing game. Think you're tending it in an online world. Now, you'll take your car and race it against other humans, for all to see. Now, you can tinker with your car—upgrading it with name-brand car parts, applying your own custom paint job—and then watch as others drool over it, or maybe even get in a bidding war to buy it from you.

When you enter Motor City for the first time, you'll be given a small amount of money to purchase your first car, which you'll buy from one of the game's virtual lots (complete with oily-sounding salesmen). Depending on what "neighborhood" you're shopping in, different cars might be available. Stop in a more run-down neighborhood, for example, and the only thing available (that you can afford) may be a beat-up '67 Impala. At each lot, an element of supply and demand will also factor in, so if there's a run on a particular model, it may not be available when you first log on.

Did we say '67 Impala? Yes, you read that right, Gasoline Breath. For the first time in the Need For Speed series, EA is abandoning the rich man's luxury wheels in favor of something (somewhat) closer to reality for most of us. According to the team, Motor City is going to feature somewhere between 20 to 40 licensed vehicles at launch, all classic American hot rods from the 1930s through the 1970s, with the primary focus on the muscle cars of the '60s and '70s, such as the '63 Corvette Stingray and the '70 Mustang 302.

Though the game features some killer hot rods, you'll only be able to afford a lower-end "beater" to start. This gives the game an online-RPG feel: The thrill of Motor City, the motivating force that EA thinks will keep you coming back for more, is the opportunity to build up that car, buy (or win) new ones, increase your reputation and skills—all in an attempt to become the biggest badass with the hottest wheels in town.

Race for Pinks

One thing we should make clear is that Motor City is not an online-only game. It will actually be playable in three modes: Single Race, Motor City Offline, and Motor City Online. Single Race is just a quick "get in/get out" offline race against the computer on a randomly selected track. Motor City Offline will let you practice customizing and tweaking your car, as well as racing on the 8 to 12 tracks scheduled to be available online (EA hasn't settled on the final number yet). Those worried about getting crushed online thus have a good place to hone

---

Need For Speed:
Motor City

Genre: Sports/Racing
Release Date: 04/99
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts

The driving force behind Motor City is ownership—and the pride and bragging rights that go with it.

EA got partly there with the recently released Need For Speed: High Stakes, which adds a career mode so players can purchase cars and upgrade them as they win races. Motor City takes that model but makes it infinitely more exciting by setting the Man on the digital speedways? Now you can prove it to the rest of the world in a persistent online universe where the car—not the spellbook—is king.

You Are What You Drive

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You Are What You Drive

The driving force behind Motor City is ownership—and the pride and bragging rights that go with it.
their skills, and those who simply want to enjoy the game offline can do so as well. The heart of the game, however, is the online play, and here EA has big plans. Once you buy a car, you’ll be able to participate in two main kinds of races: sanctioned races and challenges.

Sanctioned races will be “official” races set up by EA, where gamers pay an “entry fee” (with their MOTOR CITY money, not real cash) to join races of about six to eight players for prize money (again, not real cash). Sanctioned races will include drag races, racing ovals, and Grand Prix-style races through city streets.

Challenge races are where it seems that the real heat is going to be. Here, players will be able to host or join races that take place late at night (in the gameworld) on city streets, with the possibility of police cars in pursuit. Races will be either for a set amount of cash or, for the truly bold, for pink slips. That’s right: Lose the race, and you lose your car, permanently (unless you win it back). EA is working on a whole reputation system, based on such elements as your win/loss record, how many challenges you’ve refused, how many times you’ve dropped out, and the number of times you’ve successfully eluded the police.

A Whole New World

EA is aiming for much more than a simple matchmaking service here. Their big goal is to create a virtual racing world, with a dynamic economy and real sense of community. The “hubs” where gamers will meet to chat and to host and join races are represented visually by 50s-style diners and drive-ins. When you enter a hub, your car will be seen parked in the lot (or cruising by if the lot is full). Gamers will be able to set up clans, or racing teams, and a dynamic buddy list will keep you track of where your friends are online.

The Motor City Gazette will be a daily online news source where gamers can submit listings to buy and sell (and possibly auction) cars, paint jobs, and custom parts. Those who’ve designed a particularly cool paint job can also upload it to one of the game’s paint shops, and if another gamer buys it, the designer gets a cut of the profits. Buying, selling, and trading cars is anticipated to be as huge a part of the game as the actual racing—and it doesn’t take much of a stretch to imagine car sales winding up on separate auction services such as eBay.

The biggest hitch for this whole project, of course, is the technology. Will EA really be able to translate the high-polygon, 3D beauty of its NFS engine into an online racing game that won’t break down over latency issues? Will only those with cable modems or T1 lines be able to play? EA is claiming they’ll be able to keep the requirements relatively low but admit that they are breaking new ground here and, like ULTIMA ONLINE, it may take a while to shake itself out.

As of this writing, EA is on the verge of beta testing for Internet play through HIGH STAKES and hopes to work out the latency problems in time for MOTOR CITY’s scheduled winter release. Look for a hands-on field report from a CGW grease monkey just as soon as they let us on the track.

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ORCS: Revenge of the Ancient

Berkeley’s Tolkien Game Is Almost Impossible to Describe—But We’ll Try Anyway

by Robert Coffey

If you’re expecting ORCS: REVENGE OF THE ANCIENT to be just another trivia game from Berkeley Systems well, Jack, you don’t know Zug-Zug. Berkeley is taking some big risks with its first move into the hard-core gaming market. Not only are they working with a license and fans that are notoriously difficult to please, but the game’s design is a new, near-indescribable mix of role-playing and strategy. most like X-COM, charging you with developing your team your way, steering Hobgrat toward a specialty in magic while Nathrak masters the battlespace.

The customization is taken even further with the game’s combo generator. As orcs gain experience in using weapons, new moves will be unlocked. Your job is to link up a series of sweeps, stabs, and chops into devastating attack combos that are then taught to your squad. While you can make scores of combos, your orcs can only retain a few of them as dictated by their intelligence. In a sense, the combos become almost another piece of equipment for you to slap on your charges since, just before combat, you’ll decide which combos your forces take into battle.

All that preparation culminates in the frequent arena battles where you get to see if your orcs are the vicious war machine you envisioned or a bunch of gory pigmen. ORCS’ RPG engine can only extend your capabilities as dictated by their intelligence. In a sense, the combos become almost another piece of equipment for you to slap on your charges since, just before combat, you’ll decide which combos your forces take into battle.

All that preparation culminates in the frequent arena battles where you get to see if your orcs are the vicious war machine you envisioned or a bunch of gory pigmen. ORCS’ RPG engine can only extend your capabilities as dictated by their intelligence. In a sense, the combos become almost another piece of equipment for you to slap on your charges since, just before combat, you’ll decide which combos your forces take into battle. Uh? Turn-based and real-time? What the hell does that mean? Basically this: you’ll see the action unfold in a seamless animation without obvious turn breaks. The orcs will fight on their own, without direct control from you, but you will be able to issue commands. Whether they listen to your orders depends on their discipline rating; headstrong orcs will ignore your directives and follow their inner problem child.

While every little decision is crucial, you’ll also be charged with making some big choices as well. The orc Clan Council will periodically alert you to situations you may or may not want to deal with. Do you go to stop some raiders bedeviling a crossroads? After wrapping up some block markers, do you return the warhammer they stole or keep it? Further, every NPC has a personal agenda, so every decision will echo even more deeply into the gameworld. So many choices, with each helping to determine your path through the game’s branching structure.

Tying these disparate components together is a storyline worthy of the source material. While the first act will acquaint you to the gameworld, your character will also hear stories and start to experience vivid dreams of bloody wars fought on Sauron’s old fortress. By the end of the act you’ll learn that these are the memories of The Ancient, a rival of your current master and an orc who claims to possess the one quality no orc has ever had—freedom. By Act II you’ll have embarked on a path to either serve or crush Sauron, travelling even further across the sprawl of Middle Earth until you encounter an even more shadowy figure when Act III commences.

Is Berkeley more than a one-trick pony? Here’s their chance to prove it. Whether they pull off this ambitious design remains to be seen, but you’ve got to give them this up-front—they’re jumping head-first into the belly of the gaming beast.

ORCS: REVENGE OF THE ANCIENT

GENRE: RPG/Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q4 ’99
DEVELOPER: Berkeley Systems
PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios

SUING UP You prepare your orcs on these two screens. You physically equip your orcs in the first screen and train them in the second.

MOMENT OF TRUTH All your training and preparation comes down to this: pitched battles where you find out if you created an orc army capable of defeating your enemies, or a squad of losers that will disgrace you before your masters.

INFLUENCES African mask influences carry over into the combat that unfolds via a turn-based, stat-driven engine that plays out in real time.

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- 23 unique, immersive missions and campaigns
- Interactive 3D accelerated universe
- Operate authentic WWII vehicles, including a Panzer tank!
- Strategy Guide available from Illumination Publications
Age of Wonders

Epic Covers HEROES' Tune, But Makes It Their Own

by Jesse Hlatt

Age of Wonders looks an awful lot like HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III. The game opens with a guy on a horse in the middle of a map full of rolling hills and pixie dust. Your task, as in HEROES, is to muster an army of fantasy creatures and capture towns. So our first reaction was, why bother? Why bother playing a rip-off of an award-winning, classic design? But once we got beyond the surface similarities, we found that AGE OF WONDERS doesn't play the same as 3DO's fantasy classic. We also found that the design differences are significant enough to make the game worth a try. In fact, after a few hours of play we realized we actually preferred AGE OF WONDERS to the game that it mimics.

Hero, Go Home

The first major departure from HEROES, and the difference that makes all the difference in play style, is that units are free to roam around the map without a baby-sitting hero. Individual units can run errands, pick up goodies, scout, and reveal the contents of an enemy stack. This freedom totally opens up the game, making it more freewheeling and faster paced. In addition, diplomacy and alignment play a much bigger role than in HEROES, combat is more flexible and less abstracted, and there is actually a semi-compelling story to pull you into the campaign.

The tale begins when marauding humans overrun a peaceful island. There is widespread devastation, and the surviving native elves are divided into two camps. The light elves are against war and want to find a way to live in harmony with the humans. The dark elves want revenge and would like to get rid of the humans once and for all, even if they have to embrace evil to do it. Both sides are compelled to travel to a place where a prophecy predicts a final showdown. The goal is to gain control of the fractured island and to recruit local inhabitants to your cause.

Diplomacy and alignment factor heavily into the story and the gameplay. Every action you take will affect your diplomatic relations with the other races of creatures. If you capture a goblin town and burn it down, any goblin units you control could defect and attack. If they are passed off enough, you may have to abandon a goblin town to hold onto it. Alternatively, you could force races out of their homes and bring in a friendly race. The refugees you create won’t like you very much, and you’ll probably see them on the other side of the final showdown, but the new residents will appreciate the gift of the new town. The diplomacy elements carry over from mission to mission, increasing the replayability of the campaign.

Fantasy Flexibility

One of the best features of AGE OF WONDERS is the combat system. For one thing, it can be adapted to your preferred playing style. If you’re faced with a particularly one-sided battle, or don’t really care about tactical maneuvering, you can automate the battle via a combat system similar to that in WARLORDS III. If you choose to get into the nitty-gritty, you are treated to a zoomed-in map of the area or town upon which you maneuver individual units. The maps are much larger than anything in the HEROES series, but what’s really great is that any unit in a hex adjacent to the one being attacked can participate, adding an extra dimension of subtlety to combat tactics.

AGE OF WONDERS is stepping into a realm dominated for years by the HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC and WARLORDS series. AOW falls squarely in the middle of these two strategy-game giants, blending the better elements of both and adding something of its own. What it brings to the table is fresh enough to make AOW a serious fantasy-strategy contender.
A Jedi Knight must remain focused.
Mastery of the Force requires that one purge all unnecessary activities from daily life.

STAR WARS
EPISODE I
THE PHANTOM MENACE

Prepare to immerse yourself in the epic adventure that is The Phantom Menace. As the central character, you will journey to all the stunning locations of Episode I, where you are destined to play a decisive role in every key event. All-consuming? Yes. But then, there’s no such thing as a part-time Jedi.

www.lucasarts.com/products/phantommenace
www.starwars.com

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Gearbox Comes Up With a Unique Take on the Original Story

**Half-Life: Opposing Force**

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE opens with you, Corporal Adrian Shepard, sitting inside a military chopper on its approach to the Black Mesa compound. The drill sergeant is briefing you on your mission—which basically centers around containing the quadrumine Gordon Freeman is stuck in the middle of—when your Osprey goes down in a ball of flames. Tended to by some scientists, you come to your senses inside Black Mesa. Being a tough-as-nails soldier type, you pick up a pipe wrench and join the fray.

**Tough Toys for Tough Boys** At one point in the game, you face a massive alien confrontation with a squadron of your boys by your side.

MMMM...DONUTS Note to self: Otis, one of the game's new AI characters, may not make the best travel companion.

**Answer My Questions!**

OPPOSING FORCE is more than a mere-of-the-same add-on. It expands the HALF-LIFE universe in terms of both gameplay and, more importantly, story. A batch of new weapons (see sidebar) await your most destructive impulses, and a new cadre of monsters—from the new Pit Drones to the massive, highly intelligent Shock Troopers that control the Pit Drones—can't wait to make your acquaintance. Also new to the game are the ninja Black Ops forces to complement the rare but lethal female Assassin units.

Thankfully, you're not all alone. Your soldier friends are at your side this time.

Around. These super-powered AI soldiers will play vitally helpful roles in the game; you can call them up from radios for support, get them to cut through doors, or even get the medic soldiers to heal you.

But the game wouldn't be HALF-LIFE without two key components that made this 3D shooter such a smash in 1998: plot development and terror. You enter the plot right around the time Gordon Freeman encounters the military in the original game. But from this point on, you and he are on separate story paths within the same universe. While your paths may cross a few times, you have your own business to take care of. (Part of said business: Using the loader you see at the beginning of HALF-LIFE to solve a puzzle.)

Lest I spoil the story, I'll stop short of giving the specifics, but having played through a few of the game's levels I can say that OPPOSING FORCE has more twists and turns than the lines to see Phantom Menace and more horrifying moments than a high-school dance. In one scene, blue arcs of electric energy start whistling down the size of the room you're trapped in, which then begins flooding with toxic green goo.

The OPPOSING FORCE designers promised me that over the course of the game they would answer many of the questions HALF-LIFE left lingering. The suitcase-bearing G-Man's role will be explained a bit more, as will the nature of the experiments going on at the Black Mesa facility. I'd be surprised, however, if OPPOSING FORCE doesn't create as many questions as it answers, what with HALF-LIFE 2 in the works and all.

**That's What Friends Are For**

OPPOSING FORCE should one-up the original product in the multiplayer arena. Gearbox has approached several of the top 3D-shooter level designers, such as Ritual Entertainment's Levelord, and signed them up to design multiplayer levels for the game. The final product will feature 12 of these celebrity-designed maps. The multiplayer mode will incorporate all the game's weaponry—old and new.

It surely would be nice if you could play as the aliens, though. (Hint, hint.)

**Biological Agents of Justice**

**OPPOSING FORCE will add seven new weapons to the mix.**

**Pipe Wrench:** Functions like the crowbar, but it's three times as large.

**.357 Desert Eagle:** A fast and accurate sidearm; using the alternate fire laser scope makes the gun even more accurate.

**M26** A super-heavy machine gun capable of firing many rounds per second.

**Sporo Launcher:** A biological rocket launcher with an alternate fire grenade launcher.

**Garbanel:** This biological grappling hook allows you to bring the enemy into your arms, or make like Spiderman.

**Shock Rifle:** It's a rapid-fire energy weapon. It's a spider. It's both! The Shock Rifle inflicts victims with blue pulses of energy.

**Displacer:** In the multiplayer game, the Displacer (the massive weapon modeled by the soldier to the left) instantly teleports multiplayer opponents to a random respawn position on the map. Use the weapon's alternate fire mode and you'll be temporarily transported to the alien world of Xen, where you may find regeneration pools or hostile alien creatures to play with before.

**Half-Life: Opposing Force**

**Genre:** Action

**Release Date:** Q4 99

**Developer:** Gearbox Software

**Publisher:** Havas Interactive

www.computergamingworld.com
Last year, defending the Commonwealth was the biggest challenge for gamers.

This year, destroying it is.

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Play the Indie side in the all new Defiance campaign, featuring in-mission save points, new weapons and more. Rebate available for original Independence War owners.

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www.independencewar.com
We've scoured the world for the most promising games in development. For our faithful readers, we've spent hot summer days in Dallas, Texas, researching the newest shooters; we've sneaked unauthorized peeks at software in development, to see if it's really going to deliver; we've listened to estimated ship dates without laughing out loud, in order to get you the scoop; we've even fended off the advances of booth models at E3 (well, at least Jeff Green claims he has). The following, then, is our list of the games we think you'll buy, you'll play, and you'll love (and not in that unnatural Jeff Green kind of way, either).
All the Games You’ll Want to Play, You’ll Need to Play, From Now Until the Next Century

Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms

If you’ve seen a WWII war movie, you’ve seen a preview of Valve’s TEAM FORTRESS 2: BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS. TF2’s intense 3D action and team-based play evoke classic scenes of heroism under fire. Designed to be immediately accessible and understandable to even the most casual gamer, TF2 could bring 3D action to the masses of armchair Private Ryan’s.

The team-oriented design will offer something for everyone and every style of play. While veteran action gamers will surely go great guns for the heavy infantry, rocket infantry, and sniper classes, gamers with less refined shooting skills or more refined sensibilities can choose to contribute in crucial supporting roles as medics, turret-building engineers, or overseeing commanders that direct the movement of their team. While every class will be able to do at least one thing well, no one class will be able to succeed without the help of others. For example, a heavy infantryman can lay down a withering barrage of suppression fire, but he’ll need snipers to take out rocket-firing foes that are pinning him down and medics to pull shrapnel from his hide. By making each unit a unique and vital part of the whole, the Valve design team is clearly encouraging tight, disciplined team play as opposed to the loosely aligned, chaotic mobs that pass for teams in other 3D action environments.

While TF2 will have standard play modes such as Capture the Flag, we expect TF2 will really shine in its campaign games, in which the linked scenarios unfold with sweeping cinematic effect. One campaign puts teams on either side of a beach invasion, sequels to a perilous march through fields, and then culminates in a pitched struggle over a village bridge. Our editorial Magnificent Seven can’t wait to play it. (For a more detailed overview of TF2, check out our July 1999 cover story.)

Q4 ‘99, Sierra Studios, www.team-fortress2.com

ACTION

We’re really looking forward to NovaLogic’s DELTA FORCE 2 (Q4 ‘99). The trademarked voxel engine is sporting 32-bit color for environments that are nowhere as dark as those of the first game, allowing for the use of fog to counter players who leaned too heavily on sniping in multiplayer mode. DELTA FORCE’s terrain was second to none, and that dominance continues with the addition of rocks, trees, and very tall grass—perfect for a sniper to slither through. With vastly improved teammate control, fixed weapon emplacements, and new weapons that can shoot through tents and walls, DELTA FORCE 2 is looking sweet indeed.

We’re also looking forward to PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D, the sequel to Jordan Mechner’s classic side-scroller. POP 3D preserves the flavor of the original game with realistic, motion-captured animations of running, jumping, climbing, and fighting. The artwork looks great, and the action is perfectly evocative of an Arabian Nights adventure. (To see for yourself, check out the preview trailer on this month’s CG-ROM).

SUB CULTURE was a cool game that got overlooked. Even so, it must have caught the attention of enough gamers to warrant a sequel. DEEP FIGHTER (Q1 ’00). DEEP FIGHTER will retain the Lilliputian feel, physics models, and abundant sea-life of SUB CULTURE, while adding more action and some strategy (think BATTLEZONE) to the mix.

While EIDOS has announced a new TOMB RAIDER game for 2000, the designers at Core Design are being very close-mouthed about the whole thing. What we do know is that TOMB RAIDER IV will feature a brand-new game engine and that it will be one of the first games optimized for the Pentium III.

The wish for a decent Star Trek action game could finally come to fruition in Activision’s STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE (Q3 ’00). Developed by Raven Software, the first game based on the Star Trek Voyager TV series is a first-person shooter using the QUAKE III engine. As the leader of an elite security force, you’ll defend Voyager after it is sucked into a new dimension; you’ll gain in rank and the ability to command forces as the game progresses.

Not quite Austin Powers, not quite James Bond, Monolith’s NO ONE LIVES FOREVER (Q2 ’00) is a tongue-in-cheek
Oni

Depending on where your interests lie, ONI can be either (a) a mythical Japanese demon/alien or (b) a soon-to-be-legendary action game. It features a kick-ass and take-names heroine and a new twist on the whole 3D shooter concept. Since most of us were getting out in front of our computers in college instead of hitting the books, you can probably guess which ONI we'll be dealing with today.

Konoko, the heroine of Bungie's radically departing fighting game, is a green-eyed member of the TCFT. An elite technological task force responsible for maintaining the peace in the futuristic, anime-styled universe where ONI is set. During the course of her short career, Things Happen, as the game's designers like to say. In short order, anime turns to animosity, and Konoko finds herself fighting anyone and everyone just to stay alive.

Here's the twist about ONI: when we use the word fighting, we're not just lightly tossing the word around. Konoko wallows on the hard edges in full-contact, hand-to-hand battles with attacks and special moves the likes of which PC gaming has yet to see. (Yeah, you can use heavy weaponry, too, if you're not into fisticuffs. And oh yeah, you're a woman.) The game provides a storyline to drive the 3D combat for the single player, but better yet, ONI will feature LAN-based multiplayer combat between the various game characters.

Q1 '00, Bungie, www.bungie.com

Tribes 2

STARSIKE: TRIBES was one of the most pleasant surprises of the past year, breeding a rabid following with its seamless blend of action and team-based strategy. Given its success, it's no great shock that designers at Dynamix are already hard at work on a follow-up. While the various contests in the sequel will be enhanced and/or replaced, the main thrust is on providing more of what gamers came to STARSIKE for. There will be new vehicles, including ground-based hovercraft and boats that will prove ideal for fighting on new watery terrain. There's a new race, the Bio-Derms. There are three new weapons tossed into the mix, and there's an overhauled game engine that serves up stunning visuals with even more dramatic landscapes, environmental hazards like lightning and quicksand, and some wild architecture. Finally, a more robust AI will make for an improved single-player experience and allow tribes to practice their tactics before facing the real deal online.

Q1 '00, Sierra, www.starsiege.com/tribes/

Hidden and Dangerous

An action game from the wargamers at TalonSoft? Yeah, and John Carmack's given up programming for cross-stitching. But it's no joke. While HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS is actually more of a WWII S.A.S. commando simulation featuring covert operations and special missions deep inside Axis territory, it has a strong action component. You command a squad of four commandos—geared up with historically accurate uniforms, weapons, and equipment—from a top-down map view. Or you can take control of any one of your soldiers individually in third- or first-person mode.

Having some twitch skills will help you survive, but this game is no QUAKE. When one or two shots can kill you, firefights are short, terrifying, and deadly. In a hostile environment where you're almost always outnumbered, you must use careful planning and strategy to succeed. A lot of games have been reaching for this ultimate combination of strategic and action elements; it's a tough blend to get right. But HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS actually could be something that wargame grumps and action fans can agree on.
Quake III: Arena

Um... you might have heard about this one. The no-question, must-have title for action fans this year, QUAKE III: ARENA is shaping up to be the last word in Deathmatch fury. The release of the test version has only heightened our pathetically storbeering anticipation by offering a glimpse at the beauty, speed, and sheer explosive power of the game as well as a tantalizing taste of the obviously crafted levels we can expect to litter with the gibbs of friends and loved ones. With dynamically scaling bots ensuring that gamers of all skills can earn their chops in single-player before taking the plunge into online play, QUAKE III: ARENA could be the game that brings the brutal art of Deathmatch to the masses.

Q4 '99, Activision, www.activision.com

Giants: Citizen Kabuto

The MDK team is back with another wacky third-person game, but don’t turn the page just yet. GIANTS, a 3D action game inspired by atomic-age monster flicks, looks to be one of the better third-person games for the winter season.

GIANTS’ visuals and play style really blew us back a few feet. No dark toms here, the game takes place on colorful islands populated by the most bizarre critters. Of course, pretty graphics can’t curry a game, so we were thrilled to play a scenario as Kabuto, the very angry giant representing one of three sides in the game, and experience the happy-happy-joy-joy of smashing buildings and picking up little human types to munch on. The other teams of monstrosities have their moments, too: conjuring sea monsters and tornadoes with the spell-power of the Sea Reaper is great for kicks, as is using the more staid but ruthlessly efficient formations and stealth suits of the techie Meccaryus. As of press time, the single-player game is still being tweaked, and the multiplayer mode should be hammered out by the time you read this.

Q4 '99, Interplay, www.interplay.com

Loose Cannon

Car combat games are a dime a dozen, but when the lead designer is Tony Zurovec, the man behind both of Origin’s incredible CRUSADER games, gamers had better keep their eyes on the road. Players will be cast as Ashe, a mercenary in a near-future America ravaged by economic collapse. Unlike the tongue-in-cheek style of INTERSTATE ‘76, LOOSE CANNON is going for a more realistic feel to draw gamers in, with realistic traffic patterns, a police force that will respond to reckless pedestrian poaching, and no action-gamey power-ups. Gameplay will blend both on-foot and behind-the-wheel battles, with Ashe able to leave his car at will to fight enemies, car-jack new rides, and pursue fugitives into buildings. The action rolls through nine cities and 12 sprawling countryside areas where the bad guys have barricaded themselves in well-guarded fortresses. Twenty core missions develop a storyline centered on busting a criminal cartel, with optional money-making missions such as hostage rescues, recon assignments, and assassinations.


Tom Clancy’s Rogue Spear

With an all-new graphics rendering engine, vastly improved AI, and a host of new features, ROGUE SPEAR should only improve on its groundbreaking precursor, RAINBOW SIX. The new pixel-pushing code will allow for spectacular environments such as the Prague Opera House and impressive weather effects like snow and rain. The Observer mode from the EAGLE WATCH expansion pack has been retained—great for gamers who opt just to command their teams and not actually do the shooting.

An emphasis on ease of use is apparent in a sleek, streamlined interface that will make team selection, load-outs, and commands easier to manage. That’s a good thing since players will have even more options and tools at their disposal, including the ability to peer around corners, move while crouching, and sit down in an accurate sniper posture. Overhauled AI should result in even deadlier enemies that will seek cover instead of waiting to be killed and, even more importantly, in team members that won’t hustle in the corners of rooms like a bunch of shitty-pants recruits.

Wheel of Time

Based on the popular series of fantasy novels by Robert Jordan, WHEEL OF TIME is unlike any other first-person action title. Instead of just blowing away hordes of monsters while looking for an exit, gamers will instead be collecting and defending a number of magical seals as they combat the evil Black Ajah. Rather than weapons, players will wield spells in the form of Ter’angreal, magical elements that will let you shoot fireballs, release enemy-seeking magic missiles, and even disguise you so you are able to blend in with your enemies.

The game makes its break from the ordinary with its multiplayer game, in which gamers will have to collect seals from opponents while guarding their own seals in a custom-built citadel. Utilizing a simple editing tool, you’ll plot your own defenses in the form of tilting staircases, spear traps, and groups of monsters, freeing you to go out in the world and thwart the devious traps of your enemies to snatch their seals.

Q4 '99, GT Interactive, www.wheeloftime.com

SWAT 3: Close-Quarters Battle

In a radical departure from the renewed perspective of previous SWAT games, SWAT 3: CLOSE-QUARTERS BATTLE puts gamers into the police-issue boots of this elite strike force. Set in Los Angeles in the year 2005, SWAT 3 is shooting for a high degree of realism with its 20 missions taking place in real-life locations such as the air traffic control tower at LAX, Grauman’s Chinese Theatre, and the lush Bel Air Hotel.

SWAT 3’s ambition to create as truthful and tense a close-quarters combat experience as possible is impressive, and is especially apparent in a painstakingly accurate ballistic model, which goes so far as to track each pellet fired in a shotgun blast. As in real life, high-powered weaponry can be used to shoot through walls, and, of course, your enemies will be able to do the same. In order to survive, gamers will have to learn such real-life tactics as working corners, following appropriate room-clearing procedure, and even counting the rounds their weapons fire.

Q4 '99, Sierra Studios, www.sierrastudios.com
Vampire: The Masquerade

Remember when everyone said that RPGs are dead? Now, following the massive success of BALDUR’S GATE, the genre is hotter than ever. How appropriate, then, that the RPG we’re most excited about in 1999 is about rising from the dead. The developer, Nihilistic Software, gave us a spin on its latest build of VAMPIRE, and we’re still a bunch of drooling idiots after seeing this game.

In case you missed our infamous April issue, the story focuses on what happens when a fanatical anti-vampire knight ironically becomes a vampire. You can play the game from either a first- or third-person perspective (we preferred third). The interface is a simple point-and-click affair; combat is real-time, but the team is feverishly working on reducing the DIABLO-style clickfest. The party members already move autonomously depending on their general aggression, and you’ll have easy access to various Disciplines (a.k.a. skills), weapons, and abilities.

Deus Ex

Finally, this game has been declassified. Looking at it, you wouldn’t think it was made with the UNREAL engine because of the numerous RPG-style additions, such as a skill system, dialogue, a real inventory, and a maddening sense of detail. Character development is defined with skills (À la FALLOUT), nanotechnology augmentations (physical enhancements), and even the contents of your inventory. Design guru Warren Spector showed off the effect of the skills system; with a low sniper rifle skill, the crosshair kept on jittering and making it hard to hit your target, but a high skill makes your crosshair stay in place. He hesitated to use the word immersive, but the gameworld is very detailed; you can read every newspaper and use every computer, and NPCs will react to whatever you happen to be doing.

With the issue of linearity versus nonlinearity, DEUS EX will compromise by giving you missions with fixed goals; how you achieve said goals completely depends on how you play your character.

The back-story casts you as J.C. Denton, a new member of the antiterrorism organization UNATCO. You start a few missions in New York, but the plot really gets rolling once you travel to Hong Kong. Other locations include Paris and even the White House (as close to the real deal as they can make it), plus a few places Spector didn’t want to disclose just yet. Finally, he wanted to make sure players don’t become frustrated, so every conversation, significant event, and important map will be logged in for easy reference later on. A world-spanning, first-person spy RPG—too bad it’s coming here February 2000, at the earliest.

01’00, Ion Storm, www.ionstorm.com

RPG/ADVENTURE

More RPG Blockbusters

What more is there to say about DIABLO 2 (Q4 ’99)? As usual, Blizzard is taking its sweet time with this sequel to one of the biggest gaming blockbusters of the decade—and who can blame them? Every time they take the time to get things right, they end up delivering killer gaming. This action/RPG is deeper, more complex, and a lot longer (filling four CDs) than the original, in hopes of delivering a richer role-play-

ing experience to accompany the stellar hack-and-slash. Look for it to disappear off store shelves as soon as it’s released this holiday season.
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Realistic Weather Patterns. Real-time storm systems with ever-changing factors, such as fog, lightening and icing.

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Interactive Air Traffic Control. Real-world operation provides continuous interaction with the ground and other aircraft nearby.

ULTIMA ASCENSION (Q4 '99) has generated more Internet discussion among RPG fanatics than any other game on this list, and for good reason. It's the latest, and reputedly the last, of Richard Garriott's single-player ULTIMA games—games that have defined and towered over the RPG genre for years. Featuring a gorgeous, fully interactive 3D environment and third-person perspective, the game generated early heat (from here and elsewhere) for veering towards a TOMB RAIDER style of gameplay, but those fears may have been premature, as the latest versions we've seen reveal a game that's still unmistakably ULTIMA. Decide for yourself this Christmas.

Like Deus Ex, Tom Hall's righteous-looking ANACHRONOX (Q4 '99) is showing strong promise as a title that may turn Ion Storm's luck around. This ambitious, console-style, fantasy/Sci-fi RPG had a great showing at E3, based mainly on some truly inspired 3D artwork and animation. We know, we know—the gameplay's the thing, and we desperately need to see more of it, but for now we're putting our faith in Ion Storm's resident mad genius—who has a couple of games called WOLFENSTEIN 3D and DOOM on his resume.

WEREWOLF: THE HEART OF GAIA (Q4 '99) is the next game from Dreamforge and ASC Games, the team behind last year's award-winning SANTA CLAUS 2: THE JOURNEY. The 3D animation and paper RPG from White Wolf, WEREWOLF promises to be a dark, horror-tinted, emotionally complex role-playing experience, as you take on the role of a shape-shifting werewolf. The state of the art graphics, based on the Unreal engine, may put this one over the top.

SEPTIERRA CORE (Q3 '99) has been around a while, as it has bounced between publishers, but it looks to finally be on track for a release this fall from Monolith. This game's influence, console-style RPG has a nice, original touches, and may be a sleeper hit.

Speaking of console RPGs, SquareSoft EA is porting over their next RPG, FINAL FANTASY VIII. They learned their lessons from FINAL FANTASY VII, and they're working on the 3D card problems, making the art cleaner, and making the game look less like anime. They're also aiming for a ship date soon after the console release (Q4 '99), rather than the nearly-year-later release for FTVII.

Planescape: Torment

When most people think of AD&D, they think of dragons and wussy little elves, not of sarcastic talking skulls or a tower of living heads. These are typical elements in PLANESCAPE: TORMENT and illustrative of the radical departure that developer Black Isle is taking for its next AD&D game.

While you do wake up with amnesia, you also realize that you died. Here you don't really gain levels; you trigger memories, since your character has literally done it all. It's single-player only and uses a modified version of the BALDUR'S GATE engine. The interface has been streamlined, so you get more eye candy when you walk around, which is helpful because TORMENT has such an abstract and imaginative setting. Gameplay is similar to that of BALDUR'S GATE, with the significant addition of the faction system, all NPCs now belong to factions, so every action has consequences for how NPCs will relate with you. The surreal look on top of the unique Planescape universe makes TORMENT a serious contender this year.

Q3 '99, Interplay/Blade Isle, www.interplay.com

System Shock 2

Ask anyone in this industry about his or her favorite games, and you're bound to hear the name SYSTEM SHOCK a few times. SYSTEM SHOCK was one of those "great games that not enough people played," and for years and years fans kept on asking for a sequel. Well, those wishes have finally been answered; the premier offering from Irrational Games—a team of ex-Looking Glass developers—will be SYSTEM SHOCK 2.

Irrational has made quite a bit of progress since the last build we tinkered with for our May issue preview. Pbi Powers has been finalized, and there are a whopping 35 powers total, in addition to the 14 weapons, 11 implants, and dozens of random inventory items. Like DEUS EX, SYSTEM SHOCK 2 will go for the "same puzzle, multiple solutions" approach, and for those of you who missed the puzzle-style mini-games while hacking, it's back. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 looks very solid, and we think more people will play this title and give the series the recognition it deserves.

Q3 '99, Looking Glass/Irrational Games, www.lookingglass.com

Gabriel Knight III: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

This is the adventure game genre's last great hope, possibly last, dying gasp—not that there's any pressure on it or anything. But if any game could ever rescue the genre, GABRIEL KNIGHT III is it. Designed by Jane Jensen, the brilliant storyteller behind the first two games in the series, GKIII once again plunges headlong into the realm of supernatural mystery, as Gabriel and cohort Grace Nakamura investigate the disappearance of a dethroned royal's newborn son. The investigation takes them all the way to a mystery of biblical proportions—as anyone who's seen the controversial ads for the game knows.

GABRIEL KNIGHT III is exchanging the full-motion video approach of the previous game for a full-3D engine, an inevitability of the times. Sierra was less successful than hoped for with KING'S QUEST VIII, their last major adventure game to make the switch to 3D, but GKIII, grounded with stubborn determination in traditional adventure gaming and emotionally complex storytelling, has a much greater chance for success. As adventure game fans, we sure hope so.

Q3 '99, Sierra Studios, www.sierra.com
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This won't hurt a bit.

Never again will you be fragged into fine chunks while you look for the right key for “deathbeam.” With Game Commander, any custom keystroke or key combination can be pre-programmed to a single voice command. Scream “Die Pig!” to launch an Alpha Strike at the 100-ton mech barreling down on you. Yell “Wingman, Break and Attack!” and your computer wingman will peel off to nail that incoming bogey hot on your tail. All without ever unclenching your clammy fist from the joystick.

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“The Game Commander is amazing to use. Sim jockeys may have finally found something better than keyboard templates and even more complex HOTAS controllers. Check it out.”

— Loyd Case
July 1999
Computer Gaming World

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April 30, 1999
Adventure Games: Dead?  
Despite the strong odor of death in the air, not everyone has completely given up on the adventure genre. Activision's STAR TREK INSURRECTION (Q4 '99) may fill the void left by the now-dead (excuse us, "on hiatus") SECRET OF VULCAN FURY. This adventure game, a sequel to the movie, boasts a strong Next Generation storyline, excellent prerendered art, and solid traditional adventure gaming mixed in with some light action sequences.

Infogrames' OUTCAST (Q4 '99) is a stunning-looking action/adventure, made even more stunning by the fact that it is based on voxel technology, rather than the now omnipresent 3D. This fantastic voyage to a parallel universe to rescue a doomed space expedition has an epic, cinematic feel to it, with a nice mixture of exploration, traditional puzzle-solving, conversation, and action.

Infogrames is also preparing the U.S. release of SILVER (Q3 '99), a charming-looking TWINS' ODYSSEY-style game mixing elements of adventure, role-playing, and action in a fantasy story about the fight against an evil sorcerer. Already popular with adventure-starved fans in Europe, SILVER is due in the U.S. this fall.

DIABLO-alikes
We won't call them clones, because they all offer their own unique spins, but three games are on their way that are, shall we say, "highly reminiscent" of the Blizzard classic. G.O.D.'s DARKSTONE (Q3 '99) has a cool random quest generator, Westwood Studios' NOX (Q2 '99) boasts a furiously fun multiplayer mode with great spell effects, and Eidos' REVENANT (Q4 '99) adds a cool element of console-style fighting to the standard RPG mix.

Asheron's Call
The next great massively multiplayer RPG comes from Microsoft, in which you play the role of a young computer scientist attempting to rid the world of an oppressive techno-corporate monolith. Just kidding! Following the groundwork laid by ULTIMA ONLINE, and later by EVERQUEST, ASHERON'S CALL is shaping up nicely as another fantasy-based online game overlaid with a strong social element.

The coolest and most original aspect of ASHERON'S CALL is the loyalty system, which allows newbies to pledge themselves to more experienced players. It's a win-win situation: Weak newbies get the protection they need, while the protectors get a portion of the protectors' experience points. Rather than actively hunting newbies in order to kill them, then, experienced players will be out to forge bonds with new allies—a brilliant way to deal with the endless PK problem (not that it will ever go away.)

We'll bring you reports of the ASHERON'S CALL beta test very soon. Q4 '99, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

Jane's F/A-18
From the Jane's Baltimore team that brought you F-15 comes a simulation of the U.S. Navy's newest carrier attack plane, the F/A-18E Super Hornet. The sim will carry over the best elements of JANE'S F-15, including deadly realistic flight modeling, detailed instruments, and a wide variety of weapons and combat scenarios.

But what's even more notable is what's improved. The first thing you'll notice is the state-of-the-art graphics engine, which now supports Direct3D and is rid of the "melting mountains" syndrome that plagued F-15. Higher screen resolutions will also be supported. You'll fly the F/A-18E from the deck of the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan (CVN-76), and the action won't stop when you exit combat. In fact, the most challenging aspect of the game may be putting the plane down on the pitching, rolling deck in what promises to be the most realistic simulation of carrier operations yet. The F/A-18E is a fly-by-wire plane, so look for a very different feel than in the F-15 sim.

The campaign promises to be more immersive and replayable than the one in F-15. Although it's scripted, it's semidynamic, with lots of randomness as well as branching missions that vary depending upon your performance. Along with additional mini-campaigns, there's also an enhanced mission editor that will allow you to create your own sorties. Multiplayer fans will be happy to hear that you'll be able to fly cooperative missions (including missions created with the editor) with up to eight players over LAN or Internet. Other features of interest include air-to-air refueling from S-3B Hornets and a selection of the hottest new-technology weapons such as the AIM-9X Sidewinder and multiple versions of the JSOW and JDAM air-to-ground weapons.

Q4 '99, Jane's Combat Simulations, www.janes.ea.com

www.computergaming.com
**Freelancer**

Chris Roberts’ epic space combat and trading game is undeniably one of the most impressive titles we’ve seen this year. In fact, it may be as groundbreaking as Roberts’ original WING COMMANDER. Roberts wants to push technology to the limit, and he appears ready to accomplish that goal if the nebula-combat scene that journalists were shown at the recent E3 trade show was any indication. As the ship moved through a gaseous space crackling with electricity, viewers were treated to effects that blew away the nebula scenes in THE WRATH OF KHAN. Jumpgate and asteroid-belt scenes were similarly impressive, but perhaps most impressive was the sense of scale of the highly detailed, over-10,000-polygon space stations.

This isn’t just a technology demo, though. It also establishes a new paradigm for space combat. Instead of flying your ship like a plane (an effort that, in space combat, often ends up involving little more than sitting and spinning), you’ll actually guide your ship with the mouse, concentrating more on targeting than the minutiae of maneuvering. Instead of honing your twitch skills, you’ll instead buy maneuvering upgrades for your ship’s computer. We were skeptical about this, but seeing it in action, we’re convinced.

*WING COMMANDER* scrapped storyline advice. *FREELANCER* sports a cause-and-effect universe with a predefined set of rules that governs events. This means that things are happening all over the universe, not just around you, and that you can take the storyline in unanticipated directions.

The original plan was for *FREELANCER* to support up to 100 players on a client/server, but now Roberts plans to release a 1,000-plus-player persistent universe version six months after the main game ships.

*Q4 ’99, Digital Anvil, www.digitalanvil.com*

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**USAF**

USAF is being created with the assistance of the U.S. Air Force. Building on an improved engine that gets rid of the shimmering terrain of IAF, USAF promises an interesting balance of authenticity and accessibility.

USAF’s campaigns span 40 years, from Vietnam to the Gulf War to a current-day German scenario. In Vietnam, you’ll fly the F-4E Phantom and the F-105 Thunderbolt. The Gulf War will drop you into the cockpit of the F-15 Eagle, F-16 Falcon, and A-10 Warthog. The German campaign lets you pilot the high-tech F-22 Raptor and F-117 Nighthawk. Other traffic will range from MiGs and Sukhois to B-2 Spirits and KC-135s.

Look for some interesting AI here. According to Jane’s, “It’s easy to make the AI perfect, but it’s not so easy to make it imperfect.” The idea is to have the AI make the same sort of mistakes or have the same limitations as a human pilot. Multiplayer looks promising, especially if the Jane’s World War scheme, which promises to link different sim fans in the same universe, actually comes to fruition.

*Q3 ’99, Jane’s Combat Simulations, www.janes.ea.com*
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Flight Simulator 2000

Microsoft FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 offers detailed, high-resolution ground textures; 16-bit color; true elevation data with much more terrain detail than in previous FLIGHT SIM releases; and seasonal effects. High-detailed versions of New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, London, and Paris are included, and 40 other cities are present in reduced detail.

The addition of the Boeing 777-3000 and Concorde brings the number of flyable planes to 10. A Global Positioning System with a moving map makes navigation much easier, as does a new graphical flight planner. There are 20,000 airports here, up from 3,000 in the previous release. A new weather system lets you download actual weather conditions to the sim.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 PROFESSIONAL EDITION will include two high-resolution IFR training proficiency instrument panels, an expanded printed manual, and a sample of Cassian's CD-ROM training program. This edition also features two additional planes, the Mooney Bravo and the King Air 350, and high-res versions of Boston, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Berlin, Tokyo, and Rome. A flight dynamics editor and an instrument panel editor round out this version.

Q3 '99, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games

F/A-18E SuperHornet

Jane's isn't the only Hornet game in town. Digital Integration's F/A-18E SUPERHORNET should provide a strong challenge with the help of its fully dynamic campaign, a feature with great appeal to hard-core sim fans. Digital claims that SUPERHORNET will model resupply and persistent damage with unprecedented accuracy in the campaign. There will also be a mission generator/editor for creating custom scenarios. Co-op missions, alas, are limited to two players, but deathmarches can include up to 54.

The graphics engine, while not in a league with those of NATIONS and USAF, is still a dramatic improvement over previous DI engines. Avionics are modeled far more completely than in DI's earlier F-16 simulation, with eight air-to-air and seven air-to-ground modes faithfully recreated.

Perhaps most impressive is the carrier deck. While Jane's is still mulling over how much detail to include on their carrier deck due to frame-rate considerations, DI has loaded its active deck with other aircraft and a full crew that will marshal you around and get you into position for takeoff.

Q4 '99, Interplay, www.superhornet.com

Allegiance

Think of ALLEGIANCE as TRIBES in space.

While hundreds of players can battle in enormous galactic arenas, the focus in ALLEGIANCE is on team play—specifically squadrons—as teams fight and develop together. Players can choose from a variety of different roles and different types of ships: Possibilities include driving an ambulance, serving as a turret gunner in a frigate piloted by another player, and playing a team commander.

The game provides strategic depth in its approach to handling resources. Resources are gathered and distributed as "pay" to each team member. At that point, each team member essentially votes on the team's direction by allocating his pay toward new ships or research into the game's tech tree. Alternatively, one team member can be designated Researcher; he gets forwarded all the funds and makes the team decisions.

With every team and player's stat recorded online and the enlistment of the BattleTech guys for the game's back story, ALLEGIANCE is hoping to build the sort of online community that only role-playing gamers have enjoyed thus far.

Q2 '99, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games

newest high-tech helicopters. Novologics also will visit the Comanche with COMANCHE 4 (Q4 '99), featuring a new 32-bit color Voxel Space graphics engine. The company is claiming a "painstakingly real-world physics system" with six degrees of freedom flight modeling. Will it deliver realism? Watch for a hands-on look in an upcoming issue.

Another chopper sim, MicroProse's GUNSHIP III (Q1 '00), will let you fly the Apache Longbow, the AH-1Z Cobra, the Eurocopter Tigh, and the M-28 Havoc. With front-seat/back-seat co-op multiplayer mode and campaigns throughout Europe and Asia, this sim can share its battlefield with M1 TANK PLAYSET II (We'll take the helicopter, thanks.) The helicopter crowd is rounded out by KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR, from TEAM APACHE creators SIMIS.

If you're really worried about a potential sim drought, check out FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT 2, which lets you create your very own flight simulations. Using the hot 3D engine from TEAM ALLIGATOR, it should allow much more impressive creations than the original FST.

FLANKER 2.0 (Q3 '99), from SSI, Is finally getting close to shipping. Recent months have seen dramatic improvements to the performance of this Su-27 simulation, which combines the realism of the original with a state-of-the-art 3D engine and even more dramatic detail. Rounding out the flight sim pack are JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER (Q4 '99) from Novologics and PRO PILOT 2000 (Q4 '99) from Dynamix. Finally, the developers of RENO AIR RACES, the air racing sim abun
Imagine what you could save.

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The Fashion Footwear Association of New York (FFANY) and QVC present the sixth annual Shoes On Sale, televised live from The Sheraton New York. Over 80,000 pairs of designer and brand name footwear will be sold at half price to benefit breast cancer research and education programs. With savings like these, it's simply one sale you can't afford to miss.

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and casual players, respectively. And tank fans can soon look forward to Pygmygus' PANZER ELITE, a graphically splendid WWII tank sim, and Novalogic’s ARMORED FIST 3 (Q3 ‘99), with support for Novalogic’s flagship Novaworld massive multiplayer arenas.

Space Shots

If gravity gets you down, fear not. There’s plenty of action coming on the space simulation front. FREESPACE 2 (Q4 ‘99) features enhanced graphics, dazzling nebula effects, and enhanced squadron-based multiplayer support. Fans of WING COMMANDER who don’t want to wait for Origin’s distant online version will want to check out STARLANCER (Q4 ‘99), which has the feel of the classic WING COMMANDER games crossed with a WWII air combat film.

Sierra’s stunning BABYLON 5 SPACE COMBAT SIM has been pushed back into early 2000 due to upheavals at the company. Even with the delay, its awesome 3D engine will dazzle you with effects rivalling that of the TV show. INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE will bundle the award-winning original with a completely new campaign that lets you play for the other side.

Finally, there’s Novalogic’s TACHYON: THE FRINGE (Q4 ‘99). While the graphics in early versions couldn’t match the likes of FREESPACE 2, the game’s free-form storyline and support for 120-player Novaworld play make it one of the most interesting space sims coming down the pike.

SPORTS

Driving

Super Super SUNDAY!

Once the domain of the ultra-hard-core, wrenches-and-catchets style of gaming, racing games are getting more popular and more mainstream by the month. As always, EA Sports is right in the thick of it all with two titans, NASCAR 2000 (Q4 ‘99), the company’s latest creation in their action-oriented racing franchise, sports some snazzy graphics and such real-life racers as Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhardt Jr. The company also recently announced an alliance with Pace Motorsports, the organization that presents the Superbikes Motorcycle competitions.

One of the companies we haven’t heard much from is Motomsports. This newly created Dallas-based sim shop is working feverishly on two upcoming Net-based racing games: AMA SUPERBIKE (Q4 ‘99), a motorcycle race-
**Madden 2000**

Football on the PC has never looked this good. In the latest edition of JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL, fans will finally feel what EA Sports basketball and hockey fans have experienced for the last few years: a gorgeous-looking, true-to-life sports game. Beyond the high-quality visuals, MADDEN 2000 features an improved running game, character sizes that allow players to accurately reflect their real-life counterparts, and the usually strong defensive AI. To top it all off, this time around you'll be able to set up a multiplayer franchise mode—perfect for beating your friends through the ages.


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**Motocross Madness 2**

Graphics alone do not a great game make. But combine them with an already superb game, and you've got gold in them there hills. The premise of MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 (Q1 '00) hasn't changed much since the original game, which received our CGW Editors' Choice award earlier this year. Hop on a dirt bike. Race against the computer or your friends. Perform death- and gravity-defying feats. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

The genius of MOTOCROSS MADNESS is that it makes riding a simulated dirt bike fun. Wide-open tracks and a mode that lets you compete in the open desert by giving you points for performing certain stunts make this so much more than a standard ring-around-the-track kind of game.

But what's really striking about MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 is the fact that when you're racing across the desert, the over-the-shoulder camera presents visual imagery so photorealistic, you can almost feel the wind buzzing through your hair.

Q1 '00, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

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**Football**

With Hasbro Interactive's recent announcement that they're getting into the sports field, expect to see an NFL-licensed, action-oriented pigskin title from them in the next two years. Other than that, it's slim pickings. EA Sports' FANTASY FOOTBALL (Q3 '99) recently raised some interest among the highly competitive but physically uncoordinated CGW staff. This Web and subscription-based title allows you to set up your own online fantasy league and play racer, and SCCA CAN AM, which is based on the Sports Car Club of America's Can Am Prototype Racing series. Huge in the 1970s, this series is currently in the midst of a comeback, and Motorsims will be capturing the thrill of this road-track racing title on the computer.

And then there's TEST DRIVE. Infogrames (formerly Accolade) is going all out with their long-standing driving series. Over the next 12 months, we'll be seeing five different racing games under this title. The first two games scheduled for release are TEST DRIVE 6 (Q1 '99) and TEST DRIVE OFF-ROAD 3 (Q1 '99). Each will feature more of what made those games popular—slick graphics and fast, fun, racing action that surpasses last year's models. TEST DRIVE 6 will even incorporate car upgrades and multiplayer pink-slip racing. Later on next year, we'll see TEST DRIVE RALLY, TEST DRIVE CYCLES, and the ultimate endurance-racer: TEST DRIVE LE MANS, which will feature an optional, real-life 24-hour race.
with your friends, or play in leagues across the country. And in a new twist for a fantasy league, instead of relying on statistics that your player generates in real life, you can let the built-in EA Sports simulation engine play your games for you.

**Soccer**

When it comes to soccer, we have one word for you. Actually, it's an acronym: FIFA, FIFA 99 rocks, so we expect FIFA 2000 (Q4 '99) to go beyond that. How will they possibly transcend last year's sports game of the year version? Better animations that include midair collisions, classic teams, and players from the past are just the start.

**FIFA 2000**

Proving that they catch on fast, and that some day soon they may be a serious challenger to EA Sports' domination, MICROSOFT'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER (Q4 '99) is no slouch in the soccer category.

**Golf**

By purchasing Access Software, Microsoft plucked the crown jewel of golf and put it in their pocket. LINKS LS 2000 (Q4 '99) will feature five new courses, including St. Andrews Old Course, and new modes of play. The game will also provide an optional, one-click mouse swing mode for the uncoordinated among us.

And, of course, EA Sports will be releasing TIGER WOODS 2000 (Q4 '99), which will feature a heavier emphasis on accurate simulation and a Tour mode that lets you compete on the PGA tour.

**Motor City Madness**

In MOTOR CITY MADNESS, Electronic Arts is taking its vaunted NEED FOR SPEED racing franchise back in time... and online. Featuring a slew of classic cars, including the Corvette Stingray, the Pontiac GTO, and even a 1932 Ford Coupe, MOTOR CITY MADNESS allows you to race in two different ways. Sanctioned road races pit you against the computer or your friends on a variety of different tracks. Unsanctioned road races take place on city streets. Win and you get a chance to upgrade your heat-up P.O.S. into a real hot rod. Lose, and you may lose your car. For more on MOTOR CITY MADNESS, which also features a unique and robust mode of Internet play, take a look at our sneak preview in this issue. Q4 '99, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com

**NBA Inside Drive 2000**

Believe it or not, Microsoft has a hoops contender that looks like it can actually stay on the floor with NBA LIVE. We were able to spend some quality time playing NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2000 and came away mighty impressed. While the game's look and feel were a little short of EA Sports' juggernaut, NBA LIVE 2000, the gameplay seemed stronger and more realistic in Microsoft's version. (Did we really just say that?) As the flow of the game unfolded, we got the impression that we were really playing basketball. Time will tell, but it would appear that EA Sports finally has some real competition on the court.

Q4 '99, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

**NHL 2000**

The CGW crowd is an odd bunch. A crowd will gather to watch two editors play PC hockey, but the real thing comes on TV and you'd think someone had flipped to ESPN. Either real life is too frightening a concept for us or somehow EA Sports has created a hockey game that is actually more interesting than the real thing.

NHL 2000 features more of the same quality gameplay we've come to expect, and then some. Harder hits, improved player animations, and a simple two-button play mode are just some of the improvements we're expecting to see this time around.

Unless Fox Interactive's NHL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000 pulls off a miracle shot, EA Sports has the hockey market all wrapped up. Q4 '99, EA Sports, www.easports.com
3 Racing Modes – Beginner, Intermediate, Full Racing Simulation Mode

Racing Season Career, From Rookie To Pro Rider

Automatic On-Line Update Detection And Download, New Versions & Features

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– Games.net

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– Next Generation Online

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– PC Gamer
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Lift And Drag  6. Wheelies And Stopples Controlled With Rider Power And Braking
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun

The grandaddy of the RTS genre is expected to be reborn hard later this month (August 23). The long-awaited sequel to COMMAND & CONQUER preserves much of the original flavor while adding loads of environmental factors, from 3D terrain to weather effects. The game picks up 30 years after the first one, with the Brotherhood of Nod once again poised to kick the crap out of the GDI. There will also be a new faction, the Forgotten, a group of former civilians (now mutants) who were left behind in the cities during the GDI evacuation.

Westwood's goal with TIBERIAN SUN is to break new ground, literally. They've rewritten the C&C engine to support 15 layers of terrain so you can tunnel under your enemies or blow up entire hillsides. The weather can also change the map, as bodies of water freeze, bridges are destroyed, meteorites crash, or ion storms modify the terrain.

Neither the terrain nor the units are modeled in 3D, which is good news for gamers who don't have 3D cards. The units will be voxels set top of landscape viewed in an isometric perspective. Some of the old units return, such as the Orca bomber and the Obelisk of Light (shown). New units include spies, recon drones, and mercenary commandos. Our personal favorites include tanks that burrow underground and pop up for surprise attacks, and the Mammoth Mark II, a walking tank several stories high.

For more details, tune in next month for a complete overview of the game, along with killer strategies on how to win.

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**FREESPACE 2**

Interplay

SoftwareForPCs.com
Shogun: Total War

If you long for the days of epic samurai clashes, you should know about EA's SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, one of the best-looking games we've seen in any genre this year. In addition to a turn-based strategic-level game, SHOGUN sports a sophisticated 3D wargame with elegant controls for formations, and one of the best computer opponents we've yet seen in a real-time game. The depth and breadth of research options are impressive yet still manageable, as you choose whether to go the more traditional Japanese route with spies and Ninja assassins, or forsake history for the Western firearms and trade.

Originally scheduled for fall of 1999, SHOGUN will be delayed until early 2000, but for good reason. EA will have a free online gaming service supporting up to eight players per tactical battle. You'll be able to create a custom army and improve its experience and morale as you campaign online. In either solo mode or multiplayer, you'll issue orders and designate melee states for your troops, and even queue orders to your veteran units. You'll also be able to erect battlefield defenses and create battle plans before jumping into the 3D tactical combat. We're very excited with the changes and eagerly awaiting what looks to be a strategy classic in the making.

Q1 '00, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com

Black & White

The next "god game" from Peter Molyneaux, the father of god games, accepts the word "play" in "morality play." BLACK & WHITE is one of the most ambitious games we've ever seen. Set in an idyllic world of small villages populated by tiny people, gamers play the role of an uninvolved being overseeing the tiny lives below. The goal is to gain power through worship, whether that worship is motivated by love or fear is up to you. Countless moral dilemmas are presented as you play, and depending upon which path you choose, the world will reflect your choices, becoming ordered and darkly foreboding or evolving into a fairy tale paradise.

Your acting agent in the material realm is an AI-driven entity that becomes the physical manifestation of your ruling philosophy. Nurture and reward this titan and you'll end up with a King Kong version of Mother Theresa; train him through punishment and fear and your henchman will become a terrifying war machine. Using spell powers gained from a growing harem of worshipers, you must spread the word of your religion until the whole world is united in praise of the One True God.

BLACK & WHITE's multiplayer game could be a godsend. At the outset there will be two multiplayer modes: a kind of chat world where you can upload your existing game creatures and let them mingle, allowing them to learn from other players' creatures; and an eight-player landscape where you play against others in a more traditional context. Lionhead is planning to follow this up with a gaming world where hundreds can join and play against each other, forming alliances, clans and the like. Q4 '99, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com

The Sims

You've played god with cities, civilizations, and entire planets. With THE SIMS, you'll finally get the chance to screw with the lives of individuals. Designed by Will Wright, who created the original SIMCITY, THE SIMS lets you take control of a man or woman and guide this Sim-person through life, from simple decisions like when to eat to more elaborate social situations such as making friends or seducing the neighbor. As your sim's life evolves, he or she can marry, move to a bigger house, and spend money littering that home with stuff—the O'American dream. Go for the traditional nuclear family, having kids and backyard barbecues with the neighbors, or do things the Northern California way and turn the house into a commune with multiple adults living in "alternative" arrangements. Most intriguing is the capacity to extend the game with downloadable sims maxis or third-party addons which add new behaviors and activities to your sim world. Very different, very cool.

Q1 '00, Maxis, www.maxis.com
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PROPS to the Spring '99 Winners!

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

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

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

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

**Quake II**
- Bon "Kuin" Danan: Montreal, Canada
- Erik "Yorador" Spoor: Amsterdam, NY
- Sebastian "Sybek" Lentan: Mississauga, Canada
- Kurt "Immortal" Shimada: Pleasanton, CA
- Alex "bad-babbit" Pogorelski: McLean, VA
- Gordon "RX Gloucester" Lu: Los Angeles, CA (tie)
- Jazon "Imazter" Spigot: Fremont, CA
- Eric "DH-Sabato" Mendieta: Mundelein, IL (tie)

**Starcraft**
- Guillaume "Grrrr" Patry: Beaupre, Quebec
- Wayne "Soso" Chiang: San Jose, CA
- Dave "BOOM" Howell: Gander, Newfoundland
- Christopher "Pillars" Page: Andover, MA
- Patrick "Kain-the-Fearless" Chapelisky: Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada
- Stephen "taurus" Chan: Culver City, CA (tie)
- David "DeepBlue" Magnes: Rochester, NY
- Dennis "Wargod-El" Lee: Grand Prairie, TX (tie)

**Registration for the Fall ‘99 Season is Now Open!**

Go to the PGL web site — www.pgl.com to join the ranks of the world’s elite gamers!
Panzer General 3D Assault

Any time you hear a critic say, "I don't know why they're doing another sequel to that game. What else can they do with that system?" you know the poor guy is jaded. Such naysayers will no doubt wallow in self-indulgent whining rather than enjoy the freshness and sheer fun of PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT.

The rich 3D environment is more than mere eye candy for the 200+ 3D-modeled vehicles and troops to blitz through; it also allows for dynamic lighting, true line of sight, and realistic movement and assaults between attackers and defenders on different terrain elevations. The interface is one of the most elegant we've seen, and both the campaigns and multiplayer options look terrific. The game system has been totally revamped, adding new rules for leaders, air strikes, supply, replacements, and the like. Somehow, it's even more accessible than the original...and easily the most gorgeous turn-based game we've ever seen.

Q4 '99, SSI, www.ssionline.com

Warlords Battlecry

Generally speaking, going from turn-based to real-time with a strategy game is akin to serving asparagus ice cream for dessert. The reason we didn't run screaming from WARLORDS BATTLECRY is that the SSG folks know their way around real-time strategy (RTS) from the CARRIERS AT WAR days.

WARLORDS BATTLECRY differs from standard RTS fare in its emphasis on heroes, training and morale. Leaders have a command radius—once outside of that radius, units lose effectiveness. Also, troops don't always fight to the last one, but may break and run if surprised or outmaneuvered.

Resources (gold, metal, stone, and crystals) are collected automatically, which means you can get to the heart of the matter—lots of combat. BATTLECRY features nine different races, each with distinct animation and unique attributes. In addition to the branching solo campaign, there are 10 different victory conditions for solo and multiplayer that may be modified, plus a scenario editor. All in all, WARLORDS BATTLECRY offers the usual polish and attention to gameplay that we expect from SSG, but in a "new" direction.

Q1 '00, SSG/Red Orb Entertainment, www.redorb.com

Theme Park World

Don't have the time to visit Disneyland anytime soon? Who cares? With Bullfrog's THEME PARK WORLD you'll be able to create and manage virtually every facet of your own amusement park, from setting the admission price and quality of balloons to designing the drops, loops, and stomach-churning loops of your own roller coasters. While a deeply involved business simulation lurks at this game's core, an intuitive interface and beautifully realized, whimsical graphics should make the open-ended play of THEME PARK WORLD accessible to even the most casual gamer.

The best part of this game is in the extras. After laying out your park, you can stroll around it from a first-person perspective and ride on any of the rides. But that's the least of it: parks can be uploaded to a THEME PARK WORLD web site, where gamers will be able to sample the designs of other players and even send postcards to friends from their virtual vacation spots. This game promises to be the E-ticket title this holiday season.

Q4 '99, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com
Conquest: Frontier Wars

As much as we were looking forward to playing CONQUEST this year, the reasons we're hearing regarding this outer space real-time strat title's delay until mid-2000 are encouraging. Digital Anvil is using the additional time to overhaul the ships for each of the four different races. One of our early concerns—the similarity of the ship designs—is being addressed. Not only will there be more marked differences between the races, but the ship styles should be easily differentiated through interfaces alone. The core of the game still relies on large fleet combat, with gamers rewarded for taking the fight to their enemies with salvage after a battle. With its random map generator and the added tactical challenge of acquiring and defending the jump gates linking battlefields, we're really looking forward to multiplayer CONQUEST.

Q2 '00, Microsoft, www.digitalanvil.com

SimMars

Sid Meier and ALPHA CENTAURi may have beaten them to space, but Will Wright is betting that gamers will want to master a planet a little closer to home, namely Mars. The goal is to build a colony on the Red Planet that can exist with very little to no support from Earth. Gamers will have to terraform the hostile environment in order to create and maintain a network of colonies. The specialized colonies will provide food, shelter, and power as well as conduct research into advanced genetics to accelerate mankind's evolutionary progress. Maxis is working closely with NASA for this real-time title to better understand the realities of space colonization in order to give the plausibility, scientific, and strategic depth. Fortunately, the game's release isn't quite as far off as an actual Mars landing.

Q3 '00, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com

Force Commander

Forget everything you thought you knew about FORCE COMMANDER. When this title reappeared on our radar after a considerable absence, it was as an entirely new game. Gone was the standard RTS top-down perspective to be replaced by a robust 3D engine sporting a nifty free-moving camera. Gamers will get to fight on both sides of a conflict set in the classic Star Wars universe, playing as an Imperial commander who eventually defects to the Rebel sides. Action will take place almost immediately in every mission since LucasArts has tossed out the resource gathering that dominates the early part of most RTS games; instead, players will have to fight in order to accrue "command points" that are earned by defeating enemies and achieving mission goals. These points are then used to purchase units to be dropped planet-side. Units and their experience can be carried over from mission to mission or placed "on leave" until they're needed again.

Q4 '99, LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com

HARPOON 4

HARPOON was a landmark game because it proved that hard-core wargames could still sell in big numbers. It didn't hurt that designer Larry Bond and Tom Clancy used the game to model the conflicts in their novel Red Storm Rising. HARPOON 4 is based on the latest in the renowned tabletop gaming series, and it offers all of the data with none of the hassle of wading through Bond's exhaustive tables and combat charts.

The time period is the height of the Cold War, chosen because it pits the two largest sea forces in history—the United States Navy and the Soviet Navy—against each other in a number of missions and campaigns. The arena is still operational combat, mostly at sea, but with a lot of variety. You might hunt down enemy submarines, join a missile cruiser group for a tour followed by an aircraft carrier strike group. HARPOON 4 is also rather attractive and fairly easy to navigate during play considering the game's complexity. Even with its outdated Cold War setting, this one looks promising.

Q2 '00, SSI, www.ssioline.com

ORCS: REVENGE OF THE ANCIENT

away anew. A drastic reworking of the original, OR2 may be the sharpest-looking RTS to ship this year; better yet, all the 3D graphics and lighting effects actually impact gameplay with the detailed, interactive terrain a silent, but active player in the game. We really like the game's use of cycling day and night, with units specifically designed to be most effective under cover of night (we'll always welcome a new way to be devious). Activision should be releasing this beauty sometime in the fall.

Check out our Preview section for Berkeley System's ORCS: REVENGE OF THE ANCIENT (Q4 '99).

Finally, Firaxis has signed on to do the long-awaited CIVILIZATION III for Hasbro, with the game slated for release in late 2000. It's likely that there will be at least one add-on pack for Civ III, as well as a scenario editor. Activision is still planning on publishing an add-on for CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER, as well.
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When the first CREATURES was released three years ago, it was remarkable: a true artificial-intelligence product that also happened to be a fun family game. Any rough edges (and there were more than a few) were counterbalanced by the sheer charm of raising your cute little Nom life forms from hatchlings to adults. CREATURES was even better than having a Tamagotchi, because you could turn the blasted thing off and save your little society in progress without worrying about your Noms starving to death. CREATURES 2, on the other hand, was a huge disappointment—too hard, too humorless. So it’s nice to see that the CREATURES products planned for later this year are moving back in the direction of the first game.

CREATURES 3 has its share of creepy moments—at times, it seems like everything in the game has a huge set of teeth. But it also has plenty of cool environments to explore. The game takes place on a starship that is so huge it supports multiple weather zones (sci-fi legend Arthur C. Clarke would be proud), and it’s surprisingly enjoyable running over fields of lush vegetation just yards removed from airless space.

CREATURES ADVENTURES, on the other hand, is sort of a CREATURES goes Candyland. The usual threats are missing, and you don’t spend much time trying to figure out how your Noms (which are now larger and more cuddly) tick. Instead, you romp, explore, and play over a stylized and very friendly environment. But you might lack at it like eating a bowl of Frosted Flakes: Who’s to know that you don’t have a five-year-old in your household?

Q4 ’99, Mindscape, www.mindscape.com

You Don’t Know Jack Offline

It’s always amazed us that the Jellyvision and Berkeley Systems folks could crank out enough material to refresh the YOU DON’T KNOW JACK experience online on a daily basis. OFFLINE is a collection of 500 of the most irreverent questions from the popular YOU DON’T KNOW JACK. THE NETSHOW, plus 200 new satirical questions based on “Pissed About a Question?” letters sent by Jack fans.

While this collection is a bit more traditional than the recent YOU DON’T KNOW JACK: THE RIDE, OFFLINE does have better graphics and audio than the online version. I’ll have to be enough to keep us Jack Attack fans happy, because the oft-rumored YOU DON’T KNOW JACK 5 is at least 12 to 18 months away. (Conspiracy alert: We were also pleasantly surprised by the PlayStation version of JACK.)


PUZZLES & CLASSICS

Puzzle Me This

International chess master Josh Waitzkin (of Searching for Bobby Fischer fame) has helped the creative team of CHESSMASTER 7000 (Q3 ’99) shape the series out of its creative doldrums. This time around, there are AI opponents that a normal human being can actually defeat (and that also have some personality, as well as top-flight computer routines based on famous human grandmasters that have always been a CHESSMASTER strength. The graphics, tutorials, and online play have been upgraded, and you can supposedly get a rating of your computer-play ability that approximates your over-the-board strength. We’ll keep our own pushing fingers crossed.

Likewise, for RISK II (Q3 ’99) Hasbro has beefed up the already solid AI of the original. The new game plays very briskly, though we’re still unsure how well it will work online. The interface was a lot cleaner than you’ll find in most board-to-computer conversions—though we miss rolling our own dice.

Those who love spatial-logic puzzles should check out Microsoft’s unsung and aggressively priced.

PANDORA’S BOX (Q3 ’99), Finally, if you’re too cheap to buy anything, you can still have a good time with Berkeley Systems’ GET THE PICTURE (out now), a free online game that lets you vote on your friends’ captions for pictures, doodles, and the like. It’s a lot like PC PICTONARY—but this time, the idea works.
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by Denny Atkin

The WWII simulation deluge is nearing over, and it looks like another drought may be in store for prop combat fans. But this last batch of propeller-driven sims leaves the gauntlet to keep gamers entertained until more sims arrive after the turn of the millennium. From B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II's unprecedented realistic simulation of every station of a lumbering World War II bomber to NATIONS: FIGHTER COMMAND's you-are-there graphics and sound to FLIGHT COMBAT's kitchen sink of features sure to please even the most hard-core of sim fans, there's plenty of virtual war left for sim fans to fight.

Flight Combat: Thunder Over Europe

Could This Be the Definitive WWII Flight Simulation?

It's happened to every serious flight sim fan. You boot up a new game only to find a major feature was omitted or hitched up. Oh, sure, all the things you'd like to see in a flight sim exist, but they're spread across five different simulations on your shelf. You don't care about the realities of budgets, marketing input, or time-to-market. You just want a sim with the works— the working works—not excuses.

If FLIGHT COMBAT: THUNDER OVER EUROPE creator Constantine Hatzopoulos has his way, your dream may come true. Talking to Con, you know this game is in the hands of a die-hard simulation fan, one of us. But Con and his team have that rare understanding of how to create a simulation with the depth to satisfy the hard-core and the flash and dazzle to bring in the novices. From what we've seen of FLIGHT COMBAT so far, Constantine Hatzopoulos is a name you may soon hear in the same breath with Larry Holland, Damon Slye, Gilman Louie, and Andy Hollis. (Better learn to spell it.)

Such accolades don't come cheap in an industry of me-too products, in a market with over half a dozen new WWII sims. But as I took my first flight in the oddly acronymed FC:TOE, I kept barraging Con with questions about features. And the answer to almost every question was a resounding yes.

Planned Yet Random

One significant feature from the hard-core sim player's laundry list that didn't get a yes was a dynamic campaign that generates the war on the fly. But FC:TOE has what some would call an even better solution: a "semi-dynamic" campaign that consists of prescribed, branching missions with a high degree of randomness. This allows the designers to create missions that are historical in nature but unpredictable even upon replay. You'll be able to go off on interesting side missions, depending upon your performance in regular missions.

While you can't change the outcome of the war, there will be different levels of victory. For instance, if you're flying for the U.S. and you get a major victory, you'll reach Berlin before the Russians, which would have major benefits for postwar Europe. Recent performance may find both companies reaching Berlin at about the same time, while a poor showing may have the Russians taking most of Germany.

The campaign choices here look familiar: You can fly in the Battle of Britain or the later battles for Europe. You won't fly as a persistent character; instead, you'll be offered a wide variety of mission types flying different aircraft. Most intriguing are the night-fighter missions, something never before fully simulated. As you take off at night over London, searchlights will comb the skies, looking onto enemy aircraft and illuminating them for you. Ground radar controllers will also vector you towards your target. The team is still considering whether to model the airborne radars of the day; they were very primitive and difficult to operate, and thus a simplified version is likely here. During the day, along with the usual escort and intercept missions, you'll also fly such tasks as train-busting, carpet-bombing, illuminating targets for Lancaster
flight model, similar to the one used by WARHAWKS. With all the options turned on, you’ll deal with spine, accelerated stalls, and all the other details of a realistic flight model. The sim features independent engine control, so you could use a dual-throttle to control each engine on a P-38 individually. How detailed is the control? Well, in the Me-163 rocket plane under full realism, you’ll have to control the fuel mixture to keep the engine running (and keep it from exploding).

The cockpits in the version 1 saw were still preliminary, but the team is planning to go all out in detailing them. Look for a full suite of view systems, including customizable fixed views and portholes. Plane exteriors in the early version didn’t look bad, but they weren’t up to the quality of B-17 FLYING Fortresses or WWII FIGHTERS. Hopefully the art team will be able to improve the textures before the sim ships. Most impressive were the turrets, which had the “squiggly” effect you see in wartime gun camera footage.

The scenery looks very good, but isn’t as detailed as that in the company’s FLIGHT UNLIMITED III civilian simulator. That’s because while F3 mods include only a single city, the terrain in FC:TOE covers over a million square miles of Europe. The environment promises to be not only realistic but also useful. Clouds aren’t just for looks—you’ll be able to lose pursuing players by maneuvering in the cloud layers.

One of the favorite features of classic WWII sims, the flight recorder, makes an appearance here. But this is far more powerful than the recorders of old. You can edit your combat recordings to add wipes between scenes, drop images and text over the video, and even add your own voiceovers.

**Custom Combat**

The feature we’re most looking forward to, though, is the ability to customize the simulation. FC:TOE opens itself up like no simulation ever has before. While sim’s like COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR and FIGHTER SQUADRON have allowed customization through the editing of creation of external files, FC:TOE actually included a built-in graphical editor that lets you modify nearly every object in the sim. Is your favorite variant of the Bf-109 not included? No problem. Open up the object in the flight model editor; alter the weight, armor loading, power plant, and armament, and now it’s in there. Adding completely new planes will also be possible, albeit more difficult since you’ll need to create the models in a package like 3D MAX.

When creating your own mission areas, you’ll be able to use a full 3D object editor to raise and lower terrain. Missing a favorite landmark? Add a custom terrain file. And, of course, you’ll be able to create your own missions, complete with randomness in object appearance probability and location, so you’ll even be able to surprise yourself.

Customizable and feature-packed, FC:TOE should have no trouble in making a name for itself in a crowded market.

**Model Flight**

There are 17 flyable aircraft to choose from, along with nine variants. These include various models of the P-38, P-47, P-51, B-17, B-24, Spitfire, Hurricane, Lancaster, Ju-87, Ju-88, He-111, Bf-109, Bf-110, Me-262, and Me-163. The planes feature a force-based
B-17 Flying Fortress II
Finally, a Bomber Simulation Done Right

Life in a B-17 Flying Fortress was anything but fun. The plane itself was tough and had an amazing propensity for making it home even with large pieces missing, but nothing stood between the crew and deadly bullets and flak except thin sheets of aluminum and Plexiglas. Flying in box formation with bullets careening all around the plane—from other B-17s, escort fighters, and deadly Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs—every step towards completing the required 25 missions had to come as a huge relief to bomber crew members.

MicroProse's B-17 Flying Fortress II is designed to capture the feelings of excitement, terror, glory, fear, and relief that those crews felt. Where too many sims are sterile recreations of the hardware without much thought given to the lives of the men who crewed these awesome machines, B-17 strives to recreate the "terrible beauty" of the experience without romanticizing it. From what we've seen so far, all you'll need to complete the experience is a Betty Grable pinup next to your computer.

Behind the Wheel
Previous sims that have let you fly the B-17, such as WARRIORS and FIGHTER SQUADRON, can man. In the nose, you'll find an accurate recreation of the famous Norden bombight. Because this system was so highly classified, the Wayward game design team had difficulty finding information on it even today. However, the developers have worked with ex-bombarbiers with over 70 missions between them to ensure the device's accuracy.

The crew slots are more than just positions you can man in the plane. Each position has an AI crew member who gains experience on each mission, so it's in your best interest to bring your boys home alive. If a gunner is injured, you can send another over with a first-aid kit, and move another crew member into his position.

If flying a bomber seems too slow-paced to you, don't write this sim off. Along with the B-17G, the sim also lets you fly the P-38 Lightning, P-47 Thunderbolt, and P-51 Mustang as escort for the B-17s. Or try your hand at taking down the bombers in the German BF-109, FW-190, Me-262, or rocket-powered Me-163. The latter should be particularly interesting to fly. You have three minutes of fuel to use to jet to 30,000 feet, make screaming passes at the bombers at 600 mph, and then glide to a landing as a sitting duck for Allied fighters.

All in the Details
Even in the early version we flew, the visuals in B-17 are absolutely stunning. The ground is mapped using a fractal detail system that adds a very realistic bump-mapping style effect. This not only makes things look more realistic but also helps provide an unprecedented sense of speed at low altitudes.

Aircraft textures are amazingly detailed, complete with weathering and chipped paint around leading edges. Watching a plane taxi, you get a good indication of both the sim's visual and behavioral realism. As the plane rolls towards the runway, you'll see the oleo shock compress on the main landing gear and the tail wheel castering back and forth as the plane turns. When AI planes reach the runway and run up for takeoff, you'll see the control surfaces move as the pilot does a control check. The detail extends to props. Not mere alternating 2D textures, the propellers are 3D even when spinning. In fact, you can use the interference patterns where the props overlap to sync the

continued on page 88
Mark Norris
10:23 a.m.
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Nations: WWII Fighter Command
A Sim With a Dangerous Atmosphere

The most striking aspect of Psygnosis' entry into the WWII sim arena, NATIONS: FIGHTER COMMAND, is the graphics engine. As you fly escort for a group of Blenheim bombers over France, the cloud cover becomes darker and more threatening, and flashes of lightning crackle around you. You throttle back too quickly as you make a pass on a Bf-109, and your engine coughs out puffs of smoke. Closing in on the target, you unload your guns and are treated to a Hollywood-class explosion.

Coming from a team that has the impressive-looking action

The campaign is dynamic, and you can choose starting dates between 1943 and 1945. Targets are generated on a priority basis, and damaged targets will remain damaged in future missions, until they're repaired or replaced. The sim will feature over 250 historical targets. You'll play the campaign as a Bomber Commander, where you'll be responsible for only your plane, or as a Squadron Leader, where you manage planes, crew, targets, and plan routes, and where the other planes in your formation will bomb on your lead. In addition, you can fly escort as an Allied fighter pilot, or attack B-17s for the Axis.

Perhaps most intriguing is the multiplayer mode, where up to 30 players can man various positions in bombers, or fly escorting and attacking fighters. With 12 B-17s, eight escorts, and eight attackers, there are 136 possible positions to man.

Given its attention to detail and historical accuracy, along with dazzling graphics and a campaign that promises great replayability, we don't see how B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II could possibly bomb.
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MOSQUITO BITE A British Mosquito strafes an Axis convoy.

not flat ground textures. When enemies are far away, you see realistic sunlight glints off their canopies, not big red icons. Atmospherics, from clouds to the haze on the ground at dawn, are unparalleled. Aircraft and cockpits, of course, look great. Birds even trail behind ships. About the only area where the engine falls down in the current build is in the mountains, which are very polygonal in appearance.

This game isn't all eye candy, however. The campaign will allow you to fly 15 historical missions for each country (England, Germany, and the U.S.), all of which are based on the actual British war records. Flying the first mission of the German campaign and escorting a group of Ju-88s over the Channel, I had a you-are-there feeling I hadn't felt since the classic THEIR FINEST HOUR. While 45 scripted missions isn't much, Psygnosis plans to release a mission editor via the Internet. In addition, there will be a variety of instant-action missions. And look for support for up to 64 players in multiplayer combat (deathmatch, team, and "VI Football" modes), as well as built-in voice support.

NATIONS appears to strike a careful balance between realism and flash and dazzle, making it appealing to first-time sim pilots as well as more experienced fliers.

OVER LAKE CHAMPLAIN A long-nosed FW-190 flies low over a lake as it searches for Allied fighters.

BOOM BABY BOOM Pyrotechnics abound during combat sequences.

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nVidia's Next-Gen Chip Could Bring Cut-Scene Quality to Gameplay

The Next 3D Revolution

As amazing as game graphics have become, they still don't measure up to the stunning animations that kick off most games. Gamers have been dreaming of the day when the gameplay looks as good as the cut-scenes. With nVidia's next chip delivers on its promise, that day may not be far off.

We cornered one of nVidia's lead chip architects and got him talking about nVidia's next chipset, code-named NV10. He terms this new chip a "graphics processing unit," or GPU for short. nVidia chose this term because the chip, scheduled to ship this fall, has more than twice as many transistors as a Pentium III CPU. In addition to having lots of raw processing power, NV10 will be able to handle much of the work a portion of the CPU's load, resulting in dramatically improved graphics and freeing the GPU to handle other chores like artificial intelligence (AI) processing.

nVidia says their main goal of the NV10 is to take on the role of calculating 3D geometry (called transform and lighting, or T&L). In current systems, 3D geometry chores can consume three-quarters of the CPU's time, leaving everything else in a game—controller input, audio, AI, collision detection, and physics, among other factors—to fight over the leftover time.

By off-loading geometry calculations from the GPU, the NV10 will let games have radically higher polygon counts, according to nVidia. For example, a typical scene in Quake II might have 3,000 polygons. But imagine that same scene with 10 times as many polygons. (Heck, maybe we’ll finally see characters with round necks.) OpenGL and Direct 7.0 both support T&L acceleration, so games using those application program interfaces (APIs) should see vastly improved performance.

Afterburner On

There are many speeds and feeds to consider in 3D chip performance, but two of the most important are triangle rate and fill rate. Triangle rate refers to the number of triangles the processor can draw on the screen per second. Fill rate describes the speed at which those triangles can be filled with shading or texture information. Traditionally, 3D chips have concentrated more on fill rate to allow for more filtering and rendering effects, as well as higher resolutions. But NV10’s design will also emphasize triangle rate. nVidia reps say that NV10’s sustained triangle rate will be about three times faster than that of a Pentium III CPU, which can put out about 5 million triangles per second.

The NV10 should be no slouch in the fill-rate department, either. nVidia conservatively estimates that NV10 will deliver about twice the fill rate of current generation 3D chips. So what can you do with that much horsepower? How about running your games smoothly at a resolution of 1600x1200x32 with all the rendering goodies turned on? Sound appealing? Yeah, we thought so too.

Other Goodies

In addition to raw horsepower, NV10 will also deliver new DirectX 7.0 3D rendering features, which we’ll cover next month. The NV10 will also support HDTV, accelerating x=2 video scaling, colorspace conversion, and motion compensation for full 1080i/480p HDTV displays.

NV10 will support the AGP 4X standard, effectively doubling the rate at which it can get data from system memory to a speed of 1.1GB/sec. A 350MHz RAMDAC will make for higher refresh rates at high resolutions, and nVidia plans to offer the NV10 in two RAM loadouts, 32 and 64MB. NV10 will support SDRAM and SGRAM, and nVidia is considering support for Double Data Rate (DDR) SGRAM if it becomes widely available.

The Difference NV10 Can Make

Given the recent S3/Diamond merger, and that nVidia has made public its intent to no longer sell chips to Diamond, we’re likely to see NV10-based boards from Creative Labs, Hercules, Guillemot, and several Taiwanese board makers—the same companies that are making TNT2-based boards. TNT2 is also currently a darling among system makers including Falcon Northwest, Dell, Gateway, and Micron, and those companies are going to be giving NV10 a serious look for their fall and holiday season offerings.

With NV10’s balanced yet aggressive design, nVidia is poised to yet again reshape the 3D graphics landscape this fall when NV10-based boards start shipping. Stay tuned sports fans, because we’ll be getting our mits on a reference board soon, and we’ll tell you how it fares in next month’s issue of CGW. And for the full lowdown on the latest graphics cards, check online at www.3dgamengauge.com.

— by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator
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Welcome to the Minefield
This Year’s Upgrade Paths Are Fraught With Danger

Planning for future upgrades is a baffling business these days. And if it baffles me, then you should worry.

Until the beginning of this year, the upgrade picture was fairly straightforward. If you had the budget, you'd get some kind of 440BX motherboard. You might have to live with a Celeron CPU, but you could anticipate Pentium III prices dropping later in the year. Users of Intel competitor AMD's K6-2 microprocessors could look forward to the K6-3. Recently, though, the picture has become more complicated—ridiculously so, in my opinion.

Cutting Corners
As the demand for cheap PCs gets more intense, so does the pressure to drive down costs. One resultant abomination was the Cyrix MediaGX processor, which coupled a really slow CPU with really slow graphics. The good news for gamers is that Cyrix/National Semiconductor will be getting out of the market for PC processors. The bad news is the Intel 810. There are several flavors of the 810, and you should avoid them all. The reason is that Intel has built the graphics controller into the motherboard chipset itself. This setup may be fine for someone running Word or doing some light Web browsing, but 3D game performance will be abysmal compared to what's possible with the current generation of 3D accelerators.

Slot + socket = slotket
Early this year, systems using Intel's new Socket 370 format started appearing. The reason, again, was cost. Back when Intel began shipping the Pentium II, it introduced the SECC (single-edge contact cartridge)—also called Slot 1 format for CPUs. This allowed Intel to package a CPU with somewhat slower-speed Level 2 (L2) cache in a cost-effective manner. But the low-cost Celeron CPU has all its L2 cache on the CPU die itself, making the cartridge format superfluous. So Socket 370 was born—a more cost-effective design that accommodates the newer Celerons' onboard L2 cache. This makes upgrade decisions more difficult, though, because there's no guarantee that a Socket 370 motherboard owner will be able to drop a future, Socket 370 Pentium III into their system. A number of companies stepped into the fray, offering adapters (termed "slotkets") that permit insertion of a Socket 370 chip into a Slot 1 connector, allowing users to contemplate future upgrades to a Pentium III. One could question why the Celeron, with 20 million transistors, is cheaper than the Pentium III, with 9 million transistors. You could also ask why Celeron is running at a 66MHz memory bus speed. This state of affairs is known as "market segmentation," which is how Intel can put the screws to AMD while still charging gobs of money for the Pentium III.

Distant Memories
It's likely that these faster, socketed Pentium IIIs will require a new motherboard and chipset, code-named Camino and dubbed the Intel 820. The 820 creates yet another puzzle for users: choosing memory upgrades. The good news is that Camino will support a front-side bus of 133MHz—about 33 percent faster than current Pentium III memory bus speeds—and will yield a peak throughput of 1GB/sec. The bad news is that Intel is trying to push a completely new memory type: RDRAM (RAMBUS DRAM). RDRAM memory modules will be called RIMMs—RAMBUS inline memory modules. Like all new memory introductions, RDRAM is likely to command a 50 percent price premium over SDRAM—even over 133MHz DRAM. So if you're contemplating a 600MHz PCI II later this year, be ready for a little financial pain.

On the AMD Front
Things aren't so rosy for AMD customers, either. Many K6-2 users, anticipating an easy upgrade to the K6-3, received a couple of rude shocks when the K6-3 shipped. First, a number of K6-2-capable motherboards couldn't handle the odd voltages of the K6-3. Then there's the K7. There's a lot of excitement about the potential of the K7. But the K7 plugs into AMD's "Slot A," derived from the DEC/Compaq Alpha CPU's EV6 bus. Naturally, it's not compatible with anything except K7, meaning that AMD fans will finally get to step away from the ancient Socket 7 format, but at the cost of new memory and incompatibility with any Intel CPU. K7 motherboards will likely support new DRAM formats, but will at the very least require PC133-certified SDRAM.

TechTIPS

Q. I have a P2-266 machine running with Windows 98. Installed as my primary card is the STB Velocity 4400 and I have a Diamond Monster 3D 2 with 12MB as my 3D add-on. I like the idea of running games like QUAKE 2, HALFLIFE and KINGPIN in higher resolutions than 800x600, which is the maximum I can use with my Voodoo 2 card. It would certainly be nice if I could use my TNT based card for my OpenGL games for larger resolutions and keep my Voodoo 2 card installed for any Glide games. Is there a simple way to disable or override my Voodoo 2 card when I would like to use the TNT for OpenGL gaming?

A. Yes. All three of these games are Quake-based, so the workaround is the same for all three. Just go to the Video Options screen, and select “Default OpenGL” instead of “3DFx OpenGL,” and the TNT card will take over 3D rendering in the game.
THE FIRST WORTHY SUCCESSOR TO DIABLO IS NOT DIABLO II.
It's Darkstone. Fully realized 3-D environments. A vast and beautiful world of castles, dungeons, caves, and forests. Male and female versions of the warrior, the thief, the priest, and the sorcerer. Over 100 types of evil beings. 32 levels of dungeons. Grisly swordplay and mind-blowing spell effects. A player-controlled camera with the ability to zoom in, zoom out, and swivel 360 degrees. A random quest generator for nearly infinite replayability. The unprecedented ability to control two characters.
simultaneously. It will release your tortured soul from the devil and deliver you into the grip of a far greater evil.

The world is living under the reign of a cruel dragon. Villagers are turning to stone. Armies of skeletons, swarms of wasps, and lumbering ogres lurk everywhere. Evil is spreading like a vine. And only you can stop it. Scattered across the kingdom are seven ancient magic crystals. Without them, you have no hope. You will creep through dungeons, explore wilderness and glades, and encounter traps, curses, and puzzles on your quest to unearth the crystals. It will take courage. It will take cunning. It will take your mind entirely off Diablo II.

www.godgames.com
## Power Rig

**Hercules Dynamite TNT2**
In our most recent round of testing, the Dynamite TNT2 graphics card was the best bang for your buck. The card ships with clock-speed and memory-speed sliders and, because it uses Teemax's Lasagna cooling fan, it's able to run at higher clock speeds and stay stable. About the only thing it won't do is run Glide, but in the Power Rig, you'll have the Voodoo² board to handle those chores. The board doesn't come with a software bundle, but does have TV-out.

### COMPONENT | PRODUCT | PRICE | THE SKINNY
--- | --- | --- | ---
Motherboard | Acer P275F | $135 | Back to the future.
CPU | Pentium II 450 | $550 | It's the top of the heap, for now.
Memory | 256MB PC133 133MHz SDRAM | $98 | Just think: a quarter gigabyte.
Disk Controller | Adaptec AIC-7890 | $89 | ROMDEBUG.
Primary Graphics | Hercules Dynamite TNT2 | $245 | The fastest 3D card in the West.
Secondary Graphics | 3dfx Voodoo²/7000 | $19 | Single Voodoo² for Glide compatibility.
Floppy Drive | Teac | $20 | You still have to have one.
Hard Drive | Quantum Atlas 10K | $620 | A little warmer than the Fujitsu, but much faster.
Backup | Iomega Jaz 2 | $300 | 2 GB of backup.
Hard-Drive Cooler | APS Technologies drive cooler | $80 | Cool like Fonzie.
CD-ROM/DVD | Pioneer 6x 3x32 DVD | $160 | New Pioneer slot-drive DVD.
Monitor | Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020a | $1,200 | Perfectly flat, good USB support.
Primary Audio | Diamond Monster Sound XM300 w/USB | $19 | For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and 6AX.
Speakers | DFS-11 | $300 | Beautiful imaging, clean sound.
Rear-Channel Speakers | Yamaha CS-6S | $500 | Ultimate rear-channel powered speakers.
Monitor | Copper Rocket DSL monitors | $100 | DSL at last.
Networking | 3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI | $20 | For dropping my buddies.
Networking Hub | Network 5000 | $170 | Multiplayer and DSL modem support.
Case | In Win Q500 full-tower ATX | $155 | New improved model.
Power Supply | Turbocool 3000 | $129 | More power, Scouty!
Keyboard | Logitech Newtouch | $45 | In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural.
Mouse/Pointing Device | Logitech Cordless Wheel Mouse | $59 | Off the leash.
Action Game Joystick | Gravis GamePad Pro USB | $30 | Familiar joystick with USB.
Flight Joystick | ThrustMaster F202 Pro | $129 | It feels right.
Throttle | ThrustMaster QDS | $115 | More control than anyone needs.
Rudder Pedals | ThrustMaster Elite RCS | $29 | Nearly perfect foot placement.
Driving Controls | ECCI CES 4000 | $1,129 | For the serious sim driver.

**TOTAL:** $8,225

## Lean & Mean

**3dfx Voodoo² 3000**
Although not quite the fastest, 3dfx's Voodoo² is still a venerable part, and at about $150 it delivers just the best bang for the buck of any graphics card going. This one card will run Direct3D, OpenGL, and Glide titles well, and it'll free up a PCI slot since you don't need that Voodoo² board for Glide now. The card also comes with one of the more serious bundles we've seen in a while: NEED FOR SPEED III (full version), UNREAL TOURNAMENT (full version), and DESCENT 3 (full version).

### COMPONENT | PRODUCT | PRICE | THE SKINNY
--- | --- | --- | ---
Motherboard | Abit DG6 rev 2.0 | $135 | Five PCI slots, Slot64, 440BX—ready for Pentium III.
CPU | Pentium III 450 | $300 | Effectively the same as a PIII 450.
Memory | 128MB Corsair PC100 100MHz SDRAM | $120 | 128MB at last.
Disk Controller | Built-in IDE | $0 |
Primary Graphics | Voodoo²/3000 | $150 | Stability, speed, and cooling.
Floppy Drive | 3x32 | $20 | Still gotta have it.
Hard Drive | Western Digital Expert 9.1 | $190 | 7200rpm from Western Digital.
CD-ROM/DVD | Pioneer DVR-103 | $130 | Slot-drive DVD.
Monitor | Optiquest VS95 | $420 | Solid 15-inch monitor at a budget price.
Primary Audio | Diamond Monster Sound XM300 | $82 | A3D and clean audio for under a C-note.
Speakers | Boston Acoustics BA-655 | $99 | Still our favorite.
Modem | Diamond Supreme 56e | $106 | Solid performance, good price.
Networking | D-Link 10/100 Ethernet | $20 | Can do 100B$Uck.
Case | Eton Vital 110-A8 | $82 | The case for upgrades.
Power Supply | Built-in, 235W | $0 | In with the new, out with the Natural.
Keyboard | Logitech Newtouch | $45 | Better than their "gaming" mouse.
Mouse/Pointing Device | Logitech PS2 Wheel Mouse | $18 | 3D Optical mouse.
Joystick | OH Gameslink 3D USB | $55 | Solid 3D controller with sophisticated features.

**TOTAL:** $1,981

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The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. - Lists compiled by Dave Salutor and Loyd Case
WHAT 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

You've got questions, we've got answers. And if there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, "What 3D card should I buy?" would have to be it. Look for this how-to-choose-a-3D-card guide every month here in CGW.

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

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

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

PRODUCT WATCH

Look Out Intel? At press time, the most interesting product about to ship is without question AMD's K7 CPU, which they've rechristened Athlon. If the performance rumors we've heard about this new chip are true, then the CPU market could be a whole new ball game, with Intel finally facing serious competition in every market segment, top to bottom. AMD has traditionally lagged behind Intel in a key area for gamers: X87 floating-point performance, which can make all the difference in 3D games. But AMD's Athlon chip has a superscalar (able to execute more than one instruction per clock) floating-point unit with three pipelines, which may well finally give them the performance edge over Pentium III in this key area. So who's the top chip standing? Tune in next month to our CPU shootout in which two chips go in, and one chip comes out. - Dave Salvator

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experience

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32-bit true color 3D games

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Goin' Mobile
Micron Delivers A Solid Mobile Offering,
But with a Few Gotchas

by Dave Salvato

Laptops have come a long way. For this they owe a lot to ATI and the Rage LT chipset, which finally brought good 3D graphics performance to the mobile set. Dell and ComPaq have been shipping Rage LT-equipped laptops for a while now, and Micron is the latest to join this club with their Transport Trek NX.

Laptops have always lagged their desktop brethren in graphics performance, and the 3D revolution only compounded the problem. And while the Rage LT chipset does a good job with 3D chores and deserves praise for what it has done for the 3D-challenged mobile graphics chipset market, it's now looking long in the tooth. In fact, the latest round of desktop graphics cards we tested here were three times faster on average than the Rage LT chipset in the Transport. Still, some better 3D is better than no 3D, and as long as you keep the resolution down around 640x480, the Rage LT fares pretty well, although its OpenGL ICD driver still has some very rough spots, including some serious drawing errors in HALF-LIFE.

Road Dog
In redesigning the Transport, Micron added some gamer-friendly features like a joystick port and an easily accessed USB port for newer game controllers. Its 14.1" TFT display generally looked good, although when on batteries it dims somewhat to conserve power. Battery life was pretty good, with about two hours of operation before things went dark. More impressive was the Transport's ability to spin the DVD drive for 90 minutes, meaning you can watch a feature-length DVD movie on one charge. That's a major plus for those long plane trips where the airline's feature film is something screwed up like "Benji vs. Bambi: There Can Be Only One."

But we also uncovered some rough edges during gameplay that ranged from annoying to unacceptable. The Transport's Matsushita DVD-ROM drive spun down quickly and was very slow to spin back up. In a game of HIGH HEAT 2000 for instance, there were long pauses in gameplay whenever the game accessed the DVD-ROM for the announcer's voice data. In addition, the drive made quite a racket when it spun up, and there were periodic hiccups during movie playback, although that may not have been the DVD-ROM drive's fault. And during game-play in QUAKE-based games, the only way to avoid broken and chunky sound from the ESS Maestro chip was to dial the audio setting down to "maximum compatibility."

A Passable Performer
The increasing gap in desktop and laptop 3D graphics performance became painfully apparent during 3D GameGauge testing, where the Transport was only one-third as fast as the average desktop 3D graphics card from our most recent roundup. In fact, most games weren't playable at the 1024x768 test resolution. The news does get better at 640x480 where frame rates improve and games get playable. However, the Rage LT's OpenGL ICD, despite this chip being in the marketplace for nearly nine months, was still not all there. In HALF-LIFE, for example, there were some really awful drawing errors that produced red blocks where part of the rendered scene was supposed to be. And though not errors per se, the Rage LT was showing its age in HALF-LIFE and during a deathmatch in QUAKE 3 TEST, where smoke effects were very pixelated.

Still Not Bad for Mobile
Despite these shortcomings, the Transport is a fairly solid unit, and as mobile offerings go, it's a good performer that's dogged primarily by its aging 3D chipset and a so-so DVD-ROM drive. Still, if you need a laptop, and want to play games, the Transport will get the job done, and let you watch DVD movies to boot. Just know that, as a gaming rig, this one has a few rough edges.
In your professional opinion, would a leg blown off by, say, a plasma gun have a similar texture?
Our 3D graphics accelerator performs over 100 billion operations a second, allowing us to render something like a mangled fibula with the utmost realism. (If it looks like oatmeal, then that's the way it's gonna look.) Our chip is compatible with a gazillion games and software applications, so why not upgrade your computer with a 3dfx Voodoo3™ board, or make sure it's built into your next one.

For more information, check out our website at www.3dfx.com. So powerful, it's kind of ridiculous.
**REVIEW • EVERGLIDE MOUSE PAD**

**Smooth Operator**

Hard-core shooter guys will do anything to get that extra frag— dialing graphics way down for better frame-rate, trying different mice, hooking up to USB, running the PS2Rate utility, using a bowling wrist support (OK, maybe not). If you count yourself among these zealots, then say hello to your next purchase, the EverGlide mouse pad. Made of high-density plastic, the EverGlide features a slightly rough surface to allow even tracking of your mouse's ball. This makes it easy to execute minute, precise mouse movements—the key to accurate aim when camping.

Using my PS2-connected Logitech MouseMan Wheel, and running the PS2Rate utility at 200Hz, I took the EverGlide for a spin through HALF-LIFE TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC, STARSIEGE TRIBES, and QUAKE 3 TEST. The overall result was very impressive. Because the EverGlide surface is consistent across the entire pad, the mouse ball never stopped tracking. And for the occasional camp-out with the crossbow in HALF-LIFE, lining up the money shot was easy thanks to the precise mouse movement possible with this pad. And general mousing with the EverGlide in Windows 98 was smoother, too.

So if you’re an avid camper in shooters, the EverGlide is something you’ll definitely want. But even if you’re just looking for a way to smooth out your shooter gameplay, the EverGlide’s surface, along with a good mouse, will get you most of the way there. Of course, you’ll still have to do the aiming and shooting yourself. — Dave Salvator

**REVIEW • KENWOOD 52X TRUEX CD-ROM DRIVE**

**Fast, but Not Cheap**

The X-factor is getting out of hand. Here we have what is probably one of the fastest CD-ROM drives you can get. It’s the Kenwood 52X TruEx, the latest drive using Zen Research’s technology for reading multiple CD tracks at a time. But the question remains: So what?

That may sound odd coming from me, but as fast as the Kenwood is, it’s not that much faster than other drives—and it has some problems. Beyond that, it’s a bit on the pricey side.

The drive scored a 1410 on CD WinBench 99, with an access time of 91.8ms and an acceptably low CPU utilization of 32.7 percent. A full, 2.4GB installation of BALDUR’S GATE seemed to cruise by relatively quickly, too. Then things get a little ugly. I tried installing some beta software I had on recordable (CD-R) media, and the Kenwood choked. I’d run into this with the Kenwood 40x/40 drive, too, but hoped it had been fixed in this iteration of the drive. Apparently not.

Overall, though, the TruEx drive is well mannered. There’s very little of that annoying vibration that you get with some high-speed drives. It also seems more solid than the 40x40, which had some teething problems.

If you don’t use recordable CDs, the Kenwood should serve admirably. But if you routinely use CD-R media, you may want to pass on it. — Loyd Case

**REVIEW • FLIGHT SIM YOKE LE FOR USB**

**Get the Yoke?**

For civilian flight sims, having a yoke controller adds that extra bit of realism you don’t get with a stick. Now, CH Products has delivered the Flight Sim Yoke LE for USB, a hot-pluggable controller that works with both the PC and Macintosh. This revamped version of CH’s yoke device—it’s also lighter and more compact than the original design—is a good, low-end, entry-level controller for sim fans.

Installation is really plug-and-play; the device uses the USB driver built into Win 98, eliminating the hassle of using a flight yoke on a system that already has a joystick or gamepad. The all-black design features an eight-direction view hat, three buttons, two toggle switches for gear and flaps, two rocker/trim switches, and a throttle lever. It attaches firmly to your desk with two screw clamps.

CH touts the lack of a dent in the wheel for better control. However, the controller has a very loose feel, and I found it difficult at times to find the center for straight-and-level flight. Also, be warned that getting it to work with analog rudder pedals requires a game that can simultaneously handle input from multiple controllers. Microsoft FLIGHT SIM 98 should in theory support multiple controllers, but the game wouldn’t allow me to select the analog rudders. CH will be releasing compatible USB pedals in late summer.

Finally, be careful when shopping for this yoke. There are two versions, and CH’s box pictures the Flight Sim Yoke, which has additional buttons and two levers for propeller pitch and mixture. Look carefully at the checklist on the front to see which model you’re getting. — Denny Atkin
Crank Up Your Computer!

80 brain-frying watts of power. Bone-thumping bass from Yamaha’s Advanced Active Servo Technology™ 2-Way satellites with immaculate highs and aggressive mids. Welcome to the new breed of Yamaha multimedia speakers.

The new Yamaha YST-MS50 and YST-MS55D (with USB) are the best speakers for games and music on your computer. They’ll even blow away your stereo. Get them for as low as $129* at your favorite computer and electronics stores.
OUT NUMBERED, OUT GUNNED, OUT OF YOUR ELEMENT...
Because we are known for so much more than making the world's best 3D audio technology and the finest audio processor on the planet, we are proud to announce our official name change to Aureal Inc. from Aureal Semiconductor.

Prepare for the next level.

www. aureal.com
www.a3d.com
How Do We Rate?

** Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience. **

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

** Average: Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla. **

** Weak: Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone. **

** Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material. **

** Does Not Rate: We review only finished products—no betas, no patches. **

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Quote o' the Month

"...you will discover, maybe even once and for all, just how much or how little you care about the Star Trek universe and its inhabitants."

Keith Ferrel, reviewing

** STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION **

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IN THIS CORNER, WEIGHING IN AT 70 TONS...

HEAVY GEAR II ** MECHWARRIOR 3

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SEPTMBER REVIEWS

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TRESPASSER

It's not in this issue... but we still think it sucks!
BEYOND IT LIES THE SECRET OF RENNES-LE-CHÂTEAU.

AND THE KEY TO YOUR VERY SOUL.

blood of the sacred

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3

blood of the damned

A 3D MYSTERY ADVENTURE
This quaint, French countryside hides a real-life enigma involving untold treasures, heinous betrayals and bloodthirsty demons. For thousands of years, religious historians, researchers of the occult and covetous treasure hunters have tried to unveil the secrets buried here.

Fate has brought Gabriel Knight and Grace Nakimura to this modest, unassuming village where they open the door to a 3000-year-old mystery. Without question, Gabriel is compelled to find the answer, no matter the price he may pay.

Here is where destiny meets truth — where your search will conjure up covenants, heresies and lies that have hidden a frightening story through the millennia.

To find the child — and to reveal the secrets held in Rennes-le-Château — you will guide Gabriel and Grace as they question suspects, uncover hidden agendas, solve elaborate puzzles and follow a dark path to one inescapable truth.

The warning is real — once you enter Rennes-le-Château — there is no turning back.
OPEN THIS DOOR, AND IT CAN NEVER BE CLOSED AGAIN.
Fantastic Facelift

Graphics and Gameplay Make DESCENT 3 the Best of the Series

by Jim Lynch

far too often, drastic overhauls are a bad idea. New Coke, Baywatch Nights and a Bea Arthur facelift are all testaments to the nightmares that can result when mankind messes with God's work. After two hot games, the makers of the DESCENT franchise took an incredible risk by overhauling their game. But unlike the post-operative, Kabuki-vasaged Bea Arthur, this reworking really pays off.

Right from the five-minute opening movie, you know that you're in for a visual treat. This year's DESCENT takes full advantage of everything 3D acceleration has to offer, with fluid, crystal-clear graphics that never overshadow gameplay—no mean feat considering the impressive lighting effects and enemy robots with distinct moving parts. Everything looks crisp and feels just right, right down to the explosions.

DESCENT 3 comes with what can only be described as kick-ass weaponry. You'll get the chance

to use everything from the tried and true Vauss Cannon to an exceptionally cool Microwave Cannon that distorts the screen of your opponent as you fry him. One of my favorites was the Cyclone Missile, which splits itself into six smaller missiles that home in on your target.

The Great Outdoors

Forget the sterile feel of the mines from the earlier games. This time around you'll be immersed in a variety of beautifully textured environments and will even take the fight outdoors as you soar across sweeping planetscapes and through towering canyons. DESCENT 3's engine

is as seamless as TRIBES when it comes to moving between indoor and outdoor areas.

Moving outdoors only underscores the sprawling nature of the game's 17 levels. And DESCENT 3 needs the room since the mission-based gameplay has moved beyond the "find the reactor, destroy it, and run away" formula of the previous games. This time you'll rescue hostages, retrieve computer data, and hold off enemies assaulting a base. Having said that, Outrage has included one "blow the reactor and run like hell" scenario, as well as a came-in version of DESCENT's first level for veterans like myself.

A couple of less-welcome old friends appear from the previous games as well. The difficulty of controlling your craft in the game's 360 degrees of movement, and the nausea that some gamers experience while navigating the spinning, twisting gameworld. To control your craft, use a joystick and take the time to run the game's tutorial. To control your lunch, take occasional

breaks.

Smarter Than the Average Bot

The robotic enemies in DESCENT 3 have also benefited from the facelift and are even craftier than in previous games. At times they're downright cunning, working in teams and using the environment to their advantage.

To combat these nasty little suckers, DESCENT 3 gives you the option of flying three different ships: the fast, agile Phoenix; the slower, more heavily shielded and armed Magnum; or the well-balanced Pyro. In solo play you have to progress through the game to get the other ships, but in multi-

player you can choose your favorite ship right away.

As one of the first action games to be really viable over the Net, you'd expect DESCENT 3 to have some killer multiplayer action. Net players won't be disappointed; DESCENT 3 includes options for Capture the Flag, Team Anarchy, Robo-Anarchy, Entropy and more. The action in multiplayer is fast and furious so if you're a newbie to DESCENT, you're best off using the Magnum—you'll stay alive just a little while longer while you learn the ropes.

DESCENT 3 is simply one of the most solid action games out there, with superb visuals and silky smooth gameplay. Once you get used to the freedom of movement, expect addiction.

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IN YOUR BRIEFS: Focusing the single-player game on objectives detailed in mission briefings is a significant improvement on the repetitive gameplay of earlier DESCENT games.

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD • SEPTEMBER 1999
**Advanced Action**
Command an extensive range of vehicles in specialized missions including night, sniper, infiltration and paratroop combat, plus fast-paced out-of-tank warfare.

**Advanced Strategy**
Be prepared to alter your plan of attack as intelligent A.I. learns as it racks up kills. Risk it all in highly-evolved Instant Action and Instant Strategy modes.

**Advanced Graphics**
Coordinate full-scale attacks as morphing 3-D units, destructible terrain, and incredible explosion and weapon effects intensify the killer gameplay.
Command WWII from the comfort of your own home.

Set in 2015, Red Storm's FORCE 21 is an examination into the future of conventional warfare. Like the U.S. Army's inquiry of the same name, this real-time 3D tactical wargame applies the technology of the booming Information Age with present day military hardware. As a Chinese or U.S. platoon commander, you will need to make split second decisions and dictate rules of engagement for your forces. You will be plunged into the heat of battle, leading your force in up to 48 combat vehicles. The real-time scenarios and action sequences will excite and challenge a variety of gamers. The makers of RAINBOW SIX have yet again digitized reality. Tom Clancy's team at Red Storm was provided with high-definition 3D graphics and sound effects from the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps. FORCE 21's 3D battlefields and maps were built from satellite imaging to produce realistic terrain and settings. The game designers even tested and drove military hardware, in order to create virtually real experiences and viewpoints. Players select the platoons, military vehicles and commanders they want to take with them into each battle situation. Equipped with weapons from the

"Our goal is to capture, in a realistic context, that split second process of the combat commander's decisions. It means distilling METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops available and time) into a virtual world of armored warfare and then letting gamers make their own best decisions. We will never capture the chaos of real battle, but we may, in some way replicate the decisions, forces, capabilities and some of the human factors that are involved."

General Frederick M. Franks, Jr. USA (Ret.)

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Computer: Pentium 200 MHz with 3D Hardware acceleration (68 Pentium 333 MHz with MMX (software rendering)
Memory: 32 MB RAM (4 MB recommended)
Operational System: Windows 95 or Windows 98
Video: Software Rendering only. 16-bit BitBlt 4MB Video Card
CD-ROM: CD-ROM compatible sound card required
Hand Drive: 150 MB uncompressed space
DirectX: DirectX 6.0 (included on CD) must be installed
Internet/Network Play: Properly Configured RSVP connection at 28.8 Kbps or better

China has invaded neighboring Kazakhstan. The U.S. is speeding to help Russia contain China's expansion. Red Storm's FORCE 21 takes you to the front lines of World War III. As platoon commander you will be placed at the helm of up to 16 armored platoons and a variety of the latest combat vehicles. It is your duty to lead your men and the millions of dollars in machinery to victory.
M-1 tank to engineering platoons you must formulate and see through a flexible battle plan. Your goal: victory with minimal losses.

Red Storm worked closely with project advisor, four-star General Frederick M. Franks, Jr., U.S. Army (Ret.). General Franks commanded 146,000 British and American troops during Operation Desert Storm and commanded the VII Corps from 1989 to 1991. Red Storm hoped to duplicate the pressures, emotions and rush of leading men into battle that General Franks described.

Against a brilliant AI and an unpredictable battlefield, you will find mastering the game to be an exciting challenge. You must complete each of the 30 missions with the men with which you began. Game play is further complicated by challenging or joining other players in the deathmatch or cooperative multiplayer. With 10 multi-player maps, FORCE 21 can be played via LAN lines or the Internet.

FORCE 21 creators have successfully crossed over genre lines by creating an addicting tactical wargame. Avid sim game fans will be impressed with the realistic game play action, from tanks to choppers. The strategic player will be challenged to plan for the entire platoon of combat vehicles, not individual troops.

Red Storm's FORCE 21 not only provides an adrenaline-pumping adventure but also offers new insight into the planning, strategy, and technology of conventional warfare. This one belongs on every serious gamer's shelf.
She doesn't need to use her body to get what she wants...

She's got yours.

You wake aboard the Von Braun with a mind-altering implant in your brain and no memory of recent events. As you wander the dark, eerie decks of the derelict spacecraft, you discover an alien material is slowly taking over the ship — feeding upon the flesh of your former comrades, leaving zombies and corpses in its wake. Behind the engulfing terror, you sense the presence of the evil cyber-being, SHODAN. She is seductive and sinister. And she pulls all the strings in the most chilling role playing game ever. Enter Shodan's terrifying world to discover her ultimate plan — or die trying. For all the gory details, visit www.iglass.com
Heavy Hitter
Activision Is Once Again King of the Giant-Robot Hill

by Greg Fortune

Activision set the standard for the giant-robot genre with the MECHWARRIOR 2 series. After losing the BattleTech universe license, they licensed the Dream Pod 9 gear universe and promised an even better follow-up. But HEAVY GEAR was a disappointment, a half-baked game. Now Activision has redeemed itself. HEAVY GEAR II does right almost everything that MECHWARRIOR 3 does wrong. While HEAVY GEAR II has a different scope than the MECH games—think powered armor suits rather than hulking battle tanks with feet—this game is still the clear choice for fans of this genre.

Armored Fists
The game places you in an elite special-ops unit on the planet Terra Nova, and as one of the planet’s finest warriors you’re outfitted with a top-of-the-line suit of powered armor called a Gear. Your unit will be transported to the planet that serves as the enemy’s base, and you’ll go behind enemy lines to gather intelligence about future attacks against the home planet.

HEAVY GEAR II is as much about managing your squadmates as it is about your individual performance, so you’ll be glad to know the game features an impressive control system that covers nearly every possible option. Squad commands are particularly well covered. One gripe: You can’t change your control settings from within the cockpit, nor is there any method to test how your Gear will respond to the controls from within the configuration screen. Another problem is the lack of numerical range data for the weapon systems. A weapon will be classified as short, medium, or long range, but I was unable to find anything that told me where the ranges begin and end numerically. These are annoying problems, but once you’ve compensated for them, they become pretty minor.

Tweakers will love customizing the Gear. You can change you weapon payloads, but the real fun comes in adding upgrades and flaws. You can add everything from ECM and sniper systems to reinforced armor, as well as faulty systems to drop your threat level. Threat level, the method of limiting how powerful you can make your Gear, seems very well thought out and nicely balanced.

Into the Fray
Once you’ve set your controls up, try out the training missions. It almost took me longer to complete all of the training missions to my satisfaction than it did to finish the campaign in MECHWARRIOR 3. Gears are unique vehicles, and it takes some training to get the hang of all the things your Gear can do.

Gameplay in HEAVY GEAR II is top-notch, with both instant action and the campaign modes.

ONE SHOT, ONE KILL The sniper and stealth settings really add to the game, if you want to live longer than this guy, that is.

PROS: Rock-solid mission design, very good multiplayer, beautiful engine.
CONS: No AI opponents in multiplayer mode; minor menu and configuration issues.
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, 54MB RAM, 370MB hard-drive space.
3D SUPPORT: Direct3D.
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem, LAN, Internet (2—8 players); 1 CD per player.
ESRB RATING: T/EEN: Animated blood and violence.
Price: $49.95
Publisher: Activision

www.activision.com

Continued on Page 130
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— Windows Magazine, May 1999

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Mech Lite
So Much Potential, So Little Gameplay

by Greg Fortune

Want to know what a major letdown tastes like? I waited patiently for the follow-up to MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES, anxiously read everything that came down the pipeline about MECHWARRIOR 3, and drooled over promises of a vibrant and interactive Mech universe. When I finally got my hands on the final game code I boiled it up, and it looked amazing. I launched headlong into the campaign... and haven't been able to get the bitter taste out of my mouth since.

Everything you've heard about the interface, graphics, and physics models is true. They're amazing. The game ran smoothly on a Pentium II/266 with a TNT board, and configuring the controls was a breeze. Modifying a Mech's load-out is very straightforward. It's a pleasure from the main menu all the way to the cockpit.

Nice Ride
Once there, you are greeted by one of the most satisfying pilot experiences you'll ever have. The Mechs are a blast to drive, and if this game's aim was to be nothing more than the FLIGHT UNLIMITED of Mech games, I'd have to give it five stars. In fact, in multiplayer games against human pilots, this engine just plain rocks.

The campaign certainly sounds promising. It's made up of four operations, with missions involving smaller objectives within the framework of the current operation. The maps are huge, with each mission covering just a portion of the overall operational map. The briefings are detailed, and the tactical map from each briefing is available from your cockpit in the field—a nice touch. After you've been briefed, modified your Mech, and allocated your salvage from the last mission, you're ready for the battlefield.

The Perils of Inbreeding
That's right where the fun stops. You'd think that given the care that went into the rest of the game the AI would be pretty solid, but you'd be wrong. Your opponents are so staggeringly stupid they make Todd Porter's G-NOME AI look like a chess algorithm. Developer MicroProse would have been better off asking Microsoft about getting the talking-paperclip AI from Microsoft Office. Just how it is possible, on the second-to-last mission in the game, to take out seven heavy Mechs—including two 100-ton Daishis taken at point-blank range—without even getting shot at? It shouldn't be possible, but in this game it is. All the Mechs and tanks seem to run prescripted routes and do not respond to variables, such as incoming fire. If you fully exploit the AI's weakness, you can get through almost any mission with little or no resistance. The heavy reliance on trigger points and scripting makes the single-player game extremely predictable and fairly tiresome.

Most of the missions play as if they came out of one of those cans in your cupboard that have no labels—they're that run-of-the-mill. It truly is a sad day in Mechtown.

Wingman commands are pathetic. You can't issue orders to more than one member of your squad at a time unless you use the tactical interface. This stops your Mech in its tracks, in the middle of battle, while you issue commands. There isn't even a way to tell a squadmate to go to a particular nav point. It's all right, though, because you'd never want to send one of these bozos out alone.

Even the instant-action mode reeks of heavy scripting and canned behavior. When battling waves of enemies, your opponents respawn in the same places every time, and follow the same scripted routine each time they regenerate. Bumping up the difficulty only seems to make you take more damage from hits and then take less—another huge disappointment.

Saved by Your Friends
Multiplayer fares better, since your friends are (hopefully) smarter than a tin of mystery
Well implemented. The visuals are compelling, the motion is smooth, and the action furious. This isn't a game in which you're going to run into a clearing with all guns blazing. You're going to sneak up behind that enemy Gear and put a couple of heavy autocannon rounds into the back of its cockpit before it knows what's happening. You'll infiltrate enemy bases. You'll execute a prison break. You'll attack a space station and disable its communication arrays before it can call for help. One mission culminates in a battle among about 20 units on the floor of a canyon. The AI is outstanding, and the wingman command structure is the best I've seen. You can even set the rules of engagement for individual units, either fire team, or the entire squad. The minute details that make this game great are far too numerous to list.

Say Hello to My Little Friends

Multiplayer games of HEAVY GEAR II are also incredibly fun. In fact, several of us in the office have tuned down invitations on the local QUAKE III server to play HEAVY GEAR II instead. This game combines the best elements of a QUAKE Deathmatch and a giant robot game. It's the kind of wild, in-your-face combat that'll keep your neighbors up late wondering just what all the yelling is about. There is one huge disappointment here, however: There's no option to play cooperatively against the AI. Other than that, just about everything is done right. This game will make you laugh, shout, and lose lots of sleep.

HEAVY GEAR II isn't perfect, but it sure comes close. The combination of good instant action, an outstanding campaign, and top-notch multiplayer mayhem makes this a game to seriously consider for fans of both giant robot games and 3D shooters. Although there are problems, none of them hamper gameplay. If you want the best giant-robot game on the market, HEAVY GEAR II is an easy choice.

Developers: Now Hear This!

We get a lot of mail about your games. We hear what people think of your games before you're even finished with them. Here are a couple of tips for you, just in case you want your next game to earn a five-star rating.

**Multiplier against your AI:** We want this. badly. Not many of our friends like being fodder, but being able to play cooperatively with them against your AI will help us get them interested in the game. Then we'll smoke them.

**Testing our controls:** When we configure custom controls, we shouldn't be more than a click or two away from being able to test how the game responds to the new settings. More than that is just sloppy design.

**Artificial what?:** We've played HALF-LIFE, been fragged by Reaper bots, and expect more than a bonehead script in the other coptkis. GEAR II got this right; MECH 3 failed miserably. Folks, the bar has been raised. Jump over it or be beaten with it.

We really aren't asking for much, just a couple of features you are more than capable of giving us. In return, we'll buy your games and maybe even be nice to you on Useret. Maybe.
We recently had the pleasure of meeting Steve Goss, of Hothouse. Steve is the designer and producer of *Abomination: The Nemesis Project*. We asked Steve a few questions about his latest project;

**What kind of game is Abomination?**

*Abomination* is a team based Strategic and Tactical Combat game, set in a 3D isometric world.

The player takes control of a group of survivors, after America has been all but destroyed by a catastrophic plague. The team is built around a Black Ops unit called, PROJECT NEMESIS, eight genetically enhanced operators whose unique abilities give the group their edge in a war against the vilest evil to ever slither across the surface of the planet.

The gameplay is split into strategic and tactical modes. In the strategic mode, the player is the group's commander. They are responsible for monitoring the city, defending objectives, and dispatching the squads of survivors to fight the war.

The tactical play works in both Real and Pause Time (like Baldur's Gate) modes. The player has to complete a wide range of mission objectives including cap busting, combat scenarios, snatch and grabs, surveillance and specimen capture. There are over 60 unique objectives and 20 secondary objectives. Each time you play, the game generates unique combinations of mission sites, objectives, and enemy concentrations. Indeed missions can occur during the day, at dawn, dusk and in the dead of night. Missions are set in over 40 different terrain types, each exemplifying differing tactical challenges.

There are 7 ways to play *Abomination* as a multiplayer game. Firstly, there is a campaign mode where 4 players can journey through the entire game — joining and leaving as and when they like. New players can join the group when others are unavailable to play. The team size can fluctuate too. It’s a rather large game and we wanted to make multiplayer very accessible.

**www.eidos.com**

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Ultimately the player has to deal with an ever escalating conflict. They need to monitor the enemy and strike at key conflict points - fighting in the streets, the sewers or the concrete jungle. As the game progresses, the enemies change. Somewhere, new monstrosities are breeding. Players must seek out the breeding grounds and neutralize them.

This is a deep game. The environments are as detailed as your control over your squad. Unlike some games, Abomination: The Nemesis Project offers a comprehensive strategic element — one where research, resource management, and team management offer a full level of strategic play value.

What was your inspiration for creating Abomination?

Well, my experiences as part of the team on the X-COM products whilst I worked at Microprose have some bearing on my work now. As a senior designer at Microprose I had the opportunity to design the sequel to UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN/COM: EARTH DEFENSE. The result was TERROR FROM THE DEEP! I then became the producer for X-COM: APOCALYPSE and worked with Mythos on the production of that game. I see the genre of Squad level games as one that is very much unexplored, unlike say, 1st person shooters or RTS games in the mold of C&C. I was given a blank slate at Hothouse to begin a new game. I decided to work within this genre - squad based tactical games like X-COM and SYNDICATE.

The nature of the world in ABOMINATION is a product of my interest in the works of H.P. Lovecraft. The stories of the Cthulhu mythos are always festering at the back of my mind and the works of David Cronenberg - the new flesh - have heavily influenced my characterizations and creations. There is a lot of pretty horrific activities being perpetrated by your enemy in the game and in many instances you get to find out exactly what and how the Brood is doing things - in explicit detail.

Can you 'develop' your team members?

The team members each have a number of abilities: accuracy, health, stealth, reaction and special skills. As the game progresses you can invest combat experience to alter their ratings in these areas. Project Nemesis characters have superhuman skills - abilities beyond those of normal men and women.

For example, the ability to become invisible, the ability to heal oneself and others, and the ability to withstand normal weapons fire. Team members that you find during the game, survivors of the plague, have special skills with different weapons; handguns, support weapons, explosives etc... They receive bonuses in combat for using the appropriate weapons.

After each mission, the player can apportion the experience the TEAM has gained amongst its members. Enhancing their skills in any way they see fit. They can tailor the team to their style of play. I, for instance, favor a stealthy group and focus on that skill. Whereas Stuart - one of the guys on the project - ramps up their health and plays much more aggressively as a result.

Tell us about the multiplayer game?

There are 7 ways to play ABOMINATION as a multiplayer game. Firstly, there is a campaign mode where 4 players can journey through the entire game - joining and leaving as and when they like.
New players can join the group when others are unavailable to play. The team size can fluctuate too. It's a rather large game and we wanted to make multiplayer very accessible.

Indeed, the campaign game can even be played by email! A 100K file is generated by the first player which contains all the strategic information, characters, equipment etc, and a replay of the last mission played. When the next player receives the email file and executes it, ABOMINATION will boot up and begin to replay the last mission. The player can even halt the action and take over the situation if they think they can do better! After the player reviews the replay and the strategic situation, they can re-equip the characters and complete the next mission. Then they email the 3rd player. This system allows unlimited players to participate, and also appends the name and email address of every player to have played the game....

The game also supports five multiplayer games -

competitions where up to 8 players can play simultaneously; Arena, Survive, Capture the Flag, Lone Runner and Hold & Destroy. These games offer a wide variety of play possibilities in both normal game areas and custom designed multiplayer maps.

**You mentioned email functionality. What else can you do via email?**

You can send your city key code (12 digit number) or mission key code (12 digit number) to anyone to so they can play either the same game or same level as you - rather than the generated missions. You can also send a mission replay (these are generated and appended to your mission debriefings for later watching), to someone else. They can watch your play, or interrupt it and take control and redo the mission. They can even send the replay back to you once they have "done it right".....

**What have you done to maximize the replay value?**

The whole game operates around a system of generated elements. The city you fight in is generated. Even the position and layout of strategic elements such as your HQ, Forward Command Posts, labs, and Satellite uplink are never the same. The streets and districts are never in the same place. From this, the land use is generated: downtown, the slums, the "burbs, industrial facilities and more. Each of these areas forms a mission site with over 1500 possible activity sites and over 100 city layouts. Each land type is generated when a mission is actioned there. There are 30 different maps for each land type, of which there are over 32 types. Each mission can have one of 60 different primary and secondary objectives. We estimate that there are somewhere in excess of 1.2 million valid and playable missions the system can generate. Given that even in the long game you are only gonna play about 300 missions there are a lot of missions you will only get if you replay the game. We even have some areas that do not occur in every game.

The reasoning behind a generated structure is core to the game itself. The game does not progress by the player playing mission one then mission two ad infinitum. Rather, the player chooses which missions they want to take, at what time of day and in what areas.

The enemy AI pursues its own course and the interaction of all these elements is what makes ABOMINATION organic, non-linear and rewarding to play.
We asked Rob Davies, Project Leader of Cutthroats: Terror on the High Seas to give us the low-down. This is what he had to say:

What was the inspiration behind Cutthroats: Terror on the High Seas?

The whole idea of a free roaming, do what you please, lawless pirate is powerful. The life and times in the 17th century Caribbean is a fascinating, unique, 'great-for-gameplay' historical era. Hollywood has decided to portray pirates as fictional, comical villains with wooden legs and hooks. Our pirates are dirty, flea bitten scoundrels that will slit your throat for looking at them the wrong way. Captain Hook may have lived in never-never land, but Blackbeard grew up in Bristol. He set out to terrorize the sea from the Bristol docks, not a hundred yards from Hothouse’s offices. Local inspiration plays a big part in the spirit of this game.

Secondly, we wanted to produce a game-world that is living, dynamic, and reactive, based on tons of historic research and including features such as real-time multiple ship/fleet combat, real-time hit-and-run land battles and a consistent economic and NPC strategic models.

The personal motivation also goes way back to working at Firebird and playing months of Elite, and then joining MicroProse and playing months of Sid Meier’s Pirates. Both, classic games based around the ‘ABCDE’ of gaming (adventure/battle/conquest/diplomacy/economics).
What is the player's goal in Cutthroats? How do they accomplish this goal?

You are the leader of a band of pirates, and you must gain wealth and success on the high seas through any means necessary. Your main objective is to obtain a hoard of money to divide among your pirate band. Money can be obtained in four ways:

- Raiding towns and robbing buildings
- Looting and capturing ships
- Performing missions
- Engaging in trade

You have many other short and medium term goals which will help you achieve this objective, including:

- Purchasing or capturing additional ships for your fleet, and finding the men to run them.
- Acquiring weapons to make your fleet more formidable in battle.
- Obtaining the ammunition, food and rum necessary for the day to day running of a pirate fleet.
- Developing a reputation, so that you are feared and respected throughout the Caribbean
- Establishing friendly relations with one or more town governors

From time to time, you must split the proceeds of your ventures with your crew. If each man's share amounts to a 1,000 pieces of eight, the voyage is a success. After a successful voyage, you choose to have it again, or retire to live the life of an aristocrat.

You can retire at any point, and you will receive a ranking. The more riches you have collected, the better your ranking. Cash, however, is not the only thing used to calculate your ranking; fame, ships captured, ships sunk, towns attacked, towns captured and sacked count as well. To obtain the status of Pirate King you are going to have to work for it.

What is the combat in Cutthroats like? Will there be land and sea battles that happen simultaneously?

We've tried to give the game a realistic feel, but this isn't a naval simulation. The basic structure of combat is point-and-click: you can change your ship's route with a mouse click, chase or attack an enemy with another click or use the keyboard to manually line yourself up to take your enemy. There are lots of special orders you can also issue—change ammunition type, or aim only at the sails to cripple your opponent. Cutthroats has multi-ship combat (up to twelve per side) and you can decide how each ship is configured with men, guns cargo and so on. You can configure your fleet to have aggressive warships and slower moving cargo carriers. Each ship will have a specific role in your fleet. You can give your ships orders to grapple and board the enemy, launch row boats, abandon ship, create fire ships and a whole lot of other stuff. When you board and capture a ship you can loot it during battle (and then escape) or capture it and add it to your side during battle by sending over crew, or capture it and hold it to pillage at

Governors can be crafty, watch your tongue or you may find yourself swinging from the gallows.

the end of the battle. When ships sink during battles you see men and cargo floating, which you can pick through as you see fit.

In land battles your men have four different weapon types (gunpowder, pistols, muskets and grenades), plus cannons to conduct hit and run raids on towns. You land at the beach and have to fight your way into buildings, loot them and get the booty back to your ship. The longer you take, the more chance other ships

Capture towns and create a new safe haven for pirates.

Pluck your victims from the water and put them to work, or leave them to the sharks and watch news of your brutality spread.
walled city, with the buildings in approximately the right position. On the other bank is a big castle that houses a garrison of soldiers. If you went to Havana today you can follow the old city wall and it has the same shape as the one in the game; the castle is in the right place; the clocks are in the right place. The economy of the towns also reflects their size, wealth, imports and exports during this period. Towns will grow or shrink as time moves on. If you sack a town it may struggle for years to return to the size and economic prosperity that you first discovered it in, or it may just cease to exist all together.

You have stated that the Cutthroats game world is dynamic and evolving. How will this effect the game play experience?

As an example, ports and ships become increasingly hostile to the player as the game proceeds: if you attack French ships, then you'll find that more and more French ships

and French ports will treat you like an enemy. Information about your activities are carried around the world by the ship's themselves: if you commit an atrocity at one end of the Caribbean and sail to other end, there is a good chance that news of your nefarious deeds won't have reached them. Similarly, if you persistently let ships escape, then your enemies will be able to pin point your location and try to destroy you. If you choose a particular area as your hunting ground, then coastal guard ships are likely to reinforce it. If you sack a town which is a big sugar producer, then the supply of sugar in the rest of the world is reduced, and the price of sugar goes up. As your understanding of the game world grows, you will be able to develop increasingly sophisticated strategies.

How much interaction will there be with NPC's?

The whole game is based around your interaction with other characters. Two brief examples, one at sea and one on land:

You can fly the flag of any nation to trick ships into thinking you are a friendly vessel. This tactic will only work for a short time, before sailors stop falling for your deception. As you become more famous, the trick becomes less and less likely to work. "That's no Spanish trader, that's the famous Black Hawk pirate ship..." There's a certain element of bluff in being a good a pirate. If you run up the Jolly Roger, maybe the enemy will be so scared that they'll surrender on the spot; or they could turn and run and you'll loose your quarry.

While in port you will interact with governors and local leaders. The attitude that you display toward each governor will range from diplomatic and friendly, to threatening and vicious. As a result, you can be given missions which involve you in sub-plots of various kinds, or start an open feud with the governor that will lead to either your capture and trial, or his death at your hands. If you are on good terms with a governor and his government you may be offered a Letter of Marque. A Letter of Marque is a legal license to attack ships of another nation that your country is at war with.

What is your favorite part of the game?

The really cool thing is the way your reputation spreads around the game world, so that other people change their opinion of you as time goes on. If you attack Spanish ships, other Spanish ships can hear of your actions (but only if the ships you attack escape) and will change their attitude towards you. Powerful fleets, warships, town guard ships and pirate hunters will be more likely to attack you. But weaker ones may run away as soon as they recognize you, making it more difficult to catch easy prey. The reaction of the world to your playing style and reputation adds a whole new level of depth that I really enjoy.
The Revenant Editor: Putting Power of Professional CRPG Design into Consumers' Hands.

One of the most understated features of Eidos Interactive's new Computer Role-Playing Game, Revenant, is the inclusion of the game editor with the final version that will ship in September. So, when you buy Revenant, you are not only getting a great single player and multiplayer RPG experience, you are also given the necessary tools to design your own levels, for you and your friends to play through, either alone, or in a cooperative game. In addition to the editor, you are also provided with every piece of art, every sound effect, and every 3D model that Revenant was built with. Enterpriseing CRPG designers will even be able to import their own graphics and sounds (along with 3D models and animations) into their personalized gaming experience.

The Revenant game world is tile-based, but there is no limit to the size that tiles can be. This allows for impressive game world features that are implemented with an easy to understand tile-layout system. Tiles are laid out in 3D space on an invisible grid (where they line up perfectly next to one another), or you can shut the grid off and move objects the tiniest bit, so that they are in what you consider to be just the right spot. Then, you can add such animations as glowing runes, flickering torches, dripping water, and crashing waves to add vibrancy and realism to your level. Adding characters to the game is a breeze as well. As an added bonus, you will even have some control over the game worlds rules. You can make up “character classes” that specialize in certain areas, or you can put limits on what characters can learn. You will be able to conjure these characters up from scratch, or edit the ones that

Revenant already includes. Monsters and NPCs from the Revenant world will also be at your disposal. Edit their attacks, how much damage they can do or take, as well as how hard they are to hit. You can even determine how much experience a character gains for killing a monster/NPC and how much treasure it will drop. Customization is at your fingertips....

Aspiring designers will also be able to run complex scripts that can be used as cut-scenes in their epics. Supply your own voice .WAV files for your characters in the game. All the power of what Cinematix Studios used to create Revenant will be at your disposal. And if you do manage to get stuck, an online hypertext manual will help you through some of the complex processes.

So, in a nutshell, you will be able to create your own scenarios which can be played as single player or multiplayer games. In essence, Eidos is progressing the art of being a Game Master in a Paper and Pencil RPG and enhancing it. Now instead of laying out dungeons on graph paper, you lay them out on your PC, with all the traps and monsters pre-set for a group of players to venture through. And when that module is defeated, you can make a module tailored towards the new power-levels of the PCs.

The RevEdit game editor is the most powerful development tool ever released to the public, and we hope that it is the first step towards creating a virtual Role-Playing community where everyone’s swords will be raised high and their spells ready.

www.eidos.com
The island of Akhulon is filled with colorful folks. Here is a brief description of the characters who you will meet, and in some cases defeat, on your valiant quest:

**Yhagoro:**
A former priest, Yhagoro discovered an ancient legend that would forever change his destiny. Infused with unholy demonic powers, Yhagoro's physical and spiritual body were warped into an evil creature. He now believes he is a god of the demon realm.

**Gina:**
Gina comes from a race of half human half feline creatures known as the Silunj. She is a weaponry expert capable of crafting excellent tools of destruction. She is also known for her trading abilities, which allows her to acquire weapons both unique and legendary.

**Sabu:**
Sabu is the right hand man of Jhaga, leader of the Yhagoro cult. Although Sabu is fluent in the magic arts, he fears confrontation and will avoid it at all costs.

**Jhaga:**
The leader of the Children of the Change cult. Jhaga is a sorcerer who possesses incredible magic power. He is a worshiper of the demon god Yhagoro and will follow his master's commands at any cost.

**Elahni:**
Misthaven’s healer is quite an enigma. Although he has saved hundreds of lives over the years and pleases the townspeople with his singing, his insistence that he is from another place and time tend to cause him many lonely days and nights.

**Rubold:**
Rubold is the owner of the local tavern. He is very proud of his establishment and does quite well for himself catering to sailors from other lands. He is fiercely protective of Kyle and has a short temper.

**Tendrick:**
The ruler of Misthaven once had complete control over the island of Akhulon. With the lucrative shipping trade, his home city of Misthaven flourished under his rule. The father of a single daughter and a former general, Tendrick is respected by his people.

**Olihoot:**
This strange old hermit lives just outside of Misthaven in the forest. He has lived on Akhulon longer than anyone can remember. Although he appears to have lost his mind, he can often be the source of crucial information.

**Jong:**
Misthaven’s resident combat trainer is a veteran of the eastern wars. Captured from his homeland by raiding armies, Jong made a daring escape at sea and swam hundreds of miles to be washed up on the shores of Akhulon. Believing he was dishonored by not receiving an honorable death in combat, Jong has vowed never to return to the East.

**Sardok:**
This sorcerer arrived in Misthaven shortly after the cult began attacking the city. He quickly earned the trust of Tendrick and was appointed official advisor to the throne. Little else is known about this mysterious individual.

**Gus:**
The harbormaster for Misthaven is a simple man. While not blessed with intelligence, Gus has a warm heart and always has nice things to say to people.

**Cronus:**
Cronus is an orphaned Cyclops who knows nothing of his origin. He is an expert blacksmith and his armors have a unique style and strength not found anywhere else.
Nukes for Newbies

Nuclear-Armed Action Makes a Great Intro to Flight Sims

by Jeff Lackey

It's exam time! Question 1: I think flight sim manuals should be (A) heavy enough to require two men and a boy just to lift them, or (B) just large enough to serve as a drink coaster. Question 2: If a flight sim doesn't properly model snap rolls, (A) I trash the disk and start a venomous online discussion thread, or (B) I prefer cinnamon rolls.

If you answered A, skip this review and find the latest FALCON 4 patch. If you answered B, F-22 LIGHTNING 3 was targeted at your hard drive. Easy to learn and simple to play, even a rank newbie can breeze through the short manual and be in the air within 15 minutes.

Cleared for Takeoff

F-22 LIGHTNING 3 puts you into a combat environment that's full of activity, with numerous enemy and friendly sorties, ground and sea operations, and a headset full of relevant radio chatter.

Coordinated allied flight missions prevent the dreaded "you against the world" syndrome.

Miracle of miracles, you have a competent wingman to assist you; tell him to cover you, and he'll actually clear your six. Graphics aren't groundbreaking—they're only slightly improved over previous Novologic offerings—but they're still better than average.

F-22 LIGHTNING 3's flight model is simple enough that flying is fairly effortless. About the only way to get into trouble is to exceed 800 knots at low level, causing structural damage. Avionics are simple and functional, providing a wealth of battle-field info without the need for an engineering degree. Weapons missiles are powerful and reliable, with one missile usually sufficient to down a bogey.

Unfortunately, your own plane appears programmed to go down after exactly two missile hits. The first hit will produce variable damage (elevator damage, fuel leaks, and so on), but take a second shot and it's ejection time. Speaking of weaponry, F-22 LIGHTNING 3 allows you to drop tactical nuclear weapons. Beyond requiring authorization to employ, you use it like any other bomb, except that you don't have to worry very much about your aim.

The More, the Merrier

F-22 LIGHTNING 3 excels in multiplayer. One click and you're on Novaworld, Novalogic's server that allows up to 128 players to fly in the same airspace. Novaworld features something for everyone, from guns-only free-for-alls to squadron-based co-ope-rative missions. Also notable is Voice-Over-Net, a feature that lets you speak with other online players. It worked as advertised, although you can only speak to one person at a time.

In a nutshell, although F-22 LIGHTNING 3 is an incremental improvement over its predecessors, if you're a casual gamer looking for a fun flight sim, it's a good choice. And if you're a hard-core simmer looking for a quick, fun break—well, we won't tell.

6 SHOTGUN

SQUAWK BOX The Voice-Over-Net option allows you to chat in multiplayer without taking your hand off the joystick.

ESCORT DUTY Keeping lumbering transports alive long enough to reach their destination is no easy task.

The Nuclear Option You'll be called upon to use tactical nuclear weapons to take out the enemy's weapons of mass destruction. You'll perform your aerial heroics in six linear campaigns, situated in locations such as Syria, Indonesia, and the Kola Peninsula. Missions within the campaigns are a mix of ground and air attacks and escort. While they increase in difficulty as you progress through the campaigns, the similarities do eventually produce a "been there, done that" feeling.

PROS: Simple to learn, simple to fly. Novaworld makes multiplayer easy for servers; built-in multiplayer voice communications.

CONS: Limited variety of weapons, only slightly improved over Novalogic's previous efforts.

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 128MB hard drive space.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D, 3Dfx Glide.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORTS: LAN, Internet (2-16 players). Novaworld (up to 128 players).

Price: $34.95

Publisher: Novologic

www.novologic.com

CGW
Team Rainbow has once again stormed the halls of gaming, this time demanding the release of Rogue Spear - sequel to PC Gamer's 1998 Action Game of the Year. Rogue Spear improves on the original in every way, resulting in a seamless blend of explosive action and spine-tingling tactics.

You'll lead an elite multinational strike force in counter-terrorism. And whether you play solo, or in the incredibly addictive multi-player mode, your thirst for justice will not go unquenched.

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Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six
Rogue Spear
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www.redstorm.com
Got Dem Road-Rage Blues
Chicago Lives and You Get to Drive It in MIDTOWN MADNESS

by Gordon Goble

They're mad, mad, I tell you! Indeed, Microsoft has had the MADNESS for nearly three years now. It started in 1996 with MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS and then moved on to motorcycles for last year's memorable MOTORCROSS MADNESS. This summer, Microsoft has gone bonkers for inner-city driving, enlisting the talents of developer Angel Studios (Nintendo 64's MLB, featuring Ken Griffey Jr.) to produce surely the greatest MADNESS of all.

How does driving a city bus through a downtown rush hour grab ya? Not too exciting? Okay, what if you could accelerate past 100 miles per hour and slam your way through traffic, tossing aside sedans and minivans, lamp posts, and park benches like a berserk T-Rex as horrified commuters shriek? And what if that cityscape was a 3D view of downtown Chicago, complete with semi-intelligent traffic, working stoplights, and a bunch of take-no-prisoners AI racers trying to do the same thing you are?

Sound like fun? I thought it might. In MIDTOWN MADNESS, Microsoft has released a racing game that offers substance, variety, and an unparalleled sense of freedom. Got something against bus drivers? Well then, take a Mustang, a Cadillac, or a speedy but brittle Panos roadster for a spin instead. Be careful, though, this MADNESS calls for certain strategies that vary with the type of race selected, the course, and the environmental conditions—meaning the fastest vehicle isn't always the best vehicle.

Da Gameplay

You can choose to race in the sunshine, under the veil of darkness, or through an all-too-typical Chicago snowstorm (where MIDTOWN's brilliant depiction of slippery handling is showcased). Or you can opt for the calmer confines of a Circuit Race, where barricades separate racers from commuter traffic, police cruisers, and other minor annoyances. Heck, you're even allowed to cruise Chi-Town without competition—a great time to drink in the startlingly realistic environment.

And if you're thinking this is street racing only, you're sadly mistaken. MIDTOWN is positively peppered with intriguing shortcuts, from underground parking lots to swank indoor malls, from treed parkland to construction zones. And yes, CARMAGEDDON fans, pedestrians abound, though they always manage to miraculously dive from the path of your marauding vehicle at the last possible second. Wanna bet Microsoft banished that one about before release? Also a bit less than authentic is MIDTOWN driving. Certainly, each of the 10 vehicles has various attributes that distinguish it from the others, and each is enjoyably proficient in terms of speed and handling. But in real life you can't jump a car over a raised bridge at 120 mph and expect to survive, nor can you crash head-on and emerge with a running engine. Yet a typical vehicle before viewing a map of the upcoming course, and a vehicle selection menu that doesn't allow on-screen comparisons. Untapped potential and questionable design elements aside, however, this is one hilariously entertaining free-form racing experience.

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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION GONE BAD In MIDTOWN MADNESS, the fastest vehicle isn't necessarily the best vehicle, as proven by this car-killing bus and freshly overturned Panoz.
The world will end in a firestorm of destruction. Have fun.

WORMS ARMAGEDDON

Exploding sheep, mad cows falling from the sky, mole bombs, detonating old ladies – this can only mean one thing. *Worms Armageddon!* In the latest chapter of the Worms series, following *Worms II*, PC Gamer’s 1998 Turn-Based Strategy Game of the Year, you’ll get more features and more weapons for more strategy. It’s never the same thing twice, and now you can do battle with up to six teams on one machine, or on-line. But there’s still only one way to win. Destroy all your enemies!

July ‘99
Welcome to Sigil, the "City of Doors," a place with gates that lead anywhere in existence, provided you have the proper key. It is a neutral ground and watering hole for races across the multiverse, all under the watchful shadow of the Lady of Pain, the enigmatic ruler of the city. It is a place where the word is mightier than the sword, where thought defines reality, where belief has the power to reshape worlds and change the laws of physics.

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Fantasy-Themed RTS From the Makers of X-COM

by Tom Price

MAGIC AND MAYHEM is fun and stimulating, but it may leave you hankering for something a bit more deeply satisfying. If all you want is a night of evil sorceresses, energy totems, and magic brownies, you can find it in this game (or in the personal section of your local weekly). But if you're looking for a more meaningful relationship, you might want to look somewhere else.

MAGIC AND MAYHEM is another game that mixes multiple genres (in this case real-time strategy and role-playing) into a hybrid that is unique at its best and shallow at its worst. You play as the young wizard Cornelius, summoning and conjuring your way through generic mythological lands that draw from Greek, Celtic, medieval, and other sources. A huge number of spells are available for you to make in your portmanteau by combining different artifacts found randomly throughout the levels—or sometimes gained as a reward for beating a boss—with mystical talismans purchased with your experience points. That's about as deep as the RPG elements get, however. Along the way you are aided by a mysterious raven named Hermes, who provides you with tips and clues to help move your quest along. Assistance also comes from your uncle Lucan, a more experienced wizard who fights alongside you with his own spells and creatures. He'll even cast a cure or bloodlust spell over you or one of your beasts in the heat of battle. The only really irksome thing about him is that he hogs the wizard is essentially what each level boils down to.

No RTS game is complete without a multiplayer mode, and while MAGIC AND MAYHEM makes a good effort to be complete and offer all the features you might want or need, with only two players over a LAN the lag is atrocious.

Even if hard-core real-time strategy and role-playing fans might feel shortchanged, MAGIC AND MAYHEM adds up to more than the sum of its parts. The game is a lot of fun, especially for someone like me who is faerie-phobic and gets bored building up defenses in STARCRACK, when he'd rather be putting together a tank rush. Throw in an esteemed pedigree (M&M was developed by the same guys who did X-COM) and incredibly weird claymation artwork, and you've got a strange and addictive game that's worth a look.

**Centaurs and Basilisks and Hellhounds, Oh My!**

Every level in MAGIC AND MAYHEM has its own strategy for combining spells and creatures to achieve victory, but there are a few monsters that come in handy in nearly every situation.

**Hellhounds:** These critters are great bodyguards. They're very tough and can paralyze enemies with a laser-like beam projected from their eyes. Add a bloodlust spell and the Excalibur spell and you've got a beast that makes Stephen King's Cujo look like that Taco Bell dog.

**Elves:** These little twinks aren't particularly tough, but they're quick, they don't cost much mana, and only the centaur has a better ranged attack. Employing a squad of these guys is usually the best way to take over a modestly defended Place of Power.

**Bats:** Always have a winged creature of some sort in your spell list—they can fly through windows and reach Places of Power behind locked doors. Bats are a good choice because they're cheap to produce.

**Brownies:** Because they're so damned cute.
the secret hides.
the truth consumes.

odi·um

n. def. - hate coupled with disgust

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

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Kingdom Come

TOTAL ANNIHILATION Gets a Fantasy Make-Over

by Thierry Nguyen

Two dead guys and a B movie helped me through TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS. Napoleon's flanking cavalry maneuvers served me well, especially when combined with Sun Tzu's wise words about terrain ("Those skilled in defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth; those skilled in attack maneuver in the highest heights of the sky"). But sometimes—particularly with a huge army of undead advancing toward my castle—I had to get a little more modern. Here I found myself relying on Bruce Campbell's eloquent line from the film Army of Darkness for motivation. "This is my boomstick," I would cry, and let fly with muskets and cannons upon the rotting horde.

Part cerebral, part brawl, TA: KINGDOMS carries on the fine real-time-strategy tradition Cavedog started two years ago.

ANNIHILATION. While the original game focused on a vague and uninteresting war between two robot factions, TA: KINGDOMS goes for a high-fantasy angle with a touch of King Lear. A powerful king divides his realm among his four children, then promptly disappears. A few hundred years later, the four children have split into two camps: one that emphasizes technology, the other relying on magic. One faction initiates an invasion, and the battle begins.

Cavedog developers should be commended for creating a much more interesting campaign than that of the original TOTAL ANNIHILATION. I barely played past the second mission in TA, but this time, I went through the entire campaign with pleasure. The stylized cut-scenes, monologues, and voices made the story seem a Ken Burns documentary at times. The missions themselves, while of the general "make camp and kill the opposition" type, have some variety sprinkled here and there. One has you enacting a daring prison break, while another places you in charge of a peasant revolt where you storm a castle and take control of a trebuchet.

Most notably, the game's campaign is large and continuous, shucking the conventional, episodic approach of games like STARCRAFT in favor of a more unique method. Instead of playing as one race throughout one campaign and then proceeding to another race and another campaign, in TA: KINGDOMS you constantly jump among all four factions during the game's 48 missions. This allows for some interesting angles on gameplay. In one scenario, you establish a beachhead. The very next scenario puts you in the opposition's shoes—your objective is to eliminate the freshly established beachhead. Although this is a great storytelling device, I can see how some gamers won't like it. You don't spend enough continuous time with any side in the battle. Just as you start to master tactics for one faction, the game switches you over to another.

I Know Why the Caged Demon Sings

Like TOTAL ANNIHILATION, KINGDOMS has 3D terrain and units. The terrain itself seems the...
He is coming.
Walking between worlds...
Traveling the road of souls from Liveside to Deadside...
And back again.
A dead man is coming, skull in one hand, 
flameau in the other...
a voodoo mask in his chest 
and lines of power in his back.
A possessed man is coming, 
stalking evil in tenements and deserts, 
subways and swamps, 
spirit world and real world.
Shadowman is coming...
To stop the Apocalypse.
To save your soul.

Shadow Man

Walk on the Deadside

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Infrastructure: The Final Frontier

Strategy Supreme—for Trekkers, at Least

by Keith Ferrell

Just how does the Federation work? What holds the Klingon Empire together? What are the Cardassians’ goals, or the Romulans’? What motivates the Ferengi?

Well, we know what motivates the Ferengi.

The economic underpinnings and infrastructure of the Star Trek universe have received relatively short shrift in the television series and in the movies, although, unlike Star Wars, those underpinnings are always present, and occasionally acknowledged. Whatever its conceptual flaws, Star Trek from the beginning sought to create a “real” universe, not a fairy tale. Diplomacy and politics in particular have figured largely in many (if not most) episodes, and technology’s impact on the universe’s cultures has been more than once a plot fulcrum. The arrival and impact of warp drive underlay a whole movie.

Now MicroProse gives us an ambitious and mostly successful attempt to show the inner workings of Trek’s five largest political entities, their interrelationships, the philosophies upon which they are built, and the infrastructures that support them.

It’s a tall order, and playing BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION imposes some hefty demands. Whether or not you feel like devoting the large amount of time the game requires probably will have more to do with how you feel about Star Trek than the actual game.

The game itself is attractively presented, with a variety of screens that range from menus of resource-management and construction options to wide-scale views of the galaxy complete with trade routes and empire signifiers. Each screen has multiple levels, each of which adds another degree of detail, another layer of data to be interpreted and managed. There is a lot of information here, and that’s one of the prime contributors to the game’s steep learning curve.

Start as one of the five bodies political that are central to the series—Federation, Klingon, Romulan, Cardassian, Ferengi. Each has its own skills, resources, and—this is important in the context of the series and the game—cultural tendencies. Those tendencies—Ferengi acquisition, Federation diplomacy, Klingon aggressiveness, and so forth—are reproduced within the game, up to a point.

Beginning with a single solar system, your task is to develop fleets for exploration, contact and diplomacy, and colonization. Simultaneously you must invest in technology and research, build structures and economic engines, monitor the size and morale of your population, and manage resources such as energy and finance. Resource management occupies much of your time in this turn-based game, although once you grow accustomed to the meanings of the various cursors, and the ways in which the various screens are layered one upon another, your efficiency tends to increase.

Still, even at the earliest stages, a turn takes a while, and I wouldn’t want to play too long without a pencil and paper close by for note jotting and reminders.

Dispatch a starship to explore the space around your home system. MicroProse has done a good job of giving a feel for the size of the galaxy—it takes a while (at least a turn, often more) to get anywhere. Once you’re there you may find a planet worth colonizing and developing, an alien race with whom you must negotiate or fight, or a physical anomaly that destroys your craft.

Journey to Babel

Contact with aliens further complicates your management responsibilities. Negotiations and alliances are crucial to success, and to the expansion of the empire. Negotiation and treaty implementation are better handled here than in many such games, and they occasionally approach a level of subtlety and nuance that approximates some of the relationships of the show.

Because the game starts in the earliest space-faring days of each empire, you get to experience first contact with aliens. This is nicely handled and contributes

continued on page 159
JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT THERE WERE NO MORE HEROES.
THINK AGAIN.

NEW EXPANSION PACK FEATURES...
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Strategy First
PC CD-ROM
continued from page 154

largely to the game's ability to communicate
that sense of exploration that was part of
Trek's stock-in-trade. Establishing commu-
cnication with a newly encountered species, whether
a familiar one from the series or a minor one, is
challenging and rewarding.

Your relationships with other species also
have an economic impact as you develop trade
routes and mutual economic dependencies.

But sometimes you have to fight (or, let's
face it, you choose to, even if your race is not
by nature warlike). Here's one of the weak
spots of the game. The tactical combat screens,
although attractive and well thought out,
seemed jarring to me. You can issue combat
orders to your fleet, then watch the orders

enacted. But because the overall game is so
dependently based on grand strategy, its tactical
aspects work as a distraction, if not an
afterthought. I quickly shifted to auto-combat
mode, letting the com-puter fight my battles. I
found the auto-combat function to be fair. (And,
to be fair, the tactical game is probably more
appealing in a multiplayer game.)

Soon you'll have
several systems humming or stuttering
along. At this point there will be so much
information and activity that you will have to
decide which tasks to focus on and which
decisions to make. You discover, as you progress,
how much or how little you care about the Star Trek
universe and its inhabitants.

Do You Grok Spock?
If you care a lot, this is a fine game. You can
drop for hours—hit hours—into the Star
Trek realm and have some fun there. The tactical
weaknesses are more than made up for by
the strategic strengths. You can come to feel

that you really are running one of the, er,
ter-prises of the Roddenberry-verse. And the game
does offer an effective vision of a galactic empire
in keeping with that of the TV series.

It's not, ultimately, a great science fiction
game. The Trek paraphernalia and framework
hold it back from fully projecting the kind of
freewheeling, galaxy-spanning sensibility that

good science fiction communicates so well. I

don't think Birth will displace Master of
Orion as the best of the space exploration,
resource, and trading games.

In short, Birth is ultimately more successful
as Trek than as either a game or science fic-
tion. But if it's Trek you want... engage!

CGW

TOTAL ANNihilation: KINGDOMS • REVIEW

continued from page 151

One of the problems with the original TOTAL
ANNihilation was that you couldn't really tell the
difference between the two sides. This time, the
four factions are unique in look and unit focus.
The Araxion (earth) faction has traditional
medieval/Air Force units like archers, cavalry,
and catapults, while its ally, Veruna (water), has
musketees, dirigibles, and the largest navy. Zion (air) has quick
flying units, and it's so mobile that it doesn't even
have standing structures for creating ships;
instead, mobile "builder" units generate troops.
Finally, Taros (fire) has the undead, along with
several mage units. While each faction has a
unique set of units, each can eventually conjure a
dragon, which is a great equalizer in just about
any battle. Finally, there is a random chance that
each faction's deity, an uber-unit of sorts that you
can control, will join any given battle.

One problem with the campaign is that the AI
is a bit erratic at times. The pathfinding is solid;
units usually get to their final destination, but
they tend to take long, alternate routes. Also, I
often found my men obliviously polishing their
muskets while yak-riding archers were firing at
them three feet away.

KINGDOMS deemphasizes resource manage-
ment, providing only one resource: mana. And it's
limited. You capture mana sites by placing
lode石头 on them, and there are mana sites you can
capture, the larger your mana pool becomes, which

makes your unit production more
efficient. In this RTS, resources take a
back seat to unit production and management.

Multiplayer consists of several
skirmish maps, along with some special
scripted scenarios like King of
the Hill and a beachhead invasion.

Once you get tired of these, you can
use the included map editor to cre-
ate your own scenarios.

My Kingdom
for a Horse

TA KINGDOMS does have some
significant problems, however. First
off, it's a system hog. On a Pentium
110MHz with 128MB of RAM, I saw
noticeable frame-rate drops at
800x600. On a 100MHz with 64MB, I had to drop
the game down to 640x480 to make it playable.

Also, while the manual is a vast improvement
over that of the previous game, it still falls a bit
short. It focuses too much on the back-story
while leaving out important details. There's no
explanation of how to use the different forma-
tions, and the multiplayer section is extremely
weak. It would have been nice to know that you
need to establish teams before a game starts, a
requirement that in and of itself is discouraging.
Not allowing in-game alliances is also annoying.
Another design limitation is the lack of unit
sounds. I like hearing a unique voice acknow-
ledge my commands for each unit. While each unit
does have a unique sound, the game tends to
use a universal chime as an acknowledgment
response. The hero units in the single-player cam-
paign have nice stats and names, but they lack
personality, because they chime and beep rather
than bark out a personal reply every time you
order them around.

All in all, though, TA: KINGDOMS is an excellent
RTS that distinguishes itself from most games in
this crowded subgenre. It's just not the must-buy
that its predecessor or STARCR AFT was.
Marred Masterpiece
A Good Sequel, but Not Up to the Original Classic

by Jim Cobb

The original OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR won CGW's Best Wargame award because it was a wonderful study of 20th-century warfare and surprisingly enjoyable for such a complex game. The OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II (ART II) brings the series from WWII to the beginning of the next century, and it chronicles the changing effects of increasingly lethal technology on the modern battlefield. In particular, ART II's clever depiction of the concept of air mobility deftly shows the major difference between WWII and modern fighting, with the helicopter finally getting its due in a computer wargame.

No Battle Vacuum Here
Like its predecessor, ART II shines in its variety of scale and locations. Battles are fought in rugged mountain ranges, burning deserts, and lush jungles, complete with appropriate meteorological effects. These battles are not fought in vacuums. They interact with events happening elsewhere and include not only third-party intervention but also the use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Three hundred and thirty weapon systems are provided in all, allowing scenario makers free rein to create or modify conflicts around the globe. Units and forces are modified by many factors: readiness, proficiency, supply, experience, force cooperation, and morale are key to engagements in which a small band of professionals can hold off many times their number.

For those who like their games fast and easily digestible, ART II's standard mode eliminates such details as specific unit orders, supply, target and traffic density, and fog of war. On the other hand, if you want to blow up your own bridges, assign your own air units, or spice up the game with random events, you're better off playing the advanced game, though it requires a lot of attention to detail on your part.

Given the apparent simplicity of just right-clicking on a target to get a combat menu, you might want to ignore the analysis function. Yet you do so at your own peril, because the depth of the combat system makes simple odds calculations misleading. For instance, a company of regular infantry in a hilly forest can give a pure armor battalion more than it can handle. Reviewing terrain effects, proficiency, and supply modifiers will give you a better clue about whether to assault all-out or by some probing attacks first.

Tarnish on the Barrel
Combat resolution in ART II is much more detailed than in the original, with a set sequence of bombardment, antiaircraft, and antipersonnel conflict. Instead of lumping all attack and defense factors into one combat resolution, antiaircraft and antipersonnel attacks are now calculated per weapon and per target. Antiaircraft weapons also undergo to-hit and to-kill rolls; this helps rectify anomalies in ART I, in which large units occasionally suffered unusually high casualties.

The game's 13 scenarios cover three Arab-Israeli wars, Vietnam, and seven hypothetical operations. Four of the more detailed scenarios require that you launch them with the OPART2 300.exe file, which is a problem if you don't have the patch installed. Too bad the designers didn't set up this process so that it could be performed seamlessly at will can be frustrating. The graphics—mediocre in the original—are serviceable at best a year later.

More of a concern is that ART II shipped with so many bugs. We expect patches for minor flaws, and we even welcome them when they represent player-suggested upgrades. Putting unplayable scenarios on the market, however, creates an atmosphere of mistrust. Don't get me wrong; THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II is still a good game, the best of its kind on the market. But works of art, alas, weren't meant to be rushed out the door. Get the patch...
SOMEBEERE, GEORGE HAD MADE A MISTAKE. His Catalan opening had been flawless. Yet, somehow, his opponent had forced his retreat and now held him in check. With his only remaining rook lured out of position and pinned, the situation appeared hopeless. This isn’t Chessmaster, he thought, there is no replay option in this game. His mind raced back to the magnificent chess sets of Chessmaster. The lessons learned. The gambits and endgame strategies. The Chessmaster opponents against whom he had matched wits and sharpened his game, as he progressed through tutorials in various levels. The voice of the Chessmaster, coaching him. And suddenly, in his hour of need, he heard the voice again: “Counterattack in the center... N-Q4.” Why hadn’t he seen it before?

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During the game, press Backspace, then enter any of the following cheat codes:

- **Code**: Effect
  - brenando: gain tech bonus
  - donttitt: instant death
  - drop a beat: turns display wavy
  - fps: toggles frame-rate counter
  - iamobi: you play as Oh-Wan Kenobi
  - lampanaka: you play as Captain Panaka
  - iamqueen: you play as Queen Amidala
  - iamplugon: you play as Qui-Gon Jinn
  - i really stink: sets game on easy level
  - kill me now: just what it sounds like
  - rex: toggles red outline on menu boxes
  - where is gurshick: runs credits

MIDTOWN MADNESS
These cheats must be entered in the command line where you installed MIDTOWN MADNESS (don't forget the hyphens!):

- **Code**: Effect
  - allcars: gives you access to all cars
  - allrace: gives you access to all races

F-22 LIGHTNING 3
The F-22 design team betrays its interest in a certain pair of fictional FBI agents with the following cheat codes. To use these codes, hit Ctrl-Enter, then type in the appropriate phrase, and hit Enter again.

- **Code**: Effect
  - black oil: replenishes aircraft
  - fight the future: replenishes current ammo
  - ghostpit: turns plane invisible
  - i want to believe: you won't crash
  - the truth is out there: gives unlimited ammo
  - this isn't happening: repairs damage
  - trust no one: turns aircraft invisible

ROLLER COASTER TYCOON
Want to add a little extra something to spice up your roller-coaster designs? Here are a few suggestions, courtesy of designer Chris Sawyer.

How about positioning a corkscrew so that it twists over a footpath? Nearby guests will be fascinated by it, and riders will get an extra thrill.

Building a pair of racing roller coasters is an obvious idea, but there are many ways to make it a bit more interesting. Here, the two tracks twist over and around each other by using a pair of parallel corkscrews. Perhaps an even better variation of this would be to have the tracks running in opposite directions, and timing the trains so they pass each other on the corkscrews.
TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS

Aramon
1. Scout early and often. While you might be able to stop an early attack with Elsin alone you still have to see it coming.
2. Use defensive structures sparingly. They are very expensive, and cheaper mobile units do the same job.
3. Don’t build a trebuchet until you’re ready. It’s a big investment, so create defenses first, a trebuchet later.
4. Remember the titan’s armor radius. One titan in a group of mage archers will make a big difference.
5. Resurrect everything possible. And grab every corpse you see.

Taros
1. Play defensively. Taros is the slowest race, and picking fights is usually a bad idea.
2. Use only caged demons on hilltops. They will stand a better chance of hitting air targets.
3. Build walls around the mage tower. One layer of walls around a mage tower will stop all melee attacks and many ballistic attacks.
4. Build either a cabal or an abyss. Rarely will you need both factories at once.
5. Baby-sit your powerful magic users. The weather witch, the fire mage, and the mind mage are weak, but very effective. Try adding one of these to a group of blade demons.

Zhon
1. Combine your stone giants and shamans. This makes for one of the most effective Zhon assault forces.
2. Rush to build a few harpies. Then concentrate on building your infrastructure. While your units are building, micromanage these harpies and capture enemy units. Harass the enemy with his own forces and maybe secure an enemy builder.
3. Zhon are mobile, so think dynamically. Queue up your builders to build toward your enemy. This allows your troops to get to the front lines faster.
4. Stone giants and death totems can take out enemy air assaults. But they must be concentrated, so use them around divine lodestones.
5. In the early game, use thirsha to claim manasites. As the game progresses and you lose thirsha, attack other enemy positions and gain their manasites.

Veruna
1. If a map has water, control it. The Veruna have incredible power at sea, so utilize it to augment your land-based forces.
2. Amazon knights are weak in small numbers. But they can be devastating in groups of 10 to 20.
3. When taking on enemy flying units, use the cannon tower. This unit will survive a third-weapon attack and cause tremendous damage to thirsha and dragons.

4. Mortars are great for base and wall defense. Build a wall and place a mortar behind it. This will give your wall towers good backup and force your enemy to either fly over or breach your wall.
5. In the endgame, create a circle of pillar-of-light structures. Then land your dragon in the middle of the circle to heal, while his mana recharges.

— Courtesy of Cavedog

Who says all roller coasters have to start with a lift hill? Here's a design (right) that cleverly uses a cliff face to allow the train to go straight out of the station into a steep, twisted drop. The lift hill on this design is actually underground, at the end of the ride.

Don’t be afraid to use the same area of land for several different rides. Here's a selection of rides (right) all built through, under, and over each other. Some of them also dive underground, providing even more excitement for the riders.

Here (left), a large upward helix leads into a tighter downward helix inside the first one.
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“Spider, get your team around that MG’s flank and nail that gunner!” he barks. Spider sends his four-man team quickly into position. Their fire surprises the enemy. Now it is they who know fear.

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# CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This monthly poll represents our readers' choices for their favorite games. **Breed War**, **Half-Life**, and **NHL Hockey** continue to dominate the chart, but **Heroes III** is coming on strong.

## Top 100

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<th>#</th>
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Who Owns Online Games?

Virtual Property and Online Community Define the Future

For me, the most exciting aspect of this year's Electronic Entertainment Exposition (E3) was seeing that I might not have been as crazy with regard to the future of online gaming as I was beginning to think I was. For years, I've been saying that online gaming will create new communities where gamers will have a larger stake in "owning" and "customizing" a part of the game. I even coined a word for such communities: I called them "cyburbs." The support for not using this neologism is overwhelming. Yet, we're beginning to see a glimpse of what I believed they would become—virtual refuges where individuals would find kindred souls.

Ironically, it seems to have been Ultima Online, the persistent world that many of us castigated from its initial launch, that turned the tide. Enough fans of the great role-playing series were willing to turn cold hard cash into virtual gold that UO not only defined a profitable business model to a company (Electronic Arts) which felt online profits were many years away, but also created a gold rush in virtual property. Recent sales of UO accounts on eBay for hundreds and, in at least one case, over a thousand dollars indicates that there is perceived value in owning property, prestige and privilege in a virtual world. Why? It was largely because Lord British and the UO team understood the value of letting people build what they wanted to build and do what they wanted to do. They also understood the value of not taking those custom artifacts away from the gamers once they'd worked for them. From the improved first age through the much-improved Ultima Online: The Second Age, the world became very real to a lot of people.

At E3, the principle is being extended. Electronic Arts has proved that they understand the value of such a community and such custom ownership of virtual property with an upcoming release from the Need for Speed team. Motor City takes the hot rods of the '50s, '60s and '70s and allows you to buy, sell, and customize your own virtual street machines. You can join virtual car clubs and spend a good deal of time betting virtual cash or racing for pins (therein giving up possession of your virtual hot rod to another player). You can paint your car with a custom paint job or sell a custom paint job to another player via an online auction a la eBay. In short, the team has wisely given hot rod fans a reason to keep coming back to the online world. As in UO, the Motor City designers understand what it takes to get you emotionally and economically committed to a game world. EA isn't the only big company to see the light, however. Microsoft is building persistent worlds. We're talking about Shadowrun's Call before. It is a 3D fantasy role-playing game that enables you to dabble in politics and recruit vessels. It has the basic appeal of a UO with a lot of extra nuances with regard to the social system and prestige system. If fantasy isn't your thing, they've got a science-fiction angle on the persistent world/universe gambit.

Chris Roberts, designer of the Wing Commander series, has struck gold again (and much more exciting. I'm looking forward to the implementation of new ways to customize games, innovative new virtual economies, and new communities. Community, customization and continuity are the keys to more robust, interesting and lucrative games in the future. I just wonder what will happen to our "real" lives when the "cyburbs" (some people never give up) seem both more real and satisfying than our everyday lives.

Recent sales of Ultima Online accounts on eBay for hundreds of dollars indicates that there is perceived value in owning property, prestige and privilege in a virtual world.
Battle lines are being drawn.

We're on your side.

Conserve your resources. You're gonna need 'em. On August 29, the battle for the future begins. And at our Every Day Low Prices, you might think of us as your first ally.

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Long Live Sims
A Look Forward and a Farewell

I received a lot of feedback about my "Sims Are Dead" column in the July issue of CGW. To those who decided not to upgrade their systems out of fear of flying no sims coming down the pike, go ahead and empty out that PC. As you'll see from our feature section this month, there are actually quite a few coming down the pike during the rest of '99 and into Y2K. The drought will continue later in 2000 and probably continue into 2001. But even then there will be a number of sims to choose from, just not in the quantities we've grown used to over the past couple of years.

I did receive a response from a respected flight sim developer. "Read your column. Dead-on," he said, "especially the observation on the cyclical nature of this biz. Success breeds imitation and competition, which breed cannibalization, which breeds bad business, which breeds drop-out, which breeds opportunity, which breeds renewed success." Sometimes it sucks to be right.

The Niche Syndrome

According to the industry insider quoted above, the coming drought is in many ways a result of the success of simulations. Back around 1995, after the last dry spell, a few sims hit the market and enjoyed great success. "Then came everyone," he said. "Now the pie has been sliced so thin that no one can make money. There's a shake-out and people are dropping like flies. Guess what comes next?"

The problem is that the market is oversaturated—while flight sims are popular, there's not a big enough market for seven different Ww II European flight sims to all make money. Like it or not, the flight-sim audience is a niche market—with rare exceptions, a successful sim can be expected to sell about 150,000 copies. And that's in a market that's not overcrowded with games. In current conditions, we find award-winning simulations such as EUROPA\N\N AIR WAR end up as commercial failures.

So are we doomed to endlessly repeat this boom/bust cycle? If things don't change, we are. And toroducing newbies to the genre. If you have game-playing friends who haven't flown a sim, no matter how good FLANKER 2.0 is, all that game is going to do is send them scurrying back to the simplicity of QUAKE III. Embrace the simple sims, and promote them to friends. Start your friends in a World War II sim, or one of the simpler jet sims, and help bring them up to speed. Share the love, people.

Responsibility also rests with game developers. It's time to step back and rethink the typical simulation design model. Today we have the "starter" sims, such as the entertaining, if fluffy, Novologic games; JETFIGHTER III, one of the best intros into sim designs of recent years; and the those missions good enough to justify buying the game. The mainstream missions will bring in the novices, and if they have enough fun, they'll move on to the realistic campaign. All it will take is a mainstream hit to show folks they don't need to be afraid of sims and perhaps we won't be a niche anymore.

This isn't an unreasonable pipe dream, either. JANE'S A-10 WARTHOG has a ramp-up campaign much like that described above. Sims' upcoming KAS2 TEAM ALLIGATOR defaults to an easy-to-fly mode no more challenging than COMANCHE 3, but has a wide variety of realism options that can be cranked up to appeal to all but the most anal of hard-core sim fans.

It's time for an attitude adjustment, hard-core sim fans.

Flying Into the Sunset

One sim-related thing you won't see in the future is my frighteningly large forehead gracing the pages of CGW. After four and a half years, this is my last column for the magazine, as I'm moving on to an exciting opportunity elsewhere. But I'll always remain close to CGW. After all, it's a great group of guys who really know their stuff—friends as well as co-workers. That, and Jeff Green still owes me $19.50.

So, sim fans, keep the faith, and spread the word. The future of sims is in your hands!

Denny may be flying off into the sunset, but you can still write him at donnayatkin@hotmail.com. And anyone jealous of Denny's cable modem can share our vengeful glee in knowing he's moving to a snowy land of 56K connections.
GREENSPEAK

Your Ultimate Strategy Guide

How to Win Every Game, Every Time, No Matter What

people often ask me, as I roam the Earth, how I can be so amazingly great at computer games. I'm afraid I have no definitive answer. It's kind of like asking Mozart how he was able to compose all that phat music.

Call it genetics; call it natural selection; call it fate itself. But someone like me comes along only once in a generation. Such is the nature of life, and better for you not to question, lest you lose the will—understandably—to proceed with your own more mortal existence.

Though I can't teach you how to be like me, I can at least set you on the path toward better gaming. No, it won't put you anywhere near my league—any more than studying music theory would make you the next Ricky Martin—but it can help to make you at least somewhat more worthy fodder for true players such as myself.

Here then, are just a few of my most successful techniques. Note that these and much more will also be available in my upcoming series of inspirational videotapes and interactive CD-ROMs, available through my Web site at a reasonable price. (And while you're at it, be sure to check out my Ta-Bo Sweatin' the Oldies workout video as well.)

1. Cow and camp.

When playing a multiplayer deathmatch game like Quake 3, never forget the Greenspeak Golden C&C™ rule: Cow and camp. Remember, if you're hiding, they can't find you, and if they can't find you, they can't frag you. Nothing makes a multiplayer game more rewarding than spending the entire time in a dark corner hiding from all the other players, calmly sniping at people from long distance. Not only is it personally satisfying, but other players will respect you for your wise, evasive strategy. Camping by respawn points and picking off defenseless players as they enter the game is another surefire way to up your frag count and earn a reputation as the kind of take-no-prisoners gamer that others will fear.

2. Pretend to suck.

This is perhaps my favorite and most often-employed strategy. Lull your opponents into a false sense of security by pretending to be incompetent. Then, when their guard is completely down, go in for the kill. I have been using this strategy to particular effectiveness in my ongoing Age of Empires battles against my friend Juliet. For a full year now, I have cleverly managed to lose every single game we've played, in a variety of "dumb" ways, all on purpose, so that she thinks I suck, as all as part of my plan to beat her badly in the coming year. Note that this is a tactic that requires patience, cunning, and creativity, as I must constantly learn new ways to pretend to be bad, such as letting lions eat my catapults, or forgetting to build any military units. Unbeknownst to her, of course, such embarrassing "tactics" are happening on purpose, so that when I do finally beat her, the victory will be that much sweeter. Sure she's "winning" now, but what hollow victories they are! Soon Juliet will discover what it is to truly be beaten by a master of the long-term strategy.

3. Don't get bogged down by "rules."

Nothing can mess up your gaming—and winning—experience more than an overreliance on rules and instructions. Flight sim, for example, are notorious for including all sorts of extraneous, intimidating material, such as 50-pound manuals, keyboard overlays, and the like, in an attempt to "help" you. Take it from me, you can just toss that stuff out. All those controls and buttons and dials do you see in the cockpit? Not important. Don't bother learning esoteric flying terms like yoke and wingman and landing gear. The most enjoyable way to get through these games is to simply grab the joystick, hit the throttle, and let 'er rip. True, you might not necessarily carry off some of the more advanced maneuvers such as "getting airborne" (whatever that means), but, as you zoom around the runway, out of control, in circles, you'll most likely so befuddle the other players that they'll resign and start a new game without you—thus leaving you with another default victory!

4. Play people worse than you.

If, in the worst-case scenario, you find yourself in a serious gaming slump—like, say, losing to the same person in Age of Empires for a year straight—you may want to simply regroup and start playing people who, if you can find them, suck worse than you do. My most common strategy along these lines is to seek out certain types of opponents, who, barring a rare occurrence of dumb luck, will almost certainly lose. Current favorites include blind people, toddlers in the three-to-five age range (who, I've happily discovered, really suck at games like Alpha Centauri), and small animals. Once you get a few of these victories under your belt, your ego will soar and you can once again climb the ladder as a Gaming God.

5. Disconnect when the going gets bad.

Finally, if, on that rarest of occasions, you find yourself actually losing a game (not on pur-

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