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Choose from over 100 different spells and weapons to create cunning spell combinations and devious strategies.

TRUE VISION
This innovative true line of sight system creates a level of suspense and excitement no gamer can resist.

INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS
Unlike most other games in the genre, you can actually move objects around, block passages and break walls down.

TRAPS
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Your choices also include:

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- prostitutes
- sub-girls
- bondage dancers
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- demons
- chots
- high priests
- welders
- nuclear workers
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- gun commanders
- dwarfs
- pimps
- lickers
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- monsters and animals
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- Use the right tool for the job. 20+ weapons to choose from, including rocket-propelled harpoons, needle guns, lasers, trip mines, rocket launchers, grenades, and flame throwers.
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COVER STORY

Five Games That Will Change Gaming

We've seen the future of gaming, and it's beyond bright: stunning graphics, incredible storytelling, ambitious online features, and gameplay that will rewrite the book on what games can do. These are the five games every gamer absolutely must know about.

FEATURES

Blasts From the Past

Sure, the future of gaming looks great, but we still want to play our old favorites -- with 3D cards, better AI, and killer sound. So we compiled this list of 10 classic games that cry out to be remade and the people we think should do the work.

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You were not born noble, but your destiny is to reign as king.

+ Command your knights in menacing formations.
+ Dominate the world’s marketplaces.
+ Embody the spirits of William Wallace, Saladin, Barbarossa, Joan of Arc, and Genghis Khan.
+ Listen to monks speak of thirteen unique warriors and civilizations, all in their own dialects.
+ Achieve victory through conquest, economic stranglehold, or exploration.
+ Find more glory at www.microsoft.com/games/age2

Microsoft
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- Interplay Announces ICEWIND, Follow-up to BALDUR'S GATE
- Big Computer Game Announcements at Gen Con
- An X-COM Play-by-Email Game?

Plus News; The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly; and the stunning debut of Mr. Sneaky.

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A kajillion gigawops of spasm-inducing game demos!

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System Shock 2
Mig Alley
Revenant
Midtown Madness
Shadowman
Seven Kingdoms 2
Driver
NBA Inside Drive
Use the Terrain to Your Advantage:
Battle on land, air and sea. Hold off enemies by controlling vital chokepoints and set up ambushes under jungle canopies.

Choose Your Allegiance:
Defend the privileged few as the hi-tech Jovian Detention Authority or take up arms against the establishment with the revolutionaries, Spawlers.

Command a Battlefield:
Fight from a traditional RTS view or zoom into the fray. Intel’s Multi Resolution Mesh technology delivers fast frame rates from any viewpoint.

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LONG ENOUGH.

Recent RTS games have shown a surprising lack of innovation—using the same flat 2-D maps and sprite-based units that their predecessors did years ago. But that’s all about to change. Your suffering is about to come to an end. Welcome to the new generation of warfare.

Welcome to *Dark Reign* 2.

“*Dark Reign* 2 looks set to take a commanding lead among the next wave of real-time strategy titles.”

— Gamespot
Control where you want to go and what missions you will fly – Develop allies and enemies as you make crucial decisions that will impact the outcome of the game.

Experience furious space-fighter combat with innovative new weapons including rail-guns, blast torpedoes, remote detonation mines and "Weapons of Last Resort".

Customize, upgrade and fly up to 10 distinct fighters – each with its own cockpit and unique combat characteristics.

Fly cooperatively with other mercenaries or go Head-To-Head against over 120 other pilots via NovaWorld.

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Explore a vast universe composed of 7 diverse regions.

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OWN BOSS

You’re JAKE LOGAN, intergalactic bad-ass and one of the best mercenary pilots in the Sol system. Framed by a powerful mega-corporation and banished to the lawless FRINGE of colonized space, you’ve got to rebuild your ship and your life by the only means you know how – as a gun-for-hire. Get ready for the most intense space-combat adventure ever created.

TACHYON THE FRINGE

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- Play major Allied bombing campaigns like Big Week, Overlord I & II and Avalanche
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Pretty Fly for a PC Guy

"I am way too cool for this," I snarkily thought to myself as I shuffled into the 1999 Classic Games Expo in Las Vegas, Nevada. But wait a second. As I sat down and listened to panel after panel of celebrity video game designers talking about their greatest and worst moments, and as I chatted up the attendees at this decidedly non-schmoozy event, I realized the sad truth. In 1967 or '89, if you had asked anyone who was into the Atari 2600 and Intellivision what they thought of gamers who played on the Vic-20 or the Commodore 64 or even the snobbish Apple II, you probably would have heard one word consistently. That word is not "cool"—it's "geek.

Regardless of platform or coolness factor, I was still amongst my kind at the Plaza hotel in downtown Las Vegas. Here, I could talk about that week when I had Tron dreams on a nightly basis to people who understood. And I could also spend some highly pleasurable time with some of the guys—like David Crane and Garry Kitchen—responsible for some of the most innovative game design the industry has ever seen.

In '84 or '89, if you asked anyone who was into the Atari 2600 and Intellivision what they thought of gamers who played on the Vic-20 or the Commodore 64 or even the snobbish Apple II, you probably would have heard one word consistently...geek.

Even though the Classic Gaming Expo centered mostly on video game systems and coin-op arcade games, it got the CGW editors thinking about the history of our little niche, and the most influential gaming experiences we've had. This month's cover story details five games we think will eventually become significant chapters in this history. And given our misty-eyed nostalgic experience in Las Vegas, we decided to turn one of our favorite lunchtime "discussions"—what classic computer games we wish someone in the gaming industry would remake—into our second feature story.

The end result of all this is a warm fuzzy issue of Computer Gaming World that we're all very proud of. Here's hoping you feel the love.

Want to wax nostalgic with George? Wax on, at george_jones@ztd.com. CGW

George Jones
Your Past is a Lie, Your Future is in Jeopardy, and You’re 35,000 Light Years From Home.

Kharak, a barren wasteland orbiting an insignificant star, has been our home for ages. It is a planet as old as our memory.

But recent genetic research suggests that we are different from all other forms of life on Kharak. Then came the discovery: an ancient tablet long hidden in the Great Banded Desert, buried within the wreckage of a half-destroyed spacecraft. ‘We must now acknowledge the inescapable truth — we are aliens to this world.

This ancient rune set our civilization on a path leading straight into the heart of the galaxy. Construction began 60 years ago on the giant Mothership that will carry thousands of our race into the unknown. In the depth of space, our enemies await our return.

The journey begins now...

“Homeworld should rewrite the rules to the real-time strategy genre”
- Gamecenter.com

“Homeworld is set to explode the RTS genre like a fiery supernova”
- CNN.com

Prepare to adjust your strategy as you navigate your Armada through an infinite 3D battlefield where the enemy can attack from any point in space.

Unparalleled ship detail and intense artificial intelligence bring each dogfight to life, as turrets track their targets independently and pilots adjust their flight tactics mid-battle.

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From Their New Album THE LADDER

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Missing Wrath

Don't get shafted! If you want to play the classic Romulan episode "Balance of Terror," you'll have to buy STARFLEET COMMAND from Interplay. I recently bought a copy of STARFLEET COMMAND. On the way home I glanced through the manual at scenarios. "Cool," I noted. "The Wrath of Khan scenario. That'll be awesome!"

So I got home, eager to try myself out against Khan's "genetically engineered intellect," but when I loaded the scenarios, no Wrath of Khan. "Okay," I said. "It's probably out on their Web site." There, I find out that if you purchase the game from them, you get a disk with "Balance of Terror," the old classic Romulan episode from the first series, as well as "Wrath of Khan" and two others. Well, I called them up, ready to pay a few bucks extra to get that disk, but they told me that it was unavailable unless purchased directly from them. They also said that they would NEVER release these scenarios for the game on their Web site, or even on a future scenario disk. That means, from now until eternity, I shall never be able to play "Balance of Terror" or the "Wrath of Khan" unless I order them from Interplay.

This is now a major inconvenience, as I must return the old game to Electronics Boutique, order from them, pay more for the game than the standard market price, and pay shipping as well. For long-time Trekkers like myself, "Wrath of Khan" and "Balance of Terror" are must-haves. I think you need to alert customers to this dirty trick on the part of Interplay, that they have no choice; they must either purchase direct from Interplay, or no "Balance of Terror" or "Wrath of Khan" from now until Judgment Day.

Dezso Janos Bartha

Kingpinheads

My father and I recently went to the computer store to purchase the newly released KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME. He was fine with the Mature rating and knew about the extreme violence that was supposedly in the game. When we got to the store the salespeople who are supposed to be selling us the game acted as though they did not want us to buy it. They told my father that there were incredibly graphic rape scenes that involved 12-year-old girls. My father and I were shocked at this fact and stormed out of there. My question is: Is what the sales people were telling us all true or were they bending the truth?

Zack Epchar

Your salesperson was either moralist or misinformed. There are no rape scenes amidst the grime and gore, but it's definitely not a game for young players.

Bot Shots

This is directed to game manufacturers' current trend of multiplayer-only games. I do not want to "hone my skills" against bots before I play online. Not all of us play online, and I think some big upcoming games are screwing the single player (you know who you are-id EA, etc.). I've enjoyed many of your games in the past, you know, when a single-player game was included. I understand online gaming is huge. But I don't think it's fair if you want to play a certain game that you have only one choice. I'll also bet there are a lot of people out there that feel the same way. Perhaps the sales of the games will reflect this. At least currently, I'm not limited to "honoring my skills against bots."

Tony Pilasiewicz

Guerilla Tactics

I just read Jim Cobb's review of THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II (September, pg. 160) and I had to chime in. In the review he states, "And how guerrillas, no matter how feisty, can hold out against large, well-supported regulars is a mystery to me." Don't feel like you are alone. I'm sure Lyndon Johnson, General Westmoreland, and Robert McNamara felt the same way about the Vietcong.

Jeff Traylor

More Answers to Life's Tough Questions

Your magazine is always informative and a pleasure to read. It's also heartening to notice that you agree with me on two of the answers to life's tough decisions, namely brunettes and Guinness, which, when paired together, makes for an interesting evening... Newcastle Brown Ale will do in a pinch, but brunettes are tough to replace. Here's to continued success and more buxom female vampire covers.

Kurt Schulz
Benton Harbor, Michigan

Target Practice

Since you have been a little hard on yourselves lately about contributing to society, just thought you should know that Computer Gaming World does have some social value. After I read the magazine, I let my son have it. He loves looking at it. In fact, we are using it as a potty training aid, by letting him look at it only when he sits on the potty. He is an avid computer gamer already at four.

Allen Brimm
Doha, Qatar
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FOX SPORTS INTERACTIVE™
Look for Soldier of Fortune this Holiday Season.
Screen shots courtesy of Raven Software.

The "kill-zone" as seen by a standard 350 dpi mouse.

The "kill-zone" as seen by the 3000 dpi Razer Boomslang.

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raze your d.p.i.

[dead player index]

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Interplay Unveils Next Fantasy RPG

ICEWIND DALE A Dungeon Romp Using BALDUR'S GATE Engine

Interplay just unveiled its plans for the next RPG set in the AD&D Forgotten Realms universe, and no, it's not BALDUR'S GATE 2.

— not this time. You'll probably hear more about that sometime soon, but in the meantime, Interplay hopes to satisfy your AD&D jones with ICEWIND DALE, an action-oriented dungeon romp set in the northernmost tip of the Forgotten Realms.

Due early next year, ICEWIND DALE uses Bioware's BALDUR'S GATE engine, but is going to go heavier on the action and lighter on the plot, a la DIABLO. "We looked at what it took to make BALDUR'S GATE, and what people liked," said Chris Parker, the game's producer (and in-house producer on both BALDUR'S GATE and the TALES OF THE SWORD COAST expansion). "We thought we could probably do a very fun and exciting, more action-based RPG. Since PLANESCAPE: TORMENT (Interplay's other big AD&D RPG now in development) is a hardcore, quest- and story-based RPG, we thought it would be cool to make a lighter game that was more action-based, and we realized we could do it with the BALDUR'S GATE engine."

The game is going to take place entirely underground in a series of dungeons, with a variety of environments, including snowy nordic regions, volcanic areas, and steamy jungle. The game's monsters will be up to four times bigger than the biggest creatures (the wyverns) in BALDUR'S GATE.

According to Parker, ICEWIND DALE will still feature numerous quests and subquests, but the emphasis this time will be much more on combat and character building, rather than storytelling. As such, the current plan is to let characters reach Level 12 or 13 — much higher than in the original BALDUR'S GATE.

"This will be a classic dungeon crawl," said Parker. "In fact, that was the first tentative name for the game. The main focus will be going after cool items and spells and leveling up."

One cool feature for serious role-players is that the game will be entirely party-based;
you'll be able to generate your whole party of six characters from scratch at the game's beginning. Black Isle is making minor tweaks to the game engine — such as speed improvements for character movement — but in general is not fusing with it.

"We're basically just generating content and building tons of levels," said Parker. "We're not monkeying with BioWare's engine. We're taking what we can from their wisdom." The game will incorporate the AD&D 2nd Edition rules, rather than the just-announced 3rd Edition rules, mainly due to timing.

"Rewriting the rules inside the game engine would require a gutting of the engine, and we don't want to do that," he said. "The payoff might not be enough at this point."

Finally, gamers should know that there is no overlap with BALDUR'S GATE at all in ICEWIND DALE. You won't be able to import your BG characters, nor will there be any characters from the earlier game appearing in the new game. It's a brand-new experience.

Can ICEWIND DALE compete in the ever-growing action-RPG field — especially with DIABLO 2 due to ship about the same time? With the AD&D license and the popular BALDUR'S GATE engine, it has a better chance than most. We'll bring you more on this game as it gets closer to completion.

— Jeff Green

---

**Reality Check**

There are a lot of really great games on this month's list, as evidenced by the high number of editors' choice awards. Just to balance things out, we included BEATDOWN. Here's our roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system. • Yellow indicates an editors' choice game.

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**15**

**Nov/Dec 1984**

It was 15 years ago this month that CGW reviewed F-15 STRIKE EAGLE, a landmark game for two reasons: First, it was one of the first attempts at a serious flight sim on a personal computer and second, it was the virtual game design voyage of a young guy named Sid Meier. Meier would leave flight sim behind for strategy games, but the mark made by F-15 would remain for years to come. So novel was the flight sim concept that our review actually spoiled the fact that you could bank, roll, dive, and even do maneuvers like a Split-S. Ooohh! And we raved over the fact that there were both air and ground targets to shoot at, even though the ground targets were colored triangles on an endless sea of green. We've come a long way, baby.

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**5**

**November 1994**

The first-person action craze kicked into high gear in the Fall of '94. We were gaga over DOOM II, and aghast at the first wave of DOOM rip-offs that every game company and their cousins were madly churning out. Among the first wave of "DOOM Toos" were piles of trash like ISLE OF THE DEAD, OPERATION BODY COUNT, and THE FIGHTING DR. J. With these, there were some winners in the bunch, like Interplay's DESCENT, LucasArts' DARK FORCES, and our pick for the best DOOM Too — HERETIC.
Were you getting jiggly with it August 5th-8th? The gaming geeks — and we include ourselves — sure were.

Over 57,000 attendees, all but three wearing black XXXL t-shirts, broke records at the four-day GenCon convention in Milwaukee, hosted by Wizards of the Coast. There were quite a few computer game companies showing their wares in addition to all of the pen-and-paper games, collectible card games, board games, and miniatures games that were on display and being played.

The big non-computer game announcement actually tied in to computer gaming. Wizards of the Coast and their subsidiary TSR announced that Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition rules were under development, and will be released at next year's GenCon. This led into two big computer game announcements.

First, SSI officially announced POOL OF RADIANCE 2 and showed a brief clip; it will be a single-player, party-based game. In addition, Interplay and Bioware announced and showed off NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, Bioware's next Forgotten Realms game, following their massively successful BALDUR'S GATE. This game looks like it could be huge (see our sneak preview in this issue). Both games are Q4 2000 releases and will use 3rd Edition D&D rules.

Gathering Of Game Companies

- Sony and Verant, makers of EVERQUEST, officially debuted SOVEREIGN, a massively multiplayer real-time strategy game. Games can be played with as few as four players and as many as 500. Verant was also showing off the EVERQUEST expansion, the RUINS OF KUNARK.
- Haobo Interactive and Microprose were showing DIPLOMACY, RISK 2, and MAJESTY. We were intrigued by MAJESTY and went back to play it several times. It looks like an RTS fantasy game but plays like a god game.
- Activision was running all of their Star Trek games along with VAMPIRE and SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. VAMPIRE continues to look terrific, with more levels and characters since it was last shown at E3.
- Sierra was showing BABYLON 5, HOMEWORLD, PHARAOH, and GABRIEL KNIGHT 3. Jane Jensen, designer of all the GABRIEL KNIGHT games, told me that GK3 may be the last Sierra adventure game for quite some time, if not forever. Jane herself is going to concentrate on writing novels after GK3 is finished.
- Interplay had PLANESCAPE: TORMENT running along with STAR TREK NEW WORLDS. NEW WORLDS is a ground-based RTS game with no infantry — the game is all hovering, armored vehicles in a nice 3D environment. As this story was going to press, though, word started leaking that the game was in trouble, and was being pulled back for serious restructuring of the campaign levels. Don't look for it anytime soon.
- Gathering of Developers had a new build of RUNE using the UNREAL 2 engine, but it's too early to say much about it. They were also showing DARKSTONE and AGE OF WONDERS, which keeps looking better.
- Westwood was showing NOX and COMMAND AND CONQUER:

The GOOD...

RE-VOLT One of those amazingly great little games that comes from out of nowhere to blow us away, and cause us to once again miss all of our deadlines. This remote-control car racer is fun and addictive — and it looks awesome too. One sign it has taken over: Resident crank Dave Salvator has been screaming, cursing, and breaking controllers in his office all week. Face it, Dave: You suck.

Palm Pilot Gameboy Emulator According to the PalmInfoCenter Web site (www.palminfocenter.com), a developer named Maven is hard at work on a Gameboy emulator for the Palm Pilot. This must happen. Someone give this man some money. We want to play Pokemon on our Palm Pilots. No, really — we do.

The BAD...

TIBERIAN SUN MULTIPLAYER LAMENESS

We're enjoying the game, in general, after a few days of playing the final release, but we've had nothing but trouble trying to play a multiplayer game — it crashes constantly and drops players out without warning. This game was years in the making. Bugs are inexcusable.

IRON CHEF CANCELLED

Okay, so it doesn't have anything to do with gaming. But this competitive cooking show from Japan was one of the best things on TV, and its appeal to gamers was widespread. Watching a QUAKE match isn't half as cool as watching two gourmet chefs compete, making dishes like tongue ice cream. Bring it back!

and the UGLY...

Piracy Runs Rampant

Gaming software piracy seems to be getting worse and worse, with cracked games appearing on the Internet the day they ship — or before. Pirates are announcing the availability of cracked games on Usenet, and even offering reviews. Understand this: Pirating games is not funny, cool, or "rebellious." If the companies don't make money, they stop making games. Is that what you really want? Cut it out.

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Try diplomacy first.

You can always invade them later.

AVALON HILL'S
Diplomacy
Bring out your inner dictator

May your wit be as sharp as your sword, because Avalon Hill’s Diplomacy has captured the true spirit of the legendary board game. You’ll start as one of the seven pre-WWI superpowers: England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. These political boundaries will become your prey as you negotiate your way to the top. Beg, threaten, plead and argue your way past nations where friends become pawns and enemies become allies. You’ll have to be cunning. Smooth. And deceitful. This is a game that can’t be left to chance.

MICRO PROSE
www.microprose.com
TIBERIAN SUN, and that game — now on store shelves — was drawing a huge crowd of onlookers. Strategy First had CLANS and DISCIPLES on display, DISCIPLES is a HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC wannabe with deeper RPG elements and some nice spell effects. Cavedog was showing TA: KINGDOMS, and it let slip that they are working on an expansion pack for that game that will add a fifth race. New World Computing was showing the new HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC 3 expansion, minus the sci-fi scenario that got them into so much hot water with fans at E3.

City on Fire

Gen Con is much more than computer games, of course. The convention spilled over into several buildings. It was just flat-out cool to walk around and see everyone passionately gaming their hearts out. There were hundreds of MAGIC: THE GATHERING variants on display at GenCon, including a pro wrestling card game and a beer card game. Pokemon players were in full force, and they’re not just kids. Wizards was also showing a beta version of a new Magic encyclopedia CD. This includes all the cards, a deck builder, all the rules from the different editions, and even a way to play over the Internet. You can play with any deck you want to make and you will get to see the card art while you play. The only catch is that the players must enforce the rules — there’s no AI. For four days, gamers held Milwaukee captive. Hotels and restaurants were flooded with folks carrying odd-shaped dice and tackle boxes full of lead miniatures. There were also a lot of women who attended Gen Con, which was a much welcome difference from E3. Us gaming guys are always looking for an excuse to break out our best black t-shirts. —Mark Asher

EMAIL X-COM To Invite Your Inbox This October

The Next X-Com Game Is...Email Only?

What! Don’t delete that email! Instead of a “get rich quick” scheme, it might just be an invitation to play EMAIL X-COM from Hasbro Interactive. Coming this October, EMAIL X-COM will be priced at $14.95. Better yet, only one player needs a copy to play email or hotseat games. Players will be able to download a client that will allow them to join games.

The familiar, turn-based, tactical combat gameplay takes place in 25 pro-generated scenarios, and yes, you can play as the aliens — finally! There are five different settings: urban, ice, downed UFOs, X-COM base, and the alien base. The usual suspects are present, including squadroids, mutons, eternals, chrysalids, snakemen, sectoids, and sectoids.

This is a streamlined game; the strategic overlay in the original X-COM is gone, letting you get right down to the man-on-alien action. The game’s look is different, too, with everything taking place on one screen. The 24-bit color graphics are clean and crisp, but won’t make you uninstall REAL.EXE.

I’ve had a stupid grin plastered on my face while playing EMAIL X-COM. There’s something cool about getting an X-COM email instead of the usual drivel. Now if only I could sic my mutons on those shirking spammers! —Mark Asher
Evolution of a species
Engineered to win

For over 20 years Saitek has led the world in manufacturing cutting-edge game products. Precision-engineered Saitek controllers feature state-of-the-art electronics and software, and are designed for maximum comfort in game play. Saitek controllers have been deemed simply the best by leading critics, and our awards prove it: CG Choice, PC Gamer Editors’ Choice, Maximum PC Award, Combatsim.com Top Pick, and CNET Gamecenter.com. Whether you fly, drive, run, punch, or rocket-jump, Saitek controllers give you the winning advantage.

www.saitekusa.com
STEALTH MODE

The Latest Dirt From the Gaming Underground

You want the latest? We sure do. And that’s why we’ve contacted Mr. Sneaky again. We don’t know who he is, but if you see a black helicopter hovering nearby, that’s him. He uses phone taps, bloodbaths, and handwriting analysis to dig up the latest. He steals open letters, hijacks FedEx shipments, and foibles a Ouija board to get the scoop. He even used Kato Kaelin, but that didn’t help much. The guy’s spooky and altogether ooky, but he dishes the real stuff...

Computer game companies are parading over the rights to base a game on the summer’s hottest movie, The Blair Witch Project (ake that “Jaw Jar”). Electronic Arts, Activision, G.O.D., and others are talking with the filmmakers. There was some initial confusion over who owned the game rights, but apparently Artisan, the film company, didn’t bother to secure them when they bought Blair Witch. Rumor is that G.O.D. may have the inside track.

With JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 in stores and apparently a hit, Sirotech has already started work on JAGGED ALLIANCE 3, another game switching to 3D. Impressions, those Caesar and Pharaoh fans, are thinking of doing a game built around vampires.

Rumor is that Microsoft isn’t happy with Digital Antelope’s CONQUEST, a space strategy game. Seems that the game just isn’t fun, so expect this to be pushed further back into 2000 as it’s retooled. MS and EA are considering some changes, such as allowing players to control ships, a la STAR CONTROL. Microprose is working on X-COM GENESIS, a return to the turn-based roots of the series...Xatix, makers of KINGPIN, is rumored to be going belly-up. Interplay is trying to work out an agreement to buy them and keep them going as a studio development team.

With the cancellation of A-10, the entire James’ Skunkworks team at Origin is no longer “wanted” at Origin and was whacked to a man. Er, I mean they were given the opportunity to “apply” for open jobs around Electronic Arts, but that would mean relocation. Even star producer Andy Hollis is looking at opportunities elsewhere in EA. Speaking of cancellations, word is that Acclaim has cancelled the RPG THRONE OF DARKNESS, and that the developers, Click Entertainment, are now shopping around for a new publisher.

From the file labeled “B” for bizarre, rumor is that Origin is working on ULTIMA ONLINE 2, which will use the ASCENSION engine. Here’s the bizarre part: EA has recently increased the parental control of their on-line products, possibly so that UO2 will be able to feature consensual sex. The developers are rumored to be kicking around ideas about how to animate characters making “the beast with two backs.” If implemented: Both parties will agree to the act and then go into a private room to exercise their, um, imaginations.

Heard something? Want to drop a dime on somebody? Contact Mr. Sneaky at sneaky@zd.com – confidentiality guaranteed.

CGW PROFILE

We Talk to G.O.D.’s Boss

Mike Wilson

1. Are you the Godfather of G.O.D.?
I actually founded it with Harry Miller and about 10 other partners... so, I’m not sure if I’m the Godfather or Godmother or Godchild. Harry’s older than me and bald, so I think he should be the dad.

2. Who would be better at DUANE? Gilligan or the Skipper?
Skipper. Looks like he’s spent more time in a chair than Gilligan. If you ask me, though, Lovey was the true fragmaster of that group.

3. Is the ultimate game trying to land a title on the charts?
Hard to say. The “charts” these days means more and more “dumbing down.” If we can put out one of the very select few games each year that makes the charts because it’s a great game, like HALF-LIFE, STARCRAFT, or RAINBOW 6, we’re thrilled. We’ll never move the volume that Ford does, but that’s because we make a Lexus.

4. G.O.D. and Third Law are doing a KISS game. What’s next? A Backstreet Boys game?
Wait and see, pal. Wait and see. Third Law is making a kick ass first-person shooter based on Todd McFarlane’s KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS universe. If it wasn’t based on PSYCHO CIRCUS, it would still be the same amazing game. Check out the comics if you don’t get how this can be cool... then just wait and see the game. Third Law will show the world how to do a licensed-property game right. We’ve seen plenty of examples of how to do it wrong.

5. Could Max Payne whip Lara Croft?
He obviously could, but that's not really his style... he likes 'em spunky like that. She's been a bad, bad, girl and could use a good spankin', though.

-Told by
Mark Asher

TCHOTCHKE OF THE MONTH

Ted Nugent
Gonzo Meat Biltong

"DID YOU EAT THE BILTONG?!?"
This was the panicked cry heard throughout the CGW office on one recent unforgettable afternoon.
The "biltong" was brought to our office by EA as part of a press demo for TED NUGENT: WILD HUNTING

ADVENTURE. It looked like beef jerky. It said "original beef" on the package. It said "once you biltong, you'll never jerk again." How could we not eat it?
But then something terrible happened. Ever-curious Copy Editor Holly Fleming decided to look the word "biltong" up in the dictionary. And life hasn't been the same here since.
Those miserable souls who ate the biltong will have to live with this equation for the rest of their sad, tormented lives:

Biltong = buttocks + tongue.

Even worse, the definition also mentions the words penis and testicles. So the best case scenario is that we ate cow ass.

From "Cat Scratch Fever" over 20 years ago, to this. Ted Nugent is apparently determined to make us miserable for the rest of our lives.

November 1999 - cgw.gamespot.com - Computer Gaming World
you know it's coming...
Darkness falls over the city. Not the kind of darkness that comes with the absence of light, but rather the absence of good. And while many prepare to naively celebrate the new millennium, a small mysterious cult, known as "The Fallen", prepares to fulfill the dark promise of an evil prophecy. Yet, left standing between these "Fallen" ones is a rookie cop and a disillusioned ex-cop.

One woman...one man...one goal...survival.

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

Explore and interact with anything and everything, as you carry out your objectives across 27 mission-based levels, within a 200 x 200 block cityscape.
Part action, part adventure - all potentially lethal, as you platform your way through five distinct sections of the city.

Brutal street fighting awaits on the Union City streets, with intense hand-to-hand martial arts combat, vehicle chases and drive by shootings, and desperate automatic gun shootouts in dark alleys.

For a closer look go to eidos.com
You are Locke D'Aviram, a once proud warrior-prince executed for failing to perform a ritual sacrifice. 10,000 years later, you've been resurrected from the dead by a prominent warlord to rescue his kidnapped daughter.

You are now part of a very special breed of warrior. You are a revenant. In order to regain full strength, you'll need to practice the problem-solving ability necessary to unlock forgotten skills.

And though there may be the whole island of Ahkuilon to explore, and more than 40 monsters to destroy, there's only one Locke D'Aviram. And however you choose to live as Locke, we think you'll agree: Life is better the second time around.

- Immerse yourself in a gripping storyline involving the future of the entire world of Ur
- Enjoy explosive spell casting effects unparalleled in any other CRPG game
- Extensive NPC interaction enables you to discover who you once were
- Multiple modes of combat include stealth, hand-to-hand, bow and weapon
- Thousands of 3D animations bring the inhabitants of Ahkuilon, as well as breathtaking combat moves, to life
- Choose from 4 character classes in multi-play mode

Check out the interactive demo at www.eidos.com
COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE GETTING BETTER.

Includes all the tools you need to make your own custom levels

REVENANT
One lifetime isn't enough.
"Soul Reaver is a deep game possessed with a myriad of impressive little touches... 9/10" - VideoGames.com

"3D exploration and adventure at its finest... Game of the Month."
- Expert Gamer Magazine

"A technical achievement... Soul Reaver delivers an epic piece of vampiric literature.. 93%" - IGNPSX.com

"98%" - PS Extreme Magazine

"Soul Reaver's environments are jaw dropping." - Gaming-Age.com
As Raziel, stalk Nosgoth feeding on the souls of your enemies.

Engage your creator, Kain, in an epic struggle for dominance.

Dark gothic story

No load times

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

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

- **Sneak through the gambling den in the Thieves Guild.**
- **Beware stepping into the light of the Sun Room.**
- **A stealthy entrance is necessary to prevent alerting the guards.**

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50 enemies. 33 levels. 25 weapons. 4 time-warped worlds. 2 deadly sidekicks. Everything to feed an appetite for destruction and don’t get too used to your weapon, your enemy or even your notion of time. Once you do, you’re bound to awake in a whole...

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evoke sheer terror among a few ill-fated network friends. Just remember, this is a place stalked not only by creatures but by change. A new world filled with horrors even more unimaginable than in the one before. WWW.DAIKATANA.COM

Suspect everyone.
Trust no one.

Will you be ready?

Eidos Interactive

Ion Storm

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It started 5,000 years ago. It's going to end now.

Can Lara Croft stop an ancient curse from plunging the world into madness? Get ready for Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation, the epic adventure with everything you've been asking for. Seamlessly integrated gameplay and FMV sequences for non-stop action.
Killer graphics with skin and 3-D texture mapping that even brings the dead characters to life. Along with diabolical new puzzles and a totally new inventory control system that make this the most incredible Tomb Raider ever. So while Lara may be back in Egypt, expect the Last Revelation to take you to a place you've never been before.
I've heard that you can infer people's tastes from the things they create; if so, I imagine that someone who worked on TRIBES was a huge fan of Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers. TRIBES has many of the elements of Starship Troopers that I wanted to play after seeing the film: brutal, fast-paced team action in slick powered armor; people with big guns out in the open terrain. And its multiple characters and customization options offer a huge variety of playing styles. So when I heard that TRIBES 2 was going to be even bigger and better, I had to see for myself.

The Great Outdoors

Unlike the games in this month's cover story, TRIBES 2 isn't designed to revolutionize gaming. The development team, based in Eugene, Oregon, just wants to create a great game and incorporate features that weren't possible the first time around. The goal is not to reinvent the wheel, but to make it bigger and faster.

They've started with an all-new game engine. Although TRIBES' outdoor engine was good, TRIBES 2 has already eclipsed it. The ground terrain looks a lot smoother and more natural, instead of like a series of blocky polygons. Also, there are more natural shapes on the landscape; the mountains and hills have been accented with spires, arcs, and other geological formations.

Fog is a major new landscape feature, adding more to the game than just atmosphere. The development team felt that sensor-jamming packs were underutilized in the first game, so the fog now makes sensor power and visibility more important. Not only does a sensor jammer completely mask someone in the fog, it also negates the...
power of the sniper laser, since the fog disrupts the laser beam. Don’t think that using the zoom-in mode will let you see other players early; you’ll only see someone when they literally jump out at you from the fog.

Along with enhancements to the game world, the characters now have a higher polygon count (around 1500, up from TRIBES' 600), and a new set of animations. If you’re feeling good about the way you took someone out, you can dance like Deion Sanders to taunt your opponent. You’ll also see a greater variety of death animations.

Tribal Thumping

Sure, the technology looks pretty good, but what about the game itself? There will be a new race, the Bio-Derms, but the difference between the Bio-Derms and the four human tribes are mostly cosmetic. There will be more variety between the worlds this time; the five world types at the moment are Bio-Derm, Lush, Lava, Desert, and Mud. Not only do the worlds look different, but the development team is aiming to have varying environmental effects. The lava world will have treacherous patches of lava; the lush world will be covered in fog and trees; and it’ll be hard to trudge along the muddy landscape.

Water will also affect gameplay. While there won’t be submersible vehicles, going underwater will offer certain tactical advantages. The physics will be different underwater, energy weapons aren’t useful, and it adds another hiding place. The team plans to tune the water physics so that you can skip discs across it.

Many of the mission types will be derived from the previous game, combined with a variety of new ones. This time structures will have multiple entrances, reducing the stalemates that often occurred around TRIBES buildings. Another tweak to CTF will be multiple flags, adding a

LEAD THE WAY, BIG BOY
This concept drawing shows the sense of environmental scale that the team is going for in the map design.

LARGE HAIL TONIGHT
The development team is hoping to include dramatic effects like this giant rock slide.

TRIBES 2's Neil Breuckner also worked on RED BARON, BETRAYAL AT KRONODON, and FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL '93.

Scott Rudi, designer of TRIBES EXTREME, contributed to RED BARON II, RED BARON 3D, and THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2.

5 THINGS

Five Things The Designers Want to Include in TRIBES 2

1. Rockets that seek out and lock onto targets.
2. The ability to skip discs along the surface of water.
3. Bridges that can be destroyed and then rebuilt, and destroyed yet again.
4. Natural weather effects (rock slides, lightning strikes, etc.).
5. The Commander Interface, a la Lieutenant Gorman in Aliens.
Team Rainbow is back in full force. Rogue Spear, the sequel to PC Gamer's 1998 Action Game of the Year, immerses you even deeper in the explosive action of an elite multinational strike force.

Rogue Spear feels so real, you'll be yelling 'Tango Down!' in your sleep for weeks. And the multiplayer action is to die for. Remember, when stalking the enemy: Walk softly but strike like a thunderbolt. You only have one shot to save the world.

- New Replay Feature
- New Mission Editor
- Full Sniper Support
- Eighteen New Missions
- Joystick Support
- Terrorists More Realistic and Lethal Than Ever
much more strategic angle to the action.

For now, the team is concentrating on the engine and the environment. Weapons were still on the drawing board; they're brainstorming ideas for new weapons while giving the originals an overhaul. There will be more vehicles this time, with three air and four ground, up from the three air-only vehicles in the previous game. They've also tweaked the interface and the shell; there will be a built-in HTML viewer, so gamers can check TRIBES info on the Web without having to leave the game. The server listing will also have a "buddy list" tracker, so if you have a good gaming groove going with some players, you can easily find them again. They're also working on improving the station interface, so that gamers can get in, grab the necessary equipment, and pop back out without much delay. For those who've seen Aliens, the team plans on implementing a Command Station interface that allows a commander to view everything his teammate is doing, and give them even more direct, command-level orders.

After seeing TRIBES 2, it's clear that Dynamix knows how to improve upon their initial success. The engine already looks great, and I'm excited at the prospect of playing with the new toys in an even larger world. By next summer, I'm sure you'll be suitting up to get back into the fray.

Tribes Extreme

TRIBES EXTREME is essentially TRIBES 1.5. The game, which is supposed to come out in the next few weeks, uses the existing TRIBES engine and will cost about $10 for owners of TRIBES. What good is it? It adds accessibility, enhancements, and a wider variety of mission types for TRIBES fans.

TRIBES EXTREME answers some of the criticism aimed at TRIBES by including a single-player campaign. It'll be three chapters with four missions per chapter. Add to that 12 new training missions, and you already have 24 full missions to play offline. There will be a new tribe called the Grievors, and the campaign throws you into the war between the Grievors and the four original tribes. The development team hopes that the single-player game and training missions will give newcomers a fighting chance online.

The other major improvement deals with the AI bots. You can either use them to train in the multiplayer missions, or use them as pinch-hitters for team matches. When setting up your game, you can give each bot a pre-defined role such as "sniper" or "turret-repair," and they'll go through their routines. Enterprise gamers can also modify the bot scripts to make custom bots.

Finally, TRIBES EXTREME will integrate a lot of mods and maps, to make a complete TRIBES package. One such mod is "Kill the Rabbit," where the Rabbit is the player with the flag and you scan points by keeping hold of the flag. Or "Freeze," where instead of dying, you get frozen. Being frozen allows you into observer mode, and you only become unfrozen when your entire team is frozen, or when someone pulls the unfreezing switch. The development team put out an open call for mod developers, so expect a lot of good user-created content on top of the material provided by Dynamix.
DOMESTICS • IMPORTS • CLASSICS AND PARTS

WATTO'S
-PODRACER SALVAGE-
- TRADE-INS WELCOME • FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC
- OVER 80 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE • ITEMS BOUGHT AND SOLD
2340 F-34 TATOOINE BULL, TWO MILES SOUTH OF THE RACEWAY.
HEY, IF WE AIN'T GOT IT, YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO RACE WITHOUT IT!!
SORRY NO FIVE-FINGER DISCOUNTS

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A HUTT PUBLICATION
Neverwinter Nights

BioWare Follows up Baldur's Gate With an Even More Ambitious D&D Game
By P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki and Mark Asher

Dungeons & Dragons, the pen-and-paper role-playing system that started it all, triumphantly returned to computer gaming last year with the release of BioWare's BALDUR'S GATE. While its commercial success virtually ensured that we'll see future BALDUR'S GATE titles, BioWare and publisher Interplay Productions have been working on an even more ambitious D&D game, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

Although commandeering the name used by an online-only D&D game that ran on America Online for years, this NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a completely original product that will emulate tabletop D&D's modular system. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will be released as a stand-alone single- and multiplayer game, but will also come with an editor to allow players to create their own adventures.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will allow players to host multiplayer games themselves, as opposed to relying on an online service like AOL. Gamers with the aspiration and hardware could conceivably run their servers persistently, permitting a few dozen players to perpetually adventure in a customized gaming-world module, happily devoid of the monthly charges associated with online games like EVERQUEST.

Come to My Dungeon

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will also bridge the gap between computer and tabletop RPGs by allowing one or more players to serve as a session's Dungeon Master. DMs will be able to assume control over non-player characters and creatures, moderate combat, and even the consequences of a character's death. DMs will also be the only players able to pause gameplay, which otherwise flows in real-time.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will use the upcoming 3rd Edition D&D rules, which re-establish a few 1st Edition character classes, remove xenophobic race limitations (and restore that charismatic mongrel, the half-orc, as an available character race), and merge D&D's multi-classed and dual-classed systems into one rebalanced regime.

Players control a single character, who can be conscripted from any of the races and character classes permitted by the new D&D rules. Evil alignments and chaotic behav...
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ior are available role-playing options, but DMs will be able to establish whether or not player characters can harm each other, in order to prevent player players from disrupting a game.

While the developers are aiming to create a computer RPG as open-ended as its table-top counterpart, they recognize that the anonymity of online gaming invites abuse. To grant gamers some assurance that another player isn’t using an artificially-enhanced character, a “character vault” will be maintained by the developers. Characters can be stored within the vault between adventures and may be removed freely to embark upon quests, but can only be restored to the vault with experience and valuables that could have reasonably been accumulated during their absence.

Ideally, the vault will grant stored characters some legitimacy, even if mischievous hackers find ways to bypass its security. BioWare hopes there’ll be little incentive to do so, since gamers can opt to store characters on their own computers, and have the freedom to create modules stocked full of empowering artifacts and godly experience points.

Have it Your Way

Instead of recycling the BALDUR’S GATE “Infinity” engine, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will use the “Omen” engine BioWare developed for the upcoming MDK2. The engine retains the isometric, top-down viewpoint of BALDUR’S GATE, but is fully 3D and allows players to rotate or magnify the camera’s perspective. The engine is also resolution independent, permitting gamers to crank up graphical details if they have the hardware. While the hand-drawn backgrounds of BALDUR’S GATE will be missed, NEVERWINTER’s tile-based system will allow the developers and creative gamers to create additional modules.

Newcomers to D&D should be lured by the game’s accessible interface and attractive graphics, while veterans will be enticed by the inclusion of over 200 spells and monsters, all with traits lifted exclusively from the core D&D rules. Characters can evolve up to a demi-godish 20th level, which should appease the gamers who consider constant character advancement role-playing game prerequisite. Characters will be able to wield two weapons simultaneously, disarm opponents, use targeted attacks, and engage in hand-to-hand combat – all in accordance with the new D&D rules.

What’s missing? Not much. Characters won’t be able to swim, which is an experience that shouldn’t be readily available to chainmail-laden adventurers in any event. The developers are bursting with so much enthusiasm over their latest project – the game’s online discussion board is jammed daily with fresh commentary – that it’s difficult not to anticipate a truly innovative role-playing experience from NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

Nextwinter at GenCon

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS was officially announced at the GenCon convention in Milwaukee this August (see story in RoadMe this month), and in between stuffing ourselves with bratwursts we checked the game out at Interplay’s booth.

Although the game is early in its development, the basic engine is in place. What struck us about BioWare’s Omen engine wasn’t how pretty it was (and it was quite striking), but how smoothly it ran. Panning the camera was effortless, rotating and zooming in and out without a hiccup. The light-sourcing seemed perfect when a character launched magic missile spells or moved while carrying a torch.

One nifty new effect that the Omen engine incorporates is motion blur. Think how comic book artists draw action shots with a sword blurring as it’s being swung, and you’ll get an idea of what the motion blur effect looks like in NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. It’s a small touch, but it adds to the experience.

The interface is also striking. It uses a radial menu, which looks like a clock dial, and is invisible most of the time, appearing only when you right-click to interact with something. It’s an elegant solution, leaving the screen 100% free of interface clutter 95% of the time.
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Copyright ©1999 by Sir-tech Canada Ltd. All rights reserved. Jagged Alliance™ is a registered trademark of 1259191 Ontario Inc. TalonSoftTM is a registered trademark of TalonSoft Inc. TalonSoft is a subsidiary of Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.
Love doesn’t work. At least, not in computer games. Every time it’s attempted, it ends up being trite, clichéd, or worse.

Yet, in Final Fantasy VIII, SquareSoft is ready to seriously tackle the theme of love and romance, in addition to the technical problems that plagued their previous PC effort in the role-playing series.

The heart of every Final Fantasy game is the plot, but it’s hard to talk too much about it without spoiling the game. Let’s start with the protagonist: Squall. He’s a student in The Garden, a premier military academy. As the game opens, Squall is attempting to pass an exam that will let him be part of an elite soldier unit known as SeeD. Once he enters SeeD, he gets involved in a massive war between the country Galbadia and the rest of the world. Looming in the background during all this is a witch known only as Idea.

As in any other Square game, you can expect a healthy dose of intrigue, betrayal, and death of beloved characters.

Deformed No More

The first immediate difference between FFVIII and FFVII is the consistent character design. Gone are the Super-Deformed characters (a Japanese art style where big heads are placed on little bodies) of FFVII—now the characters are all rendered more realistically.

Both the battle and magic systems have also been greatly overhauled. The one key change is the Draw system, which lets you extract spells and abilities from the enemies you encounter. Once you ‘draw’ a spell from a target, you can either cast it immediately or store it for later. There are no magic points or spells you can permanently learn; you’re always drawing spells from the enemy.

Also, there is a new twist to the summoning spells (called Guardian Forces)—experience. Each of your Guardian Forces gains XP and will earn the right to learn abilities. Some abilities strengthen the existing attack, others open up new attack methods. SquareSoft wants to create a sense of growth for your Guardians, as well as a bit of customization. Unlike FFVII, you don’t get Guardians by grabbing material or whatnot; you either earn them in the course of the story, or you have to defeat the Guardian in order for it to serve you.

Another alteration to the battle system is a fighting-game influence. Some of the battles in FFVII felt like they were on autopilot, as you always used the same options over and over again. Now, you can enhance your attacks with proper timing. For example, if you tap the special attack key just
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as Squall swings his Gunblade, he'll fire it in addition to swinging it. One of the characters, a martial arts expert named Zell, has several fighting-game-style combination moves that he can pull off in battle.

A few things remain the same from FFVII. The save-game scheme is the same (within specific dungeons and areas, there are save points, but out in the overworld, you can save anywhere), and the control interface is still geared primarily toward the gamepad crowd. For vehicles, you'll ride a Chocobo for a bit, but you'll also get to drive a rental car and an aircraft called the Ragnakok.

**Flash to the Past**

The development team has learned their lesson from the FFVII port, and has either corrected, or worked around its technical flaws. Graphics-wise, they have more rigorous testing methods, and they're better at using Direct3D then they were last year. Also, while they can't re-render all the 2D backgrounds (this would create a huge delay), they're using special filters to make sure they don't look as fuzzy or washed out as in FFVII. Musically, they are still probably going with the software synthesizer route, but they are looking toward using the emerging Downloadable Samples (DLS) idea, since many new PCI sound cards support DLS.

The most visible improvements are the movies. They were formerly washed-out, stretched AVIs that lost their epic feel; now they're using a new movie format that preserves, and even enhances, the look of the original movies. Depending on your PC, the movies will play in either high- or low-resolution, but the difference between the two is hardly noticeable.

At press time, the core game was complete and playable; all that remained were the movies and some text. The team hopes to go beta fairly soon and begin pouncing out the bugs, for an anticipated release near the end of the year. Square looks like it has addressed the technical problems that plagued their previous PC release, allowing gamers who like a good story, and can appreciate console-style gameplay, to finally see what the FINAL FANTASY fuss is all about. CGW
One Chip Can Turn One Second Of Gaming Into

ONE HELLISH NIGHTMARE!

Today’s game opponents are tougher to beat. So we’re issuing you an unrivaled weapon. The new Viper II graphics card is equipped with 4X AGP power and a transformation and lighting engine for the most realistic images ever. Better yet, Viper II now features S3TC texture compression, which hurls up to 15 million triangles at your monitor every second for the most intense 3D action ever. Make your screen image come alive. Unless, of course, you’d prefer to make them otherwise.
Do It All in This Incredibly Ambitious Shooter
by Thierry Nguyen

Rock

Despite its name, SingleTrac isn't content with only one genre. Heck, they're planning to combine three genres into a single game. Normally, this is where I'd say "good luck" while rolling my eyes, but after a demonstration of their next game, Rock, I really do wish SingleTrac luck.

Rock's most impressive ambition is the unprecedented freedom it will give gamers, allowing them to go easily from piloting a spacecraft, to commanding a huge Mech-like assault robot, to running and gunning in a standard first-person shooter style. This game could set a new standard in FPS action gaming, especially in the multiplayer arena.

Pick Your Poison

Rock takes place in a post-apocalyptic future, with evil corporations, ragtag forces, evil mutants, yadda yadda yadda. Okay, so it's pretty obvious SingleTrac isn't breaking new ground in the story-telling department, but we haven't exactly reached a point where people expect The Gulag Archipelago when they install the latest shooter. Besides, it's not the story that has the potential to hook gamers, it's the gameplay. Imagine a game where you can jump into a starfighter, dogfight your way to a Martian plain, hop out, toss a grenade in a Mech to kill the pilot so you can claim the assault robot for yourself, rampage across a warzone in your new weapons platform, and finally jump out and enter a building, killing some guards before you plant explosives to level it — all of this without any load screens to stall the action.

While players are encouraged to take part in all the flying, mechning, shooting fun, there will be three distinct sides with an emphasis on one of the three game types. The shooters among you will want to be playing as part of the ragtag Gruaj alliance, since soldiering is their forte. Those who prefer mechanized mayhem Mechwarrior-style will want to be a member of the meticulously-classy Imperial Directorate, who love their Robotic Assault Vehicles (RAVes). Finally, if you're just really sneaky and you love Top Gun, then you're a candidate for the DarkShyne Technocracy, a mutant race who like stealth and air power.

Each organization has a 10-mission single-player campaign where you'll have command of up to eight AI squadmates. These squadmates all have defined roles (i.e., sniper, RAVe pilot, aviator, demolitions), and better yet, they all gain experience from mission to mission. Take the same team with you from mission to mission, and it will grow increasingly deadly. This ragtag band will also have a total of 19 units (RAVes and spacecraft) to choose from. In fact, the AI even divides itself up into commanders and soldiers. For example, an AI commander can pilot a RAVe and be in charge of the three footsoldiers tasked with escorting it.

REVIEWING THE TROOPS Each faction in the game sports a different look: The Corporate shock troops run heavy on the chrome, the Gruaj rebels wear whatever they can get their hands on, and the stealthy DarkShyne dress so as not to be noticed.

PLAYING FIELD The game environments in Rock will be enormous. Not only will this platform accommodate both foot soldiers and RAVes, there's a ton of airspace for the spacecraft to fight in. There's even a tunnel that goes into the asteroid over by the noon sign.

HIVE ALIVE Under attack from a swarm of stinger missiles, the red team scrambles to man some anti-air turrets.
Sometimes to find inner peace, you must wage outer war.

Your father taught you a lot before he was killed. But he never taught you to be a hero. Your homeland remains divided by evil—and inside this blade is the power to reunite it. Now you have to decide. Do you want to try to master its power? To unlock its true magic? To drive away the mayhem that’s replaced your family? Or do you want to walk away from it all—and try to forget everything that’s happened? Your father never taught you to be a hero. But from now on you’ll have to learn things on your own.

The Legend of Blade Masters

PC CD-ROM

www.ripcordgames.com
The missions range from a simple base assault to a grand battle between two massive carriers. How SingleTrac is able to make an engine that renders spacecraft dogfights, mechanized slugfests, foot soldier shootouts, and epic space carriers all at once is beyond me. Without getting into acronym-laden technobabble, let’s just say it all works. The environment is quite detailed and accurate; carriers have functional (and usable) launch bays, turret stations, and barracks, while every building on the landscape can be demolished under enough firepower (no more hiding in buildings). All of this will be happening on a backdrop that ranges from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter to the planet surfaces themselves.

Communal Catastrophe

Teamplay is even more important than in other games. Let’s say you have a team of five. Within a single dropship, you can be the pilot, two teammates can be turret gunners, and the last two are the payload — fired out of the dropship in a special torpedo they can guide themselves, plunging into a breach point to invade the enemy. Also, different player types will have different items; with the distinct player types and the various spacecraft and RAVes, balance will be a very important thing.

All the campaign missions can be played co-operatively; other multiplayer plans include free-for-all and a “Hunted” scenario, where one team must survive while the other tries to assassinate a specific target on the opposing team.

One balance-detail we immediately liked was demolitions. A demolition expert can lay down an explosive charge that can take down buildings. If you’re the victim of the attempted sabotage, and you have the right equipment, you can defuse the bomb. Just break out the wire clippers, point your crosshair at the wire you want to cut, and pray. Cut the wrong wire the first time, and the timer speed doubles. Cut another wrong wire, and, well, consider enlisting elsewhere. If that wasn’t enough pressure, the concussive force of a nearby blast can knock off your wire-clipping aim.

SingleTrac is also giving the gamers all the tools needed for creating cut scenes and missions. Enterprising designers can make entirely new maps and mission objectives, while aspiring film directors can create their own cut scenes, complete with voices.

SingleTrac is embarking on what could be called a kitchen-sink game. Normally, I’d be on the apprehensive side, but when I got to actually see the whole act of flying, bailing out, stealing a RAVe, wreaking havoc, then getting back on foot to blow up a building, I lost all apprehension. It’s still a long way off, but ROCK looks like it can do it all without losing the focus on gameplay.

5 Things

Five Nasty Tricks to Pull in ROCK

1. Crush your friends under your RAVe’s foot.
2. Level an enemy building while they’re still in it, and watch their bodies fly from the wreckage.
3. Wait for someone to try to defuse a bomb, and drop a small grenade nearby to disrupt his concentration.
4. Snipe the pilot of a troop transport just to see the passengers try to bail out before it crashes.
5. Use the DarkShyne Scout to laser-designate a player (instead of a building) for a heavy ordinance Banshee strike.
Target sighted 600 meters out
wind - 5 knots
out of the west
2 rounds left in
the MAGAZINE
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Firaxis Recreates the Bloodiest Day of the American Civil War
by Marc Dultz

Sid Meier's Antietam!

Although American forces sustained grievous casualties at Omaha Beach, Iwo Jima, and the Ardennes during WWII, it was some 80 years prior - at the Battle of Antietam - that the nation suffered its greatest losses for a single day of combat, 11,000 men. Now Firaxis Games, with the aid of newly created Breakaway Games, plans on portraying the epic battle of the Republic using a refined version of their popular SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG! game engine and a little help from the dead.

According to Joe Balkoski, noted Civil War historian and historical consultant on ANTIETAM!, all sorts of subtle improvements have been incorporated into the game that will greatly affect the way the battle will be fought. "For one thing, the terrain in ANTIETAM! is very different from the type depicted in GETTYSBURG!" he says. "While Gettysburg was a relative-

5 THINGS
You Should Know About Antietam!

1. ANTIETAM! is being developed by Breakaway Games in association with Firaxis, the same folks who created GETTYSBURG!
2. This game won't require GETTYSBURG! to play it.
3. Joe Balkoski, author of "Beyond the Beachhead" and designer of LEW VS. GHANT, is serving as a historical consultant.
4. Unlike GETTYSBURG!, players will be able to re-fight the entire battle of Antietam from start to finish.
5. ANTIETAM! will only be sold on Firaxis' Web site: www.firaxis.com.
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Ultimate high-tech weaponry includes fully configurable, detailed equipment for amazing gameplay depth and action.
Frightening 3D realism gives you an all-too-real first-person perspective. In fact, the environment is so true-to-life, your enemies are even sensitive to light and sound.
Intriguing character generation lets you choose from three distinct personalities, each with their own special weapons and abilities.
Jane's F/A-18

Jane's Gettin' Serious... About Being Easy
By Gordon Berg

Third wire. Call the ball. Bolter. Bolter. Bolter! Utter these phrases to flight sim enthusiasts and you just might see them drool. After all, these words mean only one thing: Carrier Ops. The same team that produced last year's highly acclaimed Jane's F-15 has now developed an in-depth naval aviation simulation. This holiday season, you'll get a chance to fly the plane that will be the cornerstone of the Navy's defense policy well into the 21st century: the F/A-18E Superhornet.

Producer Greg Kraelie's team has had over a year to incorporate all of F-15's strengths while trying to eliminate its weaknesses. "Think of it as F-15 Plus," Kraelie says. "In F-15, we have pilots flying realistically in a non-accelerated time mode for a half hour to an hour, just to get to their first way point. Well, that wasn't any fun. With F/A-18, flying them off the carrier means they'll be closer to the action." He adds, "The key word is accessibility. We've applied that to every part of the game."

Indeed, the real F/A-18E is a far more user-friendly aircraft than the F-15, so accurate plane modeling alone makes the sim accessible to a wider audience. For example, the avionics are greatly simplified, making it easier to operate the weapon systems. As Kraelie says, "It has a simpler interface because the state of the art has advanced over the past 25 years since the F-15 was designed, so we get all the benefit of that by trying to recreate it as realistically as possible."

Many simulations, F-15 included, offer a casual flight model as well as an authentic one. With the Superhornet, there's no need. The real aircraft is that much easier to fly. The plane has greater "dogfighting" capabilities than the F-15, and it also has some built-in constraints to ensure the pilot won't lose control. "You can't over-G the airplane," explains Kraelie. "You'd be lucky to pull 7-1/2 Gs. Beyond that, the system relinquishes control authority. You can't depart flight with it, either." That's true. In the beta I tested, I was unable to put the plane into a spin, managing only a brief stall that quickly corrected itself.

As far as the campaign goes, there is much greater emphasis on player immersion. The missions you fly are interspersed with video clips about 15 seconds in length, which indicate your progress via positive or negative feedback. The end result is a story that unfolds to truly involve the player in the action.

Yes, the number of F-18 simulations in the marketplace are starting to rival those of the F-22, but we're talking classic Jane's stuff here. I, for one, can't wait. MEG

Eject, Eject! A MiG driver is left flying by the seat of his pants as his ride corkscrews in the sea.

Bolter You'll soon get your chance to land the Navy's best jet on a target the size of a football field.

5 Things You Should Know About Jane's F/A-18

1. The hefty Jane's manual is back, and it will be easier to read. Look for over 400 pages!
2. Over 2.5 million square kilometers will be modeled, based on U.S.G.S. data.
3. Fly one giant campaign, or jump into the action at three separate phases.
4. The Superhornet is no speed demon. The F-15 is actually faster, but the F/A-18 is more maneuverable.
5. The cancellation of Jane's A-10 has no bearing whatsoever on Jane's F/A-18.
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Volition Puts Even More Gloss on Their Polished Space Sim Franchise by Thierry Nguyen

FreeSpace 2

The first FREESPACE was the best space sim to come around in a long time. It was extremely well polished and had great production designs, but ultimately it felt derivative. Once I got a version of FREESPACE 2 and saw what the designers were up to, I was delighted to find much that may set the sequel apart from the pack.

The plot this time is the return of the Shivans during a period of, oh, let’s say “civil unrest.” While the Terrans and the Vasudans allied in the previous game, some rogue Terrans decide to backtrack and go back to war with the Vasudans. In the first few missions, the gamer is expected to wonder about the morals behind his missions. Volition is going for a deeper story this time around, rather than the straightforward “big bad aliens invade, mayhem ensues” plot.

At first, the graphics look the same. Things soon change when you run into one of the games’ features, the nebulae. Like nebulae in just about every other game, they’ll mess around with your electrical system and make targeting enemy spacecraft difficult. Fortunately, in order to counter these nebulae effects, you can either call upon a special AWAC-style ship, or use special hardware to keep a radar lock on enemies.

Speaking of the ships, the other big improvement is the capital ship design. The big ships have been beefed up significantly, so that it’s nearly impossible for a little fighter to take one out. Also, these capital ships have much more powerful weaponry — typically a few anti-fighter turrets backed up by one huge energy cannon. The development team wanted to make the prospect of destroying a capital ship a challenging thing, rather than the “line up torpedo and fire” from the previous game.

FREESPACE 2 looks like it will have the story, the spatial effects, and the ship design to set it further apart from the original game and the rest of the space sim pack. If Volition puts a spit shine on FREESPACE 2, gamers may just see the creation of another viable space sim franchise, giving LucasArts and Origin some competition. CGW

Name: Karl Wagner
Call Sign: Creepy
Skill: Camouflage

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

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Our Prayers Are Answered. Autoduel Has Risen by George Jones

Loose Cannon

A robed editor sits in his office in the lotus position, hands outstretched before a bamboo altar, upon which is laid a sacred 5.25" floppy disk. The editor softly chants the name on this floppy, with the hope that in the same way dolphins hear Aquaman’s desperate pleas for companionship, some game designer will sense the editor’s need and redesign a classic role-playing driving game.

Autoduel...Autoduel...Autoduel...Auto——

It’s finally happened. Someone has picked up the vibe. That person – Tony Zurovec of CRUSADER: NO REMORSE fame – freely admits that his upcoming title, LOOSE CANNON, is a spiritual successor of sorts to AUTODUEL, the computer version of the CAR WARS pen-and-paper RPG released by Origin in the 80s.

With LOOSE CANNON, Zurovec is shooting for that elusive balance between story, driving, and on-foot missions. In this way, the game appears to be a cross between AUTODUEL, METAL GEAR SOLID, and THIEF than to previous games in this genre, such as INTERSTATE 82 or REDLINE.

You begin LOOSE CANNON as a bounty hunter in a west coast city, and over the course of the story you make your way through the midwest to the east coast. Law and order has broken down across the nation due to a serious economic downturn. Lacking the funds to buy essential items like guns, the police call on freelancers to bring violent ends to criminal acts.

To earn money to improve your car, you cruise the city streets. Periodically, the boys in blue will request your help over the radio. Accept their offer, and you’ll experience the glory of LOOSE CANNON’s combat engine, which offers realistic driving physics and emphasizes speed and cool weapons.

You’ll also encounter combat when you’re asked to courier packages between the major cities. Since the country has no protection whatsoever, piracy reigns on these roads. At your disposal is an arsenal that would make any L.A. commuter drool: guns, rocket-launchers, and rear-mounted flamethrowers.

You eventually tap into a more detailed story with missions that will challenge you in different ways. In a mission that requires you to infiltrate an enemy base, for instance, you will have to sneak around an encampment, blowing away the tires on the enemy cars. This way, when you make your way into the base, steal the technology you need, and make your escape, the bad guys won’t be able to follow.

Zurovec firmly believes that paying closer attention to detail and developing a more interesting story, when combined with more open gameplay, will make LOOSE CANNON succeed where similar titles have failed.
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REVIEWS

QUAKE III ARENA

Whether you’re a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensity, realism, and organic look of the Arena. But don’t get caught staring at the scenery. You’ll end up as part of it.

Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player games are safe. Q3A’s single player game is a Fragmatch. The single-player games are fast, and the single-player opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and weapons. You can Fragmatch them once and move on to the next level. These aren’t the predictable, learnable enemies. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let’s hope you can stay the same.
Babe Ruth's power single-handedly changed baseball. Janis Joplin's banshee wail tipped the emotional balance of rock. And Jobs' and Wozniack's gamble on the Apple took computing from a technological priesthood and put it into the hands of the people. Trailblazers like these reshaped the world in their image. They “thought different,” and forced those who followed to do the same. And that's how we feel about the following five games. Whether through pioneering graphics technology, innovative new design concepts, or redefining what can be considered a game at all, these five will leave ripples that will be felt throughout the industry for years to come.

**1**

**FREELANCER**

Chris Roberts Sets His Sights on the Big One by George

Consider Texas, a state so enamored with the enormous that even Austin, a city very low on the Texas-o-meter, buys into the big. Wanting a bigger airport, this city chose not to simply expand their current facilities, but to build an entirely new airport five miles down the road.

This bigger-is-better mentality must be part of what keeps Chris Roberts in Austin. After all, it's a good fit—his favorite games are enormously large, epic, big-splash titles with high production values, envelope-pushing technologies, and a massive sense of scale. Games like FREELANCER.

In FREELANCER, Roberts is setting his sites on the holy grail of computer games: A game with unparalleled visual and cinematic style that is totally and completely open-ended, but also features a compelling central story. And, oh yeah, it should also be fun and accessible to the masses.

**A FLYING START**

FREELANCER's tone and visual power are illustrated simply and powerfully. The very first scene Roberts showed us—an overhead view of a bustling space port—emphasized the fact that, although this space sim uses plot and gameplay elements that have existed since ELITE, Digital Anvil's take on the genre will be something special.

The spaceport, from which you assign yourself missions, outfit your ship with new weapons, trade goods, and peel away layers of the story, resembles nothing you've ever seen...in a computer game, at least. The sun sets and rises, ships
fly between skyscrapers or landing platforms, and the cities themselves are very stylistically and dramatically represented. More reminiscent of Star Wars than even the LucasArts' Star Wars games, this one scene conveys the scope of what Roberts is trying to accomplish here—a detailed, dynamic, living world.

You begin play as a lowly mercenary, indentured to the House Liberty, the all-American good-guy clan in the game. Getting hooked up with this clan at the start means that you'll have plenty of protection in your early missions, at least until the plot gives you the chance to join up with other houses. As part of your indentured servitude, House Liberty supplies you with your first spacecraft—the futuristic equivalent of a 1979 Pinto. It gets the job done, but you're going to be very excited to earn enough money to put yourself into something a bit fancier.

**NOW THAT'S FANCY**

Freelancer's sense of grandeur is reinforced the moment you fly through the massive metallic accelerator that boosts you out of planetary space into an outer space so colorful and dramatic, it looks like it was photographed by the Hubble telescope.

Digital Anvil's version of space incorpor-
COVER STORY—5 GAMES

DOWNTOWN...WHERE THE ACTION IS
Every port of call in FREELANCER features unique, detailed scenery that would make Las Vegas jealous.

rates a sense of scale and attention to detail that will most likely set a new standard for virtual worlds. At one point, we flew around and through an enormous research station that seemed about 100 times the size of our ship. We also flew through a gorgeous, purplish gassy, lightening-strwn nebula that created a particularly eerie effect. And in a scene that illustrated the amount of detail being put into the game, we flew past a fully operational ore-mining unit. As we flew up close, you could see the ship doing its ore-crunching—the large pincer hands breaking off chunks of ore, which were then sucked into the craw of the ship.

Eventually your lovely little sight-seeing excursion is going to get interrupted by space pirates or a rival house. Then you'll see another part of FREELANCER, one that takes a sharp turn from normal space combat. Roberts and company are throwing out the joystick as a controller and focusing on making the game playable with a unique mouse-and-keyboard interface. This fits in squarely with the FREELANCER design team's mission of focusing on the purely fun parts of space combat, which means avoiding the constant 180-degree turning battles so common in space sim, where you line up a bogey, pass them after narrowly avoiding a head-on collision, and repeat.

FREELANCER completely avoids this by placing the fundamental ship maneuvering and navigation under the control of your Neuronet. You move your mouse around to target and fire on enemy ships, select your weapons, and fine-tune your position and velocity. Holding down the Shift key allows you to free look with your mouse and fire on anything you see. Holding down the Control key allows you to take over the controls and maneuver your ship in any direction.

The wild card in all this is the Neuronet—part interface manager, part on board computer, and part pilot. It serves as your navigational aid, allowing you to plot coordinates for travel and check on your cargo. More crucially, it performs critical maneuvers during combat and can be upgraded with a variety of increasingly effective tactics to make it more combat ready.

Space fights consist of you blasting away with your mouse and ordering your ship into various maneuvers via the Neuronet. Want to get on a bogey's tail and blast him into dust? Select the Trail command, which will order your ship to attempt to get on the bogey's six. Getting pounded? Order your ship to Evade, and, depending on the quality of your Neuronet, you will alleviate the pain.

Most interesting about this new take on ship-to-ship combat is the almost DIABLO-style element of play FREELANCER sets up. As you gain more money, prestige, and power, you'll be able to power up your Neuronet with new or upgraded maneuvers. Or buy entirely new Neuronets that are more advanced. Maybe you'll even discover amazingly sophisticated upgrades left behind by the ancient space-faring race who inhabited the area before you. You'll also be able to trade these maneuvers to your friends in the multiplayer game.

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER
FREELANCER's multiplayer game, which will be sold separately from the main game, will be a massively multiplayer universe where thousands of players will be able to fly around and interact with each other in a variety of capacities. Digital Anvil envisions a dynamic, socially-oriented game that features the single-player game's politics and clans as a backdrop. This multiplayer game will also permit you to be allied with one of the main houses in the game, or to go it alone.

Digital Anvil is committed to maintaining a meta story that will keep the game more focused. At one point, you might log in and hear about a big war between the Kusani and House Liberty. This could mean several different things to you; you might want to join in the war effort as a paid mercenary, or you might deduce that war around certain planets means that certain goods might command top dollar on that planet, and you'll hire some of your friends to escort you on a money-making trade mission.

Perhaps the coolest potential feature in multiplayer is the ability to own your own base. The game will feature a finite number of bases that can be taken over and controlled by human factions.

The most unfortunate aspect of FREELANCER is the fact that we'll have to wait until late 2001 to play it.

CHRIS ROBERTS

"Sure, the latest 3D shooters look pretty, but what new gameplay do they offer? Where are they taking the genre beyond having prettier rooms and more detailed characters? Too many of the game publishers seem to be going with safe bets: the latest sequel, a sports game with the latest team static; an RTS game with a few different kinds of units; or another first-person shooter that differs only in its look. I've seen far more impressed with the game design that's been going on in the console market. Games like METAL GEAR SOLID and ZELDA 64 have really blown me away by their design and the way the technical gee-whiz factors are used to enhance gameplay. There have been a few exceptions in the PC biz: Grim Fandango and HALF-LIFE stood out last year."

CHRIS ROBERT'S GAMEOGRAPHY

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HALO's indoor environments are spectacular enough. Colored lighting pours in through stained glass windows; computer displays reflect off polished floors. The building's curved surfaces and seamless textures eradicate any semblance of the Lego-style architecture we've grown accustomed to in 90-degree-heavy 3D games.

And then you step outside...

...where smooth, rolling green hills dominate the landscape, interspersed with cliff-walled canyons in the nadirs of watersheds. Trees sway in the breeze. A waterfall plunges into a sparkling river. You can't make out a straight line anywhere, and the lush scenery seems to go on for miles.

HALO challenges the current conception of how beautiful a computer game can be. It could, in fact, redefine your conception of computer games. Why? Because this third-person-perspective action game features the finest 3D-game engine, character animation, and physics modeling we've ever seen. Such technology in the hands of a company long known for making fewer games at higher-than-normal quality levels is practically unfair.

**Want a Joint?**

Not satisfied with simply stunning terrain, Jason Jones — creator of MARATHON and MYTH and the visionary and lead programmer for HALO — also aims to revolutionize the art of character animation and physics modeling. Even at this early stage in the game's development, his effort shines. Not only do vehicles and characters reflect light and cast dynamic shadows, they actually appear iridescent. Even more impressive is the life-like way in which the models move.

In almost every game you've played before, the character animations are pre-canned — they're animated before you ever play the game. What you see when you walk forward or jump is actually a series of slightly different models, rapidly painted one after another, much like a three-dimensional flip book. Not so in HALO; Jones found a way to implement inverse kinematics, a technique for modeling human motion, in real time. Game models actually have a skeleton inside them with properties governing the movement of each joint. If your character is riding in a jeep and the driver hits the brakes, the inertia jolts his skeleton forward in the seat, moving the character right along with it. At the same time, his
HALO

The Closest Thing to the Real Thing

by Jesse Hiatt

arm could be reacting naturally to the recoil of his pistol, and his head could be turning to track an enemy. This kind of dynamic, fluid movement and attention to detail is unheralded on many levels. The effects are mind-blowing.

And then there are the vehicles themselves. Driving around in the game’s jeep could practically qualify as a game in itself, due to the extremely detailed physics model (think GRAND PRIX LEGENDS off-road). The vehicles’ tires kick up pebbles and dust that change color depending on the terrain you’re driving over. Bungie also displayed an iridescent flying vehicle and hover tank that were equally impressive.

As one final demonstration of the engine’s power, Jones zoomed the map way out so that the marine appeared as just a speck in the distance. Then he smoothly zoomed in, close enough that I could read an indicator on the side of the soldier’s rifle that showed how much ammo remained.

The standard soldier’s weapons are a pistol with a built-in laser for paintball targets, an assault rifle with an attached grenade launcher, and a machete for desperate situations. We also saw a cool zooming sniper rifle, a rocket launcher that leaves realistic smoke trails behind it that dissipate into the wind, a surface-to-air missile, a spear gun, and a funky-looking defoliant weapon. The aliens pretty much have an equivalent weapon for each purpose, but they shoot blue energy beams instead of familiar, earthly ordinance.

RING AROUND THE WORLD

Bungie’s game design process is three-fold. First they fin-
ish their engine, then they play the hell out of the multiplayer game, and finally they move on to the single-player experience. Since the game recently began moving into phase two, much of the game’s story has yet to be realized. But to be perfectly honest, the HALO engine is so amazing that Bungie could let us just run around the map banging two rocks together, and that would still entertain us for a while.

The setup for the game goes something like this. A space-faring transport vessel carrying about 1,800 humans, 900 of them marines, crash lands on a huge ring-world that orbits a distant star. A theoretically feasible science-fiction construct, a ring-world is a thin ring of planetary mass thousands of miles across, with an inner surface coated with desirable life-supporting essences like an atmosphere, dirt, trees, and water. Because of the ring-world’s unique halo orbit at the Lagrange Point between a gas giant and one of its moons, this freakish world actually spins in place, with the resultant inertia creating an effect similar to gravity (remember the space station in 2001?).

An impressive artifact of tremendous significance, the ring appears to have been mysteriously abandoned by the time your ship crash lands on the surface. But much like a leftover slice of pizza at the CGW offices, this kind of phenomenon fails to go unnoticed for long.

An alien race called the Covenant soon pops up. Technologically superior to humans, these humanoids show up in great numbers to pilfer what they can from the ring. As you might guess, a full-scale war erupts between the humans and the Covenant.

Since the humans are ill-equipped to face the Covenant head on, their only hope is to use guerrilla tactics. Given this fact, at times you’ll be able to use all of the aliens’ weapons and vehicles against them. The other big problem you’ll face in the early parts of the game is that all your mates and gear got spread out all over the ringworld in the chaos preceding the crash.

**Steve Jobs Loves HALO**

HALO makes quite an impression the first time around, but it isn’t exactly a surprise that something so revolutionary would come from Bungie. After all, these guys are known for being different. Do they own their publishing; they have always supported the Mac platform (HALO is no exception — Steve Jobs unveiled the game in his keynote speech at the recent MacWorld Expo); and they tend to make fewer and more innovative games than the rest of the pack.

Although only in the nascent stages of development, it is readily apparent that HALO is a very big deal. With a solid record of setting high standards for their games, it is unlikely that Bungie will screw this one up. Which is why, of the five games we’ve selected, we feel HALO has the surest shot at changing gaming. It just looks too damn good.
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We Make History™
Peter Molyneux wants you to know something. He wants you to know that no matter what you've heard, BLACK & WHITE is not another "god game." BLACK & WHITE is a role-playing game.

It just so happens that the role you're playing is God. The truth is, no one can cram all that is BLACK & WHITE into one neat, limiting genre specification. The ambition that is the soul of this game is far too unwieldy and immense to be confined by some arbitrary term: stuffed into a routine, user-friendly definition, BLACK & WHITE can't help but resist, bursting loose from whatever elaborately-fashioned pigeon holes we game journalists can construct.

So what is BLACK & WHITE? It is, as Molyneux insists, a role-playing game. But it also happens to be 1) a god game; 2) an experiment in artificial life; 3) a strategy game; 4) the world's most surreal online-chat program; and 5) an experience that evolves into an expression of who you are. If BLACK & WHITE can be summed up as one thing, it is in the way creator Peter Molyneux sees it: "BLACK & WHITE is the closest I have ever come to what was in my imagination."
IN THE BEGINNING

The game opens with an idyllic world, a tiny island practically glowing with lush vegetation. Your goal is simple: Get the whole world to believe in you and worship you as their god. You the player are manifested as an elegantly simple, all-powerful hand hovering above the earth. Not wanting to break the illusion of the gameworld with buttons, tabs, and menu screens, the designers have made the hand the entirety of your interface. You'll grab spells from your citadel and cast them with a wave, and you'll move through the world by "grabbing" parts of the landscape and "pulling" the world until your destination reaches you.

While you cannot interact directly with the primitive tribes peppering the landscape, you can influence their lives indirectly. Spells allow you to rain down literal manna from heaven to feed starving tribes or to rip their fragile villages with vicious ribbons of lightning. Either approach will convince the tribesmen that there is something greater out there, and they will begin to worship you, either out of fear or out of admiration, and therein lies the heart of the game. Do you model yourself after Kali, the Indian black goddess who ate her own children, or the more benevolent, Christian New Testament God?

It's the sort of decision games have rarely addressed. Just as every moral choice you make in your life shapes and molds your existence, so will it in BLACK & WHITE. Live a life of callous evil and the gameworld becomes a blighted environment, scarred with volcanic fissures, while your place of power becomes an increasingly forbidding place. Nurture and care for your worshippers and the world flourishes, your palace growing to resemble a fairy tale ideal.

CHILD OF GOD

The most obvious expression of your morality comes in the form of your creature, the only living being over which you can exert any direct control. After you've successfully won over your first village and have started to amass some power, you'll discover three non-human entities: a passive cow, a neutral ape, or an aggressive tiger. After choosing one of these creatures, it is your responsibility to teach it. An enormous bundle of unchecked id, your creature is entirely dependent upon your direction to learn how...

CLANSMEN

In the villages and potential worshippers are depicted around specific tribal themes such as Native Americans, Aztecs, or those kinds.

BIG BAD WOLF

Huge and menacing, an evil wolf creature stalks the countryside.

TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT

This series of shots shows the range every creature can display simply in terms of its good or evil nature. The first tiger is fiercely evil, the second is more balanced, while the last tiger is a shining example of beatific purity.
to live in the world. Reward and punishment are the tools you'll use to shape your developing avatar; for example, should your hungry creature consume a villager, you can smack it to let it know your displeasure. That won't be the end of it, however, because you'll need to tickle its belly and pet it when it later picks up a villager, considers eating it, then lets your worshipper free. Of course, you could do the opposite, training your creature to eat everyone it sees. As the creature balances its desires with what you teach it, a personality begins to emerge.

The creature is a marvel of AI programming, learning not only through the application of your firm hand but by observation as well. It watches you, learning to use your favorite spells. As the creature adopts your beliefs, it becomes capable of acting in your stead. Capable of making its own observations, your creature can travel to a new village, realize the original online play devised. Budding deities can compete in a more traditional strategy game, pitting their spell set and creatures against each other. What is interesting here is that you use the creature from your saved game online; anything that happens to it will be carried back to your ongoing solo campaign.

Even more remarkable is Molyneux's plan for BLACK & WHITE's online community, where players will be able to take their creatures online to interact with each other in a primarily non-combative setting. The creatures will learn from each other - they could pick up bad habits, or they might learn a new, special attack. Again, this new knowledge will be carried back to the single-player game where you'll have to deal with their slightly-altered personality.

BLACK & WHITE should simply be like no other game, ever. Yes, it's graphically gorgeous, but it's the free-flowing, individualized play that is most tantalizing. It's an awful lot of ambition to shoehorn onto one CD-ROM, but if anyone can do it, Molyneux and Lionhead Studios can.
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--General George C. Patton

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What is the appeal of the Skinner box that is the home? Security, tranquility, the sense of wholeness that can only come by surrounding yourself with those you love? Nah.

I think it's more along the lines of an old Steve Martin routine in which he entertained thoughts of raising a child and teaching said offspring all the wrong words for everything. He relished the thought of a child raising his hand the first day of school and asking, "May I moo doo bucket to the banana patch?" This is the appeal of THE SIMS, the ultimate expression of the entire SIM franchise, a game where you can run amok with the lives of people, without running the risk of jail for child abuse through enforced idioclassia. Maxis, the company that practically created the so-called "software toy" genre with SIMCITY, is now preparing to deliver the ultimate toy -- human lives.

Social Darwinism Made Easy
by Robert Coffey

Birth of an Artificial Nation
Seven years ago, Maxis founder Will Wright was toying with an architectural sim, a nice little program that would let people create their own virtual dream homes. But other products (most notably SIMCITY 2000) distracted Wright and the rest of his team until about two and a half years ago. When production once again resumed what Maxis had been calling SIM DOLLHOUSE it was with one significant change -- the focus of the game had moved from the aluminum siding of the homes to the lives of the dolls within.

Anyone who's played any of the SIMCITY games knows just how pesky the virtual people inhabiting those digital metropolises can be; whether moaning about taxes or whining for a sports stadium, the "Sims" were a difficult
bunch to manage. Happily, they remain just as challenging in THE SIMS, thriving only when players tend to the minutest details of their lives. One of the most remarkable things about the game is how the design team has distilled gameplay to three basic functions—building, buying, and living—and yet managed to pack so much of the real world into those seemingly limiting specifications.

Every game starts with the creation of a new, single Sim, and deciding his or her sex, skin, and basic appearance before dividing points among basic character qualities: neatness, outgoingness, activity level, playfulness, and how nice you are. After that you dive right into the building portion of the game. Since you start with a set amount of money, you can either immediately purchase a model home or create your own. Designing your own home is a remarkably intuitive process, using a simple click-and-drag interface to plop down floors, walls, windows, doors, and anything else you feel your home needs. Gamers will have to resist the temptation to blow all their money on the biggest house they can afford right off the bat, since they'll have to furnish it as well; forget to set aside enough money for a toilet and shower and life will get very Appalachian very fast.

**PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE**
Bathing and keeping your toilets in working order may sound trivial, but ignore them and your Sims will suffer the same way an overfed, bladder-bloated you would.

**YOU CAN BUY HAPPINESS**
Keeping your Sims content is the primary challenge. While big rooms and lots of windows will make them happy, the chief purveyor of pleasure comes in the form of material goods. Comfy chairs, aquariums, stereo equipment, hot tubs, and state-of-the-art kitchens are just a smattering of the objects that
fill up your Sims’ living space.

All the objects are programmed with attributes affecting both your Sims’ mood and their behavior; this means that as you accumulate more stuff, you also acquire more options in terms of things to do. Entertainment objects facilitate social interaction, giving visitors something to do when they drop by, while quality-of-life improvements such as plants just make your Sims happier. Of course, you’ll have to maintain all these things – fail to water your plants and they’ll die, burgeoning your Sim. This amount of micro-management could be daunting, so you’ll be able to hire gardeners to care for your lawn, while maids will tidy up the house.

Beyond this, objects can also affect who your Sim is: purchase an easel and your Sim will start painting, improving their creativity and opening up new life paths, primarily in terms of employment advancement. As Will Wright explains, the gist of this “behavioral architecture” is that the intelligence is a function not only of the people in the houses, but also of the environment you’ve provided for them.

That’s right, you’ll have to get a job. The game will include 10 career tracks, each with 10 jobs that will take budding actors from a meager waiter job to superstardom, or guide enlisted army personnel to a high-profile life as an astronaut.

**LIFE OF THE PARTY**

The living part of the game is probably the most important—it’s undoubtedly the most fascinating, especially when it comes to Sims interacting with their neighbors. Other Sims will eventually drop by, and it’s your job to forge relationships with them all. Ideally, you’d like warm relationships, since you’ll need to make friends and influence people in order to reach the higher career tracks—not to mention start a family. It would be easier if you could control the neighbors, but even though they’re from families you’ve created in other parts of the neighborhood, you can’t control them once they leave their own home.

While parties, hot tub get-togethers, and conversations about aliens and other common interests will help you get and keep your friends, you’ll really have to work to get a spouse. You’ll have to woo someone with backrubs, compliments, hugs, and kisses before you pop the question. Just as in life, one miss could foul the whole deal up. Once you do wed, you’ll then gain direct control of your new partner and can start a family, growing to a maximum of eight—perfect for a very Brady Christmas.

---

**FAMILY ALBUM**

Early playtesters are responsible for the creation of one of THE SIMS’ coolest features—a built-in screen capture utility that lets you string together and annotate a series of shots. What Maxis discovered when people played the game was that they instinctively constructed stories around the squabbles, job promotions, and untimely deaths of their pet people. These photo albums can be saved in a very tidy web page format and posted online, allowing people to share the stories of their virtual families.

Even better, the families in your neighborhoods are saved in a web page format as well. This means that the SIMS’ community can go beyond the scrapbooks to actual hands-on experimentation with the populace of other players’ communities by downloading the families directly into their games, and letting them interact with the families already there.

In an odd way, THE SIMS shares the same enormous potential for self-expression that BLACK & WHITE does, allowing players to play the game the way they want, with results that can’t be tidily predicted. Maxis is embracing the game’s potential for delightful unpredictability, with no better example of this than the proposed Genetic Face Generator. This generator would be used to create the faces of Sim kids, blending the features of their parents to create a unique individual. When you consider that people can use their own faces and/or any 3D skin for their game characters, the possibilities are infinite. In fact, virtually every aspect of the game can be customized: skins, faces, objects, surface tiles, careers—you name it. While Maxis will release new items and careers after the game ships, we expect the user-created material to be the most inventive.

THE SIMS is pretty much a simple stroke of genius, the sort of idea that makes you slap yourself on the forehead and ask, “Why didn’t anyone think of this before?” What are you going to do about taking with the infinite possibilities inherent in the lives of people? With such an immediately understandable premise, THE SIMS seems destined to have an even broader appeal and marketability than the rest of the Sim franchise.
A strategy game of epic galactic exploration, colonization and conquest, this all-new Reach for the Stars builds upon the foundation created by its legendary predecessor. Whether you choose to dive into the immense range of player controlled game parameters or simply focus on galactic exploration and enemy destruction, Reach for the Stars promises an immersive and addictive strategy gaming experience!

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*GameWeek, 1997

INTERSTATE '82
BAD-ASS CARS.
BIG-ASS GUNS.
Ron Gilbert has a story to tell us. It is an epic story of heroes and villains, of good and evil. It is a story of a town in trouble, of a mighty warrior who comes to save the day.

If anyone else were telling this story, we know what would happen next. We’ve all heard it many times before. Too many times. But this is a story by Ron Gilbert, a man who has created some of the funniest and best-loved computer games ever. So what happens next, in his story, is this: the warrior arrives in town, trips over a drainage ditch, impales himself on his own sword, and dies. Now they need a new hero.

This is about all we’re going to spill of the plot of GOOD AND EVIL, Ron Gilbert’s new RPG/adventure, because to tell more would spoil things. All you really need to know is that one of gaming’s best designers has something new up his sleeve, and if everything goes his way, it’s going to change the way we think about role-playing games.

FATHER OF SCUMM

Gilbert’s goals are high, but fortunately for him, he has a career-long habit of setting new standards whenever he invents a game.

At LucasArts in the mid-’80s, he created hilarious comic masterpieces like MANIAC MANSION and MONKEY ISLAND 1 AND 2, and in the process essentially invented the point-and-click adventure (with his legendary SCUMM engine) as well as the cut-scene. Later, as cofounder of Humongous Entertainment, Gilbert completely redefined kids’ games with the mega-popular PUTT-PUTT, FREDDI FISH, and PAJAMA SAM franchises, which offer brilliantly scaled-down adventure games for young kids. Most recently, Gilbert helped start up Humongous’ Cavedog subdivision, whose first title was the wildly popular TOTAL ANNihilation.

Now Gilbert is again working on what his many fans have craved for years—a new comic story to savor. But it’s not an adventure game, it’s a role-playing game with a classic fantasy setting, with a plot and environments that will veer wildly as Gilbert unravels his involving story.

And it is his story, not yours. There is no pretending that you are the main character. “You’re just not,” says Gilbert. “He has a personality, and it’s not your personality. But the choices you make are going to help shape him, and shape the experience of the game.”

The focus on a specific character, with a distinct personality, is rooted in Gilbert’s belief that story evolves from character and not the other way around. “In a lot of the RPGs, it doesn’t seem to matter which character I pick—they all say the same thing. I look at the character on screen, and I look at the dialog, and I think, ‘why would this person ever say this?’
A WHOLE NEW WORLD
For GOOD AND EVIL's look, Gilbert is
striving to create a 3D world that is appropriate both for the game's comic sen-
sibility and its role-playing underpinnings.

I look at the dia-
log, and I think,
"why would this
person ever say this?" Characters just become 'the thief' or
'the archer' but don't have real personalities.

I'M FUNNY HOW?
As you'd expect from the MONKEY ISLAND creator,
GOOD AND EVIL is going to use lots of humor—much
of it directed at role-playing conventions. Characters
will talk amongst themselves about "leveling up,"
for example, while the plentiful dialog and ridiculous
characters, like an evil crow, will retain Gilbert's
absurdist bent. But alongside the humor is going to
be a serious role-playing game. As he put it, "If I
just do a funny story but it's not a good RPG...I'm
dead. So all the things you're used to seeing, they're
there. They're all taken very seriously."

Largely inspired by LEGEND OF ZELDA, Gilbert is
designing a large, fully-3D world to be played in
third-person perspective; it will be open enough for
gamers to explore on their own, in a non-linear fas-
tion, while simultaneously keeping things story-
based. Depending on the choices you make, and on
how much you choose to explore, gamers will have
different experiences while still receiving the same
major plot points.

'To me, the perfect game is like you kinda get through it
and are done in a few hours, but then you can go back and
play it over and over and always pull something new out of
it. To me, that's a lot more interesting than slogging
through 150 hours of gameplay just to get to the end of
a story. The ultimate goal is to tell a cohesive story while still
putting those things into another type of game. What I hope
this will do is completely raise the bar as to what story and
dialog have to be in a role-playing game. My big fantasy
dream is that once you've played an RPG with a great
story and well-written dialog, you'll never want to go
back again." CGW

Ron Gilbert

“'To me, one of the most
important things in the world is
stories. Telling a story within
in a game is kind of a lost art.
A lot of times, Act I is in the
manual, and then you get to
the action. I'm saying, let's
just do all three acts in the
game itself. When you boot up
a game, you shouldn't have to
know anything — no more than
you know when you walk into
a movie for the first time.'”

GILBERT'S GAMEOGRAPHY
Koronis Rift
Maniac Mansion
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
The Secret of Monkey Island
Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge
Putt Putt Joins the Parade (and many other
Humongous Entertainment titles)

Genre: RPG
Release Date: Q3 2000
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Cyanide
"...the ghouls overwhelmed the hero, clubbing him with their own severed limbs before feasting on his guts. And that was right about the time we knew we couldn't wait to play Nocturne. This game will be causing some hallucinogenic nightmares later this year."

- Computer Gaming World

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

- Adrenaline Vault

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

NOCTURNE

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

UNLEASHED HALLOWEEN 1999
Hydra. Monstrosities are all around us. But they came out only when the sun is spent. They are like roaches. Where there is one, there are hundreds. Beneath you, in your walls, in the shadows, waiting for darkness to open their door. And like roaches, they are survivors. Nuclear holocaust, ice ages, drought, famine, the Spookhouse will not wipe them out.
Feel What It Is To Be Immortal.

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE
REDEMPTION

“Rest of E3”
— Adrenaline Vault, Game Spy, Gameprix.com

“RPG of E3”
— E3.net

“RPG of Show”
— IGN.com, All Games Network, Voodoo Extreme

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Hate to break it to you like this, but good games don't go to heaven when they die. Nope, there's no eternal bliss for the greats of gaming's classic age, no angelic host of perfect and eternal players; there's just a sort of fading purgatory of fond memories in the minds of aging gamers.

It's a damn shame. Although most games from days gone by deserve their increasing obscurity, there are a bunch of gems in the rubbish pile that, with a bit of graphics polish and some tweaks to design, could shine in all their former glory.

Bring back the love, we say! Let the classics live again! We rummaged through our memories—the few that have survived the senile dementia—and came up with this list of oldies but goodies that we think deserve another chance. We've also picked some contemporary game designers and development houses who we think have the stuff to do right by these classics.

**RACING DESTRUCTION SET**

**Electronic Arts, 1986**

**Racing Destruction Set** was one game in a series of **Construction Sets** released by Electronic Arts in their '80s heyday. We'd love to see the concept of do-it-yourself games make a comeback. But we'd be happy with the racing game for starters.

In **RACING CONSTRUCTION SET**, you built a slot-car racing track from scratch. You designed the track; placed jumps, mines, and oil slicks; designed your car; and even adjusted the physics of the world. Then you'd take your slot cars for a spin.

For the remake, we'd pick the hottest car game group on the planet, the Electronic Art group responsible for the latest NEED FOR SPEED. Our demands are simple: We want a detailed and easy-to-use track editor with all the bells—jumps, loops, bank. And a bag of obstacles to sprinkle around. We want a car editor that lets us build a car from tires to trans. We want to be able to screw with the physics. Then, we want to be able to hop into a car and make a wreck of it. And we want a movie editor. Tomorrow. That's all.
SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

Seven Cities of Gold was the game that changed a few of us at CGW from boys to gamers. A tiny ship, a handful of terrified men, and an entire hemisphere to discover. It was a great setup and brilliantly executed for its time. As cheesy as the graphics were, and as simplistic as the design was, Seven Cities worked. It made exploring a map fun. And it was brilliantly paced. The long periods of peaceful exploration were punctuated by tense interactions with natives. This remake is a natural for Ensemble Studios, the creators of Age of Empires. And they've got a ready-made name: Age of Exploration. Let us explore a huge, beautiful map on the same scale of the AOE games. Let us establish settlements in the RTS-base building style, but don't force us to micromanage the settlements; give us a good settlement-management AI. There needs to be some competition, too. Rival nations with explorers and conquerors racing to find the new natural wonders and resources randomly but realistically spread across the world. But we don't want the game to turn into yet another RTS game. Exploration is the focus. Get it right, guys, or we'll hammer you mercilessly in the review.

PIRATES!

MICROPROSE, 1987

If anyone has approached perfection in a game design it was Sid Meier with PIRATES! Even with its dated graphics, the game still holds up today. Microprose made a half-assed attempt at an update in the early 90s, but they only marginally improved the graphics and didn't touch the gameplay. The game and gamers deserve a visual revamping, and some of the weaker game elements could benefit from recent advances in RTS design. PIRATES! had it all — action, strategy, adventure game elements, real-time wargaming, history. In the course of living through the career of a pirate on the Spanish Main, you fought ship-to-ship cannon battles, clashed swords with enemy captains, searched for treasure and the members of your scattered family, married the daughters of governors, and managed the logistics of maintaining a crew. You could even fight real-time land battles (though they weren't very good — the only flaw in an otherwise perfect design), and relive the historical careers of famous pirates.

For our remake dream-team, we'd pick Blizzard as the main design group, since they're so good at real-time games and do a great job of creating rich universes around them. We'd bring in the Prince of Persia team to develop the sword-fighting sequences. We'd have Ensemble's Bruce Shelley, gaming's Mr. Peabody, consult on the historical details and manual. And maybe we could find something for that Sid guy to do.

M.U.L.E.

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

Talk to any wheezing gaming geezer and he'll probably drone on and on about M.U.L.E., a brilliant little multiplayer game a decade ahead of its time. M.U.L.E. was essentially a family board game set on an undeveloped planet. Players bid on land parcels, developed those parcels to produce the game's resources, and then moved those resources around the game board using their M.U.L.E.s, a Multiple Use Labor Element. The design was tight and the opportunities to screw other players were plentiful.

New World Computing is the perfect choice for a remake. They've got boardgaming roots and the right sense of humor. We'd skip the boxed version and single-player game and go directly to Internet. And while they're in the right frame of mind, New World can bring back their hilarious multiplayer board game, Nuclear War.

PLANETFALL

INFOCOM, 1984

Of all the Infocom text adventures that could be revived, we choose PLANETFALL because it was one of the most popular. But we don't really care which ones get remade — THE LURKING HORROR, TRINITY, MIND FOREVER, VOYAGING — all we care about is a good story, great writing, and mature themes. All they had was text, so the Infocom authors did text very well. We miss their writing; boy, do we miss it.

For our Infocom remake we'd team up the two current masters of storytelling, Tim Schafer of LucasArts and Ron Gilbert of Cavedog. We'll take the LucasArts artists, too. Throw them in the basement for a year and prepare to hear a tale.
Aren’t you going to ride it? (After all, you built it.)

Pick your theme  Build your park  Ride the rides

Hop on board for thrills, chills and hilarious good times as you take control of your very own Theme Park! Choose one of four themes for the park you’ll build. Pick from tons of shops, decorations, and of course — rides. There are even five different roller coaster types you can customize with wild corkscrews, loops and vertical drops. You’ll also manage it all, just decide how much. Sit back and watch or attend to every detail — even decide how much ice goes in the drinks. And only SimTheme Park lets you experience all the rides and fun from a visitor’s perspective. Then share and compare your park on our web site. So go ahead, build it any way you want — then enjoy the ride.

Join the fun at www.simthemepark.com

Salt the fries
Share your park online
**CHAMPIONS AND INDESTRUCTIBLES**

Champions and the Indestructibles aren't
games that need to be remade—they need to be
finished. We want, no, need a super-hero game, and
we need it now! The concept is a no-brainer, a
natural, but no one has ever been able to pull it off.
We're going to give Peter Molyneux another shot
at the Indestructibles. But this time, Peter, dump the first-person action game idea. Rather,
think Syndicate and isometric perspective. We want a
nice character creation and development system that will
let us pick and choose super-hero traits and personali-
ties. We want a butt-load of cool animations of super-
hero powers and environmental effects. We want to
play multiplayer over the Net. We want to prance
around in pretty underwear, shouting "Zoiks and
away!" Is that so wrong?

**MARBLE MADNESS**

Atari, 1984

A million arcade
games could be
remade, but we
choose Marble Madness
because it was so original,
and the concept could easily
be expanded. The basic idea
for you youngsters: You
played a marble who rolled
around a weird 3D world full
of traps and puzzles and
"had" marbles that would
bump you off the world and
into oblivion. It was different,
it was challenging, it was fun.
We give the redesign task to
the master of arcade weirdness and fun-
ness: Shigeru Miyamoto, designer of Donkey Kong, Mario Bros.,
Zelda, and other classics. We can't wait to see the bizarre maps, charac-
ters, and traps with which he'd litter the little marble's world. And he'd
probably figure out a way to turn a lifeless sphere into a character worthy
of lunch boxes and a cartoon series. We'd also commission a special
rolling-ball controller from CH Products to completely recreate the feel of
the original.

**NEUROMANCER**

Interplay, 1988

Interplay did a great job with William Gibson's novel in
their game adaptation. They captured many of the seminal
scenes, designed clever puzzles, and did a decent job with
the difficult task of making battles with computer AIs interesting.
But the Apple II just couldn't deliver the gritty visuals suggested
by the novel, and the adaptation of Gibson's dialogue for the game
left something to be desired. The game was just far too cartoon
For the remake, we give the job to DreamForge, in particular, to the
team that put together the award winning Sanitarium. They've proven
that they can do dark and moody, and they have a rare gift among game
developers—an ear for dialogue and compelling narrative. Go at it guys. We
want to be walking the streets of Chiba by summertime.

**ARCHON**

Electronic Arts, 1983

Chess and the arcade game. Who'd
a thunk. Archon blended this
unlikely pair into a brilliant
hybrid of action and strategy. The
strategic portion was a very slight variant
on chess: two rows of characters face-to-face
on an alternating black and white grid.
But when the characters met on a square,
they dropped into an arcade battle.
For the remake, we'd keep the strategic
portion—spruced up graphically,
BATTLECHESS-style. But for the character-
on-character battles, we'd use the latest
QUAKE engine to create the 3D battle-
fields. The kicker is the online play. We'd
love to see a setup whereby people could
play different roles: You'd get your
strategians playing the chess game, while
twitch gamers fought gladiator duels in
a first-person action mode.
As for design, we're going to keep this
one for ourselves. We're currently working
on the technology to transfer our cocktail
napkin "design docs" into digital form.
And we're still to convince Thierry
"Scooter" Nguyen to change his major
from English to computer science. But
these are minor issues. With Jeff Green as
project director, we're confident we'll have
this one online for Christmas '93.

**MAGIC CARPET**

Bullfrog, 1994

The sensation of flight on a magic carpet was so good it could, literally, make
you puke. And the visual effects of the spells, like the Earthquake spell that could rip a
continent in two before your eyes, were stupifying. MAGIC CARPET deserves another
flight through the gaming world with the benefits of 3D acceleration.
There are a lot of groups that could take this project on. But having just seen the 3D
engine of HALO, we think Bungie deserves the draw. The HALO engine is capable of everything
the MAGIC CARPET engine pulled off and a whole lot more. So finish up HALO real-
quick like, guys, and take us on another MAGIC CARPET ride. GAW
RAM!
What are you waiting for?
Do you have enough RAM to really dazzle?

www.RAMmatters.com
"...resistance is futile."
- PC Accelerator

"A virtually flawless masterpiece"
- Future Gamer

"... will shake up the gaming landscape"
- CNET

"a next-generation game in every sense..."
- The Adrenaline Vault

"The 3D shooter for the next millennium."
- gamesmania.com

"...I have to tell you, it's pretty damn cool"
- IGN.com

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“Absolutely Amazing”  
— PC Games

“You couldn’t ask for more”  
— Computer Gaming World

“A real innovation”  
— Next Generation

“Best of E3”  
— GameSpot

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It's 500 years in the future. Man and machine are virtually one, and the greatest megalopolis in the world is locked in a brutal war.

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Tour mission: steal the largest, most sophisticated biomechanical attack weapon ever designed... and rich someone's ass!

Third person action gaming at its best
BRAVELY GOING WHERE NO GREEN PLASTIC SOLDIER HAS GONE BEFORE.
NOVEMBER REVIEWS

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"...The cars’ engines sound authentic - which means they all sound pretty much like power screwdrivers - except "Aquacar," which sounds like an electric bong...."

Mark Clarkson, reviewing Re*Volt

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2

FORCE 21

HOW DO WE RATE?

We Review Only Finished Games—No Betas, No Patches.

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

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

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

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

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

Does Not Rate
PHARAOH

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 whatya will, I gotta keep tastin' my brew. The Pharaoh demands the best.
And that's what heeds gonna get. Hail Osharish, may the barley crops grow strong!

Nile Farmer
Nobody told me that when the Nile floods
I have to work on the pyramids. Why didn't I go to embalming school like Mom wanted!
If You Want, You Can Be Buried With Your Hairless Cat.
Contrary to popular gaming lore, the original SYSTEM SHOCK sold over 170,000 copies and was not a commercial failure. But it is true that when initially released in 1994, Looking Glass’s ground-breaking game was overlooked by a lot of gamers, although granted with favorable reviews. Some gamers erroneously dismissed it as a DOOM clone, even though it was actually the offspring of a line of games that preceded any of id Software’s first-person shooters.

SYSTEM SHOCK defied pigeon-hole classification because it borrowed elements from a variety of genres. Yet it is precisely because of its creative design that it is now commonly, belatedly, regarded as one of the better games ever made.

Irrational Games was given the task of creating a worthy successor to the cult classic original, but the good news is that they responded by delivering a game that both retains the best attributes of SYSTEM SHOCK while providing a fresh gaming experience.

Back to the Future

Even though it’s a sequel, SYSTEM SHOCK 2 feels extremely original due to its science-fiction setting – rare for an RPG. The game’s world offers a rich combination of psionic powers, contemporary and futuristic weaponry, and cyberpunkish implants and technical skills.

Here’s the backstory: Prompted by the near destruction of Earth by the malevolent artificial intelligence, SHODAN, Earth’s previously infestected governments formed the Unified National Nominate and imposed constraints on the power of mega-conglomerates. But after inventing faster-than-light technology, representatives of the corporate creator of SHODAN, TriOptimum Corporation, convinced the UNN to engage in a cooperative expedition to unexplored space.

Your character awakens in a crisis, as the ship that undertook the journey has apparently become infested by some form of alien life. Suffering from everyone’s favorite plot device, amnesia, your character has received illegal cybernetic implants that grant superhuman abilities, and are just the kind of endowments needed in order to survive in SYSTEM SHOCK 2.

After an effective introduction and a few early cut-scenes (more disruptive than interesting), the plot is conveyed primarily by listening to email and message logs. While the convenient placement of dozens of logs throughout the otherwise realistic environments is a bit contrived, the messages are engaging and gradually expand upon the fate of the storyline’s key figures.

Unfortunately, since the settings have been abandoned by friendlies, the logs replace more significant interaction with non-player characters. There are also a handful of scripted scenes crafted using the game engine, and frequent and interesting ghostly re-enactments of recent events. Collectively, these methods convey intrigue and generate an eerie atmosphere that make SYSTEM SHOCK 2 feel unique.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2 isn’t easily characterized. The role-playing
game elements are deeper than in the first game, as you're able to personalize your character's initial attributes and abilities and subsequently update them. The game looks and generally feels like a first-person shooter, but the RPG elements and detailed environments give gameplay more depth. Unlike a shooter, you'll find it hard to be successful in SYSTEM SHOCK 2 if you storm into every room, guns blazing. For good portions of the game the ammunition is scarce, forcing players to venture advance through dark hallways and lean around corners to look for resources and opportunities to dispatch foes.

Even solitary enemies can be dangerous opponents, especially early in the game, and travel through the genuinely creepy surroundings often slows to a crawl as a result of the need for caution. Carelessly trekking into an unscouted room can alert a security camera and result in your character's quick death, courtesy of a legion of enemies or a well-positioned laser turret. Hackers beware.

Sly Engine
SYSTEM SHOCK 2's engine is well equipped for such stealthy maneuvering, consisting essentially of an enhanced version of Looking Glass's Dark Engine, created for THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT, combined with some of the better interface features and controls of the original SYSTEM SHOCK. The engine's 3D-accelerated graphics are capable of producing plausible, futuristic environments, and its lighting and lighting effects look particularly good. The engine is less capable of depicting characters, as humanoid figures look crafted from a fusion of rudimentary polygonal shapes, masked by a decent texture map.

Since there's plot justifications for irregularly-shaped beings, and since most of the game's settings are extremely dark, the relatively simplistic character models work fine, even if they're not as detailed as action gamers now expect. The music is appropriately atmospheric, but the game's crisp sound effects deserve particular praise.

Environmental audio is a supported feature that's used to great effect. Straining in the darkness to detect the distant whirring noise of a security camera, the haunting drone of a hybrid, or the misleading banter of a protocol droid becomes an essential tactic. It's great stuff and contributes significantly to the tense overall mood.

One of the best aspects of THIEF's engine was that it tracked how noisy and how visible (based upon surrounding lighting) your character was, and ensured that enemy AI responded accordingly. Those details have been ported intact to SYSTEM SHOCK 2. Stomping haphazardly through a well-lit area while blasting a shotgun will attract considerably more attention than in an action shooter—or in downtown L.A., for that matter.

Don't expect to be able to open the door to one room, deal with its inhabitants, and then calmly open the next door to do likewise. If any creatures are within earshot of combat, they'll try to join the fun, making it important to choose your fights carefully. The enemy AI is very...
good, as even basic grunts charge after you instead of helplessly lumbering in pursuit, while certain deadly opponents will try to stick to shadows, where they'll launch barely visible rapid-fire attacks.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2's interface is very well designed, with a simple click of the mouse allowing you to switch between the game's two modes - Shoot mode, used for moving and engaging enemies; and Use mode, which freezes your view as in an adventure game, where you can explore the environment, use inventory items, and access your PDA. To help you navigate, you can superimpose semi-transparent compass directions over your viewing window, pull up an automap, or maintain a miniature version of it onscreen. Since your character is supposed to be grafted with a variety of cybernetic implants, there's a reasonable explanation for your character's ability to pull up HUD information, such as the digital compass or an assessment of an enemy's hit points. Thus, the interface actually contributes to the gaming world's ambiance, instead of detracting from it.

Character Difficulties

Your character is initially trained in one of three branches of the UNN, acquiring the skills and attributes of either an officer of the OSA (emphasizing psionic powers), marines (weapon skills), or the navy (a combination of weapon skills, hacking, and other technical abilities). The professions don't add as much depth as you might otherwise suspect, since during the course of the game you can develop any skills or attributes regardless of your initial profession.

The professions are very unbalanced, especially at the beginning of the game when the cybermodules used to upgrade your character are extremely rare. It's almost impossible to survive without picking up at least a smattering of weapon and technical skills, and since navy characters start the game with those abilities, they have a huge advantage. Marines are essentially navy characters that have been stripped of technical skills. OSA characters are Lucidites that lack both weapons and technical skills and are initially extremely fragile; there are very few items that allow them to replenish their psionic powers.

I suspect almost all players will develop characters with a mix of PSI, technical, and weapons skills, so that instead of adding meaningful depth, your initial character election is essentially just a hidden additional difficulty setting. During the course of the game you can develop truly different characters who are capable of successfully completing the game, but the initial selection between professions isn't relevant in the manner it was intended.

Lastly, even though the game features a novel setting and contains significant RPG elements, gameplay doesn't evolve significantly beyond that of recent first-person shooters. You'll spend much of your time firing at enemies around corners, opening crates, and engaging in key hunts that demand meticulous exploration.

But the realistic environments, intriguing plot, and creepy atmos-

WINTER WONDERLAND Don't lie down in a pile of snow. Those shiny baubles to the left of the body are pretty valuable.

COMING ON, THE RADIATION'S FINE! The graphic engine is capable of some good lighting and lighting effects.

SPANKING THE MONKEY These happy fellows may surprise you when you first meet them.

www.ttgp.com
Well-designed Looking Glass fan site.

www.shock2.com
The official site.
DRAKAN is a Genre-Crossing Blockbuster

Flight and Magic

There's a fine line between tribute and rip-off in any artistic endeavor. That thin median fades to non-existence in the gaming world, where tomorrow always locks a hecucra lot like yesterday. Is that ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON or THEME PARK? BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION or MASTER OF ORION? HALF-LIFE or – hey, wait a second...

The latest entrant to blur the lines is the Psygnosis-published, Surreal Software-developed DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME. Equal parts TOMB RAIDER, MAGIC CARPET, and traditional adventure, this game has one confusing family tree. So does it rip off the classics or pay homage to them? Hell, I don’t know. I’ll have to let the great minds of our generation ponder that one. All a Coors guzzling backwash like me can say is that DRAKAN is a whole lotta fun to play. It's a truly inspired example of gaming artistry that makes both the publisher and developer two companies to watch in the future.

DRAKAN is the story of a girl and her dragon. Rynn is an athletic young lady (which in the gaming universe means that she possesses both spectacular breasts and an aerobized behind) who becomes bound to the legendary dragon Arokh as both friend and rider, while attempting to rescue her brother Delon. As a Dragon Rider, her mission becomes even more perilous. Rynn and Arokh soon find themselves fighting to save both her brother and the very world of DRAKAN from the forces of darkness. Hey, what were you expecting? Poetry?

Despite the routine storyline, DRAKAN captured my imagination from the moment I started playing. Much of this was due to the simple yet elegant design. The game unfolds like an adventure, with initial goals soon branching off into others. You might begin one of the 11 campaign maps by searching for a specific location, but then meet up with a character who will give you another quest. Some quests are routine “give me this and I’ll give you that” tasks, while others advance the main plot. These missions will lead through diverse worlds with landscapes that encompass everything from a volcanic hell to verdant forests.

Everything about the game is combat-intensive. While you will converse with the odd person, you're more apt to kill anyone you run into. When Rynn is on the ground (think TOMB RAIDER mode), she has to wade through hoards of enemies. When Arokh soars through the sky (think MAGIC CARPET mode), he doesn't do so alone. The engine handles all this fairly well, using either a configurable keyboard and mouse setup or a joystick/gamepad for control input. The third-person vantage point will occasionally hiccup, though. Your viewing angle will sometimes be obscured by trees, cavern walls, or the like. I can't recall ever losing a battle because of this, however.

Multiplayer is fully supported over the net. Ten maps are included for three different games: Dragon Match (players choose dragons and take to the sky, deathmatch-style), Melee Deathmatch (ground combat only), and Master of the Dragon (players start on the ground and compete for the mastery of a dragon). While I didn't get the opportunity to test multiplayer out, these various modes promise a lot of replay value as long as...

Can we still call this a Furball? Aerial combat in DRAKAN can be both exciting and frustrating. While fighting airborne enemies like the Succubus is a nice twist on the hack-n-slash norm, the controls could use refinement.

Freudian Slash

Signs are alive today, I'm sure he'd have something to say about the male game designers who created lascivious Rynn and her great big sword.

CGW Rated

Pros
Engaging and multifaceted gameplay; beautiful visuals and sound effects; inspired level design; diverse multiplayer modes.

Cons
Engine can't always keep up in combat; Arokh flies like a pig.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator video card, 400 MB hard drive space. (Recommended: Pentium II 233MHz)
3D Support: Yes/3D. Multiplayer Support: Up to eight players via Internet or LAN.

ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, violence.
the obvious technical issues have been addressed.

All the standard adventure/role-playing conventions make an appearance in solo play. Magic potions will restore your health, make you invisible, and so on. Special crystals also add to your destructive arsenal. More than 50 weapons are included for Rynn, from rusty axes to magical swords. She will also find various suits of armor during the course of her travels. Arokh starts out with the expected fiery breath, but soon finds different runes that allow him to increase his power. By the time you’re through, Arokh will have belched gas, lightning, ice, and lava.

DRAKAN features a good range of villains upon which to test your murderous prowess. The troll-like Wartoks can both slash and headbutt you into submission. Orcs are irritating little guys with a tendency to duck your best blows. Giant spiders and the Cthulhu-like Scavengers both kill and creep you out.

More challenging enemies such as the demonic Succubus and evil dragons turn up later in the game. Unfortunately, many are by turns cunning foes and mouth-breathing morons. I’ve had some close calls in the midst of a battle and others simply stop on the verge of beating me into a bloody pulp.

My lone major annoyance with gameplay is aerial combat. For a legendary dragon who fought many a battle in his day, Arokh lurches about with all the agility of a hedgehog in a hang glider. Any serious opposition in the skies always takes me out a good seven or eight times before I get in a few lucky shots. This can be a serious drag in some stages of the game, and I doubt I would enjoy dragon vs. dragon multiplayer for this reason.

The Surreal 3D engine does yeoman work with the visuals. Each environment is lovingly depicted and fully immersive. Weather and fog effects,

along with some fantastic colored lighting, complete the illusion.

Character animations are equally good. Rynn moves like the lithe warrior she’s supposed to be, and the Wartoks stomp around like they just emerged from under a fairy tale bridge.

With the exception of the atrocious voice acting (Rynn sounds more like a mall rat than a noble Dragon Rider), the audio effects are similarly fantastic. Rushing water, the echo of every movement in a cavern, the clang of blade on blade—all is wholly believable. The musical score is similarly inspiring; if John Philip Sousa scored a film version of Lord of the Rings, it would sound like this.

DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME is a must-play for anyone who experienced the TOMB RAIDER rush (and subsequent letdowns of the mediocre sequels) and loved it. It renews third-person gaming with so many intriguing new twists, that even those burned out by TOMB RAIDER clones will still find something to enjoy here.
THE RACES ARE ALIGNING.
THE ARMIES ARE GATHERING.
THE APOCALYPSE IS APPROACHING.

AND PEACE IS CURLED UP IN THE FETAL POSITION, WHIMPERING.

"IT LOOKS LIKE TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAMING IS ABOUT TO GET A SHOT IN THE ARM... IT WILL HELP SOLIDIFY AND STRENGTHEN THE GENRE." - IGNPC.COM

"INCREDIBLY DETAILED GRAPHICS MAKE THIS THE MOST LIKELY CONTENDER TO THE FANTASY TURN-BASED CROWN." - PC ACCELERATOR

Choice of automatic (fast combat) or turn-based tactical combat. Conjure over 100 spells spread over 7 spheres of magic.

Attempt to forge strategic alliances with 12 different races, including humans, elves, frostlings, orcs, dwarves and the undead.

Over 100 different fighting units and more than 50 unique heroes, that grow in experience and power.
The wise ones have seen an omen of doom in the form of a star in the night sky. The age of peace has officially been bludgeoned to death. The elfin court lies in ruin, and two factions have emerged. Battle flags have been raised, and silence has enveloped the land. This is the calm before the storm.

You cannot choose to avoid the apocalyptic battle that looms on the horizon. Hatred and the need for revenge have a very long shelf life.

Make critical decisions involving siege units, heroes, captured towns, magic spells, immunities, and stealth.

Battle your way through vast open areas, breach the outer wall in city sieges and explore dark dungeons.

www.ageofwonders.com
It's No Revolution, but Jagged Alliance 2 Is a Tough Strategy Gem

¡Viva Arulco!

She is evil. A driven bitch. She is Daidrantha Reitman, the self-proclaimed "queen for life" of Arulco, a small third-world nation now suffering under its 10th year of ruthless oppression. She has killed her father-in-law, framed her husband for the crime, beaten down her own citizens, and is now bleeding the country's resources dry. Your mission, in Sir-Tech's long-awaited, finally-released JAGGED ALLIANCE 2, is to take this evil bitch down.

And as you hire your mercenaries, assemble your squad, and attack the land sector by bloody sector, you will experience the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you are not only doing the right thing for Freedom and Justice, but you're also knee-deep in one of the toughest, most entertaining, and fast-out best strategy games of the year.

It's not easy -- and that may turn off more casual gamers -- but then, who ever said that taking down military dictatorship was easy?

Party for Your Right to Fight

Like Sir-Tech's original game of a few years back, JA2 takes a standard strategy-game framework and livens it up with some role-playing elements. The game begins, actually, in standard RPG fashion: You create a custom character, with ten standard RPG stats (though I can't honestly say I looked at many of them beyond Marksmanship). After creating your own character, you go on an online shopping spree to hire your first group of mercenaries.

All of the hiring, equipment-buying, and much of the information you receive in the game is handled through a clever interface that emulates the laptop computer you're supposedly packing next to your assault rifle and canteen. To hire mercenaries, you log onto the Web and go to a merc-hiring Web site. To order weapons and ammo, you link to an online depot. Throughout the game, you'll receive messages and files over email, while the history file constantly updates your current missions and quests. It's a great idea that Sir-Tech executes perfectly, complete with a "You've got mail" alert and cheesy banner ads on the Web pages.

Gameplay from here on out is divided mainly between two screens. On the Map screen, you take care of all the strategic macro-management. Here, you'll organize mercenaries into squads, arrange specialized assignments (such as healing other mercs and training local militias), negotiating merc contracts, and monitoring your finances as well as your squads' progression through the game's 200+ sectors.

Keeping a constant eye on all of this -- and there is a lot -- is key to your success in JAGGED ALLIANCE 2. Spend your money too fast or too loosely, and you'll find yourself with no resources for needed equipment or fresh, experienced mercenaries when you need them. Fail to rest or heal your mercenaries properly, or neglect to train the local militias, and Daidrantha's forces will eat you for lunch. You must perform a tricky balancing act of moving forward as quickly as possible, while being efficient and patient enough to keep your squads healthy, well-equipped, and well-positioned. It is impossible to win this game by just blundering forward without a plan.

Bring the Noise

The other half of the game takes place on the Tactical screen, where sectors are rendered in isometric, 2D fashion akin to FALLOUT or BALDUR'S GATE. The artwork is not stunning, but it gets the job done, with enough variety in terrain, structures, and obstacles to keep things interesting. Those looking for flashy 3D eye candy, however, should look elsewhere.

When you enter a sector occupied by the enemy, a pop-up screen allows you to retreat, having the computer auto-resolve the combat, or enter the sector yourself to play out the combat. Your squad moves through the sector in real time until you encounter the enemy, when the game switches into turn-based mode.

For each turn, each merc has a certain number of points that can be used to train, fight, or heal. You can also hire and fire mercenaries as needed. Each merc has a certain number of hit points, and each battle can be extremely hard and tedious.

MURDER.COM All of your mercenary hiring takes place over the Web, which we all know can be a source of great evil.

HARD FOUGHT JA2's tactical battles -- complete with varying stances, obstacles, a battery of weapons, and more -- can be long, slow, difficult affairs. You'll earn every sector you take.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, 32MB RAM, 37MB hard drive space. Recommended Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 64MB RAM, 654 hard drive space.


November 1998 • cgw.gamespot.com • Computer Gaming World

CGW RATED

PROS
Deep, complex gameplay; tough computer opponents; clever interface; enough open-ended, addictive strategy gaming.

CONS
May be too slow-paced for some; battles can be extremely hard and tedious.
It's Not Just The Technology
Breaking New Ground,
It's The Footsteps Of A 10-Ton T-Rex!

You embark on a journey in search of mammoth prehistoric beasts. But then something happens, and you realize you are now outnumbered and outsmarted. The hunter has become the hunted.

CARNIVORES 2

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be used to move, change position (prone, sitting, or standing), fire a weapon, use items, or reload weapons. Position really makes a difference, as does weapon range. Each turn presents you with numerous options, and requires careful planning—especially since, early in the game, the enemy almost invariably has better, longer-range weapons than you.

As you progress, your weaponry and skills get better, but the fighting, if anything, gets harder, with more enemies per sector with even more brutal weaponry. Battles, in general, can be slow, demanding affairs—I'd often spend hours trying to beat a single sector on the game's lowest difficulty level—and as such might wear on some players' patience, especially those craving instant gratification.

About the AI, well, I've played worse. During some battles, you'll swear it's cheating, as it seems to miraculously score a hit every turn, no matter the obstacle, while you miss constantly. At other times it's absolutely brain dead, sending troops practically running into your arms in plain sight. Overall, however, it feels right. Deliberate, strategic thinking is usually rewarded, while barreling forward with guns blazing will earn you a trip to the Load Game screen every time.

Louder Than a Bomb

IA2's trump card is the mercenaries themselves. There are dozens of them to choose from in the game, each with his or her own distinct personality. Each has a huge number of quirks and idiosyncrasies throughout the game, and while some can get awfully repetitive, others are hilarious, and succeed greatly in providing the game with a constant source of comic relief in what might otherwise be a rather dreary experience.

It's not just ear candy, either, but is tied directly into gameplay. Moros will tell you when they're tired, or when their contracts are up. Some refuse to work with one another. Once they've attained a certain level of experience, they'll even up their fees on you. As in an RPG, I found myself getting oddly attached to them (even, or maybe especially, the moronic Steroid), and ended up reloading the game whenever one of them died.

While the game only has one long single-player campaign and no multiplayer, much of the replay value comes from trying different mercenaries, or combinations of mercenaries. I played two games at once—one at home and one at work—and they were completely different experiences. The game's structure is totally non-linear (though you are warned which sectors to avoid early in the game), so there is endless opportunity to devise new strategies to try to whittle your winning time down. Random side quests will also keep you busy, as will experimenting with the game's many found objects, which, though undocumented, will often combine into useful new weapons and tools.

Finally, about the lack of multiplayer: thank goodness. I loved this game, but I can't imagine anything more boring than playing it, turn by turn, with a friend. JAGGED ALLIANCE 2's joy comes from your interaction with the mercs. Other humans aren't needed here.

Countdown to Armageddon

Ultimately, JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is probably too tough and too slow-paced for the casual gamer, and the somewhat crude graphics may leave newer gamers wondering what the fuss is all about. But hardcore gamers looking for a serious challenge may not find a more satisfying, entertaining, turn-based strategy game this year.
YOU ARE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE
BIG HOUSE AND A BIG HOUSE IN MALIBU.

YOU ARE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 500 G'S AND
10-15 IN MAXIMUM SECURITY.

YOU ARE THE FASTEST DRIVER IN THE ENTIRE
CRIMINAL COMMUNITY.

"... the most anticipated
driving game of the year."
- PC ACCELERATOR

FROM THE
CREATORS OF
DESTRUCTION
DERBY 1 & 2

SAN FRANCISCO
Film your own classic 70's car chase
using incredible Director-Mode

LOS ANGELES
Surveillance. Tailing. Deliveries.
Heists. And serious 70's muscle cars.

MIAMI
Getaway through real pedestrians,
traffic signals, traffic... and cops!

NEW YORK
No tracks. Just 4 sprawling urban
downtowns from NY to San Fran.

DRIVER
YOU ARE THE "WHEELMAN"
DRIVER.GTGAMES.COM
Acclaim Almost Delivers Comic Book Justice

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

The comic book license seems almost inherently doomed. Discounting the Marvel characters in Capcom fighting games, can you think of any good comic book games? The last comic-book based game I had any fun with was SPIDERMAN for the Atari 2600. So imagine my surprise, and sigh of relief, when I found that Acclaim went and made a pretty good game out of a comic book: SHADOWMAN. It's not a great one, but leagues ahead of the trash from other licenses.

For those familiar with the comic series, the game takes place around the first story arc of the series' relaunch. For everyone else: You play Mike LeRoi, who is essentially a combination hitman/shaman when he becomes Shadowman. The backstory is that Legion (from Mark 5:9) has recruited five serial killers and plans to bring about the Apocalypse. What Shadowman must do is travel into Deadside (the place where the dead rest), and acquire the Dark Souls before Legion and his five djs. Once Shadowman has acquired all the Dark Souls, he can defeat Legion.

Just Me and My Shadowman

At its heart, SHADOWMAN is another third-person perspective action game, but with a lot more action than the TOMBA RAIDER series. Shadowman isn't here to explore; he's here to violently exe-

IT'S THE 60'S ALL OVER AGAIN The cutscenes are rendered by the in-game engine, so there's none of that goofy FMV in-between levels.

The controls are more TOMBA RAIDER than HERETIC II, slanted toward keyboard or gamepad control. While the mouse can be used, it's not nearly as well implemented as HERETIC II's mouselook.

Stick a Pin in Me

While SHADOWMAN looks like a great start, some things bog it down. The enemy AI isn't stellar. Once I started using the strafe keys, I literally ran circles around the enemy while firing. Also, the game can feel very repetitive. I have no trouble running and gunning incessantly in other games, but after a session of doing so in SHADOWMAN, I feel like moving on to something else. There didn't seem to be enough puzzle elements to balance out the relentless action.

The save-game system has a bad case of console-tis. Yes, you can save and load at any time, but why is there a quick-save command but no complementary quick-load? If the quick-load was going to be omitted, then the game should at least automatically restore from your last save, not from the beginning of the level.

SHADOWMAN is a good start, both for Acclaim and for the industry. It shows that a decent game can be made from a comic license. For third-person action fans who don't mind jumping and gunning a lot, it's a reasonable buy. Let's hope that Acclaim uses this as a springboard for some really good comic-book based projects. (Note to Acclaim: either do an X-O Manowar game, or have Christopher Priest write the next Shadowman game.)

SHADOWMAN
TWO-FISTED TALES
Shadowman is ambidextrous, so if you're good, you can put a gun in each hand and take on bad guys John Woo-style.

LIVE AND LET LIVE Liveside doesn't look as good as Deadside, as you can see on this exterior level without Acclaim's usual heavy fog.

CGW RATED

PROS

Beautiful graphics engine; good-looking Deadside levels; nonlinear design.

CONS

Repetitive; not enough puzzle elements; ineffective mouse-control; incomplete save-game system.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, Direct3D compatible sound and video cards, 20MB hard drive space, 3D-accelerator card. Recommended

Requirements: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 52MB hard drive space, 3D Support: DirectX. Multiplayer Support: None.

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment • Developer: Acclaim Studios Teeside • $49 • www.acclaim.net
You've crushed entire civilizations. You've conquered the world. When are you gonna show some ambition?

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The Science-Fiction game will transform your reality when you crash land and colonize a terrain planet.

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In the Fantasy game you'll engage in battles of magic with the races who rule the clouds, the sea and the earth.

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Test and Time

Check out the latest advances in Civilization at www.civilization2.com
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Face the front lines in first-person, calling in air strikes and commanding futuristic customizable vehicles, including tanks, walkers and hoverskis, via a powerful interface.

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BATTLEZONE II
COMBAT COMMANDER
Warhammer 40,000 Meets Panzer General II

Respect Your Eldars

Have you ever played a science-fiction computer game and come away with the feeling that the gaming universe was so cheesy and shallow, it must have been thrown together by a bunch of weeny, caffeine-high programmers locked in a room until they could finally come up with something? Good news: RITES OF WAR avoids that problem, using as its setting the highly developed Warhammer 40,000 tabletop gaming system. Combining aspects of that universe with the PANZER GENERAL II gaming engine results in a thoroughly engaging, turn-based strategy game.

Lictors and Gargoyles and Genestealers, Oh My!

In RITES OF WAR, you assume the role of the Elders, a race human-like in appearance but far-advanced in capabilities. A victim of their own advanced mental abilities, they've destroyed their homeworld and travel in living spacecraft called Craftworlds. Your Craftworld stumbles upon a planet that was genetically designed long ago—an Eldar utopia called Davinus. Scouting parties have been met with unexpected attacks from human Imperial forces. Outnumbered and outgunned, you know an all-out war with the human Imperials is a losing proposition; however, there are ancient Eldar artifacts on this planet, items of power far too great to fall into inferior hands. You must therefore send localized war parties to retrieve these heirlooms before the humans can find them. You soon realize that something very strange is happening on Davinus, something involving the Alien-like Tyranids.

The campaign plot doesn't sound remarkably different from that of a dozen other science fiction computer games, but in RITES OF WAR, the Warhammer 40,000 environment makes all the difference. There are literally volumes dedicated to the description of the Eldar, Imperial, and Tyranid races, and the depth of this development is obvious when examining the Encyclopedia included in RITES OF WAR.

Unit variety is the game's spice, with 33 types of Elders, 18 each of the Imperial Forces, and the Tyranids. Unit types include Infantry, Scouts, Assault, Aerial, Devastator, War Machines, Artillery and "Psychers" (psychic power specialists). The visuals of the squads are detailed and tantalizing, from the huge Eldar Warwalkers to the terrifying Tyranid Carnifex. The drawback of the detailed graphics is that the units are very large, and not scaled to each other or to the terrain. So a Space Marine infantry icon is the same size as a huge War Walker, and both icons dwarf the surrounding mountains and forests.

The game interface is very smooth and point-and-click simple. Icons have a "strength plate" that displays the strength, remaining movement and attacks, and psychic influence all at a glance.

This Land Is My Land

Not surprisingly, RITES OF WAR plays like a lot like a game of PANZER GENERAL II. There's a deliberate "rock/paper/scissors" feel to it, with every unit having specific strengths and weaknesses. The

same size as a huge War Walker, and both icons dwarf the surrounding mountains and forests.

This Land Is My Land

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Lands of Asheron

INSIDE:
Follow thousands through the portal
A slice of the Dereth bestiary
Orienteering the vast Isle of Dereth

Asheron's Call™
Asheron Beckons You To

Encounter three cultures, thousands of adventurers, and countless monsters.

**Aluvian Realm**

As the first people to answer Asheron's call and venture to Dereth, the Aluvians brought with them a strong sense of justice and right. Many an Aluvian would rather go penniless and hungry, and be on the right side of the law, than be wealthy, powerful, and thriving on the misery of others. Even decades later, their utilitarian architecture reflects these traits. Unfortunately, these cultural tendencies often lead them to rebellious and warlike ways. The most famous of the Aluvians on Dereth are the heroes Thorsten Cragston and Elysia Strathelar. Their Aluvian values proved priceless when they led the human slaves to revolt against their insectlike Olthoi oppressors.

**Gharu’ndim Domain**

Descended from powerful magicians, gifted poets, and intrepid traders, many Gharu’ndim follow the belief that knowledge is power. Those lured to Dereth soon discovered they could not return home, but found the next best thing in the Almun Desert. The famed noble Musansayn led the newly arrived to these comforting sand dunes. Here, they established towns and cities and followed the Ghyaranqa Yadin (the poem also known as The Dozen Roads). Skilled Gharu’ndim smiths have set up shop in many settlements and some have even started crafting their coveted scalemail armor. One such smith is Maqura al-Waryah in the settlement of Tufa.
Dereth.

Sho Nation

Trained from youth for unarmed combat, a Sho is never defenseless. The eclers use martial arts as a foundation for instilling the four principles called the Stones of Joji: discipline, detachment, compassion, and humility. This philosophy is embodied in the meticulously crafted weapon, the tachi—a blade now forged in Derethian villages such as Baishi and Savato. Although known to be reclusive, even the Sho on the homeworld of Ipce are beginning to trade with the distant Gharun’dim and Milantian kingdoms. Certainly, for the Sho cultism on Dereth to survive, they, as well as the other humans, must start working together.

An archer and a warrior.

A glimpse of the Denizens of Dereth

The Reed Shark
Terror of the Swamp
The crests of these man-sized, three-legged creatures emerging from the foliage may be the only warning of an impending attack. Often traveling in packs, these distant cousins of the aquatic Shallows Shark and tundra-dwelling Mattkar have been domesticated by the Tumeroks. Recent arrivals, however, should avoid them at all costs.

The Virindi
Masked Enigma of the Badlands
Wielding wicked-edged sickles, these floating, mystical beings strike fear into most sensible adventurers. Those who don’t know about their staggering magical powers will soon find out. Travelers should always try to take on Virindi en masse. Lurking on the Obidian Plain, these apparitions mask, cloak, and conceal both their physical appearance and their intentions on Dereth.

The Lugian
Giant from the Highlands
Among the mightiest of Dereth’s monsters, these massive mountain-dwelling titans dwarf humans with their sheer size. Their strongholds are found across Southern Osteth, in the highlands of the Lirvak Range. Even the lowest of their castes—the Laigus—can effortlessly dispatch an inexperienced explorer.

The Olthoi
Scourge of the Land
The bane of the Empyrean civilization, these vile, hulking insects once enslaved all of Dereth’s humans. Today, they have been vanquished to the deepest subterranean reaches. Although Derethians want nothing more than to see these abominations extinct, the hard truth remains that Dereth still needs heroes—adventurers strong and brave enough to travel into the shadowy hives and survive what honor and bounty await within.
The Mysteries of Ashtron

Welcome explorers to the mystical

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Promises of heroic deeds and epic quests

Join us on our grand adventure to

Legend says, this is the true path to

Travel to the apocalyptic

Island of Death. Once called Heith

The mysterious world of Ashtron
A northern adventuring party returns with the news that Asheron's Call has been rekindled in the desert. Asheron's Call is a mysterious place that is said to be the original home of the ancient human race. The party is led by a group of brave adventurers, including a wise old sage named Zafar. Zafar is known for his wisdom and his ability to understand the language of the desert. He leads the party to a hidden temple in the desert, where they find a ancient artifact that is said to be the key to unlocking the secrets of Asheron's Call.

Zafar explains that the artifact is a map that leads to a hidden chamber deep in the desert. The chamber is said to contain the ancient knowledge of the human race. The party sets out to find the chamber, but they soon realize that they are not the only ones interested in the artifact. A group of evil sorcerers, led by a powerful sorcerer named Zorgoth, are also after the artifact.

The party must navigate treacherous terrain and face dangerous obstacles in order to reach the chamber. They encounter fierce monsters and treacherous terrain, but they are determined to succeed. Finally, they reach the chamber and discover the ancient knowledge. They are amazed at the power of the knowledge and decide to use it to help humanity.

Zafar tells the party that the knowledge is too powerful to be kept hidden. They must share it with the world, but they must do so wisely. The party agrees and sets out to share the knowledge with the world. They become heroes, and their name is remembered forever as the heroes who unlocked the secrets of Asheron's Call.

In the end, the party realizes that the journey was not just about finding the artifact, but about the journey itself. They learn that the greatest rewards come from the experiences we have, not from the things we find. They return to their homes, but they will always remember the journey to Asheron's Call and the lessons they learned on the way.
Allegiance System
Strength in Numbers

Starting out in Dereth can be daunting. You'll lack funds, lore, weapons, and armor. Fortunately, powerful nobles are always in search of new vassals. But choose your patron wisely. The right one will not only help you on your way, but can be a valued companion. Remember, though, when you become a patron yourself, you'll rise among the nobles only as long as you put the happiness of your charges ahead of your lust for power.

Character Creation
An Identity All Your Own

With distinct heritage groups, nearly limitless facial features, and an array of clothing to choose from, the powerful character creation system makes it very unlikely you'll encounter two adventurers who look exactly alike. What's more, you'll select from a mix of skills and attributes from a myriad of options—all the way from the martial disciplines befitting a blademaster to the mystical arts of the sorcerer. In both appearance and talents, you'll be as unique in Dereth as you are in the world where you now reside.

Magic System
An Incentive for Secrecy

Even with hundreds of spells in the hands of adventurers, there are hundreds more waiting to be discovered. In the ever-evolving world of Dereth, wizards are constantly vying to be the first to learn new methods of sorcery. For while a spell can be extremely powerful as long as its formula is kept to a few people, its strength will be fleeting once too many discover and use it. Wise magic users guard their spells, knowing those who control the most knowledge wield the most power.

Asheron's Call
Answer the Call

www.microsoft.com/games/asheronscall

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key to success is discovering which squads are effective against and which are vulnerable to other squad types. Like any good strategy game, if you simply throw all of your cool-looking warriors at the enemy, you'll end up as reptile food.

Winning requires using effective combinations of your resources; for example, using stand-off weapons to weaken the enemy before closing in for melee combat, and keeping support fire close enough to contribute to tough battles. Additionally, "Strategies" are available for purchase before a scenario—the equivalent of Strategy cards in the miniatures game. Those can turn the tide of a battle; for instance, using a Sabotage strategy on an enemy artillery unit will cause it to explode when it fires.

Another interesting aspect of RITES OF WAR is an RPG component. You can name your units and watch them grow up to 10 levels in experience. A basic Eldar unit may eventually gain enough experience to reach "Exarch" status, an extremely formidable foe. It's easy to become attached to a squad that you've named and has proven itself in multiple battles, advancing in skills and effectiveness. However, it's also quite difficult to keep your guys alive long enough to bond with them. Most scenarios are very evenly matched, as the AI examines your army before battle and adjusts its forces to match your army's level and composition. Frequently the result is battles of attrition, with you winning by the skin of your teeth and leaving the battlefield with considerably fewer units than when you began.

Give Me More

While there are a couple of mini-campaigns (three scenarios each) from the viewpoint of the Imperial and the Tyranids, the heart of the game is the 24-scenario full campaign covering the Eldar's attempts to right the wrongs on Davinthus. Beyond the absorbing story, the campaign maintains interest by offering a wide range of victory conditions, such as assasinating a key enemy leader, rescuing fellow warriors, finding and recovering a key artifact, and search and destroy missions. The problem is that there is only one full campaign, albeit a campaign that is fairly difficult to complete. True, you can replay the game and try out different army compositions, but the surprises originally presented in the plot will be gone. There is a scenario editor that will hopefully result in a wealth of battles appearing on the Internet. Still, it only gets for a campaign involving the Imperial and the Tyranids that has the same plot quality of the Eldar campaign.

However, it is a tribute to the engrossing qualities of RITES OF WAR that the player finishes the campaign longing for more. If you have any interest in science fiction and strategy gaming, RITES OF WAR is a must. CGW

### Tabletop vs. Computer

If you're a tabletop Warhammer 40,000 fan interested in RITES OF WAR, or if you've played RITES OF WAR and are curious about its miniatures origin, you may be wondering what the key differences are. The first obvious difference is that in the tabletop game, a unit represents a single entity, while in RITES OF WAR each icon represents a squad. This results in a significant difference in the scale and tactics of battle. Additionally, strengths and weaknesses of units have been modified to avoid dominating, invincible units and to ensure balance. Finally, RITES OF WAR presents a very small subset of the vast Warhammer 40,000 universe, as a visit to any Warhammer 40,000 website will demonstrate. Check out some of the sites below.

- [www.portmp.net](http://www.portmp.net)
- [www.thewarp.net/warhammer](http://www.thewarp.net/warhammer)
- [www.games-workshop.com/Warhammer40k/40kintro.html](http://www.games-workshop.com/Warhammer40k/40kintro.html)
How a Funky-Walking Girly-Man Saved the Universe

The Fonz as Savior

Imagine a typical American action film, made by Belgians and then translated back into English. The plot: a Homeric epic somewhere between the Bible and Stargate. The hero: part Fox Mulder, part Jesus, part The Fonz; a burly U.S. Navy Seal who walks like a runway model with a wedge. Add to the mix a truly great music score, worthy of any blockbuster movie, performed by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. A strange mish-mash of elements to be sure, but the result is an extremely entertaining bit of interactive theatre.

And what a refreshing change it is to have an experience on your computer that gives you the satisfaction you would normally only receive from a good book or mini-series.

A well done 20-minute trailer opens up the game and sets up the story. You play Cutter Slade (an American name only Europeans could think of!), one of the United States' best soldiers. Some kooky scientists were fiddling around and found a way to send a probe to a parallel universe, but got in over their heads. Basically, they screwed up so bad that the whole planet will get sucked into a void unless someone travels through to the other side and fixes up the probe. Of course, you're the poor sod stuck with the job, scientists tagging along.

You wake up in this strange parallel world with no gear, and no idea where the others are. Luckily, the creatures that found you are friendly and somehow speak some broken English. At this point, the game begins.

Stranger in a Strange Land

There is so much to learn about this new universe that you feel like a tourist dropped into a foreign land. You can't really understand what people are talking about half of the time. You don't know where to go, who to talk to, or what to do. The process of learning about this new place is made easier, though, by the use of your notepad and lexicon. Every time you learn the meaning of a new word, you automatically put an entry into your lexicon so you can look it up later. Your notepad works the same way, but is much different.

More of a "to do list." By the end of the game, you will have amassed more than a hundred entries in each.

All you know is that you are supposed to fix the probe, but you don't have any idea where it is. The locals, as it turns out, think you were sent down by the gods to save them. This complicates matters, because they are all willing to help you but also expect you to act as their prophesied savior. This means you have to run around doing favors for everyone before they will have faith in you and help you on your mission. The wise-ass Cutter Slade makes an unlikely savior indeed, but ultimately, you'll fulfill the prophecy in spite of yourself and save both worlds from destruction.

I'm not going to tell you any other specifics about what happens, because the whole fun is experiencing it yourself for the first time. I will say that there is everything you could ask for in a good plot here: greed, love, corruption, faith, trust, oppression, and revolution. Of course, there are also cool weapons, plentiful ammo, and lots of stuff to kill. Occasionally you will find it fairly predictable, and the dialogue is only so-so at times, but hey, you try writing a screenplay for a movie that's 50 hours long.

The Undiscovered Country

Once your adventure begins, you will find that you are not restricted by traditional levels with doors between them. There are a couple of very cool boss-like characters, but you can deal with them at your leisure. You are pretty much free to go wherever you please and do whatever you wish. The developers have used some subtle (and not so subtle) ways of corralling you into the plot, however. You can't kill too many innocents, because your reputation will go through the floor and make it impossible to progress. I also ran into a couple instances where my playing style conflicted with

OFFICIAL TESTING AGENCY

...And the location of the grand Palazzo Fete.

The city of Olimia is the capital and center of the economy.

PROS

Extremely cinematic gameplay; very open and dynamic; good story and endearing characters.

CONS

Despite claims, looks and plays like crap on slow machines; can't look up or down.

Requirements: Pentium II 200 MHz, 500MB free hard drive space, 32MB RAM. Recommended Requirements: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 8X CD ROM drive.

Designed and developed in Germany by Wings Simulations, Panzer Elite™ is poised to take the high ground as the most realistic platoon-based WWII tank simulation yet seen for your PC.

**Germans Do Details**
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**Germans Do Powerful Game Engines**
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**Germans Do Interfaces**
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**Germans Do Historical Accuracy**

**Germans Do More Than Just Tanks**
Featuring over 80 different units including infantry and 22 playable tanks.

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

**Germans Do Network Play**
Supports up to 6 players over LAN, modem or serial link, 4 players via Internet.

For more information, go to www.panzerelite.com

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the expectations of the scripting engine, but this was more of an annoyance, as nothing game-stopping occurred.

Outcast uses a voxel-based engine, which is useful for muddling large, open outdoor environments, but the downside is that it doesn’t support 3D accelerators. Infogrames will tell you that this is a feature, making the game playable on practically any machine, but this is rubbish. In truth, it still looks like crap on slow machines, just in its own special way. I played it on a Celeron 300A at home (not overclocked) and it ran pretty well, but it would bog down when there was a lot of on-screen action. On a PII 450, it ran great. Just like any system-hogging flight sim though, once you’ve seen it on a good rig, you won’t want to play it on anything else.

My one beef with the game relates to the camera control and weapon aiming. Probably due to the limitations of the engine, you can’t look up or down very far. This totally bites when there is someone shooting at you from above, and you can’t even look up far enough to see them. The auto-aiming function will latch on to these targets, but only some of the time. Inevitably, it will fail you at the worst possible moment. There is a first-person mode, but this is made almost entirely useless by the fact that when you try to aim up or down, your gun will annoyingly “bounce” back to the center.

There were also numerous times when I was in a confined space between two walls, and the camera — confused while looking for a good spot — would suddenly fly up to the roof two stories up. This wouldn’t be so bad if it didn’t drag me along with it. Of course, I was never meant to be up there, so like Wyle E. Coyote, after looking around for a moment, I would fall through the roof, down two stories, and lose half my health. Thanks a lot!

**Fantastic Voyage**

Despite some minor annoyances, I felt a real sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after I finished OUTCAST. I really got attached to all the funny characters and the universe in which I had spent about 60 hours. Whenever I got bored, or thought something was too obvious, the game would be right there making fun of itself and throwing me a change-up. There were also some jokes and surprises at the very end that were so hilarious that they left me with a very positive feeling about the whole experience. There are lots of elements borrowed from RPG and adventure games here that should make this game familiar and enjoyable to gamers who dig those genres. But OUTCAST is such an accessible game that everyone who enjoys a good story should give it a try.

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**Cool Links**

- www.outcastcentral.com The unofficial site
- www.outcast-the-game.com The official site
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.

An RPG / Strategy game. Coming this Fall. Visit www.lith.com for a sneak preview!

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Hidden Agenda

Focusing on small-unit commando action during the Second World War, HIDDEN & DANGEROUS (H&D) is wargaming veteran TalonSoft's entry into the growing tactical sim genre. Can a title without the high-tech razzle-dazzle of a game like RAINBOW SIX compete in this burgeoning sub-genre? Oh, yes. Yes indeed.

Who Dares, Wins
H&D's operations are spread across 23 real-world commando missions, letting you lead your elite team of British SAS troopers (from both first and third-person perspectives) behind enemy positions to rescue downed allied pilots, disrupt German communications, kidnap German high officials, or destroy enemy strongholds. The six linear campaigns range in location from Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, and Norway to the North Sea and Czechoslovakia.

Your four-man team is formed by choosing from a pool of 40 SAS operatives. Each soldier possesses five readily applicable abilities - shooting, reaction, stealth, strength, and endurance. Missions are won or lost depending on the operatives' skills and how aptly they're applied. For instance, your snipers should have the highest shooting skill while your bazooka gunner should possess the highest endurance and strength. Picking the right combination of men for each mission makes a crucial difference, so you'll really need to think before entering a mission.

Outfitting your team is another enjoyable part of the overall strategy; choosing weapons and equipment tailored for missions is essential. Arms include lightweight submarine guns like the Sten, sniper rifles like the Lee Enfield .303, and heavy arms like the Bren machine gun. And there's plenty of equipment to boot: binoculars, cameras, decoder, combat knives, grenades, anti-tank mines, and TNT. If you run out of ammo or equipment, your troopers can pick up weapons and supplies off dead enemy soldiers - a nice, realistic touch. Of course, some gamers won't want to bother with all this planning, so H&D has a handy auto-setup feature that outfits your team so you can head right into the mission.

H&D excels at balancing action and strategy. Like most tactical sims, the game requires a deft combination of shooter skills and tactical savvy. However, the design takes it one step further by implementing a readily available, real-time strategy screen for hit-and-run planning. This map screen can be activated at any time to quickly coordinate and control operatives. Move one commando up a hill to snipe at enemy soldiers while ordering another to blow up a tank, then move to take out a guard tower. The strategy screen is your best mate, because it's where you'll regroup when the going gets tough.

Voice command keys also come in handy if you need quick support. Other interface components could have used more tweaking. Even though there is a save feature, there's no way to restart the mission without having to toggle back through a slew of setup screens.

Hard as the Rock of Gibraltar
H&D is an extremely challenging game even at the easiest of settings. Engaging the enemy without a meticulous plan will kill you faster than you can pull a pin from a grenade. German soldiers don't sit around while your commandos haphazardly flounder around a mission. They actually sneak up or flank you during the middle of a firefight.

Tools of the Trade
The strategy map is an invaluable asset for planning tactical assaults or for regrouping when the going gets tough.

Requirements: Pentium 166 MMX, 16MB RAM, 16MB hard drive space, 3D card. Recommended Requirements: Pentium 266 MMX, 32MB RAM, 16GB Ram

Hard drive space, 64MB 3D card, 3D Support: Inertial, Multiplayer Support: Serial, modem connection (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-4 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Illusion Softworks • $50 • www.talonsoft.com

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Sniper Strategies

When picking your snipers, always select operatives with exceptional shooting abilities. Each mission should include a sniper in the plan, with a backup just in case. Pack your sniper with ample amounts of ammo, since you'll be using him to take down the majority of enemies.

Study the strategy map in order to identify favorable terrain for sniper positioning. Support your marksman with another operative when you move him to optimal high ground – a machine gunner with a high reaction score is great for this, especially in wide-open terrain. A machine gunner's high rate of fire and decent range compliments the sniper perfectly, making them a lethal combination of target interdiction and suppression fire.

Make sure you crouch or lie down before your sniper fires. This will decrease your chances of getting hit. Aim for the head when shooting, since a direct hit will kill your enemy most of the time.

When using snipers to assault buildings and encased areas, use caution. Their low rate of fire can hinder them if there's more than one enemy blasting away at your sniper.

fight. But the toughness of the missions only heightens the great sense of fun. HIDDEN & DANGEROUS plays like being in a great WWII movie – intensely suspenseful, heart-pounding action where danger lurks around every corner, behind every fallen tree, inside every trench. Weather effects, buildings, and terrain create an eerie wartorn atmosphere. This is commendable, considering the limitations of the graphics and the fact that the game features only two types of enemy soldiers – officers and grunts.

The AI is downright nasty. Germans shoot with pinpoint accuracy and they always seem to know when you're coming. My advice: shoot first or die. Still, the AI isn't perfect. Germans will stroll over dead comrades' bodies without blinking, and your own team members may shoot you in the back.

H&D's ballistics suffer from a lack of realism. Shoot a German soldier a few times in the arm and he'll quickly die, but shooting him squarely in the chest only passive him off. Headshots are the only one-shot, one-kill wonders. Also, it feels as if all rounds – from a high-caliber machine gun to a pistol – have the same impact on a target.

H&D also offers a cooperative multiplayer feature. You join forces with up to three players to take on the computer in single-player campaign missions.

With no re-spawning, team communication is truly vital, since you'll need to work effectively as a group to beat the challenging AI. One bad decision may cost you the entire mission.

Unfortunately, a few bugs do crop up. If you're unlucky, you can slip down the side of an escarpment and die, sniper roticles can disappear, or your commandos might die by walking through walls.

But HIDDEN & DANGEROUS' small unit tactics and taut action eventually win out over the bugs, freaky ballistics, and AI quirks. The strategic depth and riveting action should please armchair generals and shooters alike, while WWII buffs will appreciate its realistic depiction of elite force operations. Addictive, entertaining... what more do you need?
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Finally, a Star Trek Game for the Kirk—and Klingon—in All of Us

**True Trek At Last!**

With STARFLEET COMMAND the curious and not wholly ignorable history of Star Trek computer games finally has a product worthy of Kirk, Spock, and the rest of the classic crew.

Based on the STARFLEET BATTLES board game and perhaps benefiting from BATTLES' breadth and depth of experience, here at last the interactive universe feels like Star Trek. And that universe overlays a plot that is very much in keeping with the classic Trek universe, a dangerous place.

Despite Trek's innate emphasis on the Federation, to play only from the Federation's point of view would overlook the richness of the game's campaign sequence. The campaign structure fairly quickly reveals itself to be much more than just a straightforward progression through ranks and increasingly complex assignments. Without giving too much away, be aware that the campaign sequences should be played from each of the game's empires.

In the best tradition of Trek, the campaign reveals that not just the political balance of power is threatened, but in some ways the whole fabric of the universe. The size of the threat becomes larger with each successfully completed mission.

Ultimately, the campaign sequence comes to feel almost like a movie or multi-part episode; in some ways closest to a Star Trek novel. It's gratifying to see plot taken as seriously as playability—and STARFLEET COMMAND succeeds at both.

Care has been taken throughout the game to communicate the flavor of each race. Effective use of color and graphics establishes the fundamental differences among the various races. While the basic interface remains similar enough race to race to be relatively intuitive, the differences in design and appearance serve to remind you that the goals (and tactics/weapon systems) of, say, the Lyrans differ from those of the Klingons.

This is very much a game of multiple systems and systems management, requiring players to coordinate helm, security, science, defense and offense, communications, and more, all of it in the heat of battle. Fortunately, the command screens and sub-screens are thoughtfully laid-out. Tutorials and random non-campaign missions also help.

The essentially mercantile approach to rising through the game's ranks might trouble purists. You earn points for missions successfully accomplished, and use those points to upgrade and refit your ships. The library of available ships with increasingly powerful systems is an additional spur on the career ladder. Remember, though, you can only buy tools—you must learn the skills to use them well.

Space scenes look great, with various ships, starbases, and planets well rendered. One large weakness of the game, though, is its 2D combat plane. Combat takes place along an axis rather than throughout a globe, which is the game's only major drawback.

The game contains a variety of riches that add to replayability. The political universe comprised of the game's races evolves and changes with your success or failure at various missions. The campaign sequence introduces familiar figures that further contribute to the Trek-ish verisimilitude.

Unfortunately, some of that universe's most familiar icons and scenarios appear to be available only on discs purchased directly from Interplay. This is a shame, because everyone ought to be able to take on the challenge of "Balance of Terror" or rest in the heart of a nebula when facing Khan.

Bogus marketing schemes aside, this is a terrific game. Trek fans have waited a long time for a computer game that captures the richness of the Star Trek universe. STARFLEET COMMAND is that game, and it is rich and deep enough to keep most of those fans busy until the next time the universe is endangered. CGW

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**CGW RATED**

**PROS**

- Feels like classic Trek ought to feel; deep replayability.

**CONS**

- Lots of information to manage;
- 2D space battles;
- Khan only available in direct-order versions of game.

**Mail Order Madness**

Unfortunately, only players who buy the game directly from Interplay can face Khan's wrath.

**Insight Information**

Library of ship types and comprehensive vessel information gives you the chance to explore the technologies of species you may face in space.

**Plane Old Battle**

While coordinating multiple ships as well as ship systems is one of the challenges of STARFLEET COMMAND, having to play in a flat, two-dimensional space is a little disappointing.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 256MB hard drive space.

**Recommended Requirements:** 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator.

**3D Support:** DirectX 3.0

**Multiplayer Support:** Network, Serial connection (2 players), LAN Internet (2-5 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: 14 Degrees East and Quicksilver Software, Inc. • $50 • www.interplay.com

ESRB Rating: Everyone.
Focus on Omikron:

A quick chat with Phillip Campbell, Senior Designer at Eidos Interactive, who has worked closely with the Quantic Dream team over the last two years....

Omikron: The Nomad Soul
What is it?!!!?!!!?
Omikron: The Nomad Soul is a futuristic real-time adventure that is being developed by a talented development group in Paris, Quantic Dream. The game’s ambitious storyline and gameplay elements transcend the narrow confines of traditional gaming genres, combining a deep game plot with adventure, exploration, action, combat and role-playing elements in order to fully immerse gamers into the Omikron world.

What is your title and role for Omikron?
I’m the Senior Designer for Eidos Interactive (USA), and have been walking the streets of Omikron for over two years “maintaining Eidos Interactive’s commitment to design.” Basically that means a bit of everything! Concept and level design, additional story, voice-talent wrangling, translations, integrating the “Bowie” aspects of the game. Of course I’m always in total agreement with my two producers, Herve Albertazzi in the UK and shadow producer Tom Marx in the US. Almost always...

If possible, put Omikron’s story in a “nutshell.”
The game of Omikron is essentially a trap. From the moment you walk into your local shop and see the Omikron box on the shelves you’re playing the game, being lured into the trap. Imagine a device similar to the Hellraiser cube, it’s a compelling and beautiful object that you MUST explore. Omikron is a parallel universe, existing in real-time alongside Earth, and once your soul is projected into its dark streets there is no turning back until you succeed, or fall. You arrive in Omikron in possession of a body you do not know, for reasons you cannot fathom. From this point on you will have to talk, investigate, fight, drive, shoot, ride and explore your way to the conclusion of the game - and gain deliverance from this strange dimension.

David Cage, the boss of Quantic Dream, has spent over three years creating his singular, unique vision of Omikron - it’s all we can do to keep up with his flights of imagination!

How many characters can you possess (upon death)? Is there a limit? Are they all fleshed out in this “world city”?
There are about 40 characters that you can “incarnate.” This may be as a result of death or by your own choice. One of the skills you develop is
the ability to freely choose who you will be next. Death is by no means "The End." In Omikron, the player never has to "Quit," simply, the next person that arrives at the scene of your demise becomes you.

Once you gain the ability to incarnate other characters, the only limit is the strength of your skill. You may happen upon a body you are particularly keen on, say outside the Arena, or in the local Pharmacy. Then, it's a matter of your mana strength as to whether you can project your soul into that character or not. Each character you can play has many traits, everything from a name to a unique skill set. Some characters even have apartments, jobs, or family. Some are better at certain skills than others, you may find it easier to fight if you are in possession of a strong, fast character, or you may find it easier to sneak through a forbidden installation in the guise of a Guard. One of the pleasures of the game occurs when you take on a new character as you pick up some of the threads of THEIR life. You may find yourself diverted from your main purpose to, for example, spend more time "interacting" with your new wife, or helping Jorg to become "Master of the Arena." Incarnate as a Taar Monk, and you will not only gain access to the secret fighting techniques of the Taar, but also may feel a spiritual need to "walk the planet," misquoting religious tracts and writing bad poetry!

Tell us about the engine capabilities.

Phew! Of course it's not just about technical capabilities, glossy special effects and variety of big guns, the measure of Quantic's success lies in whether they've succeeded in making an immensely playable and REAL world to experience. Here's some of what you get!

- A full-featured first-person shooter engine, with mouse control, intelligent enemies and interactive, cinematic interludes.
- A totally 3D fighting engine, with combos, special moves, each fighter and opponent with unique styles.
- A revolutionary 'learning' system - not only can you research and learn the rudiments of good investigation technique (adventuring, if you will) but fighting and shooting skills can be constantly improved. In shooting, players can learn their skills and practice different weapons at the many virtual shooting galleries throughout the city. You may even get some insight into guerrilla tactics from Knill, the resident weaponry expert. For fighting, most characters have access to virtual training centers, where they fight holographic enemies, and later, masters of the fighting art will demonstrate and teach the player new moves, combos etc. And, of course, if you're brave enough, there's always the Arena...
- The ability to explore many diverse zones of the city surrounded by hundreds of passers-by and vehicles. Every door has something behind it, adding to the richness of the story. Add to this over 40 possible reincarnations and over a hundred speaking characters...
- Full body and facial motion capture for the first time ever in a game, coupled with hours of dialogue. In Omikron, conversations are never static!
- Realistic day/night cycles, random snow and rain.
- Virtual concerts and a fully cinematic 'game track' of original music.
- A cohesive and dynamic story, in the mould of the classic adventure games of the past, with a scenario that starts perhaps reminiscent of the Blade Runner genre, but develops into something altogether more magical...
- Oh, ok then...DAZZLING special effects and REALLY BIG GUNS!!!

Here's Omikron in figures:

- More than 400 different sets in four huge cities
- More than 140 types of characters in 3D real-time
- More than 300 objects that can be manipulated
- Hundreds of passers-by and vehicles move about in the streets
- Two years to write the scenario
- 3.9 kilos of game design
- Thousands of sketches in the graphical design
- Four hours of dialogues with more than 1200 responses
- 693 moves in motion capture
- 35 people working over three years, including 11 programmers
- 489 pizzas, 302 hamburgers, 71 chicken pinnacles with Cantonese rice, 894 litres of Coke
- 411 taxi bills

Equals - one realistic world, complete gaming freedom, who will be next?

Everyone, hard-core gamers, and novices alike, all start from the same place — alone, confused, scared. It's up to you and your soul to decide what to do next. Take advantage of the training, or just pile straight in? Go shopping, or go shoot something? Talk or fight? Follow the noble cause and save Omikron, or just hang about your apartment listening to cool music - it's all up to you...

O and A courtesy of Onet's Gamecenter.com
92 Anadan 7216
- The clattering of an endless stream of Sliders woke me for my morning patrol. Tellis is not her normal self; must pick her up something from the pharmacy. Both! Two cycles of rain already - someone must have screwed up over at the weather center again. The Center For Random Meteorology had announced the triggering of a 15 minute shower at 16 - now it's coming down so thick I can't even see the top of the dome... maybe they've shifted our weather over to Qualiser - I'll check it out.

14 Xenep 7216
- Ah, Qualiser! Zone of broken dreams. While busting a couple of flagrant Yuki offenders, I saw that dancin' again... man! Now I can understand what Kong sees in her! Don't get me wrong - there is no one for me but Tellis, but walking the Qualiser beat is sure to put the heat on anyone! Those monkeys writing propaganda for Rishen must be running dry. Here's their latest - "Don't think. We know what is good for you." Sure. I'd ignore it if it wasn't plastered all over the place. Not since Rishen's "We LOVE you all" campaign have I felt so... motivated....

23 Xenep 7216
Still in Qualiser. Fighting clubs sprouting up all over the place again. It'll be a busy day for me, keeping bases on these out-of-town bruisers. Broke up a "disagreement" in Harvey's this morning. Guy from the back-streets of Jaipur just COULDN'T keep his hands off the girls. As easy like this, a quiet sheek with Tellis in our favorite restaurant in Lahnah, overlooking the peaceful water. Well, it just seems a million miles away...

Almost forgot about the malfunctioning Megacore - there's ten citizens who won't be bothering the Sterilizer again. On that note, Rishen has decreed a change in the Code of Omimarian Laws, Article 24337, today. The target age for reproduction has been lowered again, to 36 - must get my act together, and soon!

04 Nadim 7216
Today in Jaipur, a bomb exploded in front of the Terra Trust building. Now, I'm as wary of Trust manipulation as the next man, but citizens are being injured, and nobody seems to know who what? Even my boss, Lieutenant General, seemed unconcerned, and was more interested in upfunding those with non-conformist ideas and getting them promptly to the Thought Controllers. He produced a poster for an illegal concert - every time I try to track one of those down, it's over. Hay, it's probably just some Injines having a good time - but don't tell the glorious Rishen I said that...

Kay'1
And SET sayeth: 'I am the shadow across the sun; I am the bringer of plagues. My wrath will consume all lands and shall be ceaseless.'

Egypt. Land of mythology, mystery, pharaohs... and the most complex tombs known to man. Tombs littered with mazes, puzzles and traps, designed to drive even the most persistent raiders to distraction... or death. Enter: Lara Croft. Based entirely in Egyptian locations, The Last Revelation's plot revolves around ancient mythology and the alignment of the stars at the millennium. Finding herself in a serious predicament, Lara's objective is clear from the outset - she must escape a terrifying destiny and rectify a situation that threatens to destroy humanity.

The story is unveiled seamlessly through gameplay action driven by advanced engine technology. New programming routines allow levels to dissolve into cinematic cut-scenes and full motion video (FMV). Loading screens are eliminated, making the adventure a continuous, focused experience. Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation's redesigned inventory system replaces traditional inventory rings with an easier-to-use interface allowing items to be combined, collected and stored. The new inventory also features Lara's diary, which includes her personal notes from each adventure and a location map that players can access for hints and tips. Application of the transformed system will give new life to puzzle elements - a key feature of Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation. Clear objectives and smaller locations will result in less time spent travelling between areas. Individual environments are more reminiscent of the original game - tightly focused and puzzle-oriented, but with higher levels of detail and a greater number of objects than seen before.

The atmosphere will also be more akin to the original due to the emphasis on ancient locations and tombs. To further the atmospheric detail, the lighting system features spotlighting. New environment mapping allows a variety of surfaces and objects to reflect and react to light sources. Lara herself will have a new remodeled look - fully skinned and more detailed. A range of new moves, both simple and complex, provides an assortment of brand new puzzle and trap mechanisms for Lara to negotiate. The puzzles are based on Egyptian mythology and will operate like complex board games right at the player's fingertips.
Interview with Adrian Smith of Core Design

So what's the plot this time?
We've made the basis of the story a lot simpler this time around - the player is given a very clear objective from the outset. The plot will twist and turn as Lara progresses, but the ultimate goal always stays in sight.

Very basically, Lara inadvertently releases something rather nasty whilst breaking into an ancient tomb... and of course she's the only one who can put things right. The path of true adventure never runs smooth so Lara will have various tasks to complete before she's able to face a final confrontation.

Do you fear a backlash against this title since it is the 4th in the series?
Despite any number of new features and improvements, the game is still, in essence, "Tomb Raider" - an adventure game featuring Lara Croft. What we have done this time is completely re-address a number of key elements. This will immediately distinguish Last Revelation from its predecessors and bring fresh life to the title. The on-screen format is completely new - gone are the old inventory rings, loading screens etc. It's always been our intention to make the fourth game as accessible to as many people (both old fans and new users) as possible. We've focused on simpler gameplay so the game will be easier to TRIII in terms of direction and objectives. Players will know exactly what to do, and where they have to do it. The difficulty lies in solving the puzzles that will enable players to complete objectives - so it's very much like the original game in that respect. A very clear storyline and single location means that a lot less time is wasted covering vast distances.

In some ways Last Revelation is a prequel to the trilogy, but the technical advances will make it far more detailed and atmospheric. If you've never played a Tomb Raider game, this is the one that we'll be recommending!

Can you tell us about any of the new enemies that Lara will face?
We're concentrating on highly detailed enemies - there may be fewer of these but they will certainly be more purposeful than those seen in previous titles. Since we're dealing with Egypt, our artists and animators have really been able to let their imaginations go so we've got mythological baddies as well as natives and generics. Due to the nature of the plot, you'll find a lot of rather strange things happening and don't be surprised if you find that your are pitting your skill against an adversary through the adventure.

Will there be another game in the Tomb Raider series?
Well you know what they say... You just can't keep a good girl down...!
Welcome to Union City,
a city where turmoil and madness are rampant
and only two unlikely heroes can end the chaos.

As the Millennium draws to an end, forbidding events are unraveling in the once peaceful and prosperous Union City. A brutal crime wave led by gang punks and hardened criminals threatens to undermine the peace and to plunge the city into chaos and death. As the police haplessly reel under the weight of corruption and violence, a discredited rookie cop, D'Arci Stern, lights to cleanse her name and restore order for her citizens. As she patrols her beat, the evidence quickly gathers that the gangs are now organized with nefarious intentions. However, there is an ally in the shadows - Roper McIntyre a grizzled ex-special force now converted into evangelist against a demonic cult hidden somewhere Union City and the force behind the crime wave and maybe... the destruction of man.
In Urban Chaos, Mucky Foot and Eidos Interactive present a city in trouble.

You play either D'Arci or Roper in 30 compelling missions that each take place in a unique location of Union City. The player is rewarded with information, supplies, and secret paths if they explore the district. Several types of weapons and close combat are offered to complete goals when persuasion is not successful, but be careful, the streets are alive with the riff-raff that do not fear the police.

Urban Chaos starts out with D'Arci investigating various crimes from simple assaults to bank bombings. Every district she visits has its own unique look in layout, architecture, and population. Interaction via text is available for all citizens. Besides apropriety 3D engine that allows for bump mapping, volumetric fogging, and true reflections, there is also 3D audio available via EAX and A3D protocols. D'Arci will eventually meet up with Roper who quickly becomes like a father to her. Roper is the sole surviving member of a religious group that aims to prevent the 'Fallen' (a demonic cult) from resurrecting an abomination (from Nostradamus's predictions) to incarcerate the earth at the turn of the millennium. His forte is heavy weapons and explosives. He is slower than D'Arci but packs a powerful punch. Exploration is another gameplay element that is stressed, for as D'Arci explores Union City either via foot or automobile, she can explore locations that will yield not only supplies and weapons, but secret entrances into locations where she must complete a mission. There is also a reward system in place that offers bonuses for collection.

To quickly teach the user how to operate in the Urban Chaos 3rd person world, Mucky Foot has created a training academy complete with a foot and vehicle obstacle course and a shooting range. But, all in all, combat is often your only recourse in dealing with the gangs. Urban Chaos not only offers close martial art combat, but has a realistic weapon combat engine including firearms, knives, grenades, and baseball bats! Nasty incidents like drive-by shootings and gangland rumble often take place in the bad parts of town.

Coming to the PC and PlayStation, Urban Chaos stands out for its graphically impressive representation of big city life with the chaos of crime and demonic rumblings. Coupled with identifiable characters and a pumping Urban soundtrack, it literally comes alive for your enjoyment.
Out Now!

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

An interview with Amy Hennig, Director of Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

What kind of experience can players expect?
Our goal from the beginning was to provide a seamless, immersive game experience—an epic adventure set in a relatively non-linear game world that rewards players’ exploration and problem-solving skills. Soul Reaver is an action-adventure game with an intuitive set of player mechanics, an innovative combat system, lush visuals, and RPG-type elements like character growth, ability acquisition, and story progression.

How would you describe Legacy of Kain? What type of game is it? What kind of experience can players expect?

Our goal from the beginning was to provide a seamless, immersive game experience—an epic adventure set in a relatively non-linear game world that rewards players’ exploration and problem-solving skills. Soul Reaver is an action-adventure game with an intuitive set of player mechanics, an innovative combat system, lush visuals, and RPG-type elements like character growth, ability acquisition, and story progression.

What are the most compelling aspects of the game?
The first thing that comes to mind is the data-streaming technology—that allows us to provide a seamless, interconnected game experience, eliminating artificial divisions of the game world (and the annoyance of load times). Once the player begins a game, we never want to disrupt the immersion of the game experience, or pull them out of their willing suspension of disbelief.

Besides providing a seamless experience, this technology also allows us to create a greater variety of creatures, sounds, music, and environments in a much smaller area. Most games have to keep an entire level resident in memory (thus the load times, and the often apparent lack of graphical variety in levels); by streaming the data off the CD, we can play on a very small, localized area in memory at any one time. Run down a hallway in Soul Reaver, and the environment can change drastically—without the player ever having been aware that data was being dumped and loaded.

Second, our world-morphing technology provides something players have never seen before. As Nosgoth’s first “angel of death,” Raziel’s flight is controlled by the player and the environment can change drastically—without the player ever having been aware that data was being dumped and loaded.

How big is the game?
How long will it take players to finish it?

Geographically, the game is huge—but Raziel moves at a pretty good clip, and the placement of Work Gates allows the player to teleport across the game world fairly easily.

In terms of hours of gameplay, it will depend on how a player approaches the game. Players who proceed from one major goal to the next, without revisiting previously explored areas to find bonus levels, will probably get 35-40 hours out of the game. For players who take the time to find all the bonus items and hidden gypsy spell levels, the game should provide over 65 hours of gameplay.

Any tips for playing the game?

Mainly, players should remember that the game is all about freedom of exploration—each time Raziel receives a new ability, the player should explore areas previously visited to discover power-ups, spells, etc. The player can charge right into Raziel’s next goal, if desired—none of these bonus areas are required to finish the game—but the player will have a richer (and longer!) gaming experience if they revisit previously-explored areas with new abilities.

So keep your eye out for locations that seem suspicious, and areas that you can’t get to yet—make a mental note of these, so you can return later when Raziel earns the new ability. Each of the new abilities opens up previously-inaccessible areas—so if there’s a gate you can’t get through, an unreachable opening high up in a wall, a suspicious-looking window, an area you can’t reach without swimming, or some odd apparatus that you can’t operate yet; it probably means there’s a bonus item, or a new area to be unlocked, nearby.

Secondly, don’t forget to autofocus those enemies! Soul Reaver’s combat is built around the autofocus system—you can fight enemies without using it, but the experience is much richer if you let the system do all the work. Also, AMD, Nvidia—its speedier than you think!

Finally—when in doubt, shift into Spectral. If you think you’re stuck, the Spectral architecture of the spectral realm may provide the clue that you need to progress.
Radio-Control Racing Without the Batteries

Drive Me Faster, Tiny Racer

Remember when you were a kid (or, if you're like me, last week) when you and your friends would spend summer afternoons racing remote control cars up and down the street in front of your house, darting beneath your neighbor's pickup truck, barreling through drainage culverts, and jumping the curb at the end of the driveway? RE*VOLT captures the Littlepian racing fun of RC cars and trucks, and offers some advantages over doing it for real. If your car flips over, you can right it with a touch of a button; battery yet, you can zip through supermarkets, museums, and toy stores - all the places you'd be kicked out of in real life. But perhaps best of all, you can go along for the ride instead of just standing at the curb.

Mad Max Meets Mini-Me

Gameplay in RE*VOLT is reminiscent of other first-person arcade racers like ROLLCAFE and WIPEOUT XL: insanely fast-paced racing action, replete with missiles and whatnot for smacking other racers around. Power-ups scattered along the way arm you with bottle rockets, water balloons, oil slicks, and more. A few are "power-downs," turning your car into a time bomb, or just blowing you up on the spot.

Power-ups aside, RE*VOLT feels very realistic, especially on the simulation setting, when the cars are over-powered and squelch as hell. The cars are a little too stable on very long jumps - a little too likely to land, cat-like, on their wheels - but this fudging is necessary to allow the maps to include insanely large jumps in the first place, so it's forgivable.

You can race a variety of cars, rated according to speed, acceleration, and weight, although other factors such as a high center of gravity come into play as you drive. Cars may be front-wheel, rear-wheel, or four-wheel drive; some do better on long flat tracks, while others excel at climbing hills or accelerating out of turns.

As you progress, new and faster cars become available. Similarly, you begin the game with only four tracks unlocked; you must win a championship comprising all four to unlock new tracks.

RE*VOLT looks very sweet. The cars boast shiny highlights; polished floors reflect the action; bottle rockets send out trails of sparks and leave lingering clouds of smoke when they explode. On a Pentium II 266 with a Voodoo 2 accelerator, the game ran smoothly at 800 x 600 with seven AI cars running, the rear-view mirror activated, and all the graphics options (except anti-aliasing, which didn't work) turned on.

Land of the Giants

RE*VOLT's environments are nicely filled in with enormous parked cars, loose basketballs, looming dino skeletons, towering stacks of toys and what-have-you. You can hear dogs barking behind fences, and birds chirping in the trees. The cars' engines sound authentic, which means they all sound pretty much like power screwdrivers, except "Aquacar," which sounds like an electric bong.

RE*VOLT includes a track editor so you can make your own tracks, in theory at least. In reality, the editor is cheesy and surprisingly sluggish, especially considering the game's good performance. Worse, the maps I created came out white on white, making the map impossible to see. If there's a way to apply textures, I never found it.

Crappy editor notwithstanding, RE*VOLT does a great job of putting RC racing on your desktop. And when you're tired of dueling RE*VOLT's excellent AI racers, it's time to collect your friends together for some virtual RC action over LAN, modem, or the Internet.

CGW RATED

PROS
Realistic physics; beautiful graphics; well-realized environments; fun!

CONS
Sucky map editor.

RE*VOLT

RE*VOLT is a world-class simulation of the RC scene.

End Link
www.revolt2d.com
Fan site with custom cars, hints, tips, discussion boards.
www.mardave.demon.co.uk
A great UK site for getting real RC cars.

Requirements: Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator. Recommended Requirements: Pentium II 333, 128MB RAM, 8MB 3D card.
3D Support: DirectX 3. Multiplayer Support: Internet, LAN (2-8 players), and CD per player.
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment • Developer: Acclaim Studios London • $40 • www.acclaim.net
ESRB Rating: Everyone

175
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD • cgw.gamespot.com • NOVEMBER 1999
**MECHCOMMANDER GOLD**

Tactical, squad-level mechanized combat made **MECHCOMMANDER** a solid real-time strategy title. **MECHCOMMANDER GOLD** adds some nice touches to the original game, such as unit waypoints that allow you to specify not just the direction of movement, but the type of movement your units use, like running, jumping, and even mine laying. This means you can now give your Minelayer a complex set of instructions to mine multiple areas, without having to micromanage each task. In addition to the game tweaks, **MECH GOLD** adds new Mechs and weapons, and a brand new campaign. Owners of the original game can get a rebate from Microprose, which makes for some inexpensive gameplay; and if you never played, here’s a great opportunity to see the more tactical side of the real-time strategy genre. – *Greg Fortune*

**FORCE 21**

Genre: Strategy  •  Publisher: Red Storm
Entertainment  •  $50  •  www.redstorm.com  •  ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

**GULF WAR: OPERATION DESERT HAMMER**

Genre: Action  •  Publisher: 3DO  •  Developer:  $30  •  www.3da.com

No need for fancy keyboard overlays in **GULF WAR: OPERATION DESERT HAMMER**. It’s one of those so-called “action simulation” games that allow you to light things up like the 4th of July. As you drive the advanced prototype M12 Hammer deep into Iraq’s interior and strike at good old Saddam – always willing to serve as the straight man to your missiles – you’ll enjoy Gull War’s fast-paced, enjoyable arcade action. Blow away tanks, APCs, missiles, and helicopters. Call in artillery and air strikes against the more stubborn targets, or against your friends. Killing for oil hasn’t been this much fun since 1991. – *Lance A. Larka*
JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT THERE WERE NO MORE HEROES. THINK AGAIN.

NEW EXPANSION PACK FEATURES...

+ More Than 20 New Heroes
+ Six New Challenging Campaigns
+ New Mystical World - The Elemental Conflux
+ More Hero Classes
+ More Monsters
+ More Dragons
+ New Advanced Campaign Editor
+ New Random Map Generator
+ Unlimited Gameplay
+ Extensive Customization
+ And LAN, Modem or Internet Play*

HEROES III
OF MIGHT AND MAGIC
ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE
AN EXPANSION PACK OF EPIC PROPORTIONS.

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*Player is solely responsible for all applicable Internet-related fees and charges.
COURAGE.

STRENGTH.

STRATEGY.

You’ll need all three to win.

The award winning Close Combat real-time wargame series returns to action! Close Combat, Battle of the Bulge, Germany’s last desperate attempt to stave off defeat in WWII, offers you the thrill and excitement of the Close Combat series with explosive new levels of tactical engagement and detail.

It’s the winter of 1944 and WWII is in full swing. The Allied troops are exhausted and the German troops are ready to strike. The fate of the world rests in your hands as you command German or American troops in an intense battle filled with sneak attacks, stalwart defenders, spies and saboteurs. With courage, strategy, and nerves of steel, you’ll be the one to decide the outcome of WWII!

- New Campaign system allows movement of multiple battle groups on a strategic map of the Ardennes.
- Units may enter from different points on a battlemat based on their strategic movement.
- Through advanced AI, stress, fatigue and morale have a direct impact on your troops and they react accordingly.
- Campaigns give continuity from battle to battle; player’s tactical successes and failures have a direct impact on the battle’s outcome.
- Accurately depicts WWII platoon war using combined arms.
- Internet players can use online matching services to find opponents. *Internet access required.
- Command German or American troops.
- 2 players fight head-to-head in single battles, operations and campaigns.

- Strategic game battlemaker allows you to create your own Bulge campaigns.
- Allocate artillery and air assets (weather permitting) in the Campaign and then call in support during each battle based on those strategic choices.

- Battle maps based on actual aerial photography
- True line-of-sight and line-of-fire gameplay

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"SWAT 3 looks ready to take the first-person tactical strategy genre by force."

— PC Gamer

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Graphics Card Showdown
Suped-up TNT2 Ultra Beats Voodoo3 3500

It's been a pitched battle between 3dfx and nVidia as to who's the current 3D king. Voodoo3 is fast to be sure, but in most testing, it's been defeated by TNT2 Ultra. Couple that with the TNT2 Ultra's more complete rendering feature set, not to mention 32-bit rendering, and the edge goes to TNT2 Ultra.

So now we move to Round 2, which pits Voodoo3 3500 — clocked at 183MHz and loaded with TV/video capture features — against the latest tricked-out TNT2 Ultra-based board from the dynamic duo of Guillemot and gaming system maker Falcon Northwest. Dubbed the Falcon SE Xentor, this board is over-clocked to 195MHz, while its 32MB of memory runs at a hurtling 235MHz. These two boards squeeze as much horsepower as anyone is going to get out of this generation of chips. So who's got the goods? For pure speed, Falcon SE Xentor wins the day, but the Voodoo3 3500 is no performance slouch, and still offers Glide compatibility as well as decent TV/video features.

Speed Demon
If traffic cops gave out speeding tickets to video cards, the SE Xentor would have its license revoked. And if its blazing performance out of the box isn't enough to satiate the hard-core gamer's appetite, Guillemot has bundled an over-clocking slider that will push the internal clock speed beyond the coveted 200MHz barrier.

Like Guillemot's mainstream Xentor32, the SE Xentor ships with a pared-down OEM version of KINGPIN. Unlike the Xentor32, however, this card will set you back $350. Ouch. Falcon Northwest customers get $30 off the list price, though. While the SE Xentor clearly isn't for everyone, die-hard gaming enthusiasts might want to drop one of these into their AGP slots.

The first thing you notice is the active heat sink/fan combo. It's pretty large. In its current configuration, the card will eat the PCI slot adjacent to the AGP slot. The shipping fan will be less deep but may still obstruct a bulky PCI card. Each pair of SDRAM chips also has a small heat sink attached. The card we checked out had 4.3ns SDRAM onboard, and the card will ship at a default clock rate of 195MHz for the TNT2 Ultra chip and 235MHz for the memory clock. There will also be a special over-clocking utility shipped with the card, but Guillemot and Falcon Northwest are guaranteeing 195/235.

One of the issues with highly-clocked TNT2 Ultra boards has been motherboard support. A number of motherboards do not deliver the 6 amps current at 3.3 volts to the AGP slot, as called for in the AGP hardware spec. Guillemot mitigates this somewhat by powering the cooling fan through the power supply with a standard connector like those found on hard drives. That should reduce the current draw a bit, but be aware that it could be an issue.

Pistols at Dawn
We tested both cards on a 500MHz Pentium III. With the sole exception of games that use the 3dfx mini-GL DRIVER (HALF-LIFE and QUAKE II), the Falcon SE Xentor bests the Voodoo3 3500. In some sense, this is not entirely an "apples to apples" comparison, as the 3500 also has TV and video capture capabilities. But TV aside, the 3500 is still 3dfx's highest-clocked offering.

The Falcon SE Xentor generated the highest-ever 3D GameGauge score on our test bed, at 51.5, compared to Voodoo3 3500's 49.5. Falcon SE Xentor's 32-bit scores at 1024x768 were also quite good. And this is where TNT2 Ultra pulls ahead of Voodoo3, both in rendering feature set, as well as 32-bit rendering support.

We also took a look at the Falcon SE Xentor on a Pentium III/600, where its 3D GameGauge score was upped to an impressive 57.38 (an 11% gain with the 20% increase of CPU speed).
On 2D performance, Falcon SE Xentor again squarely outguns Voodoo 3 3500, whose 2D performance is actually slower than that of a Voodoo 3 3000.

Convergence, or Lack Thereof...
First, let's dispense with the 3D question. The Voodoo3 3500 is quite fast for 3D games. It's not the fastest card we've seen in 3D GameGauge, but it's way up there. And, of course, it supports Glide, 3dfx's proprietary legacy API. If that's what you're looking for in a 3D graphics card, then this may be the card for you. So on the merits of its raw 3D performance, Voodoo 3 3500 is a contender.

But the 3500 is supposed to be more than that. It's 3dfx's shot at making a convergence product, with onboard TV tuner, video capture, and TV display functions. It's in these key areas that 3dfx fails to deliver.

The 3500 has an onboard TV tuner made by electronics giant Philips, and also serves as an FM tuner. This part works very well, and the on-screen "remote" works well, though it lacks keyboard equivalents for all the buttons. However, the channel scan only picked up about half my good cable channels; I had to manually activate the rest. Video and audio connections are made through a small, slick looking breakout box.

The TV-out is abysmal. More often than not, you get a garbled picture. Heaven help you if you try to use the TV and your computer monitor at the same time — you risk making the monitor unusable, and booting with just the TV connected is the only way to fix the problem.

If you do get it to work, the monitor refresh rate is an ugly 60Hz, and you can't run higher than 800x600. 3dfx is aware of these problems, but chose to ship the card anyway.

If you have a hankering to output video to a VCR, look for a different solution. Voodoo3 3500's poor video output quality is mitigated somewhat by the ability to capture to a hard drive, and 3dfx automates time shifting of programs recording to the hard drive in its control panel. But the capture quality is quite poor. If you try to use the MPEG-2 capture capability, you're limited to 320x240, and you will drop frames at that resolution (and this was on a 500MHz Pentium III). The WinDVD software DVD player does a decent job of playback on the PIII/600, however.

All in all, if you want the fastest available Voodoo3 card around, then this is it. The convergence features — with the exception of simple TV-watching on screen — still need a lot of work. The whole thing feels like a product that was shipped too early. You'd do better to get a Voodoo3/3000 and an ATI TV Wonder PCI card, if you have the free PCI slot.

Pros
Excellent 3D performance; Glide support; cool TV tuner.

Cons
TV-out is abysmal; MPEG-2 capture very limited; 2D performance is sub-par.

Requirements: A8P slot, Windows 95 / 98 or Windows 98, 32MB of RAM
Price: $399
Manufacturer: 3dfx Interactive
www.3dfx.com

GADGETS FOR GAMERS

If you came to PC gaming from the arcade world, maybe you still pine for the controls found on those upright consoles. What if you could go to your local arcade, rip the control console out of one of those units, bring it home, and plug it into your PC? With HanaHo Games' new HotRod joystick, you can do just that. The unit connects via your keyboard port, and has a pass-through connector for your keyboard. This can be the ticket for playing new old stand-up arcade games using the MACE emulator, and it'll even do pretty well with newer sports titles, too. NFL Blitz, anyone? At $200 bucks, it ain't cheap, but if you want to indulge your arcade jones at home, then give this guy a look. — Dave Salvato

HotRod Joystick, $200, www.hanaht.com

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Audio Update

The Art of Noise

by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

Give Your Audio Sub-System a $200 Ear-Lift

Things on the PC noisemaker front have been well, kind of quiet. We've heard some great new speakers that have shipped this year from some unlikely places. But most of the progress has been on existing sound cards and sound chipsets, as well as in more new games that are using these 3D audio technologies, some to very fine effect. All of this begs the question: Do I need to upgrade my audio gear to get ready for this holiday season's offerings? Well, like all things computer-related, it depends.

If you're still running that old Sound Blaster 16 ISA card, it's high time you made the move to PCI. Even Creative's AWE-64, a very good sound card in its day, is now long-in-the-tooth. And if you've been putting off upgrading those Dixie Cup speakers that shipped with your PC, then it's time to think about making that move as well. The great news is that there are some very good speakers to be had for under $100 bucks.

Even if you've got a solid PCI sound card and a set of speakers you like, there's one other piece of gear you may want to consider if you do a lot of online gaming and use voice-over-IP applications like Roger Wilco — and that's a good PC headset. We'll take a look at a few headsets, as well as your best choices for sound cards and speakers. That said, let's have at it.

Listen Up: Vortex 2-based cards like Turtle Beach's Montego II Quadzilla do a better job with 3D audio in two speakers, but if you've got a four-speaker setup, then it's practically a coin-toss between Vortex 2-based boards and Creative's Sound Blaster Live cards. The SB Live cards do feature a better wavetable synthesizer than Vortex 2-based cards, so if you're a part-time musician, then you may want to lean that way.

Sound Cards

Sound card choices are more limited than in the past, but the choices that do exist have more features and better performance than ever. PCI is now the interface of choice; no major new ISA sound cards have shipped in the last year, and it's unlikely we'll see any in the near future (sound of cheering in the background).

There are a number of key features to look for in a sound card, and their order of importance depends on what you're looking for. The first thing to look at, as with graphics cards, is the chipset. The two most prominent audio chipsets are the EMU10k from Creative Labs, used in the Sound Blaster Live line, and Aureal's Vortex2 chip, used in the Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla and numerous other cards. The new kid on the block is ESS's Canyon3D, which promises more sophisticated positional audio through the use of Sensaura's MultiDrive technology. MultiDrive supports active 3D audio through all four speakers if you have a four-speaker setup. That is, HRTF (head-related transfer functions), which alter the audio stream to fool the ear into assigning a direction to a given sound, is calculated for all four speakers, not just the front pair. Avoid, if possible, any card that only supports the AC97 CODEC — it will eat CPU cycles and kill your game performance. Do look for a card that supports four speakers, though, even if you don't

Vortex 2, Revision B

We had a chance to preview the latest version of Aureal's revision B Vortex 2 chip. It's the same architecture as the original, but Aureal has streamlined the chip and improved performance dramatically. At 22KHz, 8-bit audio with 16 streams, Audio WhBench reported 0% CPU utilization. That's right, 0%.

At 44.1KHz, 16-bit audio, the performance hit crept up to 2.32%, but that's hardly a problem in any game. Note that any game that makes heavy use of A3D 2.0's occlusion and wave-tracing may still show some performance hit, but Aureal's rev B silicon should help a lot. Note that you'd probably still want a Sound Blaster Live if you're a dabbling musician or recording hobbyist, as CPU utilization does spike up with 32 voices. And while MIDI sounds much better with revision B than the older Vortex 2, it's still not quite up to the Sound Blaster Live sample set. But the new Aureal chip should alleviate any concerns about CPU utilization in games.

Cards using the new Aureal chip will be distributed under the Aureal brand by IO Magic: www.iomagic.com. Pricing had not been set at press time. — Loyd Case
Rip An MP3.

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Rip apart enemies in DirectSound 3D.

Diamond’s Monster Sound MX400 will rock your PC audio world. Based on groundbreaking technology from ESS and Sensaura, Monster Sound MX400 adds a whole new twist to your gaming experience by adding vertical positional audio, so you now hear sounds on a whole new axis—above and below you, true quad output and Dolby Digital* surround sound* for PC home theater. And it’s ready for the Rio upgrade for hardware accelerated digital audio playback, encoding and FM Tuner inside your PC.

So Up Your Audio with Monster Sound MX400—truly in a class by itself.

*Requires Dolby Digital
plan on using that feature right away.

How is “Faster” Audio Good?
Performance is a key feature. You don’t want your cool 3D audio to cause the frame rate of the game to tank. We can test CPU utilization with Audio WinBench 99, which gives us a good indication of performance. The performance champ is Creative’s Sound Blaster Live – its CPU utilization stays under 3% with 8 and 16 streams of audio, and barely creeps up to 4% with 32 streams. Very few games support more than eight streams, however. The Sound Blaster Live also has a superb MIDI sample set, while Aureal’s can only be described as adequate (MIDI isn’t much of a factor in most games today, though). The Vortex 2, running the newer 2035 reference drivers, stays fairly low with eight 3D audio streams at 22KHz, but spikes up to just over 5% with 16 voices at 44.1KHz. That’s still pretty low if you have a fairly fast CPU (the next revision of the Vortex 2 will perform better – see sidebar). The Canyon3D’s performance was disappointing at both resolutions. Given that the Vortex 2 performance steadily improved with new driver releases, we can only hope that the same will be true with the new ES3 chip. The Canyon3D came mounted on a Terratec sound card that supports digital (S/PDIF) audio in and out, an optional FM tuner, and wavetable add-on connector. The quality of the 3D audio was good, especially as we were the MIDI samples, but the performance penalty is too great for most today’s demanding games.

However, the DMX control panel should serve as a model for a good audio control panel. That brings us to the Sound Blaster Live versus Vortex2 debate. Our take on it is choose a good Vortex2 board, like the Xiteli Storm or Turtle Beach Montego II, if you’ve only two speakers. If you have four-speaker rig, flip a coin. The four-speaker positional audio is slightly better in our Audio WinBench listening tests with the Sound Blaster Live, but A3D tends to sound better in real games; in either case, the differences are relatively small. The Xiteli Storm comes with a pair of headphones with “force feedback” (read: they vibrate). We found this to be a worthless gimmick and turned it off, but the headphones themselves sound fine, and the whole bundle is $49.9. If we had to pick one card, though, it would be the Montego II, with its cool diagnostic tools and useful control panel. The Sound Blaster Live full version comes in a close second – especially if you’re an audio hobbyist as well as a gamer – but it will cost you a bit more.

How We Tested
Most of our testing of this audio gear was subjective listening. For the sound cards, we ran Audio WinBench’s CPU usage tests, which measure how much of the CPU gets eaten when playing multiple wave files through both DirectSound and DirectSound3D. We also ran a number of MIDI sequences through the cards’ wavetable synthesizers to evaluate the quality of their Generation MIDI patch sets. What we found is that Vortex2-based and SB Live cards do a good job of keeping CPU usage low, though Terratec’s new Canyon3D-based card suffered from higher CPU usage.

For speakers, our testing involved a lot of listening tests – both of CD audio music as well as gaming audio. For musical material, we used a wide variety of music, ranging from Bruce Springsteen to the woofer-punishing Bach’s Toccatas and Fugues in D Minor, which brought a number of the speakers to their knees. We were listening for tonal clarity (solid bass and clean, uncolored mids and highs). We also did our dreaded RFL (really, um, frickin’ loud) test, where we ran the speakers up as loud as they would go without going into distortion. For gaming audio, we played the opening trailer for MechCommander, as well as Quake 3: Arena. Again, we were listening for good sound reproduction across the spectrum, and because the best way to have one’s gaming audio is loud (as in very), we again did the RFL test. – Dave Salvator
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Speakers

Developments on the speaker front this year have basically consisted of new, cheap offerings for companies looking to pay in the sub-$100 speaker range, where the great bulk of PC speakers are sold. There are, however, several noteworthy offerings that come in around $150. There is one primary consideration to factor into a speaker-buying decision, and that's of course the sound. Doesn't matter how cool they look, or what type of technology they use (cone driver, flat panel, dipole radiator, etc.); if they don't sound good to your ears, and cleanly deliver the volume level you're looking for, then they're not for you.

Secondary considerations include an integrated power supply, or at the very least a Soap-on-a-Rope-style power supply. In this day and age, wall-warts simply don't cut it. Also, look for speakers that have a headphone jack "upstairs," that is, on one of the satellite speakers. This is a very handy feature late at night when you're looking to make with the mayhem and don't want to wake up the whole house. If they've got the headphone jack "downstairs" (on the woofer), then that's better than nothing. So really, the main thing to do when buying a set of speakers is to make sure that the store you buy from has a good return policy. That way, you can take home that prized new set of speakers and put them through their paces in your office, hovel, cave, etc., and make sure that they sound good to your ears. Because taste in speakers is a little like taste in wine, and not everyone is going to agree on which speakers are the "best." That said, here are our recommendations, which we've broken into two categories: best overall and best value.

Best Overall: Yamaha YST-M55

Yamaha is a long-time denizen of the audio world, making everything from pro audio gear, to home A/V components, to PC speakers. In our listening tests, the Yamasas simply delivered the best sound quality, both for music and gaming audio. There was plenty of low-end, and mids and highs were also well defined. These speakers excel as well in the RFL test (see sidebar), developing serious volume without distortion, thanks to 80 watts of amplification. In fact, in gaming audio tests, our ears said "uncle" before these speakers did.

They do come with USB functionality that frankly doesn't add much for gamers. In fact, we'd counsel you to avoid USB audio altogether, particularly on games that use 3D audio via DirectSound3D. As a feature on speakers, don't even bother looking for it.

Honorable mention goes to Philips' 370s. These speakers have a lot of very loud volume without distortion, and have good imaging, though Yamaha's offering still sounded better to our ears. Also worth a look are Labtec's 5620 units, which also delivered tons of volume and sound very solid across the spectrum, both on music and gaming audio. They didn't quite have Yamaha's smoothness, which is why the latter gets the nod.

Best Value: Altec-Lansing ACS54

Altec-Lansing's low-cost, four-channel offering impressed us for its general sound in music audio, but more so in gaming audio, where they produced good volume without distortion. And because they're four channel, they'll certainly help make 3D audio more, well, 3D. About the only thing missing is a headphone jack, though the power supply is integrated into the woofer. Honorable mention goes to Labtec, whose 2414s sound good, and develop decent volume levels before clipping becomes apparent. But the 2414s deliver what they do for about a $40 street price. They lack a headphone jack, and suffer from wall-wartitude, but based on the merits of their overall sound, they're definitely worth a listen.
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Headphones/Headsets

There's a problem with speakers when using 3D sound: vertical cues. Even with four speakers, it's difficult to reproduce any sense of vertical position. For example, it's difficult to discern the position and direction of an aircraft circling overhead in a game.

Headphones bring those HRTFs right up to your ears, and remove any problems with cross-talk. So the horizontal 3D positioning is much better, and even vertical cues can now be heard with some clarity—though it's still not perfect. So it's to Xite's credit that they bundle some kind of headphones with their Vortex 2 board.

There is a gigantic selection of headphones on sale, with prices that range from $0.99 to $500. And the adage you get what you pay for doesn't always hold true. There are some very good headphones in the $30-60 range from companies like Sennheiser, Koss, and others. One of the best microphone/headset combinations I've used is the Koss R-85B. These combine a great sounding pair of stereo headphones with a reasonably good condenser microphone (though the mounting bracket could be a bit more solid). Telephone headset manufacturer Plantronics is now making a small PC headset offering as well in its HS1. Of course, I still like my ancient Koss Pro4 AAA's best, but you won't find those anymore outside of Ebay.
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— RPGXtreme

www.lith.com
In my years of building PCs, upgrading systems, and writing about all of it, I’ve bought a lot of computer gear. In the process, I’ve learned a lot about shopping. There’s a whole world of jargon to hardware shopping that you learn as you become an experienced buyer.

Like all jargon, the language can be strange and confusing. It’s not intended to confuse buyers (call me an optimist), but it often does nonetheless. So I thought we’d spend some time doing a little shopping and clear up some confusion along the way.

Let’s start by paying a visit to www.computer-shopper.com, one of many good Web resources for direct buyers. In our virtual shopping experience, let’s first go looking for a CPU.

**OEM: No, It’s Not a Mantra**

There are a couple of things to note in the screen shot. Note the top, circled entry: “Intel CPU OEM Pentium III.” Then, check out the second circled entry: “Intel P-III 450 Retail.” What’s the difference? They’re both Pentium IIs, right?

Well, yes, but ignoring the speed difference, there’s almost always a price differential between the OEM and retail version. OEM stands for “original equipment manufacturer.” OEM products are for resellers to use in complete systems.

In the past, that requirement was adhered to more strictly than in today’s Internet shopping environment. You will often see the terms “OEM,” “white box,” and “tray” used interchangeably. You’ll also see “retail,” “boxed,” and “retail boxed” CPUs—they all mean the same thing. Why is that? Are you really just paying for a printed box?

Well, no, not entirely. The retail boxed version of any Intel CPU comes with a three-year warranty and an attached cooling fan and heat sink.

The OEM version comes, if you’re lucky, in an anti-static bag. You have to buy the cooling fan separately. You’re also at the mercy of the reseller when it comes to warranty; Intel supplies only a 30-day warranty to the dealer. There’s no difference in performance, however. OEM products can be a great deal, but are often stripped-down.

It may be something as simple as selling in a plain box without the software bundle, or something more complex like removing actual hardware features. It’s common, for example, for OEM graphics cards to leave off the TV output that is common on retail versions.

But it can be even worse than that. One graphics card company once sold an OEM product to one of the larger computer vendors with a slower RAMDAC than the retail product. Both the graphics card company and the system dealer got into hot water with buyers for that bit of cost reduction. So, pay close attention to what features are listed for a card, and make sure you’re getting what you think you’re paying for.

**Windows Shopping**

Okay, now let’s head out on our shopping tour again and find a copy of the Windows 98 SE operating system.

In this brave new world of e-commerce, there are still some online shops that are, let’s just say, less than scrupulous…

This time, we’ll visit another shopping service called Price Watch (www.pricewatch.com). Price Watch is a great site because you get prices from a wide variety of Web dealers, sorted by lowest price to highest.

There are a number of ways to buy the Windows software. First, you can get the standard retail version, in either a full or upgrade model. Or, you can buy the OEM version, which is typically a full install version, but slightly different.

For one thing, the OEM version doesn’t give you the goofy “This is for computers without Windows” message you get with the full retail install version. More important is the licensing agreement. The OEM version of Windows states that it must only be sold with a full system. Many resellers get around this with a fine print, such as the line “must be bought with HD or CPU & motherboard.”

However, a little careful shopping will reveal that you can buy the OEM version without even that minimal requirement, provided you’re a known customer.

In this brave new world of e-commerce, there are still some online shops that are, let’s just say, less than scrupulous, and could spawn some other e-terms like e-fraud, e-scam, or e-swindle.

So paying a few extra bucks to do business with an outfit that a friend has recommended—or a shop that has a better return policy—may well be worth it.
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CPU | Pentium II/300 | $800 | It's the top of the heap, for now.
Memory | 256MB of PC133 certified SDRAM | $380 | Just think, a quarter-gigabyte.
Disk Controller | Adapter 940/2w | $340 | 80 megabytes per second.
Primary Graphics | Falcon SE Xtender | $350 | Fastest TNT2 card around.
3.5" floppy drive | Teac | $32 | You still have to have one.
Hard Drive | Quantum Atlas 10K | $825 | A little smaller than the Fujitsu, but much faster.
Backup | Iomega Jazz II | $300 | 2 gigs of backup.
Hard Drive cooler | Friction-Free Ball-Bear | $49 |“Keep that Atlas 10K cool!”
Primary Audio | Turtle Beach Montego; Quadroth | $99 | For four speaker DirectSound, 3D and EAX.
Rear channel speakers | Jame CS-6 | $470 | Ultimate rear-channel-powered speakers.
Modem | Copper Rocket DSL modem | $400 | DSL at last.
Networking | 3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI | $70 | For trapping my buddies.
Networking Hub | Netgear GS108 | $100 | Multiplayer & DSL modem support.
Power Supply | Turbocool 300 | $129 | More power, Scrotty!
Mouse/Pointing Device | Logitech USB Mouseman Plus | $49 | Off the lot.
Action Game Controller | Generic Gamepad Pro USB | $29 | Get two.
Rudder Pedals | Thrustmaster Elite RCS | $79 | Nearly perfect foot placement.
Driving Controls | ECCI C3S 4000 | $1,129 | For the serious (and rich) sim driver.

Total | $8,283.00

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

Lean Machine

Component | Manufacturer
--- | ---
Motherboard | Aopen AX586 Pro
CPU | Pentium II/450
Memory | 128MB Corsair PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller | Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics | GallantExtend X32
Floppy drive | Teci
Hard Drive | Western Digital Expert 5.1
Primary Audio | Diamond Monster Sound MX300
Modem | Diamond Supra 56c
D-Link 10/100 Ethernet | D-Link
Power Supply | Built-in, 230W
Keyboard | Logitech Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device | Logitech PS/2 Wheel Mouse

"Which 3D Card Should I Buy?"

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So— you asked for it, you got it.

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

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

**Choice B:** If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Guilemote Xentor 32, which is currently the fastest 3D card in the West. At about $350 street price for the 32MB version, this card is pretty pricey, but it is the fastest (see this month's review on page 209). Even if you're running a P-III 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade 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. If your budget can't handle a $350 price tag, TNT2 Ultra-based boards from Guilemote (Xentor 32), Diamond (Viper 770), and Creative Labs (3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra) will also do a good job without breaking the bank.

**Product Watch**

Where's Athlon?

After last month's CPU shoot-out, you may be asking yourself, "So if AMD's Athlon CPU is so damn fast, why isn't it in the Power Rig yet?" A fine question. The reason? At press time, we wouldn't buy an Athlon anywhere. They weren't shipping yet. And because we don't want to recommend anything that you can't actually buy, we're holding off for a month. When Athlon ships, you'll see it in the Power Rig and maybe even in the Lean Machine as well.

In other CPU news, Intel is readying their next-generation chipset, code-named Gamire. Now rechristened the 820, this new chipset brings several welcome additions, including faster memory, a faster hard drive controller, and AGP 4X. The 820 will support a 133MHz interface between the CPU and the North bridge, as well as a new memory type called RAMBUS; the speed of which will be somewhere between 1.266/sec and 1.666/sec, a serious speed bump from the current 800MHz/sec that the 440BX chipset delivers. The 820 will also support SDRAM, since RAMBUS memory may be in relatively short supply as the 820 debuts this fall. In addition, the AGP pipe will get much faster, going from 528MB/sec peak throughput to 1.165/sec. The 820 will also support the UltraATA-66 specification, so hard drives using that standard should see a performance increase. As soon as we can fetch one of these motherboards, we'll let you know how it fares versus 440BX.

**ON SALE**

**Nov. 2**

**The Ultimate Gaming Machine**

Next month in Hardware, *CGW* sets out on its annual quest to find the Ultimate Gaming Machine. We'll review 15 complete computer systems from mouse to monitor and tell you which have the power you need.
Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

What does IDE mean? What is a DVD drive good for? Is there a DVD drive that also has a CD-ROM drive built in?

IDE stands for “integrated device electronics” and is the interface used to connect most hard drives in your computer. Current generation motherboards all come with built-in IDE ports that support the UltraDMA/33 standard. DVD drives are mainly for watching DVD movies, though there are a few DVD games out there. Most DVD games were originally released on CD-ROM, and have now been re-released with higher quality video for cut scenes on DVD. All DVD drives will read CD-ROM discs, though the very first DVD drives would not read recordable media (CD-R).

Q I can never seem to get the full capacity of hard drives after performing an fdisk. A 6.4 GB hard drive yields only 8.8 GB, and a 6.4 GB hard disk only yields 6.1 GB. Has it got anything to do with the BIOS setting? I'm currently using Win 98 and ABIT BX-6 R2 motherboard.

A It's probably not your BIOS. While older BIOS chips could not properly detect hard drives larger than 8.4 GB, the ABIT BX-6 rev 2.0 isn't that old. What you're seeing is the difference between how the hard drive company views the universe and how the rest of us look at it. Hard drive companies believe that one megabyte is 1,000,000 bytes. However, most computers and operating systems believe that one megabyte is 1,048,576 bytes.

Q What's this I hear about TNT2 Ultra cards not working in some motherboards?

A A few cards don't work properly with some motherboards. A number of earlier motherboards that used the Intel 440LX chipset didn't deliver adequate power to the AGP slot. At least one, the Asus P2L97 revision 1.05 or earlier, is way out of spec, and will fail with most TNT2 Ultra cards. Others miss the rated current spec (6 amps at 3.3 volts) by a smidgeen. But a highly clocked card, like the Guilemot Xentor 32 or the Hercules Dynamite TNT2 Ultra that has an onboard fan, needs the full 8 amps of power. Guilemot has done a lot of testing on this, and you can find a list of problem motherboards at their site, www.guilemot.com. At least one board, the Asus P2B-F, is fixed by simply updating the BIOS to the current revision.

Q I had Win98 and Red Hat 5.2 on a Lilo dual boot. Being the idiot that I am I used Partition Magic to just delete the Linux partitions. Simple enough, right? I figured Lilo would ask which operating system I wanted to boot as usual, only “Linux” would be a “dead link” and I could fix that later. Well now it’s messed up. The usual Lilo boot usually looks like “Lilo Boot”, but now it just says “L” and freezes up. I try to boot from a floppy, I get to DOS, I can browse my C: and newly created D: drives all I like. But when I type “WIN” it starts to load Windows and then I get two errors. One says that the registry files are unavailable (or something like that) then it passes by that and the BSOD comes up saying “A device or resource required by VFAT is not present or unavailable. VFAT cannot continue loading. System halted.” Is there any way of fixing this?

A There are several possible solutions, in order of increasing severity. The easiest one to try is to boot normally. You'll end up at the DOS prompt. Go to “windows\command” and type: “sys c:”. This will make the hard drive a DOS bootable drive. But it won't work if the master boot record has been altered by the Linux install. If that's the case, try: “fdisk /mb”. Do NOT do this if you are using some kind of disk manager, like OnTrack or MaxBlast. Given that you were using Linux, though, this probably isn’t an issue. The third thing to try is to get a copy of the latest version of Partition Magic, which understands Linux partitions, and can help in deleting Linux native partitions. Another cool utility is Symantec's Gdisk, which comes with their Ghost partition package. But Gdisk is command line driven and can be very dangerous, so use with caution.

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

We get mail. Lots of mail. Huge quantities... well, you get the idea. Readers send us all kinds of intriguing techie questions. We answer as many as we can directly, but because we find that you're often asking similar questions, we figured we'd answer the most frequently asked ones here. If you've got a hardware headache, send us mail at cgw_hardware@zd.com.
Five New Solutions.
The problem with computers is they always seem to have problems. That's why more people in the world depend on Norton software to keep their PCs out of trouble than any other.

And the smartest way to keep your computer working just became a no-brainer. Because now there's new Norton SystemWorks™ 2000, with improved versions of all our award-winning programs.

Inside one box is everything your system needs to find and fix glitches. Zap viruses. Free-up unused space. Wisk away unneeded files. Guard against crashes. Even update your computer automatically. All in one smart suite, for one sweet price.

Here's how Norton SystemWorks 2000 protects you every working day:

Get Off To A Faster Start On Monday.

Did your computer wake up feeling overloaded and sluggish today? Seems it can't load your database as fast as it used to?

Perk up its performance with Norton Utilities™, America's most popular system-optimizing and conflict-solving program.

With just one click, it'll give your entire machine a complete check-up. Including your CD-ROM, speakers, sound card, video board, modem, even your mouse.

You don't need to call in a computer repairman when you've got a doctor (the Norton Disk Doctor™) on call 24 hours-a-day.

Vaccinate A Virus On Tuesday.

It looked like such a friendly, innocent little e-mail.

But by reading it, you opened up a Pandora's box of corrosive code. In the blink of an eye, it
could have wiped away a year’s worth of work. It could have screwed up your data. It could have tucked its deadly digital infection deep inside your hard drive. It could have, and would have… but you had Norton AntiVirus.”

We’ve inoculated more computers than any anti-virus software ever invented.

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

Clean Up The Clutter On Wednesday.

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

But that was before everyone you ever met e-mailed you.

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

Before MP3.

Before video grabs and digital photos.

Before the hottest Sim game needed 8 CDs.

Isn’t it time to throw open the window, and toss out all that clutter??

Sweep away your unneeded files, unused programs, and unnecessary junk. With the #1 choice for hard drive clean up… Norton CleanSweep.”

Catch A Crash On Thursday.

Tick… tick… tick… tick.

Like some technological timebomb, all computers are doomed to blow up. Only you can’t predict when yours will crash. Or why it will freeze. The only thing you know for sure is that it happens to everyone.

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

We think the best defense is a stronger offensive. That’s why Norton CrashGuard™ jumps right into the path of an oncoming crash. It protects your work first, even creating a SafeOriginal™, then guides you step-by-step through recovery. Crashes happen. Just make sure you’re not crushed by the next one.

Call For An Instant Update On Friday.

Has another week flown by already?

In this high-tech world, a thousand things can change in only five days.

There are new software updates, system patches, bug fixes, hardware drivers, and virus definitions. Luckily, you’ve got a six-month subscription to Norton Web Services.” It’s the most comprehensive PC resource center on the Internet.

Like a Yellow Pages for computer support, it’s the one place to turn for all current system maintenance information and downloads.

Internet “operators” are even standing by. Our Norton support staff is there, online, to assist you in real time. And if you’d like, we’ll even notify you about the latest developments, by e-mail.

Is Sunday A Day Of Rest? …Hardly!

You can snooze as late as you want, because Norton SystemWorks is awake and alert to any potential PC problems.

Our award-winning programs are protecting your computer, automatically, 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

So surf the Web. Play a game. Or, don’t even touch your computer. “Like a lifesaver bobbing on a turbulent sea, Norton SystemWorks will keep you afloat.” (InternetWeek. 3/99)
"It's The Obvious Choice."
-PC Magazine

"Norton SystemWorks brings together several best-of-breed utilities for significantly less than you'd pay to get them separately. For one-stop shopping for system utilities, it's the obvious choice."
- PC Magazine, 5/99

"...does even more to help Windows users deal with the headaches of system crashes, missing or corrupted files, computer viruses, and other facts of Windows life."
- PC Week 4/99

"...a seamlessly integrated suite of utility and antivirus software...an exceptional value."
- InternetWeek 3/99

"...other programs offer similar features but fall far short of what Norton has."
- Knight Ridder Newspapers 1/99

Put new Norton SystemWorks 2000 to work today.
http://shop.symantec.com

To buy it online, or find your nearest Norton software dealer, please visit our website.

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Reviews

**SAITEK P120 GAMEPAD**

Requirements: Joystick port, Price: $99.99
Manufacturer: Saitek Industries
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

**Such a Deal**

Most of the news about gamepads has been about the herd migrating to USB. But Saitek has focused on making a very inexpensive gamepad that can be found for 10 bucks. That's right, 10 bucks. Now, you may be thinking that you'll get what you pay for, but Saitek's P120 gamepad is a generally competent gamepad that works well for sports titles, and is competent for driving titles.

Installation is easy enough: Connect the P120 to your joystick port (no USB connectivity), bring up the Game Controllers control panel, and configure a Custom controller with three axes and four buttons. A quick calibration and you're good to go. The P120 has a D-pad mini-joystick that can be stored in the body of the gamepad when not in use. I do have a couple of design gripes. The third axis is controlled by two toggle-like buttons, but the buttons are essentially digital, so that the “axis” only has three discrete positions (center, hard-left, hard-right). This “axis” might as well have been two extra buttons. Also, the four-button layout is essentially a “two-row” design, rather than a circular.

**ACTIONTEC 56K PCI CALL WAITING MODEM**

Requirements: Free PCI slot, Price: $105
Manufacturer: Actiontec
Contact: www.actiontec.com

**Hold the Phones**

I’ve steered people away from PCI modems in general, because most of them are “soft” modems — little more than an excuse to sell more powerful CPUs. Actiontec has finally shipped a modem that’s the exception to that rule. Soft or “Winmodems” use your CPU to process most of the modem chores. They’re terrible for online games, and often cause unacceptably high lag times. More traditional modems have their own controller chip that takes the burden off the CPU. The Actiontec PCI modem also has its own dedicated controller, so you don’t get that severe CPU hit. When playing with TRIBES or Q3TEST, 1.08, I saw server ping times as low as 120ms, and game play was smooth and lag-free on servers with less than 250ms pings. I was able to connect to a local ISP at data rates regularly above 44kbps (usually around 48kbps). The call waiting is handy, too, if you’ve got that feature on your phone. I was able to take a call while online, tell the person I’d call back, hang up, then disconnect from the Net gracefully (you have about 7-10 seconds). I wouldn’t want to do this in the middle of a hot TRIBES session, though...

At $105, the Actiontec is more expensive than those low-ball Winmodems, but your gaming experience will be much better for the extra dough. —Lloyd Case

**ABIT BE-6 SLOT ONE MOTHERBOARD**

Requirements: ATX chassis, Pentium II or better, and an UltraDMA hard drive for maximum performance, Price: $130
Manufacturer: Abit
Contact: www.abit-usa.com

**Ultra-Frustrating**

A bit has developed a well-deserved reputation for offering motherboards that cater to users who love to tweak their systems and play around with overclocking. The new Abit BE-6 motherboard has an onboard UltraATA/66 hard drive controller, which is the latest version of the EIDE hard drive connection standard, and is faster than most current EIDE controllers on motherboards. The board uses an HPT366 controller chip to handle the UltraATA/66 chores. There are four IIDE connectors on the motherboard, and you can have up to eight IDE devices attached. Abit even supplies an 80-conductor UltraATA cable for more reliable performance.

Despite the thoughtful inclusion of the better quality cable, UltraATA/66 on the BE-6 wasn’t very reliable in UltraATA/66 mode. I attached a pair of Western Digital Expert hard drives. The system frequently locked up during WinBench 99 disk WinMark testing when attached to the ATA/66 connectors. Switching to ATA/33, the hard drives ran perfectly, with no problems. In the end, I had to carefully run each test, one at a time, to get the final results. During normal use, the system did crash several times a day, though it was hard to pin down the cause.

The bottom line is that if you desperately need an UltraATA/66 controller, you may be better off with another motherboard and a PCI controller card. Even then, the testing shows almost zero difference between UltraATA/66 and UltraATA/33, even on the fast Expert series hard drives. While Abit gets come credit for trying to push the performance envelope in general, this time they may have pushed it a little too hard. —Lloyd Case
Love thyself.

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Plunge deep into the most exquisite environments ever seen and taste the forbidden fruits of sorcery, treachery, unique multiplayer campaigns and artifacts of absolute power.

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Terror grips the land. The powerful and evil Sorcerer Silver has abducted the women of Jarrah for his treacherous purposes. Take control as David, a simple hero on a quest to find his beloved and to defeat the almighty Silver. But it won't be easy. In order to succeed you'll need to recruit allies, master swordplay, learn the art of magic, and venture through hostile worlds teeming with Silver's corrupt followers.

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

Marvel at vivid special effects, powerful magical spells, and the mighty weaponry that you'll acquire on your journey.

Travel through hundreds of beautiful locations, rich in detail...and packed with danger.

Your mouse is your sword. Use it in real time combat to vanquish foes, including demons, dragons, and other insidious creatures.
JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is one of the toughest assignments a gamer will ever get. Even at the lowest level of difficulty, the supposed "newbie" level, this game can kick your tail from here til Sunday. There are no quick paths to success here, no kick-ass-quick schemes. Success requires the disciplined development of a number of sound tactical habits.

1. WAIT FOR IT!

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is such a difficult game because it requires traits rarely rewarded in gaming—patience and restraint. If you go into this game guns a-blazing, your Mercs will die. If you aren't willing to spend a lot of time setting up a strategy, your Mercs will die. If you get sloppy with your tactics, your Mercs will die. Yes, the games will be long and a little tedious, but this is JAGGED ALLIANCE 2—not so much a game as a test of character.

2. COVER OFTEN, COVER WELL

Cover is everything. Cover is life. If you try to fight toe-to-toe with your foes without adequate cover, your Mercs will die. Your opponents have god-like aim, even with pistols, even at long range. So whenever possible, approach a sector from the angle that provides the best cover. If you find yourself fighting a patrol in a sector without cover, retreat—and try to fight them on better ground.

It's easy to tell when your Mercs are out of the sight of foes— the foes turn black. What's not easy to tell is whether or not a particular rock, tree, or wall will provide cover from a particular foe, which is one of the more frustrating parts of the game. If your Merc has been sighted by a foe and is running for cover, leave yourself extra movement points so that you can experiment with various positions and postures. It may take some furtling around before your Merc is safe.

Once in adequate cover, the most common tactic is to pop up to take a shot and drop back down. Always leave yourself enough movement points to duck down again, or else—that's right—your Mercs will die.

That said, you must be very cautious with the Pop Goes The Weasel strategy. If your foes get set up in firing positions around your hiding spot, there's a very high likelihood that they will get interrupt shots when you pop back up.

And a quick note on sighting: just because an enemy has turned black doesn't mean you can't hit him. If your line-of-sight is not blocked, you have a chance (although greatly reduced) of hitting a foe who's "in the black." Sometimes these long shots are worth the ammo if the targeted foe is threatening your favorite Merc.
**Flanking**

One way to alleviate the enemy-interrupt problem is to use the most important tactic in JA2—flanking. Whenever possible, try to position your Mercs so that they have firing positions on the enemy from different angles. Flanking combined with the Pop Goes The Weasel strategy is very effective. A Merc can pop up from one position and fire, thus drawing the attention of your foes. Then another Merc can pop up from another angle. Since the foes are facing in another direction, they are much less likely to get an interrupt on the second Merc, and they must also change their facing to fire on the second Merc, burning valuable movement points. If you alternate between Mercs, you can keep your foes’ heads spinning.

**Hit-and-Run**

Another useful tactic, especially when outgunned or outnumbered on a night operation, is the hit-and-run. Crouch up on an enemy, take a nice shot, and then retreat. Have other Mercs positioned behind the first Merc so that they have a chance of interrupt shots on the pursuing foe. Fire, fall back, set up more potential interrupts. Repeat. Whenever possible, try to completely disengage from the enemy and return to real-time mode when using the hit-and-run; the reason being that when you encounter the enemy again and drop into turn mode, all of your Mercs will have their full allotment of movement points.

**Time to Pump You Up**

Improving your Mercs' stats is both rewarding and essential. To improve stats is obvious in most cases, but here are some not-so-obvious—and some very cheesy—ways to pump Mercs stats.

- **Agility:** The fastest way to improve agility is to sneak around in stealth mode with enemies nearby. It's a risky operation for a clumsy Merc, but it will improve agility very quickly.
- **Dexterity:** The vultures that prey on dead bodies are great for target practice. Throw knives at them to pump up your dex.
- **Health:** One of the more difficult attributes to improve. Try marching around Arulco with extremely heavy inventory loads and you might pick up a few health points.
- **Explosives:** Obviously, handling explosives will improve this stat. If you find a land mine, pick it up, then plant it again, and dig it up again. Repeat and watch your explosive stats soar. Fumble, and watch your Merc's debonded head soar.
- **Leadership:** Train militia and this stat will climb through the roof.
- **Strength:** Frying open crates and punching things will give you a good workout. Use stun grenades to knock out enemies and then pummel them with your fists. There are also a few inanimate objects that can be used as punching bags.

**Order of Battle**

When conquering towns, there's no set path you must take. Here's one suggestion, which roughly orders the towns by difficulty:

- Omerta
- Drassen
- San Mona
- Chizena
- Cambria
- Alma
- Grumm
- Estoni
- Balme
- Orta
- Meduna

**Item Combinations**

There are a ton of items in Arulco that can be combined into very useful objects. Here's just a few.

- **String + Soda Can = Alarm**
  Attach to doors as a guard against sneak attacks
- **Aluminum Rod + Spring = AP Enhancer**
  Increases a gun's firing rate
- **Steel Pipe + Glue + Tape = Barrel Extension**
  Increases a gun's range
- **X-Ray Tube + Gum + Fumblepack = X-Ray Unit**
  Part for X-Ray Detector
- **Copper Wire + Lameboy = LCD Display**
  Part for X-Ray Detector
- **LCD Display + X-Ray Unit = X-Ray Detector**
  Ah, we've given enough away, haven't we?

**Pass the Buckshot**

Got a Merc on the front line in need of a grenade? Throw it to him! Your Mercs are quite good at tossing and catching stuff. A needed item like a grenade or an ammo clip or a first aid kit can be tossed from the rear to the front in a single turn, with movement points to spare. (Note: If you're tossing a grenade, make sure you take the grenade from the inventory. If the grenade is in a Merc's "hand slot" when you toss it, it is live and your Mercs will die.) You can also do this with weapons. Have only one high-powered rifle? Take two shots, pass it to a neighboring Merc and take two more. If you plan it right, the entire squad could use the rifle in one turn.
**CGW TIPS**

**Hidden & Dangerous**

**Codes** Type "iwillcheat" at any opening screen or menu. Then enter the following codes during gameplay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantelie</td>
<td>Go-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodhealth</td>
<td>Full Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openalldoor</td>
<td>Opens all doors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allitems</td>
<td>All items available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killthemall</td>
<td>Kills all enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showtheend</td>
<td>Shows end movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamedone</td>
<td>Completes current mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamefail</td>
<td>Falls current mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurrect</td>
<td>Brings team back to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funnyhead</td>
<td>Big-head-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy</td>
<td>View enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debugdrawwire</td>
<td>Wire-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playerrecords</td>
<td>Shows your position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laraacroft</td>
<td>Alternate uniforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**System Shock 2**

**Tip** In the game hit [Shift]+[,], and then type "summon_obj [Item]", where items can be: medical kit, psi amp, wrench, pistol, shotgun, assault rifle, laser pistol, EMP Rifle, Electro Shock, Gren Launcher, Stasis Field Generator, Fusion Cannon, Crystal Shard, Viral Prolif, Worm Launcher.

**Codes** These other codes also work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>psi_full</td>
<td>Fully restores psi points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uhermensch</td>
<td>Pump up all of your stats and skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Descent 3**

Enter the following as your player name to unlock the respective cheat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IvesGolitl</td>
<td>All weapons, energy, shield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BurgerGod</td>
<td>Go-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TreeSquid</td>
<td>Full map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoreClang</td>
<td>Level jump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeadOFLight</td>
<td>Destroys all bots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testicus</td>
<td>Chock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FrameLength</td>
<td>FPS display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ByeByeMonkey</td>
<td>Chase view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTERSTATE '76**

Use the names below to drive these secret vehicles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POCGREN</td>
<td>Helicopter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNAT</td>
<td>Tank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTAIR</td>
<td>Hot-Air Balloon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THETRUTHISHERE</td>
<td>UFO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WARZONE 2100**

Press [1], type the code and hit [ENTER].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time toggle</td>
<td>Steps and starts the mission timer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get off my land</td>
<td>Kills all enemy units on the map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show me the power</td>
<td>Gives 1000 extra power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whale fin</td>
<td>Gives 1000 extra power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hallo mein schatz</td>
<td>Skips to next mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work harder</td>
<td>Completes all currently active research topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double up</td>
<td>All of your units are twice as tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill selected</td>
<td>Kills the presently selected units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>john kettley</td>
<td>Toggle weather: snow, rain, clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biffer baker</td>
<td>Units almost indestructible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sparkle green</td>
<td>Stronger units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MECHCOMMANDER**

Create a new file named "mechcommander.2" in the directory where MECHCOMMANDER is installed. No need to actually put anything here, just make sure the file exists.

Then type in these codes during a game:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lorrie</td>
<td>replenish ammo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camu</td>
<td>toggle God mode on/off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mineyeshaveenthglory</td>
<td>reveals the map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paundpflesh</td>
<td>more money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rockandrollpeople</td>
<td>unlimited drop weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type Lordbunny and then press b and left click on the target to hit it with unlimited artillery.
Extortion has never been so much fun!—PC Gamer

Wildly hysterical strategy game set in the American underworld circa 1933. You’re the Boss; use your street smarts and an army of willing thugs and enforcers to take control—slip-up and you sleep with the fishes!
What happened in 1932 in the Amerzone?

And why did the professor die before telling me all his secrets?

Legendary white birds?
Better than both Riven and Myst combined! A True Masterpiece.

Strange creatures?
Dungeon Keeper 2

**Codes** During gameplay, just type [ctrl+alt+e] at any time. If you did this right, you will hear the sound of a door opening. Then type the following codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>show me the money</td>
<td>Gives money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now the rain has</td>
<td>Shows map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel the power</td>
<td>Upgrades all monster's skill to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this is my church</td>
<td>Provides all rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fit the best</td>
<td>Provides all rooms and traps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i believe its magic</td>
<td>Provides all spells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do not fear the raaper</td>
<td>Win level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Annihilation: Kingdoms

**Codes** After starting a skirmish game or multiplayer mode, press [Enter] to bring up the message box. Press [+] then enter a code and press [Enter] to activate it. Enter a code again to deactivate it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atm</td>
<td>Fill mana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubleshot</td>
<td>Weapons do double damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>halfshot</td>
<td>Weapons do half damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrared</td>
<td>Fog of war on/off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowlase</td>
<td>Full map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zipper</td>
<td>Faster unit building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RAINBOW SIX

To activate cheats, press ['] while in the game and then type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEAMGOD</td>
<td>Team god-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVATARGOD</td>
<td>Player god-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUMPY</td>
<td>Stumpy-mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLODHHOPPER</td>
<td>Enlarges player's feet and hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEGANOOGGIN</td>
<td>Mega head mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIGNOOGGIN</td>
<td>Big head mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPINGEDISCOUNT</td>
<td>Refill ammo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOBRAINER</td>
<td>Turns AI off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEBUGKEYS</td>
<td>Debug keys enabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURNPUNCHKICK</td>
<td>Changes players from 3D to 2D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPLORE</td>
<td>Victory conditions on/off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RECOIL

During playing hit [CTRL]+[X] to enter cheat mode, then type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>Invincible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemmit</td>
<td>All weapons enabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medic</td>
<td>Shields full strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TEST DRIVE 5

Go to the first Options menu and type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cup of choice</td>
<td>Unlocks all cup races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that takes me back</td>
<td>Enables backwards mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i have the key</td>
<td>Unlocks all cars and tracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i carry a badge</td>
<td>Drive police cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lone crusader in a dangerous world</td>
<td>Press horn for nitro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remote braking</td>
<td>Press horn to freeze opponents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Got a great tip for your favorite game?

Send your tips, tricks and strategies to cgw_letters@zd.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line) and we'll publish one submission each month. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the CGW BozoBin!
Don’t worry, at NVIDIA, amazingly fast, cutting-edge graphics processors are all we do. The results are ultra-smooth frame rates and incredibly vivid colors that allow you to see and play 3D/2D games exactly the way game makers intended. Not to mention an internet experience that comes to life. If you demand this kind of performance out of your games and the Internet, then demand your next PC or graphics accelerator comes loaded with a NVIDIA chip. There’s no reason to settle for anything less. Graphics to the nth degree.
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Introducing a frenetically-paced, visually stunning 3D RTS from Sierra Studios and Massive Entertainment
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CONTROL
COMING IN 2000
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The Mod Squad

Consider Valve Software the Medicis of modern action gaming. They're serving as "patrons" to amateur mod (user-made game modifications) designers by eyeing talented people—such as the ACTION HALF-LIFE team—and either hiring or helping them. Valve not only hosted the recent HALF-LIFE Mod Expo in San Francisco, but they also provide extended and ongoing support for mod authors.

Harry Teusley, artist/designer and mod guru at Valve, says, "My support role is best characterized as "being there for mod teams." Since the SDK was released, the job of mod team support has largely been one of answering technical questions, or if I can't, funneling the questions to someone who can. Teams may also have artistic questions, or marketing and legal questions regarding their mod, and I answer those as well."

This treatment is a contrast to times past, where mods were handled with a more laissez-faire attitude. John Carmack would eventually release the source code for his various engines, and let the user community do whatever it wanted to with his work. But the source code was unsupported, and people had to learn from each other, rather than from the masters.

Justin Fisher, creator of the Aliens TC for DOOM (widely considered the best user-mod ever made for an action game), remembers the early days of mod-making. "It was sometimes a real grind to have to rapidly master a huge and unending series of often incomplete, buggy, unrelated, or incompatible software tools," he said. "More help from Id would have been a very good thing in most respects."

Ending the End-User Support

The problem is that this level of support for the mod community takes resources away from the developers. Not every development team can afford to have even one person—let alone two or more—dedicated to working with mod designers. Also, from the designer's standpoint, there is a danger of having a creative vision hampered. Fisher is optimistic, though, "as long as the support can be used as a platform to help launch us in our own directions, rather than as a guide which leads us and narrows where we can go."

Handled carefully, official mod support can be a way for a company to last. Valve knows this, and so does Epic (who is hosting an UNREAL-Mod contest with $150,000 in prizes, and making UNREAL TOURNAMENT mod-friendly); it builds brand loyalty, and breathes new life into titles which may otherwise be considered passé (ACTION HALF-LIFE and GUNMAN convinced the CGW editors to load up HALF-LIFE again).

More people are encouraged to try their creative hand; with official support, these new creations will get good exposure. Carmack and Romero had their start as amateurs working out of a garage. The next Carmack is probably out there too, waiting for a studio to notice him or her and become their patron. CGW

I tracked down Justin Fisher of ALIENS DOOM fame, and asked him what he's been up to lately. "I'm currently helping a friend set up a Web-design company," he said, "but the longer I spend away from making new worlds and games, the stronger their pull becomes. It's been several months now and I'm reaching the point where I'm going to put down what I'm doing and go for a good job or offer that comes my way." (Note to any development teams looking for designers!)

I also asked him if he had any advice for budding mod designers out there. "Probably the biggest pitfall I fell into, and one that many people still fall into, is making the most important parts of the game first. You need to know whether your plans are feasible, so you see if you can make the core elements work. But during the project, your tools get better, your skills improve, and you acquire new techniques. In short, the parts that you do near the end of the project (except for deadline rush) are going to be far better than the earlier work. Don't make peripheral stuff as you can at the beginning, and as much of the important stuff when at the height of your abilities and tools."
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FLANKER 2.0 features stunning graphics and streamlined playability — without compromising the technical excellence of its famous predecessor! Fly the Su-27 Flanker using a new 3D graphics engine and improved flight dynamics — or take off from the deck of Russia's Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier in your new Su-33. From the interactive training sessions to the ultra-realistic flight model, this premier combat flight sim is ready to pounce!

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Mission editor lets you create your own realistic theater of operation.

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FLANKER 2.0
COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATION

Flying Legends
Gaming Outside the Lines

The days of cut-and-dried strategy genres are numbered. Yes, there’s always going to be a place for pure real-time frat in the COMMAND & CONQUER mold, an audience for Sid Meier CIV-style grand strategy, and a home for hardcore wargames, but they’re being whittled down by gamers’ love of anything new, and the growing audience of casual gamers looking for games that cast a broader net.

You’d think these disparate influences would work against each other, but surprisingly enough, the most interesting and enjoyable games on the horizon have something for both groups, and they’re accomplishing it by blurring genre lines.

Role-playing influences are cropping up everywhere. While this trend began with the troop training portion of X-COM and MYTH’s experience-gaining veteran troops, it’s really coming to the fore in games like Sir tech’s JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 and Red Storm’s upcoming SHADOW WATCH, which charges players with developing their individual units in over 70 skills and abilities. While this has an obvious effect on the strategic portion of the game, it gives strategy gamers a reward heretofore reserved primarily for MIGHT & MAGIC or BALDUR’S GATE fans—that sense of accomplishment that comes only from watching your characters grow under your guidance. Need more examples? What about WARLORDS: BATTLECRY and its very traditional fantasy RPG heroes, or METAL FATIGUE’s experience-gaining ‘march crews’? Action and strategy hybrids are becoming so numerous, they’d form their own genre if they weren’t such a diverse lot. The first BATTLEZONE game proved the two apparently incompatible genres were a natural fit, and the sequel is taking it even further, allowing gamers to all but forgo the action side of the mix to focus on base-building and unit commanding. Games like ROGUE SPEAR and SWAT 3 may look like first-person shooters, but their heavy emphasis on planning and tactics make them stand out from the QUAKE-likes, and let sound strategists succeed even if their shooting skills aren’t the best. For the ultimate in shooter/strategy hybridization we’ll have to wait for next year’s TEAM FORTRESS 2, where gamers will be able to play a pivotal role as a team commander and never have to fire a shot.

Does this genre-bending harm titles? On the contrary, I think it fits at the center of AGE OF EMPIRES’ incredible success. By giving gamers the ability to win by building Wonders and not destroying their enemies, Ensemble Studios created a game that can appeal to both grand strategists and real-time vets. With even more ways to win in the sequel, the AGE OF EMPIRES franchise should only attract and addict more fans. Appealing to different sets of gamers might be what draws many to IMPERIUM GALACTICA II, with its blend of grand strategy, real-time combat, and a game engine that lets you pause the real-time combat to issue orders to your ships.

So does all this mean that more traditional titles are dead? Not at all—Sid Meier could probably buy a private island with what he’ll make from the upcoming CIV III, and a new WARCRAFT game from Blizzard is a guaranteed bestseller. But if the genre as a whole simply stuck its head in the sand and refused to change, it could find itself under a headstone—right next to the murdered-by-clones adventure genre.

Robert’s Playlist

1. Might and Magic VII
2. High Heat Baseball 2000
3. System Shock 2
4. Jagged Alliance 2
5. Wiggie, a Palm Pilot Scrabble-alike

All You Pretty Things

Strategy titles have been using 3D acceleration for some time now, but it’s just starting to really pay off in the eye candy department. BLACK & WHITE should set a new standard for imaginatively-rendered game environments, while BLOOD ORION 2’s weapon effects, night-and-day cycling, and dazzling environments threaten to doom gamers to failure as they neglect fighting and just soak up the gameworld. And while gamers have been cooing and ahhing over gorgeous screen shots of HOMEWORLD’s space fleet battles, IMPERIUM GALACTICA II’s 3D-accelerated space wars flat-out tops them, with incredibly dynamic combat highlighted by brilliant ship-simulating lasers and beautiful, twitching lightning guns.

But the most impressive thing we’ve seen lately in a strategy title doesn’t even use hardware acceleration: AGE OF EMPIRE II’s trebuchet. A paragon of unit design and animation, we’ve been charming these babies out in multiplayer games just to drink in their muscular grace as they lob their payloads at enemy walls and buildings.
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“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
The Case Against Elves

When role-playing games were a near-dead genre in the mid-1990s, many gamers questioned why one of computer gaming’s oldest genres suddenly became so unpopular. Almost all RPGs featured a pseudo-medieval swords-and-sorcery game world full of goblins, fireballs spells, and giant rats. The lack of originality was so pervasive that new gamers were led to believe that elves and swords were RPG prerequisites. Strategy games with fantasy settings, such as MASTER OF MAGIC, were erroneously classified as RPGs. The horror!

How did the genre become so stagnant? RPGs are not about Tolkien-esque settings. RPGs are about being able to assume a role in an open-ended, meaningful way. Through character creation and development, or just through choices made during the game, players individualize their pixelated alter-egos and ultimately their experiences. The setting of the virtual world is irrelevant in characterizing a game’s genre.

Ironically, although the inspiration for their computer counterparts, tabletop RPGs have featured a larger variety of settings, including science fiction (GAMMA WORLD, TRAVELER), western (BOOT HILL), comics (MARVEL SUPERHEROES) and horror (VAMPIRE, WEREWOLF). Several of the original tabletop RPGs, such as DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and TUNNELS AND TROLLS, were swords-and-sorcery games, but there’s never been a shortage of paper RPGs set in other environments. Yet with a few notable exceptions, most of which were released in the 1980s, computer RPGs have focused exclusively on chopping up orcs and yielding +4 battle-axes.

With the genre in full resurgence, I hope it doesn’t doom itself again by producing increasingly derivative games and ignoring innovative settings. The immediate future still looks promising. Interplay’s FALLOUT games garnered both critical and commercial success at least in part due to their milieu’s stylish amalgamation of futuristic post-apocalyptic and ’60s Americana. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 is a sequel but still seems highly original, because it includes relatively novel science-fiction elements such as cybernetic implants and psionic powers.

To the mix a development team (led by Ken Levine) experienced in making innovative products, an advanced version of the THIEF 3D engine, and some strong first-person shooter elements, and it’s easy to see why the title garnered good advance buzz.

Helmed by industry veteran Tom Hall, ANACHRONOX’s development team seeks to combine truly original science-fiction environments and the same sort of action/RPG hybrid gameplay offered successfully by several console RPGs. DEUS EX merges elements of James Bond’s adventures and the X-Files. With the impressive UNREAL engine, DEUS EX’s development team has created some of the most realistic-looking, immersive environments yet seen in a role-playing game. The team is led by Warren Spector and Harvey Smith, who helped create the original SYSTEM SHOCK, ULTIMA UNDERWORLD, and other critically acclaimed RPGs. Promising games are also in the works based upon White Wolf’s VAMPIRE and WEREWOLF milieus, although the game based upon the latter will emphasize action over RPG elements.

Even with the gradual expansion of computer RPGs into science-fiction and horror settings, it still seems as though developers are artificially narrowing the scope of what reality is gaming’s broadest genre. How can we have yet to see computer RPGs set during the world wars? Saving Private Ryan’s band of soldiers is a suitable model for a WWII RPG party. The Wild West? Outlaw legends provide ample fodder for compelling RPGs. These intuitive settings have been consistently ignored by developers, as have others. How about a Viking RPG featuring the gods of that mythos? What about ancient Egypt, medieval Japan, or imperial Rome? Unless RPGs innovate and evolve into new settings, the renaissance RPGs are enjoying will quickly end. So many possibilities, yet such little innovation shown to date.

Who dares ignore the elves? For comments from the creators of DEUS EX, FALLOUT, and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 on this column’s topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock’s RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.
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Labor of Love

It's a shame (and a crime), but almost every computer product released these days seems to require a patch. And while most companies will allocate some time and resources toward a game after it ships, many games don't achieve their full potential even after a patch or two. Such was the case with two recent flight sims. The companies released an intended "final" patch, but both games still needed more work. Fortunately for us, a grassroots effort prevailed in both cases—a dedicated handful of people were willing to produce further revisions in their spare time. The newest patches should be available by press time.

European Air War

Two people are currently hard at work on EUROPEAN AIR WAR. EAW may be a gaming media darling, but it still has its problems, especially in the multiplayer department. After the version 1.1 patch shipped, Brandon Gamblin and Chris Coon of MicroProse kept close tabs on the reaction in the Internet newsgroups. Says Gamblin, "We heard about the troubles that EAW was having on the Internet. So, a few of us started working on the Internet problem in our spare time, still devoting full-time effort to our main projects. That was how the 'unofficial' patch got started."

MicroProse was supportive of the process. "There was never any difficulty with them," said Gamblin. "Once it looked like we had sufficient cause and substance for a patch, we told Hasbro/MicroProse about it and they started giving us support for it (QA, artists, etc.). It was always understood, however, that this was not part of our main work. This was always an extracurricular patch."

Although this patch focuses on multiplayer, it also adds some new features and a few more bug fixes. In addition, an "unsupported" art kit has been made available, allowing players to alter their own planes and virtual cockpits, as well as the terrain. For more information, go to support.micropulse.com/eawupdate.htm.

Screamin' Demons

ParSoft's Michael Harrison had to travel a different road with SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE. Although version 1.5 essentially turned SDOE into an altogether different flight sim, it still wasn't enough, especially when it came to the flight modeling. "Unfortunately, we were only given two weeks to work on the patch, so that naturally limited what we were able to fix or add," explains Harrison. "Activation didn't want to invest more time on the game, but there were elements that needed modification. Rather than leave the users in the lurch, I decided to take on future mods and fixes. Given that a personal goal of mine was that we try to build a community around OpenPlane so that we could continue to improve upon it, this struck me as the right thing to do rather than to treat each game as an independent island."

These are admirable goals to be sure, but Activation was hesitant to approve any additional patches. "Some people
In November, The Online Multiplayer Game Of The Year Goes Solo.

TRIBES EXTREME

The original, best-selling Starsiege "TRIBES" pioneered the genre of online squad warfare. While TRIBES Extreme significantly enhances that multiplayer online experience, it also adds an entirely new single-player campaign against computer opponents, as well as new "team-building" missions that let a team of players hone their squad combat skills against computer-controlled teams on full-scale online maps. Join Us.

www.dynamix.com

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Let's Get it On!

I saw the early dominance of Microsoft firsthand when I worked at PC Week magazine, one of Computer Gaming World's boring older brothers. Remember WordPerfect? Or how about Lotus 1-2-3?

Six years later, having seen Microsoft Internet Explorer reel Netscape in like a little cod, I'm wondering if EA Sports is picking up on the fact that Microsoft has them square in its targeting reticle. To be sure, EA has witnessed many a competitor, from VR Sports to Sierra Sports, trying to move in on their turf. And to their credit, they've repelled all challengers in practically every major sports category with their unique blend of attitude and action gameplay.

But now Microsoft is here, using the same tactics they've used to dominate other markets. Tactic number one: They've taken their time with their products. Both NFL Fever 2000 and NBA Inside Drive have been in development for a long time. Tactic number two: Not having to worry so much about profits this time around, they're releasing their products at a much-lower-than-normal price: $19.99.

Battle of the Network Stars

But the gaming market is a little different. Since Microsoft doesn't have as many advantages in the gaming arena as they have in the browser or productivity arenas, a lot of this issue boils down to one question: Who has the better game? Here's a breakdown.

**Football**

Football is a closer contest than I originally thought, given the Madden series' noble lineage. Madden 2000 definitely has the bells and whistles—like the totally unique Great Moments mini-game, and 32 season career modes. It also has years of development behind it, which means you'll see unparalleled defensive play. To Microsoft's credit, they didn't just reverse-engineer Madden; the design team really put forth their own vision of digital football. It shows. NFL Fever 2000 looks and plays more realistically, and incorporates a layer of graphical detail I've yet to see anywhere else. If you're into faster action and attitude, choose Madden. If you're more into realism, it's NFL Fever.

**Adventure:** Tie

**Hoops**

NBA Live 2000 has better graphics, and two of the coolest features I've seen in a basketball game. You can play with players from the NBA's past, including Chamberlain, Magic, and Bird, and you can play with any of these legends—or any other NBA player—in a one-on-one schoolyard mode. Although Microsoft's NBA Inside Drive does play more like the real-life sport it simulates, the game lacks some visual appeal—as well as the classic players, free-agent salary negotiations, and the flavor of the game.

**Adventure:** EA Sports

**Baseball**

Nolo contendere. The competition here isn't even close. Triple Play dominates Microsoft Baseball. But Triple Play isn't the finest baseball game around anymore. That title belongs to High Heat 2000.

**Adventure:** 3DO

The frightening thing about all this for EA Sports is that Microsoft, unlike the VR Sports of the world, will keep plugging away until they figure out the formula for success. It's up to Electronic Arts to determine what happens—it's their battle to lose. If EA maintains an aggressive focus on balancing fun versus realism, and doesn't develop conservatively, Microsoft may find itself unable to easily dominate the sports arena. And for PC gamers, a competitive genre is much more fun. PlayStation owners know what I'm taking about—PSX football games got much better when NFL GameDay came out.

Microsoft isn't even competing right now. (Side note: NFL 2000, which should be coming out soon, takes the game back to its early, faster-paced, shoot-it-out roots.)

**Adventure:** EA Sports

---

**George's Playlist**

1. High Heat 2000
2. Age of Empires 2 (beta)
3. Madden 2000
4. NFL Fever 2000
5. Quake III

**Life vs. Computers**

One of the high points in my life involves the cherished autumnal ritual of running the year's batch of football titles through a full-season simulation. This year, I picked Madden 2000 and NFL Fever 2000 as the officially-licensed prediction makers. Unless the two games know something we don't, the regular season featured surprises in both cases. In addition to predicting that the 49ers wouldn't even make the playoffs, and that the surprising Tennessee Titans would win the AFC Central, NFL Fever 2000 predicted that the Vikings and the Broncos would make the Super Bowl with the Broncos running away with it, 27–14.

Madden 2000 saw things a little differently in one regard. The Broncos went out in the first round of the playoffs in this season sim, and the Jaguars somehow played their way into the Super Bowl against the Minnesota Vikings.

Something that worried us is that Madden 2000 also saw the 49ers fail to make the playoffs. Here's a word to the wise: If this actually happens, the resulting depression here in the Bay Area might trigger the big Internet stock crash everyone's been expecting.

Once again, we will try to convince the magazine's publisher to buy us a satellite dish so that we can "keep track" of how well these games model the real NFL season, and we'll let you know how the two games fare over the course of the next four months.
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Johnny Levels Up

The King is Gone, but He’s not Forgotten

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
-William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming” (1921)

How do you begin a column about Johnny Wilson? With a joke, perhaps, to pay tribute to his unrepentantly raunchy sense of humor? With a memorable anecdote from times past, to acknowledge his 15-plus years at Computer Gaming World? Or how about with some kind of erudite, literary quote to set the tone and establish a conceptual framework - the kind of thing Johnny always did in these pages?

The problem, unfortunately, is that whichever way you choose to begin, you’re almost certainly doomed to failure. Because nothing you could write in one page could possibly do justice to a man who has been so closely identified with, and done so much for, this magazine. So you might as well go for the literary one. It’ll make you look smart for the chicks - and Johnny could always appreciate that, too.

As it turns out, this Yeats guy knew what he was talking about. The center cannot hold forever, even at a computer game magazine. Johnny Wilson, CGW’s longtime editor-in-chief and patron saint, has moved on. And why should you care? Because you wouldn’t be holding this magazine in your hands right now if it were not for his extraordinary, near two-decade-long career here.

Way back in 1982, when Johnny first started working for CGW, gaming was still a young, humble, hobbyist’s medium; a subculture of a subculture. Gaming was far from mainstream entertainment - it was the arcane, funky new refuge of chess club and Dungeons and Dragons veterans. Guys like Richard Garriott and John Romero were not yet celebrity superstars, just geeky programming guys writing code late into the night.

The early CGW reflected this: amateurish, pamphlet-sized, with ugly black-and-white artwork. Johnny’s first review was for a game called HORSERACING CLASSIC for the Apple, which he called “a darn good party game.”

From such humble beginnings, Johnny ascended the ladder from writer to Associate Editor to Editor, and eventually to Editor-in-Chief. Along the way, he helped shepherd the magazine from an underground geekfest to a mainstream international publication with hundreds of thousands of readers. He saw the industry grow and mutate into something radically different from what it was, and he took CGW through this same process - heroically struggling to straddle the line between satisfying older readers, while giving newer readers something they could relate to. Maybe he didn’t succeed all the time, but he damn sure never stopped trying.

What is important about Johnny Wilson is this: He taught the entire industry that though computer games may be, in the grand scheme of things, a rather frivolous business, that doesn’t mean we can’t think about them and write about them with intelligence, and passion, and a strong sense of integrity.

It was Johnny Wilson who insisted that all reviewers finish a game completely before writing a review. To him, anything less was half-assed and irresponsible - the equivalent of writing a movie review after walking out halfway through. It was Johnny who for years refused to preview a game unless we had playable code. Long after CGW’s competition began escalating the war to grab “exclusive” previews, Johnny stuck to his guns - over the protests of his own staff and superiors - not wanting to participate in what he saw as empty cheerleading for games that might ultimately suck.

Johnny Wilson obsessed over every page of every issue that he ever worked on. I’ve never met anyone who took his job more seriously. He could not bear to see us print something that was incorrect. He’d fret in his office for days, with the door closed, if he perceived that we had blown it somehow. It was sometimes painful to watch.

Market realities forced CGW to evolve over the years, but Johnny always fought to ensure that that evolution never took place at the expense of the magazine’s integrity. He was a warrior and a visionary. He worked ceaselessly. He never gave up, even when he wanted to.

He also did the best Elmer Fudd I’ve ever heard.

Johnny Wilson is alive and well. Actually, with a new wife, home, and job, he’s probably more alive and more...

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