The Tale is Legendary
Dwell as a vampire in the legendary World of Darkness... where creatures of the night reign supreme.

Experience an epic quest in single-player mode, as you come to grips with your bestial nature and cling to your last shreds of humanity.

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The rich tradition of tabletop role-playing games finally comes to the PC with the unique Storyteller mode, which lets you create, edit, host and control your own online adventures. Manipulate the story using a series of real-time commands, including adding monsters, controlling NPC's and triggering events.

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Enlist the aid of other vampire clans, who will help you negotiate the deadly domains of your enemies.

Interact with over 100 non-player characters in medieval Prague and Vienna and modern London and New York.

Create your own thrilling RPG chronicle with downloadable tools, including a level editor and scripting language.

Create your own character and join in other players' adventures through WCN.net's free matchmaking service.
"...a Bleeding-edge RPG..."

— Computer Gaming World

"Best RPG of E3"

— Official E3 Game Critics Award
In the northernmost reaches of the Forgotten Realms® lies the frozen region known as Icewind Dale. Journey deep into the Spine of the World mountains, a harsh and unforgiving territory teeming with fearsome and merciless beasts. There you must confront an ancient evil that threatens to unleash an unspeakable horror upon the face of Faerûn.

Real-time combat using the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons® game system. Battle Ice Trolls, Giants, and hordes of terrifying Undead – over 70 types of monsters to put your valor to the test.

A wide range of breathtaking environments and beautifully rendered terrain. Explore the region known as Icewind Dale, from magnificent temples, and ancient ruins, to volcanic caverns and icy plains.
Necromancer

Long hours of study in dank mausolea have made his skin pale and corpse-like, his figure, skeletal. Most people shun him for his peculiar looks and ways, but none doubt the power of the Necromancer, for it is the stuff of nightmares.
Vengeance Was Only The Beginning
Respect for life is a mortal concern.
Can you forget what it is to be human? This is one of the questions you’ll confront in Baldur’s Gate II: Shadows of Amn. This epic sequel to the Role Playing Game of the Year will immerse you in a world of intrigue, adventure and fierce combat. Set in the Forgotten Realms® campaign setting, Baldur’s Gate II is the most stunning Advanced Dungeons and Dragons® game to date.

- Encounter hundreds of different types of monsters, thousands of NPCs and over 130 new spells in a huge and intricate world.
- Create a new character or import your Baldur’s Gate™ and Baldur’s Gate™: Tales of the Sword Coast™ character into Baldur’s Gate II and continue the epic saga.
- New races and character kits such as the Half-Orc, Beastmaster, Undead Hunter and Assassin add to an extensive array of character options.
- New weapons and AD&D proficiencies (including a two-weapon fighting style) create unique combat options for players.
- Supports 800x600 resolution, full-screen mode and 3D acceleration for spectacular visual effects.
- Improved multiplayer support for up to 6 players for the ultimate role-playing experience.

www.interplay.com/bgate2
Battle of Tatooine

EXALTED HERO OR FORGETTABLE

That heavy feeling on your shoulders is called the burden of command. Get used to it. With real-time ground...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Service History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Veers</td>
<td>Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul, Battle of Hoth (wounded), Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (captured).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2nd Lieutenant Gorga</td>
<td>Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sergeant Krung</td>
<td>Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sergeant Major Corillon</td>
<td>Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lieutenant Major Antilles</td>
<td>Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (wounded).</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1st Lieutenant Spiker</td>
<td>Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (promoted).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Statistic? It's up to you.
Mummies. The Undead. Ancient Curses. What's a nice girl to do?

Meet Lara Croft. Beauty, brains and brawn of Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation.
Out to save the world from a deadly curse, you can bet it won't be with her good looks.

TOMB RAIDER 
THE LAST REVELATION

tombraider.com
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Through a process more shrouded in secrecy than a Masonic ritual, the cabal of misfits and gentle psychopaths that are the CGW editors engaged in their annual orgy of self-important opinions, personal insult, and ritualistic "Amok Time" combat to determine what were the best games of 1999. Scooter may never walk again, but it was worth it. Here they are, the final Premier Awards of the Millennium.

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CREATE THE ULTIMATE FANTASY KINGDOM!

For every holy day, there is a Harpy. For every peasant, a Troll. Recruit from sixteen different hero classes to fight off the hordes of monsters stalking your kingdom.

Only a sovereign of your great stature can bring peace to the long-suffering peasants of the land. Manage your gold carefully, you'll need to spend it wisely to achieve success.

Yours is an iron fist in a velvet glove. Battle against, or cooperate with, up to three other players in multi-player games—the choice is yours.

If something rubs you the wrong way—put a price on its head! Place reward flags with gold bounties to prod your heroes into dishing out some heavy metal vengeance.

THE MAJESTY DEMO RULES

AND SO CAN YOU!!

Download the majestic “MAJESTY” demo and you’ll automatically be entered in the ‘King for a Day’ competition. Win a trip to tour authentic medieval castles in England.
Valve and Cisco team up to improve the Internet, Crave Entertainment enters the PC market, and a multiple-choice quiz to make your brain hurt.

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REAL TIME STRATEGY IN THE FINAL FRONTIER.

↑ BOMBARD your enemies with long-range weaponry.

↑ BOARD derelict vessels and repair them to add to your fleet.

↓ DESTROY your enemy with phasers, photon torpedoes, or over 30 special weapons.

↓ ASSIMILATE enemy vessels and use their own ships against them.
FOUR RACES. ONE GALAXY. ENDLESS STRATEGY.

War rages across the Alpha Quadrant as you command four powerful races in a strategic struggle for survival. Who will live? Who will be assimilated? The future depends on your every decision. No one said leadership would be easy.

BUILD Starbases to harvest resources and construct your Armada.

ELUDE your enemy by using one of the five kinds of nebulae to conceal your forces.

DEFEND EARTH in an all-out battle for survival as a new insidious Borg threat entwines in 29 action-packed missions.

REINFORCE your Armada using wormholes to traverse vast distances in mere seconds.

EXPERIENCE REVOLUTIONARY EFFECTS. A real 3D engine showcases the cinematic action of your 30+ starships.

STAR TREK® ARMADA

CONTROL THE RACES. CONTROL THE GALAXY.

Available on PC CD-ROM
"...far more immersive than...any other upcoming multi-player only game."

Gamer's Alliance

Up to 1,000,000 players means 999,999 enemies or allies around every corner!

Build alliances with a network of friends! Work together as a team to attack and defend against hostile intruders!

Ignite the battlefields with a massive, ever-expanding arsenal of weapons and units of mass destruction!
OF THE ROCK

IN THE INTERNET'S ONLY
1,000,000
MULTI-PLAYER GAME

10SIX

Own. Mine. Defend. Attack. 24-7

"...will change the way you play games forever"
Next Generation

Breakthrough virtual economy —
buy, sell, own, collect, and even steal
limited-edition weapons and power-ups!

Download FREE!

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SegaSoft Networks, Inc.
You own the night.
Everything else you have to steal.

All you have is your stealth, your cunning and the time between dusk and dawn. Luckily that is all you need because everything else is up for grabs — as long as you avoid wandering guards. Use the shadows as your cover. Treasure the silence of your footsteps. And enjoy a nice quiet evening in someone else’s home.

- Enhanced Dark Engine allows for a more engaging stealth experience
- Advanced AI system creates a variety of human opponents to outwit
- Sophisticated new tools to improve your success as a master thief
- Realistic environmental weather effects like rain, fog, and snow

THIEF II
THE METAL AGE

Steal the interactive demo at www.eidos.com
Born a Prince... Raised a Peasant... Become a Hero!

TZAR
The Burden of the Crown

Visit the kingdom of Tzar at www.talonsoft.com

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Why It's Worth the Pain

The reason you may have a more difficult than usual time reading my column is because I am writing it on my Palm Pilot. You see, I was struck by inspiration while sitting on a sand dune on a Los Angeles beach.

Luckily, I had a Palm Pilot to pour words into; inspiration never waits for me to catch up to it, that's for sure. Unfortunately, the Palm Pilot still has quite a way to evolve before it will be a truly functional device. (An automatic spell-checker would be a good start.)

As a gamer, it is easy to get frustrated and occasionally fed up with PC games along these same lines—because of the technical or human limitations of this rapidly evolving medium. Sloppy interfaces, incompatibility bugs, and features that don't quite do what we expect all conspire to turn our leisurely love into a major pain in the ass.

Often, and this is where gaming can get far more annoying than using a Palm Pilot, we have to overcome nag or technology handles simply to play. A 20-minute-long installation, followed by restarting your

As a gamer, it is easy to get frustrated and occasionally fed up with PC games...because of the technical or human limitations of this rapidly evolving medium.

system, followed by 30 configuration weirdness doesn't make for much fun. At least on my Palm, I can just turn it on and start playing.

But we keep on playing games, in spite of the hassles, because of the great experiences they provide—experiences that, at their best, are capable of transporting us out of this world in a way that no other medium can. It's with these moments in mind that the CGW staff gathered this year, just like each of the last 15, to choose the best games of the year and heap lavish praise upon them. Given the constant technological changes in PC technology, and the constant drive to innovate, building a game has never been easier. So when those rare games come along—and there are always a few each year—that fully deliver on PC gaming's potential, there's cause to celebrate. It's these games that make it all worthwhile.

Kind of like how being able to write an editorial on a beach is worth some troubles off its own.
Two political factions have gone to war over a distant world and the secrets it holds. Victory is the one and only objective. Ground Control challenges players to tactically command an army of customizable squads, tanks, aircraft and several other units.

While battling through 30 visually stunning and frenetically paced missions that take place in vastly different environments, the secrets of this strange new world are revealed.

Possession is The Law

In addition to the incredible single-player campaigns, Ground Control features a radically new online component that offers new challenges through innovative multiplayer modes, including deathmatch style drop-in games—a first for RTS!

www.sierrastudios.com

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GROUND CONTROL

A Frenetically Paced, Visually Stunning Action RTS
Raise a family...

The new game from the creator of SimCity.

It's the ultimate test of your people skills as you create an entire neighborhood of simulated residents and run — or ruin — their lives. Design hundreds of Sims with their own unique personalities, selecting everything from the look of their faces to the clothes on their backs. Then build them anything from an estate to an eyesore. Let them live life in the fast lane or...
...or raze a family!

pursue a life of crime. Watch them party like swinging singles or make them get married and raise a family. Help your Sims find success — or watch them self-destruct. Whether they end up prosperous or pathetic is up to you. Once you’re introduced to The Sims your world will never be the same.

Meet The Sims at www.TheSims.com
A STUPOR IDEA

Come on, Pokémon? Good? Is it common practice at CGW to sniff White Out? (Sigh.)

OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR fan who occupies a loft above Pokémon players,
S.R. Krol

LOSING BY SAVING

George Jones' Editorial, "Losing by Saving" (1/18) has got to be the lamest piece I’ve read since I had to get online by using text terminals on my Commodore 64. Games themselves are NOT the real world, so of course there are "save game" features. If you could isolate yourself in a chamber, where the telephone never rang, the kids never wanted something to eat, no one ever rang the doorbell, and you had a port-a-potty under the chair, then the "save game" feature might indeed be a detriment. But your suggestions are so far off-base concerning this feature, I can only assume that you really had nothing to write about, so you tossed some words on the grill before the big office party, neglecting to note that the grill wasn’t even lit.

David Tracy
Meridian, MS

George Jones responds: I agree that we need save games. My point was that convenient saves can weaken a game’s intensity. I was proposing that we consider new ways of saving in order to maintain the immersion, not get rid of the save game entirely. After all, not everyone has a port-a-potty under their chair.

THERE ARE PENALTIES FOR THAT KINDA BEHAVIOR

I agree with George Jones' Editorial regarding the save-game feature and the lack of tension that it brings. BALDUR'S GATE had a penalty built-in that discouraged reloading. If you reload a saved game, the creatures on that screen would be tougher and more numerous. The manual didn’t really say that it would happen, so I found out the hard way.

Greg Hand

AS OPPOSED TO FAKE ROLE-PLAYING

Look at the ULTIMA emulators springing up all over the world. Three words: Player-Run Shards. Worlds created for nothing more than the sheer enjoyment of a real role-playing experience. Worlds where there is life, and story, and meaning. Where “kewl doo-dos” and powergamers are scorned and banned. If anyone needs a refresher on what real role-playing is, I can recommend a brush-up course. Stop by Mytharia, Dawn's Rising at dreamweaver.dyn-dns.com. Here there be role-players!

Paul Mosher

ATHLON VS. PENTIUM III

I've been following your coverage of the new AMD Athlon CPU and how it stacks up against Intel's P-III. I have also been following Gamespot, and I noticed inconsistencies which perhaps you could explain. The latest issue of CGW says that Athlon continues to maintain a performance edge over the Pentium-III, and cites the scarcity of compatible motherboards as well as some instability as the only things keeping AMD's powerhouse off the Ultimate Gaming Machine list. Yet ever since Coppermine, Gamespot has maintained that Intel now holds the advantage in all but a handful of synthetic tests. How is this possible? You are both using the exact same benchmarks, and I thought Loyd Case was working for both staffs. What gives?

Jason Rabin

Loyd Case responds: The apparent inconsistency is a result of working on those stories at different times. When we wrote about Athlon in CGW, it was indeed the performance leader, because Intel hadn't shipped Coppermine. And even now, although the Coppermine CPUs are faster (when using RDRAM), finding CPUs and RDRAM is a challenge at best. Then I was writing about Unreal Tournament without a mouse.


Write to us at: cgwletters@zd.com
For subscriptions and changes of address: cgw@neodata.com

ACTION games columnist Thierry Nguyen chose COUNTER-STRIKE as his mod of the year (see page 161). Get it at www.counter-strike.net
"At Last... a Medieval
Tomb Raider...”
-Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Play It With a Vengeance.

The Legion of the Fallen is ravaging the lands, killing everything in their path. Only determination, lightning-fast reflexes, and an unquenchable thirst for revenge will save the lands of Ardon. Now is the time to fight with the fury of demons. Are you hero enough?

- Unique blend of action and role-playing
- Custom built state-of-the-art 3D accelerated engine
- Action-packed hand-to-hand combat with a wide variety of fearsome weapons
  - Distinctive character development
  - 30 devastating spells of awesome power

CRUSADE OF MIGHT AND MAGIC™
Kung Fu Fighting in **BATTLE REALMS**

Liquid Entertainment's First Title Is Asian-Styled RTS

*CGW* just got an exclusive look at the first game from Liquid Entertainment—a new development house made up largely of refugees from Westwood Studios. It's highly intriguing, and if successful could change a lot of the conventions of the real-time strategy genre.

**BATTLE REALMS,** which will be published by Grave, is a 3D strategy game heavily influenced by Asian cultures. The designers, especially Liquid founder Rd Del Castillo (who produced C&C: RED ALERT while at Westwood), are big fans of Kung-fu movies, and they plan on incorporating some of the genre's more outlandish concepts—like ninjas who vanish in puffs of smoke, gravity-defying monks, and flying guillotines—into the game.

You'll play as Kenji, the exiled prince of the once-glorious Serpent Empire, who has returned to lead his people against the feral Wolf Clan and the sinister, mystical Lotus Clan. Depending on your choices, your Serpent Clan can evolve into the Dragon Clan, which has more advanced units and capabilities.

Some interesting innovations are in store for the units themselves. Instead of producing specific units with different buildings, units will be spawned by your civilization at a rate according to your prosperity. So if your town's economy is healthy, your birthrate will increase and you'll have more peasants. You can assign them to peasant duties, like resource collection, or you can reclassify them by sending them to a building—the keep, for example—to turn them into fighters. Unit abilities can also be upgraded by sending them to more than one training center.

The designers are trying to break from a few other strategy game conventions by overhauling the resource management and combat systems. The "living resource system," as Liquid calls it, will attempt to create a more realistic model for your civilization's interaction with its environment by making the actions of supplying and storing resources more like the real world. Combat will be enhanced by prepared battle plans, both default and user-created.

**BATTLE REALMS** is still a long way off—2001, at least—but its originality, coupled with some of the coolest art direction we've seen in a while, make this a game we'll be keeping our eye on. Look for a follow-up preview in a future issue of *CGW.* —Tom Price
Shogun Sharpens Its Steel

Epic Strategy Game Set in Feudal Japan Nears Completion

It's not every day a game will let you play as a 16th-Century Japanese warlord. But if you're into strategy or wargames, that's exactly what you might be doing this spring.

The ambitious design of SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR features vast real-time tactical battles, where over a thousand troops maneuver in formations across beautifully rendered terrain. They can be played in either full-screen or wide-screen mode—the latter giving the game the proper Kurosawa-feel. Weather effects and atmospherics like smoke from gunfire help paint a realistic scene.

The game can be played on a number of levels:
- one-scenario real-time battles;
- strategic campaigns where you build up troops and invade other territories as in Risk;
- or historic campaigns where you attempt to recreate the successes of actual Japanese warlords. The goal of the campaigns is to become the Shogun—the military ruler of all of Japan.

You play the strategic game from a zoomable map overview. Each area produces a fixed amount of koku-rice—the resource that allows you to build fortifications and create units. The more territories you have, the more units you can create—which range from simple ashigaru spearmen to ninja assassins. There are also spies, which let you infiltrate an army to assess its strength or murder a general to demoralize it.

The enemy AI is coming along nicely. It was interesting to see troops retreating to high ground when they got an initial mauling, making it much harder for our cavalry to successfully pursue them. It was also encouraging to see the AI choosing to put spewmen in front to stop a cavalry charge, and using archers to soften up infantry from a distance.

Get ready to get medieval later this spring.

—Alan Dykes and Ken Brown

Reality Check

As expected, many publishers waited for the holidays to bring out their big guns, and it shows—there's a lot of Editors' Choices all around, and no universally-panned game. The clear-cut winner here is UNREAL TOURNAMENT, with FREESPACE 2 providing a strong presence as well. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>CGW (out of 5)</th>
<th>PC Gamer (out of 100%)</th>
<th>GameSpot (out of 10)</th>
<th>Gamecenter (out of 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freespace 2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-Life: Opposing Force</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana Jones</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the Infernal Machine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBA Live 2000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Nocturne</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Sid Meier's Antietam!</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sin Theme Park</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Ultima IX: Ascension</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal Tournament</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel Of Time</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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* Indicates game has not been rated  ● red = editor's choice game

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15 March 1985
In addition to being a special designer issue (with articles by Dan Bunten, Bruce Webster, and Jon Freeman), we had a feature article on the viability of gaming on the IBM PC. As of 1985, we had covered only the "most popular personal/home computers: the Apple, Atari, and Commodore 64," and stated that "As long as the significant IBM clones are relatively few in number...we do not feel the need to add a fourth machine to our coverage." Ah, vision...

10 March 1990
Johnny Wilson's editorial this month was a call for more recognition of game designers. It was a rousing editorial that called for publishers, gamers, and press to acknowledge the men and women designing our games. A fine idea. Also, 10 years later, most designers still go largely unrecognized (with a few glimmery exceptions, of course). Have you written an email to the designers of your favorite games lately? If you haven't, maybe you should.

5 March 1995
CD-ROMs were still big news in 1995, and people were still sadly trying to make the gaming/movie humor that is "Silwood." No one can complain about reviewing TEMUIN or NOCTURNE when games like VOYEUR or HELL graced our pages this issue. Not all is bad though; we had the preview of the original COMMAND & CONQUER (with the tagline "the strategy equal of Wing Commander 3") and a review of the five-star HERETIC. Finally, we had our annual preview feature touting games such as MEDIVARIOR II, HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC, FLIGHT UNLIMITED, and FULL THROTTLE.
The End of Lag?
Valve and Cisco Team Up to Revolutionize Internet Gaming

If your email arrives 500 milliseconds late, do you care? No. If you lose a couple of frames playing UNREAL TOURNAMENT or TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC online, do you care? Well, considering that some 12-year-old creeper in Poughkeepsie called BLUD DRINKER probably killed you as a result, not only do you care, but you’re also very, very angry. The fact is, the Internet wasn’t designed as a gaming platform: It was designed as a way for NASA, university researchers, and evil geniuses around the globe to exchange simple, text-based information. Framers of Internet and real-time strategy games have pretty much moved on from ASCII graphics, and your phone line is simply chocking on the huge amount of information it’s being asked to fire back and forth between you and that annoying pre-adolescent.

But now, God willing, that’s all going to change. When Valve’s HALF-LIFE did for the shooter, so does Valve hope that their PowerPlay project—started in conjunction with Cisco—will do for online gaming. Their goal is simple: to bring LAN-quality gaming performance to the online arena, so that the Internet becomes the dominant entertainment platform of the near future. That’s so, in Valve co-founder Gabe Newell’s words, “TEAM FORTRESS 2 can compete with a rotten of Friends.”

You Down With UDP?
So what the heck is PowerPlay, and how is it going to revolutionize online gaming? It’s a set of protocols and deployment standards, involving such popular cocktail-party topics as UDP header compression and basic infrastructure—including router and access concentrator issues—that should create LAN-type performance for dial-up users, as well as for those gamers languishing away on overloaded cable modem and DSL subnets. PowerPlay is more than just some sort of elaborate TCP/IP patch; it’s a suite of technologically innovative improvements that will impact the whole experience of Internet gaming.

Think of it in terms of the sound you hear in a movie theater: The sharp Dolby audio is an encoding standard that ensures high-quality sound recording, while the THX that brings the sound to life is a deployment standard that ensures that the quality recording is played back in the best possible way. The analogy here with PowerPlay is that it does the same sort of thing—efficiently encoding data and maximizing its performance and playback. There’s also one other way to look at it: It should be unbelievably fast. And it will be demonstrably fast, shipping with a simple benchmarking tool so that gamers can compare online game performance between a game’s PowerPlay and non-PowerPlay-enhanced versions.

A comparison to OpenGL is also appropriate since Valve, working closely with Cisco—the 800-pound gorilla of the Internet router business—won’t be charging any licensing fees or turning a profit on the technology. The initial PowerPlay release schedule is planned in two separate phases for this year. Currently, Cisco and Valve are focusing on industry initiative, asking ISPs to sign up and support it; putting the infrastructure in place; making it available to application developers; and reaching out to the online community and convincing them to support PowerPlay-certified networks.

To that end, PowerPlay 1.0 will make its big debut in conjunction with a major—but as yet unnamed—national...
ISP, offering both a free month of service and a free, non-HALF-LIFE-dependent version of TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC. That should happen by March.

Newell expects other game companies to jump onboard later this year with 2.0, since it will be focused on even lower client latency, bandwidth reservation, and voice integration.

At that point, the modular nature of the technology will allow developers to patch existing games easily, making them PowerPlay-compliant within weeks. By releasing the code specifications to all participants at that point, Valve expects to focus on developing its own games and letting a growing PowerPlay project take care of itself.

Seeing Is Believing

Granted, it was just a "Before and After PowerPlay" MPEG of TPC, but the demonstration we saw was impressive. The weird skipping, dancing movement of characters in the game world was replaced with seamless animation, and aiming a weapon was a revelation—you could actually aim at an enemy with a sniper rifle instead of guessing where he'd be in 1.3 seconds. Every type of game would benefit, from shooters to the new breed of 3D real-time strategy games to the overcrowded realms of massively-multiplayer RPGs to finally allowing sport gamers to play—and not just manage games online.

Count on CGW to keep you up to the minute on this potentially momentous technology in future issues.

—Robert Coffey

Flip This 'Bird

Ever watch the Thunderbirds or Blue Angels doing their incredible maneuvers and wonder, slack-jawed, "How the &%# do they do that?" Well, find out. A free add-on patch to USAF lets you wrap your F-16 in a Thunderbird skin and learn three aerial maneuvers from a real Thunderbird pilot. The 9MB download includes instructional voice-overs and an airshow audience to perform for. For extra fun, try equipping your Bird with a few air-to-ground missiles and see if you can hit the grandstand.

You can find the patch at www.janes.ea.com, and while you're there, check out what's like to take off from and land on a carrier by former F/A-18C pilot Jim "Hornet" Campisi.
Fight evil and reap your rewards more swiftly and accurately with the 2000 dpi Razer® Boomslang®.
weapon in your inventory: the mouse.

Prepare to take on the Devil himself in Diablo® II—sequel to the monster Action/RPG hit. But be warned: to face such a foe, you’ll need one hell of a weapon. Introducing the Razer® Boomslang™:

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The madman behind UNREAL TOURNAMENT spills his guts

Cliff Bleszinski

How do your relatives react to you making a living designing games?
It's like working in the pornography business. Your parents don't really understand what you do, but they strive to accept it. You may make good money, but your relatives remain unsure of your career choice and try to discourage the youngsters from growing up to be like you.

UT's getting a great reception. Anything you'd do differently?
I wish we had more time to include more Assault maps. Oh, and a Nali player model. We're adding that into post-release. There's nothing in the world like firing a rocket up a Nali ass while hearing him scream "Ha Boo GEE!"

What's the relationship between id and Epic like?
We frequently mail-bomb them and hire Dallas-area hooligans to key their cars and pour sugar in their gas tanks.

Who would win? Q3's bots or UT's?
I'd have to say QUAKE's bots because of their perfect aim!

Will CGW readers get farther by getting A's in geography or by boning up on UnrealEd?
Seeing as I'm having a hell of a time finding any talent to hire for our upcoming game I'd have to say the best strategy is to learn UnrealEd, Photoshop, and 3D Studio Max and pimp your work online while waiting to drop out of college.

What's with that wimpy Dessloch butt in UT? He's modeled after CGW's fairy-tale columnist—or, I mean RPG columnist-Dessloch, isn't he?

We were considering having Dessloch's original bio be "Fresh from BALDUR'S GATE, Dessloch is wet behind the ears when it comes to First-Person Shooters" but we figured it would be a bit too obvious.

I'll just toss this pearl at ya—banana peel gun! What do you think?
Seeing people slip and slide around an arena into lava like idiots would be highly amusing.

I'll be faxing over an NDA immediately so you can help work on our next title.

Cool! How about a saltwater-bottle weapon?
Now that one sucks. Don't quit your day job.

Kilzreek will be appearing in Playboy soon. Is this an ongoing developer trend?
I don't anticipate Playgirl calling me unless Heroin Chic becomes the look they're looking for.

You've been known to wear some, uh, interesting outfits and accessories to previous gaming events. From Marilyn Manson type contacts lenses to pants with blinking lights, we think we've seen it all. How can you top that?
I'm thinking about streaking the Nintendo booth this year at E3.

—Interview by Mark Asher

Subtitles: The CGW Challenge

Shakespeare did it. Movies (especially sequels) do it all the time. And now, with game companies seeming utterly compelled to do it. What are we talking about? Subtitles, those undifferentiable nuggets of prose tucked onto game titles in an effort to clear up just what the hell a name like OMIRKON could possibly be about. Even while these marketing-department-spawned stabs at profundity generally fail as adversely as Star Trek V: The Final Frontier, there seems to be no end in sight. See if you can match up the games on the left with their granduer-bestowing subtitles on the right. Have fun, dude.

1. OMIRKON
2. TURK 2
3. MIGHT & MAGIC VI
4. SHOGO
5. DOMINION
6. ULTIMA VII
7. WIZARDRY VI
8. LANDS OF LORE
9. DRAKAN
10. SEVEN KINGDOMS II
11. WARCRAFT II
12. THIEF
13. BLOOD II
14. JETFIGHTER
15. JEWELS II
16. GULF WAR
17. REAH
18. MYTH
19. GABRIEL KNIGHT
20. KING'S QUEST V

A. THE DARK PROJECT
B. MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION
C. GUARDIANS OF DESTINY
D. FULL BURN
E. THE CHOSEN
F. THE NOMAD SOUL
G. OPERATION DESERT HAMMER
H. ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER
I. FACE THE UNKNOWN
J. SINS OF THE FATHER
K. THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN
L. STORM OVER GIFT 3
M. THE BLACK GATE
N. ORDER OF THE FLAME
O. TIDES OF DARKNESS
P. SEEDS OF EVIL
Q. THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE
R. THE FRAYTHIAN WARS
S. THE FALLEN LORDS
T. BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE

ANSWERS:

Tchotchke of the Month


This fancy, silver clock and picture frame from Activision is quite the tchotchke. It's so nice, in fact, that Jeff Green actually considered giving it to his mother for a present—if only he could have figured out a way to scratch off the Activision logo on the front. Jeff's decided to keep it for himself, and gives thanks that Activision sent it to him before they read his scathing review of INTERSTATE '82 last month. Ha ha!
Top 40

1. Half-Life
   Havas Interactive
   5 stars

2. Baldur's Gate
   Interplay
   4

3. StarCraft
   Havas Interactive
   5

4. Age of Empires II
   Microsoft
   5

5. Unreal Tournament
   GT Interactive
   5

6. StarCraft: Brood War
   Havas Interactive
   5

7. Heroes of Might & Magic III
   3DO
   4.5

8. Quake III Arena
   Activision
   3.5

9. Thief: The Dark Project
   Eidos
   4.5

10. Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri
    Firaxis
    4.5

11. System Shock
    2
    Electronic Arts
    4.5

12. Fallout 2
    Interplay
    4

13. Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear
    Red Storm
    4.5

14. Quake II
    Activision
    4.5

15. Grim Fandango
    LucasArts
    4.5

16. Final Fantasy VII
    Eidos
    4.5

17. Half-Life: Opposing Force
    Havas Interactive
    3.5

18. Rollercoaster Tycoon
    Hasbro Interactive
    4

19. Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast
    Interplay
    4

20. Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun
    Electronic Arts
    4

21. Dungeon Keeper II
    Electronic Arts
    4.5

22. Need for Speed
    4
    Electronic Arts
    4.5

23. Freespace 2
    Interplay
    4.5

24. MechWarrior 3
    Hasbro
    3

25. Worms Armageddon
    Hasbro
    4

26. Myth 2
    Bungie
    4.5

27. SimCity 3000
    Electronic Arts
    4

28. EverQuest
    Sony
    4

29. Aliens vs. Predator
    Fox
    3

30. Caesar III
    Havas Interactive
    4.5

31. Might and Magic VII
    3DO
    4.5

32. Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade
    3DO
    4.5

33. Jagged Alliance
    2
    TalonSoft
    4.5

34. Battlezone
    Activision
    5

35. FIFA 2000
    Electronic Arts
    4.5

36. Total Annihilation: Core Contingency
    Cavedog
    4.5

37. Gabriel Knight
    3
    Hasbro Interactive
    n/r

38. NHL 2000
    Electronic Arts
    3.5

39. Wing Commander: Prophesy Gold Origin
    Origin/EA
    4

40. Ultima Online: Origin/EA
    Origin/EA
    1.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!
Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaminging.com. The more people vote, the better the results, but please only vote once per month.
III. BREAKING THE OATH: 
TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

1. A verbal warning accompanied by a review of security oath. 
2. A stronger warning, sometimes accompanied by browbeating and intimidation. 
3. Psychologically working on an individual to bring on depression that will lead to suicide. 
4. Elimination of the individual that has been made to appear as an accident, suicide or heart attack.

Sources say Deus Ex was created by Ion Storm to uncover the truth. Some say it's merely the latest conspiracy fueled by a madman. And some say it's a future training tool made to look like a hyperrealistic 3-D role-playing computer game. Whatever it is, proceed with caution. They know you want it.

SECTOR 1

The year is 2068, and the world is a dangerous and chaotic place. Terrorists operate openly, killing thousands. The world's economics are close to collapse and the gap between the insanely wealthy and the desperately poor has grown to the size of the Grand Canyon. Worst of all, an ages old CONSPIRACY bent on world domination has decided that the time is right to emerge from the shadows and take control. No one believes they exist. The conspirators must be stopped from spreading -GREY DEATH-. This world is full of lies and betrayal, a world where nothing is as it seems and entire nations can seemingly be turned at the push of a button. TRUST NO ONE.

No. 34561

- Build on real conspiracy theories current events and suspected advancements in technology. Research shows, it can happen.
- Recognizable, realistic environments. Many locations are built from actual blueprints. Every object in the environment is useful.

TRUTH

- Fight terrorists, as ordered by UNATCO, to maintain control over the world.
- Survive constant attack and/or incarceration as you establish ties to a new ally base.

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

JOIN THE CONSPIRACY at deusex.com

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- Send any and all information to www.unatco.com. It could be the difference between life and death.

- Establish a new base of operations with Forbes Tech and forge alliances.

- Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with God-like powers.

## CONSEQUENCES:

### Diagram B2: Situational Missions (Fig.'s 2.1-2.6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig. 2.1</th>
<th>Build your own capabilities</th>
<th>Fig. 2.2</th>
<th>Establish base of operations</th>
<th>Fig. 2.3</th>
<th>Maintain control over Ambrosia</th>
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<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 2.4** Survive incarceration

**Fig. 2.5** Establish ties to ally base

**Fig. 2.6** Expand your pool of allies

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**Deus Ex**

question everything.

IONSTORM

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64 enemies. 24 levels. 25 weapons. 4 time-warped worlds. 2 deadly sidekicks. Everything to feed an appetite for destruction and carnage. So 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 new world.

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Suspect everyone.
Trust no one.

Will you be ready?

EIDOS
INTERACTIVE

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

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Criminal Justice for a New Millennium
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.

- Play 1 of 2 main characters - D'Arci Stern - an agile, street-savvy female cop or Roper McIntyre - a mysterious ex-soldier.
- Multiple modes of combat. Engage in hand-to-hand fighting, heavy-weaponry face-offs, vehicle chases and building shoot-outs.
- Command a variety of vehicles. Take control of police cars, vans, motor-bikes, hang-gliders, ambulances, trains and helicopters.
- 3D volumetric fog, rain, snow, night and day simulation, wall-hugging shadows and real-time simulation of crashes enhance the atmosphere and action of the game.
Just beyond the edge of death is your brand new life.

Death comes for everyone. But it will be different when it comes for you. Because in this world, you don’t stop living when you die—someone else does.

They call this place Omikron. You arrived as nomad soul. Using someone else’s body, living someone else’s life. But when they die, your life continues—in the body of the next person who touches you.

Now there’s one thing you know for certain about Omikron.

Death is no escape.

* Assume the role of up to 40 different characters through “virtual reincarnation.”
* Explore a vast 3D world, rich with cinematic reality.
* Fight in full 3D, with over 40 motion captured combinations and unique power moves.
* Combine puzzle-solving, action, shooting, combat and role-playing to work through a deeply engrossing storyline.
* Original music and virtual concerts by David Bowie and Reeves Gabrels.

Who will you be after you die?

Omikron: The Nomad Soul

Travel to a new dimension at Nomadsoul.com
Way back in the 20th Century, three humble game designers at Interplay got together and created a masterpiece called FALLOUT. Brimming with creative energy and imagination, the 1997 post-apocalyptic RPG helped reignite the then-smoldering role-playing genre with a killer combination of deep gameplay and bold artistic design. Three years later, the game still looks and plays great.

After completing the initial design on FALLOUT 2 almost two years ago, the three designers packed their things and set out on a quest of their own—to found their own game company. And so it was that Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky, and Jason Anderson started up Troika Games. Their first RPG is on its way later this year—and if you thought that FALLOUT was ambitious and cool, wait until you see ARCANUM.

Dwarves With Guns

For their first project, Troika's desire was to move away from FALLOUT's futuristic setting and to create a classic fantasy RPG instead. But, just as they did with FALLOUT, they've added a twist: It's a fantasy world that's gone through an industrial revolution. Thus, though you'll still see all of your favorite Tolkien-esque characters—gnomes, elves, ogres, halflings, and so on—you'll now have industrial-age weapons and machinery along with your arrows and spells. Now, dragons must share airspace with World War I-style zeppelins.

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA (the game's full title) retains FALLOUT's isometric perspective, but the team created a brand-new engine for the game, with 800x600 graphics and 16-bit color. Just as FALLOUT's graphic design mixed a futuristic setting with kitschy 1940s-style art, ARCANUM features an eclectic melding of fantasy elements with a late-1800s, Jules Verne-style industrial look. And this dual imagery—fantasy versus technology, magic versus machinery—forms the core conflict and the essence of ARCANUM's story and gameplay.

You can play one of eight races—human, dwarf, halfling, elf, half-elf, gnome, half-orc, or half-gre. Stats are divided into four mental stats (intelligence, willpower, perception, and charisma), and four physical stats (strength, constitution, dexterity, and beauty). Most are standard RPG fare, but beauty is quite cool, determining a person's initial reaction to you before you ever speak. Create a butt-ugly gnome, for example, and people may completely blow you off. (As in FALLOUT, you'll be able to recruit party members along the way.) The system is completely open for you to create any statistical combination—and the game will play out differently depending on your choices.

Similar to FALLOUT's perks, ARCANUM features
optional "backgrounds." If your character were "Raised By Snake Handlers," for instance, you would get a 20 percent resistance to poison. You can edit the background text, so the more creative role-players can make up their own backstory. Similarly, you can easily import portraits into the game, allowing you to customize your character's look.

Spellcasting Vs. Technology

The heart of the game, and your biggest character decision, is determining where you stand in the great magic-versus-technology dichotomy now enveloping the land. It's been about 70 years since the Industrial Revolution, and the land's magic users now must contend with those pursuing technological disciplines instead. Are you an old-school magic guy, a new-school engineer—or a dabbler in both schools? ARCANUM will monitor your decisions with a balance meter, and how well you succeed in casting a spell—to give one simple example—will be determined by how strong your magical aptitude is. The more you commit to one particular school, the stronger you'll be in that school, but the more vulnerable and ineffective you'll be in the other.

Arcanum's magic and technological systems are extremely deep—providing ample rewards for devotees of either one. Magic is divided into 16 colleges, with five increasingly powerful spells in each. There are eight disciplines of technology, with seven degrees in each. As you earn degrees, you'll gain the ability to read increasingly complex schematic diagrams, which in turn will enable you to use found objects to create powerful technological weaponry, such as folding guns and a giant, mechanized arch-nid that can fight for you.

Speaking of fighting, the game will use both a real-time and turn-based combat system—you can play it either way. Both systems are essentially based on speed. In real-time, the faster your character, the quicker you'll be able to strike. In turn-based mode, faster characters will have more action points to spend per turn (a la FALLOUT). The designers figure that most players will actually use both systems—and you can switch dynamically throughout the game.

ARCANUM's interface is a state-of-the-art marvel that accounts for things RPG fans have been clamoring for for years. Most notable is the "auto-pack" feature, which will automatically rearrange your inventory items to use slots at maximum efficiency. The game's deep logbook will keep track of all quests completed, failed, or still open; your reputation in various towns; any blessings or curses you have; and your total number of kills (as well as what you've killed).

Finally, the game will include a completely separate multiplayer mode, with its own set of maps that will let about 2-8 gamers play either cooperative-ly or competitively over LANs or the Internet. Troika is including an editor in the box, so players will be able to create their own detailed maps and quests to distribute. Expect a huge community to swell up around this game.

Quest For Glory

With FALLOUT under their belts, the Troika team really had nothing else to prove. But with ARCANUM, they are taking one of computer gaming's oldest genres—the fantasy RPG—and turning it on its head with something completely new. Dwarves with guns? Mages on steam trains? We'll see how well they pull this off later this year. Stay tuned.
FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE!
ENLIST!
It's a cold, cruel world, a world ragged with pain in the wake of a sweeping plague called the Grey Death, a world drowning in a vicious whirlpool of riots and barbaric acts of terrorism. Gliding silent and unseen through the muck are the agents of UNATCO; their shadowy lives a daily maelstrom of deceit, treachery, and violence. As a member of this global anti-terrorist organization, it is your duty to silence the forces of chaos, but slowly the accusations of the supposedly murderous thugs you're battling begin making sense, and your crystal-clear perception of morality is fogged by uncertainty. Who can you trust? Who are the Judases? The true believers? And what is your role in it all? Welcome to the conspiracy-steeped world of DEUS EX, a world where the only thing you can trust is that you can trust no one.

Secret Agent Man
Overseeing the development of this next-generation RPG is Warren Spector, the designer behind ULTIMA UNDERWORLD and SYSTEM SHOCK. The game's overarching goal in Spector's mind "is to put power back into the player's hands. To confront them not with puzzles, but with problems." To that end, every facet of gameplay is being crafted to present the gamer with multiple possibilities and choices, giving the player the ability to shape their playing experience their own way. This begins with the player character's initial stats. Rated in eleven abilities including computer skills, medicine, lockpicking, demolitions, general tech-ability, and four types of weapons skills, your avatar starts off untrained in all. As you gain experience, you can increase your abilities to Trained, Advanced, and Master skills, but experience points are going to be so stingingly won that you'll only be able to master two skills at most, with the rest left primarily at the Untrained level (unless you go the "generalist" route, training a little in all skills).

But while these tough decisions will significantly impact your game, you aren't going to be forced to play just one way. You'll still be able to use a sniper rifle even if you're untrained; you just won't have sufficiently-steady aim to be effective. And while anyone can hack a security system, only the trained won't set off an alarm in mere seconds. Dialogue with NPCs focuses on simple either/or responses, forgoing convoluted conversation trees, yet still playing a part in sculpting the overall course of the game.

Six-Trillion Dollar Man
But the biggest -- and easily the coolest -- device defining your character is the nanotechnology augmentation you acquire. DEUS EX takes place in a not-too-distant future where high-tech personal enhancements allow you to upgrade your body like so much hardware. When you get the opportunity to install an augmentation, it will typically come in the form of yet another choice. Do you enhance your legs for better speed and jumping ability, or upgrade

It Isn't Paranoia if They're Really Out To Get You by Robert Coffey
your eyes so you can see in the dark? The augmentations will work hand in hand with the other characteristics to create unique, specialized characters: Expect to see sniper players augment their eyes to the point that they can see their foes at great distances, what weapon they're carrying, and even how many hit points each of their body parts has left.

The goal is to create a game that equally rewards different play styles. To that end, experience is rewarded for solving problems, not for killing enemies. It's atypical of most RPGs, but if you're encouraging some players to sneak around, break into installations, and hack computer systems, why would you want to negate their special attributes by forcing them to shoot anything that moves?

But rewarding all those different play styles makes balancing and designing the game that much thornier. Every obstacle needs multiple solutions. For example, an early mission asks you to infiltrate a sealed-off Statue of Liberty in order to neutralize some terrorists. How do you get in? You can kill every terrorist in sight and storm in, take security offline, get a key from an informant, plant demolition charges to blast in, or hide in a security camera's blind spot while you pick a lock. It doesn't matter how you get in, just that you do. You could kill every terrorist and even in sight, but you're not getting any experience until you get in that statue.

So don't let the first-person, UNREAL engine-driven look of the game fool you into dismissing DEUS EX as another moody shooter. A compelling, twisting storyline and honest-to-God unique character generation make this a game to watch for in 2000.

---

5 THINGS...

...From the Real World Affecting the Artificial World of DEUS EX

1) Usable, Interactive Objects

Vending machines will dispense drinks and snacks for restoring minimal amounts of health. Hanging pots and slabs of beef in a kitchen will move when brushed up against — perfect for tricking escaping enemies.

2) Blueprints and Maps

Actual blueprints and maps of the Statue of Liberty, Hong Kong, New York’s Battery Park, and more underscore the game’s realistic feel.

3) Localized Damage

Damage will be tracked separately for arms, legs, torso, and head. Head shots will kill quickly, leg shots will slow or cripple, damage to the arm will affect aim.

4) No Monsters

Instead of a constant, tedious stream of human enemies, very plausible near-future military combat robots will liven up the adversarial mix.

5) Everyone Can Hear

You can hear security cameras and guards at a distance, as well as the sound of guns drawn by bad guys who’ve already heard you.
“This game rocks, you know.”

First stop on any mission is the pre-assault briefing. Here you’ll receive the latest updates on the current crisis, configure your team’s arsenal, and determine your entry point and tactical approach to the target location.

Systematically search each environment, or take command to breach and clear each location until you find your suspect. As the Element Leader, stealth and dynamic tactics are just a keystroke away when commanding your five-man team.

15 stunning photorealistic locations, filled with more than 150 motion-captured characters. Each mission is based on real L.A. locations, including the sewer system, the Convention Center, and even the LAX airport control tower.

Experience the challenge of OCP’s revolutionary AI. Encounter over 100 goal-oriented characters who react to your every move, ensuring you’ll never play any mission the same way twice. From tactical officers to bad guys — they’re so smart it’s scary.
feel like you’re actually the leader of a SWAT team.”

-Extreme 3D.com

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SWAT 3
CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

www.sierrastudios.com
“one of the best adventure

★★★★★

“A completely visceral experience from scene one that keeps you interested to the shocking conclusion.”
— incite PC Gaming

Award of Excellence

“I’ve just finished playing the best adventure game that has ever graced my hard drive, and I’m still reeling from the experience.”
— Games Domain

9/10

“Jane Jensen is the best story-teller of the interactive medium.”
— Gamesmania

blood of the sacred
GABRIEL KNIGHT3
blood of the damned
series to ever grace a PC”
— Next Generation Online

★★★★★
“the most complete, the most ambitious, the most compelling, the most intelligent, and yes,...the finest game the genre has yet produced.”
— Adventure Gamer

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Adventure Game of the Year
— computer gaming world

“Here is everything you want in an adventure game.”
— Time Digital

BRIEL KNIGHT3
BLOOD OF THE SACRED
BLOOD OF THE DAMNED
A 3D MYSTERY ADVENTURE

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- IGN PC
9 out of 10

"... one of the best real-time strategy games I have ever seen!"
- Gametropics
5 out of 5

"This is what immersion is all about."
- Daily Radar
4 out of 4
Check Six, Daddy-O! In a 1930s That Could Have Been, You Have To Bank Hard and Fire True, or You’re History

by Chris Lombardi

very once in a great while, a fresh game concept comes along that grabs hold of a gamer’s heart, sinks its nails in, and won’t let go. Even before you know who’s developing the game, before you know what “engine” it will use, or how many jillion polygons it will push. Before you read the bullet-point list of features, or know which washed-up actor will do the voice-overs in the cut-scenes...you’re in love. Your first thought: “This is a game that I must play.” Your second: “I hope to God the game developers don’t screw it up.”

Such was my response when I caught wind of Microsoft’s upcoming CRIMSON SKIES. All I had to hear before I started pining away with love sickness was this: It’s an air-combat game set in a speculative 1930s. It’s got stick, tricked-out prop aircraft; aircraft-carrier zeppelins; and a nutty pulp-fiction storyline. And—and this was the clincher for me—a 30s-era Big Band/swing soundtrack. What a relief it was, after visiting Microsoft to uncover the rest of the story, to find that this great concept might actually deliver on its promise.

The universe of CRIMSON SKIES is the brain child of Jordan Weisman and his pals at the FASA Corporation, the tabletop-gaming folks who brought the BATTLETECH and
SHADOWRUN gaming universes to the world. According to Weisman—founder of FASA and now the Creative Director of Microsoft Games—CRIMSON SKIES was a labor of love, a project he and the FASA crew developed in long, after-hours gaming sessions. The game began as a tactical boardgame of air-to-air combat, similar in style and mechanics to the classic STAR WARS boardgame. Players chose an aircraft, outfitted it with weapons, and dueled on hex-grid maps using an elegant set of rules for fire and movement. The boardgame was published in 1986 and has since sold over 10,000 copies—a decent showing in the slumping tabletop-gaming biz.

When FASA was purchased by Microsoft in January of 1999, Weisman saw an opportunity to bring the CRIMSON SKIES universe from the limitations of text and cardboard, and make it more fully realized in the multimedia realm. When Microsoft gave the go on the project, Weisman joined his band of designers and artists with veteran flight-simulation developers Zipper Interactive, and the digital incarnation of CRIMSON SKIES began its taxi for take-off.

THE UNITED STATE OF AMERICA

The CRIMSON SKIES universe starts with historical U.S. events of the 1920s and suggests a few fascinating and reasonably plausible “what if?” changes. What if the CRIMSON SKIES universe asks, the push for Prohibition had become a virulent fight over state versus federal power and had failed—resulting in a weakened union and a heightened spirit of regionalism? What if some states then became “Prohibition states,” outlawing alcohol and closing their borders to stop alcohol trafficking, getting into squabbles with neighboring non-Prohibition states? What if the flu epidemic of 1918 had returned in 1927 in a nastier form, and the resulting plague mentality had bolstered the spirit of isolationism? Finally, what if the stock market crash of ’29 was right on schedule?

From this point, the history of CRIMSON SKIES takes a sharp left turn from plausibility and spins off, out of control, into the realm of wacky pulp fiction. The union shutters into 20-some independent nations, among them the Nations of Dixie, Hollywood, Appalachia, and Free Colorado. The great public-works projects of the Depression-era are never completed, so that the system of interstate highways that paved the way for the age of the automobile is never realized. The result is a greater reliance upon—and thus a speedier development of—aerial. Zeppelins and aerobuses become the primary means of interstate trade, and aircraft militia the means of waging wars and combating the air piracy that thrives in the chaos.

As the hero of our tale, Nathan Zachary, the leader of a band of aerial pirates with a Robin Hood morality, CRIMSON SKIES will tell the story of Nathan and his colorful adventures in this vivid milieu in classic Wing Commander-style: a series of air combat scenarios interspersed with narrative. True to the era, the narrative will be delivered via voice-acted “radio dramas” and news reports, as well as stylish black & white photography.

It's Good To Be (Minions of) the King!

During our visit to the legendary Microsoft campus (where we got lost and narrowly avoided absorption into a PowerPoint project team), we had a chance to talk off-the-cuff with the game's developers about their experiences working for the Big M. After the obligatory jokes about corporate mind control implants—and a comment from Jordan Weisman about how his title “Creative Director at Microsoft” was an oxymoron (he was kidding, Bill...) — they had several interesting, and positive, things to say about some of the advantages of working for the up-and-coming gaming giant.

The largest advantage is, of course, resources. This doesn't necessarily mean cash; however, it means, for instance, the luxury of taking the time needed to get a game right. The relatively tiny Games Division, the division of which are a pittance in the larger Microsoft scheme, doesn't suffer the same overwhelming pressures to ship games as does a smaller company that lives from release to release. If a game has drifted off track, Microsoft can take the time to fix it. Or—in the extreme case—if a project is just not working out, they can kill it (although a project manager in the group quickly commented that this would be "strongly discouraged").

Perhaps the most impressive example of "resources" was the Microsoft quality-assurance infrastructure, the largest and most sophisticated in the business. Not only do game designers get access to a huge team of professional testers available to hammer away at Microsoft games, but they have an active playtesting program that brings in gamers from the surrounding community to play and comment on works in progress. And they don't just test Microsoft games. In fact, the designer of MECHWARRIOR 4 (another FASA/Microsoft project) is trying to hash out details of the MECH interface, he can have the testers play Sierra's EARTH SIEGE in order to find out what they did and didn't like about its interface! The obvious danger of this approach is that the "design-by-focus-group" syndromes, but the developers seemed well aware of that risk.

Finally, they were delighted to find that the halls of Microsoft are teeming with talented people. It was common, they said, to run into a legendary programming god who, for the price of steak fajitas at the Campus food court, might help them hash through a particularly hairy engineering problem.

Sounds just peachy, don't it? Of course, they may not have been joking about those brain-implants.
SIMPLE, HOT, DEEP

The CRIMSON SKIES approach to air combat is also similar to WING COMMANDER. While the underlying game engine is capable of delivering a “serious” flight-simulation experience (the engine is a descendant of that used for MicroProse’s TOP GUN F-16 sim and MECHWARRIOR 3), the designers are dialing back the realism to the “grip it and rip it” level. While each of the aircraft will have unique flight dynamics, and while you can still stall a plane (if you really, really work at it), CRIMSON SKIES makes no claims of being a simulation. The designers are going for the feel of flight—not its reality.

If it were a simulation, there’d be no way in hell you could pull off the kind of aerial acrobatics Nathan Zachary will be asked to pull off in the course of an average mission. The designers are shooting for loads of Indiana Jones-style high adventure, where achieving the impossible is an every-mission affair. In one mission, Nathan Zachary decides he needs to steal the Spruce Goose, the enormous experimental aircraft developed by millionaire/aviator Howard Hughes, from its Long Beach, CA hangar. In Zachary’s way are the Hollywood Knights, the nation of Hollywood’s air militia led by the famous film starlet/air-combat pilot, Charlotte “Charlie” Steele. First, Zachary must engage a wave of Knights over the fully-realized lot of a Hollywood film studio, his guns sending enemy pilots careening into the faux Martian landscape of a Sci-Fi set. Then, he must fly through the Spruce Goose’s hangar, deposit the agent who will steal the craft, and protect the Goose from more Knights and armed battle-zeppelins during its painfully long taxi, take-off, and escape. In other scenarios, Zachary is picking people up from moving trains with rope ladders extended from his plane, and parachuting out of it in order to land and steal another plane.

As if these stunts weren’t enough for one day’s work, each scenario has a number of side objectives. These “Danger Zones,” as the designers are calling them, offer even more stunt-flying challenges above and beyond the central mission. The Danger Zones include lots of Star Wars-like “trench runs” and maneuvers under bridges and through canyons, skyscrapers, and train tunnels, as well as suicide runs against heavily-armed zeppelins and anti-aircraft positions.

The reward for surviving a Danger Zone—and the incentive for seeking them out—is Zachary’s scrapbook, a novel and clever design twist for a scenario-based game. The idea is that after each mission, Zachary will compose a scrapbook of photos, stories, mission statistics, newspaper clippings, and personal moments related to the mission. The collection of items will differ depending on how the player went about completing the mission’s objective, and if he succeeded with any side objectives in Danger Zones. The designers hope to have several hundred different items that can make it into the scrapbook so that each player ends up with a unique composition at the end of the game. The designers are even making it easy to snap screenshots of scrapbook pages for uploading to the Web, so that players can compare and contrast.
The emphasis of the CRIMSON SKIES design is on constant action and loads of pyrotechnics, and the Zipper graphics engine seems well suited to the pixel-pumping task. The plane models are gorgeous, the action fast and fluid, and the weapon and damage effects look very cool—thanks to a “particle system” that renders minute particulate smoke, fire, dust, and exhaust. Clouds have layers of depth, so you can fly within canyons of fluff. The generic terrain below is not particularly impressive—a conscious design decision in order to get more detail on the planes and to keep the minimum system requirements at a P-200 with 32MB RAM—but the terrain that matters, like cities, bases, suburbs, and movie sets are populated with lots of structures and atmospheric details.

Over the course of his career, Zachary will have the pleasure of flying a number of different aircraft, the airframes of which seem to have been born of a collision between the experimental aircraft of the late-war Luftwaffe and the centerfolds of Hot Rod magazine. Each airframe will have unique flight dynamics, and the player can modify each before every mission. Guns and ammo, armor placement, engine, paint scheme, and nose art (which players can design and import into the game) can all be tweaked for maximum performance given the demands of a particular mission. Need burning magnesium rounds or drilling rockets to eat through tough enemy armor? Load ‘em up. Or maybe you need “sonic blast” or “flash” rockets to temporarily incapacitate enemy pilots? There’s even something of a guided missile that requires you to hit an enemy with a dumb “beacon rocket” before firing the homing rocket that will track and smack the marked enemy.

Once in the air, the gameplay is as streamlined as the aircraft. Again, the designers have chosen to promote unmitigated action over all else. The cockpit sports but a couple dials indicating speed, altitude, direction, and ammo status. There’s no radar (historical accuracy, you see...), but there is a “spyglass” that appears on the edge of your screen displaying your closest target or mission objective. You’ll fly with wingmen, but there are no wingman commands; however, your wingmen will chatter constantly to help you maintain your situational awareness.

This emphasis on simplification is the only point I can see where the design could stumble. How will gamers accustomed to “power systems management” in games like FREESPACE and WING COMMANDER feel about the lightened workload? Or the lack of damage modeling in the aircraft’s flight dynamics? Or the lack of control over wingmen? The designers are consciously bucking against entrenched conventions here. Will they buck too hard?

I don’t know. But my hunch is that we’ll be too enthralled with this game’s overwhelming coolness quotient to really care. We may be too busy bagging bogeys while circling the Empire State building, and sinking aircraft-carrier submarines in their secret Hawaiian cove. We may be grooving too hard on the Count Basie sound (I know it sounds weird, but believe me, the music works!), and so caught up in the storyline to even notice.

All I can say for sure is that CRIMSON SKIES is the hittest, most colorful action game to come around since the muscle cars and funk of INTERSTATE ‘76. This alone will ensure that when this baby flies this summer, I’m going for the ride.
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The 2000 Premier Awards

The Very Best of a Great Year in Gaming

Ask anyone who's worked at Computer Gaming World about the secret (and reportedly bizarre) ritual that goes on during the first week of the first month of every new year, and you're likely to get an evasive reply. No one will talk about the process...only the results.

This much is known: On the first Monday of any new year, the CGW editors disappear for a day. When they return from their top-secret location, they solemnly declare in their next issue the names of the finest computer games in each of the major genres (and some of the smaller ones). They also identify the game that transcended everything else, and is worthy of the title Best Game Of The Year.

Prepare to sing, laugh, and cry. We present to you the finest games of 1999.
GAME OF THE YEAR

Unreal Tournament

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive • DEVELOPER: Epic Megagames • www.unrealtournament.com
Last year, HALF-LIFE took the next step for single-player action games. This year, UNREAL TOURNAMENT (UT) proved itself to be the herald of the multiplayer experience, not just for action, but for all of gaming. UT manages to capture the purity and fun of the first-person shooter, and then extends this to the online world with tremendous polish, permanently increasing our expectations of how rich and varied multiplayer gaming can be.

Out of the box, UT has a slew of gameplay options, from straight-ahead fragfests to the team-oriented Capture-The-Flag to the more strategic Domination, or even the cooler, mission-based Assault games. And, in addition to the core games, you can also engage several quirky game variants that will spice up your experience, such as Fatboy or Invisibility Arenas. And if you can't find any friends at all, you can always play against the Bots, one of the game's other surprises.

Last year, HALF-LIFE demonstrated perhaps the best computer opponents of any 3D shooter. Until now, UT'S Bots go much farther, so much so that, in a frightening analogue to the Terminator films, they act a little too human sometimes. They know their way around levels and they know how to use the various weapons. But the best testament to UT'S AI comes in team-based scenarios. While HALF-LIFE'S marines will scout and attack, UT'S Bots will divide into teams that will scout, attack, defend, feint, and even hit you from multiple entry points.

On many occasions, great games are released that only diehard fans can fully appreciate. UT breaks through by being accessible to anyone."

"On many occasions, great games are released that only diehard fans can fully appreciate. UT breaks through by being accessible to anyone."

Past Winners of CGW's Game Of The Year

1998 Half-Life (Sierra)
1997 Jedi Knight (LucasArts)
1996 Diablo (Blizzard)
1995 Gabriel Knight 2 (Sierra)
1994 X-COM (Microprose)
1993 Doom (id Software)
1992 Civilization (Microprose)
1991 Wing Commander (Origin)
1990 Railroad Tycoon (Microprose)
1989 SimCity (Maxis)
1988 Empire (Interstel)
1987 Earl Weaver Baseball (EA)
1986 Ultima IV (Origin)
1985 Kampfgruppe (SSI)
ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Red Storm • www.redstorm.com

Like a good Clancy novel, RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR is equal parts showmanship and technical tour de force, and the story is more framework for the intense action. Like its predecessor, ROGUE SPEAR is based on the elite team of terrorist-killing commandos from Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six. Players equip their operatives with specialized weapons and equipment, plan their team's movement in exacting detail, and—if all goes well—bag the bad guys.

The genius of the game lies in its immersiveness. Most of this is done through masterful graphics in imaginative settings such as a hijacked 747, snowy military bases, bomb-blasted cityscapes in Kosovo, and even a 400-year-old Persian fortress. Picking your way through these perilous environments, you issue orders to operatives who are so life-like that they breathe and blink. The intelligence of the tangos lying in wait presents challenges rivaling a good strategy game. Should you deploy the sniper and risk announcing your presence, or try sneaking up on a hostile to drop him with a silenced weapon? Do you have time for a stealthy approach, or will you sacrifice the hostages if you don't blast the building? These gripping scenarios distinguish games like RAINBOW SIX and SWAT 3 from "run-and-gun" shooters, but ROGUE SPEAR goes far beyond its peers with a wider variety of missions, dramatic audio, demanding AI, and gut-wrenching suspense.

If the action is riveting in single-player, it's even better against human opponents. There are a huge number of multiplayer scenarios and user mods for ROGUE SPEAR on the Net, which add unlimited replayability to this outstanding combat experience. Red Storm's aim is right on target.

The Year's Guilty Pleasures

Nintendo, Sega, and the 1980s played pivotal roles in the lives of the CGW editor in 1999...all three distracted us to the point of destruction. At the top of the list sits the travelling analgesic, the Game Boy Color, through which we discovered the POKÉMON way, and lost many, many hours of our lives in the surprisingly excellent, old-school, role-playing gameplay within. Thanks, Nintendo. No, really—we like having people smirk at us on airplanes, buses and trains.

Another major distraction of the year included Hanahó's awesome classic video-game PC system, which included a slew of classic coin-op arcade games; and the Sega Dreamcast, which got us hooked for hours at a time on games like SOUL CALIBUR and NFL 2000.

So what do we anticipate seeing nominated next year? Well, no one at CGW can wait to dive into the team-based action of TEAM FORTRESS 2 and TRIBES 2. O.N.I.'s combination of high-kicking martial arts action and shooter combat should land it a nomination, as should the high-flying dare-devily of this month's cover subject, CRIMSON SKIES. And if we're all really, really lucky we could see ODIN WAN, HALO, and HALF-LIFE 2 gracing the 2000 Premier Awards—if they come out.
While last year's winner - INDEPENDENCE WAR - was based on innovation, this year we're giving the award to the best traditional space sim since TIE FIGHTER. While LucasArts and Origin usually dominate the domain of the dogfight, Interplay brought us a space sim with the frantic fun of the sci-fi gun duel combined with exceptional polish and refreshing newness.

It's often said that this genre attempts to capture the flavor of WWII dogfights. FREESPACE 2 embodies this notion. It manages to inject the WWII flavor without sacrificing the sci-fi angle; bombing runs against capital ships are met with flak, and ship-to-ship combat lacks only gravity. While many other space sims do a great job of providing the sensation of dueling with other craft, FREESPACE 2 ups this by adding massive, epic battles between carriers and destroyers.

FREESPACE 2 should also get credit for its stunning visuals, QUAKE 3 ARENA and UT look good, but can you see four beam-weapons cut a massive enemy carrier in half in a 3D shooter?

Watching a fleet battle in FREESPACE 2 is akin to watching the very best special-effect scenes in Star Wars, Star Trek, or Babylon 5.

All in all, FREESPACE 2 takes many of the conventions of the great space sims before it, adds some new twists and tweaks, and emerges to be the best there was for 1999.

Runners Up

Heavy Gear 2
(Activision)

MechWarrior 3
(Starbreeze)

X-Wing Alliance
(LucasArts)

We put our prediction for next year's Game Of The Year squarely on Chris Roberts's upcoming magnum opus, FREELANCER. Anyone who's been itching to experience PRIVATEER in the massively-multiplayer sense will want to watch out for this title (assuming it makes its end-of-2000 ship date).

Tchotchke of the Year

The CDV Gnome

The CDW offices are awash in promotional crap. Or, as we call it in polite company, tchotchkes. T-shirts, mugs, tote bags, and toys - all this stuff sent by game companies to make sure we have their games at the forefront of our minds. Of course, the scheme doesn't work, because everyone does it, and they usually send boring stuff.

This year's number-one exception to the mundane rule is the Garden Gnome given to us by CDV Software, a small German game publisher. The gnome has nothing to do with their game - a WWII strategy game...

Haiku on a Gnome
Red lips, bright eyes, cute
You beckon. I run to love.
Sit in my garden.

RTS - it's just "German."
Thank you CDV, for this little gift of love, and congratulations on besting a horde of highly-paid marketing professionals!
The word "immersive" is a term that most gaming journalists have expelled from their vocabulary, but there really is no better word to describe HOMEWORLD. Utilizing gorgeous deep-space imagery, dramatic music (including a well-placed "Adagio for Strings" by Samuel Barber), and short but informative cut scenes, the designers at Relic created an almost cinematic game around their Battlestar Galactica-inspired space opera. You can't help but feel a little bit lost and alone yourself as you gingerly escort the remnants of your civilization through uncharted space in search of a new (or possibly old) home.

A real-time strategy game that explodes the ground-bound, top-down, tech-tree conventions of the genre in ways destined to be imitated again and again, HOMEWORLD offers a truly unique gaming experience. The incredible 3D spatial design, coupled with an easy-to-use camera system, really gave gamers the sense of commanding a huge fleet of craft moving realistically through space.

In many ways, HOMEWORLD is reminiscent of last year's HALF-LIFE - which set a mood and maintained it until the end. HALF-LIFE had a compelling, well-told story at its core and so does HOMEWORLD. Interestingly, both games were debuts from new developers and both were published by Sierra.

HOMEWORLD follows a very simple recipe for making a great game: an original concept executed to near perfection. The result is a title that deserves CGW's Strategy Game Of The Year award, as well as serious kudos for each of its distinctive design elements.

We expect that Maxis' THE SIMS will pretty much grind our magazine production to a halt next year. Then again, Peter Molyneux and Lionhead Studios' visionary BLACK & WHITE has just as much of a chance of killing CGW as any title. And now that we think of it, FORCE COMMANDER's real-time Star Wars strategy action and DARK REIGN 2's gorgeous 3D world should pretty much be the final nail in our coffin.

The Trebuchet from Age of Empires 2

A weapon is the gamer's bread and butter. And a great weapon is his pride and joy. This year, our joyful cup runneth over, as a number of games sported weapons that went above and beyond the call of doleful duty.

Take the nasty Chem Missile from COMMAND
WARGAME OF THE YEAR

Sid Meier’s Antietam!

PUBLISHER: Firaxis • www.firaxis.com

1999 marks the first year that one of our Premier Award winners could only be purchased online. While some games can only be played online, they've always been available in stores or distributed as shareware. SID MEIER’S ANTETAM is a grand experiment by Firaxis to test the popularity of online-only distribution for commercial releases.

Apart from its distribution, there's nothing revolutionary about ANTETAM. It's a carefully refined update of SID MEIER’S GETTYSBURG, the real-time Civil War game that earned our Premier Wargame Award in 1997. ANTETAM uses the same 2D engine — so the graphics aren't stunning — but the units are finely detailed and the soldiers now bear a variety of uniform styles. You'll hardly notice these touches during a game, however, because ANTETAM is the epitome of a Sid Meier design: intensely absorbing and wickedly punishing. Whether you play the whole battle (an 11-hour marathon) or the individual scenarios from either the Confederate or Union side, you'll be faced with an opponent who makes rapid use of terrain and exploits any weakness in your line. You could spend hundreds of hours with the single-player game, and the random-scenario generator and online play offer hours of unlimited replayability.

ANTETAM has been criticized for small things — including its graphics, occasionally choppy frame-rate, and the fact that it's not a big leap from GETTYSBURG. But it does offer every feature a serious Civil War gamer could want, in an interface that's accessible to casual strategists. In a year when few wargames were released and when those that did came out were inferior to their predecessors (OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II; PANZER GENERAL 3D) — ANTETAM takes the high ground. Only CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE offered serious competition, but AI quirks and mysteriously reincarnating units held it back.

LOOKING AHEAD

If ANTETAM sells well, next year we can expect a series of new wargames from Firaxis under the Sid Meier name. But the wargame we're looking forward to right now is Talonsoft's RISING SUN, a platoon-level slugfest set in the Pacific Theater of WWII. Get ready to storm Guadalcanal in 2000.

& CONQUER 2. Nothing said "screw you" like this noxious blast, which destroyed buildings and sent out a nasty cloud of vapor that turned the victim's units against him.

For sheer power, nothing beat the UNREAL TOURNAMENT Fisk Cannon, which not only could decimate an opponent with one shot at close range, but could take out a weakened opponent around corners with its ricocheting shrapnel.

But it's not all about raw power. Finesse counts, too. Pedro Martinez was a devastating force in HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 when he combined his overpowering fastball, wicked slider, and psychologically debilitating change-up.

Finally, though, nothing married destructive force with grace like the trebuchet in AGE OF EMPIRES 2. This wonder of ancient engineering hurled boulders that could, in seconds, destroy the wonder of a rival empire that took hundreds of years to build. The graceful arc of its swing was a kinetic poem to the creative and destructive forces that battle within the human soul.
"...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
ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF THE YEAR

Planescape: Torment

PUBLISHER: Interplay • DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios • www.interplay.com

Last year's Baldur's Gate may have been an excellent AD&D role-player, but it was still classic AD&D - broadswords and magic missiles, faeries and elves. Contrast this with Planescape: Torment's singing maces and floating skulls. It is Salvador Dali to Baldur's Gate's Edward Hopper; it's new, it's surreal, it's fresh, and while the other is a fine example of tradition, ultimately, this is the one that's more intriguing.

What is it about Planescape: Torment that made it RPG Of The Year? Sheer originality and willingness to be thought-provoking. The design team took many of the issues gamers have with RPGs, and devised completely new twists to address them. The main character's immortal nature means that death is no longer a reason to reload; in fact, death is often needed to jar new memories or to bypass puzzles. Combat isn't the only solution to a given problem; using your brain or charisma can solve many quests. This award-winner also manages to parody some diehard RPG traditions: A side quest takes you to a grand experiment in randomly-generated mazes filled with Poozles and loot, all to "discover what is the appeal behind the dungeon."

The quality of writing in Planescape: Torment also elevates it over other RPGs. Not only did the design team create a compelling story behind the most tired of cliches (waking up with amnesia), they also wrote dialogue that never insults your intelligence. Oftentimes, the dialogue stops being filler and starts being philosophical debates on topics like entropy or the will to live. At times, the writing surpasses even the mighty Ultima IV in dealing with ethical dilemmas.

While there were many contenders - most notably EverQuest and System Shock 2 - Planescape: Torment excels at combining all of its design elements, and hence this imaginative game is our RPG Of The Year.

Runners Up

EverQuest
(BBI Studies)
System Shock 2
(Looking Glass)
Might & Magic VII
(3DO)
Asgard's Call
(Microsoft)

There are so many huge RPGs coming out in 2000 that it's exhausting us already to think about which one might win an award. Looming over the genre, and over gaming in general, is Blizzard's long-awaited Diablo II - the monster release of the year. But posing extremely tough competition are these heavy hitters: Ion Storm's Deus Ex, Interplay's Baldur's Gate II and Neverwinter Nights, Sierra's Arcanum, and SSI's Pool Of Radiance: Ruins Of Myth Drannor. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. This is your moment, RPG fans. Enjoy it.

Looking Ahead
ne good thing about living in Belgium – other than the waffles – is that they apparently haven’t heard about the supposed “death of adventure games” over there. Thank goodness, because if Belgian game-developer Appeal had been as down on the genre as the rest of the industry, they might never have made OUTCAST, our choice for 1999’s Adventure Game Of The Year.

It’s an unusual choice, we know. For one thing, OUTCAST is more like an adventure/action hybrid than a “pure” adventure. But what we love about OUTCAST – especially in comparison to its only competitor, Sierra’s much higher-profile GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 – and what ultimately gave it the edge in our minds, is that this game always stays true to its vision, however goofy that may be. Fundamentally, adventure games tell stories, and OUTCAST told a great one, about a Schwarzeneggerian commander sent to a parallel world to fix a black hole, where he is promptly mistaken for a god by the local alien population. As you play the game, the plot expands as you go forward, surrounding you with a large cast of colorful characters and personalities to interact with and engaging you in dialogue that is surprisingly and refreshingly funny throughout.

The game’s art direction is equally compelling. No one will mistake OUTCAST’s voxel-based engine for UNREAL TOURNAMENT, but Appeal proved it could create some wondrous outdoor environments this way – without making gamers buy a 3D card. The cinematic camera angles and truly great musical score (performed by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra) both add greatly to the game’s epic feel.

It was a slim year for adventure games, to be sure, but that in no way should diminish the achievement of OUTCAST, a game that told a great story in a confident, compelling and entertaining way – something that not all the great adventure games do.

The biggest question in the adventure game genre is not what might win the award in 2000, but whether we’ll even be handing one out. It’s that grim. You can pretty much count on one hand the adventure games in development. The coolest ones we’ve seen both hail from Europe – THE LONGEST JOURNEY from Norway’s Funcom, and THE REAL NEVERENDING STORY from Germany’s Discreet Monsters.

LOOKING AHEAD

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

**Best Character**

Morte from Planescape: Torment

In a year with memorable characters like the villainous SHODAN in SYSTEM SHOCK 2 and the meaningful Guardian of ULTIMA fame, the best character of the year turns out to be Morte, the floating-skull sidekick in OF MONKEY ISLAND. Yet, the moment Morte tells the story of why he’s with you, he elevated himself from mere comic relief to become one of those characters you truly care about. Not since Floyd (from the ancient PLANETFALL) has comedy and tragedy mixed itself so well within a single character, much less a sidekick. We applaud the design team of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT for writing such a rich, memorable character.
From the moment we installed High Heat Baseball 2000, we knew there really wouldn’t be much of a contest for Sports Game Of The Year. While our other nominees were content to incrementally advance the state of their respective sports, High Heat 2000 revolutionized its sport, snatching the “Best Computer Baseball Game Of All Time” crown from COW Hall of Famer Earl Weaver Baseball. It redefines what a baseball game—and maybe even a sports game—should be.

Like no other game before it, High Heat 2000 captured the intangible essence of baseball. The pitcher/batter confrontation—the soul of baseball—was just about perfect, with every at-bat a struggle complete with subtle mind games that blossomed pitch by pitch. And for something unexpected in almost every game, from heartbreaking final-pitch losses to exhilarating, double hit victories. Teams grew from just a roster of names into a collection of players with personalities and character: the always disappointing all-star, the clutch pinch-hitter, the unnervingly unpredictable middle reliever, and the number-five starter that heroically gutted through eight grueling innings to pitch a key victory.

It all managed to recreate perfectly the highs and lows a fan experiences—the sunny promise of Opening Day; the nail-biting final games of a pennant race—making High Heat Baseball 2000 not only the Best Sports Game Of The Year, but simply one of the best games of the year. Period.

Runners Up
John Madden Football 2000 (EA Sports)
Jack Nicklaus 6: Golden Bear Challenge (Activision)
NFL Fever 2000 (Microsoft)
NBA Live 2000 (EA Sports)

Considering what 3DO accomplished last year and what we’ve seen in the early alpha builds of High Heat 2001, this franchise is definitely a front runner for the best game of 2000. But there could be some surprises in store.

Keep an eye on Microsoft’s follow-up to this year’s strong NFL Fever 2000. And Tiger Woods 2001 will allow virtual duffers to play against the pros in major tournaments, an innovation that could net it some accolades.
or a lesson in how to make a sequel and build a successful franchise, you needn't look any further than the NEED FOR SPEED series from Electronic Arts. NEED FOR SPEED III won CGW's 1998 Premier award for driving games because it skirted the line between a hardcore racing sim and an arcade racer. Its follow-up, NEED FOR SPEED HIGH STAKES, wins the award this year for maintaining the awesome gameplay of its predecessor, while adding so much more. HIGH STAKES offered over a dozen tracks that can be raced backwards, mirrored, or both. Following a trend set by the superb PlayStation title GRAN TURISMO, HIGH STAKES also included a career mode with a detailed financial model that allowed you to earn money by winning races, and then spend it on upgrades and repairs for your car. And the hot-pursuit play mode introduced in NFSIII was expanded to let you play as the police, or as a member of a pack of scofflaws.

Technically the game is masterful, with improved graphics and a more realistic physics model that includes some early realistic force-feedback effects. The cars are lovingly rendered with 3D interiors and animated drivers. In essence, NFS:HS builds upon the greatness of NFSIII by giving us more, more, more. Next year's installment, NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY looks to take the series to the next level once again.

While we enjoyed the novelty of RE*VOLT, the setting of MIDTOWN MADNESS, and the blinding speed of EPISODE I: RACER, the sublime qualities of NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES set it head and hubcaps above the rest.

We've been lucky enough to get some sneak peeks at racing titles slated for next year that, if they fulfill their early promise, could be contenders for next year's awards. MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 from Microsoft is boasting a slick graphics engine and myriad gameplay options, while NFS: MOTOR CITY will be the first racing-oriented persistent online universe.

**Sleeper Hit of the Year**

Re*Volt

Sometimes a game flies in under our radar - under everyone's radar - that turns out to not only be really good, but insanely addictive. RE*VOLT surprised the hell out of us when it was released this past Fall. The concept - racing remote-controlled toy cars - we've seen before, but never with such style. The engine was one of the best 3D engines we saw all year, and the real-world environments (the supermarket is our favorite) gave a great sense of scale for these tiny vehicles. RE*VOLT's cars sound like the real RC thing...and handle like them too. Add in great weapons - from bottle rockets to oil slicks, and you've got Mad Max for the Toughskins set.
HAS EMERGED

COMMAND & CONQUER
TIBERIAN SUN
FIRESTORM
EXPANSION PACK

NEW GDI & NOD UNITS
NEW MULTIPLAYER MAPS
ALL NEW WORLD DOMINATION TOURNAMENTS
ENHANCED BATTLEFIELD RANDOMIZER
NEW UNIT UPGRADES
INDIGENOUS LIFE FORMS

for the inside scoop, www.westwood.com
n a down year for flight simulations, one shines as brightly as a ray of light piercing through a thunderhead. MiG Alley covered an era that has been long-overlooked (the Korean War), but which offers a fascinating prospect for virtual pilots: the first jet-versus-jet air war. While configurable enough to give novices a good ride, the game's highest realism levels yield an experience the most discriminating of flight fanatics will relish. You can hear every creak and groan of these first-generation jets as you push them to the edge of their capabilities. The aircraft all have their own idiosyncrasies, and every graphic detail of these jets – beautiful in an ugly way that only a military aviation fan can appreciate – is perfectly modeled.

Back then, cannons were the weapon of the day, so lightning-fast jousts were the typical engagement. MiG Alley ably captures this dynamic, and may in fact feature

the best pure dogfighting in any sim until now. The AI is also surprisingly human: a veteran computer pilot may fly to the edge of his plane's capabilities and sometimes beyond, while a rookie pilot may panic and bail out of his plane as soon as you pepper him with cannon fire. Attack a pair of opposing aircraft, and one plane might draw you off while his wingman sneaks behind you and stitches your six. Add to this a dynamic campaign that is a strategic game in and of itself, allowing you to prioritize enemy assets, target them, and then set up – in great detail – all of the strike packages, and you have a sim that will be flown for years to come.

1998 was a tough year for digital fly-boys, with the cancellation of several high-profile titles, and the dismantling of MicroProse's august FALCON team. But despite these setbacks, 2000 still has some very promising titles in the works including MicroProse's B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II, HiTech Creation's ACES HIGH, and Looking Glass Studio's first stab at a combat sim:

**FLIGHT COMBAT: THUNDER OVER EUROPE.**
Nobody does quick-fix classic gaming like Cunning Developments and Empire Interactive. Last year's BIG RACE U.S.A. was perhaps the best pinball game - digital or physical - we've ever played. This year's FANTASTIC JOURNEY is not quite up to BIG RACE, but it's still far and away the best game in its category.

The ball physics in these games are practically virtual reality, and the table designs are clever and deep, with dozens of special shots and mini "quests" that must be fulfilled on your journey towards a high score. FANTASTIC JOURNEY's Jules Verne theme is developed through myriad sounds and animations that play out on the overhead display.

The only drawbacks: The music is annoying as hell, and the gameplay is so addictive that you'll never get a thing done if you're fool enough to load the game on your work computer. Hands down, FANTASTIC JOURNEY offers the best 10-minute servings of gaming you'll find.

Runners Up
Mind Gym
(Simon & Schuster)
Pandora's Box
(Microsoft)
Chessmaster 7000
(Mindcruise)

The Destroyer Walks Again
objects in mirror are larger than they appear."
Intel's CEO, Craig Barrett, no doubt sees an AMD logo in his rear view mirror - and it's looming larger all the time. Most challenges to Intel are still licking their wounds, unable to keep up with Intel's clock speeds and floating-point performance. But when AMD shipped the Athlon in 1999, the market for high performance, x86-compatible CPUs was no longer a near-monopoly. Gamers quickly discovered that Athlon's fast, three-issue floating point unit (FPU) was as fast or faster than the equivalent Intel FPU. This made for superb 3D-gaming performance. For months, Intel trailed AMD, until Intel's Coppermine CPUs shipped. Even then, they only substantially exceeded Athlon in gaming performance by using fairly exotic RDRAM memory. What AMD accomplished in 1999 was a major coup: Their new CPU completely reshaped the performance PC marketplace, and AMD is now struggling it out toe-to-toe with Intel's best.

PC makers hungry for an alternative quickly began shipping Athlon-based systems. Gamers, always looking for great performance at low prices, snapped up the new systems. All in all, it's been a resounding success story for Santa Clara-based AMD. If there's any dark lining in this silver cloud, it's been the lagging technology in the motherboard chipsets and L2 cache. That is quickly changing, however, as AMD embeds L2 cache, and as chipset makers introduce new technology like AGP 4x and DDR SDRAM. Make no mistake: Athlon systems are fast, and can make for superb gaming. All you need is sound, fast video, and an ATA/66 hard drive. Competition is sweet indeed.

Doorstop of the Year

Thrustmaster Fragmaster
We have seen some poor attempts to solve the "first-person-shooter problem," that supposed affliction that prevents gamers from using the mouse/keyboard combination in 3D shooters. But Thrustmaster's Fragmaster has got to be one of the worst. Thrusty's ill-fated attempt brought together a so-so design with bad execution to produce this year's Doorstop Of The Year.

The Fragmaster was marred by serious driver problems and poor performance that had most buyers fuming, not to mention that Thrustmaster was slow to pull the product out of store shelves after realizing there were problems. For a company that's been such a friend to gamers over the year, this was a dark chapter in its history. Here's hoping that under Guillemot's ownership, Thrusty will rediscover their commitment to quality gaming peripherals.

Best Sound Design
System Shock 2
Considering the almost complete lack of interaction with any other character in the game, the way SYSTEM SHOCK 2 hooked you with a compelling story told almost solely through audio is testament to the game's stellar sound design. The best voice-acting in recent memory creates a pervasive sense of menace through the haunting words of the dead in recorded logs and emails. The other sounds were just as compelling, specifically the tortured laments of the Hybrid, the perverted maternal cooling of the vicious Midwives, and the chillingly evil directives of the steely queen-bitch herself, Shodan. Echoing voices throughout the derelict spaceships promised that a violent death forever lurked just around the corner.
The TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC mod for HALF-LIFE engrossed us so thoroughly that, for a while, this free multiplayer add-on received serious consideration for Game Of The Year. Valve should be commended for this instant classic, which has spawned hundreds of clans around the world. One of the very few titles to combine class- and character-based gaming with an action environment and the type of objective-laced missions that are now becoming standard fare for 3D-shooters, TFC upped the ante to the point that it’s just now being approached by the competition.

Once we played the Hunted scenario – in which one team protects a president trying to reach an SUV before being assassinated by the other team – we realized two things. First, Valve is way ahead of the game. Second, we absolutely cannot wait to get our hands on TEAM FORTRESS 2.

It’s Time to Gather Your Champions
**Best Level Design**

Unreal Tournament

too many times, action games stick to a strict theme, such as gothic castles or space stations. UNREAL TOURNAMENT’s only theme is “fun combined with looks.” With levels on pirate ships, mountainous monasteries, WWII-style beachheads, and runaway trains, UNREAL TOURNAMENT gets the nod for providing levels with a good mix of gameplay and aesthetics.

**Best Voice Acting**

The Keeper From Dungeon Keeper 2

Indulgently wallowing in the deliciousness of all that is evil, the silky baritone of the Keeper from DUNGEON KEEPER 2 did more to set the mood of the game than any of the other sounds or graphics. Every tantalizing word that dripped from his mouth was like a drop of rancid honey, conspiratorially speaking to your dark side and drawing you deeper into the game until you too could gleefully chortle at the misfortunes of heroes, delight in the suffering of the good, and relish the torment of your enemies. Being bad never sounded so good.

**Best Manual**

Homeworld

What’s the deal with... game manuals? Too many companies skimp on their written support, cramming barebones info onto a CD booklet or, worse, burying all you need to know in a half-assed online manual that hurts you while saving them paper costs. Not so the manual for HOMEWORLD. Composed by Montgomery E. Crabeapple, this game’s manual not only concisely and expertly gave players all the information they need to play, but enriched and informed the game’s outstanding story. Well done, Monty.

**Interface Design**

Age of Empires II

If you want to really appreciate the dozens of interface enhancements made in AGE OF EMPIRES 2, go back and try to play the original AGE OF EMPIRES. It’s like stepping back a couple hundred years in history. How did we ever live without the unit formations? Or the right-click way-point interface? Or the idle peasant-key? Well, at least we won’t have to live without them again, for AGE 2 is the new standard in real-time strategy interfaces.

**Best Soundtrack**

NBA Live 2000

E A Sports knows that hip-hop is the unofficial music of professional basketball, so with NBA LIVE 2000, they included some of the best rap, funk, and hip-hop music to ever grace a computer game. Original cuts by Rahzel are bolstered by classics from Naughty by Nature, Run D.M.C., and George Clinton. To quote a wise old sage (or maybe it was Bootsy Collins), “they got the funk.”

The CGW staff would like to thank Gordon Borg, Loyd Case, Desslock, Marc Dultz, Bruce Geryk, Kenneth Johnson, Jason Kapalka, and Jeff Lackey for their contribution of words and ideas to this story.
Art Direction

**Planescape: Torment**

It's not the graphics, it's the gameplay – this has been the mantra of gamers for decades. But while the intention of that mantra is a good one, we know it's not altogether true: Graphics have a huge impact on our gaming experiences, with the capability of transforming a good game into a great one.

Witness PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, a masterfully designed RPG that, when combined with superb art direction, becomes one of the best RPGs we've ever played. The artists of Black Isle Studios took the philosophy of the PLANESCAPE universe and gave it life in pixels. The visual theme of the game - the perfection of geometric forms laid over with the chaos of a hellish, decaying world - is consistent throughout. The result is one of the most affecting visual environments ever created for a computer game.

Art matters. And this year, the Black Isle artists mattered the most.

**Best Playgrounds of the Year**

**Bullfrog Productions Ltd.**

As seemingly disparate as DUNGEON KEEPER 2 and SIM THEME PARK may appear to be, we loved them for the same reason – never has so much life been packed into a computer monitor. DK2's self-torturing Mistresses and flatulent, chicken-gobbling Bile Demons; the hallucinogenic carnivals teeming with mischiefing kids lining up to race around in a giant rat-mobile – these were the tremendously entertaining and wholly original sights and sounds Bullfrog so richly, rewardingly, brought to life for gamers this year.

A New Adventure Beckons
2000 HALL of SHAME

Where there is sunshine, there is shadow. For every good, a bad. With so many good games released this year, the necessity of balance in the universe required that there be a pack of stinkers. Here are some of the uglier moments in gaming this year.

Coaster Of The Year

Nocturne
(Gathering of Developers)

Forsaking gameplay at the expense of technological achievement, designer Terminal Reality utterly squandered its promising pulp-horror premise as it pinched off this steaming load of werewolf crap: tedious cutscenes where characters literally stood around; controls that actively hampered play; camera angles that squarely focused on the asses of NPCs instead of the action; painfully bad voice-acting; Artificial Imbecility in lieu of Artificial Intelligence; ludicrously high system requirements; and some of the most maddening god-awful key-hunting garbage to ever masquerade as play. Man alive, every moment playing this game physically hurt.

Playing NOCTURNE was about as enjoyable as gargling fishhooks. And that, friends, makes it the Coaster Of The Year.

Worst Game Concept

SKYDIVE: ‘Nuf said.

Truth In Advertising Awards

It’s nice to see marketing folks with a sense of integrity in the gaming industry. Three cheers to the people who accurately entitled ODINIM and ABOMINATION. And to Sierra, who provided a warning label on the front of PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER: “The Longest 8 Seconds Of Your Life.”

“Licensed to Kill” Award

How long will TV, book, and movie licensees have to suffer mistreatment from misguided game publishers? This year’s victims included Braveheart, clumsily manhandled by Eidos; and South Park, which was butchered in not one, but three games. Ah, well. Blame Canada.

The Outpost Memorial Award

OUTPOST: a game that will live in infamy. A game with so much promise, with such big dreams, all of which was wasted because the game was released too soon — incomplete, buggy, unplayable. This year’s OUTPOST memorial reward goes to... ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION! Origin just had to ship it by Christmas. And now they’ll have to live with the fact that they topped off the longest running and most beloved gaming universe with a great big sloppy turg.

The Game We Thought Would Suck The Most, But Actually Sucked The Least

We try not to judge a game by its cover, but the box of Simon & Schuster’s MINDGYM, which featured a Woody Allen look-alike in nothing but his tighty-whities, was so repellent that it sat on our shelves for weeks because we couldn’t bear to touch it. But once a CGW editor (out of a nagging sense of duty to gamer-kind) finally installed the game, we found a lot to like — particularly the Monty-Pythonesque sense of humor that enlivened this inventive collection of brain benders. Check it out, if you can bear the humiliation of being seen holding the box.
Might and Magic
Day of the Destroyer

9 New character classes and races
26 new skills, spells, and special abilities
New lands of heroic fantasy and adventure
Good. Evil. The choice is yours.

In the four corners of Jadame gates to the planes of Fire, Air, Earth and Water have opened and denizens of those realms are sweeping across the lands devastating all in their path.
You must lead a band of rugged adventurers on a perilous mission to save the kingdoms from ruin.

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INTENSE CARRIER OPERATIONS PUT YOU RIGHT ON DECK. From steam catapults to catching the wire on a rolling ship, you'll experience every aspect of carrier-based flight operations.

BREATHTAKING GRAPHICS PUT YOU IN THE SCENE. Full weather effects and stunning terrain rendering even closer sights of sun off your 3D cockpit as you fly over the North Sea and Northern Russia.

ULTRA-REALISTIC 3D COCKPIT PUTS YOU IN CONTROL. The fully interactive cockpit gives you point-and-click-use, and a panoramic canopy view for the most heart-pounding sensation of flying ever.
And you thought landing on the green from the fairway was hard.
**PROBLEM:**
How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper for defense find out the source of evil on earth?

**SOLUTION:**
Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.

Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker does not have security access to leave the room. So to cause a commotion, "Bob" lowers a 5-ton tank on unsuspecting worker.

Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, medics have security access.

Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.

Dumping the medics body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.

Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! How heavenly!

While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.

After seeing the awesome power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop. Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.
END OF THE WORLD PROMOTION

The end of the millennium is upon us. The two thousandth year after Christ. Who better to celebrate it with than "Bob" God's favorite cherub?

Where is the biggest new years celebration every year? New York City, Times Square. Shiny, Interplay and Messiah want to send one lucky winner, and friend, to the biggest party on Earth. Witness, first hand, the apocalypse. If it is the end, you might as well be partying when it happens!

Visit www.messiah.com/contest.htm to register for your chance to win!
Or send a self addressed stamped envelope to:
Messiah: End of the World Sweepstakes, P. O. Box 36,
Ojai, California 93024-0036.

FREE
"Making of Messiah Kit"
by mail. See box for details.

"The only thing that people will be talking about next year is how nothing compares to Messiah." - Game Pro

"What will revolutionize the gaming world... is Messiah's unique style and more than a little disturbing gameplay." - PC Accelerator

"It's this act (possession) of not just taking on a body, but an actual character that makes the game so unique." - Core Magazine
Sound goods.

If you're searching for the best possible 3D audio experience, you can spend a lot of time listening to the claims of imitators. Or you can get the ultimate experience with A3D on a Vortex card from Aureal, the folks who invented 3D audio for the PC.

The Vortex SQ1500 delivers award-winning A3D on two or four speaker systems, or on headphones, and is the ideal choice for gamers on a budget.

The Vortex SQ2500 provides A3D 2.0 positional audio with geometry-based Aureal Wavetracing, also on two or four speaker systems, and is the ultimate PC audio experience.

Aureal has always provided the best 3D audio technology for the industry, and now we can offer you our own sound cards, built from the ground-up by Aureal engineers. Get the goods that sound good...sound cards from Aureal.

Get an Aureal Vortex sound card from your retailer or directly from Aureal at: www.aureal.com.
MARCH REVIEWS

We expected a flood of email in response to our X-Men star ratings (issue #186), figuring some Gambit fan club would want to have words with us. But we got a grand total of zero responses. Zip, zilch, nada, bubkus. What's with you people anyway? Can your ire no longer be raised by some opinedated ignoramus game editor with a bully pulpit and some whack attitudes towards pop culture? Do you no longer wish to debate the merits of Denton's Cool Ranch vs. Ruffles' K.C. Masterpiece BBQ? C'mon folks, let us know what a bunch of stupid jerks we are for giving Herbie the Love Bug only one star by dropping us a line at cgwletters@zd.com.

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

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HOW DO WE RATE?

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

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

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

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

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

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

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"....just enough of the occasional random rant from your host, evil wind-up toy Regis Philbin, to capture that special, fifth circle of Hell ambiance peculiar to 'The Reeg.'"

- Robert Coffey, reviewing WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE

Planescape: Torment

Nations: WWII Fighter Command
**PLANESCAPE: The Game To Die for, Again and Again**

The nature of death, the true essence of things, the value of suffering, the balance of the cosmic order... wait, is this *Computer Gaming World* or *Philosophy Today*? While most computer games are comfortable following the archetypal "valiant hero slays forth and slays Evil Fooze Supreme" style, Interplay's newest role-playing game, *PLANESCAPE: TORMENT*, dares you to question your own beliefs. Half game, half mytho-poetic meditation, *PLANESCAPE* is a role-playing game without peer.

**Hell Is a Frame of Mind**

Don't make the mistake of equating *PLANESCAPE* with elves and faeries just because the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* logo is on the box. While the many rules and conventions of AD&D are present, *PLANESCAPE* is as far from traditional AD&D as you can get. The easiest way to describe the setting is to ask Salvador Dali to paint an interpretation of Buddha's words. Imagine Sigil (the city in which most of the game takes place) as an inter-dimensional crossroads of the imagination, a place where reality takes on the shape of one's beliefs, and every bounded space is a potential portal to another frame of mind — whether it be Hell, Heaven, Limbo, or Wisconsin. Into this weird and wild world you are dropped, nameless and without memory.

The Planes are depicted with the BALDUR'S GATE Infinity engine, so combat is real-time with the option of pausing, and the screen resolution stays fixed at 640x480. It is different from BALDUR'S GATE in that the view is full-screen and the perspective is closer to the ground, making both the characters and locales larger and more detailed. The interface is significantly streamlined; many commands are now either context-sensitive, or selected by a menu activated with the right mouse-button. Some people may not like the additional

streamlining over BALDUR'S GATE; I got used to it.

**This Builds Character, Really**

Unlike other *AD&D* games, you begin by creating a totally new hero. Character generation consists of tweaking the stats of The Nameless One — and he is ultimately defined by your actions. Alignment, traditionally something you pre-select and use as a guide for your in-game behavior, is now determined by your behavior in the world. You start as True Neutral, and depending on how much lying, vowing, killing, or altruistic action you exhibit, you will move between the various alignments.

This is only one example of the "shaped by action, not by creation" design that *PLANESCAPE* allows. Most quests and conversations present different options based upon your character's statistics. Intelligence affects both the information gleaned from conversation...
and puzzle-solving options; charisma determines how well you lie; dexterity determines whether you're fast enough to grab someone; and strength determines whether you can snap your victim's neck. This results in some of the most effective role-playing possible without other humans. Every single dialogue or quest has multiple solutions based on your abilities. Combat is only absolutely necessary a few times; I talked/trained my way through three-quarters of the game the first time I played it.

As far as class goes, you start the game as a level-three fighter, and from there on, you can opt to be a fighter, thief, or mage. All you need is a trainer willing to switch your profession, and you're free to switch from clubbing people with your own hand to weaving spells like Celestial Host. All experience points you gain apply only to your current class, so you should pick one class in which to specialize rather than attempting to equalize them all simultaneously (unless you like the idea of trying to finish as level five in all three, rather than as a level-22 mage). The game does seem heavily slanted toward mages, however, as they get the most impressive spells and have better defensive items.

Death Takes a Holiday

The most clever design element — in a game rife with brilliant design elements — is the handling of death. Guess what? You're immortal. Except for a few extraordinary circumstances, death is no longer a reason to reload a game. Every time you "die," you will wake up in a designated area, with all inventory and experience intact. Death is the central theme in this game; in fact, you must die in order to trigger memories that advance the plot and solve certain puzzles. The fact of your immortality presents some situations that you've never seen in a game before, such as having someone open you up and search your intestines for hidden goodies, or biting your own finger off and replacing it with another.

The design team seemed to have looked at every major annoyance of past RPGs, and either fixed or satirized them. For example, quests are still inherently FedEx runs, but their staging and execution makes up for it — such as a ticking time-bomb type of quest, which finds you trying to return a box to a series of people who don't want it. Rats, the most mundane of RPG creatures, suddenly become deadly when a group of them uses its Hive-mind to cast brutal spells on you. Mazes, the universal torture device of gamers, are perioeded in a sequence where Higher Beings create a maze complete with identical-looking rooms, random loot, and Fools to research "the appeal that mazes hold for adventurers."

PLANESCAPE's best feature is its terrific writing. Be warned, this is a text-heavy game (circa 800,000 words), so be prepared to slow down, take your time, and read.

Time to Party

Your journal does a good job of tracking quests and giving info on the imaginative NPCs you can recruit.

Ho Ho Ho, Jolly Gray Giant

Sigil is so surreal, you can find yourself talking to a giant gollum created by Entropy in order to create weapons against the forces of Order.

Critical Success

AD&D effects like critical hits are illustrated with animations appropriate to your character, like Nordom's gear. Note that since the focus is closer, there's not as much ranged combat as in BALDUR'S GATE.

Making the Most Out of Life?

PLANESCAPE contains a number of plot-critical moments found only in optional quests. Here's a checklist of nifty things you don't want to miss, but might if you're not thorough. WARNING: there be PLOT SPOILERS below.

Before going to the Fortress of Regrets, make sure to retrieve the Bronze Sphere. Once inside, you will get a chance to talk to some people, and learn what the Sphere truly is. This is probably the most important revelation in the entire game.

If you recruit Fall-From-Grace, be sure to talk to her about Morte; then talk with Morte afterwards, to learn his full story. Delonarra isn't the only person-from-a-previous-life in the Mortuary. If you have a severed-arm from a previous life, go to Fell's Tattoo Parlor, and ask Dak'kon to translate your conversation about the tattoos on that arm. Once you learn Dak'kon's story, search the first floor of the Mortuary to find this new person.

Be sure to buy a Modron Toy at the Curiosity Shop. Toy with it until you get into Rubikon Maze, and find Nordom. He is one of the funniest and most powerful NPCs you can recruit. For the other NPC, be sure to walk past the portal before leaving Curst.

Living in a Van Down by the River

You can improve your other party members by either discussing philosophical precepts, or by simply motivating them.
The Hottest Pre-Orders

**Diablo II**
"Explore the world of Diablo II, journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures and uncover ancient mysteries."

**Uncharted**
"Lara Croft may have opened the door for the third-person perspective action game, but Konami, Sony's heroine, could lead the charge."

**Giantz**
"Giantz is a 3D real-time strategy game that takes place on planet consisting of 30 separate islands."

**Dark Reign 2**
"Dark Reign 2 will introduce new strategic elements, incredible graphics, new RTS enhancements and spectacular multiplayer gameplay."

**Vampire: The Masquerade**
"Based on the popular tabletop role-playing game, the PC version of Vampire: The Masquerade offers fans of the series a true translation."

**Business Tycoon**
"A fast and furious world of simulated stock trading... sharpen your skills, sell and trade shares without investing your capital or livelihood."

**Transformers: Race Wars**
"Muscle is back... the most realistic racing simulation ever created, with the most exciting cars ever produced."

**Die Hard Trilogy 2**
"Try to beat the odds as you match wits with the meanest, smartest villains in the most explosive adventure John McClane has ever faced."

**The Sims**
"From Will Wright, the creator of SimCity, comes a new strategy game that hits close to home. It's up to you to decide... their fate is in your hands."

**TRUSS Extreme**
"Join the thousands of tribal warriors who have discovered the REAL challenge of squad-based combat."

**Amen**
"Begin the most dangerous adventure of Bishop Six's life, as he slowly uncovers the horrible truth behind this strange affliction..."

**Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms**
"If you're ready for the challenge of true team-based online action, you'll find it in Team Fortress™ 2: Brotherhood of Arms."

**Metal Fatigue**
"If you're a real-time strategy gamer and this news only gets you vaguely interested in Metal Fatigue, there is something wrong with you."

**Tron Play 2001**
"EA Sports' award-winning Triple Play Baseball™ series is back for another big season."

**Command & Conquer: Firestorm**
"Kane is Dead and a new enemy has emerged. You've played the biggest game of 1999, it's time to experience more."

**Duke Nukem Forever**
"Duke fans, sign on up, this game is amazing."

**Test Drive: Le Mans**
"The ultimate driving challenge. If you feel like keeping up all night, there's a 24-hour challenge packed in."

**Test Drive: Cycling**
"Put on your leather and helmet (where the law requires), and get ready for the ultimate cycle challenge."

**Flash Point**
"Promises to combine several genres into one—for people who like a mix of intense firesights and brain-challenging tactics."

**Mission Impossible**
"Mission Impossible will give you a good ride the first time you play it, even though you might start pulling your hair out when you're stuck."

**B17 Flying Fortress**
"The B17 Flying Fortress, alongside the legendary Avro Lancaster, was the ultimate bomber in WWII."

**Red Guns**
"A futuristic, first-person 3D shooter set in a slick, neon-washed cyberpunk world."

**MGS 2**
"Visually the game is quite stunning: the lighting and shadow effects are the most impressive features."

**Final Fantasy VIII**
"Amazing plot and character development, great cinematics; good battle engine."

**Majesty**
"MajestyTM is a unique sim putting you in the crushed velvet hotseat of your own kingdom."

**Soldier of Fortune**
"Plunge into the secret and deadly world of the modern-day gun-for-hire in Soldier of Fortune."

**Gunship**
"This is one of the most immersive games about modern combat in years."

**WenziTea: The Apocalypse**
"A seamless blend of action, adventure, and role-playing... boasting more thoughtful plots and characters."

**Star Trek: New Worlds**
"It's time to leave the vastness of space behind and play out your destiny in the biggest land battle."

**JIP 500**
"A fantastic, first-person 500cc motorcycle racing experience that sets the standard in simulation and fun."

**Orion**
"An epic tale of action, strategy, exploration and conquest set in the depths of the ocean."

**Evolva**
"Combine equal parts genetic engineering, third-person action and overhead strategic/tactical gameplay, and this is what you get."

**Max**
"Character balance is well-done, what is even better are the spell traps and combinations."

**Soulbringer**
"Soulbringer is a new 3D classic fantasy Adventure RPG in the true sense of the words."
The Coolest Recent Releases

Quake III Arena
“No one is safe. Hardwired action is yours for the taking in single-player and multiplayer battles.”

Unreal Tournament
“A single-player extravaganza and a multiplayer tour de force. If you’re looking for ‘the next big thing’ in computer gaming, stop your search.”

Asheron’s Call
“A stunningly beautiful epic role-playing game that draws you and thousands of other players into a dynamic, 3D online world.”

Tomb Raider Last Revelation
“Follow Lara back to Egypt where she returns to her roots, both in gameplay and story line.”

Half-Life Opposing Force
“Opposing Force has more twists and turns than the lines to see Phantom Menace and more horrifying moments than a high school dance.”

Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine
“Infernal Machine is gorgeous, seemingly well-paced, and filled with interesting foes.”

Septerra Core
“Those who enjoyed Final Fantasy VII or Return to Kranodor should look out for Septerra Core.”

Freespace 2
“The best traditional space sim to come along in some time isn’t from LucasArts or Origin. It’s the sequel to the well-done Freespace.”

Messian
“It was foretold that the messiah would return after 2000 years. Apparently, he caught an earlier flight.”

Sim ThemePark
“The theme park is back in town and the kids are clamoring at the gates. The only thing is you haven’t built it yet.”

What I Want:

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<th>PC PRE-ORDERS</th>
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RECENT RELEASES

| Quake III Arena | $43.95| 44 |
| Unreal Tournament | $43.95| 44 |
| Asheron's Call | $42.95| 43 |
| Tomb Raider Last Revelation | $32.95| 38 |
| Half-Life Opposing Force | $38.95| 37 |
| Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine | $32.95| 38 |
| Septerra Core | $38.95| 37 |
| Freespace 2 | $42.95| 43 |
| Messiah | $42.95| 43 |
| Sim ThemePark | $42.95| 43 |

TOTAL

* Check UGOdirect.com for current prices
they mushroom into heavy philosophical debates on topics such as existence, doubt, entropy, or the will to live. The ethical dilemmas presented surpass even those of the mighty ULTIMA IV, the 15-year-old standard for ethics-based character development. The writing can get heart-wrenching at times – such as the incredible guilt I felt when I heard Morte, the floating skull side-kick, tell about his past, or the vulnerability felt in reliving someone’s dying moments. Also, sometimes the game’s best moments are written in excellent prose rather than portrayed on-screen, leaving a lot to the gamer’s imagination.

Problems in Paradise
There are just a few problems with this game. A few bugs will cause some quests to remain unsolvable when certain actions are taken; armor class can get screwy after spellcasting; auto-pause doesn’t always work correctly; and a memory leak can severely slow things down. Some gamers might get annoyed at the gradual linear-ity of the story, and others will be miffed that there are so many courier quests.

Finally, a personal annoyance of mine is that certain elements of the rich story are completely optional. You can go through the game doing only the necessary work and get a great story, but if you take the extra time, you’ll get an amazing story. I sometimes wished that certain story elements were part of the main quest rather than side quests. Yet, it’s a testament to the game that despite all of these annoyances, it still kept me up nights and consumed the majority of my gaming time, even after finishing it twice with two radically different characters.

There are certain, rare games that have become experiences for me, such as the raw, visceral DOOM and the majestic CIVILIZATION II. I’m completely surprised by how quickly PLANESCAPE has become one of these experiences as well. Most of this is based on design and story content – never mind the beautiful art or the atmospheric sound and music.

PLANESCAPE is simply the best RPG since FALLOUT, and for gamers who don’t mind putting up with minor annoyances, a tome of text, and the possibility of questioning your own values, it’s time to see what being immortal is all about.
DISCOVER
Set sail across vast oceans to discover new islands and worlds filled with varying terrain and resources.

COLONIZE
Claim an uncharted island as your own. Then, establish your settlements, use resources, and begin to build a new country in your name.

BUILD
Begin with a simple settlement of farms and fishing villages. Establish industries, develop an economy and grow your population to turn your early settlements into thriving towns and cities.

TRADE
Establish treaties and trade routes with other islands and colonies. Good relationships will guarantee your success.
Features:

- 1602 A.D. is a unique blend of two exciting genres, part empire builder part real time strategy
- Discover over 700 unique islands with varying landscapes
- Over 90 building types. Over 30 unique trades
- Single player mode offers a choice of seven campaigns, continuous play or more than 40 scenarios with pre-set missions
- 5 tutorial games guarantee a quick and easy entry into gameplay
- Real time land and sea battles
- Lavish 3D animation replace functions filled by statistics in other games
- Dynamic artificial intelligence automatically adjusts to player’s skill level
- Cinematic transitions between scenarios
- Multiplayer mode for up to 4 people per network or 2 players via modem and includes over 30 unique multiplayer scenarios
- Map editor lets you create your own new world to build and rule

CONQUER
Use battle ships and troops to keep your settlements safe and trade routes free from hostile enemies.
Or, wage war against your enemies.
Jane's F/A-18 Delivers Its Payload on Target

One Super Hornet Sim

Jane's latest hardcore simulation, featuring the U.S. Navy's brand-new F/A-18E Super Hornet, carries on the fine tradition established by the LOMBOV series and F-15E flight sims. As with its predecessors, F/A-18 combines an authentic flight environment and highly-detailed avionics modeling to create a superb sense of flight.

Most gamers reserve reading a game's manual as a final act of desperation. Indeed, the quality (or lack thereof) of many game manuals may well have trained their readers to behave this way. F/A-18's manual, however, is a welcome exception to the norm. Although it appears a little small, weighing in at 200 pages, it is absolutely packed with information, especially regarding avionics, electronic warfare, and target recognition as I have seen in a single source, let alone a game manual. And there are some real gems of information that aren't usually available to the public.

The Big Picture
F/A-18 features numerous other improvements over previous Jane's titles. Compared to F-15E, F/A-18 contains roughly twice as many campaign videos and 50 percent more digitized speech, with some 39 voice actors.

You'll find the usual variety of gameplay modes: instant action, narrated training missions, single missions, and campaign play (including multiplayer campaigns). Training debriefings are particularly interesting, providing "did you know?" tidbits about each mission. The campaign engine uses the usual method of reasonably random missions, interlinked to form an overall war. While not truly dynamic, mission elements provide some level of replayability.

The mission editor, of course, allows players to create missions to their hearts' content.

Under the Microscope
The flight model may well be the most heavily scrutinized, heavily criticized aspect of any flight sim. For a $40 computer game, F/A-18 holds up remarkably well when compared to real-world flight parameters. The real F/A-18 is an outstanding fighter, but bleeds speed rather fast. Sim jocks, thanks to the flight-control system, can hold the stick full aft all day without departing. Doing so, however, will bleed the speed and leave the simulated jet an easy, wallowing target. The flight-control system is no replacement for real-fashioned energy management skills. At the same time, the E-model's larger engines (delivering 30 percent more thrust than previous models) can accelerate the jet rather quickly. It's very easy to overshoot a slow enemy or to come in too fast to land on the carrier.

As the manual indicates, available G-load varies based on weight and flight profile. The jet has a tendency to pitch up at transonic speeds, which is normally corrected by the flight-control system. Still, available G-load drops below 6g at transonic speed to prevent accidental overload.

The avionics suite introduces many features never seen before in a flight sim. For example, F/A-18 takes non-cooperative target recognition (NCTR) a step beyond FALCON 4, providing more details about operation and usage. F/A-18 features decoys, which saved more than one Hornet in operations Desert Storm and Allied Force (and probably account for more than a few bogus enemy-kill claims).

The weapons model breaks new ground as well. The AIM-120 AMRAAM (medium-range missile) goes beyond the one in FALCON 4 by providing a "LOST" cue when it is unlikely to hit its target. The AGM-88 HARM (anti-radar missile) also has advanced modeling, allowing multiple modes of operation. Besides targeting and attacking an emitting site, the missile may also be fired at pre-set coordinates or even "blindly" ahead, where it will search for and engage emitters.

For those who want to experience Navy-style probe-and-drogue aerial refueling, F/A-18 will show you why it requires a steady hand. After making a correction, allow the plane to settle on its new course before yanking the stick around more. This prevents over-controling (don't forget: Wobble your toes!).

Call the Ball
As we can rightfully expect, F/A-18 features the absolute best aircraft carrier environment found in a sim. The carrier moves forward, pitching and rolling with the waves. This effect is particularly noticeable when waiting for a cat launch during bad weather, as the horizon appears to rise and fall. Reliable ATC calls will get the player airborne and back on the deck, although I found the "radio stack" (which causes multiple calls on multiple channels to continually step on each other) annoying, even if realistic.
Particularly interesting is the treatment of the carrier’s "meatball" lens system. Located along the left edge of the deck, the meatball helps the pilot line up during the final seconds of a carrier trap. The limited resolution of computer monitors, however, makes realistic placement of the meatball on the deck very difficult to see until after one has already landed. Jane’s broke with this less-than-useful tradition, placing a meatball “window” over a non-critical part of the instrument panel. When the pilot “calls the ball” during approach (indicating he has visual contact), the meatball appears over a central control panel. Although technically unrealistic, the feature offers a much more realistic landing experience by providing a fully usable meatball. It’s a worthwhile tradeoff to let you experience what a real pilot experiences, rather than to see what he sees.

Sometimes combat provides enough white-knuckle trauma for the fighter, and the thought of repeated sorties during a bad-weather night landing isn’t appealing. Consequently, F/A-18 also simulates the real world Automatic Carrier Landing System (ACLS), which brings the jet back aboard the ship “hands-free.”

Any Downside?
Perhaps F/A-18’s weakest category is the cockpit graphics. While featuring higher resolution than Jane’s F-15, the cockpit is rather blocky compared with sims like FALCON 4.0. But the terrain looks reasonable and features some great weather and shading effects. Most importantly, the opponent’s wings are clearly visible at dogfight ranges. Damage effects during combat, especially burning planes falling from the sky, are rendered quite well. Long, streaming smoke trails from missiles and wounded planes highlight the sky. Graphics detail, though, has always devoured CPU cycles, and F/A-18 is no exception. If you want maximum graphics detail, be prepared to sacrifice frame rate (and vice versa).

In the end, F/A-18 is a truly remarkable game, and clearly an evolutionary step in the Jane’s line. This title gives an excellent glimpse at the workload of an F/A-18 pilot, and provides a very authentic – as well as entertaining – flight experience.
For your safety
In preparation for takeoff, securely fasten your racing harness. You are flying in the Porsche® 911® turbo—capable of launching from 0 to 60 in 4.3 seconds and cruising at speeds in excess of 170 mph. Please remember, smoking the tires through 360s and four-wheel drifts is strictly encouraged. We know you have a choice when it comes to your adrenaline needs—thank you for choosing Need for Speed.

Sicherheitshinweise
Vor dem Start die Sicherheitsgurte fest anlegen. Du fliegst im Porsche 911 Turbo.

Mesures De Sécurité
Veillez à bien attacher vos ceintures en vue du démarrage imminent. Vous vous trouverez à bord de la Porsche 911 turbo.

安全のために
離陸時には、必ずシートベルトをしっかりと締めてください。
現在、ポルシェ911ターボで飛行中です。

Also available for Playstation® game console.
ELECTRONIC ARTS®
www.needforspeed.com

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EXIT OPERATION:
OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS. IF SCENERY IS MOVING—REMAIN IN VEHICLE. IF STATIONARY, PROCEED WITH CAUTION TO NEAREST EXIT.
QUAKE III ARENA Is Good Pure Deathmatch, but That's It

Barely A Tremor

I confess: DOOM nearly killed my Computer Graphics course grade. While WOLFENSTEIN 3D was a great at-home diversion, DOOM sucked up my lab time during class. When I should have been creating Bezier curves and fiddling with CorelDraw, I was either thumping Imps or watching a classmate's little mannech clutch his throat in agony before crumpling onto the floor. When I joined CGW, I joined a House Of QUAKE. It ended our days; it soothed our nerves; it sometimes delayed the magazine. I thought the proud House Of QUAKE would still stand with the release of QUAKE III ARENA (Q3A), but, alas, it fell.

Engineers of Destruction

Before I get to The Fall, let me say this: Nobody — and I mean nobody — can code engines like John Carmack. Q3A proves that. Network-wise, Q3A is very solid; though the few times it stumbles, it falls flat on its face. A couple times, I've had timeouts on the office T1, and while it's very playable on my piddly 56K connection at home, that pesky network socket flashes on my screen a lot more often than want-ed. It's not as perfect as, say, QUAKE II's or even QUAKEWORLD's network code, but I'm sure it'll be tightened up. Out of the box, it's still very reliable.

Utilized properly, Q3A has some of the best graphics in any action game. Techheads will note the heavy use of curved surfaces and volumetric fog, while visualists will appreciate their excellent use within levels. Also, while these elements help make the levels look beautiful, id has yet to grow out of an extremely limited color palette. They've merely added red and purple to their now-familiar collection of browns and grays.

While the limited color palette makes the levels a bit drab, their design is geared entirely towards gameplay. The levels are generally divided up into themes; some are gothic arenas, others are twisted hybrids of organic and metallic form, and the last few are free-floating space platforms. There are hardly any "hot damn, that's pretty" feats of architecture in Q3A; all the walls and ceilings and arches are built from a deathmatch gameplay perspective. Paths are laid down in such a way that maps are easy to navigate, yet they aren't bone-numbingly simplistic. Every level is laid out to give the perfect balance between finding someone else quickly and having the time and space to gather your items. Many items and secrets have multiple methods of reaching them (i.e., doors or pads or rocket-jumping) in order to prevent the "only one way to get there" syndrome. Some levels emphasize close, tight combat (the one-on-one tourney maps) while others (any of the tier-six maps) have wide-open areas perfect for spraying indiscriminate fire. All in all, id is still untouched when it comes to designing pure deathmatch levels.

Boys and Their Guns

Traditionally, most DM modes in other games have had a limited variety of characters to play; they were all basically different colors.

Requirements: Pentium 233 MHz, 64MB RAM, 256MB hard disk space, OpenGL, supporting 32 card, mouse. Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 300 MHz, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard disk space, fast Internet connection, 3D Support: OpenGL, Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-32 players), CD needed for single-player or game creation.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: id software • $50 • www.quake3arena.com
ESRB Ratings: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

MARCH 2000 • cgw.gamespot.com • COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
For the record, we at CGW like UT better, hands down. UT simply has more: more gameplay thanks to the various play modes; more interesting levels that seem more like environments, rather than just maps some guy made; way more colors; and more simple mods out-of-the-box. While UT's hot AI is imperfect, it doesn't outright cheat as much as Q3A's, and it also handles teamwork much better. Sure, Q3A will undoubtedly be the subject of many user-designed mods that will expand its playability, but UT already has a solid foundation out-of-the-box for future user-designed mods to stand on. Considering the variety, the gameplay, the AI, the polish, the overall sense of character, and the way the game is just so intoxicatingly fun—if we have to give the nod to UT, the CGW House Of Quake has been toppled.

and outfit on the same model. Q3A ups that by providing 30 different players, most of which are entirely new models. Some models are there for nostaligia's sake — such as the DOOM Marine named, well, Doom, or the QUAKE Marine called Ranger. Others are wholly new creations, such as Orbik the giant-eye-with-legs, or Uriel the wingless gargoyle. It's a refreshing change to be able to play as something other than a male human, female human, ugly human, or humanoid robot. Not surprisingly in this steroid-packed game, the majority of the female models tend to look like supermodels packing enormous...um...guns.

About those guns: Q3A's weapons exhibit extreme More-Of-The-Same syndrome. You've seen all of these weapons before, and with the exception of the BFG, they've been only slightly tweaked. The rocket launcher is still the dominant weapon; the shotgun still has two barrels and thumps people up close; the plasma gun fires the same blue balls of death; and the railgun is still the sniper's choice. Sadly, the lightning gun no longer discharges pure death in the water like it did in QUAKE, and the BFG went from blasting an all-consuming deathball to a rapid-fire quad rocket rifle (id wanted a bit more skill to be used in BFGing people). Sure, they're well-balanced — man alive, they should be after having been used in four games.

(Very) Artificial Intelligence
One of the big marketing points for Q3A is the bot-play, but bots are a hit-or-miss affair, with more misses than hits. On the default set-

PULSATING PASSAGEWAYS Curved surfaces allow the id team to add H.R. Giger-esque techno-organic tubes and other such rounded landmarks to the levels.
WATCHING THE WATCHMEN

Before joining any big game, you can always scope out the territory as a spectator.

TEAM ORDERS

DO AS I SAY Transmitting orders requires either using this menu, typing in the commands, or editing .cfg files to bind commands to keys. None of these options is as effective as UNREAL TOURNAMENT's command interface.

MAKE HASTE Q3A's list of power-ups include Haste (picted), Quad Damage, BattleSuit, Flight, and Regeneration.

OLD MAN MURRAY Leave it to id to place little references to, er, icons of the online community.

BFG? BFD! The BFG is basically a super-bolely rifle now, so you'll need to actually aim it this time in order to reduce your opponents to a cloud of pulp.

ting (Bring It On), they're complete pushovers; playing on I Can Win! is akin to playing with brain-damaged monkeys. Crank up the AI a bit, and they start getting better. They don't follow strict patterns, and in fact, they almost have personalities (some bots prefer being railgun snipers, while others have different levels of aggression/cowardice). Their personalities extend to the goofy text messages they often type to each other. These range from pure trash talk to compliments to utterly bizarre comments (while it's funny to see Bones quote a Dickinson poem, it reinforces the fact that it's a hot - since I've never seen a player who'd type in an excerpt of a 19th-century American poet). They even have full conversations with each other (and you, if you type something to them), which sometimes has the side effect of making the game feel so surreal. I half-expected some giant, smiling tiger-elephant from a Dalí painting to suddenly swim by and tip its hat at me.

It would be nice if id had stepped there, but alas, on the higher levels, the bots cheat - plain and simple. On difficulty modes such as Nightmare, bots are merely decent players with godlike aim; Xaero ably navigates a level and picks up good loot, but when he fires, he never misses. How else can one explain him hitting me on the other side of a map as soon as I respawn? Or how one hit from his shotgun while I had full health and armor kills me, while he can take two, maybe three hits with the same conditions? Good players sometimes fall into patterns that may take a long time to detect, but they rarely have precise enough aim to hit a rapidly-moving target weaving through the air - in one shot with a railgun - while flying through the air themselves. In Q3A, cheaters always prosper, and it sucks.

Singularity Failure

In addition to skirmishes with the bots, Q3A has a tournament mode. What this means is that the 28 deathmatch levels have been divided up into tiers, each tier having three normal deathmatches, and ending with a one-on-one tourney map. Within each tier is a fixed number of bots, with the best bot of that tier being the opponent for the final tourney. On the default setting, I finished this in four hours. Pump up the bot AI, and that became, well, about six-to-eight hours. Yawn. You don't even
get a tangible award or marker for completing it; you just get a goofy cinematic. With the combination of a simply decent skirmish mode and a mediocre tournament, don't be looking for a fulfilling single-player experience. CTF is tackled on as an afterthought; it's nice, but having just four maps out of the box - even if they are by the Godfather of CTF Dave "Zoid" Kirsch - just isn't enough.

Also, there is quite an unfriendly interface to power the game. While the maps and the bots are there to assist newbies, the interface sure as hell isn't. The browser barely passes muster; it's a hassle to refresh, sort, or add servers to favorite lists. It's so barebones that GameSpy or PingTool is pretty much required to find a good server. When setting it up, you have to make a .cfg file that will cycle through the maps, which is pretty weird in an age where every other game has a simple "rotate map" button on their interfaces. Finally, giving orders in CTF requires one to either type them out, or to press Escape and use some arcane menu system. Granted, most of the Q3A audience are hardcore deathmatchers, but why make the claim of "helping to ease newbies in" with such a lacking interface?

It's extremely difficult to slap a rating on Q3A, especially in light of UNREAL TOURNAMENT. On one hand, it ended up with what it set out to make; a solid, pure deathmatch game. But in light of UT, that doesn't seem to be enough; I just want more. I know that deathmatch purists are already eating this game up, and if you crave incredibly fast deathmatch in the realm of DOOM or QUAKE, then Q3A is your game. Those of you who want a bit more depth - and a decent single-player mode - should either pass, or buy this title and wait for the online community to make mods for you.

www.gamespy.com Go here to spare yourself from the cumbersome server browser.
www.bluesnews.com/quake3 The never-sleeping Blue maintains a good central-resource area for Q3A players everywhere.
www.planetquake3.net A good resource for news, mods, and levels.

FATALITY!

Particular feats, such as well-placed shots or multiple frags, are signaled by flags above players' heads. The yellow icon here is accompanied by a hearty "Impressive" voiceover.

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CLOSE COMBAT IV Tautly Reenacts the Battle of the Bulge

Mayhem in Miniature

Fifty-five years after the actual battle, CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE takes gamers back to the desperate, hand-to-hand fighting in the latter stages of World War II. Like its three predecessors, BATTLE OF THE BULGE gives you an eye in the sky, far enough away to monitor the battle, yet close enough to hear your men shooting, shouting, and dying.

CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE adds a number of new features to the award-winning, real-time, tactical combat system that have a dramatic impact on play. For starters, the game incorporates an all-new strategic layer that lets you plot the movement of battle groups and monitor the location of the front lines throughout the course of the campaign. This is an important advancement for the series, because it gives players a better sense of the battlefield and where they can best employ their assets. Second, the designers have finally added air-to-ground support to the system—something critics have been clamoring for since the release of the first game—and they've even managed to include off-map artillery fire and parachute drops. These are certainly long-overdue improvements, and they help put the game on an entirely different level from its earlier chapters.

Familiar Terrain

BATTLE OF THE BULGE is not without its problems, however. While playing the Grand Campaign, I noticed that my German assault groups were fighting for the same piece of ground again and again, even though I had gained a Total Victory earlier in the campaign. To make matters worse, I was oftentimes commanding the same forces I had led earlier, and in some instances, I was fighting with units that had been destroyed in earlier engagements.

I also found the computer opponent and strategic layer to be a bit troubling. At the tactical level, the computer-controlled American forces would often launch feeble counter-attacks along narrow avenues of attack when they had absolutely no hope of achieving success. In fact, on several occasions my units were able to flank the enemy's axis of advance, smash their assault, and gain a Total Victory while remaining on the defensive—all without the loss of a single landing. Meanwhile, at the strategic level, the computer's forces would put up only token resistance at critical road junctures, especially along the key approach routes to the River Meuse. As a result, I was able to brush past the enemy's defenses, seize my objectives, and advance toward Antwerp well ahead of schedule and without suffering grievous casualties.

So what's my assessment? Well, even though the strategic layer adds a welcome new dimension to the system, and the AI has been tweaked to provide a bit more challenging play, I'm of the opinion that the tactical and strategic layers could have been better integrated to offer a more cohesive plan of action. And while BATTLE OF THE BULGE is certainly an important step forward for the war gaming community—and, in particular, the CLOSE COMBAT series—it still has several miles to journey before it has indeed reached its final objectives.

CGW RATED

PROS
Engrossing gameplay; new off-map artillery, air support, and strategic layer.

CONS
Battles sometimes need to be relought unnecessarily; dead units reappear in later scenarios; AI is erratic.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz or faster, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM, 4MB video card.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 400MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, 3D Support. Note: Multiplayer: Support; 2 player, LAN, modem, Internet, serial, and USB connections.

Publisher: SSI • Developer: Atomic Games • $45 • www.ssiolione.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

AUF WIEDERSEHEN The interface makes it easy to draw a bead on enemy units. The green line indicates a clear line of sight; the exploding Sherman heralds another bad day for the Americans.
SWAT 3 Bursts Onto the Tactical Combat Scene, Armed to the Teeth

COPS 3.0

Like the heavily-armed precision team it models, SWAT 3 kicks in the door of tactical combat games, bristling with innovation and human all-business attitude. The game introduces several new features such as dynamic orders and communication, randomly-placed suspects and objectives, and uncannily human artificial intelligence. It's the most convincing first-person simulation of close-quarters battle since RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR, and in many respects is more realistic and demanding. In fact, the simulation is so complete, it underscores once again why you never want to be a cop.

Welcome to SWAT, Please Train Yourself
One of the biggest hurdles to enjoying SWAT 3 is teaching yourself how to play it. Without a tutorial and with the sparsest of manuals, you are thrown into your first mission without so much as knowing how to open a door. You'll learn the ropes, but the oversight is especially unfortunate considering how some training could have deepened the game's realism.

The game unfolds through 16 missions in locations throughout Los Angeles in 2005. As commander of a SWAT team, you'll be called to rescue hostages, escort dignitaries, serve warrants, or "bring order to chaos" in many elaborate and unusual scenarios. The art direction and design of these locations are superb, and the objectives are interesting and varied. More importantly, the scenarios are different every time you play them, because the threats are randomly placed. (The game's producer, Rod Fung, says the team created 500 different starting locations for hostages. That sounds right, because I've died in at least that many ways.) The random-threat assignment is one of the game's best features and gives it serious replay value, crucial in a game with no multiplayer support.

A story emerges after a few missions about a Russian terrorist group intent on vaporizing downtown LA with a tactical nuke, right before the signing of the Nuclear Abolishment Treaty. The story is interesting, but not as detailed or dramatically enacted as the one in ROGUE SPEAR.

Each mission is preceded by a convincing briefing that lays out the mission objectives. In most cases you'll learn what kind of threat you're facing and who to look out for. The narratives are crisp and well acted, and they do a great job of creating urgency. At the end of the briefing, you select your weapons (Benelli shotgun or silenced MP5 if the suspects don't seem to have body armor, M4 assault rifle if they do) and head out on the hunt.

Watch My Back
Once the mission starts, you're in command. You must instruct your officers as to what to do as you enter buildings and clear them of threats. Rather than take point and try to be a hero as in ROGUE SPEAR, you issue orders to your team from behind them with a menu of commands such as "Enter and Clear" or "Cover for threat." It's a bit awkward at first, but after a while it becomes natural -- and essential -- for survival.

Rarely do a game's elements synthesize so perfectly as in this one. The detail of your men, the design of the locations, the intelligence of the suspects, and the erratic behavior of hostages all come together to create a chaotic, thoroughly realistic simulation of what you'd expect to face on the job.
expect a SWAT operation to be. When your men encounter threats, they'll yell, "Drop your weapon, moron! Get down on the ground! Do it!" Sometimes the suspects will cooperate, other times they'll start firing and you'll hear, "Officer down! Officer down!" Many times you'll lose half your team if you overlook a door or a terrorist hiding spot. In the heat of the moment, it's easy to shoot a hostage or even a member of your own team because he stepped into your field of fire or you confused him for a terrorist. Thankfully, your own team will never plug you the same way, but if you shoot one of them, watch out.

This illustrates another of SWAT 3's advancements in the tactical-shooter genre: You have to discriminate in your choice of targets. You're a police officer, not a member of an elite military group like Rainbow or Delta Force, so you have to ensure hostage safety or you'll lose the mission. The game includes a number of tactical aids based on real SWAT equipment to help you. These range from non-lethal shotgun rounds to tear gas, flashbangs, and a very useful remote video camera. All of these make it possible to identify and disable threats without firing a shot. Of course, if you want to execute terrorists in retribution for wounding your officers, you can do that, too. But you have a leadership rating in the campaign based on your effectiveness and the proper use of deadly force. If officers lose respect for you because people are getting injured and killed, they won't be so quick to follow orders.

**Flies in the Ointment**

Most of the time, SWAT 3 is a suspenseful, immersive, action-packed simulation that succeeds in what it sets out to do. But there are several things that hold it back, and I don't mean the minimal manual or the lack of multiplayer support. First, I wouldn't expect 10-year SWAT veterans to go plunging off into dangerous locations without cover at the first sign of threat. The officer AI isn't bad, but you'll need to corral your teams and tell them to cover far more often than you should have to. If not, they'll die.

Second, despite the fact that you may be ordered to rescue the president of Russia from a hotel, escort dignitaries at the Convention Center, or disarm a nuke at City Hall, you never have more than a four-man team. Imagine being a SWAT commander facing a barricaded force three times your size—and not being able to call in backup.

In the tedious-but-not-ridiculous category, the necessity of calling in every hostage, suspect, and downed officer bags down the game with busy work. It would have been nice for fellow officers to be able to assist with calling in trailers.

Finally, even though there are only 16 missions, a lot of people will never finish the game either because it's too hard or because the last mission is a maze. With such fascinating scenarios earlier in the game, I was disappointed that the last level is a timed maze with seven devices, randomly located throughout a vast sewer system. If I wanted to feel desperate and under the gun, I'd work for a newspaper.

**Debrief**

Despite these issues, I still recommend SWAT 3 for those interested in a challenging and deep tactical-combat game. It gives ROGUE SPEAR serious competition; but even though they both have strong replayability, I'd give a slight edge to ROGUE SPEAR for its greater sense of drama, additional replay options, multiplayer capability, and just plain fun.

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**Waving the Magic Opti-Wand**

One of the best tactical aids in SWAT 3 is the Opti-Wand, a slender video camera with a 180-degree field of view, mounted on a flexible tube. The device lets you peer around corners to see who might be lurking there. You can order your Element to use the Opti-Wand and report back what they see, or you can use it yourself. By using the Opti-Wand to "mirror" for threats, tossing in tear gas, and yelling "Police! Come out with your hands up!" most suspects will surrender without a fight. 
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Lara Croft Returns For Her Last(?) and Perhaps Best, Adventure

Her Roots Are Showing

L

ove her or loathe her, Lara Croft is back, and for the last time if we can believe Eidos’ promise to kick their Lara habit. TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION is the game that fans of the series have been waiting for since the original. Everything that was good about the first game has been rehashed, and everything wrong with the sequels has been either fixed or minimized, making THE LAST REVELATION as good as the first TOMB RAIDER game — and in many ways even better.

The story this time has something to do with mystical amulets, awakening ancient Egyptian gods, and a mentor-turned-evil-nemesis who looks and sounds a lot like Tot from RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK. In fact, the first level flashes back to Angkor Wat in 1984, and follows teenybopper Lara and her then-teacher as he trains her in basic maneuvers. It’s a rather boring level, and a poor substitute for Lara’s mansion, which served the same purpose but contained a lot of secret goodies and was way more fun. The rest of the game takes place entirely in Egypt where you will actually raid tombs, something that the previous sequels had moved away from.

Gameplay hasn’t changed in any fundamental way. You’re still doing the same running-jumping-climbing-swimming moves, but with a few new additions. Lara can now use poles to climb up and down as well as swing from ropes. The ropes are a nice nod to realism, but are very difficult to use, especially when you have to swing from one rope to the next. Thankfully, the number of box-pushing puzzles has been reduced considerably, and the new variations on switch-pulling (hanging switches, chain switches, upside-down switches, etc.) refresh that terribly tired element of puzzle solving. On the whole, the puzzles are truly unique and intelligently placed around the levels.

Lara’s arsenal has been pumped up to include a scope that fits on several weapons, and several new types of ammunition. The crossbow, for instance, can fire normal bolts in addition to explosive and poison-tipped bolts. And when outfitted with the scope, a weapon is fired from a first-person sniping mode.

The game’s dated graphics engine may be its biggest weakness, but the serious effort the designers put into making the levels look beautiful and exotic pays off so well that I can’t fault them for reusing it. The texture work is some of the best I’ve ever seen, and the addition of bump-mapping really makes a difference. The level design is quite varied and skillfully done. Believability and atmosphere seem to be the focus over humorous, overly-campy rooms. The elegance and diversity of the layout in the Lost Library of Alexandria level make it one of the best levels in the series.

It seems that the designers at Core finally listened to all the complaints about the various TOMB RAIDER games and put out a game that finally does the series some justice. They went back to what made the first one good — elegant level design, a continuous sense of discovery, and a mood that strikes a perfect balance between tension and satisfaction.

If you’re like me and were enraptured by the first game in the series, but consistently disappointed by the sequels, then THE LAST REVELATION will revive your faith. If you’ve never played a TOMB RAIDER game, then there’s never been a better time to start.

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**PROS**
- Excellent art direction; good puzzle design; a return to the series’ earlier style.

**CONS**
- Tired engine; gets tedious in places.

**CGW RATED**

---

**Requirements:** Pentium II 266MHz, 16MB RAM

**Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 300MHz, 32MB RAM, 3D Support: DirectX 6.0a

**Multiplayer Support:** None

**Publisher:** Eidos • **Developer:** Core • **$45** • **www.eidos.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated violence and blood
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- Gamer’s Source

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- GameProWorld
KING OF DRAGON PASS Plays Like A Book

Reading is Fundamental

Have you read a good game lately? KING OF DRAGON PASS from A Sharp is a turn-based fantasy/strategy game that is just a few icons and pretty, hand-drawn screens away from being a text-based game. If ever a game was designed to test the hardcore gamer's creed - namely, that gameplay is all that matters - that game is KING OF DRAGON PASS.

KING OF DRAGON PASS is set in the fictional world of Glorantha. You are charged with leading your barbarian clan, one of many that have resettled in the Dragon Pass area. Your goal is to lead your clan to prosperity and eventually form a tribe by convincing other clans to join with yours. The ultimate goal is to see one of your clan leaders become king.

My Kingdom for a Cow!
Throughout, you'll be accosted by raiders from other clans, bandits, shamans, strange creatures like vampires, and more. The coin of the realm is cows. You trade and raid for cows, and only slaughter them for food when you have no other options. You'll also have to juggle resources, and make sure that your people are fed and your weaponshanes (fighting units) are happy and sufficient in number. You'll form alliances with some clans and feud with others. You'll establish trade routes and barter with neighbors. It's the classic decision-making stuff that is at the heart of any good strategy game.

The gameplay is divided into years made up of five seasons. You can take two actions during a season. The actions are grouped under farming, relations with the other clans, trade with other clans, war, council makeup, magic, and adventure. For example, a war action might be to raid another clan, while a magic action might be to sacrifice to one of the gods or to build a temple. Doing both would wind things up for that season.

The best part of DRAGON PASS is the believable fictional world. The writing is quite good throughout the game, especially the myths and stories of the gods. These myths are important, as you'll have to recreate some of them in the form of hero quests to gain the favor of a god and win the game. You'll also be treated to fine writing throughout as each member of your Clan Ring, a group of advisors, offers his or her perspective on a problem confronting you.

While the strategy game offers a wealth of decisions to make, it can at times feel like a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book that turns the pages for you. An event will occur, such as one of your clan women being caught cavorting with a rival clansman, and you will then be presented with a list of choices. Do you 1) ignore it, 2) Force the clansman to marry her, 3) Raid the rival clan or...you get the picture. Pick one and hope you choose wisely. Usually, you don't. This game is not easy. I had to restart several times before I succeeded.

Graphically, the game has nice hand-drawn screens but absolutely no animation. The setting of a battle is described to you and then you choose to charge, skirmish, etc., and the results are displayed. The overall effect is not very exciting. Too many games compete for our attention, and the visual presentation in DRAGON PASS - while pretty in its static, hand-drawn way - is a major drawback.

Ultimately, KING OF DRAGON PASS is a game long on atmosphere and strategic choices, but it fails to engage at every other level. Call me shallow, but I want gameplay and graphics. And I'll bet you do, too.

CGW RATED

PROS
Rich fictional world; myriad strategic choices.

CONS
No visual feedback beyond its hand-drawn screen graphics.

Everyone wants to see the Vargr warfronts which we were able to create...cool graphics. These new graphics include the ability to move your units as you like, rather than having to move them from their default. You can now move your units up to 20 squares and than home. We've also added more detailed hand-drawn map. We've made it look like a real map - and it's ready for those Vargr warfront.
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What's in a Name? In the Case of ABOMINATION, Lots

As Advertised

ABOMINATION is almost a good game. With its RPG-style background and depth, the game offers action-packed strategy similar to a real-time JAGGED ALLIANCE or X-COM...until your team gets into a scrap. Then all hell breaks loose and you're stuck playing a game that shoots itself in the foot again and again with its inadequacies and shortcomings.

A terrible virus, mutants, cultists, a top-secret government facility, a team of biologically-engineered special agents — can anyone come up with an original post-apocalyptic game premise? Oh well, if you can muster the energy, it's your job to outfit and lead a group of 16 commandos, each possessing the standard skills — in addition to the standard cybernetic attributes — as you struggle to stop the carnage and save mankind.

After choosing and equipping your team of four agents, you pick a mission via the file screen, then head off to the overview map where you try to figure out your team's immediate objectives — be it destroying a facility, doing some recon, uncovering a special item, or a combination of goals. ABOMINATION randomizes over 1.2 million tactical sites on 25 different maps, so you'll really never do the same thing twice in the same area. The interface, however, is so messy that you'll spend considerable time just figuring out how to launch your team into action. Once you do, the game moves into a colorful and graphically-appealing tactical 3D environment — even at the 640x480 resolution you're forced to employ.

The real problems surface in combat. For a game touting strategy and tactical elements, a variety of squad formations would have been a blessing — especially when the enemy is tossing grenades and other explosives into your bunched-up group. And your cybernetically enhanced and utterly useless squad will make your blood boil: There's Detonate, a demo expert whose grenades injure team members; Pyro, who can psychically firebomb monsters but does more damage with a submachine gun; and the worthless Doc, a medic with a few combat abilities rendered obsolete by the abundant medical supplies strewn about the maps. Changing equipment and weaponry during the thick of battle is also more of a hassle than what it's worth, since it forces your agents to waste precious seconds of combat, without offering any real advantages.

The combat AI focuses too much on artificial and not enough on intelligence, reducing fights to sloppy street brawls. So much for tactics. Fortunately, when the combat really gets frantic, you can pause the game and issue orders. When combat is over, your team spends too much time scavenging the city rather than saving the world, though the scavenger hunts are necessary since the weapons you'll find are essential later in the game.

Missions are gathered into clumps called chapters, and the last two chapters of the game are almost impossible to finish unless you complete the right tasks early in the game — yet ABOMINATION blithely lets you progress to its impossible end. Saving games is also a problem, since you can't save in the middle of combat, and even worse, you can almost never dump one agent in favor of another after starting a chapter — at least without killing them first. Why can't you choose a four-man team prior to every mission?

What won't drive you nuts in ABOMINATION? Well, as the game progresses, your once common agents become wrecking machines as they gain experience and skills. Short missions keep the game moving along at a nice pace. And the multiplayer options are good, allowing up to eight players for Capture the Flag, Hold Position, Deathmatch, and other games.

ABOMINATION has potential, but squanders it. To enjoy it, you must have the patience to endure the extremely tough missions, clumsy equipment-management systems, worthless cybernetic attributes, cumbersome management; overly difficult missions.
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THE DIFFERENCE WILL AMAZE YOU
Prophecy Unfulfilled

Maya is having a bad day. If life weren't tough enough already—living on the second of the planet Septerra's floating World Shell continents, living off the garbage tossed from the elite Chosen up above—she now has to deal with an invasion, a legendary prophecy, and the discovery of the man who murdered her mother years ago.

That, in a nutshell, is the complicated saga that awaits gamers in SEPTERRA CORE: LEGACY OF THE CREATOR, a Japanese anime-inspired RPG designed by Valkyrie Studios and published by Monolith. Although SEPTERRA CORE isn't a bad game, it owes a lot to Square's FINAL FANTASY console games and seems rather uninspired on its own. That—plus a number of serious design flaws—drag it down to mediocre status, despite a captivating story.

Dull, Voyager

Gameplay takes the form of a lengthy quest through Septerra's World Shells. Maya and her pal party up to journey from Shell 2, all the way to the mysterious planetary Core, before calling it a day. Characters are well-designed, featuring obvious and simplistic personality traits (Maya is plucky, Grubb is a geek).

Corgin is noble, and so on; they have traditional RPG statistics for categories like Strength and Agility, along with health points, armor ratings, and the like.

Weapons and other items can be purchased from vendors on each Shell. Those vary from fantasy role-playing standards such as swords and magic runes to electronic gizmos and automatic rifles.

Mechanical weapons are powered by Core Engines that can be upgraded at various stores. Magic is performed with Core Energy—mana drawn from the powerful bio-computer that sits at the center of Septerra—and Fate Cards found along the way. If your Core Energy is high enough, you can use these cards to heal or resurrect party members, blast monsters with the elements, flee combat, and so on. They can also be combined for more varied effects.

SEPTERRA CORE is extremely combat-intensive. Many locales are straightforward dungeon crawls without the dungeon. You simply follow an obvious path, wiping out untrained groups of baddies along the way. And since combat is handled in a phased, turn-based style, you must stand for an Endurance bar to build up before performing an action, it can be slow and dull.

Even though I was always interested in the storyline, the continuous, repetitive battles wore on my nerves. Playing more than three or four hours at a time proved to be impossible, no matter how much I wanted to go on.

Although there's a lot of interaction with the game's many characters, it's all FINAL FANTASY style—meaning that you simply click your mouse and listen to a lot of long-winded conversations. This gets dreary at times, with all these mini-lectures blending into each other. Modeling all the characters on just a few facial templates doesn't help matters.

Try Before You Buy

Many years in development, SEPTERRA CORE looks and sounds dated. While attractive, the visuals are locked at a maximum 640x480 resolution. Characters are fuzzy around the edges, and there is never enough of the game on-screen at any given moment. You often walked right into enemies before realizing they were there. Audio is similarly limited. There doesn't seem to be more than two brief pieces of grating music to accompany battles, and the weapon effects occasionally sound like something my Sega Genesis would have produced.

Those tired of waiting for SquareSoft to port FINAL FANTASY VIII to the PC may find SEPTERRA CORE to be a decent enough temporary fix. All of the conventions of that long-running series are present, from the never-ending combat to the tangled affairs of big-eyed lovers. For everyone else, though, this is a definite "try before you buy" game.
"I love the smell of melted plastic in the morning."

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NASCAR Racing 3 Is All the Simulation You'll Need

You Couldn't Ask for Anything More

This won't be a surprise to those of you paying attention, but NASCAR Racing 3 is another huge success for Papyrus Design Group. The wizards at the Sierra subsidiary have produced another racing game that walks the fine line between uncompromising accuracy and a fervent rush to the finish line. If you lean toward precise sims such as Grand Prix Legends, you'll find everything you need here. If you favor arcade racers in the Need for Speed vein, this one will convert you.

Those who've played previous NASCAR titles will be familiar with what this game has to offer. Aside from a few concessions to modernity – like 3D support – there isn't much that's new here. Options remain very similar to what was offered in NASCAR Racing 2. You can take part in single races against computer-controlled pros of your choosing, go into Championship mode and drive a full NASCAR season, or hit the online oframp and take on other human racers in Internet and LAN multiplayer. A total of 28 tracks are included, from Atlanta Motor Speedway through Watkins Glen International, as well as all the top NASCAR drivers, including Jeff Gordon, Dale Earnhardt, and Bobby Wallace.

Bound Up

All of this is bound together in a customizable design that's friendly to newbies and veterans alike. To start playing, simply check the options. Turn the driving mode to Arcade and switch off Damage and Player Breakdowns. To really get going as a NASCAR pro, read through the helpful manual and take advantage of advanced garage settings that let you tweak tire weight and pressure, gear ratios, shocks, weight distribution, and just about everything else.

This flexibility is the best thing that NASCAR Racing 3 has to offer over its predecessors. Where I found that the previous games overwhelmed me with their depth right off the starting line, this one drew me in slowly. Instead of feeling like I'd been ordered to learn esoteric details like gear ratios off the bat, I could go at my own pace. This is thanks to both the adaptable design and an excellent manual.

IN THE COCKPIT

The in-car view offers the most realistic angle on the action, though it actually dulls the sense of speed. For a change of pace, and to check your velocity when hitting those turns, try a few laps using the external cameras.

PROS

Flexible engine friendly to both newcomers and vets; successfully walks the fine line between rigid simulation and an oil-burning rush.

CONS

Few advances over the previous games in the series.

SORRY 'BOUT THAT

As in real NASCAR races, nasty accidents are a part of virtually every event in NASCAR Racing 3. I'd like to say that John Andretti went into the wall of his own accord here, but I'm afraid I have to accept a little responsibility over the current state of his ride. On the sunny side of things, I escaped unscathed.

SPINNING

Minor collisions like this spin-out that Jay Jarrell and his Brown Horse forced on me provide a great look at the detailed cars in NASCAR Racing 3.

which clearly details what can be done to your car and why.

Service, Please!

NASCAR Racing 3 is only average in terms of visuals and sound. Graphics are crisp, yet oddly undistinguished. Part of this might be due to the rather bland subject matter; aside from the cars themselves, there's not a lot of color to be found surrounding the gray asphalt ovals in Phoenix and Myrtle Beach. The artists didn't go out of their way to jazz things up; either, the pit crew is unremarkable, and not even a wheel shows up in the in-car view. Audio is also merely serviceable, with a number of up and downs. Spotter sounds good and walkie-talkie-ish, though the high-revving NASCAR engines aren't as throaty as they should be.

Despite these minor shortcomings, NASCAR Racing 3 is a must-buy for any serious racing game fan. We couldn't ask for anything more than this invigorating mix of the thinking person's sim and a arcade fan's thrill ride. Just don't expect a radical evolution over its predecessor. If you're a happy owner of NASCAR Racing 2, you might want to pass. Of course, that says more good things about the earlier game than bad things about the current one. Just make sure that you've got one of them on your hard drive.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 10MB hard drive space, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA video card (supporting 640x480 at 64,000 colors).

Recommended Requirements: Pentium-4, 64MB RAM, Direct3D or 3Dfx video, stereo sound card and pedals or joystick. Direct3D 2X speed, 3D support: Direct3D.

Multiplayer Supports: Up to 4 players (via direct Internet connections, Wininet, IPX, or modem; all players require CD).

Publisher: Sierra Sports - Developer: Papyrus - $50 - www.sierra.com - ESRB Rating: All
Doing the Time Warp, NASCAR-Style

In a nutshell, Papyrus' NASCAR LEGENDS is NASCAR RACING 3 set during the 1970 season. All of the drivers, cars, and tracks from that era are present for your simulated pleasure. So if you want to rip by A.J. Foyt in his Ford Torino at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, leave the Dodge Charger Daytona of Bobby Allison in the dust at the Atlanta International Speedway, or blow the doors off Cale Yarborough's Mercury at Richmond Fairground Raceway, this is the title for you.

Other options are identical to those in NASCAR RACING 3. You can play arcade-style by turning off such things as vehicle damage, and turning on steering and shift assist. Races can be run as one-offs, or played through in a Championship mode that recreates the entire season. Full Internet multiplayer races are supported. Cars can be tweaked to your heart's content. Playing in full-simulation mode means actually dealing with the dirty details, so be sure to read through the thick manual for tips on regulating tire temperatures, manipulating cambers, playing with suspensions, and so on.

Legendary Driving

Building its name, NASCAR LEGENDS is closer to last year's GRAND PRIX LEGENDS than NASCAR RACING 3 in terms of feel. While the uniquely-American NASCAR atmosphere remains, it's offset by a more rigorous driving model, comparable to that seen in Papyrus' more European titles. Don't expect today's technologically advanced wonder cars to save you on the turns; you're driving your father's Plymouth, remember, and the entire setting is less forgiving. As someone who used to drive a '76 Dodge Monaco that handled like a school bus stuck in wet cement, this is exactly what I expected. Let's face it, these behemoths were tough to handle.

Also, some aspects of the game aren't as refined as modern racers have come to expect. Pit stops can be incredibly hazardous. More than once I pulled out and found myself unable to avoid traffic, resulting in some incredible pile-ups. Stops were more frequent than I expected, too, as I burned through tires like they were going out of style (which, of course, they really did, about 25 years ago).

Personally, I appreciated both the time warp and the extra challenge. Other gamers might not. Even those with plenty of NASCAR sim experience might find the game slightly off-putting. There's a lot to learn, and your experience with previous NASCAR games won't apply here. So be warned: If you find NASCAR RACING 3 tough already, the journey back to 1970 will be a frustrating one.

A less-welcome "challenge" for me was the wonky control setup. No matter how hard I tried, the game wouldn't recognize the D-pad on my Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad. I could use the buttons, but never the X- or Y-axis. This didn't bother me too much, as I prefer my Sprint wheel and pedals anyway, but pad drivers should take heed of this problem. I also experienced a number of fatal crashes that booted me back to the desktop, and a flashing mouse cursor on occasion. All in all, the title just didn't feel stable on my system.

High Value... With One Reservation

Presentation values in NASCAR LEGENDS are exactly the same as in NASCAR RACING 3. Graphics are good, with sharp visual quality and 3D support that goes to a crisp 1024x768. The cars look nice and feature the special gloss that vehicles seemed to possess back in the 70's. Tracks are drawn well, although there is a minimum of special effects and surrounding terrain. Audio is great, with rumbling engine bass deep enough to shake windows all over the top floor of my house.

My main reservation about NASCAR LEGENDS is that it's not really necessary. It seems more like a really good add-on to NASCAR RACING 3 than a stand-alone, full-priced product. This might cause some serious qualms at the cash register, especially for those who plunked down 50 bones for the original game a couple of months back. Judged wholly on its own merits, however, NASCAR LEGENDS is a game worthy of recommendation, even with the few bugs noted above. CGW
Interview with the Team of

Thief II: The

“We think that
Thief is really
built around
having the most
sophisticated
AI system
available today.”

STEVE PEARsal - Project Leader

You have a pretty hard act to follow, with fans expecting a great deal of the sequel to Thief. Are you daunted by the task at all?

When we did Thief: The Dark Project we were really exploring a new genre, the first person sneaker, as we like to call it. Since no one else had really built a first person game around a stealth concept before, we had to do a lot of trial and error experimenting to find out what was fun and what didn’t work so well. Now with the benefit of our experience from Thief I, as well as a lot of really good feedback from Thief I players, we are confident that we can take this whole concept of a first person sneaker to a higher level with a better tuned, more focused design and execution which we think will lead to an even more fun and immersive game.

In terms of gameplay, you’ve made no secret of the fact that you consider the stealth element of the concept to be the factor that ensured success for the original. How will you keep all those stealth addicts happy with Thief II? What do you have planned in terms of interface innovation?

Well a lot of the new powers or tools that we have planned are centered around making Garrett a better thief. We want to give the player more opportunity to scout out the mission areas so that they can come up with a more thought out plan instead of just reacting to what they run into. So you’ll see some sort of Thiefsy tool that allows you to see into an area without exposing yourself to being discovered by the AIs.
Can you detail the story of Thief 2? You mentioned Garrett was going to be involved in far more human-based missions. Can you elaborate on this? How important do you consider plot to be to this type of game?

We've got some great plot twists planned for Thief 2 and I certainly don't want to ruin anyone's surprise and enjoyment of how the story unfolds but basically you can think of Thief 2 as a three-act play. In the first act Garrett is just trying to make a living as a master Thief but he runs into increasing interference from the city sheriff. In act two Garrett discovers why the sheriff is hassling him so much more than in the past. In act three, Garrett uncovers the plans of the bad guys, leading him into a big confrontation with the boss bad guy. Garrett will be operating mostly in the city itself and so the missions will be set in more of a city setting. You'll see missions set in places you'd expect to find in a city, like rich people's mansions, banks, churches, and city streets.

How do you think Thief affected the FPS genre? Do you think Thief succeeded on the 'stealth factor' due to a stagnation in the genre?

The FPS genre has been moving towards games with more immersive gameplay set in deep, believable worlds. Thief succeeded because we were able to create a believable compelling world that supported our core gameplay concept that you become a master thief. A big part of that was that our AI's had to be good enough to convince the player that hiding from them was a believable and fun challenge.

Finally, what is it about Thief 2 that you hope will make it stand out from a considerable crowd? What are your plans after the completion of the game?

We think that Thief is really built around having the most sophisticated AI system available today. Thief's success is based on being able to simulate believable opponents to steal and hide from. No one else has AI good enough to really pull this off and we think it will be awhile before anyone else can catch up to us - especially because we don't plan to sit still so there will be a moving target to catch up with.

Not only will the AI system in Thief 2 be the best you can get in any game engine available today, but because of our experience developing Thief 1 along with the feedback we've received from our fans we will be able to craft a better focused, more sophisticated stealth experience. In other words, we can take the whole core stealth experience to the next level.

Probably the first thing we will all do is take three or four weeks off and recuperate from the inevitable crunch time it takes to get a good game out the door. Seriously though, we will be working on taking the Thief franchise to a new level.

WWW.METALAGE.COM

EIDOS INTERACTIVE
What made you choose Latin?

WS The phrase "Deus Ex" is a shortened version of "Deus Ex machina," a literary term I've always liked. Here's the dictionary definition (courtesy of the WWWWebster online dictionary):

Main Entry: de-us ex ma-chi-na
Pronunciation: 'dA-eks-ma-ki-nə
Function: noun
Etymology: New Latin, a god from a machine, translation of Greek theos ex μηχανή
Date: 1697
1: A god introduced by means of a crane in ancient Greek and Roman drama to decide the final outcome.
2: A person or thing (as in fiction or drama) that appears or is introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty.

But that's probably not what you were looking for...

The fact that "deus ex" is Latin, translated from Greek, didn't really enter into the decision. We settled on the name because it actually rewarded knowledge — if you know what "deus ex machina" means, you know a little something about the game that other people won't know until they've played for a while.

Mostly, though, we chose "Deus Ex" because I thought it sounded cool and mysterious.

world is to fight terrorists hellbent on hijacking priceless shipments of the only known treatment for a killer virus called the Gray Death. Little by little J.C. discovers that the terrorists may not be as bad as they seem. In fact, they make a lot of sense, once you start paying attention. And UNATCO? They seem a little bloodthirsty but they make some sense, too. It's all a little confusing...

As for why story is important, well, it provides context — meaning for all of the player's choices. Plenty of games get by without much of a plot but they seem kind of empty and tend to devolve fairly quickly into "everything-that-moves-or-experiences are limited to solve-the-next-goody-puzzle. In Deus Ex, we want players thinking constantly about why they're doing what they're doing. We want them thinking how their actions might affect the people who live in our gameworld. A story filled with interesting characters with interesting lives has a chance of giving each player's actions some meaning.

Storyline in games has become paramount nowadays. Can you give us a brief description of the story behind Deus Ex and why the story is important to Deus Ex's gameplay?

WS Well, we don't want to reveal too much about the story — I have to leave some mysteries for players to solve! What we can say is that Deus Ex is the story of J.C. Denton — the player character — a guy who works for an international agency called the UN Anti-Terrorist Coalition. His job in our near future
Given that Deus Ex blurs the lines separating a variety of genres, how would you describe the game so Joe (or Jane) Consumer can make an informed decision about whether he or she is likely to enjoy it?

**WS** The easy answer (at least for game geeks) is that I hope people can look back at some earlier games and say, "I liked those. Deus Ex is the next step in the evolution of games like that. I'll probably like Deus Ex," And what earlier games would I cite as our predecessors? Ultima Underworld… System Shock… Thief… HalfLife. I'm not saying we'll be as great as those games — though I hope we will! — but they're the games we took the most inspiration from.

For non-game geeks, I guess I'd say Deus Ex is for you if you want a game that really immerses you in an alternate world and lets you decide how to interact with the people you meet there and the situations you encounter.

What one message would you want to convey to gamers about Deus Ex?

**WS** Deus Ex is a game about character development in which all of your character choices are expressible, minute-to-minute, in gameplay and every choice you make has a price — everything has consequences and nothing comes for free…

Does the blurring of genre lines make it easier or harder to balance and tweak gameplay? Is it possible to make a single game that pleases fans of several radically different genres? In other words, will Joe Shooter, Jane Roleplayer and Jackie Adventure-Gamer all find ways to enjoy their time in the world of Deus Ex?

**WS** Certainly, our goal is to ensure that fans of a variety of genres find something to like in Deus Ex. It's really for gamers to tell us how close we came to achieving that goal. I'll tell you, it's a heck of a tough goal! Balancing the gameplay so no one path or character choice is overpoweringly better than any other is a real challenge. The guy who blasts his way through every situation and the person who talks to everyone and kills no one must both have fun and must both have a chance of success. Tough, tough, tough…

You've mentioned AI and physics as things you've enhanced in the Deus Ex version of the Unreal engine. Has this led to any unexpected behavior on the part of characters or objects in the game world? Are you seeing any "emergent behavior" — things the designers didn't plan or anticipate? And, if so, is that a problem or a feature? Can you plan fun that's based on the unexpected?

**SM** Here's my favorite example of emergent behavior: I was standing on top of a three-story building with a pistol. Guards were patrolling below me, oblivious to my presence. I fired off a couple of rounds, which the guards shouldn't have heard because the pistol was silenced. But one of the guards drew his weapon, turned, and started looking around for me, because the shell casing from my pistol had fallen three stories and landed next to him, and he heard it. From my perspective as the AI programmer for Deus Ex, emergent behavior is a feature, not a bug. There's nothing cooler than doing something unexpected in a game and seeing it work the same way it would in our world. It makes the game world feel immersive and real.

You've said that character development is the heart of roleplaying. How important is character development to the Deus Ex experience?

**WS** All game problems in Deus Ex can be solved in more than one way and the choices you make about your character make certain kinds of problem solutions more viable for YOU than other kinds of solutions. In other words, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my weapon skills" you're likely to get through the game lugging around lots of weapons and creating all sorts of carnage. Conversely, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my computer skills" you're going to look for computers and ATMs and security systems to hack and probably avoid combat whenever possible. Character choices expressible in gameplay are what Deus Ex is all about. But the important part of that is "expressible in gameplay" as opposed to the bit about "character choices." Character development in and of itself isn't the point, really.
The Aptly Named ODIUM is Boredom-in-a-Box

Odious

What made X-COM and FALLOUT great games was a fine balance of turn-based RPG strategy, adventure, and combat action. Clones, of course, followed. You can now add ODIUM to the list of badly stumbling pretenders, bogged down by a painfully slow and repetitive combat system and a misguided tendency to tell you a story rather than to let you discover it yourself. This makes for a very boring game.

As the leader of a three-member team of NATO commandos, your mission is simple—find out what happened to another commando team lost in a city called Gorky 17. Your team enters the city under-equipped and under-qualified (wait, aren't these guys supposed to be the “best of the best”?), thus beginning the wherewithal story of science-gone-wrong in combination with deadly government secrets, as you battle through a city ravaged by voracious mutants. You'll also run into a few helpful characters along the way.

Gameplay in this third-person game is divided into Adventure and Battle Modes. You search for clues in the real-time Adventure Mode, interacting with objects and both human and mutant characters. While the interface is fairly simple, a camera control for reaching obscure areas would have prevented an occasional inability to see vital objects and areas. Since characters do pick up a decent variety of weapons and useful items during the adventure—it'd be nice to be able to find them more easily.

And Now for Something Completely Different...

Once mutants appear, the game shifts into the turn-based Battle Mode. The combat sequences take place on a grid system, with team members attacking or defending within a specified range depending on their weapon, movement allowance, and level. Characters can only attack once per turn, but can heal each other or trade items without penalty. Combat can get dreadfully slow — each attack slogs through a scripted pre-battle ritual, like bringing the weapon to bear before performing the attack. The limitations of the combat system are very apparent in the way it forces you to frequently get within a monster's attack range; a rifle that unloads 800 rounds a minute at a maximum-effective range of over 800 meters isn't particularly useful unless it's crammed down the mutant's throat — and it still fires only once per turn. In addition, the combat is boring — even though there's a variety of monster types, each monster attacks and behaves similarly.

Game strategy principally involves placing your characters for the best possible attack and defense. This placement becomes very important when your team is guarding an unarmed character they picked up along the way.

Learn While You Earn

On a positive note, ODIUM allows characters to receive instant experience for their actions during combat. Simply hitting a monster in combat rewards you with experience points. As a result, a character's range and damage ability steadily improve as they fight. When a squad member does increase a level, a character screen instantly appears and halts combat, allowing you to distribute their newly-acquired skill points where you deem appropriate. This is one of the more enjoyable parts of the game, but a lack of real RPG depth makes this a pretty limited source of fun.

ODIUM's sound effects and background music help establish a grim and creepy mood, until the campy dialogue and limp voice-acting kneecap it. ODIUM's game environments possess a gritty war-torn feel with some cool shadow effects, making Gorky 17 feel like some really bad acid trip set in industrial Pennsylvania.

ODIUM is easy enough to finish in one weekend, and with its scripted — yet predictable — adventure story, this game has little to no replay value. Add some boring monsters and the poorly designed combat grid system, and ODIUM smells almost as bad as its title would suggest.
With Other Sound Cards You Hear Him Empty His Weapon.

With Monster Sound MX400 You Hear Him Empty His Bladder.

S3's Diamond Monster Sound MX400 will rock your PC audio world. Based on ground-breaking technology from ESS and Sensaura, the Monster Sound MX400 adds a whole new twist to your gaming experience with scorching 3D positional audio, so now you hear sounds on a whole new axis—above and below you. And with true quad output and Dolby Digital® surround sound, you create the ultimate PC home theater. Plus you can play, download, store and manage the hottest digital audio formats on the Internet or copy tracks from your CD collection to build your own high quality MP3 files!

SO UP YOUR AUDIO WITH MONSTER SOUND MX400—truly in a class by itself!

*Requires Dolby Digital decoder

www.s3.com
UbiSoft Offers a Cross-Platform Fix for Your Gamepad Jones

Need Consoling?

Make no mistake; from game design to graphic styling, Rayman 2 is a console game. One could even argue that it's a great console game. But does a great console game make a great computer game? In the case of Rayman 2, the answer is...almost.

You play the part of Rayman, an affable creature lacking arms, legs, and neck. Having your feet, head, and hands floating free may sound strange, but it works well visually. And, although Rayman 2 is not as graphically complex as some current PC titles, it looks very good; the clean, simple graphics create the atmosphere of a 3D cartoon. Adding to the cartoon-feel are sound effects reminiscent of a Warner Brothers production. This design approach, combined with amusing cut scenes and tempo-controlling background music, keep the mood of the game light and fun.

The generic "collect the shattered power crystals and defeat the evil forces" plot is more than offset by the level design. Although each level has the obligatory platform jumping, switch flipping, and "fool" collecting, all the main levels offer something new. Before finishing the game, you'll have flown a pirate ship, water-skied behind a serpent, rafted on molten lava, and piloted a rocket strapped between your non-existent legs.

Unfortunately, Rayman 2 suffers from three common cross-platform flaws: compatibility, control, and save-game problems. I tried playing the game on three different systems, and had problems on each. To be fair, two of the systems (both P-II 400s) had weak video chips, but they are representative of what many people have purchased recently. After a few calls to UbiSoft's excellent tech line, I put a spare Voodoo1 in one of the systems and the game ran fine.

Rayman 2 won't let you re-map controls, although the defaults seem logical. Movement controls may frustrate some players, as they are applied relative to the game camera instead of to Rayman. This means that when Rayman is running toward you, his right is your left; his backward is your forward; his death is your expletive. It also means that when the camera pans, Rayman does a Bootleg maneuver without any change to your input.

Winning the "most annoying feature" category, Rayman 2 requires you to complete a level before you can save the game, although there are "soft saves" during the level. Because of this feature, you will sometimes find yourself playing just to make it to the next save-portal. Yeah, that's fun.

Despite its shortcomings, Rayman 2 manages to get a lot of things right. If you are a fan of console games, or are looking for a light, fun action game, Rayman 2 may be the armless, legless, nameless man for the job.
FINAL FANTASY VIII

NOW ON YOUR PC

download the demo at: www.ff8-pc.com
We Could Be Coasters, Just for One Day

Omikrud

As a music CD, OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL is a tour de force; as a computer game, it is a big disappointment. The concept of wrapping an adventure game around a David Bowie album is a cool one – the problem here is with the execution. And your own execution will look more and more desirable, the longer you attempt to play this game.

I had high hopes for OMIKRON. With a gigantic, living world full of characters, interactive environments, and sci-fi coolness, it could have been everything we wanted BLADE RUNNER to be, with elements of fighting games and first-person shooters thrown in, David Bowie – ever on the cutting edge – not only composed all the music, but also appears as two characters and "performs" in secret concerts that take place in the game world. This is by far the only redeeming quality of the whole experience.

OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL
reviewed by Jesse Hiatt

OMIKRON's attempt to cross genres fails on all counts. The adventure component is huge – but linear and boring. You quickly learn that there's nothing alive about the world. You can walk around all day, and talk to whomever you want; but absolutely nothing is going to happen to you, and you're not going to learn anything important until you do the one little obscure thing the designers wanted you to do next. Add to the mix a hundred more useless errands, terrible voice-acting, and a paper-thin plot that takes itself way too seriously, and you've got a recipe for crap soup.

The adventure would have been tolerable if the action sequences were cool enough to function as rewards for your perseverance. No such luck. The worst PlayStation fighting games look good next to OMIKRON. It's practically all combo-based, with none of the art or graceful flow of a SOUL EDGE or TANK. First it's too hard, then it's too easy; rarely is it fun.

The first-person-shooter mode is even worse. Every time you get into a gunfight, it's a complete game-stopper. It's hard to aim, and if you do hit something, often times nothing happens. Enemies pop up out of thin air right in front of you, and the movement is clunky and barely manageable. The only good thing that could come out of this game is if it inspires others to do it right the next time. There was a good idea here, but it was completely squandered.

For Bowie completists only. CGW

CONGRATULATIONS

MARCH 2000
The World Falls Into
SHADOW

www.redstorm.com
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QUICK HITS

PRO PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY

In rock-n-roll, it was the King. In baseball, the Babe. And in the chic, high-flying world of computer pinball simulations, it's Empire Interactive and Cunnin Development, a team that has brought gamers not only the best pinball simulations, but some of the best games, period. PRO PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY is Cunnings' latest (and some rumor has it, last) game in a series of pinball sims that included last year's award-winning pinball masterpiece, BIG RACE U.S.A.

The magic formula for these games is equal parts amazing ball physics, clever table design, and a tight package of sights and sounds that gives each game a unique personality. Playing the Jules Verne-themed FANTASTIC JOURNEY is a lot like playing an adventure game: you slowly figure out the game's "puzzles," then coax your ball on its way through a series of quests involving a submarine, river boat, hot air balloon, and submarine drill machine, all played out visually on the overhead scoring display.

While generally on par with previous efforts in the line, FANTASTIC JOURNEY is a much less accessible design than the previous releases. The wide-open board emphasizes sequences of long, precision shots at drop targets and ball sinks, and the ball tends to "gutter" frequently. And it does take a while for the personality of the board to unfold; you'll have to play a few dozen games before you figure out the basic high-scoring plays. Thankfully, the array of difficulty settings grants some mercy to pinball wimps.

If you have any interest at all in pinball, give your inner-addict some loving and check this game out. ~Chris Lombardi

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE

The real millionaires here are the corporate jackals at ABC and parent company Disney who have turned a simple little quiz show into a license to print money.

But if you're having as much trouble as I am just getting through to the show's toll-free contestant phone number, this bargain-priced game might tide you over. Everything you know and cherish from the TV show — with the exception of real money — is here: fifteen multiple-choice questions of increasing difficulty, the three lifelines, and just enough of the occasional random rant from your host, evil wind-up toy Regis Philbin, to capture that special, fifth-circle-of-Hell ambiance particu-ular to "The Reap." Essentially a solo game, it's no surprise the "fastest finger" multiplayer elimination-round falls terribly flat here; unexpectedly, the Phone A Friend lifeline option is carried off very well, with Regis calling a host of his equally disturbed pals who'll let you know that they just tore off a thumbnail rotating tires before giving you their answer. Sadly, the game's biggest drawback is the way it starts repeating scads of questions after merely an hour or so of play.

It's fun while it lasts, but it doesn't last long. Final answer. ~Robert Coffey

12 O'CLOCK HIGH: BOMBING THE REICH

If its predecessor, BATTLE OF BRITAIN, was a novel, then 12 O'CLOCK HIGH is an epic. The gameplay is the same, but 12 O'CLOCK HIGH expands the scope of this strategic WWII air-combat game from operations in Southeast Asia to the entire Western Theater. The Allies plan bombing, recon, and fighter-sweep missions by micro-managing each attack or by allowing your stuff to fulfill broad orders. The Germans react to raids as the Allies watch the combat. Victory is a function of Allied air superiority, industry, and civilian damage points. Both sides must consider aircraft type, weather, altitude, attack doctrine, the timing between raids, pilot fatigue, morale, and experience.

The similarities between the two games end there. Instead of concentrating on air forces, 12 O'CLOCK HIGH has eight campaigns on specific target types; two campaigns covering the war from 1943 and 1944; and a hypothetical campaign with jets. It also has three grand campaigns, where success is measured by Allied advances. In longer campaigns, the German player chooses which targets to defend and sets production priorities for new aircraft types. Switching production is risky; no older aircraft will be available for replacements, allowing the Allies a chance to ruin the German economy before the new aircraft deploy. The Allies have resource limits, too, and must balance strategic targets against losses. The initial version has flaws in flak and replacements, which have already been patched.

This game is not for the casual gamer. It's not hard to learn the mechanics, but there are a lot of details, and watching raids may be boring for the Allies. The graphics are serviceable — but pixelated and uninspiring. Yet, students of air warfare and fans of BATTLE OF BRITAIN will find it very rewarding. ~Jim Cobb
Tanktics

Gremlin's Tanktics is a cartoon strategy game with a sense of humor. You assemble tanks from parts produced by your Part-O-Matic, which can be accelerated by sheep. Supply the POM with anything: boulders, tank parts, crates and even sheep — and out come parts for your tanks and the occasional power-up.

In 24 missions, divided into four campaigns, you fight on parvenus, miniature-golf-like battlefields going from stone-age through medieval, modern, and future ages. You build tanks from the era you're in. The enemy tanks are drawn from the next period, so your medieval tanks will, for example, face modern opponents. In the future era you face the real enemy: the dreaded Evil Black Tanks, which are an attractive tool-color.

All this would be pleasant enough if 1) you could issue orders while paused, 2) the interface didn't seem designed to help you make mistakes, and 3) you could SAVE while playing a mission. Having spent four hours battling only to crash at the victory screen, or to watch your most experienced tank rendered inanimate by an inadvertent mouse-click, induces fantasies of throwing the designers into their own Part-O-Matic.

—Samuel B. Baker, II

NHL Championship 2000

NHL Championship 2000 plays more like a true NHL game than its competition, with more team play and a slower pace vs. mad dashes down the ice for breakaway slap-shots. The reason is a superb defensive AI that plays like the big leagues; players cover the passing lanes with intelligent positioning. You have to work for shots, and work hard for good shots. But a couple problems mar the gloss on defensive play. The ice is too small, the offensive zone significantly so. On the other side of the ice, weak offensive AI is the biggest obstacle to the game's goal of hockey sim sinthhood.

While it's easy to point out its faults, NHL Championship 2000 still plays a decent game of hockey, and is more like an NHL simulation than an arcade game. There's a core of a solid sim here, but the problems detract enough to prevent a solid recommendation. —Jeff Lackey

Nations: Fighter Command

If you're going to make a historical flight sim these days, you're going to be in direct competition with something else. Unfortunately, Nations: Fighter Command picked a fight with real weightybirds, and it's just not up to the challenge. Putting Nations in the ring with EAW or Jane's WWII Fighters would be like a title bout between Gary Coleman and George Foreman.

The graphics are so-so, the flight models oversimplified, the missions dull, and the controls terrible. It's almost impossible to get it to work with rudder pedals. The lack of standard sim conventions — like putting viewing controls on the function keys — makes one wonder if the designers actually played other games in the genre. If so, they've tried to fix a lot of stuff that wasn't broken.

Ultimately, this feels like an arcade game, but even then it wouldn't pull in many quarters. —Jessie Miat

Shadow Watch

3D in the 21st Century

by Loyd Case

Winter brings with it crisp, cold air; snow in the mountains; and new 3D graphics accelerators. I really wanted to go skiing, but instead I holed up with a Pentium-III and a horde of new graphics accelerators.

On tap is a brood of boards using nVidia's GeForce 256 chip, including three that use the new DDR memory. DDR is a new type of RAM that allows two chunks of information to be transmitted in a single-memory clock cycle, speeding up the process considerably. Standard SDRAM (often termed SDR, or single data-rate memory) hobbled the high fill rate of the GeForce 256 card, but DDR memory alleviates that problem. The chip itself has four pixel pipelines and full acceleration for transform and lighting in hardware (see below for definitions of these techie terms).

Also up this month is S3's new Viper II, the first packaged product born from the merger of S3 and Diamond Multimedia. Viper II uses S3's new Savage 2000 accelerator, which accelerates transform and lighting (similar to the GeForce 256). However, the Savage 2000 only has two pixel pipelines, though they can both do dual texturing in a single pass.

Rounding out the roundup is the Matrox Marvel G400, which has robust video-capture features, a flexible TV-tuner, and the capable G400 graphics chip.

How To Choose the Right 3D Card

Choosing a graphics card can be a frustrating exercise. And the huge feature lists and marketing gibberish printed on the side of the boxes don't make it any easier. Here's our short list for choosing a graphics card:

1. Look at the games you're playing.

A flight-sim buff may have different requirements from the hardcore first-person shooter fan. And if you spend all your time playing turn-based strategy games like Alpha Centauri, then spending top-dollar for the latest 3D technology may be a waste.

2. Look at your system.

A new high-powered 3D card may not be well matched to a 266MHz Pentium-II, which won't be able to really feed the card enough polygons to fully utilize its features. If you do have an older system, consider stepping back a generation. Or, consider spending your money on a CPU/motherboard upgrade.

3. Consider other features as well.

Raw performance is great, but if you need TV-out, video capture, or digital flat-panel support, factor those in as well. As always, consider your budget, too.

DICTIONARY OF 3D JABBERWOCKY

ATI's AFR (alternate frame rendering)
Rage Fury MAXX has two Rage 128 Pro chips, and they "take turns" rendering frames. In essence, one chip handles the front buffer, and the other chip takes care of the back buffer.

3dfx's T-Buffer
3dfx's technology for enabling features like non-intrusive, full-screen anti-aliasing; and cinematic effects, such as motion blur, soft shadows, or depth-of-field effects.

Stencil Buffer
Used to create realistic, volumetric shadows and fog, instead of the more visually distressing "fog plane."
All-Out Performance Winner

There were two clear performance leaders in the bunch. Unsurprisingly, both used Nvidia’s GeForce 256 chip, coupled with 32MB of DDR SDRAM.

Hercules rises like the Phoenix to tie for the top spot. Now owned by Guillemot, the Prophet DDR-DVI resurrects the Hercules name as a performance leader. The surprise was Leadtek’s WinFast GeForce 256, which essentially tied for first. You can’t go wrong with either card – both are fast, have TV-out, and support the emerging DVI digital monitor interface. The Leadtek card might be harder to find, however, since it’s not as widely distributed.

All of the DDR RAM-equipped GeForce boards fared very well in the testing. The Creative Labs Annihilator Pro will no doubt be very widely distributed and therefore may be the easiest to find. The ELSA Erazor X² offers solid performance, a superb control-panel setup, and the excellent 3D-revelator LCD stereoscopic glasses.

Best Bang for the Buck

With street prices from some mail-order sources under $170, the Viper II is a decent card that can only get better when future drivers add support for the onboard T&L engine. In fact, considering the relatively low clock-rate and slow memory on the card, the Viper II performed quite well.

The Asus V6600 GeForce-based card is an interesting alternative with its robust TV input and output; a DDR version should be shipping by the time you read this. However, the Matrox Marvel Q400, despite its low 3D performance, wins kudos for incredibly flexible TV features, hardware-assisted video capture, and excellent video-editing capability.
3D CARD ROUNDUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>3D GameGauge Score</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Web Address</th>
<th>The Skinny</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hercules 3D Prophet DDR</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td><a href="http://www.guillemot.com">www.guillemot.com</a></td>
<td>Pricy card with superb performance and an excellent feature set. It marks the rebirth of the Hercules name.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadtek WinFast GeForce</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td><a href="http://www.leadtek.com">www.leadtek.com</a></td>
<td>The WinFast offers a nearly-identical feature set to the Prophet, at a slightly lower price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELSA Erazor X2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td><a href="http://www.elsa.com">www.elsa.com</a></td>
<td>Good controls, good performance, terrific stereoscopic glasses as an option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Labs Annihilator Pro</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td><a href="http://www.creativelabs.com">www.creativelabs.com</a></td>
<td>Cheaper, but with fewer features; good control panel and decent performance; easy to find.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asus V6600 Deluxe</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td><a href="http://www.asus.com">www.asus.com</a></td>
<td>It's only an SDR board, but 3D glasses and good video-input capability make it an interesting choice for multimedia fans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 Viper II</td>
<td>$199 (SRP) $165 street</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td><a href="http://www.s3.com">www.s3.com</a></td>
<td>Not as fast as the GeForce boards, but good performance at a decent price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrox Marvel G400</td>
<td>$270 street</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td><a href="http://www.matrox.com">www.matrox.com</a></td>
<td>Last year's 3D performance, but offers the best multimedia capabilities of the bunch, including superb TV-out and excellent video-editing capabilities.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

HOW WE TESTED

3D GameGauge 2.5

This month marks the debut of 3D GameGauge 2.5, CGW's testing metric for evaluating 3D graphics cards. GameGauge averages the frame rates of seven high-end 3D games to yield a single performance score to help you compare 3D cards. 3D GameGauge 2.5 runs the gamut of game genres, including arcade action (EXPENDABLE), first-person shooters (UNREAL TOURNAMENT, QUAKE 3 ARENA), sports (NFL FEVER 2000), racing (RE-VOLT), and simulations (PANZER ELITE and JANE'S USAF).

All the tests are run at 1280x768, except Jane's USAF, which had a bug that prevented us from testing at that resolution, so we run it at 800x600. You can see the latest results, and run the 3D GameGauge tests on your own rig, too, by downloading the scripts, demos, and patches from www.3dgamegauge.com.

Our test system consists of an Intel V860 motherboard with a 733MHz Pentium-III, and 128MB of PC100 SDRAM. We chose a high-end system so we could differentiate between the cards. We'll be using this test-bed for the next few months, so you'll be able to compare subsequent reviews with this roundup.

In addition to our spiffy new GameGauge 2.5 benchmarking suite, we also use Ziff-Davis' 3D WinBench 2000, which has full support for DirectX 7.0 transform and lighting. 3D WinBench 2000 also solves the vsync problem by disabling it through the DirectX mechanism for disabling vsync. We're also replacing WinBench 99's Graphics WinMark with Business WinStone 99, which tests actual application performance.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3D GameGauge Score</th>
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<th>3D WinBench 2000 (165/1972)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hercules 3D Prophet</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>68.7</td>
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<td>Leadtek WinFast GeForce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asus V6600 Deluxe (SDR)</td>
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<td>28.9</td>
<td>63.3</td>
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<td>S3 Viper II</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>29.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matrox Marvel G400</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
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**3dfx’s Voodoo 4 and Voodoo 5: Worth the Wait?**

By the time you read this, 3dfx’s Voodoo5 series of graphics cards are still a couple of months out. This brings up an interesting question: Should you wait? Ah, the eternal upgrading question.

Voodoo5 uses two or more 3dfx VSA-100 accelerator chips. (There’s also a Voodoo4 card that uses a single VSA-100, but it’s not a very compelling card for gaming.) But the real monster is the Voodoo5/6000, which has its own power supply, uses four VSA-100s, and has 128MB of RAM (effectively 32MB, because of the SLI implementation). They’ll also be expensive, with a Voodoo5/5500AGP card going for around $300, and a 6000 weighing in at a stunning $600. They’ll have tremendous fill rate, and some interesting features — but they will not have transform and lighting acceleration.

Of course, their competition also have products waiting in the wings. You could, of course, be waiting forever for the next thing. It’s your call, but our take on it is if your current graphics solution is inadequate, then our editor’s choice cards will last you for quite some time.
Under the Hood
BY LOYD CASE

Fear and Loathing of Copy Protection

We Need Copy Protection, but We Need It to Work

Okay, listen up: We're opening with a short quiz. Question #1: What do the following CD and DVD drives have in common?

Question #2: What does the TV show "Barney" and UNREAL TOURNAMENT have in common?
The answer to Question #1: These CD and DVD drives—according to Sierra technical support—may not be able to run either HOMEWORLD or HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE. The answer to Question #2: Barney videos and UNREAL TOURNAMENT both use copy-protection schemes developed by Macrovision, Inc.

Swatting Mosquitoes With a Shotgun
Games have rapid turnover and short lifespans—much more so than business software. So publishers need to sell as many copies as possible in a short period of time. Software piracy can severely impact a game's sales. It's not uncommon for illegal copies to show up on the Net for download—or "Warez" sites—even before they arrive at your local store.

Certainly the plethora of cheap, recordable CD drives and media has caused many game publishers much angst as the problem has mushroomed. To combat this problem, game publishers have turned to companies like Macrovision to help them protect their intellectual property.

Now, I'm all for game companies protecting their titles. With game budgets pushing into the millions of dollars, publishers and studios need to recoup their investments and turn a profit if we want to see the stream of good game titles continue. And because CD-ROMs are much more durable than floppy's, I don't even have a problem with the idea of CD-copy protection.

But what really frosts me is when copy protection punishes me for actually buying a game. And given the number of CD/DVD-ROM drives that have trouble with current copy-protection schemes, I'm not alone in this. If you've ever gotten an error message like "Please insert game CD"—even though the game CD is in the drive—you know what I mean.

Some CD drives are incapable of reading some types of copy protection. (Note that some games simply have bugs, and fail if you have multiple drives, but that's not what I'm talking about.) At other times, I've had games work, but the CD will wildly trash with some drives and not others.

Who Ya Gonna Call?
What to do if your game doesn't seem to run? First, take your CD and wash it in warm soap and water. Some out-of-the-box, new CD's sometimes have a fine film of oil or dust over them that needs to be removed. If this doesn't do the trick, contact the game publisher. If you do get the "your CD drive may not be supported" spiel, then check the CD-ROM drive-maker's website for an updated driver—although almost none of the CD makers listed in the opening paragraph have updated drivers.

As a last resort, you can take matters into your own hands. But let's make this very clear: I do NOT advocate giving away or selling illegal copies of software. But if you have no other recourse, check websites like www.gamecopyworld.com. This is not a website for pirates—the opening message on the site tries to discourage pirates.

And be warned: If you try to modify your game program, you will not get support from the game publisher. In most cases, you will have technically violated your licensing agreement. On the other hand, if it won't run, you've paid 50 bucks for what is essentially a coffee mug coaster. The most useful solution for those "CD not detected" errors is called the "NOCD crack." This usually takes the form of a patch that changes your game so that it can run without the CD present. If you use it, you run the risk of future game updates from the publisher not working. Still, it's astonishing how fast NOCD patches appear for updates.

This really shouldn't be necessary. As hardware and software evolves over time, I hope that software intellectual property can be adequately protected without inconveniencing users. But that time, I fear, may be a ways off.
Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.

To get the Maximum performance out of a multi-user game, get off the Internet and get on a D-Link 10/100Mb Fast Ethernet Network. Up to 200 times faster than the Internet, and 10 times faster than other legacy networks. Easy to set up and install, a D-Link 10/100 Network In A Box comes with everything you need to build a Windows 95/98 Network.
Laptop Gaming

I'm looking around for a good laptop computer that can double as a gaming system. But I'd like to put a fast 3D card in it, too. Does anyone make add-on 3D hardware for laptops?

No. You can, theoretically, drop a Voodoo2 card into a docking station that has a free PCI slot, but there's no way to replace the graphics chip in a notebook PC. 3D graphics on mobile systems have seriously lagged after desktop development, mainly because of power requirements and the lack of a business application for high-speed 3D (as it games aren't enough...). And, a GeForce 256 chip that needs 6 amps of current would suck the will-to-live out of a laptop's battery. Both S3 and AT&I have started to ship fairly-decent mobile 3D chips: we'll be reviewing those systems when they ship.

Mixing Peripheral Types

I have found a good price on the Suncom F15/SFS throttle [a USB device]. However, I also want rudder pedals; can USB be mixed with game controllers (i.e., rudder pedals) that use the traditional PC game port?

There's only one controller we know of that allows this -- LegoTech's Wingman Force Feedback joystick -- and it's something of a hack. While it's theoretically possible, most USB controllers (and drivers) don't take game-port controllers into consideration. However, CH Products is now shipping their USB Pro Pedals, so give those a try.

Adjusting RAM Speed

Is there any way to adjust memory speed? Say I have PC133 SDRAM. How do I adjust it to run at 100MHz?

It depends on several things. First, do you have a PC133-capable system? If so, all you may need to do is adjust jumper on the motherboard or in the BIOS setup program. If you're talking about running PC133 memory on a PC100 system, then you don't have to do anything. The PC133 memory will run fine at 100MHz. Now, if you want to run it faster, you've entered the realm of over-clocking. Many 100MHz systems allow you to change the clock rate of the front-side bus (FSB). However, while the memory itself may run fine at 133MHz, the chipset may not -- or the PCI bus speed may also be raised, causing PCI cards to fail. Tread with care if you start over-clocking the front-side bus.

Scuzy Wuzzy?

What is SCSI, and what is it used for?

SCSI (pronounced "scuzzy") stands for "small computer systems interface." It is a means of transferring data between the different components of your computer. It is most commonly used for high-end mass memory devices like hard drives. Most current generation PCI SCSI cards are compatible with a multitude of flavors of SCSI, and also support up to 14 (or more) devices on one SCSI chain.

DVD Games

I've heard that I need a hardware DVD decoder to play DVD games. Is this true?

First, there aren't a lot of DVD games. There's a special release of Wing Commander IV, River, Journeyman Project 3, Baldur's Gate, and maybe a handful more. Baldur's Gate doesn't count, since all Interplay did was cram the CD content onto one DVD. However, the games that support high resolution, DVD-quality video do require a DVD player to play back the cut scenes, even if your system is good enough to support software DVD. This will gradually change over time, as more true DVD titles ship. Windows 98SE and DirectX now have better support for MPEG-2 and other DVD features.

TECH7IP Free Hard Drive Speed-Up

OK, so it won't be like going from a Fiat to a Ferrari, but by tweaking a system-setting for your hard drive, the drive will cache more file names and disk information, letting it fetch data faster. Right-click on your My Computer Icon; select Properties; and then select the Performance tab dialogue. Next, click on the File System button, and change the setting from Desktop Computer to Network Server. Click OK, then OK once more to close the System Properties sheet. You'll then need to reboot your machine for the setting to take effect.
Yamaha’s exclusive Advanced Active Servo Technology delivers thunderous low end and brilliant highs. The YST-MS30 and YST-MS35 (USB) multimedia speakers will dramatically enhance your gaming and music/MP3 listening experience. Act now and get one for as low as $49.99*.

Save $20 when you buy now!

Get a $20 rebate from Yamaha when you buy YST-MS30 speakers before 1/31/2000. See product box for details.
YOUR TWO BEST RECIPES FOR BUILDING THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

Killer Rigs

Power Rig

Component | Manufacturer | Price | The Skinny
--- | --- | --- | ---
YY Minicube Case | Yong Yang | $213 | Lots of cooling
Motherboard | Intel V820 | $159 | AGP 4x
CPU | Celeron 733 | $720 | It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory | 128MB of PC800 RDRAM | $700 | RAMBUS
Disk Controller | Adaptec 2940ulz | $290 | 80 megabytes per second
Primary Graphics | Creative Labs Aliensware Pro | $270 | DVI SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive | Ica | $20 | You still have to have one
Hard Drive | Quantum Atlas 10k | $580 | Runs warm, runs fast
Backup | Creative DVD-RAM drive | $599 | 2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM | Pioneer GD-5200 | $160 | New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD
Monitor | Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020x | $1,520 | Perfect flat; good USB support
Primary Audio | Sound Blaster Live Platinum | $175 | For four-speaker DirectSound, A30 and EAX
Speakers | Klipsch Promedia | $250 | Beautiful imaging, clean sound
Modem | 3Com DSL modem | $400 | DSL at last
Networking | 3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI | $60 | For bragging my buddies
Networking Hub | Netgear GS108 | $170 | Multilayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply | PC Power and Cooling TurboCool 380 | $99 | More power, Scotty!
Keyboard | Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro | $59 | In with the Nexttouch, out with the Natural
Mouse/Pointing Device | Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer | $65 | No bull!

Total w/o Game Controllers | $6,320

Flight Joystick | CH 30 Combatstick USB | $55 | It just feels right
Rudder Pedals | CH Pro Pedals USB | $100 | Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls | E3000-CRS 4000 | $330 | For the serious sim driver
Action Gamepad | Interact Hammerhead FX | $40 | DualShock-like controller

Total | $7,775

Lean Machine

Component | Manufacturer
--- | ---
Motherboard | Asus P3B-F
CPU | Pentium III 600
Memory | 128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller | Built-in IDE/ATA33
Primary Graphics | Gullimex Xentor 32
Floppy Drive | Ica
Hard Drive | IBM Deskstar 220XP 9.1GB
CD-ROM/DVD | Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor | Mitsubishi 1595
Primary Audio | Audiolink S3250
Speakers | Rocktron Acoustics RA-925
Modem | Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case | Ecora VP50
Power Supply | Built-in, 235W
Keyboard | Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device | Logitech USB Wheel Mouse

Total

Joystick | Logitech Wingman Extreme
Action Gamepad | Grafx GamePad USB

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

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 Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a very good job with current games, and a 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 Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, choose Creative's 3D Annihilator 3D Pro, which goes for around $270 bucks. Admittedly a somewhat-pricy bugger, this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep the GeForce's four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a $270 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra, which is available now for around $150.

Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup, and they've got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate them with.

GET IT TOGETHER

So you've got all this great gear piled high on your dining room table, and you're asking yourself, "Now what?" It's time to take all these pieces and parts and turn it into the gaming rig of your dreams. So how do you get started? Head over to Loyd's PC Workshop page on GameSpot at www.gamespot.com/features/PC_workshop/ for step-by-step instructions on how to put your components together and get your killer rig up and running.
SWAT 3 Strategies

One would hope the real officers in SWAT 2 are a lot smarter than the ones in SWAT 3. Not only will your team members do stupid things that get them killed, but the levels are deviously designed to create all sorts of hideous tactical challenges.

And the bad guys, in medium-difficulty mode, are fast and deadly sharpshooters.

To help improve your chances, we’ve compiled some tactics to get you through three of the most challenging levels in the game. A lot of these tips can also be applied to other levels.

**General Tips**
- If you’re gone dynamic, you can’t order a team to Mirror for threats. But you’ve got an Opti-Wand to help you peek around corners. When in doubt, whip it out.
- Toss in tear gas whenever and wherever you please. Most suspects will surrender without a shot if they’re blind and choking.
- When entering unfamiliar territory, tell one team to cover it, then instruct the other team to move and clear. Keep leapingfrogging in this manner so that one squad covers while the other moves.
- Bang and clear closed doors ad nauseum.
- Your teams won’t cover doors if there is an unsecured suspect in their field of view. Cuff them, then order your team to cover for threats.

**Tango in the Window**
Keep an eye on the window while your Elements are entering through the door. If you get a cooperative tango, cover him until a team can cuff him.

**Gutshot**
Stay low, going up stairs, and you’ll have the advantage if a hostile rounds the corner.

**Peripheral Vision**
Here’s why the Opti-Wand is worth its weight. See the bad guy in the Opti-Wand window? Bounce some tear gas off the wall and bug this town.

**Sitting Duck or Decoy?**
Suspects have a tendency to cooperate in the worst places. This officer can be ambushed from three areas if he tries to cuff this guy, so be sure to cover for threats.

**Home Invasion**
As soon as this level starts, tell the Element to fall in and cover. Then check for threats and make abaseline for the right side, ground-level entry. Be sure to cover the window first before entering.

**The Prize**
She’ll be in psychotherapy for years to come, but at least she’s alive.
**SPECIAL DELIVERY** Have the Element cover while you open the service door from the right. Toss in tear gas and get ready for a shoot out.

**DBN Television Station**
The TV station is a tough level. Try entering the station from the side; clear the dressing room area and second floor, then the studio, then the garage and Monkey Bar.

**HEADS UP** Watch the upper level above the dressing rooms.

**BEHIND THE CURTAIN** Have one team cover each side of the partition between the dressing rooms and the studio. Then toss tear gas over the top of the wooden backdrop, and set up your Element to enter the studio.

**The Hotel Carlyle**
Enter the hotel from the basement. Mirror for suspects, toss in tear gas, and then tell one team to search right while the other team searches left. You cover the doors at left and the hallway. Once you've cleared the basement, head up the stairs and down the hall, and clear from the far end back, so you don't get caught in between.

**COVER THIS DOOR** The double doors in the hotel basement will give you fits. Close them and cover them at all times.

**GOING DOWN?** Don't forget to clear the elevator at the top of the stairs.

**HALL OF DEATH** Real SWAT officers will tell you that long hallways with several doors are extremely dangerous. Tell your teams to cover the doors as you move down the hallway. If a door is open, mirror for suspects and toss in tear gas if necessary. If not, go through the door at the end of the hallway, clear the balcony, and start working back. It's a big floor with a lot of rooms, but that's why you worked from the basement up — to reduce the chances of an ambush.
**CGW TIPS**

**CGW TIPS**

**Cheats, Hacks, & Hints**

**System Shock 2**

**Tips**

There's a little amusing Easter Egg in SYSTEM SHOCK 2. On your third year of training in any division, do not go through the door into the skill selection area. Instead stop, and turn left, to where the cargo workers usually are. You'll get to see a Service Robot disco-dancing after about 15 to 20 seconds; not very large, but definitely worth a good laugh.

—Robert Fitter

Congratulations to our winner, who's as easily amused by dancing robots as we are. Straight from the BozoBin, Robert's getting a copy of BEATDOWN, a John Denver: The Wildlife Concert DVD, and a copy of DELUXE STAR TREK STARSHIP CREATOR. Enjoy!

**Unreal Tournament**

These cheats work only in the Single-Player Tournament or in Practice Sessions. Press [~] to bring down the console, then type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>samtheone</td>
<td>Activate cheat mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>God mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loaded</td>
<td>All weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allammo</td>
<td>All ammo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Walk through walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly</td>
<td>Fly mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Walk mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playersonly</td>
<td>Freezes Time (type again to UnFreeze)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summon [item]</td>
<td>Summon item (see list below)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items list: WarheadLauncher, Enforcer, DoubleEnforcer, Minigun2, PulseGun, ShockRifle, SniperRifle, UT_BioRifle, UT_EighthBall, UT_FlakCannon, Chainsaw

**Heroes of Might & Magic III: Armageddon’s Blade**

While playing, press [Tab], then type in the following codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newquigon</td>
<td>Level up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newquadime</td>
<td>Hero gains archangels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newworkhardail</td>
<td>Hero gains black knights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcoruscant</td>
<td>Hero gains all buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcr2d2</td>
<td>Hero gains all battle machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcawatto</td>
<td>Hero gains money and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcprophets</td>
<td>Hero gains massive movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcprophecy</td>
<td>Show obelisk map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcrevealourselves</td>
<td>Show terrain map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcmidichlorians</td>
<td>Hero gains 999 mana and all spells</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CODES**

**Baldur’s Gate**

Open the file “Baldur.ini” in your BALDUR's GATE directory and add the line “Cheats=1” under the “[Game Options]” entry. Then save the file and run the game.

Once in the game, hit [Ctrl]+[Tab] to bring up the console in which you type the cheats. [Ctrl]+[Tab] will also close this console. Type in the cheats exactly as they appear below and hit the [Enter] key to activate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:GreatGonzo()</td>
<td>Summons 10 killer chickens who defend you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:FirstAid()</td>
<td>Creates 5 neutralize, 5 poison potions, 1 stone to flesh scroll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:Midas()</td>
<td>Gives you 500 gold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:CowKill()</td>
<td>Creates a CowKill spell if you’re near a cow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:Droll Attacks()</td>
<td>Creates a hostile Drizzt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:DrollDefends()</td>
<td>Creates a friendly Drizzt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:CritiqueItems()</td>
<td>Removes all game’s crit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:Hans()</td>
<td>Moves your characters to a free adjacent area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats:ExploreArea()</td>
<td>Marks entire area explored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Heavy Gear II**

Press [~] to bring up the chat interface. Then type in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>set camti</td>
<td>God mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set mission</td>
<td>Complete level</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 Computer Gaming World BozoBin!
**Quake II Arena**

All of these codes require bringing down the console (by default, hit the [~] key)

**Code** | **Effect**
--- | ---
/iamacheater | Unlocks all single-player tournament levels at skill one (I Can Win)
/iamamonkey | Unlocks all single-player tournament levels and adds 100 of every award to your record
To activate the following cheats, put the server in developer mode. Load up a map by pulling down the console and typing in "/devmap map-name"

**Code** | **Effect**
--- | ---
/god | God mode
/give all | Gives you everything

You can also use the following codes with the /give command:

- **Allamo**
- **grappling hook**
- **lightning gun**
- **quad damage**
- **railgun**
- **regeneration**
- **rocket launcher**
- **shotgun**

Note: A while back, we told you about how to make this macro that allows for precise zooming. There was a slip in the editing process, and the command to execute the .cfg file is "exec", not just "exec".

**Age of Wonders**

**Tips**

Heroes are great, but they're tough to come by...even if you get the Call Hero spell, most of the time the summoned heroes don't want to work for you anyway (losers). The solution? Dominate/Charm/Seduce them into your army instead, using Nymphs, Satyrs, Charlatans, or what have you. Since heroes tend to have high resistance, you'll benefit from Entangling or Cold Striking (freezing) the hero to give yourself more Charm chances. —Jason Kapalka
Welcome to Homebrew Gaming

I have a lifelong relationship with Computer Gaming World. At the age of 13, I submitted an article on how to break the sound barrier in a P-51 in Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer. This resulted in my first rejection slip. Undaunted, I sent an article describing how to take the F-18 to the edge of space in the same game, thereby securing my second pink slip. Thanks to then-editor Johnny Wilson’s good judgment, I was forced out of an early writing career and was able to focus my full attention on passing junior-high English. Now that my age has doubled (and I have acquired the ability to diagram a sentence), CGW has given me my big break. In this new column, I’ll be covering the biggest events, best add-ons, and brightest designers in the fan communities. I can think of no better way to kick off the column than to discuss The Gamers Net, a mod paradise with enough projects in development to fill this entire magazine with tales of wonder.

Grognard Heaven

I first discovered TGN at www.thegamers.net. After I’d heard about a mod for SSI’s Steel Panthers 2 that used an enhanced version of that game’s engine to turn it into a World War II game called—surprisingly enough—Steel Panthers 2: World War II. Stunned by how much more realistic this mod was than anything in the original Steel Panthers series, I’ve since gone to the site regularly for upgrades and scenarios.

Gamers who enjoyed SP2: World War II will be pleased to know that at least two new free Steel Panthers mods are slated for release. Actually, calling these products mods doesn’t do them justice. They are complete standalone games with all new graphics, sounds, units, AI, maps, and combat routines.

The first of these games, Steel Panthers: World at War, again puts the focus on World War II by modeling units and battles from 1930 to 1949. New features include a combat model with greater fidelity, off-board artillery, and reinforcement hexes. Additionally, units can capture artillery and vehicles, and crews that have abandoned vehicles can rally and remain their mounts. This Windows-only conversion will offer Internet play and should be available by the time you read this.

The other game, Steel Panthers: The NAM, covers combat in Vietnam from 1950-1975. The engine will really be stretched for this one, with the introduction of tunnels for the VC, weapons like booby traps, and other enhancements that attempt to capture the flavor of that conflict. Viet Cong casualties are never fully known to American forces until a battle is over; they won’t know how effective they were until that point. You can learn more at the Steel Lightning site, found at slightning.thegamers.net.

But Wait, There’s More…

If you’re not a fan of Steel Panthers in any incarnation, take heart. David Heath, TGN’s Director of Operations, somehow convinced SSI to give TGN the source code for other games, like Wargame Construction Set III: Age of Rifles, Gary Grigsby’s Pacific War, and Gary Grigsby’s War in Russia. The staff at TGN is updating the graphics, sound, and game engines of all these titles and will release the results, as usual, for free. The older games are being ported to Windows, with added email and Internet play, and the Pacific War update should be available by April or May of this year.

TGN staffers obviously have enough talent to make their own games, and they have plans to do so, but it makes sense that they are using old code right now. Not having to modify large portions of the original game that actually worked means the updated games can be cranked out faster than those made from scratch. It also allows for greater ease of development for entirely new games based on the old engines. “The long-term goal,” says Heath, “is to take the strategic engine in Pacific War, canniblize it, and make an East Front/West Front game.”

To top things off, all of the games available at TGN (along with new games from other manufacturers) are supplied with a steady stream of free campaigns and scenarios. Most of these come from “Wild” Bill Wilder and his team at the Wild Bill & the Raiders Design Headquarters (you can find them at war.thegamers.net). That team’s superb effort, along with the mods and games provided by other TGN affiliates, should keep wargamers in the trenches for a long time. “I guess basically what we’re doing is becoming a business for games,” says Heath, in what may be the biggest understatement I’ve ever heard.

If your mod squad is working on something the rest of the world needs to know about, send the details to me at fanbase@mail.com.
Scooter Says Shut Up

If you missed it the first time, let me spell it out for you: I like UNREAL TOURNAMENT more than QUAKE III ARENA. It's not that hard to figure out. I reviewed both games; I gave one a higher score than the other. Originally, I had planned on doing a feature-by-feature comparison, followed by an overall winner. Either that, or just explaining at length why I prefer fragging Xan rather than Xaero. I don't need to do that, though. Numerically, you can already see where I stand, and at this point I'd just be adding fuel to the fire that is the UT vs. Q3A "war." These wars of words on Usenet and web message boards perversely interest me more than the games themselves. What starts as genuinely interesting discussion often degenerates into pointless bickering by, oh, the third post. The fact is, these wars between fans of two games are like fanatical religious debates: Both sides are too stupid and committed for a real discussion, so all we get is a lot of huffing and puffing. No one bothers to try leaving it at "it's just not my scene"; they almost always have to get the last word in. Any intelligent commentary is usually answered with idiotic flames.

Case in point: Someone recently posted a Penny Arcade comic strip as a good summary of the current UT vs. Q3A "debate." What happens next? Some people start posting and bickering about which side has more losers and which side started the war in the first place. Way to reinforce the point, guys.

So I like UT more than Q3A, and someone else likes Q3A more than UT. Big deal. I don't feel compelled to write lengthy manifestos detailing why my preference is right and others' aren't. People have their own tastes; that's that. Now, if someone were to claim that, say, TRESPASSER or EXTREME PAINTBRUSH is the superior game, well, I'd try to convince him otherwise, but I won't martyr myself to do it. There's a line between healthy debate and annoying argument, and right now, the UT vs. Q3A war has long gone past it. Talking about things such as gaming evolution versus revolution, or how healthy it is to have competition within the games biz is good; writing obscenity-drenched insults involving UT/Q3A gamers, their mothers, and/or livestock is just pathetic.

Think about it: The time you take to write up that lengthy post, which will ultimately go to someone as stubborn as you, and result in an even longer reply, to which you must answer in kind... that time is lost to you. You could have used that time to, I dunno, read a book, go outside, or even just play the game. Don't waste your time arguing with diehards.

So people like game reviewer Tom Chick and I prefer UT, while QUAKE-god Dennis "Thresh" Fong and PC Accelerator's Rob Smith prefer Q3A. Don't start using our opinions in an attempt to legitimize your latest manifesto. Everyone has different opinions and biases. Next time, click "next message" when you spot a thread bordering on another pointless debate, and let people play what they want while you play what you want.

In the Zone

I've got my hands on a late-late-but-will-go-gold-tomorrow version of BATTLEZONE II. Although, I've just started playing it, I can give you my first impressions. The graphics look even better this time; there are more environment types, and skipping on top of water that is reflecting mountains and bridges is a nice way to justify how much money you spent on your computer. It's also more accessible to people who have a hard time handling both command and combat at once. On one hand, you can opt to be just a pilot and hop around leading your squad, leaving the building management to the computer. Conversely, you can hop out of your vehicle, and go to a Command Station which gives you an overhead view, and play it almost like a strategy game. Hopefully this will sell more than 11,000 copies - the horrifying sales figure of the first game.

Counter Striking

It's awards time this issue, but I wanted to make a special mention here. My personal pick for Mod Of The Year: COUNTER-STRIKE. Think of it as the RAINBOW SIX mod for HALF-LIFE. It's by far the best teamplay-based mod out there, with realistic weapon modeling, interesting maps, and even a radio-communication system. Go snag it over at www.counter-strike.net.
A No-Win Situation

Multiple split screens for monitoring remote areas of the map, a 3D engine that lets you gouge trenches in the earth, three separate sides with unique unit sets — it would seem that Mindscape really scored by picking up German developer TopWare's EARTH 2150 for worldwide distribution outside of Germany. But as cool as all the light-sourcing poly-count gobbling looks, a basic flaw in the game's premise has us concerned that this game might end up infuriating gamers more than winning them over. EARTH 2150 charges you with gathering enough resources by game's end to flee a rapidly decaying planet. Since these are the same resources you use to create units, it's possible you could beat all the missions, reach the end of the game, and still lose by having burned too many resources to build the forces that ostensibly helped you win.

What's all about?

If a game is smart and user-friendly enough to let you protect your vital base buildings by actually mounting defenses on them, why aren't you protected from the potential of total brain-squeezing game rage caused by the digital equivalent of the endless Lucy/Charlie Brown football-snatching morality play? Here's hoping part of the spit-and-polish Mindscape is putting on this product prior to release addresses this in some way.

You Can't Beat the Price

Bungie and MYTH mappers Badlands have teamed together to create CHIMERA, a striking expansion for MYTH II: SOULBLIGHTER, offering both single- and multiplayer scenarios. MYTH fans should enthusiastically herald CHIMERA's arrival — especially considering that the entire package is a free download from bungie.net (you can also find CHIMERA in Bungie's new MYTH collection, THE TOTAL CODEX, if you're the kind of person who just can't accept something for nothing).

CHIMERA continues with MYTH's already compelling story, but adds a new interface, map enhancements, and a mix of old and new units like giant wasp and armored skeletons. This isn't a package for novices, however; CHIMERA's single-player game is designed for experienced MYTH players only and is quite challenging at even the easiest settings. Voice acting doesn't firmly fit the characters, which is the only blemish in an otherwise well-made expansion. Still, CHIMERA is a sterling example of Bungie's continued commitment to MYTH and its fans.
THE QUEST FOR VICTORY WILL TAKE YOU JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE

ORBIT

SURFACE

UNDERGROUND

3-TIERED GAME PLAY, 3 TIMES THE STRATEGY, AND COMBOTS OVER 3 STORIES HIGH

Metal Fatigue lets you build and command behemoth combats. Armed with parts like Sonar Legs, Jet Pack Torsos and Gatling Gun Arms, you can fight for upgrades or simply sever your enemies’ limbs and attach them to your own forces. Best of all, you control units across 3 levels simultaneously in what has been described as part real-time strategy, part 3D action, and all together revolutionary.

METAL FATIGUE

www.metalfatigue.com
Surfing for Sim Stuff

At the start of each month, senior editor Jeff Green asks the columnists what topic we plan to write about next. He says he needs to know this information so that he might be better informed and prepared for the editorial meetings he must attend. Each month, my response is usually the same: "Jeff, I have absolutely no idea." Personally, I think he asks so that he can steal any potentially good ideas. For example, I came up with a compelling argument as to why Pokémon should be mentioned in a simulation column and he said our readers weren't interested in Pokémon. Just thought you should know.

I thought about resuming my Chicken Little routine of how flight-sims are dying, but this column is better served when I play the role of cheerleader. It’s not easy, though. One need look no further than giant-robot sim sales or FREESPACE 2 to see that any game using a joystick will probably suffer a horrible death at the retail level. (Maybe Chris Roberts is on to something by making FREELANCER extremely mouse-friendly.)

So, when in doubt as to what to write about, always fall back on traditional column filler material: Gordon's favorite web site haunts. Let's start with some daily news sites. Any savvy online-sim veteran makes www.simhq.com or www.combat.com part of their de rigeur surfing habit, but a few new sites are also worthy of some daily inspection. Make sure to swing by www.dogfighter.com, www.frugalsworld.com, and www.simarena.com for frequently updated news, quality stories, and unique material. Those of you with a predisposition toward space combat will find A Talent For War’s site, ativ.intelligamer.com, equally invaluable.

The Ussnet newsgroups are obviously a great resource for your sim addiction, assuming you can stomach some of the more "eccentric" types that often lurk there (then again, that’s what a "kill filter" is for, isn’t it?). Plus, many web and fan-sites now host powerful threaded message boards, allowing them to deliver far more relevant discussion on whatever topic you’re searching for. The best web alternative to Ussnet that I’ve found is Delphi’s flight sim forum at www.delphi.com/flight/start. You’ll have to sign up, but membership is free.

Sites more dedicated in their focus cover only one title. Such sites not only offer equally useful message boards, but they can also lock you up with some cool add-ons as well. For example, the favorite hangout for fans of Activision’s FIGHTER SQUADRON: SCREAMIN’ DEMONS OVER EUROPE can be found at www.fightersquadron.com. It was there that I discovered some WWI add-on links and downloaded a SSSA from www.ssmus.com/chickencoop/sects/index.htm. A few minutes with the mission editor allowed me to couple this with the Fokker D.VII from www.openplane.org and I was in WWI heaven. Those of you without FS-SODE can still get an idea of how much fun I’m having: Download the demo from www.openplane.org and you’ll fly a Vought four vs. four Fokker dogfight. By the way, you can also find a link to the latest “plane pack” effort at the fightersquadron.com page, a perfect example of what I was talking about in my November “Labor of Love” column.

Those of you still fond of Microsoft’s COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR will find yourself in plane-download heaven at www.combatfis.com, while visitors to simcombat.com will be equally rewarded with add-ons to several other simulations, especially RED BARON 2/3D. JANES’ WORLD WAR II FIGHTER fans need to swing by members.xoom.com/www2f for a dynamic campaign generator. EUROPEAN AIR WAR fans not quite happy with the flight models should check out ECAOnline at www.geocities.com/weuriger/main.htm. Finally, if you gave up on HI TANK PLATOON II, you should look at it again now that it’s been patched. It’s cheap if you can find it, and there’s a really cool fan site at members.xoom.com/m1tp2.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.
Technology may not replace your family pet. But it is all around you. And it can be whimsical, fun, or even friendly. ZDNet is dedicated to every single little bit of technology, from the meanest virus to the cutest gizmo. Which is why ZDNet was named "Best Overall Online Site" by the Computer Press Association. Wherever technology takes you, whether it's games, music, family computing or robot dogs, ZDNet has something for you. Because ZDNet is where technology takes you.

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Fame, Shame, and Innovation

Computer sports game fans, today is your lucky day. For no additional charge, with your paid purchase of Computer Gaming World, this month—and this month only—you receive free admission to the first ever CGW sports game Hall Of Fame, Shame, And Innovation induction ceremony! (This ceremony is neither sponsored nor endorsed by the CGW editorial staff. Which is fine by me, because then they can’t contribute to it.)

Let’s waste any time, shall we? Each nominee has been inducted on the basis of fame, shame, or innovation in the area of sports gaming.

One-on-One: Dr. J vs. Larry Bird: In an era when there was no EA Sports (or ESPN, for that matter), Electronic Arts foreshadowed their upcoming success with this 8-bit schoolyard hit. Featuring a three-point line, fatigue, a 20-second clock, and shattering backboards, ONE-ON-ONE kept us glued to our Commodore 64s and Apple IIIs, way back in the day.

Superstar Ice Hockey: If you thought the FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL franchise was the first to bring career play into the PC-sports arena, think again. This 1987 gem of a hockey game from Mindscape allowed you to guide your hockey team through the years, in the hopes of making the NHL playoffs year after year. In between seasons, you could trade for new players, or turn your team in certain performance categories to make them faster skaters or better shooters. On top of it all, SUPERSTAR ICE HOCKEY was an enjoyable, fast-moving hockey game.

Gamestar Championship Football: GPL attempted what many of us have thought would be cool at some point in our lives: a first-person-perspective football game that allowed you to control the receiver (by running pass-routes) or the running backs. Unfortunately for Gamestar—a company that also created a fantastic full-court, two-on-two basketball game with season play—DOOM and football don’t mix. Still, they gain entry on the merits of their innovative attempt. The HOFSI applauds their effort.

Front Page Sports Football: For being the first game to combine great graphics, strategic depth, real-life players, and career play. Yes, Sierra ruled the pigskin roost with this title...until a tragic bug overdose in 1999 ruined its life forever (cue VH-1’s Behind the Music music).

High Heat 2000: In addition to its stellar gameplay, HIGH HEAT 2000 also gains entry for somehow getting mentioned in every single one of CGW’s last seven—makes that eight—issues.

Hardball: This baseball legend gains entry both for its amazing gameplay in the early years...and for its absolutely shameless, unimaginative, dull gameplay in its later years.

John Madden Football: For spitting out those POST-TECMO BOWL-blues and bringing us the joy of action-oriented football for almost 10 years running.

Mario Golf: Hey, don’t laugh. Many sports-game designer could learn a lesson from the boys at Nintendo. They’ve taken a simple, enjoyable golf game and, by adding role-playing elements (as you play and accomplish certain tasks, you gain experience points, which improve your performance) have created one of the more compelling sports games of the last few years.

Was your favorite game left out? Email the HOFSI at gjones@zd.com. The $200 qualifying fee will guarantee your favorite game entry through the pearly gates. (Checks not accepted.)

Hall of Fame Is People!

The HOFSI would also like to acknowledge the lifelong efforts of two real-life sports game designers. Andrew Dolphin, for building one of the most in-depth and enjoyable libraries of DOS-based sports games ever: COACH and COLLEGE COACH football, as well as the generally titled BASKETBALL, HOCKEY, and BASEBALL MANAGER—all of which featured full career modes, with retiring players, rookie drafts...and the ability to play through a full season in 15 minutes.

And along similar lines, we recognize Mr. Lance Haffner and his line of text-based sports simulations. For keeping it real for all those years when there was no such thing as a graphical sports game that allowed you to use your brain.
Mom always said I’d be an Internet radio star!

A dream comes true. Senior Editor of Computer Gaming World, Jeff Green launches his GiveMeTalk! Internet show on Feb. 15, 2000. Be the first to listen to Jeff talk about the latest in gaming, women, and his fascinating life. Only at www.givemetalk.com - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And make your own dream come true by creating your own GiveMeTalk! radio show.

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
GREENSPEAK

by Jeff Green

An Open Letter to Lord British

Your Highness, ULTIMA IX Is a Royal Pain in the Ass

Dear Lord British,

Greetings, Sire. How farest you, at the start of this glorious new millennium? I hope well. Forsworn me for disturbing thee in public like this, but I have a message of the gravest importance. First, though, I beg your indulgence of my vulgar tongue, for I am afraid, alas, that whenever I hear this pretentious pseudo-Elizabethan talk, it always makes me want to kicketh somebody's asseth.

Lord British, you and I have never met, but I feel as though I've known you for years. Way before I ever became a scribe for this humble magazine, I was a huge fan of Your Majesty's games. Your ULTIMA role-playing games are true classics that kept me up way too many nights when I should have been sleeping, studying, or learning how to talk to girls.

As both CGW’s RPG editor and as a fan, I was looking forward to your latest epic, ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION, just as much as anyone. Five years in the making! The glorious finale to the trilogy of trilogies! The grand summation of 20 years worth of ULTIMA! Like Star Wars: Episode One, ULTIMA IX had legions of loyal fans waiting in anticipation for years, ready to plunk down their money the day it was released.

Which is why I am so pissed off.

Lord British, you have made a mistake. A big one. ULTIMA IX, you see, was not a finished product when you put it on store shelves and started raking in $50 apiece for it. Not even close. Riddled with bugs, bogged down by horrible performance, marred by brain-dead AI, unplayable on most PCs. ULTIMA IX—rather than being the gaming event of 1999—has turned into the fiasco of 1999.

The reviews are all universally scathing; many fans are furious with you; and instead of reaping any awards, ULTIMA IX is damn lucky to escape without taking home our dubious Coaster of the Year award—an award we handed out two years ago, you may recall, to your equally buggy and unfinished ULTIMA ONLINE.

For the life of me, Sire, I can't begin to understand how you could have possibly let this happen again. Do you not play your own games anymore? Do you not care about the quality or reputation of your products? Is the desire to make money for Christmas really so much more important, at this stage of your career, than doing the right thing and delaying your products until they're done?

Don't tell me you were caught unaware. I don't believe it. The first patch has a readme file dated before the game appeared on shelves, meaning the team was scrambling to fix bugs before anyone had bought the game. But, hey, you don't need to be a detective to know how unfinished ULTIMA IX was. All you have to do is boot it up—if you can. One CGW editor tried installing on three different state-of-the-art PCs before giving up in disgust. Me, I installed it just fine. The problems began when I tried to play it, and faced one embarrassing glitch after another. Like monsters who stand still. Like a frame-rate so slow, it looks like a slide show. Like heavy rain falling inside your castle. Inside your own castle, Lord British!

The great, sad irony of all of this is that for years the ULTIMA games have preached the gospel of ethics, and morality, and doing the right thing. Remember? According to the great Lord British, the eight virtues worth pursuing are Honesty, Compassion, Valor, Justice, Sacrifice, Honor, Spirituality, and Humility. I'm curious, Sire. Which virtues are tested when it comes to deciding whether to ship a product you know isn't ready yet? Honesty, maybe? Sacrifice? And which choice do you think the Avatar would make?

I know this is harsh, Sire. But I have been waiting to hear something, anything from you for about a month now, and, as of this writing, you have been strangely silent. It seems particularly strange, since you were so willing to take credit for the game before it shipped, what with your name at the top of the credits and all. And inside my ULTIMA IX box, there's even a certificate signed by you, which you say, serves "as a reminder of just how much you've meant to myself, ULTIMA, and Origin."

Which virtues are tested when it comes to deciding whether to ship a product you know isn't ready yet? Honesty, maybe? Sacrifice? And which choice do you think the Avatar would make?

You say we mean a lot to you? Then try showing it. Talk to your fans. Go to your web site and tell us what happened. The sun is fading fast on the kingdom of Britannia, Sire. Are you going to let it go down in shame, in these twilight hours, or with glory and honor?

I await your reply in anticipation, and until then remain,

Thy Humble Servant,
Jeff Green

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the Guardian is alive and well and knows where he lives. Cast spells of protection his way at jeff_green@zxd.com.
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