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The Future of 3D

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November 2000, Issue 186

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The Future of 3D 120

The blistering trajectory of 3D graphics has its crosshairs on one thing—cinematic realism. Find out how next-generation technology and game design are going to put us inside the movies.

Dungeon Masters

All hail the new kings of role-playing! Black Isle and Bioware are back again with their latest, biggest, and best RPG yet: BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN. We take you behind the scenes with gaming's newest royalty, and peek at what they have in store for you next.

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The Savior of Gaming

INGLEWOOD, California. My hometown has been made infamous by Boyz N the Hood, Grand Canyon, NWA, and Dr. Dre. Former home of the Lakers (and if you’re into hockey, the Kings), Inglewood has many facets to its reputation, few of which are positive. But home is home, and I’m proud of it. It’s the source of many childhood memories, many of which (not surprisingly), involve computer games: many of which (not surprisingly), are RPGs. In addition to ELITE, ARCHON, ZORK, M.U.L.E., and SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD, I probably played almost 100 different role-playing games. That’s what gamers did back then.

For an inner-city kid trying to cope with life in the mid-1980’s—with its Cold War tensions, AIDS, the sudden appearance of gangs, and the brutally ugly fashions depicted in classic films like Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo—RPGs were a welcome escape. Their ability to take the imaginative role-playing of Dungeons & Dragons, make it digital, and allow us to play by ourselves was the very reason I lobbied for a Commodore 64 in the first place. (Sorry mom, I lied.)

Role-playing is the past, present, and future of PC-based gaming.

My best memory of that time took place somewhere in the middle of Ultima III. A few of my friends, seeing my excitement over this classic game, got hooked as deeply as I did. They sat around and watched me play. They advised me as I made critical decisions. They even took notes and made maps of the game’s dungeons.

Of everything Richard Garriott has accomplished, he should be proudest of a single moment in the Jones household: a group of six or seven inner-city black kids sitting around a computer cheering the Avatar on as he completed the final challenge of ULTIMA III.

Such is the power of the role-playing game. To capture the mind. To create powerful attachments and motives for the characters we spend hours inhabiting.

This concept was the driving force behind the early days of computer gaming. Then the category died out, only to be resurrected by companies like Blizzard and Bioware. Particularly Bioware. Through games like BALDUR’S GATE II and NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, these people appear positively determined not to let some of gaming’s greatest secrets die.

Have no doubt. Role-playing—and I don’t strictly mean classic fantasy role-playing—is the past, present, and future of PC-based gaming. Thankfully, some companies still get it.

George Jones
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Cover Carping

What a poor cover on the October issue. What were you thinking? During a time when the hottest topic is the supposed demise of PC gaming, you publish such an ugly cover? I can't see how this is going to help people become and stay interested in PC gaming. How about some cool screenshots or game art instead of poor-quality, comic-strip-style art?

Dirk Swanson
Hey pal, bashing game companies is much more likely to ingratiate yourself to us than CGW- snipping. If you're going to criticize us, try something a little more original than dissing our cover. That is sooo 1990s.

From the Editor

A recent phone conversation with Interplay CEO Brian Fargo revealed an unfortunate error in the September issue of Computer Gaming World. In our review of the company's STAR TREK: KLINSON ACADEMY (#194), the introductory paragraph commented that Interplay had "driven their Trakt license into the ground." As Fargo pointed out, the facts indicate otherwise, as we've consistently given Interplay's line of Star Trek games above-average reviews. We sincerely apologize to Brian and Interplay for the offensive oversight.

George Jones
Editor-in-Chief

Survivor Ratings Rant

You guys put out an excellent mag, that is, until the most recent issue (October). When I saw page 104, I was disgusted to say the least. How in the world did you guys come up with the Survivor star rating system? Clearly, whoever wrote those up was a complete moron.

Rudy is not only the best survivor of the group, he's the greatest survivor of all time! All you needed to do was put Rudy on top (the 5 star rating), and everything would have been perfect. Instead, you opted to put him in last, raising serious questions about your judgment. If Rudy is rated last, how am I supposed to believe any of your reviews? As Rudy would say, "I should come in and kick all your ass."

stony006@juno.com

Favorite Gaming Moment

My favorite moment came when I was playing DANGERFALL for the first time. It was late at night and I was alone in the basement with the light turned low and game volume turned up. My character was creeping through a particularly dark and dangerous dungeon. A bend in the tunnel was approaching. So I leaned over my desktop with my keyboard in hand and tried to peek around the corner on the computer screen -- at that exact moment the 2-liter bottle of Pepsi sitting on the floor next to my table issued a loud "pop."

Needless to say, it scared me to death. I dropped the keyboard and went headfirst into the computer monitor. You might say that for that one moment I was totally immersed in my game. Fortunately, I didn't break anything nor have a heart attack as a result of my fright. I was so impressed with the game that I wrote to the company's technical support and explained what happened. They wrote back the next day informing me that heart attacks and physical injuries were not covered by the warranty, but they were happy I was enjoying it.

Rev. Victor E. Harner
Jarrettsville, Maryland

A Call to Arms

Every now and then when I start a new game, I realize that I'm playing something that will revolutionize computer gaming. I had such a realization when I played CIV in the 80s and DOOM in 1994, and I just had that realization again. Big Time Software's COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD is every gamer's dream. I truly believe that COMBAT MISSION will be the game by which all future wargames are measured.

But it's a travesty that many people will not have the opportunity to play it. COMBAT MISSION won't get the exposure it deserves.

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LETTERS

because the games of small independent publishers, like Big Time, are not stocked by large retail chains.

If we want developers like Big Time to continue to produce high-quality wargames, it's up to us to get the word out. We must fight the major publishers who say wargaming is dead.

 Upon our struggle depends the long continuity of our institutions and our identities as wargamers. Is the heir apparent of the original EMPIRE and COMPUTER BISMARCK really SONIC THE HEDGEHOG? Can we really expect a PS2 version of SQUAD LEADER? I think not. Let us spread our way of life to new generations of gamers who, until now, have been raised on mass-market titles and console games. Let us brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if PC wargamers last for a thousand years, men will say, this was their finest hour.

Michael Hawash

Better Than Swimmin' With Women

My dream from this day on is to work for your magazine. You guys seem to have huge amounts of fun doing something you love and actually make money, too...lucky monkeys! It's unbelievable—the only job that might be slightly better is marrying rich wives, then mysteriously removing the pool ladder while they're out for a swim (a la THE SIMS). Promise me a job when I get outa high school, okay?

Alex Huth

Bring us six very rich women who love to swim, and you've got a deal, kid. And one rich bachelor. Make that two rich bachelors, one of whom likes RPGs, walking in the rain, pina coladas, and humorists in tights.

CGW: 4 Stars

I have been a subscriber for the past two years. If I rated your magazine according to your review style, I would give it four stars. The Pros are fantastic articles on future games, updated information on the gaming world, and a great layout. As for the Cons, there is only one, your reviews should be called "postviews."

A published review is supposed to provide information in a timely fashion. Under normal circumstances, when the review is published for a movie or book, it is around the time the movie has opened or before the book has published. But, in your case, most of your reviews are pub-

printer; another week to print and bind. Magazine distributors take three weeks to deliver to stores nationwide. All tolled, that's two months, but since the rare game coincides with our schedule, it's usually two and a half months. So how do we do it? They print at different printers throughout the country, and pay a fortune.

All we can say is, the best games will still be available after you've read our review. If you can't buy a game after reading about it in CGW, you wouldn't want it anyway.

The Xbox Question

We received dozens of letters responding to our question about Xbox. Almost unanimously, you told us not to cover it.

200th Edition!

Your Favorite Gaming Moment

What's your favorite gaming moment? As part of our countdown to Issue 200, we're inviting everyone to submit their wildest gaming experience in 200 words or less. We'll collect the most interesting stories and print them in a special section in the March issue. Here's your chance to be a part of gaming history. Write us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

lished long after the game has been out. Is this the fault of the game companies, your reviewers, or what?

Bernard E. Cana

One of the downsides of print is the long lead time. We'd love to compress it (as long as it didn't entail working harder), but there are several reasons why we can't.

We require our reviewers to finish the game. For the average game, that's about two weeks. It takes another week to edit, lay out, proof, and transmit files to the

However, you are interested in reading about Xbox games that are also coming out on the PC. Here's a sampling of your letters:

I don't like playing games on the TV. Nor do I like using a gamepad or sitting on a couch while I play games. Nor do I like the generally similar qualities of console games, which are predominantly arcade ripoffs.

Computers have been and will be the best platform to play games on. The very best console doesn't even come close to matching the performance of a top-notch computer gaming system. I'll buy a console if and when I can get games like DIABLO 2, UNREAL TOURNAMENT and AGE OF KINGS with better performance and better prices.

James Bufkin

I am never going to switch to consoles. What I love about PC's is the endless customizing, tweaking, and upgrading that consoles will never deliver. The feel of an ergonomic keyboard under my wrist, the mouse that seems to have become part of my hand, the overall "feel" of the PC is something consoles will never give me. In the console world, there is no friendly community that interacts every day
High Impact Paintball™ brings tactical excitement to your PC for a fast team oriented experience! Purchase your equipment, choose your team, customize your player and get ready to hit the field with action so real, you can almost feel the impact!

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- Choose from a variety of markers including semi and full automatic, along with various hopper and CO2 sizes
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- Built-in GameSpy support for Internet gaming or compete via LAN with up to 8 players

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there are not a million fan sites. Even if consoles offer Internet connections, any user who has practically in mind would log on to the Internet with his PC and check out the sites. It would break my heart to see you guys start covering the Xbox in great detail. Sure, go ahead and cover the games that come for XBox and PC, but please, don't cover the Xbox in too great of detail.

Amen, brother. We read you loud and clear.

Steve "DLerium" Tu

Windows 2000

I don't see why everyone says that Windows 2000 is bad for gaming. Sure, there are a few older games that simply won't run on it like RED ALERT or FINAL FANTASY VII, but most run fine. More than fine, in fact. All my games ran at the same level of performance or better under Windows 2000 than under Windows 98 SE. All Blizzard games, from the original DIABLO to STARCRACK to DIABLO 2, run perfectly under Windows 2000. I can run UNREAL TOURNAMENT and CRACK III in 1024x768 resolution using 32-bit color perfectly. If Windows ME truly is the last OS based on the Windows 9x kernel, then Windows 2000 is the way to go.

Ian Matthews

Most of the gaming media, CGW included, cautioned gamers on Windows 2000 because of its problems with legacy games. We've found fewer problems running legacy titles under Windows ME, which seems to offer features that are better suited to gamers' needs. See our hands-on look at ME this month, and watch for our full review in December.

Eskimo Pie in the Face

After digging my way out of my snowed-in igloo up here in the frozen north, the dog-sled-riding mailman handed me the latest copy of CGW. After purusing the good stuff (i.e. Greenspeak), I grudgingly flipped to Read me. I couldn't help but laugh as I read, "We still can't understand Canada's idiotic labeling of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE as an 'adult film.' In doing so, Canada effectively banned it..." I thought that was a tad strange, because SGF is still available at all the local computer stores. You see, only British Columbia has categorized SGF with adult films. B.C. is but one province of Canada, and their provincial rulings do not affect the rest of Canada. I figured that you guys were probably just drunk on beer when you wrote that, but then I remembered that American beer is so heavily watered-down that a fruitlet wouldn't get a buzz after consuming a six-pack. What's that all about, eh?

Tim Harcuff
Ottawa, Ontario

It was tough making out your carving in the birch bark until we hosed the smoke off it, but it appears you have a point. We hope the mussels can get word to you that we send our greetings to you and your tribe. We're really impressed that you can keep your PC running on sperm whale oil and coal. You cavemen are tops, eh!

Department of Corrections

The September issue's Killer Rigs erroneously listed the ASUS K7V motherboard along with AMD's Duron CPU. There's just one small problem: The motherboard is Slot A, but the CPU is Socket A. In other words, they're incompatible. The motherboard you'll actually want is ASUS' ATV, which uses Via's KT138 chipset, and also uses Socket A, so it accepts both Duron and the new Thunderbird Athlons (with onboard Level 2 cache). We also switched the L1 and L2 cache sizes on Duron. The actual cache sizes are 128KB for the L1 and 64KB for the L2. Technical Director Dave Salvator has spent two weeks wiring Alcatraz for Internet connectivity as penance for his mistake. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

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Amaruak

Rick Blood
PC Killer?

Don't believe the hype. Here's how the PlayStation 2 stacks up with our beige beasts.

Later this month, on October 26, the Sony juggernaut will release the PlayStation 2 with the marketing equivalent of a firebombing run over North America. The consumer electronics giant will release upwards of 2,000,000 units in what promises to be one of the largest launches of any consumer device in the nation's history. Sony is hoping to whip up enough hysteria to prompt a feeding frenzy for the new system. Given estimated sales of 75 million units in the U.S., it's easy to see how people like Sony Executive Phil Harrison can buy into their own hype. But we all know (at least those outside of Sony) that the PlayStation 2 isn't going to make the PC obsolete.

In fact, strictly from a gaming perspective, the PC is much better prepared to weather the PS 2 tsunami than most people think. Why? To begin with, even at PlayStation 2's launch, the PC's 3D graphics capability will outpace it, and unlike game consoles, the PC is an ever-evolving beast whose power is constantly increasing. In a recent CGW interview, 3dfx's Chief Technology Officer Scott Sellers made this observation

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How They Stack Up

Both platforms tout monstrous performance, but on closer examination you'll see that the PC is still ahead of PS2 in nearly every area — except, of course, price.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPU</th>
<th>300MHz MIPS</th>
<th>1.4GHz Pentium-IV or Athlon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Memory</td>
<td>38MB (32MB system, 2MB audio, 4MB video)</td>
<td>198MB (128MB system, 64MB 3D card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Memory</td>
<td>4MB</td>
<td>64MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Polygon Rate</td>
<td>66 million polygons/second</td>
<td>30 million polygons/second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained polygon rate (full features)</td>
<td>20 million polygons/sec</td>
<td>25 millions polygons/sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pixel Fill Rate with 2 textures*</td>
<td>0.66Gigapixels/sec</td>
<td>1Gigapixel/sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Scene Anti-Aliasing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Resolution (double-buffered with 32-bit Z-buffer)</td>
<td>640x480</td>
<td>2000x1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage Medium</td>
<td>4X DVD, 8MB memory card</td>
<td>4X DVD, 40GB hard drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pixel fill rate describes the number of pixels per second that can be blasted onto the triangles in a 3D scene (600 million for PS2, 1 billion for PC). Higher fill rates translate into better performance, including higher frame-rates at higher resolutions.

PC CPUs are well ahead on clock rate and overall processing horsepower. New PS 2 has more overall memory, but still trails the PC. PlayStation 2 has only 4MB of video memory, which limits resolution and the ability to do full-scene anti-aliasing. Under ideal circumstances, the PS 2 can draw polygons faster than a PC, but it is a bit misleading (see Sustained Polygon Rate). When you crank up all the rendering features, and measure over time, the playing field levels out. PC 3D cards are designed to handle multi-texturing effects, so the latest cards can easily outperform the PS 2. PlayStation 2 can't really do it because of the performance hit and the limited amount of video memory. PS2's resolution is limited by its video memory and TV resolution. PCs still have tons more persistent storage, though in theory you could slap a hard drive onto a PS2 using FireWire. Okay, you got us there. Performance never comes cheap.
Wrecking the Reich

Is RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFSNITEN the best thing since HALF-LIFE?

In a man's man's world, there is one man who is The Man, and that man, the original one-man wrecking crew, is B.J. Bliskowitz, the Nazi-gibbing, Himmerl-hamerin,' war machine and father of all first-person shooters. And judging from our recent visit to Wolf-developer Gray Matter Studios, this game is the likely successor to HALF-LIFE's single-player shooter crown.

Graphically the game is amazing, with incredibly detailed, almost tactile textures—small surprise, since most of the textures are based on digital photographs team members took of actual castles and cobblestones during what was undoubtedly the most oddly-documented European vacation ever. But WOLF III-powered graphics will only get you so far: We were blown away moreover by the thudding action of the game. From the heart-stopping chase of the opening beach invasion, to the terror of the Nazi's secret occult genetic lab, RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFSNITEN seems to promise the kind of riveting, single-player action we haven't seen since HALF-LIFE hijacked our lives two years ago. The game's best feature? The fact that Gray Matter is both receiving guidance from WOLFSNITEN 3D developer id Software, and being given all the time they need by Activision to get the game right. It looks amazing already and should be incredible when it ships sometime next year.

Trust us: You'll want to reserve space on your hard drive today for this thriller. While you're at it, reserve time next month to read our exclusive in-depth preview of this blockbuster-in-the-making. — Robert Coats

TRICK OR TREAT
An undead solder is ready to party. Give him a taste of blood or a cup of oil, and he'll follow you anywhere.

NEED A LIGHT? The developers of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFSNITEN know how to melt gamers' hearts.

Reality Check

And the Winner is...COMBAT MISSION, demonstrating both that wargaming is alive, and that the little guys can sometimes surprise you. Note the overall high marks for most of the games here (except, of course, DAIKATANA). We seem to be alone in thinking VAMPIRE bit, but we'll admit that the patch makes it much more worthwhile (see related story on page 49). This month, we welcome Gamepower.com to the spot previously occupied by PC Games, PC Accelerator, Incite, and Gamers.com. May you fare better than they did.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>CGW</th>
<th>CGM</th>
<th>Gamepower.com</th>
<th>GameSpot</th>
<th>Gamecenter</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combat Mission</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus Ex</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vampire: The Masquerade-Redemption</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>Allegiance</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Daikatana</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<td>Diablo II</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shogun: Total War</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motocross Madness 2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates game has not been rated
this isn't a code

it's a message

they're out there. so are we.
Mad Men in Milwaukee
25,000 gamers cross swords at Gen Con 2000

In Daniel Pinkwater’s Fat Men From Space, an army of polyester-suited fat men invade the planet and attempt to deplete the Earth’s supply of fast food. Milwaukee suffered a similar invasion in August when more than 25,000 gaming fanatics—some fat, some thin, but all hungry for fun—descended upon the city for Gen Con 2000, depleting Milwaukee of hotel rooms, bratwurst, and polyhedral dice.

Gen Con, hosted by Wizards of the Coast, has grown to embrace all types of games—from traditional board games, to computer games, Magic: the Gathering, and role-playing. The big news this year was the newly released Third Edition Dungeons & Dragons rules, which are much more intuitive. Wizards of the Coast also announced that they are licensing the editor from ARCANUM for their upcoming Master Tools. Players will be able to use the editor to create printable maps for their D&D pen-and-paper campaigns.

Plenty of PC gaming companies displayed their best upcoming titles. Mattel Interactive showed POOL OF RADIANCE, the first RPG to use the new Third Edition rules. “Third Edition has made the game more straightforward and heroic,” according to Producer Jon Kromrey. “There are no class and racial restrictions.”

Hasbro Interactive had STARSHIP TROOPERS, the MAJESTY expansion, SQUAD LEADER, and BATTLESHIP at the show. Troopers has made big, jump-jet-aided strides since E3. Sierra’s ARCANUM was popular as players examined the detailed character-creation system. THRONE OF DARKNESS also drew a crowd (see our preview in this issue). Novologic ran a 32-player LAN for TACHYON tournaments, and when there wasn’t an official game going, players swarmed over it to play DIABLO 2, EVERQUEST, and COUNTERSTRIKE.

Microsoft displayed CONQUEST, MECHCOMMANDER 2, CRIMSON SKIES, MECHWARRIOR 4, and AGE II: THE CONQUISTORS expansion. MECHCOMMANDER 2 looks like it will be the mech’s meow. CRIMSON SKIES now lets you design your own planes—I’m putting big freaking cannons all over mine. HQ was showing SUMMONER on the PS2. It looked good, but no better than recent PC games like FAKK 2. Gamepad? You’ll have to pry the mouse from my cold, stiff hand.

Activision drew a crowd to see RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN. They also showed WIZARDS AND WARRIORS, CALL TO POWER II, and a couple of Trek games—AWAY TEAM and ELITE FORCE; the latter looks fantastic. I was also impressed with the Gathering of Developers’ RUNE, which is a gorgeous, crazed-viking-beats-the-hell-out-of-everything action rampage. Oh, and mead restores health. Yes!

—Mark Asher
The Future of Adventure is a Journey Into the Past

TIMELINE

Based on his latest best-selling novel, Michael Crichton, the creator of Jurassic Park, sends you on a story-driven journey back in time for one of the greatest adventures of your life.

Rethink What Is Possible. Fall 2000

For more information visit www.timelineworlds.com

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about Xbox that also applies to the PS2. “As with any console, Xbox is a snapshot of a technology at a given point in time, and two years from now, X0box is going to look very antiquated in terms of features and capabilities and performance.”

In addition, Sony’s decision to include only 4MB of video memory in the PlayStation 2 may come back to haunt them. This presents challenges to multi-platform developers, because PC 3D cards will have 32 or 64MB of onboard memory. One such developer is Electronic Arts’ Tony Lupidi, who is working on THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH for both the PS 2 and the PC. He notes that “the PC has far more texture memory and can push fewer polygons. Conversely, the PlayStation 2 has less VRAM but can render more polygons.” He also states that “it is more challenging to make computer graphics for NTSC TV versus VGA PC. The filtering on PC hardware is much smoother than on the PS 2, so we have to do more texture lighting to make the final scene look well and to reduce NTSC-related artifacts.”

Of course, the PlayStation 2 has several undeniable advantages, including fast boot-up times, DVD playback, and zero compatibility problems. You’ll never have to download a new graphics driver or tweak your settings to get a game to run. It also costs about one-tenth that of a new, top-of-the-line PC.

But the very nature of a closed architecture system is a liability, which is clear when you load a new game like MADDEN 2001 into a PlayStation. The crisp graphics on the PC become blocky and pixelated on the old console. Five years from now, when we load games on PlayStation 2, Xbox, or the Nintendo Game Cube, they’ll look as obsolete next to the latest PC title as PlayStation games look now. —Dave Salvador
# A License to Kill

Will the new crop of movie-based games be any better than what's come before?

**by Mark Asher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>The Pitch</th>
<th>Action!</th>
<th>Cut!</th>
<th>The Lowdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obi-Wan (LucasArts)</td>
<td>Play as Obi-Wan and fight a dozen levels using the Force and your light saber to finally duel Darth Maul.</td>
<td>Cool motion-capture animation for the saber duels allows Obi-Wan to flip, roll, and jump during his battles.</td>
<td>The “Glyph System” relies on mouse movements to make light saber attacks, and may be difficult to master.</td>
<td>Thumbs up. Cool third-person graphics and an interesting combat system wrapped up in a Star Wars license. Not even Jar Jar could mess this up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planet of the Apes (Fox Interactive)</td>
<td>You're the only human survivor of a spaceship crash. Explore 15 levels and more than 70 sub-levels while fighting apes, rats, and hyenas. Solve puzzles. Hear over 2000 lines of dialogue.</td>
<td>Motion-capture graphics for movement and facial expressions, and a stealth mode for sneaking around.</td>
<td>Looks to be more of a puzzle game than anything else, and not a very good one.</td>
<td>Thumbs down. We already know the ending, and apes are about as menacing as circus clowns. You'll want to keep your hands off these damn dirty apes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil Dead (THQ and Heavy Iron Studios)</td>
<td>Stash on a chainsaw and get to work. You're Ash, and there are hordes of creatures to kill. Go get some.</td>
<td>Taunt the creatures with Bruce Campbell voice work.</td>
<td>You run around and kill things, and that's about it.</td>
<td>Thumbs down. Try watching Evil Dead 10 times in a row. Mindless violence and clever guest work for about two hours. Give us an Army of Darkness game instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starship Troopers (Haute Interactive/Blue Tongue)</td>
<td>The bugs attack, and we send our best exterminators in powered armor to fight back in a game based on Heimann's classic novel and the movie.</td>
<td>Great engine really looks cinematic; powered armor; and MYTH-like gameplay.</td>
<td>Puzzle-based missions and no resource gathering.</td>
<td>Thumbs up. It looks cool, the squad-level AI seems up to snuff, and we finally get powered armor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier (SouthPeak and Skinter Games)</td>
<td>You're an out-of-date killing machine abandoned on a backwater planet. Just when you get used to the peace, aliens attack your colony.</td>
<td>Top-shelf graphics and over-the-top action.</td>
<td>Aggressive system requirements and repetitive gameplay.</td>
<td>Thumbs down. Kurt Russell couldn't save the movie, and great graphics can't save this game. Besides, you're named Todd. That's a plumb, not a deadly cyborg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The World Is Not Enough (Electronic Arts)</td>
<td>You're James Bond playing through the events seen in the movie.</td>
<td>First-person game mixes stealth, action, and Q's gadgets. You even get to ski. That's cool.</td>
<td>PC game is being delayed for the PS2 version.</td>
<td>Thumbs up. It's Bond, James Bond, and that means it has a license to be killer. With the QUAKE III engine and the coolest spy setting going, we can't wait for this one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair Witch (Terminal Reality, Human Head, and Radical)</td>
<td>Three developers create three new episodes that predate the surprisingly successful indie film.</td>
<td>The NOCTURNE engine is very cinematic and should provide the right atmosphere.</td>
<td>The NOCTURNE engine is designed for looks, not gameplay.</td>
<td>Thumbs down. In 2003, three Blair Witch games entered the retail shelves and were never seen again. Weird camera angles work for spooky films, but not for spooky games.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>The Lowdown</th>
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</table>

## And From Games to Movies...

Give Hollywood credit. Several years ago, they tried to muscle into the game business and failed because the games they made sucked. They took it in stride, came right back, and made movies based on games that also sucked.

**Double Dragon**

Two brothers united in a fight against evil should have united to prevent this film from being made.

**Super Mario Bros.**

This movie is proof that Nintendo – along with cockroaches – will survive a nuclear war. What a waste of Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper.

**Wing Commander**

Saman in space? Freddie Prince Jr. instead of Mark Hamill? As a film director, Chris Roberts is a great game designer.

**Mortal Kombat**

Just like the game, the fight scenes are great fun. The game sticks to fighting. The movie doesn't. Fatality!

**Street Fighter**

It's sad that this was Raul Julia's last movie. Siddler still is that for Jean-Claude Van Damme. It wasn't.

Finally, we're hoping that the upcoming Tomb Raider doesn't suck. Lara at last sheds her polygon. What will Angelina Jolie shed?
American McGee
The man who put the knife in Alice's hand.

First, the name. Also, any problems when traveling?
The most difficult was in Japan, where saying, "I am American" will get you, "I
know you are, but what is your name, stupid?" Eventually I became
"Takashi"... much easier that way. And the Japanese realize automatically that
if you're using a Japanese name, it's because your own name is something
dumb.

Why Alice, and is Beatrix Potter safe from your clutches?
Alice just seemed natural. The characters, the environments, and the story are
all so amazingly well-adapted to becoming a video game. Everything about a
truly gothic/Victorian wonderland appealed to me. Beatrix is probably safe
from my clutches... I don't think parents (or kids, for that matter) would appreci-
ate my interpretation, but then again, who knows?

You got your first break by living in the same apartment complex as John
Carmack. What if you had lived next door to Sid Meier?
Something tells me that Sid and I wouldn't have formed the same bond as
John and I did. If it had happened though, I would have been just as honored
to learn under Sid as I am for having the chance to learn with John. Actually, I
think if I had lived next door to Sid, he would have moved to another part of
town.

What's cool about Alice?
Alice the character? That's there's a lot more to her than people are expecting.
Alice the game? That's there's a lot more to it than people are expecting.

Do you think Alice will upset fans of the book? Is this going to be a game that
parents will let their kids play?
Upset? Not really. To date, we've received tons of comments via the Web site
(alice.ew.com) and e-mail. Of those comments, I would say that maybe one
percent of them have been negative. This is going to be a game that parents
will need to put some thought into before letting their kids play it. It is not a
children's game in any respect, and I think we've done a good job of making
that clear to everyone.

What's the craziest non-gaming stunt you've ever pulled?
My friends Chris, Elso, and our respective wives/girlfriends like to do a sort of
performance art on the weekends in San Francisco. Lately, we've been wearing
80's rock-star hair and crazy outfits, then going out to dinner at the nicest
restaurant we can find. We call ourselves the "Fingerling Brothers" and gener-
ally try to cause as much havoc as possible. We were mistaken for Bon Jovi
once! Rock on, Bakimonos!

Has immersing yourself in the world of Lewis Carroll given you any weird
dreams at night?
I think it would be more accurate to say that the world of Lewis Carroll has
immersed itself into my weird dreams at night. —Interview by Mark Asher

Microsoft's Big Huge Deal
Brian Reynolds' new company makes deal with devil

The rich just got richer, again.

Two months after devouring Bungie, Microsoft has added yet another A-list develop-
er to its growing gaming roster. This time it's Brian Reynolds, the creative genius who—
in partnership with Sid Meier—brought us CIVILIZATION II and ALPHA CENTAURI.
Reynolds split with Meier earlier this year to form his own company, Big Huge Games, and
now Microsoft has announced that it will be the exclusive publisher and distributor of all
Big Huge-developed games.

"This is the culmination of where we are aiming Big Huge Games," said Reynolds.
"We're a group of guys with a particular dream, and a particular game that we want
to create. It's going to require significant resources and time, and we need a publisher
that believes in us. In Microsoft we found a
game group that's not just about marketing and distribution—it's gamers who understand
games and will offer significant contributions to all parts of the development process."

The deal specifically includes PC games. Ed Fries, vice president of games publishing at
Microsoft, says, "This is a concrete example that PC games are going strong, and that we're committed
to them. The 'PC is dead' talk comes around every time a new set of consoles come out, but it's never true. The PC is a great
platform, and it will always have the best performance and the best graphics."

Big Huge hasn't disclosed any details yet about its games. As for Microsoft, we asked
Fries who might be next, and jokingly suggested id Software.

"If I could work with John Carmack," said Fries, "I'd love to do that." —Jeff Green
RULING THE UNIVERSE TAKES EXPLORATION, AND A FLEET OF WARSHIPS HELLBENT
Colonization on Destruction.

Traverse an expansive multisystem galaxy.

Devise your supply strategy carefully.

Fleet admirals are under your command.

Travel through wormholes to explore the vastness of space as one of three uniquely equipped races: Mantis, Celareans, or humanoid Terrans. Then, while managing resources to build fleets, battle through 16 systems for control of the universe.

The stunning particle explosions and 3-D environment can be viewed the way you choose with maps that zoom in and rotate. And multiplayer mode pits you against your peers. Gather your troops; the fate of the galaxy is in your hands.

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Conquest
Frontier Wars

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Danger awaits, hardy traveler, in the turbulent lands of Arcanum! Prepare potion or pistol, for armament is a must! Encounter more than 500 friends and fiends of the oddest sort on dozens of quests and campaigns. Travel alone through this massive realm, or invite companions to join you online. And for those with discriminating taste, we sport the most advanced role-playing system ever created in this or any other reality.

Brigands beware! Eighty spells in 16 Colleges are at your disposal, while the mechanically inclined can construct wonders of the age with 60 technological degrees from eight disciplines.

An epic story with multiple paths ensures you'll never play a single or multiplayer game the same way twice. Or create your very own online campaigns with the Arcanum World Editor.

Dozens of quests and a limitless character design let you decide the destiny of your character, be it elf, half-ogre or other sundry races.

www.arcanum1.com
Bullets & Brimstone

Witness the metallurgical might of the repeating rifle or unleash the dark arts of a Hellgate, as a mechanical future challenges a magical past.
We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month; other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the new reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your dates have been hitting so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zifdavis.com

**ARGACOMIC**

Most of the content is done, but the development team decided to push this title all the way to February, in order to properly beta-test the game. There should be an open-beta test by the time you're reading this.

**Duke Nukem Forever:** 3D Realms recently announced that they're looking for a programmer to code the multiplayer game. The single-player game may be nearly complete, if they're starting to get serious about multiplayer.

**Oni:** Bungie says they're at the "Ultra-Near-Done-Alpha" stage.

**RETURN TO CASTLE GRAYSTORM:** Gray Matter reports that they're about 80 percent done with the game. Translated: Give it another 10-12 months.

**SUMMERNIGHTS:** Like a few other titles, the PC game was pushed to next year to accommodate the release of the PS2 version this fall.

**SIMMARS:** As reported in Inside Strategy, SIMMARS was placed "on hold" in the wake of the SIMS. In other news, there have also been comments about working on a multi-player version of the SIMS, but no official word on that so far.

**STARS:** STARS: Generations is good news—"they're in the home stretch, beta-testing time (going through second beta), and should be on track for the shelves soon.

**HOMELAND:** Cataclysm: It looks to be just like Brood War—a good example of what expansion packs should be. Interface improvements, graphical tweaks, new technologies, and a slicker-sounding story...could it go wrong?

**STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE:**

Raise the shields, put the Federation on hold—this looks like an honest-to-God good Star Trek action game. We got a playable build two weeks ago, and since then, four editors have been eating it up. It boasts beautiful graphics and mostly solid AI, but appears to be a bit short. This is preliminary, though—watch for our full review next month.
STEALTHMODE

The orcs have come home to roost at Sierra. As faithful readers may recall, Mr. Sneaky previously mentioned that Sierra was about to lose the Middle Earth license after they fired the MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE team and shut down production. I hinted at developments more dire, and it's happened: Sierra has sued the Tolkien estate to establish their right to make a Middle Earth game, and the Tolkien estate has countered with their own lawsuit, asking that the rights to make Middle Earth games be returned to them.

As part of the contract with the Tolkien estate, Sierra was supposed to deliver a Middle Earth game or they would be in breach of contract. So they did, or so they say. Earlier this year, Sierra supposedly finished a game set in Tolkien's Middle Earth mythos. Why wasn't it released? Apparently, Sierra wasn't allowed to publicize it or sell it without prior approval, and the Tolkien estate said no. It's likely that the Tolkien people thought the game stunk, and that Sierra threw something together to satisfy the contract and hold on to the rights. Sierra says they would love to talk about the game, but they can't. Hmmm.

Elsewhere in gamedom, an Infogrames exec recently had quite a brainstorm. Believing that most gamers never finish a game anyway, he proposed turning 60-hour games into 40-hour games. He had an actual formula that converts hours of gameplay into development weeks, so he thinks Infogrames can cut development time by a third. He probably also thinks that Jerry Lewis is a comic genius.

Steve Petersen, the guy who started the CHAMPIONS RPG game (and who worked on the PC version that was never finished) says he's been approached by companies who are interested in doing a PC version of CHAMPIONS. There's even talk of doing a massively-multiplayer superhero game.

White Wolf has been talking to Activision about taking VAMPIRE for-ward, with discussions ranging from a full-blown PC sequel down to new multiplayer missions.

Why haven't you seen the JAGGED ALLIANCE expansion? It's been done for months. Sirtech is reportedly unhappy with the publishing deal they've been offered. They want more money, in other words. Expect one side to buckle so they can get a gold version out for the holidays.

My guess is that Interplay and Shiny have the rights to make a Matrix game. Most likely a PS2 title.

Nintendo of Seattle's engineers have an interesting assessment of the competition. They praise the Dreamcast (safe, since it's likely to be a marginalized competitor). They think the PS2 is too hard to program and don't think the current games make the system worth buying. Finally, they hate the Xbox's unified memory architecture and think it will be a continuing problem.

Vampire: the Patch

1.1 patch for Nihilistic's RPG makes it more palatable

In response to fan complaints/comments/requests, Nihilistic and Activision have delivered a patch to VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE that has definitely improved the game. Although the patch contains numerous bug-fixes and tweaks, the most important changes are two gameplay additions: the ability to save anywhere, and to pause combat. VAMPIRE's save-game system still isn't as good as that of DIABLO II, where town portals and waypoints made it easier to pick up where you left off, especially early on.

But the new patch makes the single-player game much less frustrating. The game is so story-driven that the ability to save anywhere means you can now experience that story in a more fulfilling way. Being able to pause combat also makes a big difference, making things less chaotic. Combat is still real-time, but now, at least you can pause to get potions or weapons ready as necessary.

We don't rate games based on patches, but we wanted you to know that it has been improved. You'll find the patch at www.activision.com. —Jeff Green
Great commanders don’t do grunt work.

No matter what anyone says, the trowel is not mightier than the sword. With SideWinder Strategic Commander, you can finally focus on commanding your army. That’s because a quick push of a button will order the construction of vast infrastructures. Assemble legions of troops. Delegate entire fiefdoms. Or jump to any spot on the battlefield.

Set it up with your keyboard and mouse. Customize it for 72 different chores. And let it do the dirty work so you’re free to strategize at the speed of thought. It won’t, however, choreograph your victory jig.

But we’re working on that.
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HOUSEWARES
EVIL DEAD
Hail to the King.

Chainsaws, boomsticks, and Deadites, oh my!

Slice and dice the undead with a weapon in each hand.

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Best of all . . . Bruce Campbell as Ash!

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Quest Enhancement

EVERQUEST expands to an uncharted ice continent that's cooler than cool

--- WANTED: EVERQUEST junkies to jump all over Verant Interactive's upcoming expansion, which adds 16 new adventure zones to the already expansive EQ world. The Scars of Velious is a massive glacial land where the great dragons have existed for eons in icy solitude. The new realm is a place of ice caves, crystal caverns, dwarven fortresses, storm giant steads, and the mysterious Plane of Mischief—where heroes are said to be as powerful as gods.

The mix of unfamiliar creatures you'll encounter in Velious include: storm and frost giants, ice and undead dragons, sires, ottermen, cave bears, snow orcs, and walrusmen. Travelers will also be introduced to a myriad of new races, NPCs, weapons, spells, quests, and different forms of travel—including cantankerous sea gnomes who will ferry characters from zone to zone.

A word to the wary: The new add-on is not for the faint of heart. Only experienced characters of at least 30th-level and above need apply. THE SCARS OF VElius—a welcome addition to the immersive world of Norrath—is scheduled for release in December 2000. —Raphael Liberatore

HOOFING IT Players can take their characters up to the 60th level in the new expansion, and interact with new races like the Dwarves of Coldain, the Snowfang Snails, or this wandering centaur.
DIABLO II burns up the charts to #2, where it'll probably stay until HALF-LIFE is retired later this year. Several new games debut this month, including both MOTOCROSS MADNESS titles (huh?), DEUS EX, and ICEWIND DALE. Meanwhile, some of last month's newbies have already faded: SHOGUN slipped two notches, while COMBAT MISSION and VAMPIRE have both fallen off the list. Nonetheless, there are a ton of great games out there right now, and more on the way: CRIMSON SKIES, STAR TREK ELITE FORCE, HOMEWORLD: CATAclySM, and QUAKE TEAM ARENA could shake things up next month.

**WHAT WE'RE PLAYING**

**Deus Ex**

At one point, half the office could be found plugging its ears and humming so as not to hear the plot being drudged across the room. Ah, sweet, sweet FPS addiction... where hath thou been?

**Icwind Dale**

ICEWIND DALE is the RPG of the moment, satisfying our post-DIABLO 2 jones for hardcore tactical gameplay. Block hole’s winning streak continues.

**Unreal Tournament: Tactical Ops**

As if we needed another reason to play UTL, the new add-on is the most addictive anti-terrorist mod since HALF LIFE: COUNTERSTRIKE. Get it at www.planetunreal.com/tacticalops/.

**Crimson Skies beta**

Surely, the only new PC flight game this year is the greatest ever.

**Madden 2001**

Thankfully, the only new PC flight game this year is the greatest ever.
Death can strike anyone.  
For the right price.

You never know when death will come—unless you make a few special arrangements. Because once the Hitman takes your assignment, someone takes a bullet. It's not a righteous way of life, but we all have to make a living. Even if it means making a killing.

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Somewhere Else.

you had the strength to crush steel and bone?
you could bend reality to your will?
your thoughts became deeds of valor?

Ever Wonder?
NASCAR is one of the fastest-growing spectator sports in America, with something along the lines of 250 million people attending or tuning in to NASCAR events last year alone. But it's not so much the middle-American fan-base that has made NASCAR such a hot license for the video and computer game market; it's the hardcore racing simulation enthusiasts. Ask any one of those grognards what the top NASCAR computer game is, and few will disagree that Sierra's NASCAR RACING series from the award-winning Papyrus Studios rules the roost. The latest installment, NASCAR RACING 4, is slated for release in February, coinciding with the Daytona 500. As you can see from these exclusive new screens, NASCAR RACING 4's new game engine is one of the most amazing we've ever encountered.

**BEHIND THE WHEEL** Car interiors in NR4 are fully 3D-rendered for a more immersive look. What, no cup holder? If you look closely, you can see the first signs of an accident dead-ahead. The physics engine has been modified to allow cars to get completely inverted.

**RUSTY IN FRONT** It's not just the cars that are highly detailed. Check out those track textures. We've never seen such nice cracks (and we're not talking about those fans bending over to get another Pabst out of the cooler)
CORKSCREW FOLLIES Sears Point raceway is one of the more unique tracks on the NASCAR Winston Cup schedule – due, in part, to being one of the few non-ovals, but also due to the fact that it’s set in the middle of California’s wine country. Unfortunately, the age-old question “what goes best with pork rinds, white or red?” remains unanswered.

WHAT’S ON DRAFT? As any racing fan will tell you, drafting can be the name of the game. IRL’s advanced AI makes for drivers that use real-world tactics.

THE INSIDE TRACK The new graphics engine really pushes the photo-realism envelope. If I wasn’t wearing pants and drinking a warm beer, I’d think I was watching this on TV.
Sega Rally now available on PC.

You know, like the one in your office.

SEGA RALLY 2

SEGA RALLY

CHAMPIONSHIP

Customize your car’s setup for maximum velocity and perfect handling.

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Tackle 21 white-knuckled courses - day or night, through all kinds of weather.
Sega's hottest racing game ever is now available on PC. Get ready for that road-chewing, dirt-spitting action you've come to expect. With a fully customizable car, you might even survive to see the checkered flag. Race the computer or challenge your friends over the Internet. And remember, if too much Sega Rally gets you fired from your job...it works great on home computers too.
Feast on the souls of your enemies by Thierry Nguyen

**Sacrifice**

The folks at Shiny have an obvious God complex. Shiny's MESSIAH was just the first step; it had you at the whim of only one Divine Being. SACRIFICE throws you into an ungodly godly slugfest that might be the result if you put the Greek pantheon on the Jerry Springer Show. You play as a wily wizard out to make his own way in the name of one of these gods, through a contest of action and strategy similar to that of the BATTLEZONE games.

**HOW DO YOU TAKE DOWN A GOD?**

The base of any god's power is the altar. It's here where you'll be doing the sacrificing that the game name calls for. First, summon up your sacrificial lamb...

...then cast the Desecrate spell, which summons some witch-doctor-like fellows to start making pretty lights and weird noises around the enemy altar.

His Form Is Off. The interface is pretty straightforward: hold down the right-mouse button, and move it around to display the appropriate menu. If you know where a command is [e.g., Skirmish Formation is up and to the left], you can just fling your mouse that way to issue that command.

TowerIng Infernal. Consider these your "harvester" units. You plant these towers on mana shrines around the landscape to "claim it," hence the shrine will add mana only to you and not to any other godly goober loitering around.

continued on page 68
SURVIVAL IS A STATE OF MIND.

Featuring the voice of Ice T

Earn 80 Talents [Psionic weapons] such as Eye of Ra, Fireball and Mummy’s Revenge to destroy your opponent

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SANITY
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Throne of Darkness

Daimyo meets DIABLO in this hack'n'slash role-player
by Brett Todd

What do you get when you combine the gameplay of DIABLO with a Japanese legend, nasty undead monsters, and a gang of seven samurai straight out of an Akira Kurosawa-penned script?

A: THRONE OF DARKNESS, an upcoming action/role-playing hybrid that aims to sate those left wanting more after sending the big red guy with the horns back to hell.

Sierra is clearly hoping that lightning will strike twice—though perhaps that should be thrice, considering the multi-million-selling success of DIABLO II—when it ships the Click Entertainment designed title in the first quarter of next year.

High aspirations? Sure. But judging from the state of an eight-level beta demo I've been playing of late, they may not be far off the mark. Everything is in a very early state at the moment, but the building blocks have been put into place for this game to be a worthy successor to the Blizzard blockbuster's legacy. And here's one more hook for you: The game's designers—Donn Garten and Ben Haas—are both Blizzard alumni, and were members of the original DIABLO design team.

The Evil Undead

THRONE OF DARKNESS is solidly rooted in medieval Japanese folklore. It begins with the fall of Kira Tsunayoshi, a corrupt Sengoku who took a cursed potion to stave off a curse from the Kami—four elemental deities that reside in all things. The evil brew made Tsunayoshi's body immortal, but his soul was replaced by that of a demon named Tanshin. This new Dark Warlord then had vats of the elixir made up for his soldiers, who were turned into the undead upon drinking it. Other supernatural creatures were soon conjured up, and dark armies began to pillage the Yamato, killing everything in their path. Only one Daimyo (equivalent to a powerful feudal lord in medieval Europe) managed to survive this reign of terror. As dawn comes the day after the carnage, he begins to plot revenge with his seven remaining samurai.

Which is, of course, where you step into the fray. Players begin on the top floor of their Daimyo's fortress and must fight their way through fields, ravaged towns, caverns, shadowy forests, and other forbidding terrain to reach the final confrontation with the Dark Warlord. A number of quests will be assigned by the Daimyo throughout the solo campaign. Up to
Your thirst for conquest goes unquenched no longer.

Five new civilizations to lead or conquer: Aztec, Mayan, Huns, Spanish, and Korean. Four new campaigns to emerge victorious: Attila the Hun, El Cid, Montezuma, and the Battles of the Conquerors. Your challenge: Expand your empire and rule the world.

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That HOOOOO THAT YOU DO

Each samurai is rated in five characteristics. They range from the self-explanatory Strength and Vitality to the more esoteric Ki—the magical energy behind spellcasting. Making offerings to the gods is another key component of magic in the game.

Playing with Dolls

The standard RPG “doll” interface is used to equip your characters. All the role-playing basics—armor, swords, bows, magic scrolls, and healing potions—are on hand, albeit with a distinctive Eastern flavor.

Four of the seven samurai can be used in your party at any given time, with the remaining warriors going back to their shrine to be healed and rejuvenated. Expect to be swapping samurai in and out frequently as you proceed through the game, as each character has different skills required to advance in specific areas. The charismatic Leader, for example, is a master of tactics and is helpful during complex battles, while the Berserker maximizes damage by wielding a sword in each hand; and the sumo-like Brick can hammer down even the largest monsters with his iron kanabo (club). Specialties of the other four samurai—the Archer, Ninja, Swordsman, and Mage/Wizard—are self-explanatory.

Combat is pretty much a constant during the game. Skeletal archers, black-skinned demons, gigantic Oni and Kappa, and much more serve as the Dark Warlord’s minions. Combat never gets out-of-hand, however, thanks to the ability to call “plays” during scraps. Clicking on an icon in the left corner of the interface brings up a menu listing commands that order all the warriors to attack one foe, to split off and fight one-on-one, and so on. The playlist varies depending on which character you have in your party, with the Leader naturally having access to the greatest number of commands. This option comes in very handy during a full-scale battle with numerous adversaries, and allows the designers to make the real-time action more palatable to turn-based RPG fans. Adding this sort of control to the proceedings without slowing the game down is an admirable accomplishment.

‘Cause It’s Witchcraft

Magic is another important part of Throne of Darkness. Along with typical attributes like Strength and Dexterity, each samurai is rated in Ki, the magical energy that powers spellcasting. While all samurai can cast spells, each has access to different ones, with the exception of a few common incantations. Some are better at magic than others, with the Mage predictably topping the list. Spells are divided into four categories based on the elements of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. So you’ll find the likes of Ice Wall, Chain Lightning, Earth Spear, and Water Kanji among the available conjurations. Some general spells—such as the Mage’s Healing and Cure Poison—are available outside the elements. Further spells are obtained by making offerings to the elemental gods throughout the game. Those equally faithful to two different gods will be rewarded with special “combo spells” that take advantage of both elements. So you might be able to cast a fire-water hybrid later in the game, if you say your prayers.

Multiplayer modes function in exactly the same way as the single-player game, with the lone exception of clans. Each clan features from one to seven players who each control single samurai during the adventure. A total of 35 people can take part at one time. Up to 24 join the four different Daimyo teams aiming to topple the Dark Warlord, while the remaining seven serve as the evil one’s lieutenants. This should lead to some interesting games where alliances are formed and dissolved amongst the Daimyo’s men. Only one clan can emerge victorious, so even the closest of allies will eventually need to turn against one another.

Add to all this a graphical design evocative of the Far East and a dramatic musical score that brings James Clavell’s Shogun (the novel, not the mini-series) to mind, and you’ve got a game that should warrant a look-see early next year. Until then, check out the official Web site at www.throneofdarkness.com for updates.
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Startopia
Homesteading on the final frontier
by Robert Coffey

From big fiery plummeting chunks of Skylab squashing dingoes in the outback, to the overbudget and underbuilt International Space Station, the live/work space facility concept has had its share of problems.

To really enjoy the daunting challenges of interstellar construction boggles you needed a clip-on tie, a $500 protractor, and a cushy NASA position; that is, until late this year when STARTOPIA hits store shelves. A space station simulation in the lowest sense of the term, Mucky Foot's latest project lets you fill an orbiting ring-shaped space station with amusement parks, hotels, bars, and a wide assortment of whimsical aliens.

Runaway Development With a Purpose

As opposed to the "software sandbox" approach of other sims like SIMTHEME PARK or SIMCITY, STARTOPIA is shooting to set itself apart by offering a more focused, mission-based style of play. Space city managers will start off building very rudimentary structures (energy collectors, housing, etc.) in order to progress in the game, working their way up to missions in which they'll compete with up to three computer players for the aggressive acquisition of the 16 sections of the space station. Success can come through a number of means: political, financial, or military. The only constant in this dynamic game is the need to keep your growing alien population happy.

And that alien population is a huge part of the game. The structures you build will both attract and pacify specific aliens: If you want an army, build combat arenas to draw the warlike Kasvagonian, and "exotic bars" (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) to keep them onboard. Need to build a weapon of mass destruction? You'll probably have to corrupt your more intelligent lifeforms by denying them the more refined amenities they desire, and instead exposing them to those same arenas and exotic bars. With every creature and race having stats for their mind, body, and even their soul, you'll have to juggle everything wisely to attract and keep the population you want.

Getting to Know You

Managing the frequently conflicting races will be an integral part of your overall strategy. Each race has a very strong personality which can influence the other races with which it interacts. The Zedem Monks, for example, will bring a sense of spirituality to your station; but if their spiritual fervor goes unchecked, they'll go Moonie on you, converting your most vital aliens into cult members, potentially leading to a disastrous wave of religious fanaticism. The same double-edged personality quirks are present in every race, like the Tribble-ish Memaus whose cute cuddliness cheer your population right up until they mature—into hideous, murderous, hard-to-kill monsters. With all the races and structures now in place, Mucky Foot figures they're about 90% done, with just the balancing and mission structure to go. Any strategy game with balancing left to do is at best 75% done. Let's hope they don't push too hard for that Christmas release and launch STARTOPIA before she's ready for orbit.
EPISODE 1 THE RISE OF TYCOONS

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red alert 2

the soviets are exacting their revenge and invading the united states. fight on the side of freedom or join the soviet war machine.

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take your campaign over land, sea and air to utilize over 100 units & structures to deliver your fury.

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cinematic movies accentuate each hard-won battle and brief you for your next mission.

will you lead an american victory parade in the streets of new york or host a soviet victory celebration in the white house?
It is an unlikely home for a king.

This is the thought in your head as you stand on the sidewalk looking at an utterly nondescript office building on 82nd Avenue in Edmonton, Canada. Your quest has taken you thousands of miles, across an international border, to the far northern region of the continent, and now all you can think, as you approach the entrance, is: This is it?

But “unlikely” is perhaps the key word that you could use to describe everything about Bioware. Founded five years ago by two family doctors with no previous experience in designing games, Bioware is now indisputably one of gaming’s royal elite. Their collaborations with Interplay’s Black Isle Studios have created what is essentially a new role-playing dynasty, and their next move—releasing BALDUR’S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN—is easily one of the biggest events of the year.

How did this happen? How did a couple of Canadian M.D.s whose only previous programming experience was designing medical software like the “Gastroenterology Patient Simulator” end up at the top of the gaming heap? We braved the hostile American-Canadian border patrol and journeyed up to Edmonton to see them in action.

Complete Control

“The main ingredient of everyone here is that they’re passionate about their work,” said Dr. Ray Muzyka, who founded the company in 1995 with his friend Dr. Greg Zeschuk.

They would have to be. At the time of our visit, Bioware was in the final crunch period of getting BALDUR’S GATE II out the door, and, while they were not quite as insane as we had expected, there was still a lot of work to do. For the BG II team, the official office hours for the last couple months have been as follows: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and Saturday 12:00 to 6:00. That’s 60 hours a week, if you’re counting. But they...
Dungeon Masters

With Baldur's Gate II, Black Isle and Bioware Complete Their Quest For The Role-Playing Crown
aren't. Many of the team members will stay much later than that, and play the game at home in their "off hours" to seek out as many bugs as possible.

"Almost everyone here is a tester on the game," said Muszyka. "I play the game every night for around three hours, from midnight until 3:30 am. I try to find 20 bugs at a time and report them the next morning."

This is the kind of insanity that leads to success.

All these two doctors had between them when they opened Bioware's doors in 1985—other than that Gastroenterology Patient Simulator—was a shared passion for computer games, comics, and, as their first T-shirt proclaimed, "anything geeky." That passion has taken them far.

Bioware's first game was the Mechwarrior-style SHATTERED STEEL, released back in 1996—a decent but not spectacular debut. But the company hit it out of the park in 1998 when they partnered with Interplay's Black Isle Studios to produce BALDUR'S GATE, a gigantic RPG set in the AD&D Forgotten Realms world. Defying even the remotest expectations, the game sold over one million copies, brought role-playing and DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS back into the fold of computer gaming, and established the Bioware/Black Isle team as a major force in the industry. Since that game, Bioware's Infinity engine has been used to fuel three more highly acclaimed RPGs: the TALES OF THE SWORD COAST expansion, PLANECAPE: TORMENT, and ICEWIND DALE.

This year has seen Bioware take off even further. The company—now at nearly 100 employees—defied expectations again by developing one of the best action games of the year so far, MDK2. And they recently scored perhaps the ultimate coup—the chance to produce the first single-player RPG set in the STAR WARS universe for LucasArts.

First, however, they must get BALDUR'S GATE II out the door. And now the pressure is on.

Career Opportunities

On this mid-August morning, the Bioware office is busy, but not out of control. Much of the staff, in fact, is not even working on BG II. Offices and cubicles are full of t-shirted designers working on NEVERWINTER NIGHTS (see sidebar) and the PlayStation 2 version of MDK2, and hidden away in his office, away from the prying eyes of journalists, is art director John Gallagher, working on concept sketches for the STAR WARS RPG. The relative calm is not what we expected.

"This project is definitely not as stressful as BALDUR'S GATE was," said co-lead designer James O'Brien. "We have long hours, 12 to 14 hours a day—but we don't have people sleeping over at work. With BG there were longer hours, a lot more stress, and tempers ran higher. We're a more mature company now."

The planning for BALDUR'S GATE II began immediately after they finished the first game. Muszyka, O'Brien, Gallagher, lead programmer Mark Darrah, Black Isle's Pergus Urukhart and Chris Parker (see sidebar), and other team members conducted group meetings to plan the sequel. "We started with a list of design suggestions from fans, message boards, and internal ideas from here and Black Isle of all the things we'd like to see in a sequel," said Muszyka. "We had probably thousands of things on the list. We boiled it down to a list of a few hundred items that we felt would add a lot of value—and that list became the design document."

Among those core features were 800x600 resolution graphics, better AI scripting, a better journal, and an annotatable map. On a more general level, they wanted to expand the character and
Baldur's Gate II: a First Look

So the one question we all want answered about BALDUR'S GATE II is: Does it live up to the hype? The definitive CGW answer: We don't know yet.

Although we originally hoped to review the game in this issue, Bioware was still tweaking and refining it as we went to press, so we didn't have final code. We did, however, have a beta with most of the game on it—so what follows here are some initial impressions. Be aware that I only made it as far as Chapter 2, and if Bioware's estimation of total possible gameplay is to be believed, then I have about oh, 190 hours to go.

What's My Motivation?

As in the first game, you'll start BALDUR'S GATE II by creating one character. This time, instead of being a spell-less, staff-wielding weakling, all starting characters will begin with 89,000 XP, which will put you at 5th to 7th Level, depending on class. You can also import your party from either BG or TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, and your character will be bumped up to the minimum 89,000 XP, though TALEs characters could go all the way up to 181,000.

Most gamers are going to spend a lot of time on the character creation screen, because there's so much to choose from now. In addition to one new race (Half-Elf), Bioware has added three new classes (sorcerer, barbarian, and monk), and best of all, a host of new kits that modify the classes in a variety of ways, allowing you to create much more specialized characters (see chart). The big bummer here, of course, is that you only get to make one character, which feels like a small roadblock after being spoiled by the full-party creation in ICEWIND DALE. If the game is really 200 hours long, how many of us are going to replay it to try different kits? The good news is that, as early as Chapter 1, you'll run into NPCs with kits who can join your party—so you'll still get to play around with them even if you didn't create them yourself.

And the fact is, is a tradeoff that BGII needs to make for the sake of the story, in which the NPCs play a huge role, with far more storylines than in the first game. I am going to refrain from giving away too much here, because Bioware has really flipped the story telling, and there's one major twist involving one of your party members very early on in the game.

I'll tell you this much: The game opens just months after the end of BG1 in which you have destroyed the evil Sherekv and learned the nature of your own ancestry. Although you ended that game in glory, you start the sequel imprisoned in a dungeon, where you have been suffering brutal experimentation at the hands of an unknown captor. Also imprisoned: your old friends Minsc and Boo, Jahiera, and Iom. Getting out of this dungeon is the basic goal of Chapter 1, and while not exactly earth-shatteringly original, it highlights many of the new game's strengths.

Go for the Eyes, Boo!

First of all, there's the graphics. Screenshots can't really do it justice, but the switch to 800x600 resolution has made a huge difference (and gives a glimpse as to what might have been with DIABLO II...).

The level of detail is amazing—and coupled with some nice animation—has really made this world come alive. It also shows just how beautiful a 2D game can still be.

The interface changes are welcome, solid ideas across-the-board. They're little things, but cumulatively, they make a big difference. The Rest button, for one thing, is now prominently displayed on the left panel rather than being buried like it was in the first game. All three panels are now toggle-able, so you can play the game in full-screen mode, or with any combination of panels displayed. Hitting Pause will automatically bring up the panels you last had displayed—making it simple to get yourself ready for combat.

The journal is now so much better that it reinforces just how inauspicious the one in the first game was. There are now separate tabs for active and completed quests, critical path notes, and player comments. Yes, someone finally figured out that it might be nice to take notes in an RPG right inside the game. Similarly, the autops is now completely annotatable. You can mark key locations (like locked chests, or NPCs), which will then be flagged on the map.

Doofaeus, Kensai warrior, shares his first impressions

by Jeff Green
The Brains Behind Black Isle

While BALDUR'S GATE 2 is primarily the result of the hands-on work of the folks at Bioware, we shouldn't downplay the importance of the team at Black Isle Studios, who have co-produced the BALDUR'S GATE games, and developed both PLANESCAPE: TORMENT and ICEWIND DALE in-house at Interplay.

Though not nearly as well known as other higher-profile game designers in the business, both Division Director Feargus Urkuhart and Senior Producer Chris Parker have emerged as two of the most important RPG developers around. Here's what they have to say for themselves.

Interview With
Feargus Urkuhart
Black Isle's Division Director

Who are you and why should we care? I'm the Division Director for Black Isle Studios. I manage all of Black Isle's internal and external products and I sometimes play at being a designer, as with FALLOUT 2. My main responsibility is making sure that Black Isle products live up to what we have done in the past, and that we continually evolve in what we develop.

How do you explain your incredible success the last few years? All of a sudden, beginning with FALLOUT, Interplay has produced one great RPG after another. What changed? The main change at Interplay was the division of development that started to occur in 1996. With the founding of the Black Isle division, we were able to focus on making RPGs and only RPGs. Then after FALLOUT, even with the departure of a number of Black Isle employees over to Troika [now working on ARCANUM—Ed.], we've been able to have a relatively stable development staff, allowing us to take what we've learned and apply that to future games. We have also been very lucky in our relationship with Bioware, in that we've been able to work very closely with them and with the engine they created for the original BALDUR'S GATE, the Bioware Infinity Engine. Coupled with our focus, I think we've also been successful because we've been relatively careful about the technological scope of our products. We realize that the success of an RPG is based in the gameplay and the content created for it, and not always in the technology. So, we have focused our efforts on delivering the best content, in engines that are as new as possible—but are not on the bleeding edge.

Were you a big D&D player in real life? If so, describe your character in your current (or favorite) campaign? I've played D&D/AD&D since I was about 12. However, the longest campaign that I played in was actually a SHADOWRUN game. My character in that was a Dwarven Street Samurai named SPUD who had two things on his mind: money and finding out where to get more money.

3rd-Edition rules: cool beans, or a fiasco? What are the best/most exciting things about the rule changes to you? Does anything suck? After reading through the Player's Handbook two or three times, I can pretty much say that it is probably the best thing that has ever happened to D&D. The rules are much more modern and in a word, it's just smoother. The best thing, though, is that it is still D&D. Wizards of the Coast was able to update the rules without losing the things that make it feel like the game I've played for almost 20 years.

Will you play BG2, or are you sick of it already? Actually, I'm playing it right now. A small confession I have is that I never got past Chapter 5 in the original BG, but I'm hoping to finish BG2 before it comes out.

Clampdown
But how does a company really know that their game doesn't suck? They play it. They test it, over and over, for literally thousands of hours, looking for everything that isn't working, could be better, or just flat out stinks. And this has been the life of the BALDUR'S GATE 2 team for months now.

I MUST NOT GO POSTAL For lead programmer Mark Burrah, BALDUR'S GATE 2 is not a game, but an endless stream of code. Be glad he takes it out on SOUL CALIBUR.

Playing their own game, endlessly. It's a huge job—and not as much fun as it sounds.

On the wall outside Muzyka's office is a gigantic whiteboard with a chart of every single area and subplot in the entire game. Each area not verified as being 100 percent complete and bug free is marked with an X. On this day in August, there are 52 X's remaining.

Verifying whether things are working correctly is primarily the job of the Quality Assurance (QA) department, who are basically paid to play the game and to do everything they can to try to break it. Along with Bioware's QA department, Interplay has sent a six-person QA team of their own to Edmonton, and they also have four more
This player character is a 7th-level half-elf Kaelzi warrior, representing both a new race and class in Baldur's Gate II. His Kai ability inflicts maximum foot-kicking pain in a day for 10 seconds.

Small effects are enhanced with OpenGL. If you have a 3D card, it's not required but it's worth it.

One of the NPCs who can join your party is a specialized thief, a bounty hunter. He's excellent at setting traps.

Again, these are small changes but help remove a lot of the frustration, guesswork, and busywork from the first game.

All of the Black Isle RPGs have featured stellar written dialogue and voice acting, and BALDUR'S GATE II at least through Chapter 2, maintains that tradition. Written dialogue is now broken up into smaller chunks of just a couple sentences per screen, which will come as a relief to anyone overwhelmed by PLANESCAPE: TERRITORIAL's daunting blocks of text. The voice work is outstanding as always, and those who loved Minsc in the first game will be happy to know that he's as ridiculously over-the-top as before.

The Patient

Combat works just as in the first game, but the combination of the new kits and the higher starting level-point make the early battles more interesting right from the start. My character, a half-elf Kaelzi warrior, is a phenomenally butt-kicker. He gets no missile weapons or armor, but his Kai special ability makes up for meagerness, allowing him to inflict maximum damage for 10 seconds, once a day, on all attackers. The first NPC I picked up, Yoshio, was a thief/bounty hunter with extremely high-intelligence and the ability to set special traps.

It's too early for me to comment definitively on subquests, though I can say that through a good portion of Chapter 2, there is already much to do—and none are FedEx quests. Random wandering around the scene to have been all but eliminated. And getting to the first town after the opening dungeon reveals another of the new game's joys: a town map with every key location already marked. Pathfinding, another of the first game's weaknesses, is greatly improved. I conducted numerous experiments, and in almost every case, every party member went the right way, making intelligent moves to get out of each other's way.

Final Answer?

But don't take my word on any of this. If you have this magazine's CD, play the demo yourself. I can't pass judgment until I see it, but if the next 190 hours hold up to the first 10 I've played, but from what I've seen so far, BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN is going to be everything Black Isle fans have been craving and hoping for, and then some.

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Interview With
Chris Parker
Black Isle’s BALDUR’S GATE 2 Producer

Who are you and why should we care?
I’m Chris Parker, a Senior Producer in Black Isle Studios, and to be perfectly honest I really don’t have any idea why anyone would care. But I have been the producer on BALDUR’S GATE, TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, ICEWIND DALE, and BALDUR’S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN.

What were your responsibilities on BG2? What does a producer do? Is it kind of like a movie director?
My responsibility is BALDUR’S GATE II. I primarily coordinate, communicate, and approve in all areas of bringing the game to the shelf. I work with PR (press and public relations), marketing (creation of ads, box materials, promotional materials, etc.), quality assurance (Game testing), audio (music, VO, SFX), and anybody else that does anything for BGII or Black Isle at Interplay. I work with Wizard of the Coast because of the Forgotten Realms license. I work with Bioware on essentially all aspects of development, but they actually do all of the design, art, and programming. In the end, I am basically personally responsible for the whole ball of wax.

Were you a big D&D player in real life?
I have played various pen and paper RPGs over the years. Mostly AD&D, but a lot of other games too. I think my favorite character was a fighter named Jered. He was a total power-gaming character—1st-Edition with Unearthed Arcana rules. He dual-wielded daggers that he was double-specialized with. Even at first level, this gave him something like 5-2 attacks and he was around 4A-7 To Hit and damage. So in a good round, he would do around 20-30 damage at first level. Hehe. I’m not even sure.

3rd-Edition rules: cool beans, or a fiasco? What are the best/most exciting things about the rule changes to your opinion? Does anything suck?
I like the 3rd-Edition rules a lot. I actually did some beta testing on them last year and I thought they were great. The overall changes to combat make the game both more intriguing and quicker to play, which was one of my old complaints about 2nd Edition. In 2nd Edition, your combat options for a fighter type were basically move and attack—but if you were a thief, you wondered if you wanted to hide in shadows before you moved or attacked, etc. In 3rd Edition, you can do all this semi-complex stuff, but it’s all blended into a pretty swanky system.

Will you play BG2, or are you sick of it already?
I will probably still be working on my current game of BGII. I’ve been working on it for about two weeks and I haven’t gotten out of Chapter 2 yet! I don’t know how long it would take to get sick of it. There are so many levels and branches of complexity that you could probably play through it five times and still be finding stuff you had no idea was even there. I’m not even remotely sick of it yet—playing it is actually the part of my job I look forward to the most.

PIZZA AGAIN Today’s lunch haul, The BI2 staff is working 12-hour days Monday through Friday, meaning they’ll eat most meals together. Unlike during the first game, it’s not always pizza. “It didn’t occur to me that I could order anything else,” said boss Ray Muzyka.

According to QA lead Scott Langevin, each member of Bioware’s QA team is assigned an area, and is responsible for ensuring that that area is as bug free as possible—a process that he said takes about a week, on average. More than one QA person will look at one area, of course, because as he put it, “14 eyes are better than two, and each set is going to look at a problem with a different perspective.”

Bioware generates weekly build tests of the game, along with daily updates, and QA must constantly check and recheck whether problems have been fixed—or if new ones have been created. Every person testing the game—from QA and elsewhere, at both Bioware and Black Isle—fills out a bug report every day, and it’s then the menial task of line producer Nathan Pilewski to compile all the reports into a massive Excel spreadsheet, and then sort and distribute the reports to the appropriate designers and programmers for fixing.

“It’s not terribly glamorous,” admits Pilewski. “There’s a large misconception about what it’s like to work at a game company. I know that when I started I was thinking, ‘All right! I’ll get to play video games!’ But this [pointing to the spreadsheet] is what I do all day.”

Pressure Drop
The QA guys do get to play the game, but quite often, they’re playing the same small area, over and over, for hours on end. As Muzyka describes it, “The QA people don’t just verify that the game works and is fun, they have to go all through every scene trying every crazy thing they can think of to break it—attacking the people they’re talking to, or casting spells in the middle of a

six-person teams testing the game back in California.

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dialogue—and only when they've successfully gone from start to end trying every crazy thing is that area considered 'finished'. Then, we immediately re-test.

The QA team is also solicited for their opinions of the game. It's a known, notorious fact in the games industry that QA departments are often treated as second-class citizens. They're often entry-level employees who are 'just' playing the game, and quite often their comments and criticisms are not appreciated, or even listened to by those 'higher up'—as all those creepy games on your shelf prove. But this kind of class division does not appear to exist at Bioware.

"We always listen to QA," said designer Ohlen. "They're really representative of the people who are going to be playing the game. If they don't like something, well, no matter how much fun you thought it was going to be, there must be something wrong with it."

The most recent change came with the endgame. "Just a week and a half ago someone here told me the end of the game sucked," said Ohlen. "I asked a couple other people and they thought it sucked too. So I took a general survey and it turned out that everyone but one guy thought it sucked. They all liked the idea of the end, the final battle, but said it went on too long—so I shortened it. When everyone is saying the same thing, you have to listen."

At this late date, however, the team is mostly past any qualitative changes. The emphasis now is on squashing bugs. And there are lots of them. Random game crashes. Impossibly tough monsters. Placeholder sounds (like helicopters) not yet removed. So the 12-hour days continue, the bug reports keep shuffling from desk to desk, and the whiteboard slowly gets those Xs removed.

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**NEVERWINTER NIGHTS**

We check in with NWN producer Trent Oster

**** BARDIAN'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN is currently getting all the attention, but for many role-players, their next RPG, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, is even more exciting—due mainly to the limitless multiplayer capabilities (see our July 2000 cover story). We checked in with the game's producer, Trent Oster, to see how it's moving along.

**How's it going? About how far along in production of NWN are you now? 20%? 50%? 33.3%?**

I would rate the development on NWN at about 40-45% right now. We've nailed down most of the issues and have technical solutions for problems we've encountered in the past. The big task ahead is primarily implementation.

**What are the latest, coolest things you guys have been implementing recently? What are you most excited about right now in the game?**

The combat system really has me excited. Early on in the project, I spoke about getting away from the ' Flintstones boxing' model of combat, where I swing, they swing. We've done exactly what I planned out in the beginning: Players will parry, dodge, and interact with each other in a plausible combat setting. If you miss your attack, it will be because your opponent dodges the blow, shrugs it off, armor, or parries it with a weapon of their own. The entire system gives combat a much more dynamic feel and makes it fun to engage with.

**Are there plans for an open beta test, and if so, when might we start hearing about it?**

We've discussed an open beta for NEVERWINTER and we're quite excited about the idea. As to when a beta test would open up, it will be some time yet. When we're ready, we'll post a sign-up sheet on our Web page at www.neverwinternights.com.

**How many modules do you think you are going to ship with the game to get people started? And are you worried at all that there won't be enough to keep people going before they start creating their own? Or do you think we'll start seeing user mods instantly?**

We are planning on around 25-30 modules shipping with the game. These modules will mostly be linked into our campaign and will serve as our main story for NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. As for user-made modules, the toolset is so friendly that I expect the first few dungeon crawls to start appearing literally within hours of the game's release. It will take time before the full power of the toolset is really understood and utilized, of course, so it may be a little while before high-quality, high-quality, user-created content...
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“As this project is winding down, said Ohlen, we’re getting a lot of programming bugs that we didn’t expect, since this is not a new engine. But we’ve modified the engine in so many different ways—scripting language, how spells work—that there’s still a lot to do.

Programmer Mark Darrah agreed with the others that the situation is far less tense than with BALDUR’S GATE, and that a new engine would have presented much more serious problems. “The stress is there,” he said, “but I’ve had no major breakdowns yet.”

Death or Glory

Throughout our day at Bioware, we witness the same attitude in every department: confidence and optimism tempered only by fatigue and the desire to be done. There’s no backbiting, no infighting. After all these hours, no one appears to hate anyone else, or, more surprisingly, the game itself. Of everyone we talked to, only one—Ohlen, the game’s co-designer and the one perhaps most familiar with every detail of the game—says he won’t play it when it comes out.

Some, like programmer Darrah, are actively looking forward to it. “I didn’t play BG because it couldn’t run on my machine at home, but I’ll probably upgrade so I can play this one,” he said. “The programmers have the advantage of not really knowing the story so well— we’re just looking at it in bits and pieces.”

For Dr. Ray Muzyka, neither the 12-hour days, nor the graveyard-shift play testing (while also trying to finish up an M.B.A.), nor the pressure of trying to live up to the gaming community’s very high expectations have remotely softened his enthusiasm for or confidence in the game. “We really like to think of BALDUR’S GATE 2 as the only game you’ll need to buy this year.”

It’s not arrogance. It’s just a sincere statement of belief from a man who knows his company is at the top of its game.

As we leave Bioware at the end of the day and march off to experience the joys of high-alcohol Canadian beer, we are left with this final thought: There is no magic formula to what makes a great game or a great game company. There are only people. Get the right combination of them together, and that’s what makes things start to happen.

Right now, there’s some serious magic happening up in Edmonton.

Bioware by the Numbers

- Number of total Bioware employees: 96
- Number of Bioware employees on the BG2 team: between 20-35
- Estimated number of total person-hours spent working on BG2: 55 years
- Number of BG2 team members who finished BG1 (as game players): 15
- Estimated number of pizzas consumed at the office during BG2 production: 1500 (conservative)
- Estimated number of hours team members have spent playing BG2: many thousands
- Number of nights slept at office: none
- Number of nights slept at office during BG1 production: 40 to 50
- Estimated number of hugs fixed so far during beta-testing: over 10,000

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Springtime for Gamers
More Winter for ICEWIND DALE Expansion

The Groundhog of Doom has seen his shadow, heralding in several more levels of winter in ICEWIND DALE. Encouraged by the early sales success of their traditional hack-n-slasher, Black Isle has begun work on ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER, an expansion planned to ship in...the heart of winter.

HEART OF WINTER will take players deeper into the belly of ICEWIND DALE and will center on the city of Loneywood—one of the Ten Towns central to the R. Salavator novel upon which the game is based. The main plot involves an uprising of Barbarian tribes, which threatens to sweep the Dale clean of all hygienic and cultured peoples. Throughout the course of the adventure, players will explore barbarian culture, visiting a barbarian town, war camp, and burial site while seeking out the origin of the barbarians' uppy antics.

Of course, there will be a slew of additions and improvements, including:
- 800x600 display support
- gem bags and scroll cases to keep inventories tidy and to allow more space for loot
- DIABLO II-style hotkeys for locating objects on the ground and hidden doors
- experience-point cap raised to 2.9 million (19th-level fighters, 17th-level wizards)
- 40-60 new high-level spells, including Earthquake and Spiritual Wrath
- the complete elimination of combat (kidding)

The design team also promises some inventive new monsters and a couple twists that they're keeping strictly hush-hush.

WINTER OF OUR DISC CONTENT
Back at the ranch: this concept art for the town of Loneywood into a lovely and cozy holiday trash-n-slush resort.

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PLANESCAPE Team Has a New Project

Black Isle has made their name turning the universe of AD&D into rock-solid games. But that, apparently, is no longer good enough. Now they want to create their own universe from the halflings up.

The team that brought us PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, the CGW 1999 Role-Playing Game of the Year, is now six months into a quest to forge their own original high-fantasy universe using the LithTech 3D engine.

Few solid details are available on the game at this point, but we do know this: The universe will not stray far from traditional high fantasy, and will include the usual cast of characters— including ye olde dwarves, halflings, and elves. The rules will be an expanded version of the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. system used in the FALLOUT games, so it will have a well-developed skill system. The player will control a single character who can acquire companions throughout the game, just as in BALDUR'S GATE.

There will be multiplayer play. And the LithTech 3D engine will be used to render the world from an isometric perspective.

This world-creation business is a tall order. Few computer game developers have succeeded in creating original fantasy universes, and no one has done it in the past 10 years. But if anyone has a shot at success, it's the current kings of the computer RPG world. More news as this world emerges from the void...

---

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Otanka Onslaught, Kelta
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PS2+
SO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TURN ON THE PS2?
Well, first, of course, you have the nifty new start-up sequence (far right), and if you have a PS1, PS2, or DVD disc in the system it will automatically load. But if there's nothing in the system, or the drive tray is open, you go to the new system menu where you have three choices: Browser, System Configuration, and Version.

THE BROWSER
No, not Netscape—this isn't that type of Browser. This is where you mess with everything hooked up to your PS2: Any memory cards, PocketStations, DVD video discs, audio CDs, PS1 or PS2 games in the system will appear here as little icons. If you select a memory card, you will go to the memory card management screen: Select any software and it will load. Presumably other peripherals, such as hard drives, modems, and other extras will also be accessed through here in the future.

UTILITY DISK
The only CD that comes packed in with the PlayStation2 isn't a bunch of game demos (as was previously promised), but more or less an electric version of the instruction manual. It walks you through the use of various parts of the hardware, and also includes a short sample of DVD video and the PS2's DVD player driver so you can reinstall it to your memory card if you need to.

The controller ports and memory card slots, all the same size and shape as on the original PlayStation. Only two sets? Yup. Sony says they didn’t include more controller ports in order to keep costs low.

The good ol’ PlayStation logo, which you can rotate easily to suit a vertical or horizontal configuration.

The light in the Reset button glows red when the system is idle, and green when it is active. The eject button has a blue light that flashes when the drive is opening or closing.

You might recognize these little buggers called USB ports—they come standard on modern PCs. All kinds of peripherals—mice, keyboards, scanners, printers, cameras, hard drives—can plug in here, quick and easy.

That fundamentally changes society in the
SYSTEM CONFIGURATION
Here's where you can customize your system's settings: change the language for the menus to Japanese or English, the time and date (yes, the PS2 has an internal clock), turn the digital audio out on or off, set the component video out to RGB or Y Cb/Pb Cr/Pr, and finally adjust the screen ratio to full screen or the letterboxed 4:3 or 16:9 ratios.

VERSION
These are the programs that run various functions inside your PS2, and will surely be upgradeable in the future. The list on the system as it stands now is browser, CD player, PlayStation driver and DVD driver, all of which are version 1.00 (not surprising since this is from one of the first PS2s off the production line!). You can't really do much here yet, except for one very important, very cool setting under the PlayStation driver, where you can adjust the PS2 to play your PS1 games with faster loading and smoother textures.

Trip Hawkins, CEO of 3DO, on the PS2 to NEWSWEEK
the same way the printing press did.

STEM
**BOOTY CALL**
On bootup, four colored lights (purple, red, blue, and green) swirl around a dark blue mist, with any number of transparent cubes scattered about—the number of cubes seems to increase the more you play your PS2. After a couple of seconds and a loud tone, the “camera” zooms into the mist, and your disc loads. Huzzah!

Here we have a pic of the PS2’s CD player interface (top)—unfortunately even more boring than the PS1’s. Next is a shot of a system settings screen (middle), which keeps up the “clear crystal and swirling lights” motif of all the system menus. And finally we see what the browser looks like (bottom), with a memory card, PocketStation and DVD in the PS2, all represented by icons.

Two different stands went on sale along with the PS2 in Japan, a horizontal and a vertical stand. The horizontal stand (about $9) lays under the PS2 and really doesn’t do much except look nice, while the vertical stand (about $14) stabilizes the PS2 so it can stand on one end and save space.

**THE DVD MOVIES**
Unlike the Japanese PlayStation2, which requires a memory card file to play DVD movies, the U.S. version allows you to watch your favorite flicks right out of the box. If you’ve yet to watch a movie on DVD, you’ll immediately see the giant increase in visual quality that it offers. And don’t forget all those nifty extras such as trailers, behind the scenes footage and director’s commentary, that can be found on many DVD releases.
Three Heroes
One Enemy
All Action

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Radical advances in 3D graphics are going to put you into the matrix.

by Dave Salvator
Remember how *The Matrix* took you to another world? Its immersion was so complete, its special effects so stunning and seamless, the real world just melted away for 136 minutes. That sense of artificial reality—or the "Hollywood Experience," as game industry types put it—is one of the great driving forces in 3D graphics innovation. The goal for game designers and 3D hardware architects is to deliver special effects that rival anything you've seen in a big-budget movie. PC gamers are going to have front row seats to an amazing new era in graphics realism.

In the next few years, you're going to see phenomenal advances in lighting, more life-like scenes populated with more inhabitants, and far more detailed-looking characters. Virtual actors will begin to take on human qualities, both in terms of their behavior and expressions. Imagine these actors not only conversing with you but also having emotive facial responses that make their personas as three-dimensional as their bodies. How soon will we see these changes? Five years, you think? Some game designers have already begun using facial-capture technology, and they say we're going to see *The Matrix*-quality special effects on PCs in two to three years. And you wondered what people were going to do with 2GHz systems...
ONLINE METAVERSE MATCHING SYSTEM

Vie for control of the galaxy through territorial expansion and economic domination.

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The Mirak Star League, ancient enemies of the Lyran Star Empire, joins the galactic war with fighters, carriers and twice the missiles.

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NUMBING SPEED

It's amazing how far we've come in such a short period of time. I joined CGW at the dawn of the 3D revolution, and I remember early conversations with Rendition and 3dfx about their first-generation parts. These were two hungry upstarts who were trying to set the industry on fire with technology the gaming public didn't even comprehend. But I remember seeing VQUAKE—a version of QUAKE designed to use Rendition's V1000 chip—running at the then-amazing resolution of 640x480, and knew that the shape of things to come was triangles, and lots of them.

Since then, the rate of innovation of 3D chips has been such that nVidia's rallying cry is, "Moore's Law is for wimps!", referring to the former Intel chief's tenet that PC processing power doubles about every 18 months. The pace of increase in 3D graphics chip processing power has far outstripped that rate, at times approaching 6X leaps in horsepower in a single year. Through several generations of chips, we've come to not only acclimate to this rate of change, but expect it.

But that's ancient history now. This is the computer gaming industry we're talking about, and who gives a rip about the past? It's all about the future. And what does 3D's future look like?

LIGHTS!

TRIANGLES!

ACTION!

The possibilities are as boundless as the imaginations of the designers who create these otherworlds. Many developers are striving to deliver nothing short of the same visual magic that wows movie audiences. Epic Games' Tim Sweeney, the engine architect behind UNREAL TOURNAMENT, believes that "photo-realism is a good goal, but you have to look at photo-realism in the way that moviemakers do: We aim for visually realistic scenes, but we want everything

Moore's Law Is for Wimps!

Moore's Law states that CPUs double in power about every 18 months. As this chart shows, the rate of performance increase of 3D graphics chips has been roughly triple that of CPUs. 3D chips are now about 25 times faster than they were in 1998. And, with the arrival of 1GHz Pentium IV and Athlon CPUs, and the next-generation technology in the works from chipmakers, this ride is far from over.
to be a lot more vibrant and exciting than real life." Legendary game designer Peter Molyneux sees things in a different light: "Games do need to look like movies, but not to be limited by the factors that limit what movies can do." And what's needed to bring that cinematic look to games? One of the biggest improvements you'll see in the next year or so will be in lighting. You might not think that lighting is important, but as any cinematographer will tell you, lighting is everything—it sets the mood, through a combination of what it illuminates, and what it doesn't. Think how the movie Aliens would've looked without those eerie shadows and steam.

We have lighting effects in current games, but they're often hacks, or simulated lights that can't react in realtime. A common technique has been to use light maps, which are bright textures painted on top of other textures in a scene. And while some games have had shadow effects, there remains much progress to be made on the way to dynamic lighting like that in Aliens.

Games do need to look like movies, but not to be limited by the factors that limit what movies can do.

Peter Molyneux, Lionhead Studios

SAY GOODBYE, BLOCKHEAD

What may be more noticeable to gamers will be higher-definition characters and scenery. Over the next several years, the number of polygons (triangles) that developers can use in each scene will grow enormously. More triangles equate to more complex, better-defined scenes, particularly when it comes to models of people and animals. Recall the square-necked models from the original QUAKE versus the more fluid models of UNREAL TOURNAMENT to visualize the progress already made. Tony Lupidi, an Art Director at EA working on THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH (TWINE), looks for-
ward to having “art and animation of the same high production values as seen in the very best movies and animated films.”

Realism involves more than detailed characters. Lupidi observes that “game worlds are just too spare and empty of the multitudes of stuff you live with in your everyday environment. Open your closet or look at your desk to see what I mean.” The technologies associated with accelerated transform and lighting (T&L) will enable developers to portray complicated scenes, replete with the clutter of our everyday life.

Higher triangle counts also means more models on the screen. Think about the 3D worlds you’ve encountered in your gaming adventures—how many moving characters were on-screen at a given time? Maybe five or ten? The simpler answer would be not enough. Think about a football game—22 players on the field and another 60 on the sidelines. Picture your running back getting knocked out of bounds, careening through those players, and crashing headlong into the Gatorade table. Or picture the opening scene in Saving Private Ryan. Imagine storming the beach with thousands of soldiers, picking your way among the obstacles to take out the enemy’s defenses. Even wargamers are going to reap big benefits from these advances.

An added bonus of T&L is the ability to do more elaborate particle systems. Peter Molyneux notes, “The problem with computer environments is that they don’t look dirty enough. In real life everything has dirt, but computer environments are always too pristine to be real.”

SURFACE TENSION

It’s not easy painting smooth surfaces out of triangular shapes, but that’s the problem every 3D artist faces. Tim Sweeney notes that “we are still incapable of rendering surfaces that look...
of rendering realistic materials. We need very accurate surface-lighting models, representing all of the possibilities for lighting. In the past, we simply didn't have any tools with which to solve these problems, but now with the Microsoft/NVIDIA/3dfx/ATi push for DirectX 8 ‘pixel shaders,’ we can start attacking these problems. Major visible progress will occur within a year, but we’re still four to six years away from having enough pixel precision...and 3D graphics power.”

The “pixel shaders” that Sweeney refers to are a key component of DirectX 8. These programmable shaders will allow developers to have much more flexibility in defining their lights, and will allow more highly detailed surfaces that appear to have texture. Blizzard's Jay Patel is equally enthused about this new flexibility in DirectX3D, but he cautions that “it will take some time before developers get their brains around the new features and programmability of DirectX 8.”

So this trio of features—lighting, higher triangle counts, and surfaces—will do a great deal to bring a more realistic look to the 3D worlds we play in. But there’s an added benefit: Programmable shaders and accelerated T&L will both be done on the 3D card, freeing a considerable amount of CPU power for other things. Rather than having the game’s 3D engine consuming the lion’s share of the CPU (even with a 3D card installed), developers can instead make big improvements in physics modeling, character AI, and collision detection—just to name a few often-neglected gameplay elements.

**Better 3D Graphics. Better Games?**

Will 3D graphics make gameplay more engaging? Developers had mixed answers to this question. EA's Tony Lupidi believes that “as overall scene density increases, we will be able to create a more immersive environment with more emotional believable characters that inhabit it.” But Epic's Tim Sweeney emphasizes, “Graphics don’t make games more fun! Fun games existed long before good graphics. The best that graphics can hope to do is to make games more realistic, and therefore more immersive. They can draw the player in more effectively, but ultimately, it's the pure gameplay that keeps players coming back for more.”

But in the hands of masterful designers like Miyamoto or Molynieux or Meier, gaming experiences could prove to be more powerful than motion pictures. It's one thing to watch Neo as he jacks into The Matrix. It will be quite another when you're doing it yourself in virtual Technicolor. The budgets for these games could grow five-fold, because outrageous special effects aren't cheaper just because they're shown on 17-inch monitors. But for those companies that can afford the utmost in visual fidelity, and for those who can afford the latest hardware, it will be only a few years before we step into virtual worlds as realistic as the one outside.
Building the 3D Future

How silicon sculptors 3dfx and nVidia see tomorrow's 3D graphics

While game developers give life to the games we play and love, it's the hardware architects who build the underlying playground that makes it all possible. To get a sense of where things are headed with future hardware, we sat down with two of the industry's leading architects, 3dfx's Scott Sellers and nVidia's David Kirk. And despite the sometimes-vitriolic tone of online debates between each company's adherents, the meeting was civil, and the two architects wound up agreeing with one another more often than not.

Both architects see the future of 3D as being cinematically driven. Scott Sellers explains, "As great as 3D graphics are now and how far they've come, if you show the latest/greatest game running on the latest/greatest hardware to someone who's not familiar with computer-generated graphics, it's still very underwhelming. Their mindset is still absolutely being set by Hollywood...[and] we are still enormously far away from being able to offer a Hollywood experience in realtime." But David Kirk observes that, "...cinematic realism comes from the ability to do more realistic shading and lighting. Those capabilities are beginning to exist in the hardware now, and the game authors are just beginning to explore those features and experiment with them, and we're starting to see some really stunning effects." And although the two perhaps disagree as to how soon we'll be seeing photo-realistic cinematic effects in games, they do agree that DirectX 8's new programmable pipeline is going to enable developers to create never-before-seen effects in new games. As hardware developers, their task is to build a playground for both developers and gamers to romp on, and then turn them loose. Sellers notes that, "all you can do is give them the tools, and they're going to be able to generate things we couldn't even imagine."

But several considerable challenges stand in the way of the continued revolution. The biggest one, both agree, is video memory bandwidth. Sellers states, "memory bandwidth is the number-one challenge that the industry faces, and it has been for quite some time. We are certainly not being limited by pixel-generation capabilities." As these 3D engines' horsepower has grown at their outrageous clip, memory technology's rate of advancement hasn't kept pace. There are faster DDR SDRAM memories coming into the market by the month, but these 3D engines, which use a "brute force" approach to high performance—parallel pipelines, multiple textures per pixel—absolutely hammer video memory.

"Our motto has always been 'Why use a screwdriver when you can use a sledgehammer?'"

David Kirk, nVidia

All you can do is give game developers the tools, and they're going to generate things we couldn't even imagine.>

Scott Sellers, 3dfx
Kirk wrly notes that “our motto as far as brute force goes has always been ‘Why use a screwdriver when you can use a sledgehammer instead?’” But he goes on to say, “Products coming out this fall and next year have the ability...to draw way too many pixels.” And this is where both architects believe that DirectX’s new programmability is going to play a key role. Kirk explains that “one of the motivations for exploring per-pixel shading, and the ability to do complex and interesting pixel-shading programs, is to try and shift the battle from more pixels to better pixels.”

On the topic of the “Xbox effect” on the PC gaming industry, both architects see more upside than down. nVidia got the design win to do Xbox’s graphics system, and many of the strides made in developing this new graphics chipset will likely migrate to the PC after Xbox’s introduction. Sellers sees a kind of cross-pollination effect happening due to the platforms’ similar architectures: “Xbox is a good thing for the industry in general, because it will get developers working on DirectX 8 features sooner.”

As for “far out” technologies, things like holographic displays or major advances in 3D glasses, both were rather skeptical. Kirk observes that “there have been a lot of attempts to make holographic displays, and they’re all terrible.” But he points to a coming display technology somewhat similar to current LCD flat-panel technologies that will be capable of resolutions like 6000x4000, which would make for a very big picture indeed.

---

**Let There Be Light**

This nVidia tech demo illustrates the effects of per-pixel lighting. As lightning arcs and dances between these two plates, its changing shape casts realistic light and shadows on the surrounding structure.
“Its melee-intensive combat and absolutely evil visuals should put it a "cut above the rest"” - IGN

“Prepare to be knocked flat on your ass by Rune from HumanHead Studios” - Incite

His eye, torn and mangled, it was here I met and lopped the head of my first dark warrior and learned that my village and people were to be the next spoils of Sarkamen's War. It is here my quest took form.
HEAVY METAL looks hot, but it's not a satisfying play

A Quick FAKK

The new animated sequel to the 1981 cult classic **Heavy Metal** 2000 was originally conceived as an homage to former Penthouse Pet Julie Strain. **HEAVY METAL FAKK 2** - the PC game based on the new movie - succeeds brilliantly in fulfilling that vision. It's a perfect reflection of a Silicone skin queen: beautiful, artificial, shallow, and unfillinging. It's not as if the game's designers lack talent or expertise. They deftly combine several popular gaming styles into a balanced blend of action and adventure. It plays in third-person, using both first-person shooter and fighting-game elements in combat, and includes a fair amount of dialogue and scripted events to advance the story. The problem is that there are too few original or interesting challenges. The combat becomes repetitive, the jumping sequences are tedious, and the controls are often unresponsive. Playing the game can be rewarding at times and visually arresting, but it can also be

**CGW RATED**

**PROS**

- Gorgeous graphics;
- Fluid animation;
- Cool weapons;
- Two-fisted combat;
- Good blend of action and adventure.

**CONS**

- No relationship to the classic *Heavy Metal* movie or comic books;
- Weak story;
- Tedium jumping puzzles;
- Repetitive, uninspired game design.

---

**ACTION**

Reviewed by Ken Brown

---

**DIE BY THE SWORD**

These cult recruiters are a combination of televangelist and corporate trainer, and they unleash wicked critters from their midst.

**STOP STARING AT MY CHEST**

As the game wears on, Jella wears less.

---

Requirements: Pentium II 300 or Athlon 300A, 64MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space, OpenGL-compatible video card with 8MB memory. Recommended Requirements: PIII/1.33 GHz or Athlon 400, 128MB RAM, 256MB hard drive space, Radeon 8500 or TNT2. ATi Rages 128 or 3Dfx Voodoo 2 video card. 3D Support: OpenGL Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: Gathering of Developers * Developer: Ritual Entertainment * Price: $40 * www.ritual.com

ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.
Don’t Cry for Me

By Tom Price

We’re knee-deep in mediocrity this month. One look at the (mostly) low ratings we handed out attests to the fact that we’re wading in the murky shallows of this year’s gaming pool. But don’t worry, I’m not about to tell you how put out the game reviewers at CGW are about having to play these weak titles, or how it’s times like these that our jobs suck. You know why? Because our jobs don’t suck! We’re the luckiest bastards in the world! How many times have you clenched your teeth in anger at some spoiled rotten game “journalist” who writes about how much life sucks because they just had to play all the way through DAIKATANA and write a review on it? You won’t hear us complaining. How dare we anyway? Our readers plunk down good money for games (hopefully on our recommendation) and have little sympathy for someone who “has to” play games for a living. We’re in this business for three reasons:

1. The Games: So what if I’ve still got copies of BEATDOWN stinking up my shelves; the free (FREE) copies of every game that’s come out this year more than makes up for it.
2. The Money: It’s not great, but it’s a living. Hell, I’d make more as a school teacher, but not having to listen to whiny little runny-nosed brats all day (Jeff Green excluded) is worth more than money.
3. The Tchochkes: I don’t know how I lived before I had all these Nerf guns. And of course, some day, my grandkids will be taking their inheritance (i.e., the Sammy Sosa bobble-head figurine) to the Antiques Roadshow.

In a perfect world, every whimsy, pimpily-faced game reviewer complaining about the unfairness of his job would be handed a shovel and directed to the nearest ditch. Don’t let them fool you; this job is never hard, and those of us lucky enough to do it should be thanking the gaming gods every minute of the day for smiling down upon us. In fact, I’ve got to go sacrifice an editorial assistant to them right now.

NOVEMBER REVIEWS

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The Sims: Livin’ Large

SoulBringer

Submarine Titans

Sydney Olympics 2000
ways to die. But there are some interesting challenges in avoiding giant claw-like cave dwellers, dive-bombing birds, and various carnivorous plants.

Mercifully, there are fewer jumping puzzles in the final third of the game, and combat becomes more intense. You'll face tougher critters, more varied challenges, and some spectacular environments, but by this time there's hardly any story left, and the game has descended into "find the four keys to unlock the four spirits of restorative goodness". This is one of the game's main weaknesses — that it rarely rises above rehashed, nonsensical objectives that have no relationship to Heavy Metal, no meaning to the story, and nothing to keep your interest other than a general desire to finish a game you paid 40 bucks for. It's not what you'd call a taut, suspenseful adventure.

**Fight, Die, Reload**

Combat is one of the game's strong points, but it's not as good as it should be. Julie encounters new weapons throughout the game, both melee and ranged, and the variety makes QUAKE III look like scissors/paper/rock. There's a flaming sword, giant axe, flamethrower, rocket launcher, twin Uzis, soul-sucker, and chaingun, just to name a few. Most of these have alternate-fire capabilities, and the designers did a great job of making sure each weapon is useful. The most striking innovation, though, is that Julie can use a weapon in one hand and block with a shield in the other. It's not always effective to do so, but there are times when it works well. In addition, Julie can use lighting game-style combo moves that increase attack damage. At its flesh-hacking, bullet-spraying best, combat can be a real kick in the ass.

At its worst, it can be a mouse-slamming, concussive-cussing aggravation. It takes only about 10 mutant mosquitoes to make you wish you'd never bought the game. A lack of ammo in the earlier levels forces you to rely on melee attacks, making you more vulnerable to the encroaching cycle of die, reload, repeat. The monsters aren't varied enough throughout the game, and boss-level creatures in one level can turn into common enemies later. If you complete a level with low health, you might have to go back to the previous level to do it again better, or you'll be too weak to face the next challenge.

The final showdown with Lord Tyler brings out some of the best and worst aspects of the game. Tyler is a fantastic, towering Malone with hit points for years. Julie must use all her wiles to nail him with the right kinds of weapons, eluding both him and his minions, to keep him off-balance. You'll die perhaps 50-100 times. In the midst of it all, daring endlessly around obstacles to avoid him, you'll get stuck in the landscape and become so aggravated you could strangle Julie yourself. But eventually Tyler falls with a great thud, and you'll feel like you've actually accomplished something.

**And Like That, It Was Over**

There's an old Jewish joke with two women complaining about the food in heaven. The first one says, "The food here is terrible," and the second one adds, "Yeah, and the portions are so small!" HEAVY METAL isn't a terrible game, but it would be remembered as a better game if it offered a longer, more fulfilling challenge. Some players have reported finishing it in under 10 hours, and although it took me about twice that long, it's still short.

I wish I had better things to say about the game, because I really wanted to like it. It's amazing to see what Ritual did with the QUAKE III engine, and the artwork is consistently excellent. I didn't have any problems with stability, but others have not been so lucky. I simply found that the game offered too little depth and creativity to deliver a satisfying ride.
In Space... no one can hear you scheme!

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The best-selling modern naval wargame series* returns with more power than ever!

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FEEL THE POWER OF commanding the world's modern naval forces—Destroyers, Submarines, Aircraft and entire Carrier Battle groups will be at your fingertips.

LARRY BOND's HARPOON 4 is one of the most epic and graphically compelling modern battle games ever created for the PC. While accurately simulating the complexities of naval warfare, its interface and gameplay are accessible to players of all skill levels.

From all out Cold War confrontation to the skirmishes of the new world order, LARRY BOND's HARPOON 4 takes you on the ultimate power trip.

UNPARALLELED MILITARY ACCURACY
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Intuitive interface enables instant playability for beginning and seasoned gamers. Issuing orders and attacking enemy units are just a click-and-drag away.

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Features exclusive campaign by New York Times bestselling author Larry Bond. Take charge in an epic Cold War conflict that will determine the fate of the free world!

WINDOWS 95/98 CD-ROM
LIVIN’ LARGE. Bizarre as a head in a jar:

The Surreal World

THE SIMS: LIVIN’ LARGE. Will it improve your life? And more importantly, will it improve the lives of your Sims? Today on Maury, we ask the newest citizens of Simsville their opinions. What they say may surprise or even shock you.

Lovey Hartley: I thought it would be fun, like The Real World. Instead, it was a nightmare.
Michaelfish Vanilla: The death. The disease. The torture. That hideous goddamn clown. It was a living hell.
Jimmy Layabout: For me, it couldn’t have been sweeter.

THE SIMS: LIVIN’ LARGE
reviewed by “R. Kincaid”

Let’s get a few things clear first. You all lived in one of the new subdivisions, correct?
Michaelfish: That’s right, Maury. There are now five neighborhoods providing fifty lots for families.
Jimmy: And the houses are way cooler than the old ones.
Lovey: That’s easy for you to say. I started out in a feeder house, created solely to befrend you and other Sims. I enjoyed none of the new floors, walls, or nifty new items. It was a sterile, horrible existence. eight of us crammed into a garish one-room home. What kind of life is that? Thank God, I had my career.
Michaelfish: Career? You’re a friggin’ exorcist!
Lovey: Better than a bottom-feeding game reviewer like you. At least I got past the second rung in my paranormal career, unlike you in your abortive attempt at journalism.

Jimmy, do you have anything you’d like to say?
Jimmy: Maury, I’m all about doing nothing. I could’ve been a hacker or a musician. Matter of fact, I even did a stint in the military early in my life. But what I really want to do in life is nothing.
Lovey: That’s for damned sure, you good-for-nothing slacker.

Abducted by aliens?
Michaelfish: That’s right, Maury, aliens. Thanks to Lovey’s constant star-gazing, she induced an alien abduction while I was visiting one night. Bright rings surrounded our bodies and we were beamed up to the mothership and...
Jimmy: Lovey’s always screwing us up in some way. Like the time she rigged that magic lantern and summoned a genie that could only come up with about $1800 in bills instead of the money she asked for. We’re still paying that off.
Michaelfish: To be honest, this whole new LIVIN’ LARGE world is incredibly creepy. I even saw Death, the Grim Reaper himself. Frankly, it scared me silly.
Jimmy: Maybe if you hadn’t murdered your roommate...

CGW RATED

PROS
A slew of new possibilities and life events.

CONS
May inflict more chaos and danger upon your Sims than you’d like.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 17MB hard drive space, Win 95.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: None
Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Maxis • $30 • www.thesims.com
ESRB Rating: Teen: mature sexual themes, mild animated violence, comic mischief.
Murdered your roommate? Is that true?

Michaelfish: You have to understand, Maury, my other roommate and I were driven to it. Before Chris died, he decorated our humble home with several Tragic Clown portraits. At first we thought they were cool, in an ironic, campy sort of way. That was before they summoned the clown himself.

Lovy: I've seen that bugger. He's some kind of eerie.

Michaelfish: He never left us alone. The clown woke us up when we slept, forever got in our way, and pestered us incessantly. We blamed Chris. It was his idea to buy the paintings. We began by torturing him with voodoo dolls.

Jimmy: That was before you walled him up in the closet and let him die. Did you even try to bargain with Death when he came for Chris?

Michaelfish: My heart wasn't in it. But it was awful to watch him starve. And collapse in a pool of his own urine.

Lovy: You bastard. Why didn't you kill him by building explosive garden gnomes at a workbench? That would've been more humane.

It sounds to me as if the LIVIN' LARGE world is a dangerous place.

Lovy: You got that right, Maury. Sure we have more career and decorating options, but I'd swear that almost any new item can have unexpected consequences.

Jimmy: But they're not all bad. Take the vibrating bed, for instance. Finally, we Sims can play a little Barry White, pop a quarter in the bed, and do some naked wrestling.

Lovy: Oh, and you did plenty of that. Bastard.

Jimmy: What can I say? I'm a serial lady killer. Besides, I remind you, I have to work really hard to maintain friendships if I want to do more than be a personal tour guide.

Lovy: Your career is no harder than any of ours. We all have to work harder than any Sims before us.

So what's the verdict? Would you rather be livin' large? Or livin' small?

Jimmy: Large all the way, Maury.

Lovy: I don't know that I could ever go back to the old way of living. I feel like a whole new part of the world is open to me—and just because so much of the world is fraught with danger and calamity doesn't mean it's not worthwhile.

Michaelfish: Just don't buy the gnu up pig. That thing'll kill you for sure.
Mr. Hakkinen, Your Car Is Ready

Introducing the best F1 racing simulator available, warts and all

Like most hardcore gamers, racing simulation fans are always in search of the next big thing. This isn’t always good. Constantly chasing the latest and greatest is a hollow pursuit that’ll make no one happy but the advertising weasels on Madison Avenue. As anyone who’s grown out of the N’Sync and Britney phase could tell you, bigger is not necessarily better.

That axiom has never been more true than in the case of GRAND PRIX 3, the latest addition to Geoff Crammond’s acclaimed F1 racing series. On paper, it isn’t much of an advancement over its immediate ancestor, which arrived on store shelves way back in 1996. Core elements of the code can be traced back to the DOS era; Internet multiplayer modes are nowhere to be found; visual presentation doesn’t fully measure up to what most gamers expect today; audio is almost an afterthought... none of which matters a bit. Even though the game doesn’t measure up to its more contemporary competitors in terms of feature sets, the top-drawer physics, painstakingly recreated tracks, and flawlessly modeled cars provide an unrivaled sense of intensity and realism. This is the only serious racing sim you need on your hard drive right now.

Impressive, Most Impressive

Of the many impressive facets of GRAND PRIX 3, perhaps the most remarkable is its playability. While there are some very good F1 games out there, players have to overcome a few hurdles before they enjoy them. EA Sports’ F1 2000 is a fine title, but it has problems with smash-up derby driver AI and requires the System of the Gods™ to run at its best. Edos’ F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX buries its acceptable Jack-of-All-Trades approach beneath one of the most irritating interfaces to grace a computer program since the DOS version of WORDSTAR. In contrast, nothing stands between the gamer and the track here. An intuitive interface and simple control schemes – including the automatic calibration of your video setup – make this game almost as readily approachable as PONG. If you aren’t battling a field of tough competitors on the streets of Montreal or Monte Carlo within 15 minutes of ripping open the box, you’re doing something wrong.

The game grows even more fulfilling after you’ve been playing for 15 hours. There are five difficulty settings to keep you interested as your skills improve. Driving aids such as automatic braking, show best line, and throttle and steering help provide a crutch during the early races in Rookie and Amateur; they are slowly peeled away until there’s nothing between you and the asphalt in Ace. The full complement of 16 F1 tracks from across the globe is included for Quickrace, Practice, Non-Championship Race, and Championship Season modes of play. All can be freely adjusted so that you’re running seven laps in the rain at Silverstone, learning the lay of the land at Nürburgring on an unlimited clock, or taking part in the full championship event at Magny Cours. A new wrinkle in the GRAND PRIX series is

Requirements: Pentium II 266MHz or AMD K6-2, 32MB RAM, 8MB hard drive space, 2MB video card, 4X CD-ROM drive.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 450MHz or AMD Athlon, 64MB RAM, 32MB hard drive space, 16X CD-ROM drive, compatible video card.
3D Support: Direct3D, Multiplayer Support: Up to 22 via LAN, modem, serial (one GB per player), or hotseat.

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • Developer: Geoff Crammond • $40 • www.grandprixgames.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone
"Think of Sea Dogs as Pirates! in 3D but with more depth to it... Sea Dogs simply looks great."

“...combines the extremely addictive gameplay of both Daggerfall and the old Sid Meier classic, Pirates!”

FiringSquad

Sea Dogs is an epic role-playing game for the pirate in all of us. Return to the age of sail as a young captain looking to make a name in the world. Develop your character from humble beginnings and rise to control all of the islands for your country or yourself. You can give your allegiance to one of three countries or choose to serve only yourself as a swashbuckling pirate. Build your wealth and reputation and use it to acquire bigger ships and better crewman. Hire other captains to join you in attacking and capturing other ships or forts. Where you go and what you do is up to you.

The choices in Sea Dogs are endless...

And so is the fun.
inclement weather. Set weather to random, and a mid-race cloudburst might force you to pit row for rain tires. A slider bar further adjusts for the chance of precipitation.

Dead-on physics eclipse the most recent holder of the racing sim accuracy crown, F1 2000. Cars accelerate, decelerate, and corner almost exactly as they should, the only discrepancy with the real world being tires that seem too grippy, even in the rain. This doesn’t mean that these 800-horsepower monsters are easy to keep on the track. On the contrary, their incredible power is depicted in such frighteningly realistic fashion that you always seem in danger of sliding out of control, or perhaps of just spontaneously combust.

All of this combines to make it clear that every turn of the wheel, every push of the accelerator carries with it consequences. There’s a thrilling convergence of excitement and fear that perfectly mimics the unique danger of driving a car at ridiculous speeds.

The damage model heightens these sensations even further. Crummond has done yeoman work here, considering the sins of F1 2000 and F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX. Crack-ups occur just about as often as they should, as long as you’re not careening around like an out-of-control missile. All manner of limb-crushing situations seem to be possible, with the exception of rolling a car; I always teetered right on the brink of flipping for a nerve-wracking moment before falling back onto my tires.

Cracks in the Foundation

While GRAND PRIX 3 has surprisingly few drawbacks considering the age of its foundation code, there are nevertheless a few deficiencies. Perhaps the biggest is the absence of proper Internet play. This is sure to be a thorn in the side of the many geeks who’ve come to expect such an option. As I’ve never been a big fan of playing sports games online with potentially obnoxious strangers named nO or ledFoot9, this didn’t bother me in the least. Your mileage may vary.

Hotseat, modem, serial, and LAN play are supported.

Another significant lapse that some gamers will take issue with is the use of FIA season data from 1998. This doesn’t make any sense to me. Were the rights cheaper if Hasbro didn’t use the most current information? Thankfully, this has already been somewhat rectified by gamers who’ve posted more up-to-date car sets, track-side advertising, cockpits, and so on to the Net. To start overhauling the out-of-the-box game, head to one of the best fan Web sites, www.f1-grandprix3.net.

Also, Viewtis are a little plainer than one might expect in this day and age. We’re a long way from the eye candy showcase that is F1 2000; of course, that’s not necessarily a bad thing when you consider that nobody outside of SPAR Aerospace was able to get that game running smoothly. My GRAND PRIX 3 performance using a GeForce 2 never dropped below a more than acceptable 27 FPS, and this was with all the details turned on and the resolution cranked up to a crisp 1280x1024. No glaring saccharines needed to be made to achieve that, either. Although the car models seem a touch dated, the asphalt textures are a little dull, and the background scenery prone to, uh, photorealism, everything is at least passably attractive. And there are some nice counters to this undistinquished style — most notably the mirror-like sheen of the track in the rain. Meticulous track design also helps to offset the blandness.

Montreal, a city that I’ve spent a great deal of time in, features a dead-on re-creation of both the course and the skyline. The sense of immersion while racing there was the most fulfilling I’ve ever experienced in a driving game.

“No frills” would be the best words to use in describing the audio. All the car effects are exactly the same and brake squeal is uncomfortably thin. No color commentary or other touches have been added to accentuate the TV presentation style. Browsing the menus is accompanied by the same generic technomusik we’ve all heard a thousand times before. I’m beginning to wonder if all this stuff is being ground out by some guy cooped up in his basement with a Roland keyboard and a Mac.

Finish Line

GRAND PRIX 3 is an excellent game. Some will no doubt criticize it for not being much of an advancement over its predecessor. While that’s an observation that can’t be denied, it’s impossible to be too negative when you’re dealing with what is clearly the best F1 simulator on the market today. Rivals such as the outstanding F1 2000 may best it in certain aspects, but this is the complete package.

And that’s all that needs be said. Sure, Geoff Crummond and his design team could have done more in terms of providing a few modern amenities, such as sharper graphics and full net play. But even if they’d jammed everything but the proverbial kitchen sink into the box, it’s hard to imagine the end product being any more enjoyable than it is now.
A TRANQUIL ALASKAN NIGHT.
SO QUIET,
YOU CAN BARELY HEAR
A NECK SNAP.

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR
SOLID
NOW ON PC.

YOU'RE A RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES AGENT SINGLE-HANDEDLY TAKING ON AN ARMY OF TERRORISTS.
THE AWARD-WINNING CONSOLE GAME COMES TO LIFE ON THE PC WITH IMPROVED GRAPHICS
AND OPTIONAL FIRST-PERSON PLAY MODE. PLUS, IT NOW INCLUDES OVER 300 VIRTUAL REALITY
TRAINING MISSIONS TO HONE YOUR SKILLS AS SNAKE, OR EVEN PLAY AS THE NINJA.

INCLUDES VR MISSIONS
Start in Go-Karts, then advance to F1600, F3 and the ultimate F1's!

Advance through the ranks to a WilliamsF1 career - or start there, if you can hack it.

Master 16 international tracks or design your own custom course!
THAT REAL RACING FEEL COMES FROM REAL SERIOUS RESEARCH.

This is as close as you'll get to real F1 action on your PC without adding tires and an engine. With actual WilliamsF1 racing telemetrics, you're in for the ride of a lifetime. Start as a rookie in the Go-Kart series and move up the rankings to F1600, F3 and finally become a real WilliamsF1 team driver. To make it this real, our game designers had to go the extra mile. But it was the greatest 18.2 seconds of their lives! Coming Soon.
AGE OF EMPIRES once again outgrows its borders

It's Still Good To Be King

It's always great to get new stuff for a game you love, but there's always the tricky question of whether you're getting your money's worth. THE CONQUERORS, the expansion for AGE OF EMPIRES II, has two strikes against it: 1) At $30, it's a fairly expensive expansion pack, and 2) the original game is damn near flawless. But the real litmus test for an expansion pack is how much you would miss it if you had to go back to playing the original game without it. AGE OF EMPIRES II without THE CONQUERORS really isn't an option anymore.

The most important changes are also the subtlest. If you play online, you've probably come up against players who litter the map with Town Centers, using them almost like frontline tanks.

Town Centers with a complement of Villagers could not only harvest resources, but hold off most casual attacks. A popular cheese tactic was to play as the Teutons and crank out your enhanced Town Centers to shut the other players out of the early expansion phase. Ensemble Studios fixes this in THE CONQUERORS by making Town Centers more expensive and by reducing the Teutons' bonus.

Another complaint about AGE OF EMPIRES II was the way you had to constantly visit your farms to rebuild them after they'd been harvested. As the most important source of food in the endgame (when you should be fighting battles), farms become a necessary and nagging bit of micromanagement in an otherwise self-sustaining economy. THE CONQUERORS adds a handy farm queuing option, and it's hard to go back to AGE OF EMPIRES II without it.

Both of these fixes fall into the category of things that should have been in a patch. There are several other patch-worthy tweaks like these. Villagers can be assigned to build a structure and they'll automatically work after it's completed, rather than wait to get orders. Area-of-effect weapons are more careful about friendly fire, and naval units now use the same formations as land units. There are some important balancing tweaks to unit stats and some helpful additions to the interface. All of this is subtle, but crucial enough that Ensemble really owes it to their fans to make these changes available in a free patch.

Fortunately, THE CONQUERORS also contains more traditional value-added features like new units, civilizations, game modes, and single-player campaigns - all are worth the $30 sticker price. The Spaniards and Huns should prove popular among cavalry lovers, while the Mayans easily unseat the Britons as the new lords of archery. New suicide bombers for attacking walls and buildings (Potarids), Batterers Rams that now work like tanks, Bombard Cannons boosted to the status of junior Trebuchets, and torch-wielding Hun Tarkans all have a dramatic effect on the castle sieges that are such an important part of the endgame. Each civilization also has an exclusive new technology.

The new single-player campaigns are peppered with the unique touches and gameplay twists that keep them from being merely a series of skirmish missions. The new game modes do a great job of focusing on the action on a geographical location, which cuts down on the sprawl that makes some AGE OF EMPIRES II endgames overwhelming. In Defend The Wonder, everyone attacks a single player who has to defend a monument. King Of The Hill pits all the players against each other for control of a single monument in the middle of the map. These game types also show the value of the new AI commands that let you make specific requests of computer-controlled allies.

Although a lot of what you'll find in this box really belongs in a patch, most of THE CONQUERORS truly is worthy of an expansion pack. Suffice to say that after THE CONQUERORS, the Age of Kings will never be the same.

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Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 90MB hard drive space, AGE OF EMPIRES II
Recommended Requirements: 64MB RAM, 256MB hard drive space
3D Support: Yes
Multiplayer Support: Up to eight players via Internet or LAN
Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Ensemble Studios • $30 • www.microsoft.com/games/conquerors/
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.
"It would be a damn shame if you spent your $60 for the month of July on Diablo II and let Icewind Dale pass you by." ~ Daily Radar

"(Icewind Dale) is well suited for fans of Black Isle Studios' previous games, fans of classic hack-and-slash AD&D computer games, and anyone looking for an action-packed role-playing game with a lot of depth." ~ GameSpot

"Action, action, and more action. This is an AD&D dungeon crawler's dream come true." ~ IGN

www.interplay.com/icewind
In the ancient land of Yamato, an aging and power-hungry warlord turned to darkness in his mad quest for eternal life.

His soul ravaged by the demon Raiken, the warlord released hordes of undead warriors and hellspawn to crush all life from his kingdom and the four houses of power who swore fealty to his throne. As bodies fester from the warlord’s assault, seven samurai stand ready for their final mission — revenge.

- Lead your samurai through ten huge environments of fast-paced action role-playing based on Japanese monsters and myths.

- Get ready for intense multiplayer mayhem! Up to 35 people can play online and vie for the mantle of Dark Warlord.

- Innovative character AI gives you more than 30 commands for you to lead your party through the always-changing landscape of the single-player game.

www.throneofdarkness.com
THRONES OF DARKNESS
REACH FOR THE STARS can't quite catch them

Star Search

With hardcore wargames choking out their last dying breaths of commercial viability, "lighter" turn-based strategy games (e.g., anything without panzers) suddenly find themselves the squashed guys on the block. You have to feel sorry for the marketing folks over at the unholy Mattel/SSI/SSG combine trying to find a way to "sex up" REACH FOR THE STARS to compete with younger, firmer, 3D-accelerated, shelf-space neighbors. When your most notable feature is being based on a 20-year-old Apple II game, you've got a hard sell on your hands.

Reviewers experience the same problem. Always on the lookout for a juicy bon mot or spicy witicism, it's hard to sound sexy discussing production queues or combat result matrices. For this reason, and because it gets boring to keep comparing a title to an earlier, better game, I've decided to sex things up for you by replacing every future use of the phrase MASTER OF ORION in this review with the words "Jennifer Lopez."

Apple II Abacus

Most gamers under the age of 30 probably believe the 4X (explore, exterminate, expand, exploit) galactic space-ploitation genre began with Microprose's Jennifer Lopez. In fact, 4X games existed before this classic. Running on a steam-powered Apple II abacus, REACH FOR THE STARS was released early in the Cretaceous period, and, as my press kit insistently tells me, was the genesis of all future galactic conquest games. Jennifer Lopez included.

Along with CGW's own Jeff Green, I was actually alive at this point in time and actually played the original REACH FOR THE STARS, though all I can really remember through the fog of time and senility are lots of little dots and cryptic abbreviations like INP and DEF. Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, this newfangled version has replaced the cryptic abbreviations with cryptic icons, and now has much bigger dots.

But, as the increasingly desperate Mattel/SSI/SSG press keeps telling me, "the classic gameplay remains intact!" For those who've never experienced Jennifer Lopez, what this means is that you start with one dot, accumulate icons and numbers, and gradually take over all the other dots.

Look, if you have no idea how a space-ploitation game works, you're in the wrong place... flip ahead a few pages till you find a screen of a big rocket phallus. Or something. This isn't for you, pal.

Now, if REACH FOR THE STARS isn't as soul-crushingly spreadsheet-like as the upcoming STARS! SUPERNOVA is likely to be, it certainly makes very few concessions to the eye-candy crowd. One resolution was good enough for your grandpa, and it's good enough for you. Don't even get me started on 3D acceleration, kid. You want flash-bang space fights as in IMPERIUM GALACTICA II or HOMEWORLD? No you don't. Here's what you get: lines of ships. They park facing each other. They shoot little balls or little lines

REACH FOR THE STARS
reviewed by Jason Kapalka

CGW RATED

PROS

Well balanced; humongous replayability; awesome editing suite.

CONS

Abstract, bizarre interface; distinct lack of sexiness.

PARK AND SHOOT The exciting world of combat in REACH FOR THE STARS.

BEGINNING OF DAZE The galactic production queue, complete with rings, wings, and other things.

MINISTRY OF CONFUSION Bonus points: See if you can tell the factories from the labs, or the defense guns from the shipyards, on the colony screen.

Requirements: Pentium: 16GHz, 32MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space. 
Recommended Requirements: Pentium: 200MHz, 64MB RAM.

Multiplayer Support: Up to 8 players via LAN, TCP/IP, or McKay.

Publisher: Mattel • Developer: SSG • $30 • www.ssi.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone
Cate Archer is The Operative in NoOne Lives Forever™

A brilliant adventure stylishly blending espionage, action and humor set in the late '60s. Premiering the advanced LithTech™ 2.5D Game Operating System — for the most realistic spy experience possible.

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for a while. Then some explode.

Keys, Wings, and Rings

Interface-wise, the new REACH FOR THE STARS is creative in the worst way. Apparently dissatisfied with the boring old buttons, windows, and menus of the 20th Century, the designers have opted to invent a futuristic interface where the dominant elements are keys, wings, and rings. So, if you want to build a cannon for defensive purposes, you click the roundish button on the "key," which brings up the "wing" showing your planet, which, oddly enough, consists of a bunch of "rings." Then you find something that looks (sort of) like a cannon and click to place it in the planetary build queue. With me so far?

Now, sooner or later your gun will get built, but let's say you need it pretty soon, owing to a monstrous Hive invasion fleet parked above your planet, vomiting down nasty plasma death. Now you click on the wrench-looking thing on the "key" to get the empire-wide building queue wing-thing (complete with rings). See, your bombarded colonists on Oxair IV may have that gun as their highest priority, but the Bureaucrats of Default Build Order may have decided to prioritize some labs and McDonald's franchises on bray III and IV before getting around to that defense installation.

Luckily, you can now click the swoopy thing to the right of the rings on the wing to change these priorities. (And yes, now I've given even myself a headache.)

To be fair, once you've figured out the rings, wings, and things, the system works pretty well, though you may well long for the less abstract interface of Jennifer Lopez. From here, it's a pretty standard drill: Make stuff that makes other stuff, so you can colonize more planets to make more stuff, and along the way, research new stuff to make and kill all the other intelligent races in the galaxy.

Rinzi Plinzi Bafflebag

The tech tree is - surprise! - a bit weird. Each of the 20 different races has its own separate tree divided into ten eras, each with an assortment of different devices to research. You can jump ahead to later eras without researching all, or even any, of the inventions in your current era, but many of the later inventions have earlier ones as prerequisites.

If you're not confused yet, no problem: Each race also has different names for every single piece of technology, so you'll spend a while playing as the Myrmod race before realizing that their Rinzi-Plinzi is in fact your familiar friend, Mr. Laser Gun Mark I, under a nom de baffle-gab. A bit later, you'll puzzle out that the Glurby-Wurby and Beffle-Snab are actually just Engine Type I and Engine Type II.

Unfortunately, the tech tree's creativity lies mostly in these wacky names, which basically boil down to lasers, missiles, shields, and engines of increasing bigness. You'll find no nifty Black Hole Generators or Stasis Fields here. It's a little depressing to work up to level-10 tech just to see a text box reading, "+5% penetration."

Ship design and combat are likewise complex but unsatisfying. There are apparently lots and lots of calculations going on: outer screen defenses, ECM, shield penetration, relative ship speeds, long-, medium-, short-range combat values, and so forth. But none are realized in a visceral way, thanks to the "park and shoot" combat resolution.

Tastes Like Yarrrning

The same colorlessness affects the different alien races. While there are a huge number to choose from - each with distinct characteristics for combat, trade, and colonization - none of them really have any character. They're all just a bunch of numbers. The diplomatic model - a grid similar to old WARLORDS games - is functional but lacks the flavor of previous hits within this subgenre. No ambassadors barking "This means WAR!" just a few lines of icons. A little more characterization - hell, any characterization - would have gone a long way.

On the plus side, REACH FOR THE STARS is well-balanced and hugely replayable, containing a lengthy campaign game, several dozen scenarios, a random-map generator, and a super-cool editing system that lets you tweak practically every aspect of the game.

Sadly, all the replayability in the world doesn't mean a whole lot when the game's just not that much fun to play in the first place. Between the word abstraction of the interface and the blandness of the technology, combat, and aliens, SSF's space-plodiation offering ultimately comes across as competent but boring.

It may have been first, but Jennifer Lopez still does it better.
Get to the finish line... way you can!
Experience the Episodic Game Novel where player feedback will affect future Chapters.

Digital Tome presents, Siege of Avalon, the first CD quality game designed for Internet Download.

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A game like this only comes around once in a Blue Moon. - Ray Tilden
The Model Layering is awesome. - Frag-O-Phile
How dare you be so good to us! - Cronos

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Visit www.Siege-of-Avalon.com
SUBMARINE TITANS deserves das boot

Sink, Sank, Sunk

How can you go wrong with a real-time strategy game that has bomb-wearing suicide dolphins, massive vacuum quaka bombs, and those bioluminescent jellyfish ships from The Abyss? Ellipse Studios answers that question in SUBMARINE TITANS – an inspired, beautiful, heartbreaking mess of a game.

A Three Hour Tour Into Hell

The basic twist in this real-time strategy game is that you’re underwater. Although there are a few different tile sets, the basic look of the terrain is cool deep sea blue with colorful coral abounding. The screen is full of tiny moving squid, rays, and lobsters. Bubbles rise as gently as the lilting underwater soundtrack. But then combat begins, the dopey action music kicks in, and all hell breaks loose. What was a lovely and serene virtual aquarium becomes a virtually unplayable real-time loss of control, not unlike reaching into a tank to grab a handful of bright tropical fish and feeling them slip through your helpless fingers.

The interface in SUBMARINE TITANS is horrible. Game-killingly horrible. The tiny buttons and icons are scattered across sliding panels and submenus. There is no way to queue tech research, construction orders, or waypoints. If you want to lay a minefield or a line of sonar beacons, you have to tag along behind the appropriate sub, and... drop...each...one...manually. There is no hotkey to change the game speed and you cannot interact with any part of the game while it’s paused. SUBMARINE TITANS is full of the sort of interface decisions that make you wonder if the developers ever played an RTS game.

SUBMARINE TITANS deserves better, because there are some welcome concepts here. As you move further along the tech tree, you have to make decisions about whether to go for blunt force or special abilities. There are ways to capture enemy units and technologies, spy on the enemy by hacking into his computers, and bypass his armor to damage his ships with sonic waves. The three sides are each distinct, with well-balanced units and the special abilities. The Silicons’ colorful organic look, equal parts Dr. Seuss and The Abyss, is a great contrast to the sleek militaristic White Sharks and the rounded edges and domes of the Black Octopi.

Lost at Sea

But many of the game’s good ideas are poorly realized. Underwater caves that hide your units from the enemy are a good idea, but not when they hide your units from you. Fire levels of depth to represent vertical combat are a good idea, but not when the game’s 2D graphics can’t make sense of it. A tech tree stuffed with trumps and counter-trumps is a good idea, but not when it’s a poorly organized series of nonsense names and tiny icons. Limited ammo to prevent rushes is a good idea, but not when you have no control over the resupply of your units. Most importantly, a game with lots of different kinds of units, buildings, technologies, and special abilities is a good idea, but not when it’s locked into the hyperactive pace of TOTAL ANNihilation, without any help from the interface to make it manageable. There’s a lot of nuance here, but there’s no way to play it.

The underwater angle is a good idea, but the gameplay is just business as usual but with underwater graphics. Buildings use “oxygen” instead of energy, there are five levels of “depth,” and your minimap uses “sonar” instead of “radar.” The game does nothing with the unique aspects of pressure, light, speed, or sound in an underwater setting. Except for the little schools of fish swimming around, SUBMARINE TITANS might as well be a good-looking sloppy game about floating tanks.

She’s Taking on Water Fast: Quick – manage the battle raging here with this Byzantine, hyper-unfriendly interface.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 140MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: None
Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-24 players); one CD per player.
Publisher: Strategy First; Developer: Ellipse Studios; $40; www.subtitan.com; ESRB Rating: Everyone

CGW RATED

PROS
A novel and nuanced concept...

CONS
...completely torpedoed by clumsy execution; the frontrunner for "Worst Interface of the Year."
Survival in the world of Fallout: Tactics takes serious firepower. The Brotherhood of Steel search the wastelands for the toughest technology to help them turn the tide of battle.

If you want to survive this game, you’ll need the best weapon. To get your gauntlets on your own Falcon Gaming PC, just call

1-888-FALCON-1
or visit
www.falcon-nw.com
More action! Gameplay is faster paced, but still requires the careful planning and investigation of mission possibilities before execution.

- New animation and physics systems creating an immersive, action-filled WWII environment.
- Control a variety of new vehicles, including jeeps, tanks, trucks, boats and cars. All vehicles are based on authentic models from WWII.
- All single player missions will be playable in a cooperative multiplayer mode.
- Realistic enemy behavior that provides deeper and more engaging gameplay!
- Brand new characters join up with the original cast!
- Incredible graphics create an experience so vivid and highly detailed, you won't believe your eyes!
SANITY falls short of its ambitions

Not Playing With a Full Deck

The designers of SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT have managed to answer the ancient Zen paradox: "How does one create a jumping puzzle when the main character can't jump?"

Too bad it's a question no one but crazed, cave-dwelling philosophers bothers asking.

SANITY almost has it. The game presents a lot of interesting design ideas, but they fall apart amidst very real problems like interface issues, cliché puzzles, and uninspired weapons.

You, as voiced by Ice-T, play Cain — a psionic policeman. Psionic powers are called Talents here, and are found in Talent cards (think Magic: The Gathering). Cain starts off knowing a few Talents in the Fire Totem (a Talent categorization system), and throughout the game, he'll pick up more Talent cards to add power to his formidable mind. The cliché story involves an unearthed artifact, Very Important Children, and awakening a massive apocalyptic evil dude.

SANITY uses the LithTech engine, but you wouldn't really know it at first. For one thing, the game is played top-down. The camera either automatically follows Cain (very annoying), or the camera stays fixed, moving only when you decide to rotate it. Using LithTech 1.5, the game manages to look both very pretty and to run smoothly. Levels engage in ample use of colored lighting and architecture, and the visual effects for the Talents are as bright and colorful as any traditional comic-book superpower.

Myst-y Eyed
It's too bad that such a pretty engine is saddled with poorly conceived and executed puzzles. It's admirable that SANITY tries to break away from the action-mold by adding elements from adventure games. I liked how the bosses require cunning rather than blatant force. I was amused by the insane life-or-death game show. Yet, these interesting ideas are overshadowed by tired game filler such as block-pushing puzzles and the aforementioned jumping puzzles (by the way, the answer to the paradoxical question is, "we'll give the player temporary levitation as a power"). We even get the traditional "do silly tasks for me in order to get important item" puzzle. At one point Cain asks, "Who the HELL would install invisible floating platforms in a power station?" While I appreciate the attempt at self-conscious humor, the self-awareness doesn't absolve the designers of the sin of unoriginality. Also, some puzzle solutions are just plain bizarre. In order to sneak into a tour, I have to beat up a civilian and steal his shirt? Do the words "police brutality" mean anything in the SANITY universe?

Talent Show Supreme

The Talents are nearly great. The trouble is, the different Totems all have similar Talents. Every Totem has a projectile, a forcefield, a summoning, a spell that affects the ground, etc. The colors are different but the underlying design is the same. There're a scant few truly unique Talents, while the rest mostly follow a formula. It would have added a lot more strategy and depth if the Totems had more specialized Talents (like Science's Shield-Shatterer or Illusion's Invisibility). The Talents you can buy for multiplayer are a step in the right direction, but then again, you do have to shell out more money to get them.

Finally, the interface could use a lot more work. Instead of the tried-and-true "click on a spot to go there," you have to hold down the mouse button to get Cain moving. This sounds petty, but it translates into babysitting Cain past the most minute of obstacles, and more camera movement than necessary.

I wanted to like SANITY. It almost has the vibe of a hip, slick, over-the-top comic book. But the puzzles, the disappointing execution of the Talents, and the interface all fall short of what could've been great.
The Greatest Show On Dirt™
The meanest, nastiest, wildest sprint cars anywhere get sideways on your PC for the first time ever.

Dirt Track Racing™: Sprint Cars puts you in the driver's seat with your choice of 16 World of Outlaws® stars. Drive one of their cars or design your own.

Hit the dirt on 20 realistic speedways. Modify cars and tracks to make the action even meaner, wilder and nastier. Get ready for more excitement than you can handle!

"This Game Rocks!"
-Mark Kinser, Two Time Series Champion
HITMAN

WHO IS HE(ITAL)?

The Hitman is a clone. A result of laboratory experiments, conducted by a former military physician. Surreptitiously created in a secret lab as a first prototype. He was raised within the confines of a mental hospital in Romania. His genes were sampled and carefully selected from a group of five men driven by the same desire to control, possess and live forever. These five men were highly specialized professional soldiers, and the Hitman received only the best genes from each one of them, creating a superhuman far superior than the sum of his parts. He was brought up and trained in this remote and unfriendly environment by his creator. The training facilities in the basement under the hospital were the ideal place to shape this clone to his profession. Over the years he became the best assassin of his time, and he turned into a perfect instrument destined to fulfill the monstrous dreams of the physician that created him. He is extremely fast, very intelligent and highly skilled, and eminently performs his tasks with remarkable precision and zero remorse. He carries nothing to cloud his mind during his assignments...

YOUR MISSION:

As the enigmatic Hitman, you must use stealth and tactical problem solving to enter, execute and exit your assignment with minimum attention and maximum effect. You have an arsenal of black market weapons and tools at your disposal: however, choosing the right weapon is critical— attracting attention could lead to early retirement. Learn your environment, plan your moves carefully and make every attack count. Remember: Death can strike anyone. For the right price.
So many puns, so little time for this dog of an RTS

Dogs of Bore

Don't be fooled by the fact that TalonSoft, a publisher with a reputation for hardcore wargame simulations, is behind this game. Nothing about DOGS OF WAR says "simulation," "hardcore," or even "entertainment." This is a joyless and frustrating experience disguised as a ground-breaking blend of real-time strategy and action. Maybe if it wasn't such an ugly game to look at, or if the controls were somewhat manageable, or if the voice acting wasn't so grating, or if the plot wasn't so formulaic, or...well, you get the point. There's a lot wrong with DOGS OF WAR and very little right. That's too bad, because if the game had delivered on some of its concepts, it might have been a very fresh experience.

I Can't See Clearly Now

DOGS OF WAR is one of the new tactical-style real-time strategy games where basebuilding and resource harvesting are ditched in favor of pure combat action. The graphics engine is 3D based, but you'll have difficulty utilizing or even appreciating it due to the nearly unusable camera controls. The only 3D RTS game to offer a usable camera control system was GROUND CONTROL, and Massive Entertainment hit that nail so dead on the head that everyone else should just copy what they did. In the case of DOGS OF WAR, the limitations of the camera could be a good thing considering how ugly and boring the graphics are. The artwork is pedestrian and uninteresting, and there are a lot of missing textures and exposed polygon seams.

Designer Silicon Dreams tries to inject action elements into its tactical-RTS gameplay by allowing you to place yourself in direct control of any individual unit under your command. This sounds like a cool idea except for the fact that units are near impossible to control. Response is laggy, there is no mouse lock, and you're limited to forward, backward, and turning motions. Not that control in standard RTS mode is any easier. Sure, the unit-grouping function is easily accessed on your HUD, but it's hard to tell which units you have currently selected. Add clumsy pathfinding to the AI and you've got an incredibly frustrating experience.

Wot the Smeg?!

Even more annoying than the interface is the terrible voice-acting. Craig Charles, better known as "Dave Lister" on the wacky English space-altcom Red Dwarf, handles a good deal of the voiceover work, and his brogue is serviceable at parts, but it quickly grows annoying. He even overuses the word "smeg" his catch-word on Red Dwarf. What connection do DOGS OF WAR and Red Dwarf share? None. How annoying is it to hear Lister say smeg every two minutes? Extremely. Lister, please, keep your smegging in context.

At least the designers give you more than two factions to choose from and play through in campaign mode. (You mean it will take a lot longer to finish this game? Ah, smeg.) In addition to the Imperial Order and Warmonkeys, you'll also play as the Mantsi -- a group of giant bugs that look like they were cribbed from Starship Troopers. I guess this game could be a lesson in good intent, wasted on sloppy design. The idea of being able to jump into the driver seat of a vehicle you control in RTS mode is a good one, and should continue to be explored. If DOGS OF WAR has any value, it's as a cautionary tale for future RTS explorers.

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Required: Pentium-II 266MHz or better, 32 MB RAM, 850MB hard drive space.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 333MHz or better, 64 MB RAM.

3D Support: DirectX 8.0, Multiplayer Support: 2-8 players, LAN or Internet.

Publisher: TalonSoft

Multiplier: Silicon Dreams

$40 • www.talonsoft.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.
This is definitely not a 'me too' game: it has the potential to be one of the compelling strategy titles of the year."
PC Gamer, August 2000

"Graphically, this is by far the most intriguing of the Battle Isle games"
Computer Games Magazine, August 2000

Where Turn Based and Real Time Meet...
Strategy Gaming will Never be the Same!
Check Out the Latest on
Battle Isle: The Andosia War at
bluebyte.net

www.bluebyte.net
The giant robots of METAL FATIGUE trip over tiny details

Animetal Monsters

By taking the giant brawling robots traditional to anime such as Gundam, offering a high degree of customization, and then splitting the battlefield into ground, air, and subterranean levels, METAL FATIGUE offers something different, interesting, and even exciting...and then falls into the same traps that snared dozens of previous real-time strategy games. So, while METAL FATIGUE's unique style and play stand out from the crowd, the game ends up being just as chaotic and cumbersome as countless others among the RTS masses.

Don't Call Them 'Mechs

The battlefield of METAL FATIGUE is dominated by Combats: giant custom-fitted robots that tower over conventional units. Combots are built piece-by-piece - arms, legs, torso, and head plugged together and sent on their way to wreak havoc. Each side starts with a few unique parts, accumulating the rest by scavenging the battlefield and researching recovered enemy gear. Combat battles are a real thrill, as their brightly colored parts spin, kick, slash, hit, and fire at each other in a variety of fluid animations. The prominence of edged weapons such as katana and laser swords makes disembowelment common. Once a battle is over, vulturous hover trucks swarm onto the battlefield and carry components back to base to be fitted onto new Combots.

Since each side has a distinct color, it's common to see patchwork 'bots bashing each other in furious hand-to-hand combat. The focus on Combots makes a sharp departure from similar titles by limiting conventional ground units to a scant six: tank, missile launcher, artillery, unarmed drill truck, unarmed hover truck for construction, and a special anti-Combat weapon. The only time foot infantry appear is after they've ejected from their Combat - about one second before they're squashed under a giant metal foot.

The colorful Combots are pretty much the only element of the game that is visually appealing. Terrain and basic unit graphics are competent but terribly drab and familiar, and maps feel a bit cramped. The engine and interface is satisfactory, offering a rotate-able, zoom-able, 3D view of the battlefields along with all the expected RTS features: unit grouping, attack states, patrol points, etc. Menu bars are bulky and unattractive, however, and the entire interface could use streamlining; though, on the positive side, far more functions are bound to hotkeys than in a common strategy game. Splitting the battlefield into three levels adds yet another layer of complexity, and while there are some tactically interesting moments, three-level battles can become massive headaches of micro-management.

Mental Fatigue

Compounding METAL FATIGUE's problems are the standard pathfinding issues, which are doubly difficult given the huge size difference between small units and Combots. The small combat units play a peripheral role, offering cover and drawing fire from the enemy's small units. They also get in the way and make it almost impossible for Combots to maneuver in numbers. Grouped units get stuck with infuriating regularity, and a loaded Combat stuck behind a piddling row of tanks is just a sitting duck. Only the two air units have decent mobility and perform useful battlefield functions.

Plenty of gameplay options are available, including custom skirmishes, eight-person multiplayer, and a narrative campaign centered on three brothers who find themselves at odds over an alien relic. Their feud leads each to join different corporate factions, known as "CorpoNations": the mystical Neaupia, the militaristic Mil-Agro, and the even-handed Rintoch. Each brother is the focus of a campaign comprised of ten missions, with unique narrative threads and different technologies. Bonus points are awarded for successful campaign missions, enabling you to douse upgrades for the next mission. Thanks to these options and the robotic twist, METAL FATIGUE can be fun. But the frustrations and failures that have unfortunately become part and parcel of the RTS experience fight against you at every step. There's no denying the appeal of custom-built giant 'bots fighting with swords and power-lasers, but there's no escaping the little annoyances that ultimately undermine the whole.

CGW RATED

PROS

Three planes of combat and highly customizable battling robots provide plenty of gameplay options.

CONS

Drab, maps, too much micromanagement, and, of course, the requisite terrible RTS pathfinding.

Requirements: Pentium 266MHz, 32MB RAM, 80MB hard drive space, SVGA 3D card. Recommended Requirements: Pentium III, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. 3D Support: Direct3D Multiplayer Support: 2-8, LAN or Multiplayer (one CD per player). Publisher: Talensoft • Developer: Zena, Inc. • $40 • www.metalfatigue.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.
A Plague Falls Upon The Land and Enemies become Allies. Who can you trust?

Just when you mastered the art of war... The gods changed the rules. Check Out the Latest on The Settlers IV at bluebyte.net.
SOULBRINGER

You can’t help but feel kind of sorry for SOULBRINGER. Released under the giant shadows of DIABLO 2 and ICEWIND DALE, it hardly registered on the gaming landscape. Though I’d like to say it deserved a better fate than that, well... it didn’t. Not quite. This 3D action/RPG from Gremlin Interactive (who created the underrated REALMS OF THE HAUNTING a few years back) does a few things quite nicely: It tells a nicey (though hardly original) little fantasy story; it features a very pretty 3D engine with a MYTH-style isometric perspective; it has nice music and sound; it has a cool macro-based combat system; and it showcases some of the best motion-captured combat animation I’ve seen in an RPG. All good. But as much as it gets right, it blows. The 3D engine looks great, but ultimately is extremely frustrating, as you’ll spend more time just trying to position the camera and move your character than you will actually solving any puzzles. The motion-capture animation looks great, but it’s butt-slow – I was reluctant to pick up items I needed or to open doors just because it took too damn long. The interface is needlessly ugly and confusing, and the inexplicable lack of an auto-map makes it hard to keep track of where you are. It’s not awful, but it could have been so much better. Wait for the bargain bins. – Jeff Green

Genre: Role-playing • Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Gremlin Interactive/fivegaming.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence; use of tobacco and alcohol

CLEOPATRA

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Sierra Studios
Developer: Impressions Games • $30 • cleopatra.impressionsgames.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Pharaoh! Workers still wander about aimlessly, and there are unexplained production stoppages. Also, the new giant scorpion attacks seem only to irritate and slow down the already lengthy missions. There’s a lot of combat in CLEOPATRA, but, as in PHARAOH, leading your troops to battle is mostly a boring mouse-clicking exercise. Forging Pharaohs will likely find themselves wrapped up in CLEOPATRA’s 15 very hard missions spread over three campaigns. But with more polish it could’ve been an expansion pack for the ages. – Mark Brooks

SYDNEY OLYMPICS 2000

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Eidos
Developer: ATD • $35 • www.olympicvideogames.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Until someone can figure out a better control configuration for track & field games than the old button-tapping frenzy, Olympic-themed games will never really surpass the sublime simplicity of the old Konami arcade stand-ups TRACK & FIELD and HYPER SPORTS. Eidos’ new officially-licensed Olympic product, SYDNEY OLYMPICS 2000, doesn’t do anything new control-wise, or anything else-wise. The 12 events range from OK (Javelin, Kayaking), to annoying (Platform Diving, Skeet Shooting) to buggy (Cycling). Arcade mode is the quickest way in and out of this tedious gaming experience, but the full Olympic mode shouldn’t be glossed over. It adds a career mode that allows you to enhance an athlete’s skills in preparation for the Olympic trials. It’s a fairly well-executed mode that’s wasted on an otherwise buggy and unsatisfying game. Unless you’re in support of self-flagellation as an Olympic event, you’ll want to skip this game and watch the real deal on TV. – Tom Price

BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE

Genre: Action • Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • Developer: Rayland Interactive • $35 • www.redstorm.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Bang! Bang! Bang! That’s the sound of your synapses firing, searching for a reason to keep playing this shallow game after the first ten minutes. You play a lone pilot of a faceless alien race, fighting other faceless adversaries, and gameplay couldn’t be more comatose – actually, it can during the narration by a drunk Tom Brokaw clone during 30+ minutes of indifferent cutscenes. Sporadically, BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE can be pointless arcade fun, but a serious gamer will put this game down after a few missions. The 19 levels don’t offer much variety or ingenuity as you hop from galaxy to galaxy, protecting the good guys while fighting an endless stream of “alien” enemies that all sound like pissed-off Russians. Enemy AI isn’t great, with only a few ships showing signs of intelligence by hiding behind asteroids. Sure, the game looks good while you’re tearing through nebulae and asteroid fields with 10 vivid weapons, but beyond that, there’s no there there. You can’t substitute cotton candy for the meat and potatoes of strategy and a good plotline. Try STARLANCE! or FREESPACE 2 if you want a game with substance, ‘cause BANG! doesn’t cut it. – Jason Babler
An Avenging Angel

The alien Catteni forces have crushed Earth. Humanity has been enslaved. All hope is lost, until a defiant Angel Sanchez and her band of rebels appear on the scene to exact revenge and take back the planet. Join Angel in the fight to restore FREEDOM — at any price!

3rd PERSON ACTION/ADVENTURE — Fight to free the planet using tactics of secrecy and ambush!

STEALTH — Hide in the shadows unseen, but prepare for action when you step into the light!

TEAM-BASED GAMEPLAY — Control up to three characters per mission. Lead a unified force or take your chances going solo!

FULLY-VOICED DIALOGUE — Connect with other characters and immerse yourself in the story!

EASY-TO-USE INTERFACE — Whether you’re a first-time gamer or a true veteran, jump right into the action!

ANNE McCaffrey's
FIRST RESISTANCE

www.redstorm.com/freedom
NEW FEATURES IN WINDOWS ME PROMISE MORE STABILITY FOR GAMERS

I’ve Got the Windows in ME

In a lot of ways, Windows Millennium Edition (ME) is to Windows 98 what Windows 98 was to Windows 95. No, that’s not a Zen riddle, it’s just that both Windows 98 and Windows ME represent evolutionary improvements over their predecessors, and neither is a significant departure from the real guts of the OS. Unfortunately, despite several welcome improvements, some of Windows 9X’s warts do remain.

Windows ME promises to improve several areas, most notably digital media, system stability (“PC Health”, as Microsoft puts it), and the fast-boot feature. What will interest gamers are the added features to improve overall system stability, which are System File Protection (SFP) and the System Restore utility. The SFP feature basically write-protects about 300 key system files—essential DLLs, and INF files, for example—and won’t allow a game’s installer to overwrite these files with older or tweaked versions. In the past, games and other applications have been guilty of this and it can cause system instability. The other half of this dynamic duo is System Restore, which takes “snap-shots” of your system’s setup (registry settings, etc.). What’s cool about this feature is that it can take these snap-shots on a daily basis, or you can take one before you’re about to, say, install a new 3D card. That way, if the install goes awry, you should be able to return your system to its previous state with minimal headache. Think of it as a time machine.

The Windows Help and Support application (a greatly enhanced, Internet-aware help engine) states that it requires at least

BACK TO A BETTER PLACE Using Windows ME’s new System Restore, you can return to a previous (working) system state, hopefully saving you from yet another Windows re-install.

GADGET OF THE MONTH

For years, we’ve used Zip disks to continue our office gaming at home. Most save-games will fit neatly on those 100MB disks. But how about carting MP3s, images or bigger save-games, or entire game installs? Zip disks just run out of gas. A new company called Minds@Work has taken a 6GB hard drive and packaged it so that it’s mobile and will connect to any PC via USB. You’ve got 6GB of mobile storage in a package not much bigger than a cassette case. You can install games on the Digital Wallet, but don’t expect blazing performance. Because of USB’s peak data rate, the best throughput you can hope for is around 1.5MB/sec, more likely closer to 1MB/sec. Not bad, but very slow compared to new EIDE drives. But the high portability factor is a very cool way to take your MP3 library, along with whatever other big multimedia files you have, and make them instantly mobile.

Minds@Work Digital Wallet • $500 • www.mindsatwork.net
The Church of the Blue Light

There's a quiet revolution on the horizon for laser-based storage technology like CDs and DVDs, and it's called blue lasers. DVDs already have the potential to hold a whopping 17GB of information if they use the double-sided, double-density format. Now, imagine being able to quadruple that capacity just by changing the color of the laser used to read the disc.

Researchers have figured out that blue light's shorter wavelength allows a blue laser to read a disc with a bit density changing the disc. Or, the next time a game is using a movie license, the game and the movie could come on a single disc. Of course, getting both a good movie and a good game using that license is a more difficult feat, but it's always technology that leads the way before good apps follow.

One blue light CD = 7.5 DVDs = 108 conventional CDs

Coming Next Month: The Ultimate Gaming Machine

Every year they gather, all vying for the crown, all battling in the gaming arena to see who will emerge victorious. Many are called, few are chosen. Next month we begin the three-issue odyssey that is CGW's Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup, where we scour the land to find the very best gaming machine to be had. We'll start off with pre-built systems for under $1,700. Then, in January, we'll take on the heavyweights where money is no object, and we'll see if Intel can bring its newest artillery piece to bear, the Pentium-IV.

Then, in February, we'll show you how to build the machine of your dreams in two load-outs: an absolute beast with the best of everything, and an economical system for under $1,700. Sharpen your pencils, save your pennies, ship the kids to Siberia if you have to; next month we're going in, and this time, it's personal.
Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR

Beyond the Beige Box

Why, after 20 years, does a PC still look like a PC?

When asked in a recent Newsweek interview why other companies aren't innovating PC design, Apple CEO Steve Jobs opined, "Most of the people running the companies don't love PCs. Does Steve Ballmer [Microsoft's CEO] love PCs? Does Craig Barrett [Intel's CEO] love PCs? Does Michael Dell love PCs? If he wasn't selling PCs, he'd be selling something else." So Apple has The Love that the rest of the industry lacks, if you believe Jobs. It might also be that Apple needed a way to stand out in the crowded home PC market. For whatever reason, you have to give Apple credit for making bold changes in the design of its products. And though Apple has been at best a fair-weather friend to gamers over the years, Jobs has a point.

For 20 years, the PC industry has been lifting those innovations and grafting them into the PC—the mouse, the graphical user interface (GUI), and peer-to-peer networking, to name a few. And yes, some PC makers have essentially knocked off the iMac design and put a PC in it (iPad, anyone?). But the question is: Why does an entire industry still follow one company's lead? There are plenty of talented, inspired industrial designers out there, so why haven't we seen a profusion of new designs like those in the automotive industry? There are many reasons, but the biggest one is probably that PC companies still sell most of their PCs to corporations—as in old school, suit-and-tie, gray cubicle, brick-and-mortar-type companies. And because that segment doesn't comprise a big part of Apple's sales, they don't have to worry about fitting their box into that culture.

A Function of Form

You may be saying to yourself, "I put my PC on the floor and I only look at it when I slap a CD in there. What do I care what it looks like?" Good point. But inside a PC lives a hell of a lot of very cool technology—not unlike home-audio gear—so why can't PCs have a look that says, "Hey! There's some serious freakin' hardware in here!"

Some of my gripes with PC design aren't aesthetic. We're now four years into the USB era, and on most PCs, those damned USB ports are still on the back of the machine. Props to Compaq for being the first PC maker to put them on the front panel. Intel's new 860 chipset for the Pentium-II has two USB root hubs, so a PC maker can now have two ports in back, and bring the other two up to the front; other PC makers will finally be doing this for their fall products. But this should have been as standard as having the floppy drive living on the front panel.

Of all the things Apple has done in terms of design, one thing I am waiting for is someone to make a PC case similar to the G3/G4's, where you lift one latch, and the side of the case opens like an oven-door—bringing the motherboard out of the box so it can be worked on easily. This was a truly inspired design, one of those times when you say, "why didn't someone think of that before?" When someone does bring that case to market, assuming they get it right, it will no doubt wind up on one or both of CGW's Killer Rigs component lists.

I've seen the new Pentium-II PCs due this fall, and even Dell—that bastion of beige—is revamping its case design and going for a sleeker look. So it seems that the industry might finally be warming up to the idea of a different look. But the point is, all you PC makers out there, you don't have to wait for Apple to create the next new design. Blaze a trail! Think outside the box (so to speak). Give your PC a look on the outside to match the coolness of the technology inside, or to reflect the personalities of those who are looking for something different.

What do you want your next PC to look like? Let me know at cgw_hardware@davis.com.

Dave's Mix

1. Crimson Skies Beta
2. Comanche 65
3. PocketChess
4. Speak No Evil
5. Sticks and Rudder

Hokum
the Palm
Wayne Shorter
Wolfgang Langiewieche
Ace pilots don’t settle for cheap thrills.

Real flying is all about wrestling the raw powers of Mother Nature. Hanging on as you throttle your engines. And relishing the feeling as your wheels kiss the tarmac. You’ve never felt anything like the new SideWinder® Force Feedback 2 joystick.

Using a next-generation processor, it takes technology to the limit by delivering over 100 distinct forces with more speed and strength than ever before. Turning more than 200 force feedback-enabled games into the most intense gaming experience imaginable. So the next time you’re ready to push the envelope, you’d better buckle in first.
The Eternal Question

Should I buy a Pentium-III or Athlon 1GHz now, or wait for the Pentium-IV?

I haven’t gotten my mitts on a Pentium-IV yet, so I can’t answer that part of the question. The Pentium-IV will have a revamped floating-point unit, and parts of its integer ALUs (arithmetic logic units) are clocked to run at double the speed of the rest of the chip. So it shows promise, on paper anyway. But as for the immediate decision between Athlon and Pentium-III, the performance of these two parts is a virtual deadend, so the decision turns to price. If you’re not hell-bent on having RDRAM — the benefits of which only show up in some rare cases — you could build a solid and pretty affordable Pentium-III-based rig using an Intel 815-based motherboard that uses PC133 SDRAM. But Athlon, at the same clock-speed, is a good bit cheaper (an 850MHz P-III at press time was around $400, whereas an 850MHz Athlon was closer to $250). If you’re going to go the Athlon route, I suggest the ASUS A7V, a Socket A board with the Via KT133 chipset that can accept the new Thunderbird Athlon (still called Athlon); the A7V also has AGP 4X and PC133 SDRAM support.

Memory, Explained

I’ve been shopping for 128 MB PCS800 RDRAM on the Net. I ran across two kinds, ECC and Non-ECC, with ECC being more expensive. I plan on using this RAM with an ASUS P3C-E motherboard. What’s the difference between these two memory types, and why is there a price difference? ECC stands for Error Code Correction. This type of memory has the ability to correct data errors on the fly. ECC memory is generally used in “mission-critical” servers, and the price difference you’re seeing is due to the ECC functionality. But ECC has a downside, which is that it can slow memory performance down. So, we recommend standard non-ECC memory, or if your system came with ECC memory pre-installed, to disable ECC in the BIOS.

Feeling Conflicted

I recently got a SmartLink 56k PCI modem from Archtek. I had a lot of trouble installing it; it simply would not install like the instructions said it would. After it was in, I noticed an error when my Sound Blaster Live! drivers loaded. I took the SB out, and I was able to install the modem per instructions. When I put the SB back in, my computer froze when Windows was about to start. Evidently there is some conflict, but how do I find out what it is, and how do I go about resolving it?

To check your I/O resource usage, right-click on the My Computer icon, and select Properties. Go to the Device Manager dialogue tab, and double-click on the Computer icon at the top. Here, you’ll get a list of which devices are using which resources. You can switch around between IRQ, DMA, and I/O address settings. The likely culprit is an IRQ conflict, but check the other resources and see what the devices are fighting over.

Once you locate the conflict, look at the list and find an available resource (e.g., an unused IRQ). Go back to Device Manager, and select either device and double-click on it. From here, select the Resources dialogue tab, and deselect the “Use Automatic Settings” option. You can now manually assign what I/O resources the device will use. Once the conflict is resolved, the two devices should be happy.

TECH TIP: Blame the UPS Guy

If your system occasionally doesn’t “see” the video card when you first power up (multiple beeps from the PC speaker), yet it works normally when you do a warm reboot (hitting Ctrl/Alt/Delete) cycle power, it may actually be your uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Some UPSes cycle the battery during startup and don’t actually deliver full current. Wait until you get the full “green light” from the UPS before powering up your system. —Loyal Case
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.
**Power Rig**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>The Skinny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YY Minicube case</td>
<td>Yeung Yong</td>
<td>$213</td>
<td>Lots of cooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>Asustek P4M-E</td>
<td>$180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>Intel Pentium-III 1GHz</td>
<td>$1100</td>
<td>Finally, you can get a Gigahertz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>256MB of PC100 RAM</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>Up from 128MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disk Controller</td>
<td>Adaptec 29160</td>
<td>$865</td>
<td>Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Graphics</td>
<td>Hercules 3D Prophet II 6400</td>
<td>$340</td>
<td>DDR SDRAM and T&amp;L support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5&quot; Floppy Drive</td>
<td>TDK</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>You still have to have one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Drive</td>
<td>Quantum Atlas 60 - II</td>
<td>$830</td>
<td>New or at 3GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backup</td>
<td>Creative DVD-RAM drive</td>
<td>$270</td>
<td>5.2 giga of backup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM/DVD</td>
<td>Pioneer 4x SCSi DVD-300S</td>
<td>$135</td>
<td>New Pioneer St-Brite DVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Mitsubishi DiamondPro 22&quot; Monitor</td>
<td>$1150</td>
<td>Perfectly flat, good USB support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Audio</td>
<td>Sound Blaster Live Platinum</td>
<td>$180</td>
<td>Four-speaker DirectSound, A30, and EAX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Boston Acoustics BA1600</td>
<td>$175</td>
<td>Loud, clear, uncolored sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>3COM Ethernit 10/100 PCI</td>
<td>$140</td>
<td>Reach out and talk someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking Hub</td>
<td>Network 6960</td>
<td>$95</td>
<td>Multiplayer &amp; DSL modem support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Supply</td>
<td>PC Power and CostLeg Terraced 300</td>
<td>$190</td>
<td>More power, slightly!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>Natural in, Okay out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse/Pointing Device</td>
<td>Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td>No ball!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USB Hub</td>
<td>Logitech WingMan F-port USB Hub</td>
<td>$79</td>
<td>Got them USB ports upstairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Total for Game Controllers $5,646

**Lean Machine**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>ASUS A7V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPU</td>
<td>Athlon 750 w/ cooling fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>128MB PC100 SDRAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disk Controller</td>
<td>Built-in IDE/33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Graphics</td>
<td>Hama 3D Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floppy Drive</td>
<td>TDK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Drive</td>
<td>Maxtor Diamondmax 4600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM/DVD</td>
<td>Pioneer DVD-114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Optiquest O95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Audio</td>
<td>Sound Blaster Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Boston Acoustics BA-036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modem</td>
<td>Actiontec PCI Ch-Writing modem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Antec Crystalstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Supply</td>
<td>Antec 300W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>Microsoft Internet Keyboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse/Pointing Device</td>
<td>Logitech USB Wheel Mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joystick</td>
<td>Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Total $5,851
Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.

**Power Rig**

Alienware’s Area 51 Aurora took no prisoners in our recent testing, and its latest AMD Athlon-based rig pushes the CPU speed up to 16GHz. The Aurora is also packing 256MB of PC133 SDRAM system memory, along with a GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card with 64MB of DDR SDRAM, and Klipsch’s testimony four-channel ProMedia V2-100 speakers. And, this rig’s all-black components give it a menacing look to match its performance.

**Lean Machine**

Falcon Northwest built its reputation on gaming rigs from the “bat out of hell” school. But Falcon’s new line of value-minded systems will serve the budget-challenged as well. Dubbed Talon, these boxes can be custom-ordered, but the $1,749 stock load-out includes an Athlon 700MHz CPU, 128MB of PC100 SDRAM, a Hercules Prophet 3D graphics card, Sound Blaster Live Value, and a 10GB hard drive. With a 17” monitor and Cambridge’s PC Works speakers, this box delivers a lot of punch for the price.

**PENTIUM-IV IN THE WINGS, AND THRUSTMASTER MAKES A COMEBACK**

At press time, Intel was preparing its autumn assault on AMD’s Athlon beachhead with the new Pentium-IV, Intel’s first major architectural overhaul since the original Pentium Pro was introduced five years ago. As of late, AMD has continued its unabated push to find homes in gamers’ systems, and has become a force to be reckoned with. A 1GHz Athlon is now $600, which is about half the price of the same-clocked Pentium-III.

Meanwhile, for all you hardcore flyboys lamenting the passing of Thrustmaster’s excellent F22/TQS joystick/throttle combination, lament no more. Thrustmaster has announced that it’s bringing this vaunted duo out of mothballs and giving it a serious facelift, including USB functionality and programming software that doesn’t require a Ph.D. to use it. The stick will be an exact replica of the F16 Block 50 control stick, and the pedals will also switch to USB. The products will be called the F22 2000 and the TQS 2000, and are scheduled to launch this year.

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

For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3Dx’s Voodoo 5 5500 PCI board. At around $280, the V5 5500 delivers solid performance and has very good FSAA compatibility. And when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo 5 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card. For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules’ 3D Prophet II Ultra, based on nVidia’s GeForce 2 GTS chipset. With 64MB of DDR SDRAM, this board will blast games at 1600x1200 — if your monitor can handle it. If its $500 price tag is too much for you, get Hercules’ 3D Prophet II Ultra, using the GeForce 2 GTS chipset; the 32MB version runs just under $300.

**WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price</th>
<th>The Skinny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Solid, stable socket; an Athlon motherboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$160</td>
<td>Enter the Thunderbird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$130</td>
<td>128MB, spawned in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9</td>
<td>It’s in there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$126</td>
<td>Solid GeForce SDRAM card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Still gotta have it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$130</td>
<td>Fast and cheap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$155</td>
<td>Slot-drive DVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300</td>
<td>Solid 19” monitor at a budget price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35</td>
<td>R.I.P. Ansul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Best sub-$100 speakers, period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10</td>
<td>Solid performance, good price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>In black, of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45</td>
<td>Drunk with power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$24</td>
<td>Cheap, nice add-on buttons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30</td>
<td>Better than the “gaming” masses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$38</td>
<td>Very solid 3D joystick with USB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** $1,698
The PlexWriter 12/10/32 is an absolute find when it comes to writing discs, much like HP’s recently reviewed 9310i. And while the two suffer the same media problems (the drive writes too fast for some CD-R media to keep up with), the extra speed can cut down the disc-writing time down to around two minutes. But all this speed seems to come at the cost of reliability. Although it never actually refused to read a disc, it did have many errors trying to read data from CDs. When it does read correctly, it doesn’t feel like it’s as fast as it claims, and feels slower than the HP 9310i — which is rated at the same 32X speed (12/10/32 means 12x writing, 10x rewriting, and 32x reading). If you want the fastest thing on the block, this is it. Just be sure you have another drive to do your day-to-day CD-ROM reading activities. — Alex Handy

The new SideWinder Game Voice is Microsoft’s foray into voice-command gaming and voice-to-voice chat over the Internet. Other contestants in this field have included Game Commander and Roger Wilco, but Game Voice seeks to combine the functionality of both these products — voice-over-Internet and voice-command recognition — into a single, slickly designed package. The eight-button controller that allows you to toggle between giving game commands or talking to others is what separates this package from the rest.

The unit is well designed, but the question is, where do you put it? If you’re playing a shooter like UNREAL TOURNAMENT, you can’t just lift your hands from the mouse and keyboard to fiddle with the Game Voice — unless you have a death wish. Considering that the point of giving voice commands is to relieve extraneous keyboard typing, the voice controller just seems to complicate things.

The headset also leaves much to be desired. The sound quality is poor, and a loose wire running from the mic to the earphones is a snarl hazard. You also have to ask, do I really want to look like some dorky Time-Life operator?

If you want to get into in-game voice commands and voice-over-Internet technologies, buy yourself a decent headset, toss Game Commander MX up with Roger Wilco, and let the good times roll. Or you could try growing a third hand. — Tom Price
I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerates. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature will come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ 64MB DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI!

Gimme RADEON!

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Visit ati.com
Civilization Horoscopes: Your Astrological Forecast for the 4th Through the 15th Centuries by Tom Chick

**AZTECS**
(see Meso-Americans)

By hunting boars. Since your Hunters now carry more meat, you won't have to micromanage hunting by luring boars to your Town Center. Your ability to quickly spit out hordes of infantry just got better with Perfusion and Anarchy. Get some sun.

**BRITONS**

Mayan rising eclipses the reputation of your archers. To make matters worse, your Longbowmen refuse to wear Thumb Rings. Treat yourself to Yeomen later in the game to make up for it. The sun will never set on your empire. By "never," we mean "not until the 20th century."

**HUNS**

The fact that you can't build a house contributes to your general feeling of restlessness. Take advantage of this freedom by traveling to new places, seeing the sights, and then plundering them. Don't despair if everyone else seems to hate you.

**BYZANTINES**

No more Monks healing units faster than the enemy can damage them, but at least your Cataphracts rule the battlefield now more than ever. Make your life less complicated, but consider renaming Constantinople again.

**CELS**

You will not get along with your neighbors, so be thankful for your trusty siege engines. Scorpions do more damage and can attack multiple targets, so you are poised to keep the party crashers away from the gates.

**CHINESE**

Sadly, you will no longer be known as the "rush civ," a title that now goes to the Huns. Buck up and enjoy your advantage with THE CONQUERORS' new super Scorpions. Take time out to make a pretty vase, found a dynasty, or flirt with Communism.

**FRANKS**

Conquer France early and often.

**GOTHs**

Win the early race to the Castle Age

**SPANISH**

You will receive visitors who won't leave.

**MONGOLS**

Now that your Light Cavalry have an Imperial Age advance, use more cavalry to get your way.

**PERSIANS**

Slow War Elephants got you down? Mahout them and win the day.

**SARACENS**

You will receive visitors who won't leave.

**SPANISH**

Spend your money at the Monastery. Tend to spiritual matters personally with your mule-mounted Missionaries, a powerful part of any balanced army. Your Conquistadors, as the fastest hard-hitting units in the game, will serve you well if you manually keep them out of range of counterattacks. If micromanaged properly, circumstances will turn in your favor. Expect the Inquisition.

**TEUTONS**

You might be unhappy that now you have to play fair and square instead of building Town Centers everywhere, but at least no one will hate you anymore. Consider dropping the extraneous "e" from your name.

**VIKINGS**

You will discover a continent but not get credit for it.
DEEP, DEEP, DEEPER
A BATTLE-HARDEN WORLD OF
3D REAL-TIME ACTION & ADVENTURE

DEEP RAIDER™

GET THE DELUXE PACK ONLY AT
www.deepraider.com

DELUXE PACK
FULL VERSION DEEP RAIDER™ × FULL FEATURED USB JoyMouse™

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Comanche vs. Hokum

Survival Tips for the Virtual Rotorhead by Jeff Lackey

Enemy Engaged: RAH-66 Comanche versus Ka-52 Hokum (EECH) is one of the most engrossing flight sims to hit the shelves in years. However, the features that result in unprecedented immersion – a fully dynamic campaign, complex missions, and a myriad of decisions – also result in a potential for bewilderment. Here are a few tips that may increase your medal count, or at least your survival rate.

Double Your Pleasure...

Before you install EECH, go to www.razorworks.com and download the chapters that were inadvertently left out of the U.S. version's manual. While you're there, pick up the latest patch which, unlike some sim patches that fix serious bugs, is primarily composed of feature enhancements (many of the result of user suggestions).

Next, pick up a copy of EECH's older brother, Enemy Engaged: Apache versus Havoc. You can find it for about $9 most places. Install it, and then update it with the patch on your EECH CD. Next, make sure you run it at least once, to set up its graphic files. Now, when you install EECH, it will integrate its predecessor and you will have doubled the number of flyable choppers and campaigns.

Staying Alive

If this is your first chopper sim, remember that the name of the game is stealth. Fly as low as you can, and use the terrain to stay out of the sight of the bad guys until you are ready to fire. A great example of this approach is the way that veteran EECH pilots a target surrounded by SAM sites. Find some masking terrain, such as a hill or mountain. Snuggle up close behind it, then set your ground radar to high priority mode, forcing it to select only anti-air targets. Select your smart missiles, such as Hellfires, then slowly bob up until you acquire the SAM sites. Fire a volley of missiles in LOBL mode (LOAL mode will not allow missiles to redirect to targets out of the line of sight) and quickly drop back down behind the masking terrain. The SAM sites will be taken out while you're hiding. Repeat until the defenders are depleted, and then attack your primary target with impunity.

Also, don't forget to use all of your assets. An artillery strike or air support, if assets are available, can transform hunters into prey. However, don't forget that that helpless enemy column you caught in the open knows how to radio for help, too! So don't hang around too long, or you'll find an enemy fast mover eating you for a morning snack.

But Wait! There's more!

There's a wonderful strategy guide on your game CD that can give you enough tips to get started. The best thing about EECH is that its complex, dynamic gameworld allows for an endless variation in strategy and tactics!
WE PUT EVERY TREE, POND, AND SAND TRAP
EXACTLY WHERE THEY ARE ON THE REAL COURSES. SORRY.

Or with the Arnold Palmer Course Designer, you can design your own course and put everything exactly where you want. Either way, you'll get the most extensive Links upgrade ever thanks to all-new graphics and improved ball physics. So, grab your sticks and tee off as Arnold Palmer, Sergio Garcia, Annika Sörenstam, or eleven amateur golfers in the most realistic golf experience ever seen.
Success in ICEWIND DALE is all about a carefully constructed, well-balanced party of heroes. If you haphazardly throw some dwarves and elves together, you'll soon find yourself pouring money into Temple coffers for resurrection services. Before making your first (or next) party, look at these suggestions. They could save you much grief later on in the game.

**Three’s the Ticket**

Whatever you decide for your party makeup, three attributes matter the most: Dexterity, Constitution, and your character's "prime attribute"; these three attributes should ideally be 18 or higher. Balancing your attributes is nice and all, but you're better off having some stats in the low single-digits in order to buff up these all-important three. Dexterity is crucial because the whole world will be swinging all manner of nasty weapons at you, and it's always better to have a dodging bonus. Constitution determines how many hitpoints you get per level, so a high constitution translates into being able to soak more damage, no matter who you are.

For Fighter characters, the prime attribute is usually Strength; you'll need it for them to use some of the more powerful items in the game. You can safely sacrifice attributes such as Intelligence or Charisma to pump up the main three. Rangers should have decent Wisdom, since they become pseudo-clerics down the line. Paladins are required to have a high Charisma, so knock down either Wisdom or Intelligence to beef up your main attributes.

The Priest's prime attribute is Wisdom. Clerics have a slightly easier time, as they don't have the Druid's Charisma requirement. If you're making a Druid, slash off Intelligence or Strength to make up for the required Charisma. If you have to choose between lowering just Intelligence or Strength, go for Intelligence, since a decent Strength is often needed to wield some of the better druid/cleric-only items.

Mages are the most straightforward: Intelligence. You generally don't need a charismatic, nor a wise Mage. Most of the time, your Mage will be in the back, so Strength isn't really needed either (though, it doesn't hurt). If you're going to pick a Specialist Mage, opt for either Illusionist or Necromancer, as the only opposing schools are each other, which is perfectly fine. The other Specialists have either too many opposing schools, or they oppose schools with really useful spells.

The Thieves are the trickiest classes to create. Treat them as Fighters, but make sure they have the highest Dexterity possible. Since they will serve as Scouts and monster busters, they will have to fight. Also, pour all your skill points into Stealth at first. Later on, when you start finding Stealth-enhancing equipment, develop Find Traps (the dungeon designers went a bit crazy with traps) and Open Locks. Pickpocket isn't really worth it, as you'll be making a ton of money by selling surplus +2 equipment. Bard are the trickiest; for them, lay off Strength, knock down Wisdom, and beef up Charisma and Intelligence in addition to Dexterity and Constitution.

**A Touch, or Two, of Class**

If you plan on multi- or dual-classing, you're on your own. Either way, you'll need to make some hard choices about how to have good Attributes for your current/future classes. A couple of suggestions that aren't too hard to create, and became really useful: a multi-class Mage/Thief, and a dual-classed Fighter/Cleric.

If you take the proper time to tweak your attributes, you'll thank yourself when you see your fighters having 100+ hitpoints at level seven, or mages who can take more than one hit per battle. Now go on and turn your level-one weaklings into master demon-slayers.
The Legacy Continues with the New 3rd Edition D&D Rules!

- New Character Classes and Races: Monk, Sorcerer, Barbarian and Half-Orc
- Random Quests and Dungeon Areas
- No Race or Class Restrictions

Forgotten Realms

Pool of Radiance

Ruins of Myth Drannor

www.poolofradiance.com
Diablo II

I just finished reading your magazine's guide to DIABLO 2, and the guide made the Amazon seem completely dependent on the bow. I think the Amazon is an excellent melee fighter because my character just turned level 25 and deals up to 150 damage with a pike. While the pike has a very slow attack speed, the Amazon's jab attack gets around that. So my character can deal 3x150 in under one second, translating into 450 damage! Add the 33% chance of critical strike (if your character has that skill upgraded enough) for a grand total of 600 damage in one second. Nothing stands a chance, including other characters in duels.

—Jon Wagner

For refuting our DIABLO 2 guide, we're giving Jon a copy of Tzar: Burden of the Crown, a Sanity t-shirt, and a Klingon Communicator trinket. Enjoy!

Evolva

If you find yourself constantly being overrun by swarms of beasties, here are some ways to "thin the herd." Although it may seem obvious, make sure to use the terrain to your advantage. Not only can you often avoid damage by taking the high ground, you can also lure the aliens into withering ambushes at choke points. If you need to avoid combat completely, get the crawlies to chase you onto the slippery green surface that are usually located near cliffs. While you can use your "sticky-feet" or jumping ability to stay alive, the aliens will slide helplessly to their doom.

Shogun: Total War

Sure, it's a lot of fun watching your cavalry sweeping down a hillside or seeing geysers of smoke rising from your columns of Musketeers. But the core of any good army in SHOGUN is Warrior Monks and Archers, who are the most versatile and useful units in the game. Train them early, often, and at every opportunity. Warrior Monks are the best balance of speed, offense, and defense. They can scare away low-honor Buddhist units without even coming to blows. Unlike gunpowder units, Archers aren't hobbled in the rain, they have greater accuracy and range, they don't require a direct line-of-sight to their target, and you won't have to wait for any foreigners to show up before you can train them. By the time you can start training Arquebusiers and Musketeers, you should already have several high-honor Archers for your long-range needs. Remember that other units have their place, but your bread and butter should be Warrior Monks and Archers.
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**DARK REIGN 2**

- Use the mine-detecting units. Use them. Use them. Use them. In the later stages of the single-player missions, the Spawlers use them religiously. You're going to steadily lose your forces to parasitic bombs unless you meticulously scour areas. The best way to accomplish this is to group your units into two squadrons. One should be composed of four to six infantry and a mine-detecting unit. The other squadron should be the bulk of your forces. Use the smaller group to scout ahead of the second force. Unfortunately, you'll have to micromanage this element of the game.

**EVERQUEST: RUINS OF KUNARK**

- One of the hardest things to do in EVERQUEST is to earn money in short order. Enter trade skills. By learning a trade, such as pottery or brewing, you can easily make bundles of cash as your skill level increases. It's not unheard of to earn 10 or 20 platinum from making pots and beer, then selling them to local merchants. One word of advice, however: You'll want to be around level 9 before you start trying to become a craftsman or crafts woman.

**ICEWIND DALE**

- Here are some combat tactics for a standard party consisting of two fighters, two priests, one mage, and one mage/thief. The mage/thief scouts ahead with stealth, and scopes out the opposition. If there is one defined leader, backstab it. Otherwise, open with an area effect spell, and retreat back to the party. The rest of the party will initially be using ranged weapons on the incoming enemies.

  As the enemies close in, the fighters switch to melee and rush forward. They will dish out and soak most of the damage, and maintain distance between the party and the enemies. The priests then focus on healing, using their slings, or casting a support spell or two. Finally, the mages sit in the back and either pelt the enemies with area-effect spells, or surgically target important enemies. The mages must be protected; the priests serve as a buffer between the mages and the combat, and the mage/thief in particular plays bodyguard to the mage.

  This strategy works well in taking down anything from hordes of cold wights, to fire giants, to Yxunomei herself.
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A Totally UNREAL Year

GAME OF THE YEAR PACKS A MIGHTY HAUL OF UT BOOTY

Capping off a fine year of UT-mania will be UNREAL TOURNAMENT GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION, wrapped and ready for the holiday season. Aside from offering the latest version of the game, this release jams in the UT Bonus Pack, Inoxx Map Pack, and some extra maps like Hall of Giants from Digital Extremes, co-developer of UNREAL. Three of the better Net mods are also being included: Rocket Arena, ChaosUT, and Tactical Ops. Rocket Arena features a sick fight-to-the-death format set amidst a tight, tiered level. Spectators can watch these one-on-one brawls from a variety of perspectives as they wait for their chance to take a piece out of the winner. The levels are quite nice, though deliberately small, and the gladiatorial format works surprisingly well.

ChaosUT is the UT version of a popular QUAKE and QUAKE II mod that adds terrific new weapons—including a nasty-looking sword and a crossbow with multiple bolt types. The real highlight of Chaos, however, is its classic Chaos Kamikaze mode, which allows you to self-destruct when you have more than 10 rockets. The explosion grows exponentially bigger the more rockets you have—it's a real room-cleaner. Finally, there is the most interesting of the lot: Tactical Ops (formerly called SWAT). This is nothing less than Counter-Strike for UT, and that's no exaggeration. The maps may not be quite as consistently effective, but the format is the same: strike force versus terrorist, money to buy weapons and upgrades, and realistic victory parameters. Weapon modeling is almost as strong as in CS, with good recoil effects and graphics. This is one you shouldn't miss. With a little further tweaking, it may replace Counter-Strike as the strike-force mod of choice.

The two massive enhancement packs bundled in the Game Of The Year Edition are available for download at www.unrealtournament.com. The Inoxx Map Pack collects six maps from master level designer Cedric "Inoxx" Fiorentino, who did the Terranlux and Extreme levels for the original UNREAL. This pack contains Facing Worlds 2 (a new take on the classic CTF level); the vast Kosov Valley; a set of tiered concentric circles dubbed Nucleus; the low-grav SpacNoxx; and a pair of amazing, vertigo-inducing levels set on a vast skyscraper under construction. These are outstanding multiplayer maps with plenty of hidey-holes, multiple levels, and ramps.

Prior to the Inoxx release, Epic gave fans another set of free enhancements, dubbed the UT Bonus Pack. In addition to four new skins, there are eleven CTF and DM maps of varying quality. While Arcane Temple is a moody DM map and Hydro16 a good, intricate CTF map...
for large groups, some other offerings—such as Cliff Bleszinski’s own Strapped—are a bit wanting. The bonus pack also adds “relics,” powerups which respawn and move within the level if left untouched. The relics are Strength, Regeneration, Defense, Speed, Redemption (brings you back to life once), and Vengeance (explodes upon your death with a large killing radius). This summer also saw the release of the 425 patch for UT, which improved several areas of password-protect-
ed sessions, made numerous enhancements to the editor, and generally smoothed out the code.

Sure, the Game Of The Year Edition is a box full of stuff available free on the Net. Anyone seriously into UT should look these items up and download them. But it’s a solid bundle for the Wal-Mart crowd, and will help further spread the good word of the best online action game around.

If you want to forge the expense, check out PlanetUnreal for links to all this gear and more. While there, make sure you download the CorpseMania mod. I’ll let you discover the joys of this demented little gem for yourself. Just set it to ZombieBeatDown, crank up the A1 zombie count, and aim for the brain. GCW

** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER **

** T OM’S MIX **

1. **COMBAT MISSION**
2. **UNREAL**
3. **TOURNAMENT CTF**
4. **METAL FATIGUE**
5. **VIRTUAL TASKER**
6. **Alice Cooper’s**
7. **Brutal Planet**

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**Are We Obsessed Yet?**

**The ULTIMA ONLINE Convention**

In college I worked the dealer’s room at Creation Conventions. You know: those sci-fi media cons that drew guests like George Takei, Bill Mumy, and Robby the Robot. These were the ultimate grazing grounds for geekdom, but I think they may have a challenger in the Ultima Online World Faire, being held this November in Austin, Texas.

Even though I’ve rarely spent $2,500 on imaginary online real-estate, I like ULTIMA ONLINE as much as the next person who doesn’t make it his life’s consuming passion and actually breathes air outside the basement now and again. But imagine, if you will, someone so enthralled by UO that they buy plane tickets to Texas, get a hotel room ($175 a night), and spend $125 to $200 in registration fees (no UO gold accepted) to sit around for a weekend soaking up the B.O. of the hairy dude in the next seat and listening to panels such as “The Quest for Game Balance: How Do We Get There?,” “Animal Taming,” and “Notoriety and Player Self-Moderation: A Discussion of Tools.” It’s EST through the looking glass. It makes one long to hear William Shatner talk about horse-breeding for an hour while fervent fans wave their hands in the air and try to get him to talk about The Tholian Web.

Actually, the Faire (and if I do say so myself) is a ripping good time if the FAQ at the Web site (www.uo.com/foar) is any indication. For example:

**Q: Can I bring medieval weapons such as swords or slings?**

**A:** Yes. If you plan on attending in costume, you may bring medieval weaponry. However, certain policies do apply, and you will be subject to any local ordinances.

Since this is Texas—a state with a concealed carry law—I can’t imagine what weapons might be barred under local ordinances, but I’d love to find out. The rules do clarify this further: Swords, maces, clubs, and daggers are allowed at the con. The party poopers at Origin, however, have to get all nanny-like in their policy statement: “Do NOT allow any weapon to be handled by children, do NOT use any weapon in a threatening or dangerous manner, do NOT swing your weapon around.” Why bring a hand-tooled spiked club to a party if you can’t let your ten-year-old swing it in a dangerous manner? I also imagine that these local ordinances would frown on actual Player Killing at the con, so you antisocial PKs should stay home. The FAQ says nothing of spellcasting, blacksmithing, or the ever-popular bowery, so have at it in the Austin Convention Center lobby.

Of course, I mock what I don’t understand, largely because I know good material when I see it. I’m sure UO fans will have a grand old time meeting in real life, and putting a face to Thwarner the Ugly, who they met on the quest for the golden poontang. It’s also further proof that all the smart people in the gaming industry are in Origin’s marketing department.
To Infinity and Beyond!
SPACING OUT WITH 4X SPACE GAMES IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Long a staple of the PC gaming industry, the sprawling 4X (Explore, Exploit, Expand, Exterminate) space-colonization opus has been conspicuously absent on the recent strategy-gaming landscape. Until now. We've already seen the release of IMPERIUM GALACTICA II, and before year's end (provided everyone sticks to schedule) we should see STARS!

SUPERNova, SPACE EMPIRES IV, and REACH FOR THE STARS! What do these games have in common besides superfluous exclamation marks? They're tried-and-true, head-to-toe traditional turn-based interstellar empire-builders, stressing management of multiple layers of strategy. And they're also all a little too easily dismissed as "overly wonky" by gamers intoxicated by fast-paced RTS action. Don't make that mistake—all of these games have something to offer gamers who are up for a challenge.

SPACE EMPIRES IV is a perfect example of the entire genre. The first game was a one-man creation released as shareware in 1993. Since then, little Malfador Machinations has plugged away on its original design and (at press time) is disclosing the release of its forth iteration, the first commercial version of the game. What makes a game like SPACE EMPIRES IV and its ilk stand out from the rest of the strategy field? It serves up an open-ended stew chock-full of tantalizing options and possibilities, the likes of which you won't find in scripted mission-based games.

All of these titles offer enormous and intricate tech trees, incredible customizability, rich economic systems, the ability to design your own ships, and more. The final version of SPACE EMPIRES IV will sport hundreds of tech levels to research, more than 500 spaceship components, 300-some facilities to build planet-side—and the ability to edit them all or even to create your own. I've been playing the limited 100-turn demo (www.malfador.com) for a few days now, and even this little taste has me thirsting for the full-blown game. Every one of these titles offers more unique replayability than you'll find in any RTS random skirmish.

In a year that's seen a number of competent, fairly enjoyable, but basically uninspired RTS releases, strategy fans would be well advised to immerse themselves in an old-school galaxy-heater, and perhaps rediscover a depth of strategy and personal satisfaction they might not have realized they were missing.

Maxis Cancels SIMMARS
With the incredible success of THE SIMS, Maxis has decided to cancel the development of SIMMARS, a space colonization simulation. With Will Wright and the Maxis brain trust behind it, SIMMARS seemed a very likely candidate to fill gamers' extraterrestrial Manifest Destiny-fueled fantasies, especially in the wake of the disaster that was the OUTPOST series. Unfortunately, the immense appeal among both casual and hardcore gamers of deciding when and where Bob Newbie will urinate, and whether Bella Goth should or should not have a lesbian love affair behind Mortimer's back, scrubbed the planned launch of the SIM franchise into outer space. With the small-town simulating SIMSVILLE and SIMS ONLINE in full-bore production, Maxis decided their limited resources and staff were best allocated to the expansion of this huge new franchise.

PANZER GENERAL Heads to the Russian Front
When 3D graphics became de rigueur for games, SSI introduced 3D units and terrain to its venerable PANZER GENERAL design. The resulting game, PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT, suffered from interface problems and lost the refined feel of earlier versions. SSI has modified the game to make it easier to control units, added new campaigns, and improved the strategic map with better unit information. The new title, SCORCHED EARTH, is still the same game at heart, but these improvements—along with a new Battle Generator—make it much more worthwhile. If it's been too long since you've lost yourself in a good WWII chess game, reconnoiter this one.
Plotting Your Destruction

TWO ACTION GAME WRITERS TALK ABOUT THEIR CRAFT

When you think about great writing in games, action games are probably the last thing to come to mind. Most shooters are content to let their guns do all the talking.

Even so, action games have come a long way since DOOM, in which the entire “story” was a couple lines in the game’s README file. Beginning with SYSTEM SHOCK, and continuing in titles like JEDI KNIGHT and HALF-LIFE, action games have begun to incorporate more narrative into their structure. Some games even feature the work of real writers.

Curious about the strange land where words and pixels meet, Inside Action tracked down and cornered two of these writer types: Sheldon Pacotti, scriptwriter for DEUS EX; and Warren Ellis, established comic book writer (Transmetropolitan, Planetary), who was brought in to script the upcoming HOSTILE WATERS by Rage Software.

Get in, and Start Typing

Depending on a development team's style, the writer is either a lone wolf or part of a team. Ellis reflected, “They had—and I hope they don’t mind me saying this—half an idea. They knew what they wanted to do, and were simply unsure about how to go about doing it. I came in and fleshed their idea out, added a new background, and created a world around their central story element. I worry the shit out of you, and then you go out to blow things up.”

Chain Me to a Desk

With some minor differences, actually writing the game is “Scripting a comic is still more difficult, because as the writer and creator you are charged with providing the entire experience. In a game, the experience is what happens between your story elements.”

I asked Pacotti if he’d do more game-writing, he gave a more forward-looking answer: “I think we’ve barely scratched the surface of what computers can do in the realm of storytelling. The medium’s going to mature over the next ten years, and I’m hopeful that a genre of ‘game’ will emerge that has the same mass appeal as movies, and can accommodate adult-level character development and drama. I’d like to be in the business when that happens.”

So, for all you current or budding writers thinking about breaking into the gaming industry, here’s some nuggets to chew on. And if the writers intrigue you, hit www.warrenellis.com and www.sheldonpacotti.com to learn more about them.
All's Well in Flight Simsville

LITTLE TIDBITS OF GOOD NEWS, FOR A CHANGE

Fellow writer Jeff Lackey rightly pointed out to me that we flight sim nuts have probably never had it so good. Between titles such as COMANCHE VS. HOKUM, MIG ALLEY, EUROPEAN AIR WAR, FALCON 4.0, JANE'S F/A-18, RED BARON 3D, and so on, what more do we need? And I'd like to note that all of these titles, with the exception of F/A-18, have within them a dynamic campaign in some form or another. Furthermore, there appear to be some great titles on the horizon, so who cares if the total number of releases each year is dwindling, as long as what eventually comes out is of good quality?

Granted, I'd found myself a tad burnt out and unenthused until recently. Maybe it was because there have been other great games released late that have competed voraciously for my limited free time. (I'd admit to bugaboos of DIABLO 2, ICEWIND DALE, DIUS EX, and COUNTER-STRIKE, to name but a few.) Sighs, however, are notoriously jealous and don't like to share. So what got me excited about committing again to some long-term sim relationships? Upgrades! Nothin' says sim lovin' more than a faster processor, extra RAM, and a new video card. They'll make you dig out every sim you've ever owned to see how much better they play on a new and improved computer. Am I being too shallow?

One Vote for 3Dfx

The Voodoo—A Simmer's Paradise?

Speaking of new video cards, the hottest pieces of hardware among the sim crowd right now are the latest efforts from 3Dfx, and their recent line of Voodoo 3D accelerators. Now, lest you think we're one big happy hive mind here at CGW, allow me to be a minor voice of dissent. I take some issue with the conclusions drawn in the August issue about the Voodoo 5500. Yes, it was late to market and, yes, the latest GeForce can sure kick the crap out of a Voodoo when it comes to the QUAKE 3 engine. But what about sims? Squeezing out that few extra frames-per-second isn't as important to a flight or driving sim as it is to a first-person shooter. Where the new Voodoo makes a big difference is in the hardware-implemented Full Scene Anti-Aliasing. Captured screen grabs won't do this point justice; you'll simply have to see it in action for yourself. I, for one, can never go back to jaggy or shimmering, and 4xFSAA on a 640x480-only title will look new again. Be sure to visit www.papadoc.net/Voodoo_vs_GeForce2.htm to get a better idea of what I'm talking about.

Microsoft SUCKUp 2.0

Hold That Carrier Still!

It sure has been a great summer to be a press weenie on Microsoft's PR list. While playing with the COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 beta, I've discovered just how much I truly suck. I'm 0-for-20 on attempted traps, and counting. With regards to the CRIMSON SKIES beta I'm playing, I hereby issue the following bold statement: There is something seriously wrong with you if you don't enjoy playing this game (assuming it ships fairly bug-free).

A Patchwork Sim

More FALCON 4.0 User Updates

The last time I mentioned FALCON 4.0 in this page, we had just seen the first release from the ibeta.com team in the post-Hasbro era. Now, they're up to their third rebuild patch, and it's amazing what they and the user community-at-large have accomplished with this sim. In fact, it sometimes seems FALCON 4.0 is getting more user-added creations and updates than the Linux OS. And all of this based on hex code altering of an already compiled product. Imagine what could be done if they had access to the actual source code...

You can stop imagining now, because the source code was "leaked" to the Internet. This has sparked quite a few debates on the morality of gaming with patches based on the theft of an intellectual property—a property many consider to have been abandoned by Hasbro. The best example of this dilemma can be found in the work done by the mysterious individual eRazor, who has given this sim an unprecedented look and feel with a boost in frame rates by converting FALCON 4.0 over to DirectX 7 graphics.

For more information on the FALCON patching madness, check out the incredible work done by Bob "Groucho" Markis and his "F4Pplus" articles over at combatstims.com. Be sure to look those up if you need help figuring out the proper order of the myriad of enhancements available.

Hope for the Rudderless

Saitek Help

For the first time I can recall, I'm flying without any CH gear. I'm in love with my new Saitek X35 stick throttle/rudder combo, but it was a rocky start and Saitek's Web site was less than helpful. All I can say is, thank God for Ron Hunt's Saitek USB Help Center, or I would have been completely screwed. Check out www.saitekhelp.com.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.
When the time came to conquer Gaul, he **rounded up his friends** from the 'net.

When they said it couldn't be done, he **instant-messaged** them and told them it would.

And when the broken bodies of their foes lined the streets of their conquest, he got back on the **chat channel** and decreed:

"**BOO-YAH!**"
STARFLIGHT Rides Again!

RABID FANS CREATING THIRD EPISODE OF CLASSIC SPACE SIM

The first time in my life I experienced pure, seething jealousy was when my best friend's dad bought a new Tandy 1000 and a copy of STARFLIGHT. He wouldn't let us touch his new computer, but just watching him mining hundreds of unique worlds, communicating with strange aliens, and navigating the vast universe stands out as one of my most cherished gaming memories. I still haven't found a game as deep and rewarding as that original effort—including STARFLIGHT II on my Amiga 500. For the last fifteen years, I've been wondering why a third game with upgraded graphics and sounds wasn't released, as the gameplay mechanics were so outstanding that I still play the original to this day.

Apparently I'm not the only one who feels that way. A group of talented fans is hard at work on STARFLIGHT III: MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE. The game is looking good, and the team is adding many features that were lacking in the first two installments. If all goes as planned, players will be able to purchase at least three types of ships, pick up special missions and loads at the closest spaceport, and even hire mercenaries to help out in pitched space battles or to shug it out on the ground. Twenty races populate the star map, not including new planet-bound races that haven't developed space-flight technology yet.

The most amazing thing about the STARFLIGHT III project is that several members of the original STARFLIGHT team have given the project their blessing. The SFIII crew doesn't have to worry about copyright violations since Rod McConnell, the owner of Binary Systems (the company that created the original game), gave them permission to use anything they need. Tim Lee and Greg Johnson—who worked for years on the original game—have made themselves available as consultants. Lee has also been providing original design documents and source code to help the SFIII team get over some rough spots. "My motivation for joining the team was to encourage the production of a fun pastime—something that would be fun to make and fun to play," says Lee. "We had to cut so much out of the original STARFLIGHT due to technical limits, and it would be excellent to see those elements realized with today's technology."

Greg Johnson, who went on to co-found ToeJam & Earl Productions, is helping for similar reasons. "It feels really good to see people so devoted to making something that they're willing to give up a huge chunk of their life to build it for the sake of building it; and probably more than anything else, so that they can play it," Johnson told me. "When we originally built STARFLIGHT, we had no end of problems. We went way over schedule and the project was almost canned any number of times. The thing that really kept it going was that we just had to see it when it was done."

Johnson hopes the support he's lending will eventually help the SFIII team experience the same elation he did when the original project was completed. "I remember saying quite seriously many times, 'I don't care if I die as long as it's after we finish,'" he says. "Beneath all the dollars, and the politics, and the marketing, and the technical headaches, it's really 'the game' that matters—and when you're young and starting out, that can sweep you up and become everything.' The team working on SFIII seems imbued with a similar level of passion, and the game should be something special when it finally is finished. You can track its progress at Starport Central, found at www.geocities.com/Area51Station/2571 .

A New STAR CONTROL?!

Let's Do the Time Warp Again

STARFLIGHT isn't the only timeless space classic getting a modern update. Another team has been working on the all-new STAR CONTROL: TIMEWARP for some time now, and a complete melee engine with more than two dozen ships is available for download at the www.star-control.com/timewarp site. An adventure game engine will be incorporated later, but until then, you can content yourself with battles against a buddy or the recently-added AI.
Your beeper beeps. Your PDA chimes. You can make a quick call wherever you are. Yup, technology is an integral part of everyday life. That’s why ZDNet has all the product reviews to help you find the latest gadget. In fact, ZDNet was named “Best Overall Online Site” by the Computer Press Association. However technology touches your life, ZDNet’s Reviews Channel has something for you. Because ZDNet is where technology takes you.”
Drop in on some friends

When terrorists secured the compound, Alpha Team mobilized on their favorite server.

Agent Z instant-messaged his teammates with a bally scheme to go through the window.

Twenty minutes of breaking glass and shattering limbs ensued.

Afterward, they regrouped on the chat channel.

“Next time, you guys be the terrorists!”

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### HINT BOOKS

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<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>$14.95</td>
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<td>Soccer</td>
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<td>Football</td>
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<td>Tennis</td>
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<td>Pool</td>
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<td>Ice Hockey</td>
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### COMPUTER GAMES: SIMULATION

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<td>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</td>
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### SONY PLAYSTATION

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<td>Beyond Good Fellow</td>
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<td>The Last of Us</td>
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### NINTENDO 64

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<td>The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time</td>
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Get Stuffed
CGW's talking turkey spreads some holiday cheer

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

I say this to you even though I am writing this in August, and most of you are reading it in October. Am I a retard? Do I not know how to read a calendar? The answers to those questions are no and yes—in that order, I think. But if you look on the cover of this magazine, it quite plainly says "November 2000." Thus, no matter what is actually happening in reality, Ziff-Davis Media says that it's November, and since that fine organization helps me put food on my family's table a good two to three times a week, it is imperative that I go along with the charade. They also recently told me that 2+2=5, by the way, and I am here to tell you that that does in fact make a lot of sense to me. Yes, sir.

So to get into that holiday spirit, I thought this would be a good opportunity to, well, to give thanks. Like those noble pilgrims back in 1621 who gathered around tables to share food and smoke peace pipes with the Indians before screwing them out of their land, I sit before you in celebration. Yes, friends, the gaming world can be a cantankerous one. We bicker, we jostle, we complain. At times it seems that we're never happy. So I say, let's put all of that aside for now. Let's join hands as friends, bow our heads, and speak of the good times. Let us give thanks where thanks are due.

I am thankful, first of all, to gaze upon the PC Data Top 10 list and not find any hunting games. Regis is still there, but Regis will probably still be here after the apocalypse, along with the cockroaches, so what are you gonna do?

I am thankful that DAIXATA, our Long National Nightmare, is finally over and behind us—and that John Romero and Ion Storm and all the rest of us can move on to bigger and better things. Yikes.

I am thankful for THE SIMS and ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON—two incredibly fun games that I could actually show to my six-year-old kid without feeling like an irresponsible social deviant. They made for nice breaks between our family sessions of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and KINGPIN.

I am thankful for EA Sports' CRICKET 2000, which confirmed my suspicions that cricket is, in fact, the stupidest game ever invented.

I am thankful for Old Man Murray (www. oldmanmurray.com), consistently the funniest, smartest gaming site on the Web. They tell it like it is and don't give a damn what anybody thinks. Game publishers fear them and hate them—and that's all you need to know.

While I'm at it, I'm also thankful for Blue's News (www. bluesnews.com), Gone Gold (www. gonegold.com) all the GameSpy "planet" sites, Evil Avatar (www. evilavatar.com), and the many other gaming sites too numerous to mention who work their butts off to keep the gaming citizenry informed on a daily—often I must say—basis.

I am thankful that it is not my job to look at Star Trek games when they are brought into the CGW office.

I am thankful for Bethesda, Big Time Software (COMBAT MISSION), and all of the other smaller, independent gaming houses keeping the faith amidst difficult odds.

I am thankful for all the women who participate in this business despite the incessant misogyny and embarrassingly immature boys club attitude. I'm especially thankful for all the hot-looking ones who show up at our office in tight pants.

I am thankful for all the cranky folks on Usenet, who keep us humble every single day by reminding us that we suck.

I am thankful for the brown sugar/cinnamon Pop Tarts in our vending machine, without which my life would be a brimming trough of despair.

I am thankful for the following games, which have all personally enslaved me this year: SYSTEM SHOCK 2, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, DIABLO 2, ICEWIND DALE, MDX2, MONKEY ISLAND (for the third time), and SHOGUN (the current obsession).

I am thankful for LucasArts, for bringing the MONKEY ISLAND series—my favorite games ever—back one more time. Sorry about all that "adventure game is dead" stuff. I was just bitter.

I am thankful for all the smart, patient PR personnel who put up with a neverending stream of BS from both the gaming press and the developers they represent. You think their job is easy? Here’s an exercise for you, then: Try writing a positive press release for MESSIAH.

I am thankful for all the cranky, outspoken folks on the Usenet gaming forums, who keep us humble every single day by constantly reminding us that we suck.

I am thankful for Napster, for introducing me to all sorts of cool music at the office which I then went out to buy at my local record shop—damn it.

And finally, I am thankful, once again, for the great Johnny Wilson, who many years ago rescued me from a hellish job in the real world, editing reviews of networking routers and modems (for the Mac, no less), and gave me sanctuary here at Computer Gaming World. Please don't ever make me go out there again.

Jeff would like it known that he doesn't really hate cricket. Just English people in general. Send your royalist hate mail to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com, and God Bless America!
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