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- ’Nuff Said

"If you loved Baldur's Gate, then... Baldur's Gate 2 is bigger, more ambitious, and just a flat-out better game. Bioware and Black Isle have said they want this to be the only RPG you'll need this year—and, frighteningly, they may be right." - Computer Gaming World

"This sequel features fantastic locales, more spectacular monsters, and more character classes. It promises to be the most ambitious second edition D&D® game ever." - GameSpot

"... Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn will be one of most important RPGs ever released. It is a beautiful epic, bringing to the field a new level of polish, detail and design. And, it's going to change everything." - IGN
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"Every aspect of Sacrifice blew me away.... the graphics engine, the unique style of gameplay, the in-depth storyline."  - 3DGPU.com (August 2000)

"Sacrifice is a stunning game, and you won't be disappointed..."  - GameSpy.com (August, 2000)

"... checkout the breathtaking eye-candy....."  - Riva3D.com (August 2000)

"While the game itself is revolutionary in it's style, the graphics absolutely blew me away."  - 3DGPU.com (August 2000)

"Shiny Entertainment's Sacrifice is in a league of its own and left this avid game player just drooling."  - Terra.com (August 2000)

"I like Sacrifice. A lot..... fantastic gameplay, inventive ideas backed by even more inventive character designs..."  - IGN.com (August 2000)

"The game is drop-dead gorgeous. It controls easily and its unique twist on gameplay mechanics makes it just quirky enough to stir interest among both casual and hardcore players."  - Daily Radar.com (August 2000)

"After spending a good deal of time playing Sacrifice, we're as excited as ever about Shiny's latest opus. It's refreshing to see a developer that is committed to inventing innovative settings for its games."  - GameSpot.com (August, 2000)

"... it's really rather impressive..."  - CGImag.com (September, 2000)

"Not only does the game boast a gorgeous 3D graphics engine, but it exhibits some smart design and gameplay as well."  - Piringoad.com (August, 2000)
Finally, a software pirate you can trust

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FEATURES

Lean Machines

They fly like butterflies, sting like bees, and they’ve got price tags that won’t K.O. your wallet. Six lean, mean, gaming machines face off in our annual Ultimate Game Machine roundup. Find out which machine scored the TKO.

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RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN

It’s been 10 years since B.J. Blazkowicz busted Nazi heads in WOLFENSTEIN 3D. Now B.J. is back, facing a fresh army of hideous Hitlerite henchmen in true 3D. See why we think this could be the best single-player shooter since HALF-LIFE.

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FIVE LAPS TO GO.
PACK ON YOUR TAIL.
TIRES READY TO SHRED.

IT'S CALLED HEAT.

Bobby Labonte

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HEAT

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George Jones
An issue of character.

Letters
Gamers go postal.

Index of Advertisers
In case you can't find the ads.

Greenspeak
A case study in career suicide.
PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A LITTLE INTERGALACTIC SHOWDOWN.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR ARSENAL
Mix and match to create up to 32 variations of powerful weaponry, including upgrades.

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Stalk your quarry from 2-D dinosaur-infested jungle ruins to corroded techro-wastelands.

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Hunt down hordes of genetically modified mutants in single- and multiplayer action.
The legacy of authentic D&D® adventuring continues. New from SSI, the company that practically invented D&D role-playing on computers, 3D adventuring in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® unlike anything you've ever experienced. The Pool of Radiance, once thought inactive, now emanates a force making all it touches undead. Discover the power behind this vile resurgence and defeat it. Explore, as you never thought possible, the ruined Elven City of Myth Drannor—one of the most mysterious and dangerous places in the FORGOTTEN REALMS.

Fully-realized 3D animating characters and monsters.

New spells and minimized pop-up interface.

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The Legacy Continues with the New 3rd Edition D&D Rules!

- New Combat Systems, Tactics, Skills and Heroic Feats
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- No Race or Class Restrictions

Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor

www.poolofradiance.com
Project IGI: I'm Going In is the first military stealth shooter to stress cunning and covertness over firepower.

Sent in behind enemy lines for a routine track and capture, you take on the role of Dave Llewelyn Jones, a British and US operative. Suddenly caught between greed and treason, this assignment evolves into a solo mission of stealth and retaliation.

Battle your way through Eastern Europe in pursuit of a homicidal ex-Russian Colonel bent on turning Europe into a radioactive wasteland. An adrenaline pumping plot keeps you riveted as you go behind enemy lines to save the world from nuclear terror!

FEATURES:

- Use your skills in thievery, computer hacking, sabotage, and reconnaissance to finish your mission objectives.
- Match wits against enemy AI that intelligently reacts to your every action with actual military tactics.
- Call in for Napalm strikes via your revolutionary map communication PDA.
- Equip yourself with the latest NATO spy gear and assault weapons to defeat enemy surveillance, bunkers, tanks, and gunships.
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.

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Return to Character

I just got back from Japan. The big occasion? The Tokyo Game Show, which is a very big occasion indeed, since it’s open to the public. A big deal for me was how vocally avid the Japanese are about gaming. Don’t get me wrong—we love games here in the States, too, but it’s not too often that you see a computer gaming tradeshow where 15% of the audience is dressed as their favorite gaming characters.

It got me wondering. Why don’t we see this kind of enthusiasm in the States? A part of it is undoubtedly cultural. Being an 18-year-old with intimate knowledge of Snake from METAL GEAR SOLID won’t get you socially ostracized in Japan. It will here. Especially if you’re in your late teens, or in my case, almost 30. Exploring this theory would take an editorial of its own, but it basically boils down to the fact that we still perceive games and comics and even digital technology as the domain of the immature or geekish.

Secondly, Japanese games take the time to develop and build strong, often complex characters. For some reason—with the exception of the FINAL FANTASY series and the METAL GEAR games—deep storytelling has fallen out of favor here in recent years. Our love affair with action games has been too hot and heavy.

It used to be that PC games were very story intensive, mostly because they had to compensate for the lack of adequate graphical representation. Not anymore.

Ironically, one of the most important games ever released changed that. 1992 was a huge turning point for gaming. That’s the year that WOLFENSTEIN 3D came out, establishing id Software as one of the dominant game developers of the 1990’s.

That’s the year many a PC game developer realized that straightforward action games could sell hundreds of thousands of units. The success of DOOM amplified these sentiments.

By the time id released QUAKE in 1996, character-devoid action games dominated the market. By 1999, character-rich PC games were extremely scarce.

HALF-LIFE started to change this. And to come full circle, RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, our cover story this month, should continue the trend. But you know, neither game will develop the one story element that provides the ultimate emotional hook: character. Gaming needs to rediscover it.

Being an 18-year-old with intimate knowledge of Snake from METAL GEAR SOLID won’t get you socially ostracized in Japan. It will here.

George Jones
IT'S TIME TO BUILD THE NEXT GREAT EMPIRE.

MAY THE GODS BE WITH YOU.

Control the fate of ancient Greece as you rule cities, defend territories and rub elbows with Gods, Heroes and Monsters.

From the makers of the award winning Pharaoh™ and Caesar III, comes a city-building game of mythological proportions. Featuring more adventures and gameplay than ever, Zeus lets you interact with the Olympians. Build a temple to Athena, or summon the hero Perseus to battle the mythic beast Medusa. And as your city grows, you can even establish colonies while engaging in diplomacy, or extortion, with other city states. With action on land, sea — and the heavens — Zeus proves that city-building isn't just for mere mortals anymore.

AVAILABLE NOW
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.
“His city, 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.”
I've been called back to Wonderland,
It's darkened since I dreamed.
The Queen rules with an evil heart,
It's time. I intervened.

American McGee’s Alice

Wonderland has been cruelly corrupted by the deranged Queen of Hearts.
The Mad Hatter, Jabberwock, and other familiar characters have become her menacing minions. Out-run, outwit, or outfight these twisted characters and confront the sadistic Queen. Only one of you can survive. Travel through wickedly surreal landscapes wielding an arsenal of sinister toys, including rapid-fire playing cards and jack-in-the-box bombs. Designed by American McGee of Quake® and Quake II™ fame, and using an enhanced Quake III: Arena™ engine, American McGee’s Alice pulls you into a fast-paced, third-person world where horrific characters and fiendish puzzles conspire to deprive you of your sanity before they take your life.

Are you ready for the next chapter of Alice? Visit alice.ea.com
Fallout Tactics: A Post Nuclear Tactical Combat Game

WWW.INTERPLAY.COM/FALLOUTBOS
Best Letter Ever!

My subscription just started and I must say, CGW is a sight to behold. I did almost nothing but play video games when I was growing up, and even though I'm in prison, I still like to read about all the cool stuff I'm missing.

That's kind of pathetic, huh? I'm so addicted to video games that I subscribed to CGW, even though I have at least five more years to do before I can play any of them. By that time, they will be obsolete, and console systems will rule, but I am looking forward to playing all the games I miss, in chronological order, to see how PC gaming evolved while I was away. I've been down since '92, so it's going to be a long list.

Of course, I'll have to rob another armored car to be able to afford it... just kidding! Ha, ha! I would never do that again. From now on I strictly rob drug dealers. Doh! No, no, I'm retired. Yeah, that's the ticket... retired.

Bobby "redrum" Hopper
03771-078 Unit 2F

Yes, but They Did Make Those Crop Circles

Your review of ASHERON'S CALL in the July issue was entertaining and thorough. We feel compelled, however, to clarify one minor point.

Your article references "pyramid schemes" under a section titled "My Way or the Amway." The comparison clearly implicates Amway as a pyramid and this is a highly inaccurate characterization of our business model, as the enclosed card explains. In all likelihood you were not aware that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has established a legal definition of pyramid schemes. According to the FTC, a pyramid scheme compensates people for the simple act of recruiting additional people, regardless of consumer sales. Pyramid schemes are not tolerated by the FTC, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the U.S. Postal Service, and any of the 50 state Attorneys General, or Amway. In 1979, the FTC found that the Amway Sales and Marketing Plan is not a pyramid because it is based on retail sales to customers. Amway is recognized by federal and state courts and regulatory agencies as the example to follow for multilevel marketing plans.

We hope this clarifies matters, and would appreciate a correction to the inaccuracy.

Anna Bryce
Public Relations
Amway Corporation

Okay, sure. We're sorry. While you're here, would you like to buy some of George Jones' Nutritile products?

Thumbs Up for PipBoy!

I just wanted to make a comment regarding Dirk Swanson's letter "Cover Carping" in November 2000. It's very obvious that Dirk is totally unfamiliar with the FALLOUT series (blasphemy!!!). Otherwise, he would have instantly recognized PipBoy. Considering the fact that the issue had a huge story on FALLOUT, I think the PipBoy cartoon and the radioactive orange was very apropos. I, for one, instantly said "Oooh...FALLOUT...lemme see!" Keep up the good work, guys!

Anne McKay

Win a Monster Gaming System!

Valued at Almost $5,000!

Falcon Northwest MACH V

- 1GHz AMD Thunderbird Processor
- 512MB SDRAM, 60GB Hard Drive
- 19-inch Viewsonic Monitor
- Hercules 64MB 3Dfx Voodoo 2 Video Card
- 400 Watt Klipsch Promedia Speakers
- Plus Zip Drive, Modem, Keyboard, and More!

FOR MORE DETAILS AND CONTEST RULES, SEE PAGE 190.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

To enter, log on to www.contest.computer gamingworld.com, and fill in your name and address, e-mail address, and daytime and evening phone numbers. One entry per person. Entries must be received by December 5, 2000.

Full System Details: AMD Thunderbird 1000MHz, 256K L2 cache, 512MB SDRAM, ATX Midtower, IBM Desktop 60GB ATA100 hard drive, Viewsonic P790 19-inch, 256MB, 16x12 CD-ROM, Hercules 3D Prophet II 64MB GeForce 2, Klipsch Promedia speakers, 400 Watt ATX power supply, extra fans. For more details, visit www.contest.computer gamingworld.com.
it's a message

this isn't
Internet Sports Leagues

George Jones's recent column about MADDEN 2001 (Inside Sports, September 2000) states that "From here, it's only a matter of time before we see...career modes that play out over multiple seasons, and hype and hoopla commensurate with real-life sporting events."

I just wanted to let you know that thousands of users are already using the BASEBALL MOGUL and FOOTBALL MOGUL games to play career-mode simulations. And unlike EA and HIGH HEAT, we've already spent years working out the bugs, and we are focusing our efforts on Internet play, not 3D engines.

A recent Internet search revealed that BASEBALL MOGUL leagues outnumber any of the other products. Moreover, we are continuing to support the product and leagues with patches and new versions. A QuickPoll survey of over 1,000 users shows that BASEBALL MOGUL leagues are preferred 5-to-1 over other sports baseball, and are considered "easy to learn" by an amazing 13-to-1.

So, if your readers want some baseball action in the off-season, they should pick up BASEBALL MOGUL 2000 at iMonkey.com and join a league!

Clay Dreslough
President, iMonkey.com

Scooter Knows Games...

Just finished Thierry Nguyen’s review of DEUS EX (October 2000). I don’t usually write to the magazines I read, but I felt compelled after this game review. I bought DEUS EX the first week it was out in my area, and was totally absorbed as soon as I started playing. So when I saw the 3 1/2 star rating in the review, I felt it should have been higher. Until I read the review.

Scooter’s analysis of this game was on the money: the AI, crappy frame-rate at some points, etc. The one thing he did, which I don’t usually get from reviews, was to convey the fun this game brings to the player. I agree that maybe some won’t be as forgiving of the flaws, but as the article reads, it’s a game well done and ultimately a fine ride. Again, great review, and thumbs up for an informative article based not only on all the tech stats of the game, but throwing in the more relative gamer’s opinion: It was fun!!!!

Ken Hall

...and Robert Coffey Doesn’t

Please Lord God King Game Designers, don’t listen to the rantings of blasphemer Robert Coffey (Inside Strategy, October 2000). Please continue to innovate the interface of your blessed games. Refrain from using the cookie-cutter approach to game-interface design, and try something new and innovative. It might not always work, but it’s the only way the interface is going to improve and get better.

Mike Hansen

Robert Coffey responds: I’m all for innovation. I’ve just played too many games lately that have bent over backwards to be different and have only succeeded in creating needless hurdles for their game’s. Who wants to keep right-clicking on empty terrain, because the game’s funky interface prohibits you from simply deselcting units? Try something new and innovative? By all means, but only if it helps the game and makes sense.

Ken Hall
The 1930s ain't what they used to be. America lies in pieces and air power is king. It's a shoot-or-get-shot-down world. You'll dogfight ruthless air pirates. Rescue saucy pinups. Dodge flak from dicey femmes fatales. And mix it up with other aces online. But remember, one thing still holds true—don't get mad, get even.

[Website: www.microsoft.com/games/crimson-skies]
Last night, she shot you down.

TODAY, IT'S YOUR TURN.

CRIMSON SKIES

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Win an eight-day trip to the United Kingdom in the Dungeon & Dragons® Castle Sweepstakes!

Enter to win and demo the game at www.playdnd.com/cgw.
Find Yourself. Somewhere Else.

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

Ever Wonder?
Something New Chills the Heart of Icewind Dale...

A Hero reborn, a people betrayed. The Barbarian tribes are on the move, threatening to wipe out the Ten Towns of Icewind Dale. Yet all is not as it seems. An epic journey awaits the heroes of Black Isle’s hit RPG, with new monsters to battle, new places to visit, new treasures to find and new wonders to behold!

www.interplay.com/icewind
Supports 800x600 resolution!

6 new regions to explore, including the town of Lonelywood.
THANK GOD EVERYTHING'S NOT POWERED BY Voodoo5.

With the world's first full-scene hardware anti-aliasing and our proprietary T-buffer cinematic effects engine, the new Voodoo5 is the most powerful 3D accelerator card on the planet. Want proof? See for yourself @ www.3dfx.com.

Full-Scene Hardware Anti-Aliasing: 
INSTANTLY SHARPENS AND SMOOTHES THE GAMES YOU ALREADY OWN.

T-Buffer Cinematic Effects Engine: 
The most realistic 3D environment allowed by law.

Up to 1.5 GigaPixel/Sec. 
Fill Rate: Tear through levels, burn through scenes.

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SO POWERFUL, IT'S KIND OF RIDICULOUS.
Marvel This

Fifty years of comic books have given us some of the best stories and characters in fiction, spawning dozens of books, magazines, and movies (including the recent X-Men), but not one superhero game has been worth the box it shipped in. Finally, we hope, that's about to change.

Irrational Games, creators of last year's award-winning SYSTEM SHOCK 2, is taking a very rational approach to the subject. "We decided not to license a comic book property, which would cut out resources in half for the game," says Ken Levine, creative director at Irrational. "Several of us are huge comic book fans, and we love to create characters and settings for superheroes, so we thought we could create a universe as compelling and detailed as anything we could have licensed."

They plan to create three superhero games, the first one set in 1962 in New York City. "The early sixties were the coming-of-age of comics, where heroes had interesting quirks—they were not paragons of virtue," says Levine. "Our game will be in the style of Steve Ditko's Spiderman and Jack Kirby's The Fantastic Four."

The game will use the same engine as the upcoming BRIDGE COMMANDER and DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE, which supports plenty of graphic detail in a panable, zoomable environment. FREEDOM FORCE will reportedly have much of the visual complexity of FREEDOM RIDGE, combined with the bustling activity of SYNDICATE WARS. The streets will be filled with traffic and people, the latter of which are sure to become hapless victims.

You'll start out with one superhero with adjustable attributes, and you'll acquire more heroes throughout the game. Taking down the evildoers confers prestige points to invest in increasing your heroes' powers.

When news of trouble reaches headquarters, you'll choose up to four superheroes per mission and sweep into action. Sometimes it'll be henchmen harassing the crowd; other times it'll be supervillains tearing up parts of the city. This is where the game should shine:

Everything is being built with destructibility in mind. Your superheroes will be able to grab a telephone pole or a bus, and commence with some high-octane as-
kicking. Walls will be smashed, trees uprooted, bystanders injured, and large structures destroyed. Depending on their ability, heroes can fly, burrow, or use force beams to contend with villains wielding powers that could be stronger than that of your heroes.

"You can make a mess, from knocking over the Statue of Liberty to taking out the Brooklyn Bridge—the scale and scope of these battles should be huge," says Levine.

3D Irrational intends to support multiplayer and a wide range of mods from users. But for now, they're focusing on the basics: story and characters. "Aside from the technical aspects of blowing stuff up, it's important to have a range of characters with interesting motivations and complexities to them. We're really working hard to make this world feel honest and realistic to the period, on top of making it an incredible game."

Stay tuned—we'll bring you more details as it nears its Winter 2001 release.

—Ken Brown

Next-Gen Jukebox

Play games, music, or strip poker via broadband at your local pub

As our wired society hurtles ever closer towards a merger of The Jetsons with The Matrix, even the corner bar will have to enter the Internet age. Don't be surprised the next time you stumble into your neighborhood watering hole if some biker dude is swiping his Gold Visa into a spiffy jukebox to play ZZ Top while he surfs the Net.

But surfing isn't all you can do on the i-C.E.M. With a 500MHz processor running Windows 2000, the unit beats with the heart of a PC. The company making the units, Ecast, is working with Activision and other developers to bring parlor games like Shanghai and action titles like QUAKE III to the system, either solo or multiplayer. Instead of a mouse, the i-C.E.M. will have a special trackball device to help you get your fix while waiting for your drink. All of the systems will be wired with broadband connections for zippy performance.

When the tranvestite in the corner starts looking good, you can serenade "her" with music on demand from emusic or rollingstone.com. If you like what you hear, another swipe will send the CD on its way to your door via Amazon.

The company has installed 15 units in San Francisco, Denver, Oakland, Los Angeles, and Dallas, and plans to roll out an additional 300 throughout the United States by the end of the year.

The GOOD...

EURO STUDIO WAVE
Thank God for the Eastern Europeans. While established PC developers are leaping like lemmings toward next-gen consoles, game design studios are popping up all over the former Eastern bloc. Croatian developer Croteam is working on SERIOUS SAM; Russian house Beka Entertainment is working on EMOTION; Bohemia Interactive in the Czech Republic is developing FLASHPOINT: 1945, and 1C:Maddox Games is programming a great-looking flight sim in Moscow (see page 62). Welcome, comrades!

The BAD...

BUGS IN BILL'S HOUSE
Boy, do we expect more from Microsoft. The company that proudly proclaims its testing ability, has an impressive record of releasing clean games, recently shipped MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 and CRIMSON SKIES with bugs. Numerous users have reported lockup problems with MM2, and a memory leak in CRIMSON SKIES can result in the loss of your career. We hope this is not a sign of things to come from the company that has set the standard for all software publishers.

and the UGLY

3DFX'S FUTURE
The picture at 3dfx isn't pretty. The company reported second-quarter losses of $180 million. Meanwhile, Nvidia's GeForce 2 leads the way in 3D performance. None of the systems in this month's Ultimate Game Machine roundup were 3dfx-powered. Their next release, the $600 Voodoo 6000, isn't exactly going to sell like hotcakes. But we hope this 3D pioneer can reverse its fortunes.

TCHOTCHKE OF THE MONTH

Yes, the CGW editorial staff is a misbegotten aggregate of seething human balls of hate—but we're future spree killers with a heart. So thank you Blue Byte for providing us with this month's tchotchke, an inflatable SETTLERS IV mace that lets us unleash the white-hot fury bubbling beneath our deceptively benign facades, providing us with all the visceral thrills of unchecked skull-bashing homicidal mania, with none of the messy viscera. Now all we need is a foam rubber Iron Maiden, and our lives will be nearly complete.
What's Up With... The latest news on a dozen games we'd like to yank from the bitstream

You might just as well be naughty as nice this year, because a lot of games you may have expected to be ready for gift wrapping this holiday season are slipping until next year. Let's take a look at some of the biggies.

**Tribes 2**
Sierra is going to "extend the beta appropriately to finesse the game so it meets the highest standards." Translated, this means that Sierra is taking an extra six weeks to make sure their title can capitalize on the void created by TEAM FORTRESS 2's absence and HALO's defection to Xbox. Much of the extended beta will be focused on balancing and performance-abuse testing, but by giving the team more development time, they've recently been able to add whistling mortars and grenades, new explosion effects, bases that go dark when generators are destroyed, moving stormfronts that will disrupt the battlefield, and gray cycles that now can hover over water as well as submerge. We're glad they're taking the time to polish the game—we just hope they can keep their word and get this cool-looking team-based shooter out by December.

**C&C Renegade**
At last, a C&C game that doesn't resemble all the previous C&C games! Westwood didn't have much to say, other than to indicate that it wouldn't be out this year and that they'd have more information soon. Since the engine looked sharp and ran smoothly the last time we saw it, we're guessing Westwood has found incorporating the game's shooter focus while retaining the feel of the C&C universe more challenging than they'd imagined. Rumor has it the game is still another year off.

**Duke Nukem Forever**
Last month we reported in Pipeline that 3DRealms recently advertised for multiplayer programmers. We're hoping that's a sign that they're nearing completion with single-player. Meanwhile, George Broussard recently posted an update on the 3DRealms Web Forums that talks about some of the weapons in the game. Nothing's finalized yet, but the mix sounds similar to DUKE 3Dz, with the addition of sniper rifle and a revamped version of the ever-popular Shriner. Most weapons are said to have alternate-fire capabilities as well.

DNF has long been rumored to include racy content that might prevent it from being sold at retail, but in a recent interview with CGW, Broussard denied that would be the case. You can expect some strip club scenes and off-color remarks, but it'll be closer to PG-13 than R.

DNF still has no official release date, but we think we'll finally see it by summer of 2001.

**El Sid's Games**
DINOSAURS and CIVILIZATION III are coming from you know who, but neither will be out this year. "Sid is deep into game creation" Firaxis told us, which sounds like he's either working feverishly or taking a nap. According to Hassbro Interactive, we can expect CIV III in August of 2001, while no date has been set for DINOSAURS, which is an EA game.

**Dungeon Siege**
This action-oriented RPG from the maker of TOTAL ANNihilation, Chris Taylor, and Gas Powered Games looks like a Summer/Fall 2001 game. Gas Powered recently got the multiplayer game up and running. "We are plowing forward!" Taylor told us. We're waiting, Chris!

**Anachronox**
One thing's for certain, nobody's going to be able to accuse
very promising—we're just hoping that constant feature creep doesn't delay this baby so long that gamers lose interest.

**Team Fortress 2**

"Not the dreaded TEAM FORTRESS 2 questions," joked Sierra's press department as we interrogated them. We didn't get much beyond name, rank, and serial number, other than to confirm that Valve's notoriously high standards (remember, this is a company that scrapped the first incarnation of HALF-LIFE and started over from scratch) are pushing this title until sometime next year. The game is being retooled with a brand new engine with the rumor being that they've dropped QUAKE III and licensed Havok technology (also used in WARCRAFT III) to depict realistic physics properties. Take off your shoes and pull up a chair, it's going to be a while.

**Obi-Wan**

Finally, a small saber of hope for us games-starved gamers. LucasArts said that OBIE-WAN may make it out this year. Yay! Then they also said, "Until next year early you may also wait." Darth Memo to LucasArts: Stop letting Yoda answer the phones.

**Loose Cannon**

Another title from Digital Anvil, Tony Zorovich, the man behind the CRUSADER: NO REMORSE series, is also behind LOOSE CANNON, a game which combines driving and first-person-shooter action. Digital Anvil is currently taking a step back and retooling the game to make sure it still looks current when it ships late next year, and possibly (much like DA's real-time strategy CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS reevaluating its overall playability and fun factor.

**Freelancer**

This is the game Digital Anvil's Chris Roberts said he wanted to make when he was making Privateer—now, if we could figure out what movie he was trying to make when he made Wing Commander. While we don't think Roberts' reach extends his grasp, the scale of this space opera seems to be more of a challenge than the team anticipated—witness the dropping of the very ambitious multiplayer. This one looks like it will docking in the Fall of 2001.

—Mark Asher and Robert Coffey
YOUR FATHER HAS BEEN KILLED. YOUR HOMELAND OCCUPIED.

TAKE COMMAND AND
RECLAIM
YOUR BLOODRIGHT.

Choose from 21 'Mechs' to outfit with massive weaponry. Then, lead your lance mates in an epic 3D-mission, single-player campaign. Or, join a fierce multiplayer battle for up to 16 MechWarriors. Vengeance will be yours.

MECHWARRIOR 4
VENGEANCE

THE ASSAULT BEGINS NOV. 2000 • WWW.MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/MW4
one small step for man...

one screaming leap
for racing games.

Step into the virtual cockpit of the perfect simulation of the Formula One Championship Season down to the last damper and anti-roll bar. It will not be easy. But it will be fast. Screaming fast. From Monaco to Silverstone, from rookie to ace, from single player to 4-player speedfest, from checkered flag to champagne - GRAND PRIX 3 is the next step up for real racing fans. Your car is waiting.
THE CGW PROFILE

Jason Hall

Monolithic Chief may be world's largest geek

SANITY, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, the LithTech engine being licensed all over— you guys are on a roll! I'd like to believe that, but really think that this industry is cyclical and that it just happens to be that all of these events lined up in a way that makes all seem very impressive.

You're like what? 7'2"? If you played id's John Carmack in basketball one-on-one, you'd destroy him, wouldn't you?

Actually, I'm 6'6". You would think that if I played him one-on-one I would win, but actually, Carmack is so fast on the court that to even attempt to stop him from his drive to the hoop would result in me catching a pointy elbow to the eye—so I dare not!

If Carmack played you one-on-one in an IQ test, he'd destroy you, wouldn't he?

We already competed in the 1994 U.S. Mental Olympics. In the final, he and I had to sit facing each other at an empty table with a drinking glass in the middle of it. The goal was to push the glass across the table into the other guy's lap with only the powers of our minds. We both failed to accomplish this. I guess we both need to work on our telekinetic skills. I consider it a draw.

What's with the hair? Extrema male-pattern baldness?

Hair is for women, or men who can't bench press more than 300 pounds.

Why is LithTech so hot right now? How many licenses have you sold?

Well, the quick answer is that LithTech is hot because it saves developers time and money. We have sold a number of licenses. I think we have only publicly announced around 16. I may be wrong on that, though...

Your strength is legendary. Is it true that you threatened to bench-press a reviewer after a bad BLOOD 2 review?

No. I never threatened anybody, I was at home with my girlfriend that night! Those are some trumped-up charges! I'm innocent, I tell you!

Does your girlfriend play games?

Sure— but that could get very x-rated and probably isn't appropriate for public discussion.

SNOGO and BLOOD 2 were disappointing. What happened?

SNOGO and BLOOD 2 did well in their overall game reviews (SNOGO more so than BLOOD 2), but the sales of each product were less than spectacular to be sure. As for what happened, it was probably a combination of factors like timing, competition, etc. We'll do better next time!

Ice T did the voiceover for SANOITY. What was he like?

Cool guy. Very mellow. A much more knowledgeable and thoughtful person than you would expect. He's very creative.

What's this TFX ATOMIC game?

TEX ATOMIC'S BIG BOTS BATTLE is for Real Networks' Real.com Games. When it's complete, the game will be available as a free download available demo under SMB. The full version is scheduled for an Internet release during the first quarter of 2001.

Software distribution will be a growing trend in the future, and TEX ATOMIC'S BOS BOTS BATTLE marks the beginning of our effort to produce incredibly fun commercial-quality games that are of the appropriate size and cost for consumers.

How do you make a game that appeals to both the hardcore gaming crowd and a mainstream audience?

Generally speaking, you don't. They're very different groups with different expectations.

And the Winner Is... ENEMY

ENGAGED: COMANCHE vs. HOKUM, showing us that while the genre may be fading, it's not going down without a fight. Note that the high marks tend to go to either interesting real-time strategy games, or to the more RPG-like of the pack. Action games didn't seem to score as well, and while opinion on KUNGON ACADEMY was a bit spread out, everyone agreed on the dog that was DOGS OF WAR.
Shopping Online?

Being lazy isn't always wrong. Consider online shopping: Sure, it's more fun to bag your game in a software store, but do you really want to spend hours looking for parking, waiting in line, and then paying full price for a game you could buy in 10 minutes for less? It's far easier to order online.

Online shopping is fast, safe, and relatively cheap. There are probably 10 good sites to choose from, most of which will deliver overnight if you pay the extra shipping. You always know if the game is in stock, you can usually shop for the best price, and there's plenty of information on many of the sites to help with your decision. Compare this with the rush you'll get from the sales clerk who only downloads Macware.

Fight Back With CGW

We wanted to find out who had the best price and service online, so we decided to put eight e-tailers to the real-world test (see chart). We ordered two games (DIAVO II and MADEN 2001) from all eight within a one-hour period on Friday, September 8th. We opted for the standard or default delivery, which usually meant USPS Priority or UPS Ground.

Most of the sites sent an email confirmation and shipped the game promptly. We got all of our games within five working days of the order, except for the deliveries from EBworld and Egghead. EBworld took issue with the billing address on our credit card. After sorting it out with them over the phone, we got the game two weeks after the order date. Egghead captured our customer information but failed to record the order, so we dropped them from the list.

Most of the sites charge about the same amount, usually $40-50 for major new releases. There were some standouts, though. DIAVO II was $10 less from Compuexpert than on most other sites—it happened to be the "48 Hour Madness" special that Compuexpert was running that day. (Other Madness specials have offered BATTLEZONE 2 for $9.90 and THE SIMS for $14.90.) Compuexpert even threw in a free game.

Shipping fees are also a factor. Most sites charged us $4-5 for standard delivery within a week. Outpost.com is the big standout here, with free overnight delivery. This meant Saturday delivery in our case—you can't beat that. They aren't the cheapest, but their prices are roughly the same as most other sites. And once you factor in the free shipping, Outpost.com becomes extremely attractive.

Barnes&Noble and Compuexpert delivered by the next working day (Monday). They both charged about the same, but Compuexpert has the edge because they guarantee two-day shipping via Fed-Ex for only $4.

Making the Grade

But there's more to a site than price and delivery. The organization and presentation of game-related content is also important, as is the quality of the information available. Amazon leads the field with the best site design and the best game information, complemented by tons of reader reviews. EBworld is also excellent and easy to navigate. At the other end of the spectrum, Chips & Bits is outdated and jumbled, but features all of the content from Computer Games Magazine to peruse.

All of these sites will meet your needs, but we recommend Amazon, Outpost, and Compuexpert for the reasons stated above. If you know what you want, order your game from Outpost for the fastest delivery or Compuexpert for the lowest price. If you want to browse games leisurely, and perhaps buy other things like books or DVDs, Amazon can easily swallow an afternoon, but they'll meet all your needs.

Before you place your order, be sure to check the returns policy—most e-tailers will only refund your purchase if it remains unopened or if the CDs are defective. Some sites require that you send the discs to the publisher for replacement. A few sites, such as BN, will allow you to exchange a game you didn't like for another one.

One last note: Before you start shopping, you might want to check the range of prices at pricegrabber.com to comparison-shop. Unfortunately, not all the above sites show up. If you're not sure if a game has come out, drop by gonegold.com to find out the latest word.

Happy hunting.
Season on the Brink

CGW picks the Top 10 games for the holiday season

The times, they are a-changing. Five years ago, the onset of the PlayStation, Nintendo 64, and the ill-fated Sega Saturn meant nothing but good things for PC gamers, as every console game developer scrambled towards the only stable platform around.

The situation couldn’t be more different in the year 2000. Given the PlayStation 2’s anticipated success—despite Sony’s ability to ship only half the projected number of units by launch—PC and console developers alike are shifting their focus away from the PC to the theoretically greener pastures of the Sony, Sega, and even the Microsoft console platforms.

Even retailers appear to be console-biased. When asked what they would sell a customer seeking an out-of-stock PlayStation 2, managers at a San Francisco consumer software store didn’t even flinch. “We’d probably push them towards a Dreamcast,” they commented. “It’s too hard to get PC games working, and Sega has better games right now.”

Ironically, this year should see one of the strongest, most diversified collections of PC games in the last five years. Will this year’s batch of A-list games be enough to recapture the waning attention of game developers? Considering the two-year development cycles on most PC games, and next year’s influx of the Xbox and Nintendo’s Game Cube, we may have to wait until 2002 to know for sure.

For now, judging by CGW’s projected best-seller list for the holiday season, the present day looks pretty spectacular. And by itself, that’s a strong, positive sign for PC gamers. —George Jones

Projected Holiday Winners

1. Diablo II
   Blizzard reigns supreme...again.

2. Who Wants To Be a Millionaire 2
   Unfortunate but true. Regis’ global domination continues.

3. The Sims
   Everyone who hasn’t simmered will.

4. The Sims: Livin’ Large
   Everyone addicted to THE SIMS will have to have it.

5. Baldur’s Gate II
   The original sold a million games; the sequel can’t do much worse.

6. Crimson Skies
   Proof that air-based action games—especially unique ones—still sell.

7. Frogger 2
   Don’t underestimate the power of retro-games. And don’t forget about Hasbro’s new PAC MAN title...

8. C&C: Red Alert 2
   Even the mediocre reception of C&C 2 won’t dampen Westwood’s sales.

9. Combat Flight Simulator 2
   Microsoft knows how to sell the FLIGHT SIMULATOR franchise.

10. Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force
    Her-cules! Her-cules! A Star Trek game makes good.
Real squads don’t pass notes.

Scream. Howl. Heckle. The voice, man’s primal form of communication, will once again revolutionize the way battles are won. With SideWinder® Game Voice you’ll talk to and hear your squad without losing a step in an online firefight. Set up six different channels so you can plot with your teammates. Or broadcast abuse across the entire warzone. Taunt ’em. Scare ’em out of hiding. Because with the power of speech, your team’s more like a real squad—focusing on the hunt and kill. Instead of the hunt and peck.

MICROSOFT
SIDEWINDER
GAME VOICE

For a free demo check out www.gamevoice.com
### PREORDERS

**Escape from Monkey Island** *(LUCASARTS)*  
The first Monkey Island 3D graphic adventure game, with all the humorous antics and addictive gameplay of the first three installments.

**Black & White** *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)*  
Complex in detail, graphically gorgeous, with free-flowing, individualized play. Already voted one of the games that will change gaming forever.

**Tribes 2** *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*  
No armchair generals need apply, since the action in Tribes 2 promises to be so fast, you'll need your wits about you before you charge into the fray.

**Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor** *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*  
Not your run-of-the-mill, linear role-playing game. Has a cooperative multiplayer mode and a good deal of character environment interaction.

**NBA Live 2001** *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)*  
The most visually appealing basketball game on the PC. Enhanced franchise mode lets you assume the role of a general manager.

**EverQuest: The Scars of Velious** *(VERTON INTERACTIVE)*  
This 2nd expansion is designed for mid- to high-level players, and features new zones, new enemies, new treasures, and an improved interface.

**4x4 Evolution** *(GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS)*  
A 4x4 racing game that's all about rough-and-tumble off-road 4x4 racing. Features an interesting cross-platform multiplayer option.

**Battle of Britain** *(TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE)*  
Brimming with all the details of the vital air campaign over England in 1940, with literally thousands of pilots and statistics to boot.

**Star Wars Episode 1: Obi-Wan** *(LUCASARTS)*  
Follow the adventures of the young Obi-Wan as he learns the ways of a Jedi knight and the awesome power of the Force.

**Half-Life: Counterstrike** *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*  
This mod is now the newest game for Half-Life! Join a terrorist or anti-terrorist assault squad and play hostage rescue, assassination, or just blast the enemy!

### RELEASES

**Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force** *(ACTVISION)*  
An outstanding first-person shooter that pits the Voyager crew against Klingon scavengers, the Borg menace, and other senator forces.

**Crimson Skies** *(MICROSOFT)*  
An air-combat game set in the 1930s with sleek, tricked-out prop aircraft, a nutty pulp-fiction storyline, and a '30s-era Big Band/swing soundtrack.

**Rainbow Six: Cover Ops Essentials** *(UBI SOFT)*  
This is a stand-alone mission pack that includes new levels as well as historical information about counterterrorism from 1970 to the present.

**Madden NFL 2001** *(EA SPORTS)*  
With much improved graphics, this game offers the most complete online football experience available, as well as scrimmage and ranking modes.

**NASCAR Heat** *(MARSHAL INTERACTIVE)*  
A thoroughly immersive and brutally honest driving experience. Even running practice laps or chasing the pros is worth the price of the game.

**The Sims: Livin' Large** *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)*  
More character skins, more career paths, more home furnishings, and more of the original game's quirky, sarcastic humor.

**Dukes of Hazzard: Racing for Home** *(GAMERFIT PUBLISHING)*  
Fans of the 70's TV show will enjoy this one, where the adventures of the Dukes of Hazzard are turned into a mission-based driving game.

**Homeworld: Cataclysm** *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*  
The beautiful graphics, top-notch sound, and 3D play mechanics of the first Homeworld remain intact, but now enhanced by deeper gameplay.

**Star Trek: Now Worlds** *(INTERPLAY)*  
Witness colony life at the most fundamental level as you go on missions that require you to build colonies capable of making vehicles and structures.

**Panzer General III: Scorched Earth** *(WARGAMES)*  
Your skill and experience as a tank commander is tested in the armored warfare of the Eastern Front campaign of World War II.

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All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Get thousands of game titles at up to 50% off at amazon.com/videogames.
What We're Playing

Midtown Madness 2

Microsoft's arcade-style racing game is fantasy role-playing at its best: driving in San Francisco with no traffic or GUIs or menu systems. It's more about being Pac Bell Park and the CGW building?

Baldur's Gate II

DIABLO II and ICEWIND DALE were just appetizers for the monstrosity that is BALDUR'S GATE II. This RPG has the word "epic" written all over it, and quite a few CGW staffers have been clicking around Chapter Ten, which means we still have, oh, about 120 hours of gameplay left.

Homeworld: Cataclysm

The original game was probably more respected than played around the CGW offices, but the highly original missions and gorgeous spacescapes of the follow-up have hooked more than one space cadet on staff.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

An exciting, fun, polished first-person shooter with all the subtleties of a Star Trek episode and more depth than any movie-licensed game.Beam you into the world of pointy-eared Vulcans, and believe it or not — makes it cool to be a Trekkie.

Unreal Tournament: Strike Force

Just when we thought it was safe to unchain UT, this mod came along and doubled our staff. Borrowing the best elements from ROGUE SPEAR and HALF-LIFE, STRIKE FORCE combines real-world weapons with some great level design, creating an addictive tactical sim. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

It's an earth-shaking month here in the Top 40. The sense of order, continuity, and predictability that has ruled our lives has been ripped apart by DIABLO II displacing HALF-LIFE at #1. Ye gods! It's been over a year since we've seen anything but HALF-LIFE on top — what does this mean? It means Blizzard has done it again.

Most of the other changes are minor, with the exception of two superb add-ons that made their debut this month: THE CONQUERORS and CATACLYSM. Both are worth your time and money. CRIMSON SKIES and BALDUR'S GATE II just missed this poll, so watch for them next month.

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<th>Game/ Publisher</th>
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<td>Rainbow Six: Covert Ops Red Storm</td>
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<td>Shogun: Total War Electronic Arts</td>
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We Want You!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.
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MATCHING SYSTEM

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Work alone or together with other captains of your Star Empire to disrupt enemy shipping, suppress Orion Pirates, capture planets and - ultimately - to conquer hostile homeworlds.

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Dynamic colored lighting from weapons, explosions and stars
Ships and planets come to life with luminosity mapping

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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.

Meanwhile the Organians have returned, orchestrating the rise of the single-minded "peacemakers" of the Interstellar Concordium. The ISC's Plasmatic Pulsar Device is a key element of their brand of peace.
The Best Starship Naval Combat Game Just Got Better!

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STARFLEET COMMAND
VOLUME II
EMPIRES AT WAR

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www.startrek.com
Software development is an inexact science, so pinning down release dates is like predicting Madonna's next persona. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwpipeline@ziftdavis.com.

BLACK & WHITE: Was set to debut sometime in November, just in time for gamers to give thanks to Lionhead for producing such a unique game. But a combination of development issues and the overcrowding of the market made Lionhead push the release to next Spring.

Croteam has delayed their multiplayer test in order to tighten the network code.

DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE: The physics engine is the focus of the Mythos team for DREAMLAND. That is, they're focusing on integrating the physics engine into that good ol' X-COM-style gameplay. They officially pushed the release date around Easter of next year.

X-COM: ALLIANCE: Without saying why, Hasbro announced that this formerly winter release is now a spring 2001 release. Our guess is that the artificial intelligence is probably the culprit.

BLAIR WITCH CHRONICLES VOLUME 1: RUSTIN PARK: Even though the Nightshade engine was adjusted to no longer require a Gray computer, this game still runs on the pokey side.

SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION: This should be out by the time you're reading this, which means that owners of the original SWAT 3 should be able to download the enhancements. Either way, you can finally take on missions with some huddles, thanks to the multiplayer additions.
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
In light of Lara’s recent disappearance, those closest to her gather together at the Croft Estate on a gray, rainy day for a memorial service in her honor. Afterwards, the friends sit quietly together in the study of the Croft Mansion and provide new insights about Lara’s past exploits that have until now remained a secret...
HER LEGACY LIVES ON.
HOT SHOTS

II-2

STURMOVIK

With Microsoft's superiority in the silicon skies, only the Russians would be crazy enough to take them on. Fortunately for us, that's just what they're doing. A Russian development group called 1C: Maddox Games has dusted off the II-2 Sturmovik "flying tank" Russia used to defend itself against Germany in WWII, and they're using it as the centerpiece in a painstakingly detailed sim that focuses on the long-overlooked Eastern Front.

STURMOVIK ("stormer") looks almost as good as Microsoft's COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2, and boasts as many features. Maddox promises excellent flight dynamics, scaleable difficulty levels, and personalized paint schemes and nose art. You'll be able to fly 17 different aircraft and dogfight with up to 32 players, as well as take the rear-gunner position of the II-2. To reflect the plane's close-in ground support role, a large number of ground- and naval-attack missions will be included. Watch for the stormer coming in fast and low next spring.

(www.bluebyte.com)

TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

You know those TV shows toward the end of the season, when the producers combine a bunch of "best of" clips because the writers ran out of ideas? That's about the same feeling you'll get in TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES, where the "present day" Lara has disappeared, so all you can do is play the flashbacks. Fortunately, these are all-new settings, like a Russian U-boat, Rome, and a tech-ed-out futuristic city, and Lara will have access to some brand-new weapons, including a sniper rifle and chloroform. Chronicles will also include a level editor, so you'll be able to design your own levels if you don't like the ones in the game.

As to where Mr. Croft has disappeared, rest assured that all will be revealed in a future episode of the game...or perhaps in Angelina Jolie's upcoming Tomb Raider movie. (www.eidos.com)
Sammy Sosa’s High Heat 2002

It may be the end of the 2000 Major League Baseball season, but it’s not too early for our first look at just what’s in store for our favorite computer baseball game. High Heat 2002 promises some significant improvements to the best baseball game ever, including an improved graphics engine, animated base coaches, player behavior, and conferences on the mound, a new pitching system, and an enhanced user interface. As usual, we can’t wait. Coming next spring.

Links 2001

Links 2001 is a wholesale upgrade to the respected Links franchise, most notably in its beautifully enhanced graphics engine. Everything from golfers to satellite green surveys have been updated and improved. But hardcore golf nuts will be most impressed by the full-featured yet easy-to-use Arnold Palmer Course Designer included with the game. For more info, go to www.microsoft.com/games/links2001/.

Microsoft Train Simulator

As anachronistic as they may seem in our era of jet-and Internet age, the romance of the rails still evokes a powerful lure. Witness the popularity of Stephen Ambrose’s Nothing Like It in The World, describing the building of the transcontinental railroad—#1 on the NY Times non-fiction list for the last three weeks.

Microsoft Train Simulator is the most ambitious attempt yet to recreate the experience of riding the rails. You can take the controls of nine different trains—from steam locomotives and modern diesels to high-speed “bullet trains”—and operate them the way an engineer would, or enjoy the views as a passenger or bystander. Microsoft is laying 600 miles of track from around the world to depict the scenery and towns of six famous routes, and editing tools will let model railroaders build any route they desire. Listen for that whistle blowin’ next Spring.
Ancient Enemies, Frozen

Your in Our World Now!

An entirely new continent of beautiful and deadly glaciers and ice flows, many new races of creatures to combat, dragons to confront and quests to solve combine into one of the most compelling expansion packs ever released.

* New frozen continent 'Velious' located south of Antonica.
* 16 new advanced adventure zones including: ice caves, crystal caverns, crypts, dungeons and frozen towers.
* New enemies including Frost Giants, Ice Dragons, Snow Orcs, Cave Bears, Snowfang Gholls, Storm Giants and vicious Ottermen.
* A more detailed playing environment with three times the amount of polygons and larger textures than the current EverQuest world.
* Full version of either EverQuest or Ruins of Kunark required.

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Battle of Britain

MIG ALLEY follow-up hits closer to home  

Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." —Winston Churchill

More appropriate words were never spoken in describing how the RAF defeated the Luftwaffe above the skies of England. On the brink of destruction and with the fate of a nation hanging in the balance, the overwhelmingly outnumbered pilots of the RAF dashed Hitler's hopes of invasion. This year marks the Battle of Britain's 60th anniversary, and Rowan Software wants you to relive that storied struggle.

With 13 years' experience in the simulation business—and being British—the folk at Rowan feel they can do justice to the most famous air conflict of all time. If the preview build I've been flying is any indication, BATTLE OF BRITAIN (BOB) will do justice and then some, surpassing even the quality of last year's Sim of the Year, Rowan's MIG ALLEY.

It can only be a good thing that BOB will employ a modified MIG ALLEY engine that makes improvements in just about every facet. BOB will have better-looking terrain with an increased distance to the horizon, interactive 3D cockpits with functional switches and levers, and the introduction of 3D clouds into which planes can make their escape. But what will truly set BOB apart from its contemporaries will be the scale of battle. Some of the worst raids encountered by the British during the battle involved as many as 1,000 attacking planes;
Rowan's BOB will put those same numbers onto your computer screen! Even more amazing is how Rowan has pulled off believable AI behavior with this many planes in the air, without murdering the graphics frame-rate.

The Glorious Few

Five of the planes modeled in BOB will be player-flyable, and you'll also have the option to man individual gunner positions in the German bombers. The British aircraft include the famous Supermarine Spitfire and the true workhorse of the battle, the Hawker Hurricane. Although the Spitfire is the better known of the two, it was the Hurricane that shot down the lion's share of German aircraft in the conflict. For the Germans, you can fly the Me109, the twin-engine Me110, or the Ju87 Stuka dive-bomber. The hardcore crowd has long been acquainted with Rowan's dedication to providing phenomenally intricate and accurate flight models in their simulations, but BOB will offer a friendly arcade mode as well. With the option to customize all of the individual factors that comprise the flight model and combat environment, those new to flight sims can provide themselves with greater challenges down the line.

Choose Your Battles

Although BOB is a historical sim, the campaign itself is dynamic and unpredictable—a different fate could be in store for the once-mighty British Empire. In 1940, the Luftwaffe nearly broke the back of the RAF to pave the way for invasion. If it wasn't for Hitler's insistence on bombing London instead of maintaining the continuous attacks against factories and airfields, the RAF might never have recovered. The campaign can be set to reflect this blunder by forcing the German forces to operate within the appropriate historical context; or, it can be let loose of history's shackles, enabling you to wage war with the benefit of 60 years of hindsight. Taking direct command of the war effort is a game unto itself. Those up to the challenge will be responsible for marshalling Britain's limited resources against the seemingly non-stop raids Germany launched against shipping lanes, radar towers, RAF airfields, and eventually London itself. Which raid is a "decoy" to draw up the precious few RAF fighters? How many planes do you send and to where? When do you let your weary pilots rest? As the Luftwaffe Commander, what will you do differently? Can you make the Stuka more effective? Is it truly possible to knock out Britain's early warning network? Can you avoid repeating history?

Whether you're playing the role of the Commander or pilot, the campaign is played out in a real-time war room that comes alive with reports of potential raids and the calling out of likely targets and anticipated responses. Triggers can be set that determine when you fly: on take off, once planes have reached the coast, once the enemy has been spotted, etc. Those of you who just want to fight can let the AI do all the tasking, freeing you to simply choose when you go up into the air. And in the air is where BOB will truly shine. Even in this late-alpha build of the game, it's obvious that this is a sim that lives up to the Rowan pedigree. Like MIG ALLEY before it, the dogfighting is just plain fun. The radio chatter gives the sim life, and the friendly and enemy AI fly so believably that you can't help but get sucked in.

Can I Have a Quickie?

Single missions will be included for those who don't have time for a full campaign. These encompass training missions as well as historic reenactments—including the massive final raid on September 15th, 1940. These missions are also multiplayer-capable, in addition to the team-play and deathmatch multiplayer options.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN will have competition from two other WWII sims when released this holiday season. But given what I've seen of the work-in-progress, I've little doubt that BOB will hold its own against even the toughest odds, and deliver the finest hours of air combat we've seen in a long while.
Sega Rally now available on PC.

You know, like the one in your office.

SEGARALLY

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

Leave the competition in the dust. Unless it’s raining or snowing — then let ‘em eat mud!

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.
Gripping 3D Warfare
Coming in 2001
Experience intuitive controls and a familiar interface.

Caladan

Featured Gameworld #1 in a series of 4

- Command one of 3 unique sides that fit your style of play, be it honor, evil or deceit.
- Build alliances with any of 5 powerful subgroups to gain access to bizarre new technologies and units.
- Do real-time battle on over 4 unique worlds as you plot your course to the Imperial Throne.
- Create exciting tactical situations using diverse new units, such as the towering Kobra cannon and the bullish Minotaurs tank.
- Lead your forces through both large-scale planetary strategies and cunning ground-level tactics.
- Plunge into the full 3D universe of Dune - one of the greatest science fiction sagas of all time.
- Wage multiplayer war on the internet or cooperatively in campaign mode.

Visit www.westwood.com for more information.

Actual In-Game Screenshot of Caladan
If Blue Byte can squeeze a couple slices of crappy pizza, a minimum-wage job, and a chain-smoking, mildly-psychotic girlfriend with an oddly beguiling lisp into the DRAGON'S LAIR 3D box, then I will declare that, yea, verily; these mortals have o'erleapt the swift running rivers of time and space and have perfected time travel. No classic game updated for today's PC has come close to recapturing the giddy, quarter-popping frenzy of our arcade-ghosted youth, but by recreating and reinventing its source material, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D seems poised to succeed where ASTEROIDS and CENTIPEDE 3D failed.

Blast Into Your Past

I first played DRAGON'S LAIR coin-op in a pizza joint on 8th Street, NYC, during lunch breaks from my grinding cashier job. Where were you?

With countless millions having played the original game in one of its many incarnations (arcade, console, DVD, PC, and a soon to be released Color Gameboy version that has to be seen to be believed), DRAGON'S LAIR is one of the bricks in the foundation of our hobby. The first 50-cent arcade game, its film-quality cel animation made it the easiest game to find in the arcade—it was the one with a gaggle of onlookers crowding behind the player.

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is less of a sequel than a recreation. It opens with a minute of brand-new 2D animation by original animator Don Bluth, before morphing into the game's new 3D look as you guide your cartoonish avatar—returning hero Dirk the Daring—into a forbidding castle to rescue Princess Daphne. As in the original, a pair of iron gates drop and heavy wooden doors slam shut behind you as the adventure begins.

Those slamming gates and doors are just the beginning of many familiar elements. Designers Dragonstone Software have licensed several of the original rooms (and some of the talent—the texture artist was part of the original animation team 17 years ago) from the coin-op game in order to allow gamers to rediscover them. You'll drop down the same perilous tower...
elevator, get blown down the same hallway as you try to pull Daphne from a monstrous hand, and battle the same Black Knight as you hop across the same checkered floor. Even though most of the 200 rooms will be new, this will be a game that will lean heavily on nostalgia to provide its enjoyment.

Playing in Toon

Part of that nostalgia comes from a faithful recreation of the game's 2D animated look. A sharp new 3D engine will bring colored lighting, a particle system, and more detailed Giddy Goons and Crypt Creeps to the party, but the whimsical look of the source game isn't being compromised. A ton-shading system inserts black lines on models' joints when they are bent, and anti-aliasing smoothes the characters' edges in order to maintain that hand-drawn look. As opposed to the hyper-realistic textures of other 3D games, the fanciful weathered woods and stonework of the coin-op game are being recreated using the original cels and concept art as guides. The cumulative effect is astonishing—you actually feel as if you're controlling a cartoon.

But DRAGON'S LAIR 3D will be much more than a stroll down memory lane. For one thing, the gameplay will be opened up incredibly, offering players a full 3D world to explore and interact with. As in the original, danger will lurk just about everywhere. You'll have to dodge falling stalactites as you dart through a cavern flooded with black ooze, hopping from ledge to ledge to escape into a chamber where you must catapult yourself over jets of fire, then... well, you get the idea. The focus is on fast-paced, action/reaction gameplay. Still, some of the game's lady-of-the-tiger, multiple-choice gameplay has been retained. For starters, one play option allows you to charge through pre-scripted sequences and make well-timed decisions, just as in the 1983 version. The core game will feature classic-feeling moments, such as

A room where the exit is through one of three different castles—finding the right one is a matter of luck. Most gamers will probably take advantage of the new save-anywhere system to store their game, so that they can try each coffin and treat themselves to the faithfully recreated "crumbling skeleton" death animations that helped make DRAGON'S LAIR so endearing.

Along with a much more involved story, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is adding a crossbow with three types of arrows, new attack moves, and, most significantly, a magical amulet. The amulet will serve two functions: First, it will act as an online help system, gently prodding players in the right direction at crucial points in the game; second, it will bind the five magical "dragon essences" you'll gather, and store the mana required to power the essences. While you'll need all five essences to defeat the dragon at game's end, each of the essences will act as short-term powerups: The Dragon Scale protects you from fire, the Dragon Spirit makes you stronger, and the Flame Sword will ignite your blade and allow you to blast fireballs. Essences will not only help you fight, but will also be vital to progressing in the game; for instance, you'll need the Dragon's Wing to protect you from falling damage so that you can drop down a shaft to reach new parts of the castle.

With an enormous worldwide fan base, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D would seem to be a slam-dunk hit. There's only one stumbling block—publisher Blue Byte now sells games exclusively online. Keeping this game away from the eyes of less Web-savvy casual gamers browsing Wal-Mart or EBX is bound to deny them sales. But for those who seek it out online, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D just might be the freshest thing they've played since, well, since the first time they played it.

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D seems poised to succeed where ASTEROIDS and CENTIPEDE 3D failed.
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 sig.

But we’re working on that.

MICROSOFT
SIDEWINDER
STRATEGIC COMMANDER
www.microsoft.com/sidewinder
Myst III: Exile

The most popular adventure game of all time is back

Myst was one of those rare gaming gems that captured the hearts of gamers and non-gamers alike, a genuine phenomenon that remains one of the top-selling PC titles of all time. After Riven, the somewhat disappointing sequel, the game's creators—Cyan's Rand and Robin Miller—made it clear that they were not interested in doing another Myst title. Brackish was a quandary. They knew they had a very successful franchise on their hands, but without the Miller brothers' supervision, they would have difficulty living up to Myst's success. The search for another developer ensued, but only a handful of studios came close to meeting the challenge. Enter Presto Studios, the creators of the highly successful JOURNEYMAN PROJECT adventure game series.

The story of Myst III: Exile is set 10 years after Riven. Atrus—the D'ni scribe who creates worlds from his magical linking books—and his wife Catherine have escaped the past tragedies of Myst Island and now live peacefully with their newborn daughter in Tomahna. But their peace is quickly shattered when a mysterious new villain (played by actor Brad Dourif) arrives to exact revenge on Atrus. As in the previous games, players must explore a series of mysterious and wondrous ages (five in all) to gradually uncover the mystery of this new adversary.

Presto feels that Myst III: Exile is a natural evolution of the series, not just a continuation. Unlike Riven, where puzzles and ages seemed illogical and confusing, Myst III returns to its roots. Puzzles are more focused and coherent, also, the game is more dynamic than linear, so players can move from age to age without feeling like they have to finish a particular puzzle before jumping to the next age. More interestingly, unlike the original Myst, Exile will feature a number of different possible conclusions.

Myst III: Exile features major upgrades to the series' graphics and technology. Presto is using a new real-time 3D
navigation engine, which allows players to pan a full 360-degrees in any direction. MYST III will have sound enhancements—including an orchestral soundtrack—and more movie footage, so you can expect to see more of Atrus (played by Rand Miller) and Catherine in the game. The net result is that the game's environments now feel more alive, without losing any of the artistic beauty or spirit of its predecessors. Should Presto actually pull this off without a hitch, MYST fans will have a lot to be excited about when the game ships next year. **CGW**

**NO MAN'S AN ISLAND** Unlike RIVEN, all of EXILE's five, unique ages will allow players to travel from one to the other in a non-linear fashion. Each environment allows for real-time movement and interaction—so no more of the click-and-pan of yesteryear.
EATAMUS
MAXIMUS
PUCKAMUS

ICE-SCORCHING SKATING, TOP-SHELF ROCKETS, AND THE INSANITY OF GLOAT-HAPPY REPLAYS. THINK YOU GOT THAT KINDA GAME?

BRING IT IF YOU GOT IT TO NFL™ 2001. THE HOCKEY DYNASTY FOR THIS CENTURY, NEXT CENTURY, AND THE CENTURY AFTER THAT.

IF IT'S IN THE GAME, IT'S IN THE GAME.

EASPORTS.COM AOL KEYWORD: EA SPORTS
**Majestic**

Knowledge is danger in the most startling game you've ever seen.

by George Jones

Let's get one thing straight—there's absolutely no way not to use hyperbole when describing MAJESTIC. So here goes: EA.com's top secret, veiled-in-secrecy, mystery project represents the most unique experience the computer gaming industry has seen since, well, since computer games themselves. No kidding.

We're talking about an experience that recalculates your hobby in an entirely different light, one that will change your conception of what a computer game can be, and will probably introduce scores of new gamers into the mix. After all, does your typical computer game character call you at home, screaming that they are in mortal danger? Does your typical game Instant Message you five times a day?

Pardon our French, but MAJESTIC is simply going to suck with your head in ways you've never imagined. Described by Electronic Arts' VP Neil Young as a cross between The Game and X-Files, his brainstorm uses a bizarre and effective combination of video, AI, the Internet, and real life to set your imagination ablaze, and in the process develops a character-rich story that is driven by the most powerful CPU around: your brain.

**What Is MAJESTIC, You Ask?**

At its core, MAJESTIC is a fairly straightforward adventure game. In fact, given the game's lack of fancy, new-fangled visuals, you could easily consider the experience old-school gaming, with the exception that old-school games wouldn't carry on an elaborate conversation with you via AOL's Instant Messenger. And, you wouldn't make a long distance call to Oregon to solve a puzzle in an old-school game.

As Young tells it, MAJESTIC has three significant points of departure from standard adventure gaming:

1. **Relativity.** The relationship between gamer and game is fundamentally changed. Typically, games require you to come to them. MAJESTIC pushes itself to you. You might be sitting in your office and then get a phone call on your cell phone from one of the game's characters.

2. **Majestic's appeal lies in its use of realism: captured webcam conversations, real taxes that are sent to the player, and eerily life-like Instant Messenger conversations.
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™ 2.5 3D Game Operating System — for the most realistic spy experience possible.

Get the Demo www.foxinteractive.com
and mystery. But don't lose sight of the fact that MAJESTIC is, at its core, an adventure game. The inclusion of two fundamental adventure game mechanics—story and puzzles—are further proof of this. Instead of solving obscure use-the-cat-hair-to-make-a-moustache-type puzzles, you are the central character and the real world contains the puzzles and their solutions.

An avid adventure gamer from way back, Young's eyes light up as he describes how MAJESTIC actually lies squarely on the adventure game continuum that started in the 1970's on VAX systems, and was later evolved by Infocom, Sierra, and games like MIST. "We romanticize the classic games of old because, most importantly, they stimulated our imagination," he argues, "not because they had flashy, realistic graphics. We want to get the same results with MAJESTIC—but we're going to stimulate your imagination and your various senses. To this end, we don't need high-end visuals... just active imaginations, story-telling, and the active communication the Internet provides."

But all this information begs an important question: How do you play MAJESTIC? Pretty much like real life. You can almost consider it a terminate-and-stay computer game. Once you download the tiny client and AOL's Instant Messenger—if you don't have it already—the roller coaster ride begins and the game comes to you.

In keeping with the game's adventure theme, you even have an inventory of objects. A small app that resides in your Windows system tray keeps track of the various items you procure, be they virtual keys or documents. This program will also notify you when new objectives have been defined, or when new information becomes available. As the game progresses, you'll also be able to use the program to identify and chat with other gamers who are at roughly the same point in the game. Be wary, though—you never know who's real and who's fake.

In a two-hour, time-compressed demo that illustrated MAJESTIC's immersive potential, Young played through the first few days of the game. As soon as he signed up, he was hit with a few instant messages from various characters, received a fax from a fictional (we think) company that helped him solve a puzzle, and also got a phone call. Later in the demo, the phone in his office rang; we all wondered whether it was a real person or another gaming moment. That's the power of using real-life platforms and systems to advance the plot.

The game also features streaming video, so broadband gamers will be able to enjoy their shiny new DSL lines. Again, though, the real intrigue of the game comes from the way it subtly infects your life. Imagine sitting in another boring conference-room meeting, and getting a game-related fax hand-delivered to you. Or, imagine getting an e-mailed "classified" document that uncovers a mysterious top-down conspiracy. The possibilities are endless—and if successful, MAJESTIC could be too.

5 Things Conspiracy Theorists Will Love

If you don't know, now you know...

1. The Hiram Key (Christopher Knight, Robert Lomas): A fascinating tale that traces the ideological roots of the Freemasons all the way back to the Egyptians by way of Jesus.

2. Behold a Pale Horse (William Cooper): One of the quintessential conspiracy-theory books. William Cooper weaves an amazing tale of connect-the-dots between secret societies, JFK, and much more.

3. The Montauk Project (Peter Moon, Preston Nichols): An unbelievable tale of top-secret U.S. military experiments off the coast of New Jersey.

4. The Official Art Bell Web site: Ground zero for the notorious talk show host's tripped-out conspiracy theories. www.artbell.com

5. Link (Walter Becker): Light on conspiracy theory, but an interesting theory of human evolution.

Old Meets New

The absence of punchy 3D graphics means absolutely nothing. Think about it—aside from the grand finale and some fake bullets, The Game didn't use a whole lot of special effects to evoke paranoia.
EPISODE 1 THE RISE OF TYCOONS

STAR PEACE
THE PARALLEL DOMAIN

COUNTDOWN TO LAUNCH 11:15:00 - THE ON-LINE GATE TO A PARALLEL DOMAIN.
WE HAVE COLONIZED THE PLANET. AS A TYCOON YOU START WITH $100 MILLION AND MUST BUILD YOUR EMPIRE AND HELP THE PLANET GROW. THE COLONY DEPENDS ON YOUR PLAY ON-LINE WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHERS IN A PERSISTENT WORLD! FOR DEDICATED BETA TESTING PLEASE VISIT WWW.MONTECRISTOGAMES.COM

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THE COMPLETE HALF-LIFE MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE

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Blizzard should be under investigation by the DEA. Like a pusher on the corner handing out dope to the kiddies, Blizzard has been ruining lives and destroying marriages to the tinkling sounds of "click click click." But just as we were finally recovering from our severe DIABLO II addiction; just as our mousing fingers were beginning to heal; yea, even as we slowly worked our way through the Nightmare difficulty level yet again, Blizzard turns around and tells us "Hey man, we got some new primo stuff fo' ya'!" Should we check into Betty Ford now or just give up, take the DIABLO-stuffed pipe, and slowly inhale the hack-and-slash goodness within?

Yes, DIABLO II: THE LORD OF DESTRUCTION is coming. Evidently, Diablo's brother Baal is none-too-pleased that we've cleaved ol' red in two. While his namesake resides in biblical Israel (Baal was the pagan Canaanite god of pleasure and love; he even had temple prostitutes), this Baal has headed north into the Barbarian Highlands. His mission: Destroy the Worldstone. Apparently, this stone keeps the forces of hell out of the mortal realms, so in destroying it Baal and his minions would heat up a few of those northern ice caps. Naturally, you'll have to stop them before they do anything rash; you'll have two new characters and a horde of new weapons to help you along.

LORD OF DESTRUCTION is the 5th act in the play that is DIABLO II. Most of
LittleBunny_32 just KICKED YOUR ASS

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the action
takes place in the frozen moun-
tains to the north. In holding
with the Barbarian theme of the
region, maps will now include
interactive environments such as
siege engines and battlements.
Joining you atop these battle-
ments will be the two new char-
acter classes: The wily assassin,
and the giant fur-clad Druid. The
assassin spends her time learn-
ing shadow magic and building
wickedly powerful traps; the
Druid can shapeshift, call upon
wild animals, and cast ice/wind
(dale?) spells. The assassin is
quite good with martial arts,
and will be able to wield
two weapons at once, while
the Druid falls somewhere
between the Necromancer
and the Sorceress: lots
of minions and lots of
boom spells.

Of course, new charac-
ters require new
weapons. While the
Blizzard press release
says that there will be
thousands of new
weapons, there will more
likely be around 100 new
weapons, magic effects, and
enchancements—combining in
various ways to make thou-
sands of new combinations.
And speaking of combinations,
the Horadric Cube will have
some nifty new combos as
well. And, best of all, your
stash will be bigger, so you
can hold all these goodies in
storage for a good long time.

Unfortunately, with Blizzard
taking their time to build THE
LORD OF DESTRUCTION, there's
been no mention of a
BattleNet overhaul. As of this
writing, things online were
still slowed to a crawl around
50% of the time. Let's hope
Blizzard does a little updating of
the server code while they're
tinkering with the new expansion.

While there's no actual release
date set, Blizzard North is
hoping to finish DIABLO II: THE
LORD OF DESTRUCTION before
the halfway mark of 2001. Our
thought on the matter: The
sooner the better. Our hands are
already starting to shake from
withdrawal. Come on Blizzard,
just one mo' hit. We really need
it bad, man. CGW
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Featuring the voice of Ice T

In the near future, Psionics are among us. Their evil thoughts disrupt and eventually corrupt even the strongest of minds. One man, Agent Nathaniel Cain, risks his own sanity to save ours. But, Cain is about to learn the ultimate lesson... that evil's relative.

Download the demo
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AND ALL THE GAMES TO KEEP THE HOLIDAYS FROM SUCKING.
The first rule of computer game sequels: You can't keep the Undead Hordes and the Damned down. No matter how thoroughly you crush them under the heel of your mighty empire in the first game, they'll be back in any sequel. Strategy First's DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY brings back the aforementioned evil races, as well as the Mountain Clans and the Empire, for some turn-based strategic fun that plays a lot like the HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC series—but with enough unique elements to create its own brand of undead fun.

A decade has passed since the First Great War in the Sacred Lands. The game's storyline is different depending on which of the four races you choose to inhabit. The Empire is on the brink of civil war. The Mountain Clans have assembled the runes to prevent the Ragnarok, but dissident clans refuse the authority of the Cloudkeeper clans and prevent the unification of the rune wisdom. The Undead Hordes want to revive the defunct god Gallean, who was slain by the god of the Mountain Clans. And the Damned must find a way to help Bethrezen escape from where he's been imprisoned by the Empire. Whew!

The most noticeable difference in DISCIPLES II is the new 800x600 resolution. All the art and animations have been redone, and the spell effects—one of the first game's high points—should be even more spectacular this time around.

We'll also see some new units, according to Lead Designer Danny Belanger: "We are adding 50% more units and buildings in the capitals," he said. "This will greatly increase the variety and the possible combinations in each race. There are actually around 38 units per race. We are adding about 50 new units in all, giving the player more choices and options when upgrading units. For example, players might develop an Elementalist, who summons in battle an air elemental, or the Doppelganger, who can take any shape."

DISCIPLES II is adding content-specific triggers for surprise adventures and events. "There are multiple conditions that can trigger effects," Belanger explained. "Some possible conditions are: Move item to location, move unit to location, destroy party, be in alliance, capture a city, etc. These can be combined in any way to trigger any effect: Give item, spell, cast spell, summon creature, and so on. An example of a triggered event might be that if the necromancer were killed, skeletons would no longer come out of the cemetery."

Neutral creatures in DISCIPLES II will also be more aggressive and may pursue the player's forces. The battle system will feature more attack options, and the capital cities that players upgrade to produce new and better units are being completely redone.

Strategy First is aiming for a Spring, 2001 ship date for DISCIPLES II, which will include 28 campaign scenarios and a number of stand-alone quests. Besides the single-player game, DISCIPLES II will support LAN, IPX, a gaming service network yet to be determined, and hotseat play. Maybe this time, we can finally kill those pesky Undead and Damned for good!
captain's log.

crash landing
01.20.01

www.stupid-invaders.com
4x4 Evolution

Put down that damn cell phone and drive! by Tom Price

The term “4X4” may inspire thoughts of guys named Cletus tearing through muddy backwoods in a jeep filled with empty beer cans and Slim Jim wrappers, but a “hubba” game this is not. Instead of hillbillies, think soccer-mom; instead of shotgun rack, think cell phone; instead of tearing through the dirt and mud in a powerful, big-tired, four-wheel-drive beast, think—no wait, think that. Because 4X4 Evolution will have you going all-terrain in the newest and slickest SUVs on the market. 4Runners, Pathfinders, Xterras; over 50 SUVs and light trucks will be available to race in over 16 tracks. This isn’t your inbred cousin’s automobile.

But the most interesting thing about 4X4 Evolution from Terminal Reality (makers of Monster Truck Madness 1 and 2) falls under the “evolution” part of the name. Gathering of Developers is concurrently releasing the game for PC, Mac, and Dreamcast, and the cool part is, you’ll be able to play cross-platform over the Internet, courtesy of Gamespy’s “peer to peer” technology. So, say your buddy in Baltimore is a dyed-in-the-wool Macophile and your cousin in Colorado is a Red Bull-swilling console freak, and the three of you want to play an off-road racing game online against each other. Well, here’s your game. In fact, up to eight players (four, if the host machine is a Dreamcast) can play at once, and the game designers have plans for a world-wide, online ranking system. Cross-platform multiplayer gaming is looking like the wave of the future, with 4X4 Evolution as one of the clear forerunners.

4X4 Evolution’s light trucks and SUVs are all fully-licensed, real-world vehicles. Makes and models include the Toyota 4Runner and Land Cruiser, Nissan Xterra and Pathfinder, Lexus RX 300, and more. Because of the licenses, the vehicles won’t have external damage models (would someone tell me why car makers are so paranoid about letting games show their vehicles banged up? It happens, you know), but will take hits to the physics model if you damage your truck. The game will also allow you to create your own custom vehicles and paint jobs, if you’re not satisfied with the ones that ship with the game.

The 16 tracks will take the player through various environments, from the Arctic to the Arizona desert. Terminal Reality is planning on including a track editor as well, which should extend the life of this game quite a bit—especially online. The tracks are set in very active worlds, full of moving scenery like birds and airplanes, as well as moving obstacles like bulldozers and other heavy equipment.

As a rule, off-road racers are hit or miss, but Terminal Reality has an excellent track record for this kind of game—they have the Monster Truck Madness titles under their belts. The dedication to online gaming, and the pro-gaming community flavor of 4X4 Evolution are good signs that this title could be another monster hit.
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A post-modern Prometheus brings new life to the genre it spawned

by Robert Coffey
pretenders to the throne are a dime a dozen, with store shelves packed with digital doorstops claiming to be the next DOOM, the next QUAKE, the next HALF-LIFE. These poseurs have yet to get it even close. So why should anyone care about a game claiming to be the next CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN? We've heard that “next” crap countless times already, right?

We should care because CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN is the game that started it all. Because the creators of WOLF, id Software, are deeply involved—even if they’re not actually designing the game. Because after a lifetime of creating envelope-pushing, niche products like KINGPIN and REDNECK RAMPAGE, Gray Matter Studios (formerly Xatrix) has the time, support, and drive to shoot for the big time and apply their personal brand of evil genius to a certifiable A-list title.

Two years and counting after HALF-LIFE, and the single-player shooter bar is about to get raised again.
All Action, All the Time

If Gray Matter wants you to know one thing about RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, it is this: the focus is smack on fast, hard-hitting action, every step of the way. From the first chaotic moments straight through the final showdown, the designers are creating the kinds of memorable moments that sear themselves into your memory, the kind of unforgettable slabs of riveting gameplay that lead to reverential recounting years later: think “Knee Deep in the Dead” from DOOM, think of HALF-LIFE’s “Surface Tension,” think of virtually every step of the original WOLFENSTEIN. With a game this revered, this high-profile, the pressure is on Gray Matter and they are determined to rise to the challenge.

Skeptical? Then imagine this: You’re jammed in a landing craft with other soldiers, surging to shore through pounding surf. The door drops and you and your squad storm the beach, slogging through water toward a shore that seems ever more distant with each whistling mortar shell. One of those mortars hits the man next to you, killing him just as he reaches one of the many barbed-wire traps lacing the beach. You push on, darting for cover, eventually reaching the towering structure carved out of the cliffs. Mowing down hordes of godless Nazis, you finally infiltrate the base and recover the top-secret codebreaking machine you were sent after. One problem, however: your escape is blocked by the new troops swarming the beach from amphibious landing craft. Thank God you cleared out that machinegun nest and can now turn the gun against this new threat.

And this non-stop charge into the maw of war is, quite literally, the very beginning of the game. It’s just the tip of an iceberg that runs through the twisting alleys and crumbling homes of

ID AS SUPEREGO

So what the hell does “significantly involved” really mean? If id Software isn’t actually making the follow-up to their little baby of mayhem, CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, then what is the scope of their role — what defines their “significant involvement”? According to Graeme Devine of id, it means that Gray Matter and id are being very cooperative in virtually every aspect of the game, “from how hard the first mission is, to the placement of weapons.” Characters, level design, story — every game element is shot over to id for their input (which runs from specific suggestions to a simple “try something else”), and then is revised accordingly before being implemented. id enjoys veto power over any idea. So is RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN the next game from id? Nope — that would be DOOM. But id does consider RETURN to be the next id game — it’s their franchise line, after all. It’s a pretty fine hair they’re splitting there, but it does make sense: id’s stake in RETURN is very personal if not practical, hence all that “significant involvement.” Given how obviously close the WOLF series is to their heart, it speaks volumes about the degree of confidence they have in Gray Matter’s ability to create a game true both to the spirit of the franchise, and to the demanding standards of the company that originally created it.

“Two years and counting —

after HALF-LIFE, and the single-player shooter bar is about to get raised again.”
Big Unanswered Questions About RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

[1] WILL HITLER APPEAR? We don't know for sure, but we'd be shocked if he didn't make an cameo at the very least. No one appears in numerous portraits hanging throughout the levels.

[2] SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT MULTIPLAYER? Yes, if only because Gray Matter does. They won't say anything specific about multiplayer beyond the fact that the presence of several hardcore multiplayer fans on staff guarantees a multiplayer element.

[3] WHAT IS THE STORY ABOUT? Gray Matter swears the huge plot will have several twists and turns, but isn't saying much more than it involves Nazis, the occult, and genetic experimentation and will be told through brief cutscenes and in-game dialogue.

[4] WILL I BE ABLE TO COMMAND OTHER SOLDIERS? While other soldiers will fight alongside you, the designers haven't decided if or how much you'll be able to control them.

[5] WHEN WILL IT SHIP? No set date, just when it's ready.

Big Answered Questions About RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

[1] WILL THERE BE SECRET AREAS? While you won't have to go around slapping the space bar every step of the game, there will be lots of secrets in homage to the original game.

[2] WILL BOSSES REQUIRE YOU TO PUMP EVERY BULLET YOU HAVE INTO THEM? While bosses will need to take a beating to die, you'll have to use your wits to beat them as well. For example, one boss is vulnerable only while using a powerful amulet to divert lightning at you.

[3] WILL RETURN SET NEW STANDARDS OF GORE? No. You'll be able to gib enemies, but there won't be any pain skins, hit location, or limb loss.

[4] WILL I EVENTUALLY JUST USE ONE BIG WEAPON ALL THE TIME? No. Enemies will be vulnerable to certain weapons, invulnerable to others. For example, the flame-thrower-wielding Venom Soldier can't be torched, but can be shot, or blown up, or just kicked to death.

[5] WHAT KINDS OF ENEMIES CAN BE EXPECTED? All sorts and lots of them. The game will start you off with various sorts of soldiers; then, as the genetic/occult plot unfolds, you'll come up against a wide variety of failed experiments, elite forces, huge-breasted leather-clad priestesses, mad scientists, and even Nazi ninjas. Some bad guys will require you to blow chunks of their copious armor off in order to expose their weak points. Boredom doesn't seem likely.

“The pressure is really on, we are determined to rise to

SIDESHOW
BLOB This legless horror is a Lopes, one of the Nazi's failed genetic experiments. He attacks with an area effect electrical assault, or by simply hurling himself at you and beating you to death with his torso stump.

bombed-out European villages; crawls through crypts teeming with undead (and worse); ascends to remote mountain bases reachable only via a perilous tram ride; and ends in the most sinister, top-secret labs and bunkers in Hitler's black empire.

Dangerous Beauty

As deadly as the gameworld of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN is, never have you seen one as gorgeous as this. It starts with the stone, the rough, slightly damp, incredibly nuanced textures that are so convincing you'll have to touch your monitor to convince yourself they're not real. In a sense they are; the textures are the result of hundreds of digital photographs taken in European villages. This painstaking texture harvesting is already paying off in spades, creating environments that—while chiefly

BLAZING TRIUMPH
RETURN's flame-thrower is amazing, easily trumping the current "Best Flame-Thrower" titleholder, Gray Matter's own KINGPIN.
Gray Matter and the challenge.

ART IMITATING ART By requiring ID to approve every facet of the game's production, the finished game models have an atypical fidelity to the initial approved concept sketches.

composed of various rock, brick, and weathered woods—
are strikingly vibrant and varied. Some remarkable work with shaders results in filmy, airblown cobwebs, glowing embers on smoldering logs, and great water-surface animation. These almost hyper-real environments should go a long way toward creating a crucial suspension of disbelief.

But the jaw-dropping art isn't limited to the walls, floors,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 108

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW. Two views of the same scene show off two of the game's standout features—anomalous maps that include large outdoor areas, and a stunning level of model detail.

You've Come A Long Way, Wolfie

The original WOLFENSTEIN 3D was a revolutionary game, but it's now a man stuff compared to today's best 3D action efforts. In the eight years since Wolf's release, a number of mini-revolutions in 3D game design have occurred, bringing elements to the genre that the original ID design team could never have imagined. Here are some of the highlights.

TRUE 3D
WOLFENSTEIN 3D was a misnomer. It gave the appearance of a 3D world, but it was actually 2D, or 2-and-a-half-D, as some called it. When you watched a character in Wolf 3D turn around, you were actually seeing different pictures (or sprites) of the character drawn from different angles. It wasn't until DUKE NUKEM 3D that we had an environment capable of rendering characters as 3D objects.

MOUSE LOOK
Believe it or not, one of 3D gaming's most essential tools—the ability to look around a 3D environment by moving your mouse—didn't exist until 1996. DOOM used multi-level environments, but you couldn't look up or down; your weapons were auto-targeted. DUKE NUKEM 3D allowed us to look up and down with the keyboard, but not with the mouse. That's a pretty significant change.

INTERNET PLAY
Multiplayer action wasn't even a blip on the radar when ID released WOLFENSTEIN 3D. It finally broke through the barrier with DOOM, and IT managers are still suffering nightmares from its broadcast packeting schemes which crashed the networks of many large corporations, including Intel. But with due respect to Dwango and Nii, true out-of-the-shrinkwrap Internet action—of any kind—didn't exist before DUKE NUKEM 3D.

STORY
They will no longer be Nazis. B.J. Blazkowicz must escape Nazi prison by shooting everything that stands in his way. This "story" is comprised of a couple lines of text in a README file.

Now, HALF-LIFE's Gordon Freeman unknowingly triggers a dimensional rift, flooding Black Mesa facility with aliens. The army intervenes, but not in the way he expects the world to receive the game's impress. The rich story is seamlessly and cinematically woven into the game action.

MONSTER AI
Like a sci-fi horror story come true, monster AI has evolved to a frightening point. Back then, tough monsters meant higher hit points and more destructive weapons. Now, tough means UNREAL. The story of a brave and skilled four-talented players: or HALF-LIFE enemies who pull their trigger before they die, hoping to blow you up when you go for their ammo. Now that's progress.

MODS
DOOM signified a huge shift, not just for 3D shooters but for the whole gaming industry. Up until this point, gamers rarely cracked into their games to modify them. With DOOM, Id open-sourced user modifications. Hallelujah—without their innovations, would we have classic mods like Counter-Strike?
QUAKING in Your Boots

Besides RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN, there are a few other games that’ll try to make your eyes bleed by using the QUAKE III ARENA engine. Here’s your quick ‘n’ dirty guide to the current and upcoming Q3A engine-seeds.

American McGee’s Alice

Have Tim Burton and Edward Scissorhands collaborate on visualizing Lewis Carroll’s text, and you’ve got an idea of what the game is going to look like. This psychedelic action-adventure (think “TOMBS RAIDER on acid”) is slated to hit shelves by Christmas (like everything else).

The World Is Not Enough

Rather than hit you with add colors and glittering effects, this game is going for a more cinematic, semi-realistic, action-movie feel. Look for this one next Spring.

Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K. 2

It’s a beautiful, but short and not very engaging game. Refer to our review in the November issue (CGW #150) for the full scoop.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Proves you can have a beautiful and fun game based on the Star Trek license. Check out the review in this issue for more info.

THE WOLF PACK

RAVEN

Heretic
Hexen
Soldier of Fortune

John Romero

John Carmack

Wolfenstein 3D

Adrian Carmack

Spear of Destiny

APOGEE

Doom
Quake

Scott Miller

I'd Software is as much a virus as a game company. This demon seed has spawned a huge web of 3D gaming, both in spinning off its technology, or by spinning off employees who go on to create more 3D games. Here are just the major threads in the web of evil that will eventually ensnare us all.


2. Scott Miller, pockets two-thirds of the revenue from WOLF 3-D, grows rich. He funds id add on SPEAR OF DESTINY and several new shooters, including RISE OF THE TRIAD. When id abandons Apogee, he creates 3D Realms to make his own shooters.

3. Raven worked closely with id during its early days. They created HEXEN and HERETIC with id’s DOOM technology before branching out into SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE.
6. Xatrix licenses the DUK3D engine to create REDNECK RAMPAGE (1997). Two years later, they unleash the jarringly violent and depressingly-laid KINGS. Redknight is a new game company formed by Tom Hall, Mike Wilson, and Warren Spector, and others to form Ion Storm. Romero predicts emerging Ritual's fledging reputation.


8. Eight disillusioned developers leave Ion Storm to form Third Law Interactive (1998). They produced a hit work on KISS: Psycho Circus, which helped to establish the new company.

The History of Gaming 101

The Birth of Wolfenstein

Wolf 3-D was the flame that ignited the shooter craze, but who sparked that flame? It wasn't John Carmack sitting around in his underwear, dragging on a skunk roach and wondering what to do that day. Or maybe it was, but that's not the story we get from John Romero, who was there in The Beginning.

In 1989, Romero joined a gaming magazine called Softdisk to create one program a month for the magazine's floppy disk. Many of those programs were conversions of his earlier games for the Apple II. He began receiving fan mail for his games, which he would proudly tack up on the wall of his office. Not long after, while reading an article in PC Games about shareware publisher Scott Miller, something struck him as strangely familiar. Glancing up at the fan mail, Romero realized for the first time that all the postmarks on all of the fan letters came from the same Dallas suburb. The same Dallas suburb where Scott Miller lived. He fired off the analog predecessor of a flaming email.

That was all Miller needed. Miller explained that he had a proposal for Romero, but he was concerned that Softdisk might screen his calls. He asked if Romero would create shareware games for Apogee Software, for a percentage of sales. For $3,000 up front, Romero agreed. He tapped colleagues John Carmack, a game programmer, and Tom Hall, who was creating games and utilities for the Apple II, to help.

Three months later, in December 1990, they finished their first Apogee game: COMMANDER KEEN. "When KEEN came out, it started making a lot of money," Miller recalls. He began sending him monthly checks of $10,000-$20,000.

"I recognized from the beginning that they had a lot of talent," says Miller. "I spent hours on the phone with (John Carmack), and there was no doubt this guy was a genius."

Up until this time, Carmack had mostly programmed 2D games. At one point the three even created a Mario knock-off that made it all the way to the head of Nintendo. Nintendo's refusal was a boon to PC games, because not long after, Carmack began programming first-person perspective games.

Their first 3D shooter was called HOVERTANK ONE. It had flat-shaded polygons, with no texture-mapping. Miller recalls, "When I saw this it was like, 'Oh my God, we need to make a shareware game based on this.' It was mind-blowing. It didn't take a rocket scientist to recognize this was the future."

Its next 3D game, CATACOMBS 3-D, had texture-mapped graphics, but several drawbacks. "There were still some first-screen problems," says Romero. "The movement wasn't quite right, and it was in EGA. It wasn't the magic formula."

The next game got it right. Id knew it was going to take an unprecedented six months to complete, so they asked Miller to provide $100,000 guarantee in case it didn't sell. Originally, id wanted to set the game in a biomedical research lab with mutants and call it, "It's Green And Pissed."

Romero recalls, "It really begged me. I thought, we've got a cool new technology, why not have a cool idea? I was thinking, why don't we do a remake of CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN? It was 11 years later, but a lot of people still remembered it as an amazingly cool classic game. It would be in 3D, with you mowing down Nazis. I thought, what are they going to do? No one cares if you kill Nazis. So I proposed the idea, and we did that."

They began working on WOLF in January of 1992. When they showed it to Miller a couple of months later, it had strategy and adventure game elements.

Romero recalls, "In the original WOLF, you could move bodies, you could kill someone and drag them around corners. We took those elements out, because it slowed down gameplay. The game was so overpoweringly speed oriented, we needed to make that apparent. We said, 'let's make this game violent and fast.' That was a 70fps game."

"When it was done, we thought the game was awesome. I remember thinking, 'This is the coolest game I've ever played.'"

id released WOLF 3-D on May 5, 1992, and then they went to Disneyland. While id rode the coat-tails on the Grand Prix, Apogee rode the wave of WOLF sales that ultimately tallied 150,000 copies in only two years.

And the fan mail is still pouring in. —Ken Brown

Houses of the Unholy

This gothic cathedral and this village street really show off the game's attention to detailed, realistic textures and architecture.

Continued from Page 105

and unbelievably intricate stained-glass windows and frescoes. The character and monster models are shaping up to be some of the best to populate a game, and are the best examples of what the QUAKE III engine is capable of. A dizzying aggregation of real-world soldiers and nightmarish monstrosities, the level of detail is so astounding you can practically smell the leather of the elite guard uniforms or the ozone cracking off the exposed electrical circuitry of the legless Lovers.

And then there's the flame-thrower. Expect to be hearing a lot about it. From the flickering pilot light that whips back and forth with your movement to the great gouts of flame it spews. RETURN'S flame-thrower is the best flame-thrower we've ever seen, and the kind of weapon that inspires gamers to write gushing sonnets.

As great as all this eye candy is, it might be the sound that will be most integral in creating mood and tension. Howling winds in cemeteries, the sounds of trees banging against windows as you investigate a cathedral, and the moaning of the damned lurking for you just around

Europa on Five Bullets a Day

Much of the action will take place in interactive environments reflecting the ravages of war.

December 2000 • cgw.gamespot.com
Computer Gaming World
"The flame-thrower is the kind of weapon that inspires gamers to write gushing sonnets."

the corner should add up to an unrelenting feeling of dread. Additionally, the excitement of the actual fighting is ratcheted up by the sound of bullets rattling off a warehouse's tin walls during a firefight, and perhaps the most visceral, painful sound of bullets hitting a player character ever.

**Fighting the Good Fight**

Atmospheric and stellar graphics are all well and good, but what about *RETURN* is going to elevate it above the rabble and make it the landmark single-player game that Gray Matter contends it will be? For starters, they are adamant about including only those game elements that make the experience fun—steadfastly refusing to include anything that has even the potential to detract from the game's enjoyability. Translation: no crates, no keys, no key cards, no save points, no vanishing bodies, no objects you can't destroy, and no robotic mosquitoes. The realism of reloading your weapons has been sacrificed to keep gameplay moving, but every weapon should have an alternate firing ability; for example, the Tesla gun can fire in bursts or continuous mode, while the Mauser rifle features a sniper scope. One nod to realism is the way enemies will *not* spawn; this means Nazi reinforcements will be parachuting in, arriving in APCs, etc.—not suddenly appearing in a hallway you thought you'd cleared.

Gray Matter is also spending a lot of time beefing up the enemy AI. Already, enemies will pick up and throw grenades back at you—provided the fused bombs still have enough time left that they won't kill themselves trying. We've also seen enemies acting in groups, using grenades to flush you out from cover so that their cohorts can cut you down with machine-gun fire. Enemies will also intelligently use cover, run for help, and—failing years of suicidal shooter fodder tradition—actually realize that your RPG trumps their pistol, and will run away if you burst into a room toting serious hardware.

**Walking a Tightrope**

While they're elated to be working on the new incarnation of a much-loved classic game, Gray Matter is acutely aware of how high the expectations are bound to be. How do they stay true to the spirit of the original, while updating it and still giving it some of their own personality? Fortunately, Activision is just as aware of how high gamers' expectations are going to be and have scrubbed a Christmas 2000 release, in favor of letting Gray Matter take their time and get it right. Plus, Gray Matter has the added bonus of original creator id Software's input to guide them as well (see sidebar for more on this).

Can they do it? From what we've seen, the answer would seem to be a solid "yes." If there's any knock against the game, it's that *RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN* can't ship soon enough to satisfy our adrenaline addiction.

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DETERMINED THE COURSE OF WORLD WAR II.

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD’S

MAIN EVENT SIX SYSTEMS

LEAN AND MEAN

MOST SAVAGE RING BATTLE OF THE CENTURY

You’ll be surprised at how much gaming rig $1,700 will buy

Photos by Hayden Houser
Illustration by Jason Babler
The opponents square off in the ring, sizing each other up, looking for a weakness or an opportunity to land the knockout punch. These aren’t the heavyweights, but the fighters’ smaller size belies their power and ability to withstand punishment. The systems in this year’s competition for the Ultimate Gaming Machine “Lean and Mean” crown all came hungry, with their eyes on the prize. But in the end, only one emerged as champion—though three others made a respectable showing, and the final two had the tools, but not the talent. Step into the ring with us to see who can go the distance, and who will wear the champion’s belt.

By Dave Salvator, Raphael Liberatore, and Jeff Green

Got What it Takes?
As we present this year’s Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup, the hardware landscape has once again changed dramatically. All but two systems in this roundup have AMD CPUs. They all have nVidia-based 3D cards and sound cards from Creative Labs. M.I.A. are both 3Dfx, which is endeavoring to ship Voodoo 5 6000, and Aureal, which has gone to that great PCI slot in the sky. But despite the uniformity, we saw a gamut of performance ranging from not so hot to very speedy indeed. So it is with great pomp and circumstance that we present this year’s Ultimate Gaming Machines (somebody cue the bagpipe player and the gardian gnome).

Usually, we present a deluge of benchmarks, and let the numbers speak for themselves. But this year we decided to look beyond performance, and extend our consideration into five other important areas.

Performance and stability are still the main consideration, but to that we have added: component choices; included peripherals; ease of assembly and documentation; case and insides accessibility (for the inevitable upgrades); and finally, warranty and tech support. We’ll walk through these criteria one by one, pointing out the good, the bad, and the...well, you know.

Performance/Stability
What to Look For:
- Fast, rock-solid performance
- Inclusion of good utilities (i.e. PowerStrip, System Mechanic)
- Beefy power supply: at least 250 watts, preferably 300
- Plenty of ventilation to keep things cool

What to Avoid:
- Flaky, crash-prone performance, even if it’s fast
- Motherboard-down graphics and audio
- Aggressively overclocked systems

The choice of 3D card coupled with the choice in CPU/chipset are the biggest determining factors of gaming performance. Thanks to some new chipsets from Via (KX-133 for Slot A and KT-133 for Socket A), AMD is now more evenly matched with Intel. These chipsets bring AGP 4X, 133MHz SDRAM, and ATA-66 and Ultra-ATA 100 support to the AMD platform. Intel, meanwhile, backing off on its expensive RAMBUS memory, has released its 815e chipset—which offers nearly identical features to the Via chipsets. 3D graphics card performance is also close among these systems, since they’re all powered by nVidia chipsets. However, some feature GeForce boards with 32MB of DDR...
memory, while others boast GeForce 2 GTS boards with 64MB of DDR memory.

In 3D GameGauge and 3D WinBench testing, Alienware’s Core system took the top honors. Its 3D GameGauge score of 74.2 is one of the fastest scores we’ve seen. But the Falcon

**WIDE OPEN SPACES**

Alienware’s case, after unplugging the KoolMaxx ventilation fan, has plenty of maneuvering room, just watch that sharp drive-cage clip.

**Performance Comparison**

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<td>84.7</td>
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<td>10.10</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.29</td>
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* Couldn’t complete test because monitor doesn’t support 1600x1200 resolution.
The Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC—all having similar components—performed well, but they trailed Alienware. These systems were loaded out with AMD Thunderbird Athlon CPUs, though the 3D card in each varied. Interestingly, of the three, only the VoodooPC was set to run in AGP 4X mode, despite all three systems using Via's KT-133 chipset, which supports AGP 4X. The VoodooPC had an earlier GeForce card, but was actually able to achieve nearly equal performance as the Falcon and Hypersonic, both of which boasted GeForce 2 cards. But looking forward, Falcon and Hypersonic have more performance “headroom” in them for future games. Unfortunately, the Hypersonic was the only system that crashed repeatedly on our Jane's USAF test, though its scores were otherwise respectable.

Dell and Compaq brought up the rear. Dell has performed well in past shootouts, and their system’s performance was okay, but it wasn’t as fast as past systems. Compaq, however, shot behind the duck on its component choices, and its Presario used older versions of nVidia’s drivers. The Presario’s gaming performance suffered as a result, and was nearly 15fps behind the leader in 3D GameGauge.

Component Choices

What to Look For:
- At least 700MHz CPU and 128MB of PC133 SDRAM
- NVIDIA GeForce, GeForce 2, or 3dfx Voodoo 5 3D card
- At least 250 watts of power
- At least 3 free PCI slots for future upgrades

What to Avoid:
- 3D cards other than the ones above

How We Tested

To shaking these systems down, we hammered them with our own cruel cocktail of tests that include a healthy dose of Ziff-Davis' benchmarks, 3D WinBench, WinBench, and Audio and CD WinBench.

Then we unleashed our own 3D GameGauge, a collection of six Direct3D games (RE:VOLT, EXPENDABLE, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, JANE'S USAF, PANZER ELITE, and NFL FEVER), and one OpenGL game, QUAKE 3 ARENA. These tests are run at 1024x768 with a mix of both 16-bit and 32-bit color settings. We also used three tests from our upcoming version of 3D GameGauge (3.0), which you'll soon see as our primary testing tool. In these tests, we crank the test resolution up to 1280x1024x32 for every game tested.

We also ran the simple “burn” test of leaving the systems on for over a week, letting them “go to sleep,” and making sure they’d wake up uneventfully. All of the systems ran reliably.
Ultimate Gaming Machine • PART ONE

FALCON NORTHWEST TALON 2.2

- 3D GAMEGAUGE SCORE: 98%
- MODEL: Talon 2.2
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: $1,695
- CPU: AMD Athlon 800MHz (T-Bird)
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 128MB
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: VIA Apollo KT133
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET: VIDEO MEMORY: GeForce 2 GTS/32MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE): IBM Deskstar 15GB 72KXP, Ultra 66/100 ATA
- SPEAKERS: Klipsch PM 2.1

- No-name sound cards
- Integrated CPU/monitor (a la iMac), which limits upgradeability

This year, we saw more AMD iron in the roundup than Intel, which is a testament to AMD's ability not only to offer a high-performance chip, but to put it out in large numbers. Intel, on the other hand, has had difficulty keeping the channel fed with high-speed parts; the CPUs it has made available in the one-gigahertz range generally cost more than Athlons at the same clock rate.

All the AMD-powered systems except one use the Thunderbird Athlon, which has a 256KB onboard Level 2 cache, though it's still marketed under the Athlon moniker. Two ways to tell if the CPU is a T-Bird are that it will be a Socket A chip, and its clock speed will be 700MHz or better. Although onboard L2 doesn't deliver a large performance gain on games, every little bit helps; so if you're going AMD, opt for T-Bird, or at least Duron. None of our contestants had the value-priced Duron CPU, owing to AMD's aggressive pricing of T-Bird chips. Compaq was the only company to send a non-TBird Athlon.

Alienware opted for Intel. Their Grey system has an 815e chipset that is surprisingly fast, considering that its predecessor, the 810, was a dog. We liked Alienware's inclusion of the extra KoolMax cooling fan on the side of its case to keep air moving, especially since Alienware was overclocking the GeForce 2 GTS 3D card. The Dell also has an 815e chipset with a GeForce 2 GTS card, but Dell's box was slower, due in part to a slower CPU.

Every one of these systems arrived with either a Sound Blaster Live or the Value Edition of that card. A competent part with a beefy audio processor, it'll certainly get the job done. We were hoping to see Turtle Beach's new Santa Cruz card, but no such luck.

The Voodoo PC and Compaq have only two free PCI slots for future upgrades, whereas all the other boxes had at least three.

Peripherals

What to Look For:
- Front-mounted USB ports on the case
- A split ergonomic keyboard (your wrists will thank you)
- A good wheel-mouse you've actually heard of

What to Avoid:
- No-name mice without wheels
- Low-end speakers without a separate bass unit
- A 15-inch monitor, it's just too damn small

Peripherals can either enhance a gaming system, or make it mediocre. Quality components such as 17-inch monitors or higher, good game controllers, and the other goodies listed above are desirable components for hardcore gamers.

All of these computers sport brand-name 17-inch monitors, keyboards, and mice. The best keyboard and mouse combo belongs to VoodooPC for using the innovative Logitech Cordless I-Touch Keyboard and Mouse. The rest of the boxes have either the MS Intellimouse or Logitech's Wheel-Mouse. Unfortunately, none had a split keyboard, which we certainly recommend for those who do a lot of typing on their PC.

Since sound is a major component of the overall gaming experience, most of the PCs include good speaker systems. Both the Alienware and Hypersonic sport Altec Lansing's ACS54 4.1 speaker system (four satellites + base unit), while Dell uses the Altec Lansing ACS340. Compaq's JBL two-channel speakers crammed out at louder volumes. Falcon NW leads the field with Klipsch's powerful ProMedia 2.1 THX-certified speakers. But the Cambridge Soundworks FP32000 4.1 speaker system on the VoodooPC MoxonExtreme is also first-rate.

With DVD growing in popularity, Dell, VoodooPC, and Compaq all arrived with DVD-ROM drives and software DVD players. Of these systems, only the VoodooPC contains a slot-loading CD tray from Pioneer. Both the Hypersonic and Falcon use standard 48x CD-ROMs, while the Alienware features a
Ease of Assembly

What to Look For:
- A big color poster that clearly shows how to put things together
- A detailed description of installed components, and which cards use which I/O resources
- Manuals for every piece of hardware in the box

What to Avoid:
- Any company unwilling to provide the above, even if it isn’t part of their “standard” documentation

We took a straw poll here at the CGW office to determine who was the most technically challenged editor on staff, and Jeff “bad hardware mojo” Green won by a landslide. We wanted to get the most non-techie test subject possible to get these systems up and running, and see how long it took.

DELL DIMENSION 4100

- 3D GAMEGAUGE SCORE: 64.6
- MODEL: Dimension 4100
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: $1,699
- CPU: Pentium III 800MHz
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 128MB PC133 SDRAM
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: Intel 815e
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY: GeForce 2 GTS/32MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE-SIZE/INTERFACE): Quantum FireBall 18GB, Ultra-ATA
- SPEAKERS: Altec-Lansing ACS-340

I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO HEARS YOUR CRIES. I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS YOUR PAIN. YOU WILL FEEL MINE.
lacked that whole "word" thing. Falcon had pictures of what plugs into what, but didn't put them into a step-by-step setup guide. The other three systems, Hypersonic, VoodooPC, and Alienware had documentation closer to Falcon's, showing wiring, but lacking the step-by-step guidance that soothes my soul.

The actual manual labor itself, in all cases, was surprisingly painless, with such modern conveniences as color-coded cables, so I was never tempted to plug the keyboard into the sound port, for example. A nice job overall by those companies, who get my official Doofus-Proof Certification.

Now get this hardware out of my face and let me go play some games.

Case Accessibility

What to Look For:

- Mini-tower design, tool-less entry, and no sharp edges!
- Quick-release drive cage
- Easy unblocked access to the CPU, memory, expansion slots, and storage devices

What to Avoid:

- Most "desktop" cases—they're too small to work in
- Access panels with more than two screws
- Cases without individual side panels

From time to time, you'll need to jump inside your box to add or upgrade components. So we tore open these systems and rated them based on accessibility and general case design. The important factors include: ease of entry; tool-less entry; unblocked access to the CPU, memory, expansion slots, and storage devices; quick-release drive cages; and of course, airflow and ventilation.

Of the systems we tested, most require the removal of two

HYPERSONIC SILVER BULLET

- **3D GAMEGAUGE SCORE:** Incomplete (USAF crashed)
- **MODEL:** Silver Bullet
- **PRICE AS CONFIGURED:** $1,699
- **CPU:** AMD Athlon 750MHz (T-Bird)
- **RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE):** 128MB PC133 SDRAM (Kingston)
- **SYSTEM CHIPSET:** VIA Apollo KT133
- **GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY:**
  - GeForce 2, 64MB DDR
- **HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE):**
  - IBM DeskSatar 15GB 7200, Ultra 66/100 ATA
- **SPEAKERS:** Altec Lansing ACS54

FEED ME VoodooPC was the only box with a handy slot-feed DVD-ROM drive.

VoodooPC MonsoonExtreme

- **3D GAMEGAUGE SCORE:** 68.2
- **MODEL:** MonsoonExtreme
- **PRICE AS CONFIGURED:** $1,747
- **CPU:** AMD Athlon 800MHz (T-Bird)
- **RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE):** 128 PC133 SDRAM (Crucial Technologies)
- **SYSTEM CHIPSET:** VIA Apollo KT133
- **GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY:**
  - GeForce 256MB DDR
- **HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE):**
  - Maxtor Diamondmax 20GB
- **SPEAKERS:** Cambridge Soundworks FPS2000

them. We'd wanted to use Bobo the Baboon, but he was playing a bar mitzvah at Lake Tahoe during our testing, so we settled for Jeff. Here he is, ladies and gents, our very own Jeff "Sticky" Green...

Gee, well thank you very little for that rousing introduction. But okay, fine. I can handle it. I can still do this piece and maintain my self-respect. See if I ever write for this section again, though. Stupid doody-head Dave.

Anyway, I'm happy to say that all of the machines in question here are certifiably doofus-proof. Even if, like me, you hate manual labor, and would rather skinny dip with Janet Reno than set up your own computer, you can rest easy knowing that any of these systems will be easy to get up and running without any professional assistance, or aspirin.

I set up three of these systems—the Dell Dimension 4100; the Compaq Presario 7000; and the Falcon Talon 2.0—in about 20 minutes each. That's from a sealed box to a completely running PC, give or take a few trips to go wee wee and to get a supportive hug from Jason. Not bad. The Dell system was the easiest, thanks to a nice setup poster that included not just moron-friendly pictures but actual English words (and three other languages, too) to explain the pictures. Never underestimate the power of decent documentation to subdue the frightened mind. Compaq's documentation was also good, but
screws and a side panel to gain entry. Only the VoodooPC MonsoonExtreme and Dell Dimension 4100 machines use tool-less entry. VoodooPC actually topped everyone's design by using an impressive tool-less mini-tower with removable side panels for easy access.

Once inside, the Falcon Talon, Hypersonic Silver Bullet, and Alienware Grey offer plenty of room to maneuver. However, both the Alienware and the Hypersonic force you to remove a hefty fan before gaining access. Actually, the Hypersonic's video card fan gave us fits, since it's placed alongside the 3D card and it requires nimble fingers or a helper to get it out of the way. The Alienware system had a sharp metal clip on the hard drive cage, so be careful when removing it.

Overall, both the VoodooPC MonsoonExtreme and Falcon Talon offer plenty of space to play around in. Considering the VoodooPC's tool-less entry and nifty box design, it gets the nod with a 14-point rating, followed by the Falcon, Hypersonic, and Alienware, all with 13. The lowest scores go to the Dell and Compaq, whose crowded layout makes it hard to access their drive bays and motherboards.

Warranty/Tech Support

What to Look For:

- Toll-free tech-support line. 24/7
- Web-based support
- Drivers & DX7a loaded on the hard drive, in case you need to re-install them
- A bootable disaster recovery CD that can restore the system's orig-
inal drive image

Windows CD physically included

What to Avoid:

■ Any company with squeezy tech-support hours (three hours of available tech support per week don't cut it).

Warranty and tech support are the most overlooked features when considering a system. All of our system manufacturers offer a one-year warranty on components, including free shipping, and they also offer extended warranties if you so choose. Compaq, Alienware, and Dell offer a comprehensive 24/7 toll-free phone and Web-based tech support via FAQs, forums, online help, email, and "how to" guides. Voodoo PC and Falcon offer the same, except for no toll-free numbers and limited Monday through Saturday tech-support hours. Hyperscion has banker hours for phone support, but they do offer a toll-free line. They also have one of the more helpful Web-based tech support sites of the group, though that assumes your system is alive enough to see the Internet.

Other important support features include a recovery CD and drivers, plus backup files on the hard drive, which are all helpful features should you require a re-install. Hypersonic and Falcon led the way by offering a recovery CD, and drivers, while including a DirectX 7 backup folder on the hard drive. Compaq has a recovery image on the hard drive, while Dell has some of its drivers on the hard drive, but it fell short on the others. Alienware, surprisingly, lacked drivers on the hard drive, but does offer a special recovery CD for an additional fee.

And THE WINNER Is...

After watching the contestans through our six-round title bout, we have a unanimous decision. Alienware is our new Lean and Mean champion, although Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC could come close to matching Alienware's performance with a few component upgrades, namely faster CPUs and/or 3D cards. But Alienware's combination of top-flight performance, solid stability, and an accessible case with extra cooling—with a side order of good component choices and readily available tech support—combined to be an upper-cut knockout punch.

Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC all have similar components, and, not surprisingly, they have similar performance to one another. Kudos to Falcon for including Klipsch's thunderous PM 2.1 speakers, the two-channel follow-on to the cranium-pounding ProMedia V2-400s. Dell and Compaq have fared better in past roundups, but Dell's performance wasn't where it should have been given its components, and its shortfalls remain a bit of mystery. Compaq was the only company whose system has USB (and
FireWire) ports on the front of the CPU where they belong. But its component choices, particularly its motherboard running at an AGP 1X setting, cost Compaq in performance. In addition, its jbl speaker set lacks a bass unit, so low-end response was poor.

Also keep in mind that given potential CPU and memory price drops, you might be able to load up one of these systems with even more horsepower and still limbo under the $1,700 price bar, so check with the system maker and see how much bang your buck will get you.

### The Tale of the Tape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating (out of Five)</th>
<th>Alienware</th>
<th>Compaq</th>
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### COMING NEXT MONTH

Tune in next month for the heavyweight bout of our Ultimate Game Machine slap-down, where we'll pit even more machines against each other in a high-end shootout, and money will be no object. We're talking Pentium IV systems with RAM for years, and monitors the size of Shaq's Barcalounger. Don't miss it.

---

**BLAIR WITCH™**

Gathering of Developers proudly announces a three-game series based on the rich mythology behind the blockbuster film, *The Blair Witch Project™*. Hasen Films has granted unprecedented access to its wealth of intricate folklore, providing developers Terminal Reality, Human Head Studios and Ritual Entertainment with ample fodder for detailed and compelling storylines. These chilling narratives are powered by the awe-inspiring Nocturne™ engine, creating infinite opportunities for masterful suspense and blood-curdling realism.

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YURI or TANYA. 
SOVIET or ALLIED. 
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★ Rely on over 80 units with battle-hardened veterans and alternate modes of attack. Direct your campaigns over land, sea and air to deliver your fury.

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★ Wreak havoc with a friend through the specially design co-op campaign.

★ Experience each hard-fought battle with cinematic movies that deliver blow-by-blow intensity and brief you on your next mission.

DECLARE YOUR ALLEGIANCE. NOW.
SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: CRIMSON SKIES

ACE THROUGH THE HOLE Flying through the famous "Hollywood" sign is just one of the game's ridiculously foolhardy challenges.

ACTION
reviewed by Charles Ardai

Flight sims meet Robin Hood in CRIMSON SKIES

Flier Tuck

Back before it meant airport delays and endless lines at the metal detector, flying was synonymous with romance and adventure. And back before there were striking workers griping about having to put in too much overtime, pilots were striking in another sense: They were the dashing young men whose exploits made headlines in the afternoon papers and the newsreels. It's been a while since a computer game has tried to recapture this early spirit of adventure. Most flight simulators spend all their time trying to authentically depict the minutiae of flying a real plane, forgetting that authenticity and fun don't necessarily go hand in hand. I, for one, don't want to know how to fly a real plane — but I've always wanted to try my

Requirements: Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 32MB hard drive space (25MB for swap file).
Recommended Requirements: Pentium II 600, 128MB RAM, 128MB hard drive space.

3D Support: Direct3D

Multiplayer Support: Mute (2 players), LAN (limited to 2-8 players).

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Zipper Interactive • $55 • www.microsoft.com/games/crensonskies

ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence, use of alcohol.
A Tale of Two Licenses

By Tom Price

This month, we review two games based on what's probably the most exploited license in computer gaming: Star Trek. While we've become quite accustomed to deriding Star Trek games, thanks to the preponderance of stinkers (i.e. HIDDEN EVIL), we can easily forget the decent or downright good games based on the Star Trek license (anyone still playing STARFLEET COMMAND?). STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE is one of those good games; STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS is a stinker. In fact, these two games perfectly illustrate how a license can be utilized correctly and oh-so-incorrigibly.

ELITE FORCE is fortunate in that it's based on a solid foundation, the QUAKE III engine. But the designers at Raven made more than a Trek-based QUAKE mod. In fact, the game is structured and looks very much like an actual episode of the show, with accurately-recreated uniforms and sets, similar camera angles and directorial style during the cut-scenes, actual voices from the show's stars, and a requisite corny Vulcan joke at the end. It is evident that the designers are fans of the show, and the final product ends up being not just a satisfying experience for Voyager fans, but for gamers in general.

Now NEW WORLDS, that's another story. Take the license away, and you'll still have a piece of crap real-time-strategy game that no one in their right mind would want to play. But this game publishing theory of taking any piece of software, regardless of quality, and slapped a license on it is far too common. Besides, what marketing moron came up with the idea of a Star Trek RTS on the ground? Hellooo! It's called Star Trek!

Feel free to chime in (tom.price@ziffdavis.com) with what you think are some of the best (and worst) licensed games of all time and why. I'll be here, setting my phaser to uninstall.

DECEMBER REVIEWS

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<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Crimson Skies</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dukes of Hazzard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeworld: Cataclysm</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<td>Madden 2001</td>
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<td>Spec Ops II: Operation Bravo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Trek: New Worlds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steel Beasts</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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Serial Heroes

Want to get a taste of the real thing? If you hunt around on the Web, you can find information about (and sometimes actual copies of) the old serials to which CRIMSON SKIES is an homage. Try www.movielix.com for a free download of serials, ranging from the 1940 epic Buck Rogers Conquers the Universe (which happens to be the source of the slanted text scroll that George Lucas stole for the opening of Star Wars), to 1952's Radar Men From the Moon, starring George Wallace as Commando Cody. For a less science-fictional view of the aviation world, learn about Sky King at home.kscable.com/ctc/skyking, or snap up copies of The Adventures of the Flying Cadets, Bruce Gentry; Daredevil of the Skies, and Tailspin Tommy in the Great Air Mystery at sep.net.com/rcramer/serials.

cause and effect

Saving this Red Cross hospital ship wins you a new, adoring fan and one more thing to add to your scrapbook. CRIMSON SKIES is full of such rewards.

Indiana Jones films did, with no sign that the characters think their implausible, outrageous adventures are anything less than a matter of life or death. The game's soundtrack is jaunty to a fault and gets tiring after a while. The audio stutters badly when the game is loading a new scene, and the loading itself can take a very long time. Having to wait through multiple loading sequences each time you crash your plane is egregious.

But the handling of the planes themselves, once you get used to the controls, is fine, and the levels are laid out well enough that flying around in them is fun. There are plenty of tunnels, canyons, and crevices to fly through, whether of the natural (Hawaii) or human-made (Manhattan) variety, and you win kudos from your team and snapshots for your in-game scrapbook for flying through especially tight spots. Meanwhile, the worse the odds against you become, the more exhilarating it is when you prevail. It may take three or four tries, but when you finally sneak your plane through the gap between two bridge struts, blowing the thing up as you pass, there's no feeling in the world like it.

It may not be "The Bridge on the River Kwai," but CRIMSON SKIES can certainly hold its own with all the Universal Studios serials I've ever seen, and that's more than any computer game before it could say. C+/

Skies Matters

Unfortunately, there are a few other small points that detract from the game experience. Too many of the actors deliver their lines with a sort of ironic smirk, as if aware of the fact that they're imitating old movie serials. (The right way to do this sort of thing is in the way the
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!

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www.redstorm.com/freedom

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www.microsoft.com/games/conquerors
Barking Dogs don't lie—HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM improves upon an already great game

Unleash the Beast

The real-time strategy genre was already on its way to becoming a hit stale when HOMEWORLD gave it a jolt of adrenaline. Thanks to a seamless blending of storytelling and mission structure — and the first effective use of three-dimensional space in a strategy game — HOMEWORLD deservedly became a critical and popular smash. Everyone involved in the follow-up, HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM, insisted that it's not a sequel or a mission set, but a kind of "new episode" in the HOMEWORLD saga, no doubt hedging their bets in case it turned out to be a gobbledygook. They needn't have worried. The designers at Relic did well in entrusting their code to Barking Dog Studios, who have produced a game that improves upon almost every aspect of the original.

CATACLYSM picks up 15 years after the Kith reclaimed their homeworld of Algora. The different factions have once again splintered, as has the Taidan Empire, creating instability once more. You play as the Soma, a Kith clan who seeks their fortune in deep-space mining. As the game begins, you answer a distress call from an Ion Cannon Frigate under attack by the Taidan. Though you no longer have the "mothership," you control the mining vessel Kuun-Lan, which is capable of producing a limited amount of combat ships. With these beginnings, you start a new campaign with a very different tone than that of the original HOMEWORLD.

**CGW RATED**

**PROS**
- More great missions; some welcome interface and gameplay improvements.

**CONS**
- Friendishly hard at times; dodge Direct3D support.

**Requirements:** Pentium II 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard disk space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 350MHz, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard disc space. **Minimum Requirements:** Pentium II 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard disc space. **Software:** Windows, Mac, Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (1-8 players), one CPU per player.


**CHARGE OF THE FASTER THAN LIGHT BRIGADE** Nothing is more stirring than a fleet of ships in claw formation as they close in on the hill. Or, in this case, get their butts kicked by superior numbers.
BIGGER IS BETTER Giant cap ships firing powerful beams and bristling with smaller turrets still form the core of late-game strike fleets, and aren’t we glad for that?

Ics become available in groups, forcing you to choose groups of technology that will allow production of specific ships and upgrades (including special attacks for some ships). These new technologies also enable the Kuun-Lan to recreate itself as it jetsisons mining pods to add specialized technology modules. As the game unfolds, the Kuun-Lan evolves into a real ship of war. The other major effect of this gradual evolution is to limit the size of your fleet, since the game imposes a cap on the number of ships that can be built.

This addition cuts both ways, and whether you like it or not, will have a lot to do with the way you play. The maximum number of ships in your fleet can be expanded by adding new modules and creating carriers (which may also have expansion modules). This ship cap is certain to be controversial among HOMEWORLD-ers, but it makes sense in context and forces you to think tactically rather than to use superior numbers in all cases. No mission is lost because of the fleet limits that can’t be won through more clever means. The only real annoyance comes in salvaging ships, since you have to make sure the fleet isn’t mixed-out before you salvage, or else scurry to decommission other ships to make room.

The Beast Cube?

A more complex mixture of ships also helps to increase the tactical sophistication of the game. Ships now work better in tandem with other ships, and finding the best strike-force compositions becomes a major element of the game. The radically different nature of the enemy also becomes a part of this equation, since you can move from fighting Taidan and Turanic raiders to facing a Borg-like foe dubbed “the Beast.” Beast fleets are unique in that they can’t construct new ship models without enemy contact. Using their infection beam, they assimilate enemy ships and turn them to their own purpose. Once the Beast has control of a new ship model, it will be able to construct this ship itself. This gives the Beast fleet a ragtag mixture of vessels and technologies culled from everyone it encounters. It also makes fighting them very tricky, since you need not only to destroy them, but to do so while avoiding infestation.

Several other changes have been made to the core gameplay of HOMEWORLD, and all add to the richness of the game. The ability of the Kuun-Lan to move is balanced by the addition of fog-of-war, which places a new emphasis on the formerly worthless scout-class ships. Complementing this change is the inclusion of waypointing. You can set waypoints anywhere—including the “Z-axis,” or third dimension—and have patrols run the waypoints and then return, or run them as a loop. Space is larger in CATAclySM, and the mixture of fog-of-war with the increased control of patrols gives missions a more realistic flavor. It also adds a layer of complexity, but one that adds to the overall effectiveness of missions. Ships can now mine different types of objects, including dense, resource-rich crystals. Finally, the new system adds a very welcome time-compression feature and the ability to give all orders from the sensors screen.

All of this may sound suspiciously like I’m saying CATAclySM is better than the original HOMEWORLD. Well, get started on that hate mail, ’cause you know what? It is. Relic was busy creating an entirely new world, game, and system from scratch, and they did it incredibly well. But when a talented third party has time to work with a good system, they often can improve it. They learn what worked and what didn’t in the original, and then make it better. That’s what Barking Dog has done.

CATAclySM plays very differently than HOMEWORLD does due to the combination of simple design enhancements, premise, and new ship types. There’s more emphasis on preparedness. There are moments when caution is called for, and moments when you have to react quickly. The game can turn on you in an instant, such as when a plot twist in an early mission caught me with an insufficient force. Simple design decisions demand more thoughtful, careful gameplay, and that ultimately makes for a more enjoyable experience, even if it those used to the original might find it frustrating at first. By setting a few new elements in motion, Barking Dog created a game that looks back to the original while moving the entire genre forward a bit further. Call it what you will: sequel, add-on, new episode. CATAclySM is HOMEWORLD and then some.
Resisting fun is futile while playing ELITE FORCE

**Borg-a-licious!**

I expected to hate this game. I expected an unhappy, unenjoyable trudge to an unRewarding end. I expected to have to endure yet another unenforceable Star Trek game thrown onto store shelves in the desperate hope that hordes of basement-dwelling, living-with-Mom, 38-year-old, Doctor Who-quoting misfits might stop stuffing nacho cheese Doritos into their blubbery mouths long enough to throw some of their comic book money on a PC game. My expectations, to say the least, were low.

But then I actually played Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force and discovered not another failure, but an impressive first-person shooter light years ahead of other Trek games and most other shooters to boot. Elite Force beams you into the world of pointy-ear Vulcans, and – believe it or not – makes it cool to be a Trekker.

**Space Marines**

The game starts off with a little "Kobayashi Maru" twist, quickly cueing you as to what universe you'll be operating in. If you've ever wanted to know what it feels like to face the chilling blank stares of Borg waiting to annihilate your butt, well, here's your dream come true. In short order, Voyager becomes disabled by The Forge, a huge station run by a new alien race; it generates a dampering field that traps all nearby ships. The basic goal of the game is to restore power and fight off space pirates, aliens, Borg, and a little insect problem along the way. You meet up with a group of alien races drifting in the grip of the Forge, including Klingons, Malons, Humans, and a new slingshot-like race called Etherans.

Your character is Ensign Munro, part of Voyager's Hazard Team. This group, formed by that oh-so-serious Tuvok, is exactly what the game title suggests: an elite team that goes in when the action is too tough for the usual away-team suspects. They pack new weapons, new characters, and a whole lotta attitude.

**Engage!**

While the game plot has all the makings of a Star Trek episode – subplots involve budding romance, tension among the crew, and an alien menace to end life as we know it (again) – the sounds and visuals (textures and sounds were licensed directly from Paramount) pull you deeper into Elite Force than any television/movie-franchised game out there.

You will be amazed at how beautiful this game is – a refined Quake III Arena engine carries the Star Trek milieu perfectly. Every spaceship (particularly the Borg cube) is gorgeous and imaginative. Further, you will be treated to a wide range of colorful and sometimes bizarre weapons, all with secondary fire. Shoot a nasty Reaver with the insane personal Photon Torpedo Launcher, and you will see exactly what I mean.

Character facial animations actually sync up with speech and are rendered with a high degree of authenticity, down to Chakotay's facial tattoo. You interact with Captain Janeway, help B'Elanna deal with the warp drive, get reprimanded by Tuvok, and get patched up by the holographic Doctor (looks like there's no hope for us guys with receding hairlines, even in the 24th Century). Only Seven of Nine isn't voiced by the actual actor from the show; the voice-acting really helps to give the game an authentic flavor.

---

**CGW Rated**

**Pros**

- Astounding visual and sound effects provide the best-ever sense of immersion in the Star Trek universe.

**Cons**

- Very short, very linear gameplay could be more challenging; some game triggers fail to activate.

---

**Requirements**

- Processor: Pentium II 233MHz
- RAM: 64MB RAM
- Video: 8MB 3D card
- Audio: CD-ROM drive
- Sound: CD Audio
- Gamepad: Optional

**Recommended Requirements**

- Processor: Pentium III 1250MHz
- RAM: 128MB RAM
- Video: GeForce 256 color
- Audio: CD Audio
- Gamepad: Optional

**Publisher:** Activision
**Developer:** Raven Software
**Contact:** www.activision.com
**ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.
Your teammates have personalities, which is hard to pull off without a certain amount of cheesiness (especially with Star Trek). From the hard-ass, practical-joker to the constantly whining engineer, your squadmates play significant roles throughout the game, providing added drama, firepower, and comic relief. When a heroic team member dies in a long, heavy battle against the Reavers, it affects your entire crew and you as a player. How many games do that successfully? Not many.

Another reason to love your crewmates is their pathfinding. They hit the elevator button, and they all rush to you so you can continue your quest — no rounding up members who get stuck behind corners or who can't see you when you're five feet away from them. Other games could learn from a lot from this little feature.

Your battle leads you through different ships that are crammed-together, filling scrap-heaps. Each vessel is a unique and richly detailed experience that mirrors the race that built it, whether it's the cold, dirty appearance of a Klingon Bird of Prey, the Human federation ship that wins at an original Star Trek episode, or the hive-like Harvester that tears up ships for scrap.

Each craft has its native alien that you must reach out and pulverize, most from the Star Trek universe, all dramatically rendered. Watching a cavernous look of the Borg beam in and set their collective red lasers on your forehead will please any player, fan or not.

Disengage

Navigating through these beautifully designed ships, however, can be as boring as watching a Vulcan play chess. I won't spoil what you get to do in the game, but I will tell you what you won't get to do. You won't get lost in these huge ships, because doors simply don't open and elevators only go to one floor, always steering you in only one direction. You won't get outsmarted by an enemy, because the AI isn't that smart — horrible, in fact, when it comes to some bosses. Apparently, "intelligent life" doesn't notice I just vapor-ized its buddy (adjacent) and that I'm setting my sights on them next.

And you won't be able to vary your gameplay more than planting your phaser on whatever's in front of you. Stealth...well, there's not a lot of opportunity for being sneaky, even when you're supposed to be.

Your enemies' main tactic is to rush at you in groups. (A note to AI programmers: Battling the cunning Tribble is more enjoyable than 100 dumb Klingons, every time.)

Clever scripted events move the game along and create that Voyager feel. Navigating across an invisible bridge, a little space walking, and lining up a laser to vaporize an obstruction may not be brainteasers, but they add to gameplay. Unfortunately, some scripted events fail to trigger, forcing me to replay small sections as a door would open after a battle, for instance.

Oddly, the game's best asset is also its biggest weakness. It feels like a compact, satisfying experience of the TV show: cautious exploration punctuated by riveting sequences, such as a desperate last stand on an alien vessel, or returning from a mission to find Voyager swarming with attackers. That's all well and good, but the sweeping excitement of a bigger-budgeted motion picture, with more of those memorable battles, would have been more rewarding. That, and more than the 10 or 15 hours of gameplay this brief game offers.

But for Trek fans and gamers in general, this is a quality game that brings respect and real fun to the Trek gaming franchise. Hopefully, now that the standard has finally been set, we will see a better, less cynical effort the next time a developer bravely goes where everyone and their momma have gone before.
Check the Rating!

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system can help you decide whether a computer or video game is right for your family. The ESRB system offers both RATINGS that tell you what age the game is appropriate for, and CONTENT DESCRIPTORS that indicate whether there are particular content elements which may be of interest or concern.

**RATING SYMBOLS** (found on the front of the game box):
- **E**: Content may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older.
- **T**: Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.
- **M**: Content may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older.
- **RP**: Product is awaiting final rating.

**CONTENT DESCRIPTORS** (found on the back of the game box):

- **MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE**: Contains scenes depicting cartoon/animated/pixilated characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations.
- **MILD REALISTIC VIOLENCE**: Contains scenes depicting characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations in photographic detail.
- **COMIC MISCHIEF**: Contains scenes depicting activities characterized as slapstick or gross vulgar humor.
- **ANIMATED VIOLENCE**: Contains depictions of aggressive conflict involving cartoon/animated/pixilated characters.
- **REALISTIC VIOLENCE**: Contains realistic or photographic-like depictions of aggressive conflict.
- **ANIMATED BLOOD AND GORE**: Animated/pixilated or cartoon-like depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts.
- **REALISTIC BLOOD AND GORE**: Depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts in realistic or photographic-like detail.
- **ANIMATED BLOOD**: Animated/pixilated or cartoon-like depictions of blood.
- **REALISTIC BLOOD**: Representations of blood in realistic or photographic-like detail.
- **SUGGESTIVE THEMES**: Mild provocative references or materials.
- **MATURE SEXUAL THEMES**: Contains provocative material, including depiction of the human body in either animated or photographic-like formats.
- **STRONG SEXUAL CONTEXT**: Graphic depiction of sexual behavior and/or the human form (i.e., frontal nudity) in either animated or photographic-like detail.
- **MILD LANGUAGE**: Product contains the use of words like "damn".
- **STRONG LANGUAGE**: Commonly referenced four-letter words.
- **GAMING**: The depiction of betting-like behavior.
- **USE OF TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL**: Product contains images of the use of tobacco and/or alcohol in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.
- **USE OF DRUGS**: Product contains images of the use of drugs in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.
- **INFORMATIONAL**: Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text.
- **EDUTAINMENT**: Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product.
- **SOME ADULT ASSISTANCE MAY BE NEEDED**: Early Childhood Descriptor only.
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!"
Another small-time developer comes through big-time for military sim fans

Tank God

Tank simulations have always been a bit thin on the ground, and with the cancellation of Tank Platoon!, it looked like 2000 was going to be a barren year for head-bangers. Fortunately, unexpected reinforcements have arrived in the form of Steel Beasts, a superb modern armor sim from online publisher Shrapnel Games. In what has been a theme in military titles this year, Shrapnel Games shows that as long as you don't require top-of-the-line graphics, a small development team can produce a realistic simulation with gripping gameplay and not a trace of a bug.

Team Yankee

Steel Beasts is a modern armored warfare simulation in which players can directly command either the U.S. M1A1 Abrams, or the German Leopard 2A4 main battle tanks. While there are the only two driveable vehicles, Steel Beasts models a wide range of contemporary AFVs, from tanks to armored personnel carriers, as well as infantry. Thanks to the designers' consultation with some real-life tank jockeys, the gunnery systems in both the Abrams and Leopard are meticulously recreated, to the extent that excessive use of laser range-finding can actually burn out the tank's laser. Few compromises are made to realism, resulting in a stark recreation of the modern battlefield. Being caught in an artillery barrage usually means death for your entire platoon.

The graphics in Steel Beasts are 2D only, but they're surprisingly effective at depicting trees and terrain contours. Smoke effects obviously suffer, but the lack of 3D doesn't functionally detract from the game. The combination of graphics and sound does much to create a compelling battle experience.

Steel Beasts is very much a strategy game as well as a sim. Before riding into combat, players plot their strategy in the planning phase. The orders given can be made sufficiently complex (and the unit AI is generally good enough) that engagements can be fought almost entirely from the map screen, with only occasional forays into the tank commander's seat.

Once the planning is over and the execution phase begins, Steel Beasts is one intense game. When the shooting begins, you have to pay attention to the combat environment, listen to your gunner, and keep track of the other vehicles in your platoon. If you've spent some time devising a comprehensive strategy, you can just sit in the gunner's position of any one of your tanks and do the dirty work while your battle plan unfolds.

CGW Rated

Pros:
Excellent situation/strategy blend; realism; attention to detail; multiplayer.

Cons:
Mediocre graphics; sim limited to two tanks; no campaign mode; fixed graphics resolution.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 225MB hard drive space, 2MB SVGA video card.
3D Support: None.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium II 450MHz, 64MB RAM.

FROM THE CREATORS OF AWARD-WINNING INCUBATION...

"An impressive lineup of turn-based and real-time features, coupled with good graphics and sounds... looks poised to take a good leap up the leading game charts."
Gamer's Pulse, August 2000

"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

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bluebyte.net
Red Storm writes the definitive field manual on kick-ass tactical simulations

The Killer Elite

Leave it to Red Storm to come up with another tactical simulation well worth your time and effort. COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS is a stand-alone game that is basically two products in one: part ROGUE SPEAR, and part Counter-Terrorism encyclopedia packed with more CT info than the terrorist archives of the FBI and NSA combined. Well...almost. Not only does player get to experience three new gutty ROGUE SPEAR missions and six well-designed training missions, they also get an insider's look at the secret world of CT operations, via an interactive database loaded for bear.

COVERT OPS comes in two CDs. The Mission CD is where three heart-pounding RAINBOW SIX missions take you into the jungles of Bolivia to rescue hostages, the Arctic Circle to insert a satellite module, and to North Dakota where mercenaries have seized a nuclear silo. All of these missions are tough, and require detailed planning: the experience of ROGUE SPEAR and RAINBOW SIX gog-nards should pay dividends here. These are some of Red Storm's best missions yet -- too bad there're just three. Fortunately, COVERT OPS includes all of the multiplayer components and refinements that make ROGUE SPEAR the best tactical simulation on the Internet.

The second CD is what makes COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS a keep'er for the tactical sim library, or for anyone contemplating a career in Counter-Terrorism (CT). COVERT OPS provides a comprehensive overview of Counter-Terrorism from 1970 until the present. You start out in the Ready Room, the central hub where you pick an operative to train and test. Information is gathered via a "Nodeball" easy to use, multi-layered, navigational interface. Utilizing Nodeball, candidates have the opportunity to access over 15,000 briefings and articles on various CT subjects. Your goal is to learn everything there is to know about CT Forces, Historical Operations, Gear, Tactics, Intelligence, Psychology, and the Future of CT operations.

COVERT OPS also contains video interviews with top experts in the field, as well as photos and video footage of weapons and equipment, along with a description of the tactics typically employed. There are several presentations and interviews on subjects such as ballistics and room clearing, as well as insertion methods and equipment use. For example, under the topic of Counter-Terrorist Tactics, players learn about Field Tactics, Combat Training, Military vs. Police Tactics, and Operational Tactics. Click on Combat Training, and primes surface in two more areas of study -- Basic and Combat Training. There's also a special section about the making of the RAINBOW SIX and ROGUE SPEAR games. The information is quite thorough--including field manuals and bibliographies -- but even as comprehensive as it is, the intel is still basically at a survey level. Great for a layperson, but don't kid yourself that you've been trained as a CT operative. You'll have to join the SAS, Delta, GSG-9, or other Special Operations units for that. If there's a knock against the presentation here, it's that more video of actual situations would have been welcome -- there's a lot of discussion about the hostage crisis at the 1972 Munich Olympics, but no video.

Once you feel ready, you can test your skills and knowledge through a nifty little testing feature known as Officer Candidate School. Using one of the many R6 operatives as an alter ego, you take multiple-choice and image-based exams in topics ranging from psychological profiling and hostage negotiation to kit selection and Intel photo analysis. You'll discover quickly whether or not you learned which weapons and equipment are best used in certain types of covert missions. Once you successfully pass a test, you gain a certification ribbon. Complete four ribbons, and you're done with that field of study. Once you pass all seven fields of study, you gain the rank of Rainbow Commander.

COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS feels like a natural extension of Red Storm's RAINBOW SIX series. Fans of tactical sims will find this game a challenging and worthwhile experience. Just don't go setting up a kill house in your backyard before checking with the neighbors. CGW

Making an Oil Slick: The junkyard training mission is a good level for honing your skills when facing superior odds. These dead terrorists didn't spread out in the room before the entry team hit them hard, making the job easier than what it could have been.
DON'T UNDERESTIMATE
THE DARK TRIBE!
YOUR ENEMIES MIGHT BE YOUR ONLY ALLIES...

"The latest edition of the game innovates in some ways but really 'goes back to its roots' in others."
PC.IGN.com

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GamersNews.com

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This rookie has championship potential

**Bring the Heat**

Hasbro Interactive has accomplished something Papyrus and Electronic Arts haven't been able to do. They've created a NASCAR game that's enjoyable for both newbie racers and simulation gurus alike.

Now, you may find that hard to believe, since most NASCAR games usually appeal to one or the other. Papyrus's NASCAR RACING series has always been geared towards the hardcore simulation gogonards, while Electronic Arts' NASCAR titles — with their reduced emphasis on realism — have appealed more to arcade-style racers.

NASCAR HEAT has all the options that those other games have and more: 19 authentically reproduced tracks, including Daytona from the Winston Cup circuit (only Indianapolis and Pocono are missing, due to licensing issues); 27 Winston Cup drivers and their respective cars and sponsors from the year 2000 season; and the usual single-player options such as single race and championship modes, which allow you to race a single race at a time, or to compete in a full season for points against the other Winston Cup drivers.

What's different about NASCAR HEAT is that its very realistic physics model and near-photorealistic graphics engine are made more enjoyable by the number of single-player gameplay options that the most inexperienced player can handle, but that the hardcore simmer will still find fresh and challenging.

Can You Beat the Heat?

The most unique gameplay option is the Beat the Heat challenge: 36 different challenges that are introduced by popular NASCAR commentator Allen Bestwick. These challenges help you develop your stock car racing skills by putting you in various real-world situations. They range from running a lap at a competitive pace, to using proper drafting techniques to pass, to working your way through the multi-car pileup. Some of the scenarios require you to use overly aggressive tactics when, overall, finishing an actual stock car race requires a cool hand and a lot of patience. Keep that in perspective while completing this mission-based portion of the game.

Race the Pro is another new gameplay option not seen before in

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NASCAR games. It lets you race against a
ghost car, representing one of 10 top
NASCAR Winston Cup drivers like Bobby
Labonte, Rusty Wallace, and the 

- Dale Earnhardt himself - driving their
best lap at their favorite tracks. The 

king, 

Richard Petty, even gets a cameo doing a lap 
at Daytona.

You'll have to drive your best laps to beat
the pro-driven ghost cars; because you can't
collide with them, you can use their line as
the best example. When you're done, save
the replay and then watch the pro through
the cockpit view of see how they drive the
track. While this is a great feature, I would
like to have been able to compete against
even more drivers and more tracks.

Look, Mom—I'm on ESPN

Graphically, this is the best
NASCAR title to date. The car detail
is simply amazing, and in some views,
it's as if the cars drove straight from
your TV set to your computer monitor.

Adding to the perception of realism,
particle effects are especially well
done, as evidenced by the realistic
smoke that comes from your tires and
burning engine (post-crash). Each
track is authentically reproduced to
the finest detail. Skid marks and
scrape marks look much more realistic
than before. The detail of the pit
area is finally done right. All the crew
trailers with number signs are present, representing
specific pit boxes. Pit crew animations
are vastly improved over previous
NASCAR titles, with
more polygons giving
them a more rounded,
human appearance. All
this stunning graphical
styling comes at a
price, however. Even
my Pentium III 500
with a GeForce2 video card struggled to display all this detail as
the number of cars in the field increased. The release notes state
you need at least a P-III 800MHz to run a full 43-car field. Expect
nothing less than a super-charged, Winston Cup-rated computer
with 700MHz horsepower to be able to produce all the telltale visuals
this game is capable of.

Once you take the wheel in NASCAR HEAT, the physics model
really shines. Driving these cars feels like you really do have 700
horsepower at your disposal. The cockpit moves forward and back
to simulate the force of braking and acceleration on the driver's head.
Your wheels lock up from braking too hard, causing your car to
spin-out — and if you do spin, be prepared to get airborne. You may quickly
find yourself upside down. Unfortunately, the default damage model
is set to extreme arcade mode, and moving up to expert or hardcore
mode doesn't improve the realism as much as it should. You can

crash and bang your car around without
much consequence and still win the race.

This isn't really a bug, since Hasbro wants to
cater to the new and inexperienced sim
racers, but there's a

patch being developed — it should be out by
the time you read this — that addresses
these problems and
creates a more realistic
damage model in the
expert and hardcore
modes.

Bugging Out

The aforementioned patch should also take
care of some of the bugs that keep NASCAR
HEAT from being a truly great game.

Some bugs include problems with the
computer AI-controlled
cars (although they are
the best I have ever seen in a racing sim)
during cautions and
pitting. They drive at inconsistent speeds and ram you
under flags, causing your car needless damage. They
have problems reentering traffic from pit road at the
super speedways, causing major jams. I was also
unceremoniously removed to the desktop every time I
finished racing Daytona in championship mode with a
43-car field.

The game does have multiplayer capability, but it is far
from complete. There's no built-in player matching ser-
vice to search the Internet for active races. And once
you manage to find a race and connect to it, there are
no practice sessions to allow you to practice with
your fellow drivers. You can only go directly into a race.
Also, there's no option for yellow flags in multiplayer,
so you always have to race under green flag
conditions. This is a big disappointment for online
racers who want perfect recreations of NASCAR events, and it
detracts from the overall potential of the game.

Once the patch is released, you should have many options,
from extreme arcade-style racing to advanced simulation mode.
That, coupled with the new physics model, will make NASCAR
HEAT a real jewel to satisfy any racing fan — whether you're an
arcade racer or a realistic-simulation guru. Until that time, how-
ever, this game is truly a diamond in the rough.
GROOVY

Chainsaws, boomsticks, and Deadites, oh my!

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Fight evil across the spans of time: from the infamous cabin to ancient Damascus.

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Bruce Campbell as Ash!

Screenshots from Sega Dreamcast

WWW.EVILDEADGAME.COM
STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS sucks harder than a black hole

She's Gonna Blow, Cap'n!

I have a theory that someone accidentally replaced the STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS design doc with a list of things you're not supposed to implement in a real-time strategy game. This would explain a lot. It would explain why you can't save a game in progress, so you'll have to play through an entire hour-long scenario in one sitting; if you lose, you get to start over from the very beginning. It would explain why there is no way to change the game speed, or to pause and give orders. It would explain why you can't change any sound or graphics options from within the game. It would explain how STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS turned out to be one of the worst real-time strategy games you could inflict on yourself.

Set Tricorders to "Huh?"

It would also explain how some basic features you expect in any RTS managed to be left out: a skirmish mode, waypoints for units, patrolling orders, configurable hot keys, designated gathering points for newly built units, options to move your armies together, and Internet multiplayer support are nowhere to be found in NEW WORLDS. It would explain the hideous interface and the lack of useful information available to the player. It would explain how Klingon, Federation, and Romulan units and buildings are functionally identical with almost nothing to distinguish the three races, aside from a single vehicle at the top of each race's "tech tree." It would explain a convoluted resource model that's completely antithetical to the pace of a real-time strategy game – five raw resources are converted into five processed resources with silly science fiction names, with no discernable pattern for why you need them, what they’re used for, or where you can get them. It would explain unnecessarily tedious and vague building upgrades, and poorly-used rules for crewmembers and unique trainable officers who can be assigned to different tasks.

It would explain why NEW WORLDS is a textbook example of an entirely useless 3D engine making a game harder to play – the limited camera control makes it a chore to look where you want to look, not to mention the insufferable difficulty of giving units specific orders for movement and combat. It would explain why dragging a bunch of units and ordering them to attack a target results in a strung-out column of units fumbling their way across the map and arriving at different times – so that they can be conveniently destroyed one by one. It would explain the limited group-control options, the way you can only build bases on pre-set tiles, the sluggish graphics, the twitchy mouse support, and the absence of feedback at the end of a scenario.

Praising With Faint Damns

However, what’s not explained by my theory is how this wretched excuse for a game was actually packaged into a box and put on shelves.

If you were feeling charitable, you might enjoy the atmospheric graphics, the gratuitous lens flare given off by photon artillery, and the detailed bustle of a developed base’s cargo ships and construction bases buzzing to and fro. You might even appreciate the unfolding storyline about a new alien race, and some interesting alien ships and structures. And if you were desperate to find some redeeming value, there’s always this: After playing NEW WORLDS, suddenly STAR TREK ARINDA and FORCE COMMANDER don’t look so bad.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 48MB hard drive space. 

Support: DirectX 3D Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2 or 3 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: 14 Degrees East • $45 • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.
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HUNT OR BE HUNTED IN
THE CATACOMBS OF ROME
Exiled to the Eastern Front, with only a Panzer General for company

**Burnt Ground**

Panzer General was a game that infuriated hardcore wargamers while enthralling almost everyone else. The game played like a cross between chess and Stratego, had no discernible scale, and borrowed the conventions of wargaming while at the same time giving that hobby a great big raspberry. The genius of the design was that it reduced all the complication of traditional wargames to a simple formula, while retaining an emphasis on strategy. Only the most cantankerous history buffs were immune to its pleasures. Three sequels later, that appeal is fading.

Go With What You Know

Panzer General III: Scorched Earth is not an expansion pack. Ownership of previous games in the series is not required. In fact, it's not even recommended, because if you have played any of the previous games, you'll probably end up wondering why this game wasn't released for half the price as an add-on for Panzer General 3D: Assault. The core game is exactly the same, and while the scene has shifted to the Eastern Front, precious little else has changed. There are four new campaigns (two German and two Soviet), and a Battle Generator that will let you create scenarios with British, American, German, or Soviet units, but besides that and a few improved 3D effects that you'll barely notice, calling Panzer General III: Scorched Earth a "new game" is like calling vinyl "genuine Naugahyde.”

Scorched Earth does have its moments. The strategy of coordinating units (catching infantry in the open with your tanks, bringing up artillery to reduce towns, protecting your assets with air cover) requires thought and planning, and is no walkover, either. While not even close to a military simulation, the Panzer General series has an almost puzzle-like feel, and if you're into strategy puzzles and military history, so much the better. The new campaigns can be very tough, meaning that it'll take several playings of each scenario in order to advance. When you do, you'll be able to "promote" chosen leaders, which allows them to perform more actions each turn with the units under their command. This role-playing-like character building used to be tied to the units themselves, but was shifted to a leader-driven system in Panzer General 3D: Assault. The old system, however, had a bit more character.

It's Not Easy Being 3D

The biggest problem with the game, though, stems from SSI's assumption that 3D graphics would make the game better. In Panzer General, it's exactly the opposite. While some may enjoy seeing their tanks kick up little clouds of dust, this amusement turns sour when the ambiguous 3D view makes you overlook an anti-tank gun, or misjudge a mouse click for a bomber attack. The map can be rotated so that the view is nearly vertical, but there isn't a functional 3D view. A 2D "strategy map" (what does that make the normal map?) allows viewing of the entire battlefield, but it primarily serves as a general overview and "jump map" for repositioning the camera.

Panzer General III: Scorched Earth is, minor improvements notwithstanding, a box with four campaigns that could have been included in Panzer General 3D: Assault. Those who have not yet sampled the addictive pleasures of this system are encouraged to pass this one by and find a copy of Panzer General II.
The only football game in town soars to new heights.

Wide Open

With Microsoft's decision to scrap this year's version of NFL Fever, PC football fans are faced with the old Henry Ford Choice: they can have any football game they want, as long as it's MADDEN 2001.

Fortunately, you need not fret over this lack of options. Because whether you choose to play MADDEN 2001, or you decide to play MADDEN 2001, either way you'll be getting the finest title in the series, and quite possibly the finest PC football game ever. But what's really interesting is that this year's PC version -- provided you have some serious horses under your hood -- actually looks better than EA's ballyhooed PlayStation 2 version, mostly due to the PlayStation's lack of anti-aliasing and to the lower screen resolution of the TV.

Smooth...

The gameplay in both games is virtually the same, with incredibly fluid action that moves faster than any other game on the market. Unlike some previous versions, you can actually establish a running game, though its success -- much as on the real gridiron -- is largely dependent on your offensive line. The passing game works extremely well, too; you have to check safeties, check for man or zone coverage, and then throw the ball on the break to your receivers. And the blitz creates some terrifying moments.

Although a little unbalanced, the juking moves (controlled by the left- and right-shoulder buttons on the Microsoft gamepad) make for many oohs, aahs, and red faces on opponents. Better still, sure-bet plays appear to be absent, although on defense, you'll probably play it safe and consistently pick the same pass and run defenses.

Win or Else

Like last year's version, MADDEN 2001 allows wanna-be Dikkas to manage their teams' on-field strategies, as well as personnel (including free-agent signings) and front office decision-making. Both the single-season or an extended franchise mode. Also as in last year's version: You really can make like Dikka and get the big heave-ho if your team underperforms.

Where EA really demonstrates its appreciation for the PC market is in the online suite that allows you to engage in an entire season or career play, both playing games and managing personnel. It works well, although finding your way into the league is a little tricky. Players interested in just setting up single too much, which makes tackling extremely difficult; and the game tends to crash mid-game.

The only other aspect of the game that needs serious work is the game commentary, which is horribly inadequate. Pat Summerall and John Madden sound under-sampled and flat, and their commentary appears to consist of no more than 20 lines of dialogue.

But for the most part, MADDEN nails everything else right on the head. In fact, we have only one suggestion for next year's version. The Great Games mode, which allows you to play through over 25 classic games, needs to allow you to play through all the games without successfully completing each one. The infamous Heidi game -- where the Raiders scored 14 points in the last 1:30 -- is impossible, and you can't get to any of the other games until you beat this one. Maybe EA could incorporate a challenge mode, which awards you a score based on how many Great Games you win? CGW

Requirements: Pentium 200Mhz, 32 MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space. Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 400 Mhz, 64 MB RAM

3D Support: Direct3D Multiplayer Support: Internet, LAN, modem, and same-system.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • SRO • ESRB Rating: Everyone

DECEMBER 2000 • cgm.gamerspot.com • COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
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SPEC OPS II: OPERATION BRAVO

Game Development Lesson #1: A sequel should not build upon the problems of the original. You should stay off the Harleys until you've taken the training wheels off your Schwinn. Not following this simple law will make you fall down and go boom — much the way SPEC OPS II: THE GREEN BERETS did. Don't our fighting boys deserve better?

Enter SPEC OPS II: OPERATION BRAVO, a free downloadable expansion of SO2 that upgrades your game into the PLATINUM COLLECTION, the retail re-release of the SPEC OPS series (along with a strategy guide). OPERATION BRAVO contains 25 nicely rendered missions in jungle, desert, urban, and arctic terrain. But much of the game's interface has been watered down, with fewer menus, FMVs, pre-mission briefings, and operatives (there's only two instead of four — making some missions almost impossible to finish). OPERATION BRAVO sees minor tweaks in both AI and gameplay, but your AI buddies will shoot beyond the line-of-sight while ignoring orders. Sadly, most of the bugs (and shoddy AI and gameplay) still remain from SO2, especially when using D3D. Both my Pentium II and III constantly crashed during play. Even though former SO2 owners can get OPERATION BRAVO for free, it's time we call in the firing squad and shoot this game dead. —Raphael Liberatore

DUKES OF HAZZARD: RACING FOR HOME

Genre: Racing • Publisher: South Peak Interactive • Developer: Sinister Games • $30 www.southpeak.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Reviewers often slam games inspired by movies or TV shows for not being true to the originals. Rest assured, this piece of crapware is completely true to the original TV series from whence it was spawned: It's stupid, insipid, cheap, boring, and ultimately a waste of time. Oh yeah, and it will not your brain.

Rather than engage in the debate of why this game was made in the first place, let's just take a look at what makes it suck. First, it's a PlayStation port, and a very bad one to boot. The graphics engine is atrocious, with glaring anasms between polygons, low-res textures, and chunky frame-rates that put it on a par with anything pre-NEED FOR SPEED. On top of that, the missions are extremely repetitive (just like episodes of the show), and usually offer nothing more than getting from point A to point B while either ramming someone or evading the cops. Plus, you only get to bust out your dynamite-equipped arrows once! All these country bumpkins seem to do is deliver mortgages and get mistaken for bad guys. Garsh, will those old Duke boys ever quit? God, I hope so. —Tom Price

Dirty Deeds, Done to Sheep

www.empire-us.com
COOL NEW FEATURES IN WINDOWS ME, BUT IT'S NOT A MUST-HAVE FOR GAMERS

Don’t You Need ME?

The heart of PC gaming is, well, the PC: an often-contrarian beast that at too frequently stands between you and your games. Meanwhile, the neighbor’s game console just fires up and goes. Sure, our games are usually cooler, and deeper, but getting dragged into driver hell when all you really wanted was a little taste of UNREAL TOURNAMENT is about as pleasant as a prostate exam.

Enter Windows ME, Microsoft’s latest incarnation of the “Windows 9X” dynasty. As Windows 9X has evolved, it has steadily improved, added features, and generally gotten more stable. But a major plumbing overhaul won’t happen until the next version of Windows 2000, code-named Whistler, due sometime late next year. So Windows ME is the swan song for the Windows 9X Oses.

Is Windows ME an essential upgrade for gamers? In short, no, not really. It does add some cool features to Windows, but if your system is running fine with Windows 98, the upgrade isn’t necessary. An exception would be if you’re looking to build out your own Pentium-IV system, since Windows ME is Pentium-IV-aware, whereas 98 is not. But given the short supply of those chips, and that the top system makers will snarf up the lion’s share of them, home-built Pentium-IV rigs are a ways away.

My System’s Keeper

ME’s new features include system utilities to help maintain OS stability—like System Restore and System File Protection—as well as Microsoft’s Movie Maker and an enhanced Media Player that now has trippy visualizers like WinAmp. Also new are several Wizards for adding functionality like ISDN, home networking, and digital cameras and scanners. Of all the new stuff found here, System Restore and System File Protection are the most valuable to gamers, since they’re intended to eliminate the annual Windows re-install ritual.

System File Protection (SFP) essentially “plays goalie,” guarding about 800 system files and monitoring application installs. If an app’s installer tries to over-write a critical system file, SFP first copies that file to another folder before letting the installer continue (the installer could crash if

Win98 vs. ME Performance Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Category</th>
<th>Windows 98SE</th>
<th>Windows ME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3D GameGauge Score</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional 3D Tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D WinBench 2000 (1280x1024x32)</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>72.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3D WinBench 2000 (1600x1200x32)</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUAKE 3 (1600x1200x32)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUAKE 3 (640x480x16)</td>
<td>134.7</td>
<td>135.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2D Graphics Tests</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB99 Biz Graphics WinMark</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
not allowed to write all of its files). After installation, SFP compares the two files, and if the new files are older or tweaked versions of the originals, SFP copies the originals back, ensuring a basic system stability.

Smooth Ride In

It takes about 45 minutes to install ME, which looks almost the same as a Windows 98 installation. Unfortunately, the ME disc isn't bootable, so I had to hunt down a DOS CD-ROM driver to start the installation. They call this progress? Windows 98 CDs have been bootable for some time now, so if your machine supports using the CD-ROM as a boot device, you can launch the install right off the CD-ROM. That hiccup aside, the install went painlessly, and Windows ME discovered and installed drivers for my somewhat obscure sound card, and the motherboard-down Ethernet adapter.

Performance: More of the Same

We ran Windows ME through our usual benchmark obstacle course, which includes 3D's WinBench, 3D WinBench 2000, and CD and Audio WinBench. We of course also tested with CGW's own 3D GameGauge, a suite of games that we run to measure real-world game performance. The test system was a 1.1GHz T-Bird Athlon, running on Gigabyte's G-7A motherboard that uses Via's KT-133 chipset. The box was equipped with a GeForce 2 GTS 3D card with 32MB of DDR memory running version 6.21 of nVidia's reference drivers, and 256MB of PC133 SDRAM for system memory.

what we found is that Windows ME, for the most part, runs about even with a clean install of Windows 98SE for 3D gaming performance. Windows ME was about 4% faster on 3D GameGauge performance. In additional 3D graphics tests, the two OSes were even on both high-resolution tests that stress the 3D card, and on low-resolutions tests, which exercise the CPU, chipset, and memory. Through the course of testing, both operating systems appeared equally stable.

A Miraculous Recovery… Well, Mostly

To test System Restore, we created a restore point, then installed some games. We changed some of the system's network settings, adding the IPX protocol and a Netware client. Next, we took the system back to our initial restore point. We found that System Restore removed all Registry keys from the three installed games, but only deleted some of the game files from the hard drive. The games were only installed and not played, so there weren't any save-games that an installer wouldn't have known about; this partial deletion struck us as odd. The games were also removed from the uninstall list. So, you'd still need to go and delete the games' folders yourself, but the Registry appeared to be completely clean of any keys from these games. System Restore also reset the network settings to their original state, removing both the IPX protocol stack and the Netware client.

All told, Windows ME does add some valuable features for gamers, but they aren't essential. If you're running Windows 98, or if you think you need a fresh installation of Win98, you should consider upgrading to Windows ME (alternatively, Symantec's $60 Ghost utility offers System Restore features for Windows 98). But if you and your system are living in harmony with Win 98, keep it.

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GADGET OF THE MONTH

What the hell does an electric scooter have to do with computer gaming? Um, nothing. But I saw one buzzing around the streets of San Francisco, and said, "It will be mine, oh yes." ZapWorld makes "alternative transportation" vehicles, all electric, that range from the Zappy to motorized bicycles all the way up to a full-sized motorcycle. They even make small cars. OK, well, golf carts. The Zappy can move along at a pavement-searing 15MPH, and can go several hours per charge. In a congested city, this is just the thing for getting from point A to point B, provided there are no hills (up or down) between you and your destination. At that point, the Zappy rides you. But, the handle bars fold down, and at 97 pounds, you can schlep it onto a bus or the subway.

ZapWorld Zappy • $800 • www.zapworld.net

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Clean Cut

VOODOO5™ - Full-Scene Anti-Aliasing for the smoothest, sharpest images and the cleanest cuts.

Power Never Looked So Beautiful

www.godgames.com

www.3dfx.com
**Killer Rigs**

**Power Rig**

- **Component**
  - Case: Antec SX-850
  - Motherboard: Asus CUC2
  - CPU: Intel Pentium-III 1.6GHz
  - Memory: Kingston 256MB PC3200 RDRAM
  - Hard Drive: Quantum Atlas 10K - II
  - CD-ROM/DVD: Pioneer for SCSI DVD-304S
  - Monitor: Mitsubishi DiamondPro 22”
  - Flight Joystick: CH-16 Combatstick USB

**Lean Machine**

- **Component**
  - Case: Antec GemSTONE Cite
  - Motherboard: ASUS A7V
  - CPU: AMD Athlon 900 w/cooling fan
  - Memory: 256MB PC133 SDRAM
  - Hard Drive: Maxtor Diamondmax 6600+ 660G
  - CD-ROM/DVD: Pioneer DVD-105S
  - Monitor: Sony Trinitron CRT 17”
  - Flight Joystick: CH-16 Combatstick USB

**Overview**

**Total w/o Game Controllers: $4,977**

- Flight Joystick: CH-16 Combatstick USB
- Game Controllers: Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital

**Total: $5,472**

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*Prices listed are average low quotes from www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. Lists compiled by Dave Salvator.*
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 3dfx’s Voodoo 3 5500 PCI board. At around $280, the V3 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 Ultra 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, using the GeForce 2 GTS chipset; the 32MB version comes in at just under $300.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS ON PENTIUM-IV AND DDR SDRAM**

We’ve been testing Pentium-IV systems for next month’s high-end Ultimate Gaming Machine shootout, and the early numbers are provocative. A 1.5GHz Pentium-IV is about 44% faster than the fastest 666MHz Pentium-III in this month’s system roundup, using 3D WinBench’s Processor Test – which tests CPU performance handling 3D data. But that same Pentium-IV was only about 11% faster than a Thunderbird Athlon 1.1GHz on the same test. Given Pentium-IV’s 36% clock advantage, my guess is that Athlon will fare well against Pentium-IV, given equal clock rates. More on this next month.

Early performance data on AMD’s new 760 chipset shows that DDR SDRAM used as system memory could challenge RAMBUS for performance supremacy in the coming months. The 760 offers a 266MHz front-side bus, which could allow for system memory to hit a whopping 2.2GB/sec of peak bandwidth. At press time, chipset maker VIA had just announced its Apollo Pro-266 and Apollo KT-266 chipsets for Pentium-III and Athlon respectively. ALI is also reportedly at work on DDR chipsets for both platforms.

Intel is developing its own DDR chipsets for release in 2001, responding to customer demand. And while Intel isn’t walking away from RAMBUS, it would certainly appear that they’re hedging their bets.

**Power Never Looked So Beautiful**

**VOODOO5™ - Full-Scene Anti-Aliasing**

for the cleanest, sharpest images and the smoothest moves in team play.
Gettin' an Earful

The latest Turtle Beach sound card flirts with perfection

Turtle Beach Santa Cruz

**TURTLE BEACH SANTA CRUZ**

Requirements: Free PCI slot, Windows 95 or 98, Pentium 75MHz or better with 16MB or more RAM.

Price: $100  Manufacturer: Turtle Beach  Contact: www.turtlebeach.com

**VIDEOLOGIC SIROCCO SPEAKERS**

Requirements: Sound card with 2- or 4-channel output, and somewhere to put the rear-channel speakers.

Price: $450 through Voyetra/Turtle Beach

Manufacturer: VideoLogic  Contact: www.videologic.com

This card is damn near perfect. The laundry list of features is nearly endless. On the gaming side, there's support for EAX 2.0 and Sensaura enhancements to DirectSound3D. For MP3 fans, there's hardware-accelerated MP3 playback. The card can support either a full 5.1 speaker rig, or you can set up one of the ports for digital output to a Dolby AC-3 receiver. And it even supports hardware MIDI daughter cards? What's not to like? Okay, you do have to type in the serial number if you want to install the software. And, the card could have had dB markers. Big deal.

The Santa Cruz uses a true digital-signal processor from Crystal. Since DSP's are programmable, the card can support a vast array of functionality, as noted. The audio positioning seems very good, both in synthetic testing and in games. Since the card supports EAX as well as DirectSound3D, there's already a healthy library of games that will take advantage of the card. There's also very little noise generated when you crank up the speakers with no audio being played back. There are hints at future expandability, with a connector on the rear of the card mysteriously labeled "upgrade header."

On the software side, there's a lightweight bundle of audio utilities, but the most compelling piece is the sophisticated, yet easy-to-use mixer that installs with the card. One of the coolest features is Sensaura's "virtual ear," which allows you to tune 3D audio effects (when using headphones) to your own preferences.

The only (minor) concern is CPU utilization. On an 800MHz Pentium III, the Santa Cruz uses about 2.2% of the CPU — roughly twice that of a Sound Blaster Live. However, the actual number is so low as to be in the noise, and it's unlikely to have any impact on game performance. On the plus side, the MP3 acceleration will mean better performance than the Live when playing back MP3 files. —Loyd Case

Why would a company called "VideoLogic" make speakers? Then again, is the hokey-pokey really what it's all about? Also, some questions will always remain a mystery. But VideoLogic — of PowerVR fame — has hurled themselves headlong into the speaker business, and its Sirocco Crossfires are a solid first outing, albeit not an unqualified one.

The Crossfires show up with a separate power-amp. This is a first for PC speakers, as the amp more often than not lives in the busy unit. The overall construction of the speaker housings and fittings seemed solid until I went to connect the first wire, when the connector clamp promptly popped off — making for an aggravating ten minutes of meatball surgery to get the damn thing back together. But after that, the rest of the assembly was uneventful.

Another noteworthy feature is its multiple inputs — one four-channel, and two two-channel inputs that can be run in "quad" mode, which duplicates the signals from the front channels in the two rear channels. There was a delightful absence of power-brick or snap-on-erope power supplies, and the amp's controls are fairly straightforward. Extras include a headphone jack, as well as a front-mounted, line-level, 1/8" WalkMan-style input for connecting an MP3 player or DiscMan.

These speakers are very clean beasts, delivering uncolored sound for the most part on both music CDs and game audio. There was good frequency response; missing, though, were thunderous lows. The 60-watt RMS amp can pump out good volume, but you have to make it work to get there. As for running DVD's 5.1 audio through them, you'll either need a decoder that can "ghost" a center channel, or to run your decoder's center-channel output into your television or PC speakers to get that all-important center channel going.

Despite some good design decisions, the Crossfires are pretty solid but not the best 4.1 offering out there. That honor still belongs to Klipsch. What's more, Klipsch's ProMedia V2-400s are a good bit cheaper than the Crossfires. But with a bigger power amp and a lower price tag, the Crossfires could be serious contenders in the next go-round. —Dave Salvator
When it comes to your gaming display, bigger is undoubtedly better. Princeton's revamped Arcadia line of monitors took that notion to heart, coming in 27", 32", and 36" sizes. We took a gander at the 27" model and liked what we saw.

The Arcadia actually pulls double duty as computer monitor and cable-ready TV tuner. It's adorned with multiple inputs, including two VGA inputs, one of which is front-mounted for a quick PC hook-up; one component video; and one S-video input with matching stereo-audio inputs. Missing, however, was a component video input, something you'll want to get the best image quality from your DVD-player. S-video is good, but component video is better. Princeton also decided to put stereo speakers into Arcadia, and they sound pretty much like you'd expect built-in monitor speakers to sound—not bad, but not good enough to use full-time.

Arcadia supports a maximum resolution of 1024x768 at 60Hz, but it seemed more comfortable running at 800x600, where the refresh rate can go up to more eye-pleasing 75Hz. The Arcadia is HDTV-ready, supporting 480P, 720P, and 1080i resolutions—though you'll have to use the VGA connection to run Arcadia at HDTV resolutions. So, this one isn't destined for your study or office. Where it would fare well is in your living room as the nerve center of a home-entertainment system.

Image quality was very solid in a run through standard video-tests, as was color saturation and hue in both games and DVD movies. Gaming on big displays definitely rules. UNREAL TOURNAMENT on the 27" Arcadia, audio cranked way loud, all the lights off...you get the idea.

If you're looking for a PC-friendly living room display, consider the Arcadia line. The omission of component video is a pretty serious oversight, but that aside, Arcadia is otherwise a solid and inexpensive multi-purpose display.

—George Jones

Microsoft Strategic Commander

Requirements: Windows 98, free USB port, 256MB hard drive space.
Price: $99
Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.microsoft.com/hardware

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Put down this magazine and go to your television. No, I mean it. Go over to your television and turn it on. How long did it take to “boot”? Probably about three to five seconds. Now, turn your PC on, and start timing. How long did it take to boot? Probably two to three minutes. In this month’s UGM roundup, all but one of the Windows ME systems tested to a usable desktop in under 50 seconds, whereas the one Windows 98SE box we got took two minutes to get its act together. How does Windows ME do it? Well, the answer lies in what it doesn’t do. Microsoft studied the boot sequence, and looked for ways to streamline it. They determined a minimal set of drivers needed to get your system up and running. They also got rid of real-mode (DOS) driver-loading altogether. That’s great for those of you who buy Windows ME, but what if you don’t? Not to worry, friend. Stealing a page from the Windows ME play book, here are some tips on how to get your system to boot faster.

Who Am I?

In some sense, your PC poses the Question Of The Ages every time you power up. Your system’s BIOS stores information about your system and its settings, but it also auto-detects system components like amount of memory, hard drives and CD-ROM drives, and your CPU type and speed. Your BIOS also performs a Power-On Self Test (POST) to make sure that key system components are functioning. But many BIOSes have an option for a “quick” POST that takes less time, and lets the BIOS do a quicker “hand off” to Windows. To get into your BIOS when your system first starts up, hit Escape. Then press the hot key to get into the BIOS, which is usually Delete or F2, though yours may be different.

Another BIOS speed-up is to change your boot order, which is usually done under the BIOS Boot Options screen, though it varies from BIOS to BIOS. By default, most systems first seek the floppy-drive, and most now also check the CD-ROM drive to see if there’s a bootable CD-ROM in it before hitting the hard drive and beginning to load Windows. Change the boot order to make your hard drive the first boot device, so you won’t waste time hitting empty floppy and CD-ROM drives before going on to the hard drive. If you need to boot from a floppy or CD-ROM in the event of a disaster, go back into the BIOS and rearrange the boot order accordingly.

Get Real

Another place to shave startup time is in a couple of dusty old files called AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS, holdovers from the bad-old DOS days. Believe it or not, some hardware still loads real-mode drivers, usually sound cards that want to provide Sound Blaster compatibility in old DOS games. In some cases, your CD-ROM drive may be loading its old real-mode driver and MSCDEX, the DOS CD-ROM interface driver. Unless you’re still playing DUKE NUKEM 3D, odds are you don’t need real-mode driver support for either device. So go into SysEdit (Start Menu → Run→ sysedit), and take a look at these two files. If your computer is loading real-mode drivers, put the word “REM” in front of the commands to load these drivers. Don’t delete them, as you may want them again.

Lighten Your Tray

After real-mode drivers load, Windows continues to load other protected-mode drivers, and then loads applications into your system tray, located on the right of your Start menu toolbar. One unfortunate trend in Internet software is that apps like RealPlayer, WinAmp, and Shockwave seem to think they need to be in your system tray. Well, they don’t. Another culprit is game-controller and mouse-control-panel software. If you actually make use of these applications, let them load. If you don’t, get rid of them. Your mouse will run fine, and most game controllers will too. If a controller starts giving you trouble, you may have to load its tray applet.

How do you get rid of these pesky tray applets? Go to your Start menu, select Run, and type MSCONFIG. This utility is in Windows 98 and ME, and gives you “line-item veto” power over all applets. Go to the Startup tab, and from here, you can decide which applets you want to load. There are several items you should definitely load—like ScanRegistry and TaskMonitor, both of which are essential OS components. When in doubt about whether a component should load or not, leave it be. After you’ve trimmed the obvious fat, you can try the questionable applets one by one. If your system has trouble rebooting, you’ll want to re-enable that applet’s loading.

Windows 98 users can download WinBench 99 at www.zidbop.com, which has a utility called Startup Manager. It, like MSCONFIG, gives you that same line-item veto power.

Will this combination of tweaks get your boot-time down to under 50 seconds? No. But could it shave 30 seconds off your current boot-time? You betcha.

Dave’s Mix

1. Encounter: Pepper Adams
2. Star Trek Elite Force
3. The Pattern on the Stone, J. Daniel Hillie
4. Ult (It Never Ends...)
5. Madden 2001
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!
The Disappearing CD-ROM Drive

I just got a CD-R/W drive, which I installed on my secondary IDE channel. Now, Windows only sees the CD-R/W drive, but not my normal CD-ROM drive. What did I do wrong?

Each of your two IDE controllers can have two devices on them, a master and a slave. It sounds like you probably have your CD-R/W drive set as the slave device (set with jumpers on the back of the drives), and that you put it first in the IDE “chain.” The problem is that when the IDE controller, it sees the slave device as the end of the chain, and can’t see the master device that’s wired at the end of your ribbon cable. So you need to either swap which device is the master and reconnect your ribbon cable the same way, or reverse the order of the two connected drivers so that the master device is first on the ribbon cable, followed by the slave. When you reboot your system, Windows should see both devices.

Freeze Frame

I recently upgraded my system and I’m having some problems. I have a Pentium-III 500Mhz, and a Creative Annihilator 2 32MB video card with 128MB of RAM. My screen freezes when I play any 3D games. The freeze is only momentary most times, and I also hear the hard drive working when it’s happening. Any ideas of what’s causing this?

Hmm. Your config sounds like my system at home. I’ve also run into this type of problem, and after much primal screaming I started looking at how much RAM was free in Windows. It turns out that after loading, Windows has very little “free” memory left. This was disconcerting, to say the least. After some looking, I found a utility called TweakAll, which is available at www.abtonshaid.com/tweakwin.html. This is a very cool freeware utility that lets you tweak Windows in many useful ways, but as with any tweaking utility, tweak only one thing at a time, and BE CAREFUL! That way, if things go badly, you’ll know which tweak is the culprit. TweakAll has a function that recovers locked memory, and they recommend attempting to recover about half of your physical memory. So on your system, you should have about 64MB of free memory before going into any game. I’ve been doing this, and suddenly frame rates in high heat 2001, OT, and other 3D games are a lot less choppy.

Beige Box Feedback

I got a good bit of mail about last month’s column on boring case design, along with some good pointers to places to find cooler cases. In particular is a company called ColorCases (www.colorcases.com), whose Millennium case, part of their 200 Series of cases, has an Apple G4-like oven-door side panel that allows quick access to all parts of the motherboard. I also got some mail pointing me to this site: www.virtualhideout.net/cool_case/, which is a gallery of users’ custom-tweaked cases. I haven’t gotten my hands on one yet, but believe me, I will. If the fit and finish on this case is solid, look for this guy to be the new Killer Rig case for both systems, since it comes in at $99. Thanks for writing in, and if you see any other cool case designs, send me mail at cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com.

TECH TIP

Try a Drink From a Fire-Hose

Just got that spiffy new DSL or cable modem installed? Losing the amazing speed gain? It really is a world apart from the 56K doldrums, and life is good as a lowing bastard. But now that you’ve gotten a taste of speed, do you find yourself craving more? Well, you can open up your Net connection and milk it for even more speed by making a few Registry tweaks to your TCP/IP settings.

The two settings you need to tweak are called DefaultRowWindow (TCP/IP Receive Window) and MTU (maximum transmission unit). As with any system tweaks that involve tinkering with the Registry, make backup copies of the Registry’s two files (SYSTEM.DAT and USER.DAT, which live in the C:\WINDOWS folder, or the folder where you’ve installed Windows) in a separate sub-folder. That way, if the tweaks don’t work out, you can easily restore your Registry to its pre-tweaked state. Now head over to www.dslreports.com/tweaks and follow their excellent step-by-step guide to getting your connection tuned.

Mileage will vary, a lot, but my Mindspring DSL connection — rated at a minimum service of 384Kbps downstream — went from a downstream data-rate between 300-400Kbps (already good) on long downloads, to a whopping 1Mbit/sec (about tripled). Check it out and let me know how you fare.
Gaming With These Speakers Is Almost Like Cheating

With the FourPointSurround™ FPS2000 Digital speakers, winning is within your power. You will hear your enemy sneaking towards you from any direction. The FourPointSurround™ FPS2000 Digital speakers surround you with razor-sharp sound clarity, power for the most intense gaming, and bass that will kick you in the chest. If that's too much to handle, the FourPointSurround™ FPS1800 or the FourPointSurround™ FPS1500 speakers deliver true-to-life surround sound that no real gamer should be without.

You can still choose to “play by the book” - just don’t come whining to us when you lose.
Crimson Skies
Air combat maneuvers of the rich and famous
by David Chong

Learning the following advanced maneuvers will give you an edge over your opponents in dangerous skies. No single maneuver fits all situations, so it's important to be able to perform all of them. The art of applying the right maneuver in a given situation comes with practice and the careful reading of the Gaining Position section, opposite.

The Barrel Roll

Barrel rolls are useful for bleeding speed, or for adjusting your position without altering your course. A barrel roll is essentially a regular aileron roll, plus elevator input. To perform a barrel roll, roll about 30 degrees in the direction you want to start the roll. Pull up on the stick, and simultaneously throw the ailerons in the opposite direction from which you started the roll. Apply the opposite rudder to keep your nose pointed in roughly the same direction. You'll begin to arc up and over in a sideways loop, as if the top of your plane was stuck to the outside of a rolling barrel. Zero your controls when you return to level flight. You can stop your lateral movement at any time by zeroing the elevators and rudder, and rolling upright.

Use the barrel roll to help you stay behind a slow-moving target when you are in danger of passing it up. The barrel roll will blend off your speed while maintaining your firing position throughout the maneuver.

The Immelman

Much like a half-loop, the Immelman is a climbing turn. However, a simple aileron roll allows you to turn in any direction you wish instead of being limited to doubling back upon your original course. To perform an Immelman, start a half-loop and zero your pitch rate as soon as you're pointing directly up into the sky. Now, execute an aileron roll to point your lift line in the direction you want to exit the maneuver. Once the top of your head is pointing in the way you want to go, resume pulling back on the stick to complete the loop. Recover as usual to complete the Immelman.

TIP alert

The Immelman is a great way to shake a pesky bandit off your tail. If you're low on E, just perform an Immelman in reverse order, diving instead of climbing to execute a split-S.

The Yo-Yo

The yo-yo is a high-G turn combined with vertical movement. By spending some of your turn's arc in the vertical, you effectively reduce your total turn radius. To perform a high yo-yo, roll your plane slightly upwards, approximately 30 degrees above the horizontal axis. Your nose will travel through an arc above the horizon as you pass through 180 degrees. You can also reverse the maneuver, dipping your wings below the horizon to perform a low yo-yo.

TIP alert

Use the yo-yo to get an even tighter turn out of your airplane than you can get with the high-G turn when that extra cornering can spell the difference between victory and defeat. For an even faster turn rate, kick the rudder into the turn on the ascending half of the yo-yo.
Gaining Position

As complex as it all may seem, air combat really boils down to shooting the other guy while avoiding getting shot yourself. The best way to do that is to get on the fighter's tail. This brings your weapons to bear and allows you to follow your opponent's movements, while simultaneously staying out of reach of your enemy's weapons. There are two basic methods to achieve the all-important trailing position, and they are outlined below.

Turn and Burn

The quintessential picture of aerial combat involves two foes twisting and turning through the air, desperately clawing their noses around to try and get a shot off. The key to victory is an aircraft's turning radius: The tighter you can turn your plane, the quicker you'll be able to get your nose around on your enemy. Turn fights are also known by the slang name "knife fights," because of the short distances at which they are fought. Energy management is critical, as the turns will bleed your E quickly. Be aware of other enemy planes in the area, as you'll make a good target while you're struggling through a tight turn.

The high-G turn is the cornerstone of a knife fight. It gets your nose around quickly, and pulls your turn radius in as tight as possible. Put your lift line on the enemy plane (centering the spyglass on the top edge of your screen is a sure way to do this), and just pull back on the stick. If your plane's turn radius is tighter than your enemy's, then that's all you need to do.
The Powerslide


The boom and zoom, or B&Z for short, is the
antithesis of the turn fight. Whereas turn fights
are fought at short range and at ever-decreasing
speed and altitude, the B&Z pilot seeks to perform
high-speed slashing attacks in which only a very short
period of time is spent within gun range of the
enemy. Although you
won’t have long to line
up your target for a
shot, if executed
properly, your enemy will
never have the oppor-
tunity to return the
favor. The B&Z is per-
fected for those times
when you’re outnumbered
by enemy planes. It minimizes
your exposure to
enemy fire, and pres-
serves an energy
advantage over planes
that you aren’t even targeting at
the moment.

Begin a B&Z at
a higher speed
and altitude than
your target. Turn
toward the
ever-displayed enemy and per-
form a sustained
dive at 30–40
degrees. As you
approach your
foe, try to point
your gunsight ahead of
the target, so that you’re
flying toward where they will be, instead of where
they are. Don’t leave your corrections to the last
moment, or you’ll bleed speed and allow your
enemy to pull in on your six as you extend away.
When you’ve got your enemy in gun range, squeeze
off a long burst, and concentrate on one specific
part of the target to maximize damage.

If you’re not facing any other opponents, and
you’ve set yourself up on the target’s six, go ahead
and throttle back to stay on the
tail of your enemy. A barrel roll will help shed
some of your excess speed. On the other hand, if
other enemy aircraft threaten, complete the
“zoom” portion of the maneuver. Just before you
pass your target, pull up and away, using all of
the speed that you built up in the dive to regain
some altitude. Your target should not be able to
follow you straight up into the sky. If you are
followed, perform an Immelman to get back on
the tail of your opponent, who will be quite slow
in gaining altitude, giving you and your guns a
ripe target. After you’ve extended out of gun
range, use an Immelman to set up another B&Z
attack.

TIP alert
You can maximize
your firepower in
the high-speed pass
by using your
longer-range light
aircrafts first, then
switching over to
your short-range
heavy hitters once
you’ve closed the
distance. This tactic
combines a long
firing window with
the heavy firepower
you need to get a
quick kill.
"Think of Sea Dogs as Pirates! in 3D but with more depth to it... Sea Dogs simply looks great."

Gamers Central

"...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.
Homeworld: Cataclysm
Secrets of the Somtaaw arsenal
by Thomas L. McDonald

With a single-player game of 17 missions, each averaging 5 sub-missions, there's a lot to do in HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM. The best way to win is to understand your gear and how to use it. Since The Beast can acquire your technology as you proceed - and use your own ships against you - you need to know the Somtaaw hardware inside-out. Here's a good idea of how to use it.

Worker
The AI routinely goes for resource gatherers (since they're slow and unable to outrun the enemy), so give them a light escort (Acolytes if you're light on resources; ACVs otherwise) set to Neutral tactics. Upgrade them constantly and you'll wind up with a single ship that can harvest, repair, and salvage.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: None

Recon
Think of Recon ships as mobile sensor arrays, and set patrol paths far away from known hot-spots. They're your eyes, no more.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: None

Processor
Send Workers out in teams of four-to-six with a Processor. It speeds collection times by allowing the Worker to drop off loads without returning to the Kuun-Lan, and it can also repair damaged ships. It has light gun turrets and can take on Energy Cannon and Armor Level 2 upgrades. Set a team of escorts - six should do - to guard it in Sphere formation.
Tactics: Neutral
Formation: None

Mimic
A form of recon ship, Mimics are remarkably useful deep-space spies. Unarmed and lightly-armored, they earn their bones by their ability to imitate asteroids or small enemy vessels. Park a Mimic in each asteroid field to keep an eye on enemy Processors. Attaching them to enemy strike wings is less practical, but they do enable you to get a good picture of an enemy fleet. Remember that Proximity Sensors and ships with the Advanced Sensor upgrade can detect them. Their only attack is a light kamikaze strike.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Use singly

Leech
Unless detected by Advanced Sensor upgrades or Proximity Sensors, the Leech will remain unseen while it drains an enemy ship of life, converting that life into RUs for your use. Best used in teams of two to more rapidly drain a target,

The Acolyte is a ferociously useful ship. Not only is it your first-and smaller—fighter, but two Acolytes can "mate" to form the more powerful ACV. One Acolyte turns upside down and links to the other, and keep your dirty comments to yourself. You can also unlink the ACV if you need speed over firepower.

they can take down even large ships.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Broad

Sentinel
Though it has a decent fighting capability, the Sentinel is most effective in groups of twelve to create a closed-sphere force field around the Kuun-Lan. It may also provide protection for carriers, and may be used in a strike force against slow-moving cap ships - where it can provide a small front shield for attacking frigates.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Sphere (or part of Claw strike force)

Acolyte
As your most basic fighter,
Get to the finish line any freakin' way you can.
Acolyte, but in practice, it will be your core attack ship. ACVs can easily defeat Frigates, but are weak against Cruisers.

**Tactics:** Aggressive

**Formation:** Claw

### MCV

There is really no reason to use the MCV, which comes with Holographic Emitter technology. A Mimic can do the same job at a tenth of the cost.

**Tactics:** Don’t use

### Ramming Frigate

You get the Ramming Frigate right away, and may be tempted to build it — since you won’t see a new frigate model until about mission eight. They don’t have weapons, but can be used to push large Cap ships out of a battle. I didn’t find this useful very often, but in heavy battles after mission five or so, you may find that it helps blunt a heavy Capship attack. A more common use is to push Gravwell Generators out of the way, thus breaking up the enemy’s most useful defensive tactic. Never ram a Beast vessel! The Ram will become infected.

**Tactics:** Normal

**Formation:** None

### Multibeam Frigate

For the last half of the game (mission eight onward), this ship will take the place of the ACV as the backbone of the fleet. Not very good against Destroyer-class or above, they're formidable against anything smaller. Even faster ships have a hard time getting past a few Multibeam Generators.

**Tactics:** Aggressive

**Formation:** Sphere or Claw

### Hive Frigates

These are tough to use effectively, since they have a very specific role. Essentially an upgrade of the Drone Frigate in the original HOMEWORLD, the Hive sends out a swarm of six mini-fighter drones. A couple of Hives at the front of an attack can provide some distracting fire for enemy escorts, while Multibeam or ACVs hit the main target. Similarly, at the rear of a fleet retreat they can send up harassing swarms to slow an enemy counter-attack. Keep the ships back and out of the range of Capship weapons. The temptation to rely upon them to protect the Kuun-Lan should be avoided.

**Tactics:** Neutral

**Formation:** Broad or Wall

### Dreadnought

The big, bad-daddy of the fleet is offstage until mission fourteen, and then you usually only get one. Park it in the middle of a monde-escort of ASVs, Multibeam, and Destroyers (with a couple Hives for good measure) and you will be unstoppable. Other large ships are not the problem. Swarms of small and medium ships are the real danger to a Dreadnought.

**Tactics:** Aggressive

**Formation:** Claw

### Carrier

Essential to expanding your fleet size, the Carrier may also be used to carry the fight to the enemy, where it can fix and produce all but the largest cap ships. They're pretty durable and can shake off fighters, but give them an escort anyway.

**Tactics:** Neutral

**Formation:** None

---

The Taidan Ion Beam Frigate is a slow-turner, but its uni-directional beam can chew up Cap ships without fast defender support.

The Acolyte will always have a role at those times when you need a quick defense or a large number of cheap ships. Keep them away from anything with more than one gun; a swarm of Acolytes will still get shredded by Corvettes and Destroyers.

**Tactics:** Aggressive

**Formation:** Claw

---

ACV

Once you get Linking Technology in the middle of mission one, you can use two ACVs to form a single ACV. The ACV can be unlinked if you need the additional speed and maneuverability of the
Falcon Northwest Gaming PCs - Unearth the Power.

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Deus Ex

- In the first mission, choose the GEP-gun instead of the crossbow and the sniper rifle, because it's a handy weapon and you won't find another one until later in the game. Use it to take out bots, cameras, and turrets.
- MJ-12 commandos are tough, but can easily be destroyed by heavy weapons. I personally suggest the Plasma Rifle. Since the Men/Women-In-Black don't run fast, and explode when they die, you'll want to take them out from a distance with the GEP-gun.
- When confronting a huge group of enemies, sometimes you should be creative and try to lure them into a trap of LAMs. They'll kill or weaken most of the enemies, leaving you to either finish them off or to scrounge for guns. - Tommy Chen

For writing a few good tips on DEUS EX, we're giving Tammy a copy of MORTIR from our dwindling cache, a MIGHT & MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN notepad, and an OMNIRON shirt. Enjoy!

ICEWIND DALE

- Mages and clerics are only as good as the spells in their heads. Here's a quick overview of the spells you should take the time to learn, in order to thump those demons and giants and burn good.
- Maga: Early on, depend on Magic Missile and Sleep. If you have the brainspace, throw in an Identification or two. Soon, you'll be running into trolls; spells like Burning Hands, Agamemnon's Scoocher, and Melif's Acid Arrow will serve you well. At level three, the two best spells are Haste (it almost makes the battles unfair in your advantage) and Fireball, with Ice Lance as a backup for when you want to surgically isolate certain enemies. Skull Trap is also a good safety measure for crowds to lay down. When your mage is at a high level (nine or higher), Chronomitic Orb becomes a very powerful spell.
- Mid-level, you'll run into a lot of spells involving Emotions and Summoning. Learn as many Summoning spells as you can (real summons, as opposed to Shadow Monsters). The enemies you summon serve as great cannon fodder or distractions to draw the enemy away from your real demon-slayers.
- Emotion: Hope and Emotion: Courage are worth learning for battle preparation purposes. Out of all the Summon Elemental spells, the Fire Elemental is the best, since it deals great damage and has enough hit points to last most battles. As for level five-and-up spells, it then becomes a matter of preference.
- Prayers: Besides healing, the best overall spells for clerics to memorize are party boosters. At high enough levels, you can stack on Recitation, Prayer, and Bless for a substantial set of bonus improvements to your party. As for other spells, Magical Stone is a nice "guaranteed projectile hit" early on. Protection From Evil helps against undead, and Miscast Magic is good for enemy mages. Later on, you'll want to stock up on Protection From Fire/Cold, as you'll be facing critters with those designations.
- Druids should use Flame Blade for trolls early on, and later, keep an eye out for Static Charge and Insect Swarm. Stock up on Animal Summings, and if your Druid is an active fighter, then Entropy Shield will be your best friend in high-level combat.
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MADDEN 2001

Know and love the left and right jukes. (They're the left and right shoulder buttons on the Microsoft SideWinder gamepad.) They will drastically boost the efficiency of your outside running game. Run a sweep or pitch-out, and then as you approach the line of scrimmage and/or secondary, juke in from the sidelines, out of the tacklers' way. Don't even bother with the spin move.

Unless your secondary is the pits, a good all-purpose pass defense is the Nickle Under 2 Man. You get a decent four-man rush, tight-man defense, and an extra cornerback. The MADDEN AI tends to pass more often than run, so it's a good first-down defense as well. It's also solid against the run.

A great run defense is the 4-3 Run Zone. It also compensates decently against the short pass.

A good goal line defense is the Goal Line Blitz B. It serves well against the inside or outside run.

The key to successful passing is twofold. First, don't take more than a ten-yard drop. You'll only make it that much harder for the quarterback to hit his target. Second, you have to throw the ball when the receiver makes his break. On out- or in-patterns, wait for the receiver to cut. As soon as he does, riffle the ball to him. On fly and corner patterns — the easiest to time and the easiest to complete against man coverage — make your throw as soon as the receiver cuts up.

In general, hard throws work better than lob passes.

DIABLO II

Diablo himself is quite the tough guy; face it, his hitpoints alone range from 5,000 to 37,000, depending on what difficulty you're fighting him on. There are a couple of things that will help you more than anything else against Diablo: resistances to fire and lightning. Diablo's main attack is lighting-based, and while there is a cold-based attack tucked here and there, he'll hit you the rest of the time with fire. Diablo also follows his own advice, as he's quite resistant to most elemental attacks. So opt to use skills that inflict direct damage — rather than elemental damage — when you can.

Sorceress: Use Static Charge to knock down Diablo's hitpoints, then follow up with either Glacial Spike or Fireball. Even though he's quite resistant to these spells, they should be developed enough to deal significant damage to him.

Paladin: If you have Salvation, by all means, use it! Even with only one point into it, it will significantly reduce the amount of damage Diablo deals. With Salvation, you can afford to just stand next to Diablo, and thwack away with either Vengeance (again, it does do elemental damage, but it also ups your base damage), or Zeal.

Barbarian: This is yet another straightforward battle. Activate your standard "Defensive Stack" (Battle Commands, Battle Orders, and Shout), and go and pound Diablo with either Leap Attack or Whirlwind (since either one will keep you moving — hence, avoiding — most of Diablo's attacks).

Necromancer: Stand back, and let your minions do some work. A good Blood Golem will serve as both a decent damage-dealer and a damage-soak. Help him out with Curses like Iron Maiden or Amplify Damage, and either sit back, or cast Bone Spear to bring Diablo down.

Amazon: If you have a Bowazon, it's just a matter of running around and pelt- ing Diablo with Freezing arrows; while they may not inflict much more damage than a normal arrow, they'll at least slow him down and prevent him from catching up to you. Spearazons, well, it's time to break out your best spear and start impaling away. If you're afraid of breaking your spear with Impale, then use a beefed-up Jab instead. Throw up a Valkyrie if you can, just to distract Diablo or to lend offensive support.
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YOU CAN BARELY HEAR
A NECK SNAP.

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COMBAT MISSION Kills Wargaming

POW! DEAD. NO FOOLIN'.

Some people might say that in the year 2000, the world ended. At least it did for hardcore historical wargamers. This is the year that a small developer released a game with real-time turn resolution and 3D-accelerated graphics, and everyone (including grongards) hailed it as the greatest wargame ever. And, it didn’t even have Hexes. Sounds like Hell must have frozen over shortly thereafter, doesn’t it?

I won’t draw out the COMBAT MISSION teaser anymore, since (a) it’s obvious what game I’m talking about, and (b) it’s in the headline. But while we’re all rejoicing (and while I’m taking a break from the Aachen scenario to write this), we might want to step back and consider the repercussions for wargaming. Although COMBAT MISSION is a tremendous game, it could well end up killing the genre completely.

Mod Squad

COMBAT MISSION is the game we’ve all been imagining since we got our first TRS-80 and loaded up a wargame to see Midway Island represented as an asterisk. Ever since then, wargamers have been fantasizing about a 3D, real-time depiction of the battlefield, all managed by the computer. This was pretty much a pipe dream on your Apple II Plus with 64K(!) of RAM, and upon reflection, it’s a little scary to see how far we’ve come. Back then, we imagined somehow using our computers to get “inside” the battle, becoming virtual participants as tank commanders or squad leaders.

The focus of COMBAT MISSION is altogether different, but you’re still left with a feeling of “being there” that’s unlike anything in other wargame I’ve ever played. Replaying a single turn can provide hours of enjoyment, as the roving camera catches episodes from a larger battle: the squad pinned down behind a wall by machine-gun fire; the Sherman versus the panzermarck team; the artillery observer trying to call in shells.

COMBAT MISSION is, in fact, probably the best depiction of squad-level action we’re going to see until you and I can put on a VR helmet and battle one another on the streets of Virtual Stalingrad. But where does this leave non-tactical simulations? In the dust, pretty much.

A friend of mine recently told me that COMBAT MISSION was the first wargame his 12-year-old nephew had ever wanted to play. Having seen it over my friend’s shoulder, his nephew was no doubt drawn to the 3D depiction of a WWII battlefield with its flashy effects and sounds. Wargamers have spent years dismissing attractive graphics, stubbornly insisting that wargames could be engrossing in themselves, without having to resort to the computer-graphics-equivalent of breast implants. Sure enough, along comes COMBAT MISSION and proves that a game set in World War II can be pretty darn compelling, even when it adheres to rigorous standards of simulation. But it better have 3D graphics.

The amusing thing about COMBAT MISSION is that it shows fairly conclusively that all that malarkey spouted by us grongards in defense of our beloved hexes and counters was just that. Presented with 3D terrain, incredible vehicle models, and superb effects, most wargamers quickly admitted that—hey— attractive graphics are wonderful. Which has been true all along. World War II has always been a great topic for computer games. It wasn’t an aversion to history that kept the general public away; it was the lifeless presentation.
London there was no sign of it, and the rumor is that it hasn't advanced beyond the early beta stage—a victim of its own ambitious goals (like dynamic AI that learned to counter a player's preferred strategy). I got a chance to play an alpha version of the game, and while I loved the fresh approach to operational wargaming, I have to admit that it would have been tough to imagine a 12-year-old seeing ROAD TO MOSCOW and exclaiming, "Oh, wow, can I be a chief of staff?"

**A Better Tomorrow**

It's hard to envision a bright future for wargames that don't have a tactical simulation aspect. Now that possibilities for 3D tactical wargaming are out of the bag, they will inevitably color gamers' hopes for future releases.

Matrix Games ([www.matrixgames.com](http://www.matrixgames.com)) has done a wonderful job updating STEEL PANTHERS (version 4.0 of SP: WORLD AT WAR is on this month's CD-ROM) and Gary Grigsby's WAR IN RUSSIA, but games from 1993 aren't going to recruit a new generation of wargamers the way COMBAT MISSION might. And that new generation is going to expect improvements on what got them hooked in the first place, not retro-upgrades. Where's that VR helmet, comrades?

Perhaps a glimpse of this future can be seen in games like STEEL BEASTS ([reviewed on page 136](#)), where traditional 2D tactical planning and first-person battlefield simulation go hand-in-hand. Whatever path wargames will take, one thing is certain: The traditional, hex-based wargame is dead. COMBAT MISSION done blew it right up.

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**BIG TIME’S NEXT BATTLE**

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**We caught up with Big Time Software's Charles Maylan to get the scoop on the company's next game:**

"It will take place on WWII's Russian Front: Soviets, Germans, and Finns locked in mortal combat from the opening guns of Operation Barbarossa in 1941, to the collapse of Berlin in 1945.

"We've received a huge list of suggestions for new features and improvements from the people playing COMBAT MISSION right now. We'll be incorporating a lot of them, plus new weapons (all new tanks and artillery pieces), new units (like ski troops), new terrain types, different combat organizations, expanded treatment of long-range tank duels and gunnery optics, and probably a new way to simulate the limited command and control abilities of early-war Soviet troops. We'll make steady graphic improvements as well, though the overall look of the game will be similar to the current COMBAT MISSION."
Let Us Console You

Inside Videogaming?!? What the?!!

Now before you start writing that pithy hate-email that starts off: "I didn't know CGW stood for Console Gaming World..."—relax. We're not abandoning PC gaming or changing the focus of the magazine. Instead, we're acknowledging the simple facts that we play console games, you (over 65% of our readers) play console games, and that paying attention to what's going on in their world and how it affects ours only leads to a more complete gaming experience. Plus, the next generation of consoles have a lot more in common with PCs and the PC gaming experience than ever before. With all the crossover titles, advanced 3D graphics, and plug-and-play Internet multiplayer innovations, it's a great time to be a console gamer.

Online Gaming Done Right?

SegaNet Goes Live

Sega's recent developments in the online arena should be of significant note to console gamers who have never known the joy of easy set-up, lag-free, Internet gaming—as well as to long-time PC online gamers who have likewise never known those joys. SegaNet, Sega's massive ISP/gaming portal/player-matching service, launched on September 7th with an enticing offer. Sign up for 18 months, and get a free Dreamcast (currently valued at about $150). Considering that SegaNet works as a fully-functional ISP for your Dreamcast or PC (email, web-browsing, etc.), that's not a bad deal.

We've played NFL 2K1 and QUAKE III multiplayer online, and the experience was no less than amazing. There was no perceptible lag playing either one over the Internet on a 56K modem, and logging into the game took about two seconds. You might ask how on earth Sega could deliver a painless and working online gaming experience when PCs have struggled for years to achieve that very thing. Simple. When end users are all using the exact same device with the same connection speeds, configuration is taken out of the user's hands. When console users can be up and playing football against their cousins in Peoria or some guy called LANDRY_IS_GOD in Texas in a matter of minutes, it will make EVERQUEST look like your Grandma's bridge club. Hopefully, some of SegaNet's innovations will migrate over to the PC.

Nintendo Announces Next-Generation Console and Handhelds

Microsoft's projected Xbox release next Christmas may be a year after PlayStation2 and two years after the Dreamcast's respective launches, but that doesn't mean it won't have competition. Nintendo finally unwrapped its plane for the 2001 holiday season: Its next-generation console, the Gamecube (formerly code-named "Dolphin"), and the Gameboy Advance, a 32-bit version of the classic handheld device. The massive crowd at Nintendo's big Japanese tradeshow, Spaceworld 2000, were wowed by an impressive tech demo that featured favorite characters from the worlds of Mario and Zelda, among others.

Don't count Nintendo out. They do still employ the Shakespeare of videogame design, Shigeru Miyamoto.

Gordon Goes Global

Half-Life for the Dreamcast

The increased power of next-generation consoles like the Sony PlayStation 2 and Sega Dreamcast is allowing for a lot more crossover PC titles. Popular first-person shooters like UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III are getting the console treatment; perhaps the greatest FPS of all time (if not the greatest game of all time) is also headed for the Dreamcast. HALF-LIFE DREAMCAST is currently in development by Gearbox software, the development house behind HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE. Slated for a holiday release, HLDC will be much more than a simple port. An entirely new single-player mission centered around the actions of one of Black Mesa's beloved Baneys, called Half-Life: Blue Shift—plus 27 multiplayer levels and a graphics engine enhanced for the Dreamcast should bring plenty of the original's PC fans back into the fold. Based on the screens we've seen so far, we're definitely looking forward to playing the new mission. Just as long as it's not with a gamepad (yes Virginia, there is a Dreamcast mouse).
Award Winning Voice Control

"Cover me."

"Entering the pits."

"Clear my six."

"Launch artillery strike."

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Massively

World War II

WARBIRDS VETERANS READY TO LAUNCH GLOBAL WARFARE

The virtual battlefield is the Holy Grail of internet military simulations. Imagine thousands of people taking on the roles of individual infantry, pilots, navy gunners, radar operators, supply gurus, and other combatants in realistic simulations—all tied together into one whacking huge online war. All who have tried it have failed. Oh, long-running hits like AIR WARRIOR and WARBLINDS had strong followings, but they were flight sims, not battlefield sims. The idea of the Virtual Battlefield (VBF) goes back as far as net gaming, with Gilman Louie’s plan to link up FALCON with other air and land sims to create a giant, multiplayer military theater. The late JANE’S WORLD WAR was another shot that stayed off target. Now, finally, someone might be doing a real VBF, and doing it in high style.

As with other recent innovations in massively-multiplayer gaming, this one is coming not from the majors but from a small startup company willing to pick up the ball and run. WORLD WAR II ONLINE (www.wwiiolonline.com) is a game in which members can join the Army, Air Force, or Marines and go to war. For many, it is a fantasy product that they’d given up on ever seeing. For Cornered Rat Software, it’s an open-beta.

My War

The specs for this game are enough to make action fans, sim fans, and wargamers all drool. When you sign up for an account at a standard monthly fee (probably about $10), you create a character, choose a side to fight for, and select one of the three branches of service. All sides of the conflict are represented: U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, France, China, and Commonwealth. You can join each branch of each country for a total of 27 different career paths on a single account. Career paths are each separate, so as you rise through the ranks in the Japanese air force, you may still be a Private in the Russian army. It all depends on which path you choose to spend the time playing. All of these choices mean a staggering array of gameplay options. You can fly, man the guns of battleship, fight in the trenches, drive a tank, or even handle supply. The logistics of all of it have crushed the will of larger companies, so what makes a start-up think they can lick ‘em?

For starters, Cornered Rat isn’t just any start-up. They were formed by several key members of the WARBLINDS team after Interactive Magic shut down their Texas office. Beginning with a dozen seasoned programmers from one of gaming’s landmark multiplayer titles, the Cornered Rat staff has ballooned to 40 people in the year they’ve spent working on this project.

“We began by cataloging all the VBF games and why they failed,” says Producer Chris Sherland. “How did those games approach these problems? What mistakes did they make? Since we knew we were breaking new ground, we had to understand these issues before we began, so we lined them up and looked at them. One of the main problems is modularity. You can’t approach it by building a flight sim and then adding tanks. So we designed it from the bottom up, as a vehicle simulator that could model anything that moved, from a bike to a battleship. The other problem is time-to-battle. A ship sim and an aircraft sim travel at different speeds. It may take 100 turns to get into battle with a sub, but only 14 minutes in a plane. We addressed that by creating dynamic spawn points to equalize time to combat for all the branches. So, players will be able to get into action regardless of branch.”

Choose Your Weapon

The practicalities of all this are daunting, but the solutions are logical. For instance, what will keep the infantry element of the game from becoming a first-person shooter like QUAKE or UNREAL? When you log in for a session, you may want to take part in a specific large battle, or you may just want 30 minutes of shooting action. The game embraces both approaches, but is always geared toward realism. Weapon types are very limited: bolt-action rifles, hand grenades, and a limited number of submachine guns.

The advanced physics model prevents the running and jumping techniques common to shooters. If you run and jump, you’ll just tire out and faint. There are
enough leashes on the players to prevent rampaging gunights and to keep to the tone of a realistic large-scale infantry battle, but enough action to keep things interesting. By using dynamic spawn points, new gamers are always close to the action.

Each time you start a session, you're presented with specific options. If you're in the Air Force, maybe you'll see a roster of current or pending battles and the planes available to fly. In the Navy, you may find that a capital ship has just entered the area and choose to man big guns, AA, or even a radar station. At any time you'll find specific, goal-oriented missions. Successfully participating in these missions from start to finish will yield a point award, which can be applied towards raising a particular character's rank. Higher ranks get more options and different weapons. Reach a high-enough rank and you can take over the role of theater commander, directing resources on a large map.

Death doesn't really exist. You never lose rank or what you have acquired. If you die in a specific mission, you will lose the points you've accumulated for that mission, but it affects your progress—not your overall character. The hardware will also be scalable in terms of realism workload. While the realism level is always high, for complex objects like tanks and planes the user can choose between hardcore mode and a mode which automates some of the more difficult functions.

The naval aspect of the game is also intriguing. Since you can't just let players spawn a battleship in an enemy port, all capital ships larger than destroyer class will be treated as slow-moving, persistent objects in the game. You can spawn into these objects, but not move them. This means that in the scope of the campaign, the big ships may only arrive at the battle at certain points, and are "at sea" the rest of the time. Small boats like coastal-patrol boats, corvettes, and PT boats, however, can spawn any time they like for quick action.

**You Are There**

A central menu tracks it all, displaying the current options available to a character. In this way, you can evaluate the unfolding battle at any time and pick the hottest zone to fight in. The game runs a persistent timeline through multiple theaters, beginning with Blitzkrieg 1940. After 1940 is done, new vehicles and weapon sets will be added and the game will move on to the next year. This repeats until the war is finished, or may possibly be expanded with hypothetical post-1945 scenarios featuring jets and Pershing tanks. Large historical battles such as Bulge and Sicily are mixed with smaller ahistorical encounters to keep the whole system constantly moving. If the system does well, they may revind and start all over again, or move into fantasy and science-fiction realms with all-new vehicle and object sets. The scratch-built graphics engine and network code look sharp enough to carry the system through several years' worth of iterations.

And that's what Cornered Rat wants: a strong, long-term MM solution that offers users something they're not getting. As Stenland points out: "The massively-multiplayer online market is poised for something new. The technology is ready for this. Massively multiplayer has to be bigger, show you more, and allow you to interact with more people. It's not about how many people you can get on at once. Games have to be more compelling. In order to keep a large market share, these games have to get better in two aspects: How many people can I see, and how many people can I interact with?"

Or, in the case of WORLD WAR II ONLINE, how many people can I see and then kill with a 54-pound explosive projectile fired at a rate of 15 shells per minute from a Fletcher-class Destroyer off the coast of Normandy? Kinda makes a BFG look like a peashooter, no?
Embrace Your Inner Elf

ICEWIND DALE IS THE SQUAD-BASED STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

I've already played the best squad-based strategy game we're likely to see this year. And it's an RPG.

Now that I've desecrated the holy altar of turn-based hex-mapped/crystal- and area-pimping RTS tank-rush clichéfest in the hallowed sanctuary of purist strategy zealotry, hear me out. The simple fact of the matter is that the party-based combat in ICEWIND DALE flat-out kneecaps anything we're likely to see in an anemic sub-genre that hasn't had a worthwhile offering since JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 over a year ago. COMMANDOS 2? It looks cool and fun, but it lacks real depth. STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM? Not bloody likely. Unless Mythos pulls a rabbit out of their hat and gets THE DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE out the door this year, fans of squad-based strategy are going to have to look elsewhere for their kicks.

So why should you give ICEWIND DALE a shot? Think of it as X-COM with fireball spells. You can totally create and customize your party, choose their loadout (with the added subtleties of choosing your spell mix), and develop every character as you wish. Remember the X-COM squad-die that healed your team members? He's your Cleric now, and he kicks ass in melee combat to boot. Your plasma gun-toting killing machine? He's the Ranger, swinging a two-handed sword, hacking towering giants into literal chunks of meat. Every melee confrontation in ICEWIND DALE offers its own unique challenges and rewards, continually keeping you on your toes as you react to the ever-changing battlefield. Of the four or five guys playing ICEWIND DALE in our office, none of us has approached the myriad challenges of the game in the same way—if that's not testament to the depth of the title, what is?

The fact is, more traditional strategy titles could learn a thing or two from a game like ICEWIND DALE. What strategy game gives you the opportunity to dictate precisely the blend of real-time and turn-based combat you desire? Why doesn't it feel as overwhelming to create a game as HOMEWORLD: offer you the ability to create detailed scripts, so that your units have standing orders on how to respond in any given situation?

Do yourself a favor. Nudge those anti-elf, pro-docking tank biases aside and try something different. You'll be glad you did.

Star Trek Review Correction

COW's recent review of Activision's STAR TREK CONQUEST ONLINE had one fairly significant error—the PC game is not based on or related to the original Star Trek customizable card game from Decipher. So while this means that the PC game's problems are problems it has all on its own, we still sincerely regret the error.

BATTLE REALMS Update

The innovations in Liquid Entertainment's upcoming BATTLE REALMS keep a-coming. Liquid just announced the implementation of the Battle Gear System, which allows even further unit-customization. Essentially a simple inventory system, the Battle Gear System allows units to enjoy special abilities based on items in their possession. For example, a musketeer might find some healing herbs, letting him heal himself once. Or the same musketeer could go to the metal shop and buy a blunderbuss, get a little training, and radically change the way he fights. Since the abilities are treated like items and are not hard-coded, gamers will be in full control of their unit mix, giving the game even more strategic depth.
Last Kingdom is a large-scale fantasy role-playing game with hundreds of monsters, items and a wide variety of magical spells, you can become one of four characters and take their roles in a land of virtual reality. Last Kingdom is enormous and can be explored for hundreds of hours by visiting mystical lands through magical portals. Once you start playing, you will realize just how little you really know about the world of Last Kingdom—and how much there is for you to discover. You can embark even further into the game-playing experience by talking, trading, and exploring with other people over the Internet. Can you save the only kingdom left from the ravaging powers of darkness? We dare you to challenge! Visit www.netamin.com today.
Will History Repeat Itself?

UPCOMING WWII SIMS WILL ONCE AGAIN COMPETE FOR SHELF SPACE AND YOUR WALLET

I'm starting to temper my enthusiasm for capitalist economic theory. I'm tired of similarly-themed games being released within the same time frame. Therefore, I hereby nominate myself as Chair of the "One Sim at a Time, Okay? Please?" committee, or O-STOP for short. Besides, "Chairman Gordon" has a nice ring to it. Here's how it works: Everyone tells me what they're making, and I get to tell them when to release it! And, to continue with this fantasy, let's pretend nobody misses a deadline and everything ships on time! Uh-huh. Billtuff.

Until my little Utopian paradise is realized, I say to hell with the notion of "competition is good" for consumers, because—so far—competition has done nothing but dilute our choices and attention spans. So far, competition has meant good products can get overlooked. Three next-gen WWII titles are due out now (or in the near future), and I'm already concerned. When I consider how good these sims look and how well they play, they definitely deserve a much better chance at the market.

Two years ago, three other major WWII-era sims made their debut at the same time. Back then, only one emerged with enough sales to consider itself proud. One was real pretty (Jane's WWII FIGHTERS), but looked alone weren't enough. One was real smart (EUROPEAN AIR WAR), and I'm a bit baffled as to why it didn't do well, because it was one of the best sims ever released. I guess popularity will always win out, because what many consider to be the weakest of the three out-sold everyone else combined (COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR).

Regardless, the question of which sim was truly the best had nothing to do with success. And that's precisely what has me worried. I don't want history to repeat itself, and neither should you. There's not much I can do for the uninformed consumer, and until I'm made Chairman, I can't stem the tide of cannibalized sales. Therefore, I'm left with this lone little page to convince you—the savvy, intelligent, extremely good-looking, well-informed CGW reader—why you should get your hands on all of these sims.

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2

Let's pretend for a moment this sim isn't from Microsoft and that there aren't hundreds of thousands of FLIGHT SIMULATOR devotees and BATTLE OF BRITAIN, the campaigns aren't truly dynamic. But there are enough trigger events per mission to warrant better replay value over its predecessor. Besides, CFS2 comes with a bona fide mission builder, so there should be new missions available over the Internet in no time.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

What to do for an encore? It's a tall order to top Sim of the Year MIG ALLEY, but I think Rowan Software/Empire Interactive will pull it off. MIG ALLEY served up the best dogfighting ever seen on a PC by melding realistic tactics with convincing AI. In my opinion, Rowan has delivered an equally compelling, but altogether different experience with BOB; it's just as fun. The best compliment I can give BOB is that the feel of its dogfights are as close as you can get to the real thing.

The Catch: The Supreme Commander-style interface, much like the one in MiG, could probably be more intuitive. At least this time, it's more fun to use.

B-17 II

Talk about going out with a bang instead of a whimper. Just in case you were worried that B-17 II would suffer the same fate as instead of just watching the movie. You don't even need to fly a plane if you don't want to; instead, you can play the role of Strategic Commander—determining targets and allocating resources—and leave the AI to handle the flying and bombing.

The Catch: You'll have to concoct another excuse for your spouse as to why you must upgrade your computer, yet again.
Beyond Looking Glass
THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR EX-LOOKING GLASS DEVELOPERS

The closing of Looking Glass might have been a good thing. Ah, got your attention now, didn’t I?
Before you run off to write an irate letter telling me what an insensitive goober I am, let me elaborate. Back in May, it was indeed sad that such a talented development studio was forced to shut down. Hearing that news made me remember all the good times I had with their games: sneaking into a base without firing a single shot in TERRA NOVA; marveling at how I could look up and down in ULTIMA UNDERWORLD. I’ll never forget the time in SYSTEM SHOCK when my character, chopped up on speed drugs, sliced Edward Diego in psychedelically beautiful slow-motion.

But it’s been months now, and as in any other business, these people were talented enough to find work elsewhere. What used to be a centralized pool of talent is now scattering itself around the industry. After snooping around, I got to see where some Looking Glassers ended up...

That Sounds Irrational
Take Dorian Brosius. He was the Sound Guru over at Looking Glass; he’s the reason you wanted to stay quiet in the THIEF games. Heck, he’s even married to SHODAN (well, the woman behind her voice, at least). Now he’s the Audio Director over at Irrational, meaning he’ll be applying his aural talents to titles like FREEDOM FORCE and THE LOST (a PS2 title). Brosius said that he’s "sad that LG is gone," but that it’s "exciting to start fresh on new projects in a change of environment, even if the change is somewhat subtle."

Also at Irrational is SHOCK 2 designer Dorian Hart, who’s working on THE LOST. He comments, "In many ways, Irrational feels like Looking Glass did seven years ago, when it was a small company with one great game under its belt, and great potential." Shawn Robertson, formerly the Lead 3D Artist for JANE’S ATTACK SQUADRON (and now the sole animator for THE LOST), muses: "Surprisingly, the transition was pretty painless. I didn’t realize how highly regarded Looking Glass was, until I was bombarded with calls and e-mails from headhunters and developers mere hours after I myself got the news."

Massively-Multiplayer Church
I also managed to hunt down Doug Church, who many people consider to be the "heart and soul" of Looking Glass. He’s been spending most of his time trying to form a start-up and create a massively-multiplayer title. Unfortunately, things are still up in the air, as the publisher he talked to decided to back out. "You’d think a publisher would have more faith in a key architect of the UNDERWORLD, SHOCK, and THIEF games, but that’s the way the industry goes. Rigik now, he’s been floating around, mostly hanging out with Warren Spector over at ION Austin, and with some other ex-LG staff at Harmonix. Here’s hoping that someone will pick up this talented designer’s work.

Fornicators and Thieves
While a good portion of the THIEF team hopped over to ION Austin to work on THIEF 3, a few of the members took their own paths. Programmer Rob Farnier got himself a nice place over at Ensemble Studios, while Lead Designer Tim Sellnow is floating around—though he’ll be doing consulting work for THIEF 3. Other LG members have gone to Papyrus, Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), or Turbine Entertainment.

Point is, these people scattered around, that’s the good thing. That means that they’ll be influencing a larger number of titles on the horizon. While I will miss the signature mark of a tried-and-true Looking Glass game, I’m comforted in knowing that their talents are now all over the industry. As I said, maybe the closing of Looking Glass was a good thing in that it helped the industry move forward, just a little bit.
Max Payne PC $44.95
Oni PC $44.95
Werewolf: Apocalypsis PC $38.95
Alien Intelligence PC $42.99
Zelda: Majora's Mask N64 $59.95
Shenmue DC $46.95

**NEW LOW PRICES!**

**COMPUTER GAMES: WAR**

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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."
GREENSPEAK by Jeff Green

A Word to Our Sponsors

Puzzle time, kids! What takes up over half this magazine every month, but isn’t written by those hired to write the magazine? I know it’s a tough one, so take your time. And no cheating by flipping through the pages, now! You should have studied.

Okay, ready? Pencils down. The correct answer is: the ads. Now I know most of you probably got that wrong, because the ads are so hard to find. But, yes, ads comprise the bulk of the magazine. So let’s talk about them.

I hate the ads in this magazine. I loathe them. If I had my druthers, CGW would be 100 percent ad-free, with nothing but page after page of exciting gaming information—preferably not written by me, because that’d be a lot of work, and that’s not exactly what I signed up for.

But let’s not live in fantasyland. Let’s take off our #1 Elven Cloaks of Nuvette and face reality. CGW is a business—not just a halfway home for gaming slackers. The fact is, we must have ads. We must make money. The lust of the Corporate Gods can only be sated by green blood.

One of the things I hate most about the ads is just how lame and ugly they are. Here, the game companies have this giant space to hit readers over the head with something cool or funny, and what do most of them do? They blow it. By my count, there’s three approaches used in 95 percent of all gaming ads:

1. Hey sissy-boy— our buff game will kick your ass.
2. Look at these breasts.
3. We know our game kind of sucks, but look—David Bowie is in it.

But, whatever. It’s not as if the ads were any better I’d actually start liking them. No, what I really hate about the ads is how they distort the perception of our relationship with the game companies. How can we write objectively, readers want to know, when the very companies we’re writing about are paying us money to advertise in the magazine? Wouldn’t there be pressure on us to play nice, to go easy on them, so that they keep on paying us?

The answer is a resounding and emphatic no. Never, not once, in the more than four years that I’ve been here has anyone from the ad sales side of this magazine even implied we should go easy on a company, let alone actually had the nerve to say it out loud. Why? Because they know better. Because they know that to do so would be to inspire a raging editorial hissy fit of epic proportions. Our opinions are all we have here. Take away our rights to say what we really think, even once, and we cease to be a real magazine. We become just a catalog.

This is so obvious that you’d think even the game companies themselves would understand this. You’d think that our integrity would be important to them, too.

Because what good is a good review from a magazine that everyone knows is in your pocket? Wouldn’t you rather get a good review from editors who are known to be tough to please? And if you get a bad review, well yeah, that’s a bummer, but maybe—just maybe—the editors had good reasons for coming to the conclusions they did. Right?

But no. Some companies never write the ads in this magazine. If I had my druthers, CGW would be 100% ad-free, with page after page of exciting gaming info—preferably not written by me...

"Why should we play with you guys," they ask, "when you’re so mean to us? See if we advertise in your stinky magazine anymore!" I think every major game company has pulled this stunt, or at least threatened to, at least once since we started, and one of them is doing it right now. Though, oddly, they don’t seem to mind taking the free publicity that goes with getting a cover story.

What jackasses. What babies. You know, I’m sure the business people on staff here aren’t thrilled about it, and are desperately trying to woo you and your money back, but here’s a message from the CGW editorial staff: We don’t care. You can spend a million dollars a month, or you can never come back. Either way, our review criteria remain the same: We’ll praise the good games, we’ll pan the bad ones. The end. Our job, as editors, is to speak our minds, not to make you feel good about spending money on ads. So grow up.

If our opinions are so wrong, then readers will figure that out and go buy a different magazine. And when readers stop spending their money on us, we’ll start to worry. Our readers—and our readers only—have the power to punish us.

But enough of this. This is the Christmas issue, after all, and I hate to end it in such a cranky way. So how about a game recommendation instead? For my money, you just can’t go wrong with Activision’s ELITE FORCE. It’s easily one of the best shooters of the year!

Happy holidays, everyone.

What Jeff doesn’t realize is that we bought him ButtSoft’s ResumeMaker 2.0 for Christmas. Send career advice to jeff.green@ziffdavis.com. CGW
my notebook comes with next-day on-site service, and this afternoon I’ll know where that is.

Tell us where you are. Someone will come and fix your notebook. It’s that simple.

Go ahead and ride like the wind. And don’t forget to bring your notebook with you. Because wherever you end up in the 50 states, it’s probably a place where a technician can arrive on-site to fix your notebook if something goes wrong. If you have a problem with your notebook, you can call us 24x7, for a tech to troubleshoot with you over the phone. Then, if hardware support is needed, a repair technician can be sent to wherever you are. It’s called Next-Business-Day On-site Service and it’s available with every Inspiron notebook we sell. Of course, chances are you’ll never need someone to drop by. But if you ever do, just find a phone. Dell4me™ is all about helping you get the most out of your PC. Our award-winning service and support is just one of the ways we’re making it happen.
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So you forgot to return a few library books and couldn’t get into the FBI Academy. Well, here at Dell™, we don’t discriminate. All of our customers are afforded the latest and greatest technology. Like the New Inspiron™ 4000, the ultimate balance of uncompromising performance and mobility. And, of course, we have all of the latest in printers, scanners, and software. So call on us to help build your perfect system or choose from one of these great systems below. Even easier than getting a library card.

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  - 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Mobility™-M1 3D Video
  - Li-Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology
  - Internal PCI V30 56K Capable FaxModem
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  - 1-Yr Limited Warranty
  - 1-Year Next-Business-Day On-site Service
  - 1 Year of AOL Membership® Included
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  - As low as $37/Mo., for 48 Mos."}

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- **NEW—Thin and Light**
  - Intel® Celeron™ Processor at 600MHz
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  - Li-Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology
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**DELL™ INSPIRON™ 5000e**
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  - Featuring Intel® SpeedStep™ Technology
  - NEW 15" Ultra XGA TFT Display
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  - Modular Removable 8X Max DVD-ROM Drive
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  - 59Whr Li-Ion Battery
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Affordable Desktop Solution
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- 20GB Ultra ATA-100 Hard Drive
- 17" (16.0" vis, 26dp) 789 Monitor
- 32MB NVIDIA TNT2 M64 4X AGP Graphics
- 12X Max DVD-ROM Drive
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- V.90 56K Capable PCl Telephony Modem for Windows®
- MS® Works Suite 2000
- 3-Yr Limited Warranty
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- HP Mail-In Rebate (Reg. $249)™
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- ProSt2 SurgeArrest, add $39

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Includes Windows Millennium Edition — the home version of the world's favorite software.

"Must register for AOL within 30 days of receiving computer. To avoid paying monthly fees, cancel during 1st year promotional period. Even during promo period, telephone access charges on your phone bill (call your phone co. for details) and surcharges for premium services and 900/800 access may apply, including in AK. For new, 18+ U.S. members with major credit card or checking account only.

Limited time offer. *Monthly payment based on 13.99% APR. APR for QUALIFIED CUSTOMERS. OFFER VARIES BY CREDIT WORTHINESS OF CUSTOMER AS DETERMINED BY LENDER. Taxes and shipping charges extra. From American Investment Bank, N.A. to U.S. state residents (including D.C.) with approved credit. Availability may be limited in some states.

Prices, specifications, and availability may change without notice. Taxes and shipping charges extra, and vary. Cannot be combined with other offers or discounts. U.S. only. Offer valid for Dell Home Systems Co. only. For a copy of our Guarantee or Limited Warranties, write Dell USA L.P. Attn: Warranties, One Dell Way, Round Rock, Texas 78682. At-Home or on-site service provided via third-party contract with customer. Technician will be dispatched, if necessary, following phone-based troubleshooting.

To receive Next Business-Day service, Dell must notify the service provider before 5pm (customer's time). Availability varies. Other conditions apply. For hard drives, MB means 1 billion bytes; accessible capacity varies with operating environment."
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the pc dell built for me?
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Your Dream Machine
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- SoundBlaster 64V PCI LC Sound Card
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- V.90 56K Capable* PCI DataFax Modem for Windows®
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