Holiday Gift Guide

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30 Games You Must Play NOW

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21 REVIEWS!
Civilization III, Commandos 2, Monopoly Tycoon, AND MORE!
Generals call them "the first ones in and the last ones out." They're the elite special forces of Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, and they don't take dead weight like you along for the ride. Unless, of course, you think you're ready for the most realistic tactical FPS on the planet.

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— PC Gamer, Holiday, 2001

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**If you meet them in combat...**
Made friends, made enemies, and almost died—can't wait to go back!

My battle with other insects in Minos Lassil

My millenium pyramid coin—ah... the joy of being a monarch

Grazed from sword... certain... left arm

Dusk Lily from my 3rd trip to Minos Lassil

My precious focusing stone... allows me to, well, focus.

Purchased in Sarin

Weapons stored here
- Quddity Sword
- Pyreal Axe

Note to Self:
Other breeds deadlier than last month

My house, Southern Osthel
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www.asheroncall.com
All the dark legions are at his command.
And you control his destiny.
Will he annihiltate? Or will Rebel forces dominate? The ultimate outcome is up to you, as Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds thrusts you into explosive real-time strategy conflicts spanning the entire Star Wars saga. With gameplay based on an enhanced Age Of Empires engine, you’re in control as six different civilizations clash in epic land, sea and air battles. You’ll command legions of troops in single and multi-player missions. Or design your own with the extensive campaign editor. You can even choose which side you’ll fight for in this epic galactic struggle. Just remember, whether good or evil, there is only one true commander - you.

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YOUR COMMANDER’S words hang like a promise of victory over the roar of Nazi mortar rounds pounding the ocean around your Higgins boat. Normandy is just a thin slice of color in the gun slot. Then with a crash, the ramp falls away into the hell that is Omaha Beach. Swallowed by surf, sand, heat, fear and fallen comrades, you abandon your sense of reality and fight for your life. Step into the boots of Lt. Mike Powell and sign on for six campaigns and eighteen missions stretching from Africa to Norway. But while you search for the courage, remember, the battle rages on.

MEDAL OF HONOR ALLIED ASSAULT

You don’t play. You volunteer.

www.mohaa.ea.com
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AvP2 is back with big scary space monsters.
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CREATE, BUILD AND LEAD A CIVILIZATION
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THIS IS WAR.
The Resident Grown-Up

I never dreamed that at age 28, I'd be a mother of nine. Two months ago, I was hired as the managing editor for CGW. Typically, a managing editor is the organizer for a magazine. She's the one to set the deadlines, make sure things ship to the printer, set up meetings, etc. The responsible stuff.

Here it goes way beyond organizing. "Andrew, you're not allowed to play Madden with Wil until you get that feature laid out. Robert, are you playing Mystery of the Druid again? Your reviews are due last week—you're grounded to your office until they're finished!" Last week Tom asked me a question and accidentally called me Mom.

We had a meeting to brainstorm cover story ideas a few days ago. Since Jeff and Ken were busy fighting over who got which Kirsy Kreme, I asked, "What are some of the ideas that people have for next month?"

"I know jujitsu!" shouted Scooter. Tom chuckled a piece of doughnut at Wil. Robert started singing a Red Hot Chili Peppers song in his Howard Cosell—does— opera voice: "Give it away, give it away, give it away now!" Jason asked, "Are we done yet? I need to get back to my desk because my nercamometer's about to level up." I went to my office and cried.

The guys have had their own share of frustration with me. The last game I played on a regular basis was computer solitaire. My first week, Robert came into my office and handed me a box, saying, "Here's the latest MMORPG, should be the greatest thing since the EQ: Scars of Velious expansion." When he registered the befuddled look on my face, he took back the box and said, "Never mind, why don't you try this fun game instead—it's called Bejeweled." They now recognize my perpetual look of confusion and will stop to explain terms like mech and ludge or recount the entire history of the Myth franchise.

There are great things about my new job. I know lots of fun new acronyms. I can legitimize my newly developed Bejeweled addiction by reassuring myself that it's okay, I work on a gaming magazine, this is part of my job. My boyfriend thinks I have the coolest job ever because I bring him games. And having a boss who likes to put things off can be good—it's easy to talk him into letting us leave the office early to go play pool.

Now if you'll excuse me, there are some articles overdue—I have to go confiscate Return to Castle Wolfenstein.

Dana Jongewaard
Managing Editor

Introducing the Memorex Pocket CD-R. With 185 MB, it holds hours of MP3 music, 140 high-res photos or tons of data. At about three inches, it fits any pocket. At pennies a meg, it fits any wallet. With both writeable and rewriteable formats, it's big enough to do almost any job, yet small enough to go almost anywhere. For a closer look, go to memorex.com. Because this little CD will be one of the biggest things in recordable media.
LETTER OF THE MONTH

While reading Tom Price's review of Max Payne [November 2001], I had to pause and ask myself, "Am I a moron? Am I so poorly educated that I don't know such simple English basics such as noir, the Bard, or the works of Dashiell Hammett, Irvine Welsh, or James Ellroy?" I'd like to consider myself somewhat intelligent, but I didn't know I had to be an English major to thoroughly appreciate a review in CGW. The article was well written, and correct, but who was the review's target audience, the English lit professor at Harvard? Next time could you just say the writing sucked?

G. Gray
Cloverdale, California

Your letter struck a chord here at CGW, G. Perhaps it was the tone of quiet desperation, so famously recognized by Thoreau as one of modern man's greatest afflictions, that affected us. Or perhaps it was your Joycean sense of outraged anti-intellectual intellectualism that impressed us so. Or perhaps you're just a moron.

Sergeant Shifrin Sets Everyone Straight

Greetings, esteemed ones of CGW!!

A quick response to a letter written by Aybara Wolf in the December 2001 issue—and a defense for Tom McDonald.

Aybara should look a bit deeper into history. I've been on active duty in the Army for about 16 years (I can retire in four more years and then work for the ancient one, Jeff Green) and stationed in Germany for nine of those 16 years. Of course, in the military, we are required to learn nuggets of lore so we can spout them off with confidence when asked.

Now, Aybara does correctly state that the German word for tank is "Panzer." But if you look a bit further back in history—say, around World War I—tanks were not originally called tanks. Because of their design, the WWI tank looked like a water cistern (a term used by the British Army). "Cistern" is simply another word for tank—i.e., "water tank." Over a period of time (and possibly due to some American language influence), the term "tank" instead of "cistern" stuck.

As far as fliegen goes, I have NO idea where that came from. Tom McDonald is on his own there. Keep up the fine work and I'll keep my subscription intact.

D. Shifrin
Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army

Rule One of Fight Club: Don't Mention the Ads

On page 80 of issue 208, there is a black-and-white ad for Civ III featuring Gandhi fighting Abraham Lincoln.

I believe this is a nod to Fight Club: Lincoln and Gandhi are the two historical figures Brad Pitt and Ed Norton's characters said they'd want to fight.

Canada sucks.

Jeremy

Wow, good catch, Jeremy. But what's with the slur against Canada? We don't condone that kind of behavior around here.

More Bejeweled Tales of Woe

My wife has never understood why I choose playing video games over mowing the lawn, working, and bathing (thanks EverQuest). So I built her a Pentium III 1GHz system with GeForce2 (she was, of course, unimpressed), with the hope of getting her into gaming. Maybe start off with Barbie Equestrian or something, and work up to Diablo II all-nighters. No luck. Then came Bejeweled. "Hey honey! Check out this pretty jewel game!" Now she spends more time playing that than I spend playing MY games! All hail Bejeweled! Of course now, nights out, dinner, and sex are out of the question. Ummm...I gotta go get a life now.

Dan Bejma
Carlsbad, California

I've subscribed for about two years. I know that's nothing compared to your Big-Time Subscribers, but I'm only 14, so BACK OFF! Okay, now I just wanted to tell you all that your magazine kicks major butt. And also, my lifelong goal is to make it into the top 15 scorers for Bejeweled on Zone.com. I'm ranked like 755,274 right now—I'm almost there!
Moto Racer 3 sends players into an ultra-realistic world of motor biking. With such features as photo-realistic tracks reproduced on location, real motorbike physics simulations, TV quality replays, realistic movements of riders and more.

- 6 blood-pumping racing styles. - Street, Motocross, Supercross, Freestyle, Trial and the all new, never before seen Traffic Mode through downtown Paris
- 15 tracks with 32 all-new bikes immerse players in completely different racing environments, such as Grand Prix, touring, indoor, outdoor and more
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- Multi-player with up to 8 bikes via LAN or the Internet

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Keep up the good work guys (and gals)! Brendan Nelson

Yeah, that’s a nice “life goal” there, Brendan. Very ambitious. Can we talk to your father a sec?

Anarchy Online: Did We Go Too Easy On ‘Em?
I have been subscribing to CGW for about seven years now. I love the magazine and count on you guys to guide me on what games to spend my gaming dollars, and more important, my limited gaming time on. If you say a game blows chunks, I don’t go near it. I have jumped the gun in the past and bought games before reading your reviews and have been sorry—most recently with Star Trek: New Worlds.

Having said that, I was disappointed to read the “review” of Anarchy Online by Thomas McDonald (November 2000). This article read more like a “just hang in there with us, guys, we’ll get it fixed” propaganda item from Funcom. Granted, facts were presented and a balanced list of the game’s good and bad points was evident. However, I got the feeling that I was reading an op-ed piece as opposed to an unbiased review. It was the last line of the article that really got to me. McDonald writes, “When it becomes fully functional, Anarchy Online will be the MMORPG by which others will be measured.” Anyone or anything can be great if they fully realize their potential. It is the act of actually fully realizing said potential that makes someone or something great.

Bottom line, I just hope that you guys stay away from wanting a game to be something it is not, and instead let us know what it REALLY is. I depend on you guys. You let me down. Don’t do it again or I’ll have to come down to the offices and spank Jeff Green in front of the entire CGW staff!!! “Nuff said.

Love,
Jeff Taylor

AO may be a great game in theory, but so was the idea that the sun rotated around the Earth. It didn’t work out well in the end, but in theory it was really nice and pretty.

You must have been paid to write that review. I don’t understand how you even got the game to run long enough to get a real review out of it. It had to be a bribe—that is the only way to justify that review, or else a band of supertrained ninja monkeys took over the magazine and let the review go through.

Whichever it was, I am ashamed of you all. I thought that, even though your magazine is a gaming magazine, you were still required to deliver the truth. Do you know the truth? YOU CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH!!! (Or at least not in this review.) In closing, just two words come to mind: for shame!

Aesirion the Aristocrat

Pool of Excrement
I am an RPG freak on both console and PC (but I don’t like Diablo). Anyway, I recently discovered the next Pool of Radiance game. I saw it at ebgames.com. Then I got interested and went to Gamespot.com. Why was this game not in a preview or Inside Role-Playing or even freaking Hot Shots!? So far, it looks ten times better than Baldur’s Gate II. I just hope your review is a full review and not one of those micro ones. All those RP gamers who are reading this know that Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor is going to be one of the best-looking AD&D games around.

Name lost because we’re stupid

Our review is in this month’s issue. Read it and find out why we avoided this game.

Games...or Girls?
Which do I pick? On one hand, I have girls, who are wonderful. On the other hand, I have computer games (like Stargate) that I have played for years. Recently I don’t find myself straying for that extra minute on Diablo II. Instead when I get on my computer, I just sit down and chat with friends. I think about girls and try to be around them, I still find it fun to play computer games, but I am no longer obsessed. Please help me! If I could get hold of a good game, I might be able to get sucked back in. Computer games can be so much better than women because they don’t get mad. If you could, please SUGGEST A GAME to get me off this girl stuff right now.

Colson

Two words for you, Colson, and you’ll never think about real girls again: Alley Cats.

Blizzard Sucks
The Rune-word combo “duress” in your November issue [Gamer’s Edge] is bullshit. I wasted a lot of time and effort acquiring those runes and the best three-sOCKET armor in the game, only to have it be a complete ****ing waste. Last damn CGW I buy.

Ray

We got those rune combos straight from Blizzard, so blame them. We take no responsibility for the editorial content of our magazine. Just kidding. We’re sorry, Ray. Please don’t leave us.

We Meant to Do That
I am sorry to say that you, my friends, demigods of computer gaming, screwed up. Oh, and what a stupid mistake it was.

Leelee Sobieski Corner
Poor Jeff Green. The guy brown-nosed and back-stabbed his way to the top, yet he still gets no respect from his underlings. Jeff, you should calm Tom Price and William O’Neal and replace them with Leelee Sobieski. Sure, he probably couldn’t edit a grocery list even if his life was depending on it, but a girl with that much mammary potential would make a great intern, to say the least.

All hail King Jeff!

Uncle Jim

We’re not exactly sure what you mean by “mammary potential,” Uncle Jim, but every time we say that phrase out loud, Scooter starts sweating and twitching. Leelee starts here next week.

Colston

In the last issue (December 2000) on page 136, on your winning trick, you have a screen shot of Diablo II: Lord of Destruction. Last time I checked, Ultima Online was not a Diablo II expansion pack. Tell Mr. Green there to let up on the beans and pistachios diet—the fumes are screwing you up.

No need for any thanks, though your next Dream Machine will suffice. And maybe the Diablo II expansion. And Blue Shift, And Baldur’s Gate II and Throne of Bhaal. And an optical mouse. Or just time travel to get me World of Warcraft. (I’d estimate 30 to 40 years from now.) Keep up the good writing and the dumb mistakes.

Jaymi “Abacus Tafali” Mistry

While we’re happy you found this mistake, we’re not so happy that you have made your demigods look bad. So no free games for you. Instead, we offer you this exciting prize: We have decided to NOT cancel your subscription!
"IF JOHN WOO WERE TO MAKE A GAME, THIS IS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE."

MAX PAYNE

NEW YORK. FUGITIVE UNDERCOVER COP. NOTHING TO LOSE.

"MAX DESERVES SUCH AN ACCOLADE NOT ONLY FOR THE RAW ENJOYMENT IT WILL BRING YOU, BUT FOR BEING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT GAME IN THIS INDUSTRY SO FAR IN TERMS OF CLOSING A MASSIVE GAP BETWEEN WHAT WE EXPECT FROM A MODERN FILM AND A MODERN GAME." - GAMES RADAR

"PART JOHN WOO MOVIE, PART FILM NOIR. MAX PAYNE IS THE ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR." - ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE

"MAX PAYNE IS GREAT. TRUTH BE TOLD, THIRD-PERSON SHOOTERS DON'T COME ANY BETTER. (IT'S) YOUR TICKET TO THE LONGEST, BEST-DIRECTED ACTION MOVIE YOU'VE EVER PLAYED." - PC GAMER

"[T]HIS SHOOTER BREAKS AWAY FROM THE GAMING PACK...CREATING THE KIND OF TENSION AND VISUAL WONDER THAT THE BEST ACTION MOVIES GENERATE." - COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

WHO SAID THE 90'S WERE BAD?!

GAMEPOT.COM
RATING: 92%

IGN.COM
RATING: 93%

VOIDDOGGXETREME.COM
RATING: 92%

GAMECENTRAL.COM
RATING: 97%

GAMES.COM
RATING: 99%

GAMEZONE.COM
RATING: 97%

GAMEPRO.COM
RATING: 95%

TELEFRAGGED.COM
RATING: 91%

GAME OVER NET
RATING: 90%

JOYBOX.COM
RATING: 90%

*QUOTE FROM COMPUTER GAMES MAGAZINE

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The Blitzkrieg begins this Christmas.

id Software’s deadliest legend reunites you in an apocalyptic battle with all-consuming evil. From fierce single to multiplayer team-based modes, rage against Hitler’s diabolical machine in a full-blown Fatherland graphically realized to Germanic perfection. Face your fear. Only you can deliver the world from evil or damn us all to hell.

www.castlewolfenstein.com
The Empire is in a state of rampant corruption since the loss of the heir to the throne.

Disciples II: Dark Prophecy

The Mountain Clans attempt to reunite their lost tribes and return to their ancient way of life.
The legions of the damned plot their vengeance as the seal on their god's earthly prison deteriorates.

From a Time of Peace Comes an Age of War

The undead hordes goddess searches for divine blood to revive her departed soulmate.

Coming Soon...

Sequel to the Award Winning Disciples: Sacred Lands

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Rewrite history.

With Civilization III, Sid Meier and Firaxis Games unveil the ultimate version of the greatest strategy game of all time. Civilization III is loaded with exciting new features and pathways to victory. Demonstrate your cultural savvy and diplomatic finesse as you match wits with the greatest minds in history. Set up trade alliances. Enter into truces. Or just do things the old-fashioned way and use your military power to take what you want. This highly addictive journey builds on and enriches the Civilization experience and makes this the must-have game of the year. Civilization III, History is up for grabs. www.civ3.com
There are more than 15 weapons, of the Familiar Feel (Terran military, hardware like this rocket launcher) and New Car Smell (exotic alien weapons like the MindClaw) variety.

Go from indoor environments to realistic outdoor scenes faster than you can say "Skaarl." Come to think of it, how do you say "Skaarl"?

UNREAL II

To many fanboys, there are really only two games, two 3D engines, two modes of gaming thought. We won't insult the Unreal fanboys by even mentioning that other game on the same page as this gorgeous shot of squads of Marines and Mercenaries dicing it out in the glorious Unreal II. Let's just say that some gamers should be quaking in their boots right now.

This Marine didn't make it—but U2's new skeletal animation system made his last moments spectacular indeed.
Run away! Run away! This heavily armored Marine has suddenly decided he doesn't like the odds.

Look at those pretty particle effects and all that polygonal grass. New Unreal II tech brings you tens of thousands of polygons onscreen.
KOHAN: AHRIMAN'S GIFT

We love pleasant surprises. And when Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns worked its way onto our playlists earlier this year, we got just that. Now comes another. Kohan: Ahriman's Gift is the first Kohan expansion; more accurately, it's a stand-alone prequel, but considering the huge amount of gameplay that it adds to the original game, it's almost like a sequel. At least this should tide us over until there is one.

More than 90 units, both new and familiar.

A fully functional map editor and random map generator let you create your own lands to add to the 40 included maps.

With five new campaigns, Kohan: Ahriman's Gift should keep strategy/fantasy gamers busy for quite some time.
There are more than 70 heroes, 100 spells, and 75 technologies. It'll take weeks just to try them all.
Microsoft's Flight Simulator series is one of the longest running and most successful franchises in all of PC gaming. All of PC software for that matter. Every year they make strides in not just physics and avionics realism, but in visual realism as well. As you can see, this year's model (which went gold just before press time) is no different. As long as we can fly over the CGW offices, we're happy.
This is the East Bay, the only place CGW editors can afford to live.

The sun rises over the bay, casting a diffused reflection on the water.

This is the CGW company seaplane. Sometimes we let Scooter fly it.

There's our office, down there somewhere...and if you look real closely, you can see Jeff asleep at his desk.
Introducing Star Wars® Starfighter™ for PC.
There's nothing standard about this flight action experience. Supercharged performance. Stunning graphics. Massive galactic battles. Three flight-ready crafts. With totally immersive depth of play that thrusts you into the cockpit. And the only one left with no options—will be the Trade Federation.

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Sleek, sophisticated, and fully loaded.

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PC CD ROM  TEEN  VIOLENCE

ESRB
Aliens vs. Predator 2

Drop the linen and start the grinnin'—AvP2 is ready to burst forth

By Thierry Nguyen
Who would turn down the chance to leap up onto someone's face and implant an egg down their throat? No one here at CGW, that's for sure. And now everyone can implant with reckless abandon thanks to Aliens vs. Predator 2.

Right before this issue went to press, we played the shipping version of the game, and so far we like what we've seen. For starters, it runs much better than the single-player demo, which sometimes got chunky in a firefight. There have been several improvements to the single-player gameplay, such as the new ability to take only as much health/ammo as you need when you run across power-ups. What seemed the most impressive though, was the Rashomon-esque nature of the single-player storyline. It jumps across several time periods, and many times when you're playing as a marine, you'll see a predator run off into the distance—and find yourself playing that exact predator during the predator campaign. And unlike the first game, this version has enough atmosphere to give you the feeling of playing a scene in the Aliens or Predator films.

Multiplayer in the shipping version also seems much better than what we experienced in the multiplayer demo. Playing an alien in the multiplayer demo was tantamount to suicide. But after we had played a few free-for-all and team deathmatch bouts online, it seemed to us that the racial balance had been ironed out. Now, getting the most frags seems more a matter of player skill than of race. Many times in the office, one of our editors would proclaim, "Well, if you do so-and-so, then the predator/marine/alien dominates!"

A few problems still show up. The single-player AI looks like it might need some tweaking; and, at least in the marine campaign, we found some questionable design decisions (the lack of marine bot AI support means the marine fights by himself through much of the campaign). But these are just our first impressions; look for a full review next month.
Mana for Motorheads

Revolutionary Motor City Online is far more than hot cars and cool paint. Electronic Arts’ hotly anticipated hot-rod/rocking monster has finally made it to the starting line. Judging by its final beta test—which was smooth and hassle-free—Motor City’s all-consuming automotive environment could seriously alter the way many computer racers spin their wheels. It is an environment where beautifully crafted 1940s street rods meet realistically modeled late-’60s muscle cars. Where dirt ovals and paved speedways vie with road circuits, drag strips, and variable weather to test the mettle of its drivers. Where players scrounge the auction blocks for that one key part to restore or rebuild their trophy ride, argue endlessly the merits of a lowered Nova, and contend with ever-shifting alliances. And it’s all done online, for virtual money or pink slips.

The game features a stunning variety of event parameters to keep the streets safe from fender-bashers and a complex physics model that rewards skill and punishes pedaling-mashing. And while good drivers and their heavily modified vehicles will inevitably damage or lose their equipment in high-profile showdowns, rookies can race without risk through low-level sponsored events. Yet Motor City’s true strength lies in its wonderful sense of community and expansive between-race interfaces, in which all competitors are made to feel part of a multifaceted virtual world. If EA manages to eliminate the instances of opponent warping that hindered its otherwise compelling beta campaign, Motor City Online’s $40 sticker price will seem like bus fare to the racetrack.

Motor City has a beautifully crafted environment with equally beautiful cars.

THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD STRATEGY GAME BONANZA

With the exception of gems like Kohan and Startopia, it's been a quiet year for strategy games. But the floodgates are opening. Civilization III, Commandos 2, Stronghold, and Monopoly Tycoon are all outstanding year-end releases. And Age of Mythology, MOO3, and Warcraft III are still on the horizon. Sleepless nights again—finally!

THE BAD HALO

So, Halo, a game we once put on our cover as one of “the five games that will change gaming,” has finally gone gold—and it looks as awesome as we had predicted. Guys around the office can’t stop playing it. So what’s the problem? We’re playing it on the Xbox, that’s the problem. Freakin’ Microsoft traitors.

THE UGLY POOL OF RADIANCE

Ahh, another heartwarming story of incompetence: A highly anticipated game with a built-in drooling fanbase! The sequel to one of the best RPGs ever made! The first RPG with the Third Edition D&D rules! And then...they release it in an inexcusably bug-ridden state. Next time you don’t plan on finishing, why don’t you just not start?
Cate Archer Returns!

Sexy heroine promises more action in No One Lives Forever 2

By Ken Brown

After stealing our hearts in last year's best action game, Cate Archer is tuning up her snowmobile and polishing her pistols for an encore. It might be hard to improve upon the original game's brilliant mix of campy spy-spoof and over-the-top shootouts. But after selling 350,000 copies of No One Lives Forever, Monolith Studios is eager to try. They intend to raise the bar in NOLF 2 with better graphics, more varied gameplay, and more of the snappy dialogue that was such a hallmark of the original.

Monolith is playing coy concerning the details, but the game's lead designer Craig Hubbard (who also designed the original) offered a glimpse of what's in store. NOLF 2 will once again put players in the fuzzy pink slippers of a '60s superspy, but the sequel may take some liberties. Hubbard says, "We're trying to create a game in the spirit of NOLF rather than its literal image. We want to build on the things we enjoyed about the first game without being weighed down by its shortcomings."

In H.A.R.M.'s Way

Cate will again battle the evil forces of H.A.R.M., which will take her to a variety of exotic locales including Japan, India, and Akron, Ohio. The gameworld and everything in it will boast significantly higher polygon counts and improved performance, thanks to a new version of the rendering engine known as LithTech Jupiter. The world will also be more interactive, allowing you to bump, activate, or destroy many features of the environment.

The designers are placing more emphasis on accommodating different playing styles this time around. Their aim, Hubbard says, is to create relatively open environments and fill them with possibilities, leaving it to players to decide how to accomplish their goals.

Sound will play a key role. AI characters will be able to hear everything that the player can hear. So, for example, reloading a weapon, opening a door, or knocking over an empty bottle may arouse suspicion. If you're not careful, you might accidentally startle roosting pigeons, bringing a nearby guard to investigate. Sometimes you can use this to your advantage, by getting a bad guy to leave his post so you can sneak by.

We'll bring you more details (without giving away the best surprises) as the game nears its holiday 2002 release.
The Blood Pledge Lineage

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For more information, subscription fees, downloading Lineage or acquiring a CD, go to http://www.lineage-us.com. Internet connection and online fees required. Windows 98/2000/Me/NT. © 2001 NCsoft Corp.
Claim a castle as your own through fierce battle. But are you strong enough to defend it?

Use the power of magic to aid your friends or destroy your enemies.

Lord British Is Back

In November and December, gaming’s legendary Lord British will enter the world of Lineage to assist Blood Pledges in the ongoing battle to protect the castle thrones of Lineage from those who would bring harm to the land. Create your account with the Lineage CD enclosed with this magazine and bring your guildmates to join forces with Lord British as he makes his triumphant return to the world of gaming!

You can also download the entire free version of Lineage here, http://www.lineage-us.com
BetterQuest
Dark Age of Camelot outclasses EverQuest at its own game
By Mark Asher

W
ow if the initial fun of Dark Age of Camelot holds up over the long haul, there will be a new contender for the crown of king of the massively multiplayer RPGs.

For starters, Dark Age had perhaps the smoothest launch yet of any massively multiplayer online game. Certainly, it was the best launch since Asheron's Call.

That's welcome news for the massively multiplayer genre, since the recent horrendous launches of Anarchy Online and World War II Online probably left fans wondering if their money was wasted. The creators of Dark Age, Mythic Entertainment, rewarded gamers with a launch that was virtually problem-free.

There were a few hiccups involving lag time and a few patches, but Mythic soon solved the problems and has been quick to respond to player suggestions.

The biggest problem for players was finding a copy of the game. Dark Age sold-out everywhere and has been the fastest-selling game of its type to date, according to Mythic. Copies were selling above cost on eBay almost immediately, and within two weeks of the launch Mythic had more than 92,000 players sign up for accounts. They've since distributed another 75,000 copies, and the company says the game is still selling well.

So what are our initial impressions? It's hard to stop playing it to write this. The game is flat-out fun if you like this kind of experience. It's similar to EverQuest in many ways. You pick a character class and run around and kill monsters, gain experience points and loot, and go up in levels. It's a level treadmill, but an entertaining one.

Where Dark Age really seems to shine is in the details. As one player told us during an in-game chat, "It's like they had a list of things that players didn't like in EverQuest and fixed them." One of the biggest complaints about EverQuest was that players have too much downtime (time spent resting to regain health and mana); downtime is almost nonexistent in Dark Age. Players also complained about some classes not being able to solo (survive without joining a group); in Dark Age, classes are better able to fight on their own. Players complained about losing items due to death in EverQuest; this doesn't happen in Dark Age-you lose only experience points.

If Mythic can continue to add content and support the game, well, look out, EverQuest. Dark Age of Camelot may indeed snatch that crown.

REALITY CHECK
Reality Check compares various media ratings with those of GameRankings.com, which averages the ratings of all published reviews for a given title.

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* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

You’re about to hack and slash your way through armies of fierce enemies. Explore vast realms from glacial ice caves to desert canyons. And control up to 8 characters at a time. So put on your breastplate and sharpen your sword, for your epic journey from one battle to the next is about to begin.

microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege
NEW RELEASES

Bundle-licious

With the holidays approaching, game publishers are piling on the special releases.

From hunting bad guys in Rogue Spear and SWAT 3 to unleashing wholesale destruction in Diablo II, this list offers plenty of ways to avoid your family this holiday season. The original versions of these games were all excellent, but these special editions add loads of new features and content that make them even more worthy. If you don't have one of the originals, get the special edition.

**Diablo Battlechest $50**

If you are one of the oddball loons who has not succumbed to the addictive madness of Diablo, you won't get a better opportunity than this to indulge. Here you get Diablo II, Diablo II: Lord of Destruction, the original Diablo, and a BradyGames strategy guide, all for a measly $50. Kill monsters, level up, repeat until your family hates you.

**Operation Flashpoint Gold Edition $40**

This new pack comes equipped with the latest version of the full game: new vehicles, weapons, and missions; and enhanced multiplayer features. It also includes Red Hammer, a 20-mission add-on that lets players fight a Soviet campaign. With a new central character, Dmitri Lukin, and fresh cut-scenes, Red Hammer is a Flashpoint must-have.

**SWAT 3 Tactical GOTY Edition $30**

While rookies will benefit from the new tactics CD, veterans will revel in the other goodies: more than a dozen new missions, 10-player support, custom careers, new multiplayer options, and more—all in addition to the original game. An outstanding enhancement of an excellent game.


Just add Nazis, and you'd have every id shooter ever made. Gold Edition is a hybrid Mac/PC disc with Q3A and Q3TA; Ultimate Quake gives you all three Quake games, and Doom Collector's Edition packs in Doom I and II and Final Doom all at once.

**Myth II: Worlds $30**

This hefty brick of real-time tactical fantasy includes Myth II: Soulblighter and its official strategy guide, loads of user-created mods including the very popular World War II: Titans, the feudal Japan-themed Basilea: Way of the Warrior, and the incredibly ambitious The Seventh God (see Homebrew on page 44).

**Totally Unreal $20**

Haven't had a chance to ride a tactical nuke yet? Here you go. In addition to Unreal Tournament and some mods, gamers also get Unreal Gold and a bonus disc with images and trailers for Unreal II and Unreal Championship. A good primer before the mighty Unreal II arrives.

**No One Lives Forever: Game of the Year Edition $30**

In case Cate Archer's British accent and skin-tight clothing weren't enough for you before, this special edition includes four new levels of moronic henchmen, a music CD of swingin' '60s tunes, a strategy guide, and map editor. The new levels aren't up to the same quality as before, but just playing with Cate again was enough for us.

**Rainbow Six Collector's Edition $70**

This box has everything but a sniper rifle: two award-winning tactical simulation benchmarks, Rainbow Six and Rogue Spear; an essential add-on (Urban Operations); a training disc from special forces experts; interviews with Tom Clancy and real covert operatives; and a strategy guide. The ultimate counterterrorist collection.

**Fallout Tactics**

While I still believe that elves are pathetic, thanks to Fallout Tactics I'm willing to revise my previous opinion of role-playing games. They're not so bad, as long as they don't have elves. Well, except Fallout Tactics isn't an RPG. Fallout Tactics is a strategy game. But the things that make it good are the things you'd expect to lose when converting an RPG to the strategy genre. Normally, I'm all for cleaning role-playing out of whatever it's managed to weasel into, but now I'm starting to have doubts, which scares me.

People go on and on about how no computer game can simulate a pen-and-paper role-playing experience. But what computer RPGs do manage to do is cram strategy into where the role-playing should be. Or is. I'm definitely not the guy to talk about that.

People associate role-playing with a story told through dialog boxes, no matter how much strategy there is in the game otherwise. But that story often just disguises the devices the designers use to incorporate strategic decision-making. The only difference in Fallout Tactics is that you don't have to click through pages of text-boxes. The truly Baldur's Gate wasn't much of a role-playing game. But it was one of the best strategy games of 1998, and how. Even standard RPG elements like talking to NPC's were just a way for you to make basic decisions like those about party composition. Need a Cleric? You can get Dynahel, but if you decide you don't need her anymore, you have to decide whether you can afford to lose Minsc. This may be related to the backstory, but you don't have to delve into that scariness to make some interesting tactical decisions.

Fallout Tactics strips away the devices but leaves the decision-making intact. Your decisions about skills and abilities determine how you'll play the game, and the lack of a lot of between-mission chatter doesn't make the game any less compelling. Instead, challenging missions, superb production values, and excellent design of the underlying engine illustrate that games are really about doing rather than reading.

There are things that distinguish an actual role-playing game from a strategy game masquerading as one, such as transparent, linear story devices that don't make any sense except as game mechanics. But done well, the elements that please role-playing fans are very likely to be the same ones that let people like me accept the game as strategy—you just have to dress them up differently. Fallout Tactics shows how unnecessary most RPG dialogue is, unless, as in Planescape, it's really part of a developed story. It's outstanding. Which I never would have expected from something based on a role-playing game.

Here comes my elf!
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One expansion pack is nothing more than a slew of new items, units, and weapons; you unlock them one by one, watch their new effects, and never bother with them again. Others just collect all the bug patches since the game's release into one $20 CD-ROM. But some expansion packs actually live up to their name by expanding the gameworld through new storylines, new worlds, and new gameplay. Black & White: Creature Isle is one among the latter.

Creature Isle picks up the story of our little boatbuilder friends from the first land in BW, as they crash on a remote island. The people of this island, while similar to the tribes in the first game, are not influenced by a god such as yourself. But they are quite familiar with the creatures, considering that their island is overrun with them. Your boatbuilder buddies decide to summon you through a portal, and the next thing you know, you and your preexisting creature land on this new island.

There are no other gods to compete with, so you'll spend less time fighting for influence. You still have to do the same things for your villagers like help them grow food and get them to worship you, but the game focuses much more on your creature. The creatures who inhabit the isle have lost their gods but have banded together in the Brotherhood of Creatures to maintain their collective strength. They are led by a brave lion named Rufus. Your main job is to earn a place for your creature in the brotherhood by completing challenges the creatures give you.

The challenges, 24 in all, are essentially a series of minigames including: Bowling—defeat a cow using boulders on a large-scale lane. Soccer—score some goals in the game those crazy Europeans call “football.” Foot Race—you have to beat a turtle around a marked course on the island. Sound easy? He cheats. Whack-a-Villager—like whack-a-mole, but with people. Sparring—there is a dojo where two creatures can square off and fight at any time without consequences. The most intriguing of all may be the Tyke challenge. Tyke is a creature—a chick, to be exact—that your creature must nurture and raise throughout the game, but only after you've hatched Tyke from his egg, a big challenge in itself. Creature Isle should enrich the BW experience, while adding more replay. Watch for it sometime before Christmas.

Creature Isle offers new storylines, new worlds, and new gameplay.
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Handhelds

Cellular Assassins

New Swedish game BotFighters turns cell phone users into virtual hit men
By Sandy Brundage

"I typed 'Fire Highlander' and hit. A few more shots, and he exploded in a cloud of blue sparks. I got off the bus at a run."

As if the real world weren't scary enough lately, it's Alive is trying to make you even jumper. The Swedish company has masterminded BotFighters, the first location-based mobile game. Twenty-four hours a day, that cell phone in your pocket makes you a walking target. "We have a lot of car chases, people racing around neighborhoods on bicycles," says Sven Halling of It's Alive. With the cell phone serving as weapon and radar, the lines between games and reality almost disappear.

"I was riding the bus to work when my cell phone beeped," a player recalled. "Pulling it out, I saw an SMS message: 'Radar alert! Tracking signal detected 2500m east.' Someone was hunting me down. If they were using a laser rifle with a range of 1600m...but the bus rolled on, oblivious to my peril."

Another message arrived heartbeat later: "Radar warning! Strong tracking signal 1800m east. The enemy had locked on." Time to shoot the messenger. But first, some counterintelligence action, thanks to a dastily typed "Scan," which sniffed out the assassin's location. Highlander was hiding only 1500 meters to the east.

"I typed 'Fire Highlander' and hit. A few more shots, and he exploded in a cloud of blue sparks, I got off the bus at a run, because who knew how long it would take Highlander to get back in the game."

BotFighters launched last March in Sweden. Since then, almost 3,000 killers have signed on to play for $5 to $10 a month on top of their regular wireless bill. There's also a small fee per text message sent. A few players have spent more than $2,000 waging war on street corners. Each victory earns Robucks—the game's internal currency—good for upgrading your blasters, shields, or laser guns via the game's Website. The site also functions as a guild hall; players chat, sign assassination contracts, and spy on the real-time positions of their enemies. The game mobilizes in the United States in a few months.

Dumpster Diver

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thierry Nguyen

On the one hand, you could have one of the greatest strategy games ever, the 2000 Action Game of the Year, an entire turn-based strategy franchise, an excellent hockey game, a fun racer, AND a deep shooter. On the other hand: a potential Coaster of the Year. Any questions?

- StarCraft $6
- No One Lives Forever $12
- Heroes of Might & Magic Millennium Edition $10
- NHL 2001 $15
- Dirt Track Racing $10
- Wheel of Time $7
- Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor Collector's Edition $65

46 Computer Gaming World
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eagames.com
New Life for Lord British and Lineage

Ultima creator teams up with NC Soft to bring Korean online game to America

By Mark Asher

Lord British is back! As part of the North American relaunch of the popular Korean online RPG Lineage, Lord British is returning as an in-game character tolay siege to the castle of the pretender kings! Better yet, Lord British will be played by none other than Richard Garriott during a month-long series of events that will take place only on North American servers.

"I am personally inviting all the powerful guilds of Ultima, EverQuest, and any other lands to come join us in Lineage," Garriott told us. "As Lord British, Starr Long (the director of Ultima Online who played Blackthorn), and many others who built the lands of Britannia, as well as many of the creators of the other lands, will be here, too, for a month-long event." Garriott's company was purchased by NC Soft, and now he's working on Lineage as well as a next-generation game for the Korean company.

Lineage has 2.7 million subscribers in Asia, but it launched in the U.S. earlier in the year with little fanfare and didn't really take off. For the relaunch, NC Soft-Austin's Manager of Community Services Susan Kath says that the game has undergone some dramatic changes.

"We've added and expanded areas, added a training area for new players, and revamped the interface to make the game more familiar to U.S. gamers," she says.

The events will play out during December, as a new castle is introduced and the ancient-pledge will attempt to win out and claim the castle as their own. In Lineage, players form groups called blood-pledges and try to gain and hold the castles. It's team-versus-team warfare, though at the lower levels it plays like an online Diablo, according to NC Soft's David Swofford.

Other changes include pledge housing, which can be purchased and used as a base; the introduction of new areas, including one that's underwater; and some whopping big dragons that require multiple groups of players to bring down.

So check out the free copy of Lineage included with this issue and play alongside a gaming legend, Lord British, late of Britannia, now looking for new lands to conquer.

"We've revamped the interface to make the game more familiar to U.S. gamers."

PERSPECTIVE: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

By Arcadian Del Sol

Love and Hunger

Hopelessly Devoted to You

Ultima Online turned four years old this month. People are still playing it. What makes people stick with outdated graphics and an aging game engine? According to Jonathan "Calandryll" Hanna of Electronic Arts, "Ultima Online still offers the deepest experience in online gaming." As for the persistent nature of the players in this persistent world, "When people feel they are a part of something special, they tend to stick with it."

Apparently so. The Realm, an online game rushed to production just before UO, has survived for nearly five years. More like an interactive slide show than an online world, The Realm is still populated with an avid player base.

It is tempting to smirk at fans of these games when more recent entries into the online jamboree sport 3D-accelerated graphics and fully detailed polygonal worlds. But at least they can point at their monitors and dare us not to be dazzled.

Cover Your Asset

After many a positive beta report, Mythic Entertainment's Dark Age of Camelot has been released to a public starving for an online game that doesn't strap you onto a leveling treadmill.

Interestingly, Mythic has opted to disable the ability to multitask with other applications while playing DAO. According to Mythic, this is done to prevent the use of third-party cheat utilities and to curtail extracurricular discussions among players that might serve to undermine the carefully balanced game of Capture the Artifacts that exists for players of higher level. In the meantime, the honest guy has to wonder if he's been hacked while playing, given that his personal firewall software will not be running while he is playing the game. But by the time you read this, there should be a fix for this posted to the support website.
Some of the very first mice, invented in 1964 by Doug Engelbart, had three or even five buttons. Doug knew the human body could get a lot done at once and also considered foot, knee, and even nose input devices!

But in the long run, our hands' incredible versatility was harnessed mostly for writing and occasionally clicking, when not stuffing Doritos into our otherwise motionless bodies.

Keeping input options simple is a healthy compromise to ensure that as many potential players as possible can plug in.

And more elaborate input devices already use more of our hands' many talents.

But compared to the hundreds of simultaneous actions modern systems can process, hands-only input is starting to look like a bit of a bottleneck.

It may be a while before the full immersion popularized by mid-90s Hollywood hits the market, but whatever parts of your body output force, you can bet there'll be a way to input it as well.

And if improved voice recognition and voice over net make typing redundant, look for your hands to play a far more complex role as well.

Force feedback devices already provide humpy steering wheels and joysticks, but the real-time manipulation of 3D objects is where things get interesting --

In short: What goes out will go in.

-- and where virtual environments might start to give the real thing a run for its money.

I've played with some prototypes and believe me, there's nothing like the feeling you get from pushing thin air.

It'll probably take longer than we want for such toys to hit the market, but at least that'll give us time to enjoy our lives outside of games -- before those games suck us in forever!
UPDATE

Wookiee Watching

What it's like to be a walking carpet in Star Wars Galaxies

By Ken Brown

Despite male and female genders, don't count on any Wookiee nooky.

Wookiees are the only species that can build and repair the bowcaster, the traditional Wookiee weapon that Chewbacca carries throughout the original trilogy. Bowcaster-specific skills will be reserved for Wookiee characters.

Wookiees are also proficient with the ryyk blade, a hand-to-hand weapon unique to Wookiee culture. As with bowcasters, ryyk blade skills will be limited to Wookiees.

In the Star Wars universe, Basic is the most common language in the galaxy. Wookiees can understand Basic and many other languages, but their unique vocal chords prevent them from speaking anything but Shyriwook, the Wookiee native tongue. Wookiees will therefore need to rely on emotes, gestures, postures, and protocol droids for communicating with other players who don't understand Shyriwook. Like other languages, Shyriwook will be available for players to learn.

Players can choose from both male and female Wookiee characters, both with customization options for facial features, hair color and patterns, and hairstyles.

Wookiees don't like the reptilian Trandoshans (another playable species in Galaxies), who have a bad habit of using Wookiees for slaves. As a result, Wookiee characters may encounter hostile Trandoshan NPCs and have a difficult time dealing with Trandoshan vendors.

GET A LIFE

Hey Polhdexer, step away from the computer

Sex
Some of us at CGW have actually experienced the act of love, but some of us still just download it. The verdict is in and CGW gives real sex five stars, so do yourself a favor and get a date. Or DSL...they're both pretty good.

Lord of the Rings Trilogy
Opens December 19. We're excited alright, but we're trying to keep our expectations low. As long as this movie validates every moment of our entire lives up to this point, we'll feel we've gotten our $8.50 worth.

Holidays on Ice
David Sedaris offers up six hilarious tales of Yuletide darkness. "The SantaLand Diaries" is a tour de force detailing his stint as a Christmas elf at Macy's. Who can resist the charms of "Dinah, The Christmas Whore"?

Maxwell's Now
CGW editors are sick of hearing "Lifetime" blur out of Wil's office, but they can't deny that this album is the bomb. What's not to like about Maxwell? He's black, he has cool hair, and the ladies love him. Remind you of someone?
A New Wizardry for a New Generation

• Explore a vast 3D world filled with action, magic, and adventure.

• Choose a custom personality for each character and hear them speak over 100 lines of dialogue.

• Battle over 300 types of monsters in some of the most intense combat ever seen in a RPG.

• Advanced creature AI brings a new level of realism to RPGs.
It's not cynical, uncreative game design if your buggy $15 product makes money!

**Tycoon Typhoon**

Could these be the next big Tycoon games you see at Wal-Mart? By Robert Coffey

With the success of Tycoon games like Roller Coaster Tycoon and Railroad Tycoon, publishers are chasing the wave with a rash of bizarre new titles. Among them: Car Tycoon, Skate Park Tycoon, Airline Tycoon, Ski Resort Tycoon, Oil Tycoon, and even Fast Food Tycoon.

If there's a market for such a thing as "Fast Food Tycoon," can the following tycoon titles be far behind? Spot the real game in this list of bogus ones for a chance to win a special sampler of idiotic tycoon games! (Send your email to gwhistles@ziftdav.com.)

**Beanie Baby Tycoon**

Blow vast sums of money on eBay as you scoop up Blackie the Bear, Early the Robin, Wiggly the Octopus, and every cute goddamn one of them no matter what your husband says. Finally, a game that speaks to the lonely, 400-pound woman in sweatpants lurking in us all.

**Celebrity Lamprey Tycoon**

What would you do for that 16th minute of fame? In Celebrity Lamprey Tycoon you need to assemble a stable of figures living in the shadow of true stars and get them campy cameo work, the occasional commercial, and the odd Playboy spread. Kato Kaolin, Darva Conger, doomed publicity whore LaToya Jackson, and more are fast dimming stars in this game's universe.

**Paparazzi Tycoon**

It's not stalking if you're paid to do it! That's the rallying cry for this callously intrusive photographer sim. Control an army of evil shutterbugs using Hubble Telescope-caliber lenses to snap topless-sunbathing photos of Jennifer Love Hewitt and gawd Julia Roberts into a fistfight for an extra fat check.

**Tycoon Tycoon**

It's not cynical, uncreative game design if your buggy, pedestrian, $15 product makes money! Instead of being burned onto a CD-ROM, Tycoon Tycoon expands the traditional realm of gaming by delivering to your door a morally bankrupt Marketing Manager, a whiteboard reading "Tycoon," and a high school programmer willing to work for Doritos, D&D figures, and a signed photo of Tia Carrere.

**Moon Tycoon**

It's on the moon! You're a tycoon! Moon Tycoon! Say it—it's fun! Moon Tycoon! How can it possibly fail?

**Wayans Brothers Tycoon**

Do you have what it takes to keep every marginally talented Wayans brother gainfully employed? Play the Jamie Foxx cord and get Keenan a mercy part in a movie! Keep Damon out of the way with a job at Orange Julius while you launch yet another series on the WB! Deal with the scintillating challenges presented by exclusive new Wayans clan members, the diminutive Theodore Roosevelt Fitzsimmons Wayans and the stuttering albino Pinky Onyx Wayans. Whatever you do, don't get them wet and don't feed them after midnight.

**Freak Show Tycoon**

Make your own hideous aberrations of nature and take them on the road, displaying them in parking lots, at county fairs, and at children's birthday parties until you reach the pinnacle of success—a command performance for England's equally disfigured Royal Family!

**The Hair Club for Men Tycoon**

You're not just a tycoon—you're a member! Design a custom line of marginally realistic hairpieces for endless horde of insecure real estate brokers. Research new materials to create the ultimate Man Wig: Does the holy toupee grail lie in yak hair, deep sea kelp, or a dark ritual involving three goats, the full moon, and a one-eyed, loincloth-clad dwarf named Manny?

**Genital Piercing Tycoon**

Ooooh, it hurts so good! Actually, no, not so good. It just hurts. It hurts really bad. It hurts really, really, really bad. And the nightmares don't get me started on those. Bundled with a special hypoallergenic force feedback mouse designed by Nine Inch Nails.
THE SEQUEL TO THE BEST-SELLING STAR TREK® RTS GAME EVER

STAR TREK® II

ARMADA

Command more ship classes and 3-D formations (up to 16 ships per fleet).

30 compelling single-player missions give you control over Federation, Klingon and Borg forces.

Engage in intense multiplayer battles with up to six races, over LAN and Internet via Gamespy.com

Report to www.armada2.com for mission updates

Activision

Everyone Violence

StarTrek.com Mad-Doc Activision}

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**CGW Top 20**

Those ruthless Sims claw their way back to the top, refusing to be outdone even by the *Lord of Destruction*

They may be cute, but The Sims will stop at nothing to get ahead.

Lord of Destruction: named for the effect it has on people's lives?

Operation Flashpoint: proves a highly compelling commercial military sim.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
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<th>Game</th>
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<td>Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed</td>
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**NOTABLE QUOTE**

"We never talk to consumers. They just f*** us up."

- Kelsey Flock of Sony Online Entertainment, in *Edge* Magazine

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**5-10-15 YEARS AGO IN CGW**

**Five Years Ago, Jan. 1997**

For a computer gaming magazine, this issue sure seemed to focus on people. Every other page seemed to feature real humans—actors from *Jedi Knight*, Christopher Lloyd in *Toonstruck*, wannabe SAG members dressed like drawings for The Last Express, a guy with a hatchet in his forehead from *Hervester*, and page after page of CGW drones posing uncomfortably in the same grey mock turtleneck. Thank God those FMV days are over.

**10 Years Ago, Jan. 1992**

Apparently vast amounts of time were continuously pumped into CGW a decade ago. How else to explain the 1991 Action Game of the Year Award going to *Links*, a friggin' golf game? Or a full page of fiction by someone called Huemac the Rune Mage? Or the oddly compelling erotic tale of Mike Ditka unfolding across four consecutive pages of an Accolade ad with this bold text: "The Earth opened, she stood naked, her wet body bathed in Beverly Hills moonlight. Ditka was out to kick butt—he hated the Austrians."

**15 Years Ago, Jan. 1987**

Cinemaware's classic *Defender of the Crown* was reviewed in this issue, and we even named a new genre for it: interactive cinema. While that term hasn't exactly caught on, there's no denying this swashbuckling adventure/strategy/action hybrid's hold on our hearts. Fifteen years later, Cinemaware has reformed and is back to making games. Can it *Come From the Desert 2* be far off?
TACTICAL MASS DESTRUCTION.
ONE BEAUTIFUL OXYMORON.

MechCommander 2 — A real-time game of power, combat and treachery set in the BattleTech Universe. As commander, you'll use strategic thinking and military intelligence to lead a company of advanced killing machines through a bitter battle of sophisticated warfare.

If you cripple the noble houses, you'll bring stability back to the 31st century. That'll make you a classic hero in the future. But if you fail, your 'Mechs will be largely reduced to a heap of burning rubble. And you won't be terribly pleased. MechCommander 2, know what it is to command.

mech.com/games/mechcommander2

Actual Game Footage

Microsoft
Estimating software release dates is like snowboarding in an avalanche. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cqwitters@anvildiv.com.

1. **Hidden & Dangerous II** Petr Vochozka, designer at Illusion Softworks, was quoted as saying that as of press time, H&DII is "close to the Alpha stage." The biggest hurdle left is the AI, which can make or break a game, no matter the genre. Even though the lead designer left the company due to creative differences, two other designers have stepped in, and everything looks like it's on track.

2. **Capitalism II** Remember designer Trevor Chan? Last seen designing Seven Kingdoms, he's returned to the game. In addition to the completely overhauled Isometric engine, new features such as a dynamic economy, more product types, the ability to use a press, multiplayer modes, and building acquisitions will be making their way into this substitute-MBA program. You can also do stuff like observe your employees and customers via an interior view and build a mansion with the money you're making (assuming you're doing a good job). You'll probably get the chance to flex your corporate might by the time you read this.

3. **Hitman 2: Silent Assassin** Eidos formally assigned Hitman 2 to take out the competition sometime next spring. In response to complaints about the previous game, Eidos will include a Save Game function as well as the option of switching between first- and third-person views (first-person for PC players, third-person for the Xbox and PS2 versions). Also, there will be an inventory system that allows weapons to be carried over from one mission to the next.

4. **Impossible Creatures** Due to trademark problems, Alex Garden's bizarre Sigma has been renamed, in the tradition of wacky '50s popmart scifi movie parodies, to Impossible Creatures.

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### Games

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### Additional Notes

- **PlanetSide**: Sony Online Entertainment, Summer 2002
- **Quake IV**: Activision, Someday
- **Reality Dealmatch**: IdWooD, Spring 2002
- **Republis: The Revolution**: Eidos, Summer 2002
- **Return to Castle Wolfenstein**: Activision, December 2001
- **Serious Sam: The Second Encounter**: Take Two, December 2001
- **Shadowbane**: UbiSoft, Winter 2001
- **Sid Meier's SimGolf**: EA, Winter 2001
- **Sims Online**: EA, Summer 2002
- **Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix**: Eidos, Summer 2002
- **Sovereign**: Sony Online Entertainment, Cancelled
- **Star Wars: Galaxies**: LucasArts, Winter 2002
- **Star Wars Jedi Outcast**: LucasArts, Spring 2002
- **Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic**: LucasArts, Fall 2002
- **Toluka Rosa**: Destination Games, Summer 2003
- **Team Fortress 2**: Sierra, Spring 2003
- **Third Ill**: Eidos, Summer 2002
- **Unreal II**: Infogrames, Spring 2002
- **WarCraft III**: Blizzard, Spring 2002
- **Warlords IV**: UbiSoft, Summer 2002
- **Warlords: Battlecry II**: UbiSoft, March 2002
- **World of Warcraft**: Blizzard, Eventually
Recognize your mortality.

Kill or be killed as three different species: Alien, Predator, Human. Each with new weapons and capabilities in a single storyline told from three perspectives. Intense action. With graphically stunning environments. Blinking just became a liability.
You mostly take your aggression out on rival gangs and the cops, but innocent people sometimes get in the way.

I don't think this is what this guy had in mind when he said, "I want to die at home in my own bed."
MAFIA

Making gamers an offer they can't refuse

By Tom Price

The '20s and '30s were kind of a renaissance for the mafia, which, by the way, doesn't exist according to the burly men from New Jersey standing behind me in my cubicle. Organized crime flourished during Prohibition, and Hollywood became fascinated with the gangster image as actors like Jimmy Cagney and Edward G. Robinson became huge movie stars. The movies of that time period, along with other more modern depictions of La Cosa Nostra, are the main inspiration behind Czech developer Illusion Softworks' new third-person action/adventure game, Mafia.

In Mafia, you play Tommy, a mild-mannered cab driver who gets caught up in the seedy underworld of crime when some thugs in need of a getaway car hop into his cab. That's how the first mission begins, with you driving a jalopy at breakneck speeds (say, 40 miles per hour?) while your goodfella passengers empty their rosaries at the persuing cops. It's a good way to kick off the game, considering what an important role cars play. Most missions will involve hopping into an old Model T or Pierce Arrow (there are no real car licenses in the game, but cars are closely modeled after real-world antiques) to get to a bank job or kidnapping or other nefarious operation. The car mode is so extensive that a racing-only mode à la Need for Speed is incorporated into the game.

You'll need a car to get around the huge fictional city of Lost Heaven, which is about 12 square miles and is populated with pedestrians, vehicle traffic, and police, who will react even if you break the smallest of traffic laws (which, by the way, were carefully researched for historical accuracy). Lost Heaven is an amalgamation of gritty urban centers from the time period like Chicago and New York. When you're not driving around town, you'll be creating other mischief within the game's 20-plus missions, mostly with bats and tommy guns.

Weapons are also historically accurate, so no rocket launchers. But the Molotov cocktails do pack a wallop. You'll mostly be taking your aggressions out on rival gangs and the cops, but innocent people get in the way once in a while.

At an earlier stage of development, Mafia used the same engine as Hidden & Dangerous (another Illusion game) but it has since moved to an original engine, called LSD3D, better suited to the subject matter. The result is a game that looks like the Depression should be dark, gritty, and depressing—but it's somehow beautiful. Mafia is most reminiscent of Max Payne and Hitman—the biggest difference, thankfully, is that Mafia has multiplayer. If Mafia can avoid Max Payne's corny story and writing while having better gameplay and control than Hitman, then it should be a huge hit. If not, someone's getting fitted for cement shoes.

GAME STATS

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2002
PUBLISHER: Take2
DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks
CONTACT: mafia@godgames.com

www.computergaming.com 63
ULTIMATE BASEBALL ONLINE

Who's on first? It could be you! By Rob Smolka
Each player you create will have a unique DNA makeup, which is a hidden set of attributes that define many of your players’ skills and abilities.

The current phenomenon in gaming (or the once-fresh idea that proved lucrative and is now being copied by everyone else) is massively multiplayer online titles. But so many of the games in development are so similar to the reigning champs (EverQuest, Ultima Online, and so on) that it’s questionable whether enough of an audience can be found to support the newcomers. Netamin’s upcoming Ultimate Baseball Online, though, looks like it has a chance to carve a niche for itself in this crowded field.

Instead of assuming the role of a warrior or wizard, you slip on the spikes of a pro baseball player. But don’t start out as Barry Bonds or Roger Clemens—you pay your dues in the amateur league to earn rank points that allow you to advance through the minors and eventually to the big show. You’ll earn these points through accomplishments like hitting homeruns, striking out batters, and being on the winning team.

Character creation consists of choosing right- or left-handedness and a unique look for your avatar. One item you won’t have control over is DNA, which determines traits such as the pitches you can throw, switch-hitting ability, batting stance, and so on. As the design team adds features to the game, DNA will take on an increasingly important role.

Players won’t be limited to certain positions. While not quite realistic (other liberties taken with realism include a lack of injuries and perfect umpires), it should help to alleviate problems with people not wanting to play certain positions. At first, you’ll participate in pick-up games. When you log on, there will be a number of games to join, each needing a full complement of players before it begins. Just pick an open spot; when all the positions are filled, the game will start. So even childish players will be likely to bite the bullet and play left field, knowing that they’ll have a chance to play a different position in the next game.

As for the gameplay, producer Daniel Manachi says, “All the interfaces were designed to be simple for the new player to pick up but with enough room for player skill to improve over time. There is a power bar for the fielding interface, and you simply stand toward the direction/player you’d like to throw to. The pitching interface will include a list of pitches that the player can throw and the power bar from fielding with an added accuracy.

Pay your dues in the amateur league to advance through the minors and to the big show.

Pay your dues in the amateur league to advance through the minors and to the big show.

The league winners are planned, though Netamin isn’t sure yet what they will be. Also, whether the game will include Major League licenses is still up in the air, but there will be plenty of team names and logos to choose from. The stadiums, too, though fictional, will have a familiar look. The cost of running a game of this sort can be crippling, and licenses can eat up a large part of a budget. There’s a possibility it will happen, as the publisher plans to recoup some of the costs through advertising partners, so expect to see real-world ads on the game’s stadium billboards, for example.

Netamin is aware that eliminating lag will be key to UBO’s success. As Manachi says, “Lag in a game like EverQuest or Counter-Strike is inconsequential in the long run. Even if you die and have to recover your corpse, you move on with no real loss. In UBO, packet loss could cost an entire game, if not a series. Reducing our packet sizes, distributing our servers nation- and worldwide, and combating lag will be an ongoing process.”

A beta test is planned for Q2 2002—by then, most of the gameplay issues will be resolved, and we should get a good idea of whether it will be worth the monthly fee. We’ll update you as the launch date approaches.
Step into the Future of EverQuest...

- Experience a massive 3D overhaul with high resolution player character models and completely re-textured zones, including the original world of Norrath and all previous expansions.
- See the world through a cat's-eye. Play as the new Vah Shir cat man race or BeastLord class.
- Mount up! Horses have now been tamed in the lands of Norrath. These noble steeds will carry you across the world at incredible speeds.
- The moonscape of Luclin adds over 24 new perilous zones to explore.

www.everquest.com
Master of Orion III

Can the granddaddy of 4X games achieve the universal domination it so desperately wants?

By Tom Chick
Every randomly created planet is unique but realistically generated thanks to an enormous spreadsheet that can handle calculations involving interstellar physics, astronomical laws, and something called a Hertzberg-Kuss diagram. Yeah, we don't know what all that means, either.

Ian Emrich is a fairly short fellow with a Napoleon Bonaparte bust on top of his monitor. Like Napoleon, he has plans. Big plans. Plans to make a game of unprecedented scope and depth. "I'd venture to say it's the most complex design ever put into a commercial gaming product. The design mandate was put in the kitchen sink, to raise the bar so high that you get a nosebleed just looking at it," Emrich says. A few minutes later, the hyperbole turns 180 degrees. "We gave you such a deep game, you need an aqua-lung to get to the bottom of it," he boasts. He is clearly fond of flash. Emrich's plan for Master of Orion III is something of a paradox. He hopes to design a complex science-fiction strategy game that will be easily accessible to "tourist" gamers. There's no doubt that MOO3, as it's called by fans of the previous games, will be complex. The demo is mind-boggling. Each game has room for 32 empires. Battles can include up to a dozen task forces, each of which can consist of up to 64 ships. Every planet, ship, task force, system, and army has its own leader. The galaxy consists of dozens of systems, each with up to eight planets, each with up to five moons and an average of five regions, each of which can be developed separately to emphasize manufacturing, mining, bioharvesting, government, research, the military, or spaceport facilities. Each region has its own population, unrest level, unemployment rate, and civil defense. Separate tax rates can be set for each planet, system, sector, and empire. Your economy can include deficit spending with your choice of fixed or floating-point currency. "If you're an accountant, boy are you gonna love this game," Emrich says, rubbing his hands together.

"We give you such a deep game, you need an aqua-lung to get to the bottom of it."

The Raas, according to their MOO rap sheet, have emerged from oppression at the hands of their brethren Saurians. The other Saurian races include the Sakka, ferocious and reptilian-like, and the big, hulking Grendaris.

GAME STATS

GENRE: Strategy
RELEASE DATE: 01 2002
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Quicksilver Software Inc.
CANADA
www.quicksilver.com
No Cats Allowed

What, no B'Eluth? No Mr. Shran? No Daroks? MOO3 will have 16 races, but not all of MOO2's 13 races are returning. "We didn't want humans dressed up in animal suits," Quicksilver's Bill Fisher says, explaining the "no furries" decision that led to cutting the Vulrathi bears and Mr. Shran cats. Instead, we'll see species like the reptilian Sakrak, the fishlike Trillarium, the cybernetic Meklars, and the Humans. Also missing will be the space monsters that guarded some of MOO2's choice systems and gave exploration a Star Trek flavor. "I loved those guys," Emrich says, "but it's that old artists' time/project-budget/schedule thing. So now space monsters lie on the cutting-room floor." Also on the floor is an ethos model that was to represent how different religions permeate the galaxy. "But it was just subtext," he explains, "And at the end of the day, it sucked!"

Grendarl

Calculator Optional

But most of us aren't accountants, so MOO3 is designed to essentially run itself. "When you start your turn, all the decisions are already made. You have leaders everywhere who have implemented your plans. So when you see your Situation Report, crises have already been handled. Now they're handled based on the leaders' races, their personalities, who their bosses are, their character traits. But none of these guys know how to win the game. It's a SimGalaxy running underneath the hood. If you do nothing and just hit done, done, done, then your civilization will slouch toward Gimorrah and you will lose the game. What you need to do is be the man with the plan and steer the great ship of state toward your vision of what it needs to be. All you have to do is whatever you feel is the most fun way to win the game."

For example, you don't have to choose planets for colonization. Each planet has a push and pull factor, which is determined automatically. The push factor represents how badly people want to leave. A planet with a harsh government, a high tax rate, a crowded population, and an inhospitable climate will have a high push factor. The pull factor, on the other hand, represents how badly people want to arrive. A planet with lots of freedom, low taxes, plenty of room, and a pleasant environment will have a high pull factor. For each turn, the game will shuffle population according to the push and pull factors, with no input from the player.

No more micromanaging colony ships and population points.

Unless you want to, of course—and this is the point of MOO3's ambitious design. The player can tell colonies where to go. They can also link with a planet to tweak its push and pull factors. They can provide financial incentives to encourage migration. In other words, all the complicated stuff will run itself, but you can get involved if you want.

Learning to Delegate

This is the paradigm that drives Emrich's design. The AI is built around the leaders, each of whom represents an AI subroutine with a series of tasks it wants to accomplish. You can either sit back and watch or dive in and override. At the beginning of every turn, you receive a certain number of Imperial Focus Points that represent government control. The more centralized your government is, the more points you'll get. For each point you spend, you can dip your
No murders to avenge.
No helpless families to save.
No morals to uphold.
Sweet.

You’re the Black Knight and you’ve got better things to do. Like lead an infamous legion of rogue mercenaries into battle, trade weapons on the black market, even fight for the ruthless House Steiner. All while piloting the most badass ‘Mechs ever. Welcome to the darker side of MechWarrior... Black Knight. Where it’s good to be bad.
screens Galore

As your empire grows, you'll have to choose where to spend your Imperial Focus Points and when to delegate to your underlings.

Fans of the MOO series have been enlisted to write up the indispensable online help system, the Encyclopedia Galactica.

Fingers into some aspect of the game and take direct control at whatever level you want. "You can do anything," Emrich says, "but you can't do everything."

For instance, to develop mining on a mineral-rich planet, you can spend an FPP to go directly to a region and build a mine there. This could get tedious when your empire grows, so the alternative is to operate from a higher level and issue a decree that all mineral-rich planets should build mines. The drawback of this higher level of command is that it's not as efficient. With each high-level edict, your Heavy Foot of Government (HFOG) rating increases to represent the layer of bureaucracy that builds up around big government. As your HFOG increases, so does the cost of everything. It's a sort of bureaucratic inflation.

MOO3's interface is built to let you get involved on any level you want. Nothing is ever more than two clicks away. The basic game screen is a 3D view of the galaxy. You can look at a flat, top-down view with notches on the lanes connecting planets to represent distance. Or you can rotate, tilt, and zoom the view. Click on a system to open its display. There are tabs along the bottom of the screen representing the major government departments. Buttons along the sides of the screen give you quick access to often-used displays. Each screen gives you basic information you'll need, but also allows you to open connected subpanels for more information.

"The beauty of this screen," Emrich says, shrinking a subpanel festooned with numbers back into its parent, "is that you never have to look at it. It's like peeling the layers of an onion and you can stop and play at whatever layer you want."

One potential problem with MOO3's vast oceans of data is that they may not have the elegance and simplicity of Sid Meier's Intuitive Civilization designs. In Civilization, food was gathered in icons. To build something, you stored up shields. To learn something, you stored up light bulbs. Elvists made people happy. There were very few actual numerals. When Activision's Call to Power games abandoned these simple mechanics in favor of numbers, many gamers felt they had lost something.

However, Emrich hopes that his "onion" approach will mean players can ignore the numbers if they want. By playing at the higher levels, players can focus on the narrative. Give speeches. Issue edicts. Conduct diplomacy. Move task forces.
If you need to escape the daily grind, come to Best Buy. You’ll find tons of games and you can play all you want. Which beats working through lunch.
MOO for Two

Multiplayer gaming and turn-based gaming traditionally haven't made a good mix. Even when players take their turns simultaneously, the pace can be erratic—one player might be carefully managing an involved war, while another is just waiting for their granary to be finished. But MOO3 hopes to solve this dilemma by penalizing players who take too much time. As you use up the allotted time, the interest rate on your loan payment rises. "If you're the guy everyone is waiting for, you'll pay," says Emrich. "It's only fair."

Then there are MOO3's tactical battles, which play out at the beginning of every turn. If you're not fighting a battle, you get a sort of peace dividend: You can start taking your turn before the clock is running. Players can save games in progress to start up another time. There's even the option for dynamic joining, in which someone can jump in to take over for an AI player.

"MOO3 is designed to give this genre its best shot to be successful for multiplayer gaming at this scale. I don't think this scale has had a good shot since Command HQ," he says, recalling Dan Bunten's prophetic 1990 game that predated even the earliest multiplayer real-time strategy titles.

Star Wars

Combat in MOO3 is locked at a higher level of interaction. When you build ships, they go into your reserves. You can then draw from your reserves to build task forces, which Emrich calls "custom chess pieces." Battles are automatically resolved unless you spend IFPs to take direct control, in which case you'll play a real-time battle.

Planets, asteroid belts, moons, and dark matter will be the equivalent of terrain. You maneuver your task forces, but each ship's leader fires weapons, uses special devices, or flees if morale breaks. The basic concept resembles that of Tim Gate's innovative Mohan.

The combat engine uses voxels to allow zooming in on close-ups or pulling back for a strategic overview. Because Quicksilver isn't using polygons, curved surfaces are much easier to achieve for planets and bulbous ships. Each of the game's eight species has 14 unique ship models that should make them easy to identify even from a distance. "One of my pet peeves in science fiction is that it looks like everyone uses the same shipyards," says Art Director Rantz Hosley. He shows off MOO3's Ichthyosian ships that look like something from Jules Verne or Leonardo da Vinci. The Cybernetik ships have modular designs that make them look like Tinker Toys. The Saurian ships are all sharp, squat angles, while the Etherian ships have frill, bubblelike cockpitsnestled in craglike carpacises with insect-wing sails. "We've done a lot of study in speculative xenobiology," he explains.

Infogrames will release Master of Orion III this spring, a few months after Civilization III (see our review on page 92). Are the guys at Quicksilver worried about being upstaged? Quicksilver's CEO, Bill Fisher, welcomes the competition. "Sid's going to sell a jillion copies, and we're certainly hoping we might be able to ride on his coattails. Three or four months later, our game comes out and people have played his game to death, and they'll think, 'You know, we're about ready for something new.'"

Emrich figures MOO3 will be the perfect follow-up. "Civ III is a very good conservative approach to advancing the design art," he says. "But we really stretch the genre out. Even if this game fails in part, I think we're going to shine in comparison to the other, conservative approach."
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Ah, the holidays. We love this time of year. And we love you, too. Well, no, we don't. Not really. We don't even know you. And if we did, chances are we wouldn't like you. But, still. We want you to have a happy holiday. We hope you get your stockings stuffed with cool games and all sorts of other good gear. Because it's good for the economy. And what's good for the economy is good for CGW. So when you get right down to it, this is really all about us. Which is the way we like it.

But back to you for a minute. You are a gamer. You like to play games all day. But you can't afford all the games you want. And whenever your girlfriend, mom, spouse, or whoever buys one for you, they always buy the wrong one. "Here you go, honey: Myst. The man at the store said this one was really popular!"

We hear you. And we're sorry. Our friends and family are just as annoying as yours, so we know how you feel. That's why we've decided to approach our gift guide a little differently this year.

We want to make it easy on you and your loved ones. So forget genres. Forget having to explain to fat old Aunt Ethel what an RPG is. Now, with our handy guide, you can simply point to the kind of gamer you are, and she can take it from there. "Let's see now, Stevie says he's a mama's boy, therefore I'll get him Baldur's Gate II."

See? Isn't that much better? Well anyway, enjoy the guide. Buy the games. Keep us in business. And have a happy holiday.

**CGW's Holiday Buyer's Guide**

Attention, shoppers! **CGW picks the best PC games and hardware for the holiday season**

By the **CGW Staff**

www.computergaming.com 79
Reflex Roger

Rather than spend time jabbing needles into the brainstem in an effort to continually stimulate his reflexes, this gamer chooses to pour his energy into the latest in gaming: All the feelings of aggression, dominance, and drive delivered within the safe confines of the computer screen, as opposed to the dangerous “real world.”

Max Payne
Fuse a Gap commercial with the cinematic stylings of John Woo, add a little Charlie Bronson to the mix, and you get Max Payne, the best action movie in modern gaming. Sure, it's short, but really, how much cop-who's-lost-it-all justice do you really need?

No One Lives Forever: Game of the Year Edition
The brilliantly funny script and style of our Action Game of the Year is now updated with a new mission, new enemy, new levels, and even a groovy soundtrack CD. Where else can you find evil spy organization henchmen discussing their 40iks or talking about starting up a band?

Clive Barker's Undying
Not just another mediocre entry in the Hellraiser series featuring a shambler pinhead, this game is honest-to-god creepy, due mostly to its excellent use of sound. Other innovations (for a shooter, anyway) such as dual-wielding and spells make this a solid buy for the gamer who doesn't mind staining his pants with fear-induced bursts of urine.

Madden NFL 2002
Forget shelling out for a satellite system to watch the games every Sunday. Madden 2002 delivers all the bone-crunching, pigskin-slapping, smashmouth fun you can imagine, plus it looks like it jumped right off the big-screen HDTV.

Half-Life: Platinum Edition
In one fell swoop you get one of the best games of all time, its follow-up expansion pack, and two great multiplayer add-ons. Even without Blue Shift or Condition Zero, this is a great way to introduce gamers to the scariness that is the head crab.

Serious Sam
It's Doom 2001, where relentless hordes of critters attempt to shred you into gamer confetti. Bundle this Croatian wonder with the sequel (slated for the holidays also), and welcome hours of “frantic action feeling.”

Return to Castle Wolfenstein
The original FPS returns with an all-new installment done by the mad geniuses behind Kingpin. Think Saving Private Ryan with zombies. After tearing through undead Nazis, jump into multiplayer, where you can re-enact D-Day invasions without polishing Grandpa's old MI. Who doesn't want to kill more goose-stepping Nazis?
Control Freak

They're easy to spot. Just knock over an action figure and see what happens. Or see how long they can keep quiet in the car. The dead giveaway is if your loved one wants their underwear folded. Don't get mad—give them a big hug and a new strategy game. And tell them it's a shame mommy didn't allow more time for potty when they were young.

Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns
A fascinating real-time strategy game with the depth and complexity of a turn-based game, Kohan lets players focus on devising the best strategies and unit mix for conquering new realms. Highly recommended for fantasy lovers looking for a change from role-playing.

Fallout Tactics
Not for the faint of heart, this Mature-rated strategy game based on the Fallout RPG series is as violent as it is rewarding. The game offers squad-based tactical combat in the tradition of X-COM and Jagged Alliance, but it is deeper, bloodier, and harder. Players fight in post-apocalyptic environments to rescue people or take out hostiles in a wasteland populated by mutants, dogs, and irradiated humans. Meaty fare for tactical combat buffs.

Commandos 2
This exquisite detailed strategy game is a control freak's dream. You command every move of an elite group who use stealth and luck to nail targets deep behind enemy lines. A major improvement over the original and great for living out your fantasies of WWII heroes.

Shogun: Warlord Edition
Few games approach the splendor this

Black & White
One of the ultimate control freak games, Black & White lets players nurture a giant beast and loose it on an unsuspecting, defenseless populace. Make no mistake, you are a god in this game, free to be as good or bad as you wish. A unique gaming experience and a remarkable achievement in artificial intelligence.
Sim Jockey

The Sim Jockey likes to keep it real, as in hardcore realism. He likes to feel as if he's actually in the thick of the action, at the controls of a powerful dream machine, making life-or-death decisions on the fly or on the track or even on the battlefield. Eaily identified by the scores of joysticks, racing wheels, throttles, and other peripherals bolted to his desk, the Sim Jockey can talk for hours about force feedback technology or the inner workings of avionics. Do not fear these people! As much as they seem to be living in their own world, they paradoxically have a better grip on reality than a lot of us.

Operation Flashpoint: Cold-War Crisis

War may be hell, but this fully interactive battlefield simulator can make you appreciate that like no other game ever has. While it's a first-person shooter at its core, this game couldn't be more different from Max Payne or Half-Life. You can get in and drive or pilot any vehicle, for one thing. This game is totally unique—and great.

IL-2 Sturmovik

Whether you prefer the challenge of dogfighting in a rickety tub of Russian bolts to the ultraseek and ultraboring fire-and-forget missile wars of modern jet combat, or if you just like a little history with your sims, IL-2 Sturmovik should fit the bill nicely.

Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002

The ultimate flight simulator. So detailed and realistic, you'll want to bring your own barf bag. Heck, they should just include a pilot's license application in the box. Everything from single-engine Cassinas to behemoth 747s are represented here, lovingly recreated down to the last switch and dial on the instrument panel.

NASCAR Racing 4

No, it isn't just hillbillies turning left. NASCAR fans know that races are a battle of wits, strategy, and precision driving. NFRD recreates those qualities so faithfully that many real Winston Cup drivers use the game for practice. Really.

High Heat Major League Baseball 2002

Real baseball geeks are more interested in the subtleties of the spit-fingered fastball than cartoonish home run derbies, so if you haven't discovered the ultra-authentic High Heat series yet, now is the time. For those who crave the drama of the pitcher-batter duel and love to pore over obscure stats and figures, High Heat is the best (and only) choice.
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Mama's Boy

When not in his room playing computer games, the mama's boy is most likely to be found at a comic book convention, playing D&D, or marking off the days on the calendar until the Lord of the Rings movie opens. He may look effete and pale, but underneath that spindly frame is some really real dwarven chain mail and the beating heart of a warrior.

Diablo II Battlechest

Nothing can make the mama's boy feel more like a tough guy than a good hearty round of Diablo II, Blizzard's epic fantasy action RPG. For the holidays, Blizzard has released the Diablo II Battlechest—with Diablo II, the Lord of Destruction expansion set, Diablo I, and a strategy guide—for a measly $50. Good, wholesome, monster-bashing fun for the hyperactive hobbit-lover in your life.

EverQuest Trilogy

If that mama's boy of yours is the social type, consider getting him into EverQuest—but be warned that you may lose him forever. The reigning champ of massively multiplayer games is still going strong with a couple of sweet holiday deals. The EverQuest Trilogy combines the original game with the Ruins of Kunark and Scars of Valona expansions. Shadows of Luclin is the brand-new expansion, with a new planet, horses, new graphics, and plenty more to keep the already-addicted happy and hooked.

The Sims: Hot Date

Now here's a real gift for the mama's boy. If he breaks out in hives, curls up in a ball, or loads his chess program at the thought of talking to a real girl, why not let him practice his underdeveloped romance skills in the privacy of his own bedroom—in a way that allows the door to remain open? The Sims: Hot Date is the latest add-on to the mega-phenomenon, with more than 40 one-on-one social interactions for him to practice with his virtual people. This is no mere game—Hot Date is educational software!

Anarchy Online

Hey, your mama's boy isn't just some kind of fey elf-lover—he also fancies himself a post-apocalyptic warrior! Okay, we hear you. We offer Anarchy Online, a massively multiplayer RPG that leans more heavily on sci-fi than fantasy. AO had a rough beginning, and plenty of people are less than thrilled with Funcom's erratic and underwhelming support, but the hardcore fans (including a few mama's boys right here at CGW) swear by it.

Anachronox

Some mama's boys like a little storytelling and humor with their monster-killing. For them, get Anachronox, a goofy and entertaining console-style RPG that deserves a wider audience. It's not for everyone, but for the guy in your life who has all the Monty Python routines memorized and collects Dr. Who memorabilia, you can't go wrong with this.
“We shall fight on the beaches... on the landing grounds... in the fields... in the streets... in the hills.

We shall never surrender!”
-Winston Churchill

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- All combat takes place with and against live players
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"...with the 1.30 update, it's so much improved that in many respects it's a totally new experience."
- Computer Games Online, October 2001

THE BATTLE OF BLITZKRIEG HAS BEGUN!

WWII ONLINE
BLITZKRIEG

Blood
Violence

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Your Mama

No one loves you like Mom, and yet, of the legions of human beings bewildered, puzzled, and outright disturbed by you, no one is more befuddled than the woman who birthed you. So this holiday try something new. Instead of alienating your family even further, build some bridges and show Mom that gaming is good. Do it for love, do it for unity, and do it to get that nagging harpy off your back so you can play Max Payne in something approaching peace!

Bejeweled
Think of Bejeweled as Mommie Dearest’s gateway drug: Once she starts playing this viciously addictive puzzle game, there’s no turning back. Remember how you had to repeat third grade (and part of fourth) because of Tetris? Well, that’s how effective Bejeweled is. And it comes with an added bonus—since you have to download it at www.popcap.com, Mom will learn a valuable lesson about what she’s been calling The Inter World Wide Infonet Superhighway Com.

Zoo Tycoon
When you were a kid, Mom took you to the zoo, right? And odds are she didn’t try to have you to be raised by dingoes like our moms did, right? Let Mom relive those nostalgic days of young motherhood with Microsoft’s most heartwarming building sims. By day, the two of you can chuckle happily together at the antics of the monkeys. At night, you can let the leopards out to terrorize the visitors.

Williams Pinball Classics
Granted, Mom may not understand the latest and greatest gaming technology, but even the most inbred Appalachian baby machine understands pinball. Williams Pinball Classics so faithfully recreates four classic Williams pinball tables, Mom might actually think she’s in a poodle skirt flirting with boys at the malt shop instead of working two jobs to support your Counter-Strike habit.

Typing of the Dead
Even Mom has a dark side. (Remember that incident with the glue gun?) Let your personal Maternal Godhead blow off steam in this wacky survival horror game, in which her schoolgirl typing skills and not her handiness with a gun will save the day. It just might save the life of the next Avon lady that callously interrupts her “stories.”

Monopoly Tycoon
Remember rainy afternoons spent playing Monopoly with the family and how your brother embezzled money from the bank and made Dad dance on his toes and sing “I’m a Little Teapot” in a piercing falsetto so he didn’t have to pay rent on Marvin Gardens and could eke out one more pointless turn? Mom remembers too. Monopoly Tycoon will scrub away all those horrible memories with entirely new gameplay that’s refreshingly familiar, tremendously engaging, and shot through with the vindictive cruelty that’s made Monopoly a family favorite for decades.
In dark, troubled times, a man will rise up to change the fate of an empire.

That man, is you.

Gothic

Embrace on a timeless adventure in Gothic, a brilliantly woven action-RPG of epic proportions. In the dark land of Myrtana, a rebellious insurrection has begun, isolating the people in an un-penetrable barrier. Meanwhile, the armies of evil are mounting in the neighboring lands, ready to take the kingdom by storm. You are the one warrior who can unite the land again, and save Myrtana from total destruction.

Get medieval on the world, go Gothic. Coming this winter.
MacGyver

Sure, everyone took a page at Richard Dean Anderson, but when you were freezing your ass off miles away from base camp, you had to love the guy who could make a Quonset hut out of Hostess Fruit Pie bags, a Cub Scout knife, and Bubble Yum. The same is true for hardware guys: Show too much interest in an uninterruptible power supply and you’re the laughingstock of your brother Germain’s quilling bee. But who gets a call when they need help? So stop laughing at the family tinkerer and hook a brother up with some hardware.

Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy Platinum
Okay, we know that he has a sound card. But does his sound card have a cool-looking breakout box, have 5.1 support, and sport more FireWire ports than Larry King has ex-wives? (Note: We actually don’t know how many ex-wives Larry King has, but we do know that the Audigy Platinum has four FireWire ports.) If you answered “no” to any of these questions, then your charge is clear: Run out and buy one. The techs in your life won’t know how to thank you.

Logitech MOMO Force Driving Wheel
He always wanted a big-time fancy car. Maybe one of them imports, even. But what with making minimum wage dropping dough in vats of gruel at the local Krispy Kreme whilst living in his parents’ basement, that tricked-out Prelude is looking more and more like a pipe dream. No way do we expect you to buy the slacker some wheels, but for $200 he can sit in his room and pretend he’s one of the “cool guys” that he sees cruisin’ the strip. Uh…maybe not.

Windows XP Home Edition
Back in ’88 Jimmy Hendrix asked the eternal question, “Are you experienced?” Well, Microsoft has an answer for you: “If you’re not, then you should be.” While gamers have always been loath to adopt a new OS, some fellas up in Hendrix’s backyard—Redmond—have come together to create one: Windows XP (Experience), which not only fails to suck, but actually kicks some bona fide ass. We had the opportunity to test the Justice Department’s favorite OS, and on the same machine, Windows XP achieved frame-rates that were on average 10 frames per second faster than the rates of Windows ME.

2GHz Intel Pentium 4 and 1.6GHz AMD Athlon XP 1800+
As I write this, I’m minutes away from attending an AMD press event where they’re going to show off their vaunted new processor, the 1.6GHz Athlon XP 1800+ (or whatever they’re calling it these days). Whether it’s a 2GHz Pentium or a 1.6GHz Athlon XP, the gadget freak in your life will love you forever if he finds one of these beneath the Hanukkah bush.

VisionTek XTASY 6564 (GeForce3Ti 500)
Yeah, yeah, we all know that his 64MB GeForce3-powered Hercules 3D Prophet III gets 3DMark2001 scores of 6000. The thing is, though, with VisionTek’s 64MB GeForce3Ti 500-based graphics card pouting inside that machine, he’ll get 3DMark2001 scores nearing 8000. What?! You don’t understand the importance of that? That’s okay; just buy the damn card.
Build improper cages, and your guests will be pounced upon in the new PC game, Zoo Tycoon! As operating manager, you are responsible for over 40 species, constructing their habitats and keeping them healthy. Hire zookeepers who will gladly clean their cages. Your animals will be happy, and your guests will be too. Especially when all their limbs are left intact.

RIBEYE, T-BONE, FILET MIGNON. A LION WILL EAT THEM ALL. The safest and most cost-efficient way to feed carnivores is to have zookeepers serve them raw meat. But for some excitement, you can feed the lions other live animals. 

BA-BYE GOAZELLES.

YOU TRY SWALLOWING A WHOLE MOUSE. The House of Reptiles is just one of the buildings you place in your operation. There are also petting zoos, bathrooms, and gift shops selling overpriced African Warthogs. The kids love ‘em, and your profit margin will too.

ALL SHE NEEDS IS A GOOD SALAD BAR. The herbivores in Zoo Tycoon need habitats that resemble their native lands. Design them properly and your animals will be happy and fat. Rainforest animals need rainforest trees. Desert animals need desert vegetation. You get the drift.

Nutrition is only one part of Zoo Tycoon. For more info on other facets of the game, go to microsoft.com/games/zootycoon.
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Civilization III
Firaxis takes a risk and produces a Civilization that rules
By Jason Kapalka

Since many people (including me) believe Civilization is the best computer game of all time, expectations for any new incarnation are, to put it sedately, high. With Civ III Firaxis could have played it safe by just updating the graphics and chucking in a few of the interface tweaks from Alpha Centauri, but instead they’ve done a full-scale reworking of several key game mechanics. It’s dangerous to screw with a classic design. After all, if it ain’t broke...

So, the big surprise is that the changes actually work brilliantly. They add depth and flavor while streamlining play and eliminating tedium. After playing this version, I find that the former gold standard, Civ II, feels broken, and that’s about the best backhanded compliment I could give the game.

The graphics for Civ III are certainly good, and include some nice subtle features, like Montezuma in a suit when you reach the modern era or the ability to custom-build your palace from chunks of different architectural styles. But let’s face it: Civ is not about the pictures.

The first major gameplay change you’ll notice is that the different civilizations have specific characteristics beyond their starting techs. For example, religious civilizations build temples and the like more quickly, and suffer only one turn of anarchy when switching governments. Each civilization also has an exclusive elite unit that replaces a regular one, such as the Germans’ Panzer tank or the Aztecs’ Jaguar Warrior. Some, like the Aztecs, get a boost early on from their elite units, while others, like the Americans with their F-15 fighter, shine much later in the game.

Next thing you’ll see is the new Culture rating for each city and empire, based on age and developments like Wonders of the World, libraries, temples, and so on. As a city’s culture grows, so do its borders, until eventually it merges with other nearby cities. This gives you a pleasing geopolitical map with real borders, and prevents annoying computer players from traipsing around

If you have even the slightest interest in strategy games, run—don’t walk—to get a copy of Civ III.
your turf with impunity. Eventually, entire cities near foreign empires with a higher culture may defect to the classier empire.

**Negotiation and Dirty Tricks**
The next big difference you’ll note is in diplomacy and espionage. Diplomat units are gone; instead, you pay money to establish embassies with rival empires. From there, you can haggle for various alliances, embargoes, technologies, and goods in an intuitive interface that allows for all sorts of interesting deals. You could end up paying a lump sum in gold, plus a yearly fee, to get an ally’s support in a mutual protection pact, along with a trade embargo of your foes and perhaps a couple workers thrown in for good measure. Later on, intelligence agencies allow you to perform dirty tricks with the same menu-driven interface (so now you can avoid spy invasions).

Trade, too, has undergone a complete overhaul. Caravans are gone. Instead, there is a range of luxury and strategic resources found on the map itself. Luxuries like wine and incense make citizens in your empire happier, while strategic resources like iron are necessary for building advanced units. When you have established a reliable sea or land route connecting with other capitals, you can trade excess resources or acquire ones you lack from other empires through diplomacy.

Where trade in the original Civ was almost an optional feature, here it is vital. You may have discovered ironworking, but if the Greeks have a monopoly on all the sources of the metal, no legionaries for you, pal. Later, other resources appear on the map as you discover new technologies: When you learn atomic theory, you’ll see uranium deposits appear throughout the world. The appearance of resources makes for much more interesting conflict in the modern eras, when borders have stabilized, as you suddenly realize, for example, that all the available sources of coal or oil are deep in the territories of those damn double-crossing Babylonians.

There are a host of more subtle changes. All unit upkeep is now in gold, rather than food or shields, and the Home City concept for military units is gone, replaced by a War Weariness factor that causes cities to gradually fall into disorder when fighting under a republic or democracy. Settlers can be automated in a variety of ways, and cities can be put under AI governors. There are a couple new units that put an interesting spin on things, like the Privateer, which flies no flag and can be used to attack other nations’ shipping without declaring war.

There isn’t enough space to go into every detail, but it should be noted that it was difficult to write this review, because each time I started the game just to check on some detail, six hours mysteriously vanished. What more do you need to hear? If you have even the slightest interest in strategy games, and I can’t imagine why you’re reading this if you don’t—run, don’t walk, to get a copy of Civ III.

For strategy tips on Civilization III, go to page 136.

**VERDICT**

Maybe the best incarnation of the best strategy game of all time.
At maximum zoom your commandos can be lost in the vastness of each richly detailed map.

Commandos 2: Men of Courage
Lead this band of brothers all the way to victory

By Jason Kapalka

What makes a great game? Some are simply so polished they have no real weaknesses (think Blizzard titles like StarCraft). Others are harder to define. They have flaws, all right, often huge and frustrating ones, but their awesome virtues simply outweigh the mistakes; consider the Microprose classics Master of Orion or Master of Magic, both riddled with game-stopping bugs and defective AI on release.

Commandos 2 falls squarely in the latter camp. Although it's shot through with bugs and screw-ups that would wind a lesser title to the bargain bin, the game itself is so damn good you'll forgive almost anything to keep playing.

The long, long, long-awaited sequel to the original sleeper hit, Commandos 2 shares the same basic premise and gameplay. You control a squad of WWII-era covert operatives in a series of puzzle-oriented real-time missions against Axis targets—movie buffs will easily recognize missions based on Saving Private Ryan, Bridge Over the River Kwai, and The Guns of Navarone. All the boys from the first game—the Green Beret, the Diver, the Engineer—are back, joined now by a host of new characters, ranging from a sexy female spy to an adorable and rather well-trained mutt. In one of the biggest additions to the gameplay, you can also control assorted—and expendable—Allied troops, which allows for pitched firefight rarely seen in the original title.

Theater of War
Graphically, the game has undergone a huge facelift. The main map still provides a top-down 2D view, but you can rotate it in 90-degree increments for a better view of the action. Inside buildings, however, the view becomes fully 3D, allowing for smooth rotation of the scene. You can zoom in or out as much as you like, though up close things tend to get a little pixelated and zooming out too far reduces you to playing Where's Waldo to simply find your guys. The maps themselves are huge—several times the size of the

Commandos 2 is so damn good you'll forgive just about anything to keep playing.
ones in the first game—and obscenely detailed, offering countless sniper positions, hiding spots, and climbable surfaces. Pleasant and not so pleasant surprises abound, like the pretty schools of fish you’ll encounter that turn out to be flesh-gnawing piranhas.

Gameplay has also been beefed up. The first game was criticized for being too puzzle oriented, with assorted commandos being overly specialized at the cost of realism, and many missions solvable with only one trick. The sequel, while still a puzzle game, opens up the range of strategic possibilities. Your commandos now have inventories and can pick up and trade assorted items, including weapons stripped from enemy soldiers. Most can now perform common operations like tying up unconscious bad guys or carrying their bodies out of sight. Objects like wine and sleeping pills can be combined to create diversions, and traps and tricks available, from smoke grenades to tripwires and landmines. Perhaps most important, you’ll no longer automatically lose a mission if one commando is killed. Instead, incapacitated agents can be revived with the use of a first-aid kit.

The 10 missions are huge, multilayered affairs, with objectives changing as you proceed. After your submarine crashes in the Arctic, for instance, your entire crew save one is taken captive, leaving you to free your comrades, infiltrate a Nazi destroyer to recover an Enigma machine, and then sabotage the ship and escape in a stolen airplane.

Maps and briefings are available that detail your primary and secondary objectives, but one of the strengths of the game is that there are almost always multiple paths to success. I often found myself ignoring the game’s suggested course of action in favor of a plan I’d come up with myself, and a brief survey of fan sites reveals that many players have come up with feasible strategies completely different from my own.

It’s almost an embarrassment of riches: There’s even replayability available via multiplayer co-op mode, hidden bonus missions to unlock, and three escalating levels of difficulty.

**Collateral Damage**

There are flaws in the ointment, however. First up is the monstrous 2GB installation footprint. Ouch. Then there are the bugs, ranging from trivial (mission objectives not being properly displayed) to catastrophic (frequent crashes to the desktop). And finally there’s the arcane interface, which may pose the game’s single toughest puzzle. Weird buttons appear and disappear, seemingly at random, while important functions are accessible only via a complex and nonintuitive hotkey system. But for all the hotkey action going on, there are no apparent buttons for quick load or quick save, an unforgivable omission in a game that absolutely requires a whole lot of loadin’. (Note: Ctrl-S and Ctrl-L will do the job, but this less-than-obvious little feature is detailed exactly nowhere in any of the documentation.)

But in the end, none of this really matters: Through sheer force of gameplay, Commandos 2 easily overcomes its weaknesses. It’s a terrific game that will likely be emulated for years to come.

**Verdict**

Despite bugs and interface issues, Commandos 2 marches to victory.
Atari Anniversary Edition

If you loved parachute pants...

By Dana Jongeward

Maybe you're tired of the realistic graphics in Max Payne. Perhaps your brain has filled to capacity with all those key commands for Homeworld. Or it could just be that you really liked the way you looked in those parachute pants. Whatever your motivation, Infogrames is back to capitalize on it with the Atari Anniversary Edition.

The 12 games in the package, which includes classics such as Super Breakout and Asteroids, have been “faithfully reproduced down to the last detail.” The sounds of the ball bouncing back and forth in Pong and the annoying theme music from Crystal Castles are still there. The reaction time of the mouse is modified so it simulates the timing of a trackball for Missile Command, Centipede, and Millipede. They’ve even built the image of an arcade around each game screen.

Call it the curse of the MTV generation: While it’s fun to go back in time for a little while, I found my attention flagging after a few rounds of each game. Somehow it just isn’t the same without the surroundings of an arcade, and soon I was getting my entertainment from counting the number of pixels on each screen as I played.

VERDICT

Great if you’re suffering from early ’80s nostalgia, but embarrassing to remember this was once high-tech.

Williams Pinball Classics

Gaming nostalgia for less than two rolls of quarters

By Tom Price

I’ve always found the concept of pinball games on the computer a little odd. It’s kind of like putting a radio show on television. And until now, most computer pinball games have been specifically designed to be played on the PC. But for all those pinball purists out there (and other than Brooke Shields and Roger Daltrey, how many are there really?), Redoubt has faithfully recreated some classic tabletops for computer gamers. The results are a bit mixed, but anyone who blew their laundry quarters every week down at the pizza parlor when they should have been home studying for midterms can appreciate the addictive qualities of the four tables available here.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon and the pirate-themed Black Rose are dead-on recreations of the original tables, including small details like the holographic creature in the middle of the Black Lagoon table and Black Rose’s multiball-firing cannon. But oddly, the simplest table, the fantasy-themed Lost World, is the most satisfying, with its two flippers and lack of ramps. Williams Pinball Classics does offer a nice trip down memory lane, but you won’t exactly be compelled to go searching for lost quarters between the couch cushions.

VERDICT

Good for nostalgic arcade trolls—but there are only four tables.
EVOLUTION ONLY WORKS IN THE WILD

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IN STORES NOW!
Monopoly Tycoon
Cornering the market on fun
By George Jones

Monopoly Tycoon is the rare game that, 20 minutes into playing it, stands out as a winner. So much of a winner, in fact, that it might just be one of the best strategy games of 2001. Gamers expecting something light, fluffy, and, well, mainstream, are going to be shocked when they find themselves immensely enjoying a gaming experience that conjures up shades of M.A.L.E., one of the all-time classic economic strategy games.

Understanding why the game has this effect requires nothing more than transporting your mind back to the days of playing the board game. Understanding how Deep Red, the game's third-party designers, captured and interpreted the essence of Monopoly is another matter entirely. They captured the simplicity of the rule system, the symmetry of the gameplay, and the depth of the original. And they managed to have perfectly balanced, updated, and enhanced it for the digital age.

Monopoly Tycoon offers several twists on the classic game. For example, when you want to buy the lease on a property, you go into an auction mode where everyone gets to bid on, for example, Boardwalk, Ventnor, or Atlantic Avenue. It's a fun feature that adds an extra layer of strategy and excitement to the game.

Whenever anyone wants to buy a lease on a property, everyone in the game enters the auction mode, one of the most tense aspects of the game. The classic Monopoly board has been transformed into a city grid on which you can monitor the competition as well as the needs of your citizens.

You can set the victory conditions to center around money, property value, or even getting voted mayor.

But if you win the bidding, you hold the deed for only about 25 game years, or 45 minutes.

Simply exploring the new dimensions of the game offers some thrills, if only because it mandates learning about a completely unique gaming environment. When was the last time you didn't have to concoct variations of the time-tested strategy of "build more units and destroy the enemy"?

This enjoyable experience is further enhanced by the fact that the rules are simple but allow for seemingly infinite strategies. Monopoly Tycoon even offers the rare experience that allows for reactive, on-the-fly strategizing. In longer games, you can reverse your play style midgame with positive results. This adds all sorts of decision-making tension, and it also leaves the game wide open strategically.

Say your opponent is winning by making a ton of money off of two blocks of shopping centers (groups of retail buildings) on Kentucky and Indiana Avenues. To squeeze her, you conserve money over the course of one 24-hour period and outbid her on the lease for these properties, with the end result being that for the next 25 game years, she pays you rent for her businesses. You can even buy the utility companies, with the end result being that you collect a certain percentage of everyone's power or water bills.

You style of play can also be influenced by how you define winning. The game allows you to choose what you want the victory conditions to center on—money, property value, getting kicked out of the city, or even getting voted mayor.

The only area where Monopoly Tycoon falls short of perfection is the AI opponents' antagonism, or lack thereof. They play a strong game, but they're just not in your face (or your mind) enough. You want to hate your competitors just as much as you hate your little brother when he beat you for the seventh time in a row, or your friend who always insisted on being the car token.

But ultimately, that's a micro-quirk, because Monopoly Tycoon is one of the most refreshing, engaging games released in a long time.

VERDICT

A classic game beggars another classic game.
Choose Your Weapon!

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Trade Empires

Marco Polo, we hardly knew ye
By Bruce Geryk

ew developers have been able to make economics as much fun as Frog City. The outstanding Imperiai games were essentially wargames with a detailed economics model, and the novel twist on empire building games that this combination produced still hasn't been duplicated. Frog City's latest effort puts the economics front and center. Only this time, that's all there is.

Trade Empires is a real-time strategy game in which you (and really just you, as there is no multi-player) develop a network of markets and merchants in a variety of historical eras, ranging from ancient China and Mesopotamia to England just before the Industrial Revolution. Players choose where to establish settlements around the map, and the flow of goods through these settlements attracts population, creates demand, and generates your income.

Your control over the markets is pretty much total. Cities develop only near centers of trade, so you design your own population landscape by your choice of market locations. Resources are fixed, however, and as settlements grow in response to your actions, you have to keep your populations supplied with food and consumer items or your cities will stagnate or disappear altogether.

You do this by carefully assigning the routes your merchants will travel and the goods they will carry. The market model is fairly sophisticated, with various raw materials able to be combined into luxury items of greater and greater value, which in turn influences the development of your population.

Trade Empires is closely related to sim games like Caesar and Pharaoh, with the focus being on the flow of goods over large distances rather than within a single city. Each market you place creates new demand and supply, and the game responds much like SimCity. The option to play without opposing merchants makes this a great game for those who just want to tinker.

At times the game is quite attractive, but for the most part the 3D terrain seems sterile and prevents the game from developing much of an atmosphere. Despite the varied architecture in the different eras, the game feels homogeneous, and this undercuts the large scenario maps that would otherwise convey a great sense of market model in Trade Empires feels a lot like a mathematical optimization machine. Which, of course, it is. But the remarkable thing about Imperiai was that with its cartoony graphics and arbitrary geography, it managed to create a far more compelling world than the one in Trade Empires.

Trade Empires is the framework of an excellent strategy game without any of the trimmings. With a more engaging atmosphere and a strategic context in which to wrap the economics engine, this could have ended up as a classic historical trade sim. As it stands, the game feels like a SimCities offshoot designed by J.P. Morgan, which isn't necessarily bad. But it could have been so much more.

VERDICT

Challenging historical trade model undone by sterility and a lack of atmosphere.
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The Nations
Another squatter in Settlers territory By Mark Asher

In The Nations, a Settlers clone that's the sequel to Aliens & Amazons, you take control of one of three alien tribes. The Pimmons are short, squat, blue, fat, lazy humansoids. The Sajkis are insects. The Amazonis are a matriarchal, humanoid society. Each tribe comes with a 10-scenario campaign. The game also supports multiplayer mode. It's fun, but the building you do in each scenario often repeats and there's not much here that you didn't see in Settlers years ago. The Nations is a city and community builder that gives you dozens and dozens of details to juggle. Do your people have enough soap to stay clean? Is their diet a good one? How far are the houses from the businesses? Are there enough scientists? Are your neighboring tribes happy with you? Are employment levels high enough? You won't lack for things to fiddle with in this game, and at times you may feel a bit besieged by how much you need to manage. Falling to meet the needs of your people makes you unhappy and affects productivity. If you like to manage a lot of details, this game will give you your fill.

In a nod to The Sims, you can view each individual and find out if they are happy, what task they are engaged in, and so on. The problem is that you can't do much with this information. You're not able to micromanage at that level with any effectiveness, so the information you receive is useless other than for satisfying your curiosity. Even then, your little people will run together in your mind as more or less interchangeable parts.

You won't lack for things to fiddle with in this game.

The Nations can be quite satisfying when things are humming along and your city is growing and your little people are happily going about their tasks. The well-drawn graphics engage with the whimsy of storybook art, so there's plenty of pleasure to be had in just observing. At a deeper level, games like The Nations are satisfying because they let you manage their small worlds in a way that the real world can never be managed.

The real downfall of The Nations is that it just doesn't distinguish itself from all the other Settlers-like games. If you're looking for something new in the genre, The Nations won't provide it. If you don't mind replaying Settlers under a different name and with a new coat of paint, you'll like this game. Otherwise, you might as well just relook one of the four Settlers games.

VERDICT ⭐⭐⭐
A good-looking game that fails to stand out from the Settlers crowd.

Gadget Tycoon
Sinking faster than a dot-com By John Fletcher

I hear "tycoon game" and think roller coasters and golf courses. So when I loaded Gadget Tycoon, I figured I'd be happily tinkering with...well, gadgets. What I got instead was Amoral Facilities Manager: A management sim that proudly touts slush funds, mob intimidation, and industrial espionage as legitimate business tools.

After an amazingly depressing opening sequence, you slog through an inconsistently explained tutorial. Fortunately, Gadget Tycoon is not difficult and soon you're running your company. Select a gadget (toilet, roller blades, or house-cleaning robot) and quickly get to the business of designing, building, and selling the proverbial better mousetrap. In this respect Gadget Tycoon succeeds. Developing your facility and balancing finances requires attention to detail, awareness of the competition, and a good sense of timing. (Try releasing new products before Christmas.) The game really disappoints, however, in its promised department of dirty tricks. The things feel like afterthoughts because, unlike other employees, you never get to see them in action. Instead they do their dirty deeds offscreen and email you their results.

Ultimately, Gadget Tycoon cannot reconcile the competing visions of subtle business sim and exercise in Wild West capitalism, and the clumsy attempt to blend the two ideas kills the potential of both of them.

VERDICT ⭐⭐
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Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos

Space sim of the year By Gordon Berg

The first question a devoted player of space simulations asks about every new game in the genre is probably this: Is it more like Elite or more like Wing Commander? The fondness for the former stems from the way it allows players to truly go about the universe wherever and whenever they wish and have it actually mean something, while the latter offers a series of space-combat games set against a backdrop of melodrama, which are compelling despite their lack of freedom of movement. To the disappointment of many a space fanatic, only a few games have followed Elite's example and attempted such an open-ended structure. While there have been a plethora of Wing Commander clones that wrapped their scripted linear missions around a story, most (excluding the excellent X-Wing and Freespace series, of course) have lacked compelling gameplay.

So where does Independence War 2 fit between these two icons of space combat? The answer is that it's almost both. For the most part, it bridges the gap between the Elite and Wing Commander styles of gameplay by including the best of both worlds—er, universes.

This is not to say the Independence War series doesn't put its own stamp on the space genre. In addition to offering an intriguing story, the original sim distinguished itself by modeling combat as it had never been done before. For the first time, players had to master the complexity of Newtonian physics within the vacuum of space—while piloting a very unnimble dreadnought, no less. IW2 continues this trend. Despite the availability now of smaller and more maneuverable craft, the game demands that you exercise tight control over your own inertia in order to survive.

While this ultra-realistic space flight is old hat to original Independence War veterans, the steep learning curve might prove a rude welcome for those new to the Badlands Cluster. It's quite clear a lot of effort was made to ease new players into the Independence War universe for this second go-around, and yet the game still presumes a bit much. IW2 pretty much fails to prepare would-be space

IW2 bridges the gap between the Elite and Wing Commander styles of gameplay.
warriors for their initial combat in the preliminary act. Unless the player somehow figures out how to incorporate the use of thrusters in addition to the simple control offered by the joystick and throttle (you should learn to circle-strafe, for example), the initial encounters might prove unbearably difficult.

**Smart Missions, Minor Setbacks**
Stick with it, though, and you'll move into the actual story. It's a century after the first game, and you play the part of recently orphaned Cal Johnston. The missions you fly as young Cal function well as the game's primary tutorial, though combat training is poor. At your side is the AI character of Jefferson Clay (who sometimes resembles Max Headroom), serving as a companion and guide.

You're much older in the next act, and this is where the game really opens up. At this point IW2 breaks from its predecessor's linear style, taking on Elite and Privateer-like elements while still delivering the goods on a worthwhile story. Missions that move the story along are clear and obvious. The open-ended space trading, manufacturing, and piracy are left up to the player's discretion, though such operations can be initiated solely from the home base. Ultimately, the only real purpose of this pseudo-Privateer style of play is the eventual and necessary attainment of better equipment for your ships. You can go just about anywhere (and there are a lot of places to go), but unless it's part of the narrows driven narrative, you can't do anything of significance once you arrive.

There is one other contentious gameplay issue, which stems from the save system and various mission difficulty levels: Saves are possible only when you're at the main base. IW2 doesn't offer anything nearly as bad as Bethesda's Echelon, but the lack of an in-flight save option can be quite annoying on a 20-minute mission that takes several attempts to solve. To counter this, you can scramper home at each free moment to save your progress, but the time it takes to do so can be annoying and distracting when you are eager to get on with play.

**Rich Rewards**
Apart from these few gameplay problems, IW2 is executed flawlessly. The attention to detail is extremely high, the Direct3D graphics are fantastic, and the story is worth pursuing. The use of the joystick's hat as a means of HUD navigation is well implemented. There are even various multiplayer modes beyond the standard (and now very stale) deathmatch. Plus, there's an online component players can log into that resolves the progress and actions of competing factions through a turn-based tracking system.

Although we question some design choices, IW2 has delivered the depth, high production value, and polish sorely lacking in many other games these days. If one has the patience, IW2 is quite rewarding.

For strategy tips on IW2, go to page 122.

**VERDICT**

Four and a half stars out of five. The closest thing we've had to Elite or Privateer in a long time.
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2—Yuri’s Revenge
Westwood’s evil genius By Elliott Chiu

Pitting off from the Command & Conquer continuity allowed the Red Alert 2 designers the freedom to create a better real-time strategy game, one with all the usual high-caliber features but with the added advantage of not taking itself too seriously. The expansion, Yuri’s Revenge, adds more of the same time travel plot, sense of humor, fast-paced gameplay, and everything else that made Red Alert 2 a great game.

The expansion introduces an array of new features. Both sides get new units and buildings, although Westwood wasn’t as generous with the Soviets. The Allies get Robot Tanks (specifically designed to counter all the new mind-controlling units) as well as Navy SEALs, guardian GIs, and the battle fortress—a sort of mobile bunker. The Soviets, meanwhile, in the game’s only blunder in balancing, do not have a counter to the mind-controlling units. And part of their tech tree got pruned. Yuri’s Revenge gives the Soviets a paltry two new units: a hero called Boris who can call down MiG air strikes, and the siege chopper.

Aside from the new Allied units, the other bright note is the new faction, Yuri’s army. He has his own tech tree with unique units. Considerable without using combined arms, but because the missions are set up as puzzles, with the enemy typically deeply entrenched. It’s a huge challenge trying to survive the computer’s onslaught of superior numbers while also probing to see how best to attack the enemy fortifications.

Still, the missions are very fun, and precisely because the battles are so hard-fought, you have a feeling of accomplishment upon finishing each scenario. A notable omission is that of a Yuri campaign that really lets you experience the new faction, but at least you can play it in multiplayer games. Yuri’s Revenge is in every way an improvement over its predecessor. It has good new units, a challenging and fun campaign, movies as good as not better than those of previous C&C titles, and some new features. Fans of Red Alert 2 will enjoy this expansion. And those who have never played Red Alert 2 now have an even better excuse to try the game.

For strategy tips on Yuri’s Revenge, go to page 133.

You get more of everything that made Red Alert 2 a great game.

One of Yuri’s super weapons is the Psychic Dominator, which obliterates or permanently mind-controls all units in the blast radius.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Yuri’s Revenge: a must-have for Red Alert 2 players.
100 WINNERS. ONLY ONE

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The Typing of the Dead
Move over, Mario! Now there's something meaner!
By Dana Jongeward

It's got a lame plot. The voice acting is awful. And for the past three weeks, we've been fighting over whose turn it is to have it. No, it's not the latest PlayStation video release. It's The Typing of the Dead.
A Japanese import based on the rail shooter House of the Dead 2, The Typing of the Dead remains exactly the same as its predecessor, with one exception: Instead of defending yourself with a gun, you're protecting the city with only the keyboard strapped around your neck. As James, you patrol the city with your colleagues, attempting to free the locals from the plague of zombies that has infected their homes. Ghouls pop up, ready to destroy you if you can't type "Too bad about your face" or "Hairy godmother" fast enough to make them splat away into puddles of gore.
You earn points by killing zombies, saving citizens, and picking up bonus items along the way. You must battle your way through six chapters, to be confronted at the end by the ultimate evil, the Emperor, who can assume the fighting forms of all the other beasts you've met along the way.
This game is incredibly addictive. The plot doesn't make all that much sense—I never quite figured out why the zombies were there or whom I was avenging or what happened to my coworkers by the end of the game. But ultimately, I didn't really care. Who needs an excuse to shoot up some zombies? And you don't have to figure out who the bad guys are—they're easily identified by the words and phrases that pop up across their chests.
With five modes of play (arcade, original, boss, drill, and tutorial), the ability to adjust difficulty level and word length, and new words and phrases for every round, the game stays entertaining through each replay.
The best part about this game? You can justify the need to play it at work because it helps you develop an essential business skill. And if you're really persuasive, you might even convince your company to buy a copy of it for you.

VERDICT
If this game were used to teach keyboarding, every kid would get an A+.

Zax: The Alien Hunter
Another Diablo clone arrives D.O.A.
By Jason Babler

It's tough to be a little game developer that isn't owned by the French. You're probably dangleing by a financial thread that realistically will last for only another two years (or two games), which translates into having limited resources that prevent you from crafting Pixar-caliber cut-scenes or hiring better designers and writers. Despite such hurdles, some companies still manage to make enjoyable games (think Serious Sam), so we're willing to cut the little guys some slack and simply enjoy some games for what they are. Hell, I enjoy B-games much as I enjoy B-movies.

There's something appealing in raw, unpolished (and yes, campy) works of art. Alas, Zax is no Plan 9 from Outer Space; this game should never have been published in its current condition. This is the buggiest game I've ever played: I stopped counting types and instances of crashes after 45 train wrecks spanning multiple, top-of-the-line computers at our lab. One of the more egregious game killers happened whenever I fired one particular weapon. It created a nifty light effect right before freezing my computer solid every time I used it. Nothing like switching to said weapon by accident in the heat of battle and then seeing all of your work frozen in time. Even worse are the bugs that suddenly reboots the computer. Nice.

It doesn't matter how appalling the voice acting is or how sound bugs caused the speakers to blast a noise like that of rabbits being skinned alive with a butter knife. What can you say about a game like this? If you can't even play a game like this?

It's pointless to call this a Diablo clone with laser guns, loops, guess I just did), and it's not even worth throwing Zax a bone and saying it's rendered nicely and had some good ideas in theory. Well, okay, for bone-throwing purposes: Gathering ore and crystals to make more than 10 weapons offers some variety, and you can make portable sentry guns and drones that fly around you for protection. My bone supply is now officially depleted.

It's sad to pick on this game. Actually, I feel like a schoolyard bully because it's not worth the time. And it certainly isn't worth your time to play it.

VERDICT
Mom said that if you couldn't say anything nice, then shut up (cue crickets)...
Hints, codes, reviews, screen shots, release dates, demos, updated everyday.
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Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor
You'll be drowning in puddles of irrelevance

By Rob Smolka

I like to compare my time with Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor (PoR) to participating in a marathon. Difficult under the best of conditions, so imagine if you had to run it wearing a pair of too-tight wingtips and with a large sack of potatoes strapped to your back. Then, just as you pass the 20-mile marker, someone from the crowd shatters both your kneecaps with a sledgehammer.

This highly anticipated follow-up to the classic Gold Box game from 1988 has to be one of the most disappointing releases in the history of computer gaming. The terrible character creation process and pedestrian dungeon design are surpassed in incompetence only by the nonexistent story, frustrating interface, and game-destroying, buggy code. Consider yourself fortunate if various hardware conflicts keep you from installing this dog. Some lucky souls have had their operating systems decimated simply by trying to uninstall PoR.

Mind-Numbingly Dull
PoR makes a mockery of the essential character-development process. Forget about spending time rolling the dice until you get the stats you want; the lame-brained system in PoR gives you a set number of points to add to your base scores, limiting your choices to an average jack-of-all-trades type or one with a single high score and little else. Yes, you can pick your race, class, alignment, and name, but that's about as much customization as you'll be able to do—each class starts off with a predetermined set of skills and equipment. Even spellcasters are restricted to choosing only a couple of spells they prefer: the rest are computer-assigned and unchangeable.

To be fair, PoR does have some good points. The animations are all fun to watch (at least the first dozen or so times), and the combat system does an excellent job of portraying the turn-based tactical battles of the Dungeons & Dragons pen and paper game. The artwork is generally good, and the user-annotated automap is helpful. That's where the compliments end. Battles are too numerous and
The magic and special effects are nicely done, but it's obvious the artists ran out of time or inspiration when designing the bland and repetitive dungeon.

All the characters you create of a certain race and class will end up performing—and looking—pretty much alike.

The map lets you make your own notes, which is a great help considering that all parts of the dungeon look the same.

Here is an NPC you can trade with. Don't get used to it, though; the dungeon crawl is pretty lonely.

GROUP THERAPY?

PoR offers multiplayer for up to six, but I can't imagine that anyone would want to subject themselves to this torture online. The game creates a random dungeon which, even by accident, has to be more interesting than the drudgery that is the pre-designed dungeon, and you get to trudge around killing monsters accompanied by guys named d00dman69 and h0mGnq3r. No thanks.

Cannot Compute

Our policy at CGW is never to review a game without finishing it, and technically I haven't broken that rule, even though it was the game that decided when I was finished. After I'd burned some 60 hours on PoR, it crashed and wouldn't let me continue. Every time I loaded a saved game, I was kicked back to the opening screen, sent back to the desktop, or allowed to continue only to be tossed out when I tried to save again. To have players invest that much time in a game and then snatch away all of their progress is completely unforgivable.

As we go to press, a patch has been released that supposedly solves the corrupted save-game problem. Sadly, if you've already experienced the problem, the patch does nothing to fix it. (An earlier patch was also issued to fix the uninstall program—but again, it was of no help to those whose OS was already trashed.) We understand that given the complexity of games today, minor bugs can crop up, but situations like this are inexcusable. This game should never have been released; at least it should have been recalled as soon as the troubles surfaced. Combine these egregious problems with the humdrum gameplay and design, and you have a serious candidate for coaster of the year.

VERDICT

Impossible to recommend without the patch. Impossible to recommend with the patch.
Far Gate

Lost in space...completely and utterly By Thomas L. McDonald

Any three-dimensional strategy game stands or falls on its interface, because movement inside a giant imaginary cube (rather than on the conventional flat plane) is hard to convey on a two-dimensional screen. *Homeworld* tackled this prickly problem and only just squeaked by with a manageable control scheme. *Far Gate* doesn’t fare quite so well. The developers at Super X Studios certainly gave it their best shot, packing *Far Gate* with colorful graphics and odd units. Unfortunately, they also decided to reinvent the wheel by creating a new kind of interface.

*Far Gate* tells its main story through a 16-mission campaign game, introducing three races along the way. It’s a modest colonists-in-a-hostile-environment tale, but generally well told with cut-scenes and dialogue accompanied by strange little cartoon portraits of the characters. During the campaign, humans encounter the primitive, organic Nue-Guyen and the highly evolved, crystal-based Entrodi (thus earning the developers graduate credits in Sci-Fi Gaming Clichés 101). The campaign and a very limited multiplayer mode are it for gameplay: there is no skirmish mode.

Super X has actually done some interesting things with the races. Visually, the game is quite sharp, with vivid colors and loads of unit detail and animation. The Nue-Guyen are like giant space animals, with ships such as the Blood Worm, which spits stomach acid; the Talon, which piersc enemies to inject corrosive enzymes; and the electricity-spouting Eel. Structures and their uses vary slightly from race to race, sharing a common base-building technique that uses limited slots around a central floating hub. Resource gathering is largely automated. You can easily group units into fleets and give them complex orders and formations (Claw, Wedge, and so on), right out of the *Homeworld* playbook. Units, structures, races, and narrative are well conceived and implemented.

The problems lie in controlling all this. The interface contains almost every mistake you can make and introduces a few new ones. First, it uses margin panels that run along all four sides of the screen. These pop up when you run your mouse over them, providing access to more advanced controls. This means they also pop up whenever you try to move the camera around or issue orders anywhere near the edge of the screen. They can be locked down, thus obscuring large swathes of the screen, or removed completely, thus removing access to essential tools. Either way, the arrangement doesn’t work.

Neither does the camera control, which either zooms in too close or out too far to be of use. You can modify the zoom manually, but this often takes time and is very awkward. Running the mouse over an object causes a bizarre, useless enlargement of that object to pop up, obscuring the very area you’re looking at. In the wide strategic views, ships become so small they often disappear. Getting the right angle is monstrously difficult. And when you’re trying to pilot ships in the heat of battle, the controls become completely untenable. Having to use the same mouse button to select units and issue move orders doesn’t help much either. There’s also an incredibly frustrating glitch that turns your vertical control into a unit selection box.

*Far Gate* is simply too frustrating to recommend. The developers created an interesting game with some novel features, but they saddled it with controls that completely negate the experience.

**VERDICT**

A sloppy interface renders a potentially interesting game nearly unplayable.
Rails Across America
Rock (solid) Island Line
By Bruce Geryk

To rephrase an old adage, game designers constantly talk about improving gameplay but few of them actually do anything about it. With Rails Across America, Flying Labs has managed the nearly unthinkable: the marriage of board game-like strategy to a sophisticated engine that could only exist in a computer game. The result is a fast, playable, challenging game with a depth no board game can match and an elegance that puts traditional sims to shame.

1998’s Railroad Tycoon II has cast a long shadow over rail strategy games, but Rails Across America leaps out of said shadow by being a very different animal. Whereas Tycoon is all about the nuts and bolts of running individual trains and cargo loads, Rails is much closer in style to SimCity’s classic 1983—except that Flying Labs’ opus lets you build a rail empire across the entire United States, as well as much of Mexico and Canada. The decisions that matter are the big ones: where to build and how much money to spend while doing it.

The objective is not necessarily to make money but rather to gain prestige through maintaining an efficient network, making the most of your investment, and dominating traffic in various regions. Prestige is also awarded for completing large projects like a transcontinental rail line or a line that connects all the cities in Mexico.

As your trains chug from city to city, the game’s detailed cargo routing engine accounts for every new track, train, and signal upgrade in your network. As new rail lines open up, traffic is rerouted to take advantage of more efficient routes. Adding new engines and expanding track capacity are essential to keep your network competitive. You can even form alliances with other players to fix prices in cities where you control the traffic, or undercut others through rate wars.

The genius of this combination is that the routing engine gives the streamlined board game-like mechanics a feeling of incredible depth without muddying the game’s elegance in the least. A system of playing cards for exerting influence over other players adds to the

Streamlined design. All of this takes place at a brisk pace in real time, especially if played at the faster speeds. The inability to perform actions while the game is paused adds to the sense of urgency without ever making the game seem rushed. Perhaps the game’s only flaw is that it doesn’t play well as an extended campaign—once the majority of track building is done, tweaking individual lines for maximum efficiency becomes a bit tedious. The result is a game that plays best in less than an hour.

Like the board games that were clearly its inspiration, Rails Across America shines brilliantly as a multiplayer affair, especially with freewheeling card play and stop-the-leader tactics. The AI is more than competent, which makes for a challenging solo game in a variety of historical eras. The polished graphics even reflect the times, with cities slowly expanding and eventually acquiring historical landmarks, like Seattle’s Space Needle or the Sears Tower in Chicago.

The historical aspects of the game aren’t just for flavor, either: Games taking place in later years introduce increased labor costs, shifting city values, improved engines, and considerations such as electrification that greatly affect strategy.

Rails Across America is one of the best-designed games to come along in years. It’s a strong candidate not only for best strategy game of the year, but best multiplayer game as well.

For strategy tips about Rails Across America, go to page 135.

VERDICT

Nice graphics, fun cinematic, interesting units, fun interactive campaign map.

This is a fast, playable, challenging game with a depth no board game can match.
**Reviews**

**Dominions**

A game this big from a company this small that works this well? By Tom Chick

To say Dominions is a turn-based fantasy-themed strategy game is just the beginning. Sure, Dominions has armies, militias, holy men, magics, and mercenaries. It's also got a half a tame with special awards for the heroes who join its ranks. It's got stats like encumbrance, fatigue, and leadership. It's got duel, magic items, and enchanted gems that fuel powerful spells. It's got taxes, food, and production resources. It's got borders, empires, flying monsters, secret shrines, and veteran soldiers. It's got powerful global spells that can blast out the sun.

Lead the heavily armored soldiers of Ulm with a Titan wielding Bots of the Behemoth and flinging Magma Bolt. Stay at home with an immobile Sphinx to research new spells and let the unending waves of Ermor's undead do the conquering. Combine a reptilian race and their carnivorous slave warrior lizard-people with a demigod dragon that can shape-change at will into a powerful mage. Or spend your setup points on a powerful civilization that spreads order, productivity, and good fortune to all the lands it conquers. Speed up time so everyone ages and dies sooner. What Dominions might lack in graphics, it more than makes up for in imagination and scope.

**What Dominions might lack in graphics, it more than makes up for in imagination and scope.**

**Ominous Horizons**

We believe in the separation of church and shooters By Mark Asher

Ominous Horizons is a turn-based fantasy-themed strategy game in Ominous Horizons, an FPS with a Christian theme.

Your task is to retrieve the scattered fragments of Gutenberg's first printed Bible so his faith will be restored and he can rebuild his vandalized printing press and mass-produce Bibles, much to the delight of the Gideon Society. You're armed with a Sword of the Spirit that shoots flaming balls of...faith! There are also weapon and armor upgrades throughout the game.

You'll battle in the Mesa Verde, where demonic forces now occupy Pueblo City; in Egypt, where you'll encounter Asubis; in the Scottish Highlands where Grendel awaits; in Japan with ninjas and dragons; in a Mayan Temple; a haunted mansion near Stonehenge with druids and witches; and finally in the Underworld.

It's a nice lineup of baddies, but Ominous Horizons' good intentions are undone by a third-rate 3D engine (think Might and Magic VII) that pauses to load textures. The game is also far too dark at times, even with the gamma settings mixed.

As for the gameplay, you get the garden-variety dodge and circle-strafing you've done dozens of times before in other, better shooters. You can download better fan mods.

**VERDICT**

AAA-level gameplay, scope, and variety coupled with shareware level graphics and interface.

**Ominous Horizons is aimed at a niche market, and that market isn't first-person shooter fans. Christian soldiers should look for better ways to sharpen their FPS skills.**

**VERDICT**

It's the same gameplay that's in every other dang shooter but done on a much worse engine. Gamers should look elsewhere.
You take a new game home and prepare for what may well be the greatest experience ever designed, but quickly discover there really isn’t much of a game behind all the pretty colors and delightful music. Once upon a time, graphics came in 16 fashionable colors and music often sounded like the jingling ring tones of a cell phone. We didn’t have high-speed video cards and wave-table sound cards. In this age of power rigs, we’ve become so infatuated with technology that we’ve lost sight of what makes a great computer game.

While other games try to improve upon the genre, RuneSword II just wants to be a fun role-playing game.

Much like its predecessor, RuneSword II is a game that strives to be an authentic adaptation of the classic RPGs we used to play, right down to the sounds of dice rattling across the tabletop. While other games try to improve upon the genre, RuneSword II just wants to be a fun role-playing game — although calling it a game is not entirely accurate. It is, in fact, a design studio that ships with several very well written demonstration campaigns called Tomes. You start by creating a small party and choosing which Tome to play. There are a handful of annoying bugs you’ll have to endure, but if you give this game a second chance, you just might find yourself enjoying it. I was not terribly impressed at first and was prepared to destroy the game in my review. But on a whim, I tried downloading a few Tomes that other players had created using the construction tools in RuneSword II. I found them not only fun and entertaining but inspirational as well, and I decided to make my own Tome. While my lack of programming experience makes the exercise frustrating at times, I’ve found the online community to be not only very
Mat Hoffman Pro BMX

The best BMX game ever (for what that's worth) By William O'Neal

When Activision sent us a few copies of Mat Hoffman Pro BMX it seemed only natural that I, the only guy in the office who actually races BMX bikes, should get to review it. It should come as no surprise that I jumped at the chance, only to curse Reviews Editor Robert Coffey about two levels in.

Mat Hoffman Pro BMX is based on Activision's vaunted Tony Hawk Pro Skater engine, and that's about where we should end all positive comparisons. While the game borrows much of its gameplay from the Tony Hawk franchise, one gets the feeling that the makers lost interest sometime during the development process. While both versions of THPS offer inspired, unique gameplay and excellent level design, and showed a general commitment to putting together a fun product, Mat Hoffman Pro BMX feels like more of a hack job.

The game starts out just as you'd expect, with the player choosing from a list of--while accomplished--mostly old-school riders such as Mat Hoffman, "Butcher" Kowalski, Simon Tabron, and others; Cory Nastazio is the only new-school guy. You then choose your bike, and, as you do in the Tony Hawk games, you have to unlock the more bitchin' bikes. It's important to note that you can customize your bike to make it faster, lighter, or better for everything from manuealing to bunny hopping. But I would have preferred for the individual components to represent real-world parts--it'd be cool to build a bike with S&M Pitchforks and Slam bars.

Once you start moving through the first level, you'll find there's no denying that MHPBMX is basically THPS on a bike. You're presented with the same list of five or so objectives, one of which (of course) requires you to knock something over--this is like the skateboard game's version of the ubiquitous "crack a full o stuff" that's nearly every first-person-shooter ever made. Where in THPS the player advances through levels by earning money, in MHPBMX you advance through the game's eight levels by landing on magazine covers. The payoff is essentially the same and the gameplay is pretty much identical to that of THPS.

And to tell you the truth, the gameplay was pretty fun--for about two levels. After that, MHPBMX began to feel way too repetitive. And while it's easy to point out how repetitive THPS was, it had what the French call that certain "I don't know what" that compelled you to keep playing. But I had no desire whatsoever to continue playing this game.

Of course MHPBMX sports multiplayer modes similar to those in THPS, but they're not nearly compelling enough to make up for the uninteresting gameplay. It seems that MHPBMX was designed to appeal to BMX riders. The main problem, though, is that MHPBMX makes me just want to turn off the computer and ride a real bike. And non-BMX riders will have little reason to play this game, what with a better and more compelling version of the same idea (in the form of THPS) lying around.

VERDICT

Better than Dave Mirra BMX, not as good as Tony Hawk Pro Skater or going out and riding your bike.
Tennis Masters Series
Better than an acid bath—but not much  By Robert Coffey

A nation, we really should set aside some time to consider seriously the consequences associated with cloning. How can we trust science not to produce horrors of hideous freaks when an entire team of programmers falls so utterly to merely duplicate the success of another game, in this case the Dreamcast's outstanding Virtua Tennis?

Tennis Masters Series is no Virtua Tennis—it ain't even Pong. Sure, it has loads of snazzy graphic features like persistent footprints on clay courts and nice shadow effects, but all they do is slow the game down to a brain-twisting crawl. I shut off virtually every advanced feature, lowered my resolution, and stripped down the textures in order to make the game remotely playable on my high-end system. Even then the players moved as if shoed in cement blocks. And no thanks are due to the sluggish controls that absolutely robbed me of any sense of where my avatar physically was on the court—not a big problem if winning isn't a goal, but I'm a little more ambitious than that. You could argue that Tennis Masters Series has greater realism than other tennis games, but if real tennis were as consistently unpleasant, Wimbledon would have switched to badminton decades ago. It all adds up to a huddlingly relentless exercise in frustration and aggravation, completely devoid of the strategy, depth, and most crucial—fun of the faster-paced and less self-importantly realistic console game.

VERDICT  The best way to enjoy this game is trading it in for credit toward a Dreamcast and a copy of Virtua Tennis.

If real tennis were this consistently unpleasant, Wimbledon would have switched to badminton decades ago.

Road to India
Paved with good intentions but little else  By Arcadian Del Sol

India is still a place fueled by ancient mysteries set in a stunning landscape. It is the perfect setting for adventure and intrigue. Yet we have waited too long for an adventure game that takes advantage of all India has to offer. Credit Microids' Road to India for rediscovering this rich landscape. If only they had rediscovered how to make a good adventure game.

Road to India begins with what is possibly the greatest achievement in bad timing in the history of computer gaming. A turban sporting stranger drops off a briefcase somewhere in New Delhi. In an instant, half a city block is rubble. Flash forward to an airport, where protagonist Fred Reynolds sends his fiancé off to visit her family in New Delhi. Flash forward again (hang on, we're only getting started) to Fred's apartment door, where he is delivered a Dear John letter from said fiancé. Flash forward for the third time in four minutes, and Fred is on a plane bound for India and slips into a deep sleep. At first, this seems perfectly natural. New York to New Delhi is a long flight. You proceed to spend the majority of the game in Fred's dreams. He gets knocked over the head so many times, it almost qualifies as a drinking game.

After watching too many introductory cut-scenes, you are finally reminded that this is an adventure game: A tile puzzle hovers menacingly in front of a swanky Bengali hideaway. Tile puzzles can be irritating and frustrating. So imagine playing one with pieces missing. Fortunately for those with a low tolerance for artificially difficult puzzles, this teaser represents the sole hurdle to completing Road to India. The plot drags you along puzzle by puzzle while telling a refreshingly mature story. Unfortunately, it tells it to you as if you were 7. To call this game short would be like calling the Bay of Bengal modest. It's shorter than most game demos. It's shorter than most game installations. It's shorter than this review!

VERDICT  At least this road to nowhere is short.
EARLY CHILDHOOD RATING: Deemed Suitable For Children 3 Or Older. Products Carrying This Label Have Absolutely No Material That Would Be Considered Inappropriate By Parents.

EVERYONE RATING: The E Replaced The Previous K-A Rating Last Year. Suitable For Kids Ages 6 And Up, E-Rated Games May Contain Minimal Violence Or Crude Language.

TEEN RATING: Contains Suggestive Themes, Mild Or Strong Language And Animated Violence. Some Parents May Want To Supervise Children Playing T-Rated Games.

MATURE RATING: These Games Contain More Adult Themes, Such As Blood And Gore, Stronger Language And Sexual Themes. Deemed Not Suitable For Those Under 17.

ADULTS ONLY RATING: The Extreme Of The Ratings, Suitable For Adults Only. Packs Sexual Themes And Extreme Violence. Console Manufacturers Have Yet To Allow An AO-Rated Game.
INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS
DESIGNER TIPS

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS
Shoot your way past the end of Act 2 with developer help. PAGE 122

TIPS
Dirty Tricks and tips for Fallout Tactics, plus Easter eggs on the Godfather DVD. PAGE 125

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS
Pummel those Reds, Rambo-style. PAGE 126

COMMANDOS 2:
Prima and CGW team up for a walkthrough of one of the hardest levels, Das Boot, Silent Killer. PAGE 128

PLUS: COMMAND & CONQUER: YURI'S REVENGE PAGE 133, and RAILS ACROSS AMERICA PAGE 135
Find one of these guys and quietly tag along behind him.

When you reach the junkyard, keep yourself hidden within it.

This unsuspecting freighter is key to finding the Marauders.
There's a walkthrough for the final part of Act 2 (a particularly difficult mission), written as a narrative from the point of view of the game's hero, Cal Johnston. While it contains a multitude of combat tactics that will help you throughout the game, it also contains major plot spoilers for a section part of the way through the game.

Now here's an excerpt from the interview with "Captain" Cal Johnston, recorded from the official inquiry into the recent events.

**BEGIN TRANSCRIPT**

**Tracking the Marauders**

*Interviewer*: Tell me, Mr. Johnston, what exactly happened after you had managed to drive the Marauders out of the Mwari System?

*Cal Johnston*: We'd built a huge alliance and had struck a blow against the Marauders. The trouble was that we still didn't know where they were coming from, and they were continuing to attack all over the cluster.

Then I remembered the tracking device we got with the Advanced Patcom. If we used that to follow some Marauders when they jumped out-system, we could find their base of operations.

We traveled to the Firerost system (even if they weren't from there, it looked like they may have used it as a route to the rest of the cluster) and found a group of Marauders attacking a freighter. I destroyed all but one Marauder and followed him across the system to a Lagrange Point. As he flew through each successive L-Point, I targeted him to find out where he was going.

He ended up at an uncharted L-Point near Dain-I; the fact that it didn't appear on our charts was very suspicious, so we jumped through. When we got there, we were disappointed—It looked deserted. There was a whole load of junk and debris and not much else. Then we spotted the incoming ships.

We hid in the junk and watched them approach. It was a group of Marauders and a freighter. They headed into the L-Point, and the tracker said they'd gone to another uncharted L-Point: Dain-I.

We followed the freighter and tracked it to its destination, which turned out to be a Marauder asteroid base. Patrols were everywhere, but by keeping close to the inbound freighter, we managed to sneak in to their freight yard. Some supply vessels were going to the L-Point, and we followed them there.

They entered the L-Point and we were surprised to find they'd jumped to Dante, a system that had long been abandoned. We headed straight back to base with this vital information.

**Scouting the Marauder System**

*Interviewer*: So, you'd discovered the secret Marauder system, Dante. What happened next?

*Cal Johnston*: Shortly after we got back, Franklyn Hoffer, the leader of our cause, sent us information on Dante. It was a binary system and had been abandoned 30 years ago due to a stellar explosion. The L-Point links were no longer functioning due to the radiation, and travel to the system had been thought impossible. But this L-Point obviously was now usable, so the radiation must have dropped to safe levels.

There was also another L-Point near the center of the system, which could be used as a back door, a way to attack the Marauders without them knowing we were coming. We didn't know where it led to or if it was even usable.

Hoffer ordered us to scout the system, find the Marauder bases, and locate the back door L-Point.

We took our smallest, stealthiest ship, the Command Section, and hid it in a cargo pod on a Marauder Megatransporter. The Marauders were hiding caches of supplies everywhere, so this wasn't too much of a problem, though it was darn scary being locked up in the dark for hours.

But the really scary thing was that we had no way back on our own, as the Command Section couldn't capsule-jump. Hoffer said he'd send a ship to retrieve us once we'd transmitted a retrieval code. That wasn't very reassuring.

We arrived in the Dante system and waited for the freighter's escorts to leave before sneaking off. According to our data, the other L-Point was located near the planet Fausti, so we headed toward the

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When you run into these comm relays, don't tamper with them!

Don't get too close to this massive station—it's the Marauder HQ.
L-Point location. When we got close, it became clear that the L-Point was usable and led to the Hoffer's Wake system. We had our back door.

Then we had our first problem: There was too much interference to transmit a retrieval signal. Without a way to transmit out, we were stuck in a hostile system. The only possibility was to scout the system for a solution.

We scanned around, and picked up transmissions from six sources. At least one, or two of these could be bases, so we decided to investigate. The first turned out to be a comm's relay. We didn't dare touch it—tampering could have alerted the Marauders.

We moved on to the next signal, which turned out to be something much more interesting. It was a big station—it had to be the Marauder headquarters.

There were dozens of ships on patrol. We had to be careful to stay at least 5 kilometers from any ships, otherwise they'd detect us. While scouting, we spotted something useful: a spare antenna array near the station. The trouble was that we couldn't get near it without being detected.

We moved onto the next signal. This turned out to be another relay, as did the next one.

The fifth signal was another Marauder station, a cargo yard. We noticed a set of field generator cargo pods, which could help boost our signal. A group of craft were inspecting the pods, so we waited for them to move away before docking to a pod and "borrowing" a field generator. We headed back to the L-Point to transmit again.

That's where we encountered our next problem: The field generator boosted the signal, but not enough. We needed the HO antenna but couldn't figure out how to get it.

We decided to visit the last signal, hoping that we might get lucky. We did.

The signal led us to a huge shipyard with a cruiser in dry dock. How the heck the Marauders got a cruiser, I don't know, but it would cause us a lot of trouble later when we assaulted the system.

We noticed some maintenance flitters near the base and realized they would probably have the correct authorization to get near the HO and retrieve the antenna. We docked to one and found the controls were locked out, but with a bit of technical wizardry, we managed to activate its remote link.

We towed the flitter to the HO, and remote-piloted it to retrieve the antenna. We docked to the antenna and returned to the L-Point to retransmit our signal.

With both the antenna and field generator on board, we succeeded. Shortly afterward a corvette arrived to ferry us home.

**Assaulting the Marauder Bases**

**Interviewer:** What did you do after scouting the Marauder system?

**Cal Johnston:** When we got back, we found that Hoffer had already made plans to assault the Marauder bases. We took our best ship and met Hoffer at the Dante back door L-Point. His fleet was assaulting the three Marauder bases, so he asked us to help out and assigned us some wingmen.

We first decided to assault the Marauder HO. Our fleet there was getting pounded by six gunstar weapons platforms stationed around the base. The gunstars were also shielding the base, preventing us attacking it.

We found that the base was controlling the gunstars and that by targeting the station, our active sensors would jam them and take them offline. We had to keep close to the station to do this, and we had to dodge a lot of enemy fire. While keeping the base targeted, we used manual aiming to destroy the gunstars.

It was tricky but we did it. With the last gunstar destroyed, the base shield went down, and we utterly destroyed the base. Chalk up one for the good guys.

We then traveled to the Cargo Yard. One of our destroyers was attempting to destroy the base, but their main beam was damaged and taking time to charge. They needed our help keeping the Marauders off their back.

We had our hands full with taking out the attacking Marauder ships when the cargo pods around the station started powering up—they contained ships using remote missiles. I managed to destroy most of the pods before they could launch their deadly cargo, and bought enough time for the Destroyer to kill the station with its cutting beam.

The final base, the Shipyard, proved tricky. The cruiser was still docked, but it had been modified with disruptor field generators—enough to disable an entire fleet...and the field was charging!

The cruiser was connected to the dry dock by two umbilicals. If we destroyed those, perhaps we could stop the disruptor field charging. I used a cutting beam to slice off the umbilicals. Disconnecting the power must have caused a catastrophic failure in the station, and it exploded, freeing the cruiser from the dock. I then realized the field was still charging, though slower than before. I attacked the cruiser, and managed to take it out before the disrupters discharged.

A message from Hoffer came in: The Marauders were defeated! We were to return to the Interstellar L-Point, and rendezvous with the fleet there. We headed out and were greeted with a magnificent sight: our entire fleet arranged before the L-Point. Suddenly the L-Point sensors went wild—jumped dozens of Marauder ships, accompanied by cruisers and the biggest capital ship I've ever seen. We were in serious trouble...

**Interviewer:** I think we'll take a recess here, Mr. Johnston.

END TRANSCRIPT

*Stephen Robertson is a designer for Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos.*
Dirtiest Trick o’ the Month

It’s crisis last month! Apparently, the Dirty Trick for last month (UO) is so dirty and low that it’s a bannable offense. As in, if you’re caught, you’re permanently banned from UO and the other EA online games. Here’s hoping the savvier readers knew what they were getting into.

Anyhow, moving on to a more current game, and one we still like, this month’s winning bit of advice helps you screw over someone in Fallout Tactics.

**Soloing the Demogorgon in BGII: TOB**

I was looking for a challenge, so I decided to solo the Demogorgon with my level 27 Sorcerer and then my Conjurer/Cleric. The key to this fight is to concentrate on Demogorgon himself. First, here are a couple things you should keep in mind:

1. He is immune to Tinstapole, but that does not mean his minions are.
2. He is immune to lower resistance, but not the effects of Pierce Magic.

Things you should have:

1. Rod of Resurrection: Why resurrect if you have only one character? The Rod will also heal you completely.
2. Anything that gives Charm protection, to protect yourself from his Charm.
3. Lots of scrolls: Back up spells that you don’t choose to memorize.

For the attack itself:

1. Cast Spell Immunity: Use Abjuration, Stoneskin, Protection from Magical Weapons, Summon Planar, and Morkain’s Swords. (Use Simulacrum and Mislead to summon more Planar.)
2. Talk to him and start the fight.
3. Get all of your summoned creatures to attack Demogorgon as you cast Improved Alacrity.
4. Cast Pierce Magic four times on Demogorgon to lower his magic resistance to almost zero.
5. Cast Implosion on Demogorgon if you’re a Cleric or Conjurer, or Abi-Daliz’s Horrid Willing

Here are couple tricks for Fallout Tactics.

First make someone and give them really high Trans, Sneak, and Big Guns skills. Then equip them with a bunch of mines, remote traps, and anything else that explodes. Put the mines and a remote trap in a place where you think someone will come, and have your person sneak near it. When the other player walks near and tries to disarm the mines, detonate the remote trap, which should take out the mines and your victim.

Another way to do this trick is to have your player stay nearby (on a rooftop or something) with a bazooka. Shoot the mines or a person when they’re near the mines. Another trick I like: Give your person plastic explosives and sneak somewhere; then set the timer for five or ten seconds and run near your target. Boom! That will kill your potential partner, but it will also kill the other player.

You can also give your player some nasty foods like yellow morkainola and stinky meat platter. If you can get close enough, to use them on the other player, you’ll poison your victim. That one is not recommended, though. If you’re in a map with vehicles, drive over the other players with Deathclaws or Super Mutants in the car, because they can kick and gore while they’re in it. —Conal “Cokane” O’Kane

And with that, Conal snaps himself a copy of the Fallout alumni’s game, Arcanum. We still need tricks for newer and different games (we will consider Red Alert 2 tricks only for the Yuri’s Revenge expansion).

Easter Eggs

**DVD: THE GODFATHER COLLECTION**

Paramount Home Video has hidden a few great features on the überrelease of Francis Ford Coppola’s classic The Godfather saga. On the Bonus Materials disc, go to Set Up. When you get to that submenu, press the right arrow key on your remote control. This will highlight a globe in the background, which gives you access to a collage of clips from various language versions of the film including Italian, German, and English. Another good hidden feature can be found on the same disc. From the main menu, go to Galleries and then select DVD Credits. Here, keep following the next arrow at the bottom of the screen all the way to the end, and you’ll get to see an HBO family from Jersey trying to watch the Corleones. Finally, go to the Family Tree section and select Sonny, which takes you to the family tree of Santino Corleone. From there, select Sonny again, and you will be taken to his biography. Press the left arrow key on your remote control and James Caan’s face should be highlighted; press Enter. This brings up Caan’s own biography. Now (last step), press the left arrow key once again to highlight his portrait on the left side, and if you press Enter again, you’ll see Caan’s screen test for his part as Sonny.

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Aease, soldiers. Place your weapons on safety, open your MREs, and chew down, because I want you relaxed for this briefing.

By now, you've experienced the tenacity of the formidable Russian enemy during Operation Flashpoint. Many of our good soldiers have been shipped home in body bags because of their overwhelming firepower. So, listen up as I describe the best operational tactics and team security for a couple of your toughest missions. Sit back, smoke 'em if you got 'em, and pay close attention to my motto: Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect.

Ranger Training
Operation Flashpoint is not Counter-Strike. You can't go racing across maps and mowing down the enemy without utilizing tried-and-true combat principles. The enemy is too well trained and can hit you from a distance; therefore, fire, concealment, movement, and cover become extremely important tools for achieving the objectives. Cover, for instance, can be just as important as a well-placed shot. Objects such as buildings, trees, vehicles, and brush offer great cover and will increase your chances of survival. When firing, remain in a prone or low crawl position near foliage or behind objects. Move soldiers into position by peeking from around the brush or object. Always survey the countryside with your zoom feature or binoculars. Shoot only when the target is in full view. Bottom line: Use as much cover as possible. And don't fall asleep, because in some situations you must move fast. Hit the Shift key and move like crazy away from tanks or BMP—otherwise, the enemy will blast you into eternity.

Ground Zero
There's no cookie-cutter recipe for completing missions. Use your judgment and keep surveying the terrain for enemy troops. Some missions provide vehicles, but that doesn't mean you need to operate them for success. Shooting enemies at a distance, especially if they are moving, can get frustrating. Use the right mouse zoom key and try leading them with your sights before firing. Just aim slightly ahead of them and fire four or five rounds in quick succession. Since recoil is a factor with most weapons, use semi-auto or burst modes for distant targets and save full auto for very close ranges. Avoid the M60 on missions when you need to bring a LAW rocket along; you can't take both due to encumbrance issues, and the recoil from the M60 makes shooting at long ranges more difficult. Keep an eye on your magazines, and reload only when

Multiple Casualties
Playing multiplayer in Operation Flashpoint requires strategic planning and teamwork before the action starts. Before the game, plan in detail your strategy based on the objectives at hand. Also, consider each teammate's role. Examine the map and decide who goes where and at which grid coordinates for insertion and deployment. Use the notation feature to mark these points for future reference and for gauging your progress during the mission. Real-time communication is essential, whether it is on the phone locally with your friends or using an online voice chat program like Roger Wilco. Squad leader commands take time to learn, so keep them simple. During the mission, inform team members of your location and the actions you are performing. When firing, communicate what you are doing. It is pretty frustrating to hear gunfire and not know if it's foe. When reaching key objectives or locations, advise your team so they are always aware of their situation. When missions require more than one objective, split your team into two or more groups with each team taking separate objectives. Just as in real combat, there is a considerable amount of planning involved before the actual combat. Stay alert, stay alive.
you get down to your last two rounds.

The sniper rifle is very effective outdoors. Sniper rifle tactics are best employed when ordering your teammates to move into the vicinity of enemy positions. A LAW rocket launcher comes in handy against vehicles like the BMP or Shilka. However, a T55 tank needs two LAW shots to take it out. After the first
shot, your position becomes compromised. So
fire, then move while reloading, and then fire
again. Explosives such as hand grenades and
satchel charges do come in handy, so load up if
you can. Plant satchel charges in highly
traversed areas such as roads or bridges, and
make sure to move far away from the blast
radius.

**The Buddy System**

At times, your squad won't respond well in
combat situations without constant direction. If
your squad is having a difficult time engaging
the enemy, have them sit back and scan the
horizon while you hunt for the enemy yourself.
Formations do work, so use them. Command
your squad to attack specific targets as they
appear, while providing cover. Take advantage of
team firepower by keeping your team in
formation. If you must separate, it's best to
assign two soldiers to a single task, like taking
out an enemy tank, for instance.

When running low on ammo during the
mission, replace your weapons and ammo with
dead soldiers' equipment. In certain missions,
locate ammo crates scattered around enemy
bases. Also order your squad members to
take enemy weapons and ammo whenever
necessary. Use the overhead map and compass
at regular intervals during the mission. The
overhead map highlights objectives through grid
coordinates. It's also great for ascertaining vital
information and waypoints. Overhead maps also
pinpoint the optimum routes for a particular
town, objective, or mission area.

Some missions assign a medic to your team.
If you or your teammates are wounded, use
the medic to heal them. You can heal team-
mates by selecting them with the F key and
then going into Action (7) and selecting the
Go to Medic option.

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**Now for the Hard Part**

Here's some advice for getting through the
toughest missions, so saddle up, and lock
and load—it's time for heroin.

**SHADOW KILLER**

**Single Player**

**SITREP:** As the single operative, your
objective is to sneak into the town of
Dourdan and destroy the fuel dump there,
then destroy the fuel convoy coming from La
Trinité heading to Houdan. After completing
both objectives, find a car along the
outskirts of town and escape to safety. You
have seven minutes to complete this mission
once the fuel dump sentries have been
eliminated.

**OPORD:** Begin 300 meters southwest of
Dourdan. Run southwest along the tree line,
keeping a safe distance of 200 meters from
the town. By running, you'll avoid a
patrolling tank in the vicinity. Move 150
meters east of Dourdan, and then head north
in stealth mode until you are adjacent to the
fuel dump, about 60 meters east.

Take out the two enemy sentries guarding
the fuel station. This will raise the alarm.
Move quickly to the fuel depot, place a
satchel charge, and then bolt toward your
second objective. Check your overhead map
if you're unsure of your coordinates. Don't
linger too long or you will have to face the
tank. Zigzag to avoid the tank firing at you.

Once you reach your second objective, near
the town of La Trinité, the tank should be
out of range. Blow the fuel dump. Now place
two satchel charges on the road going from
La Trinité and Dourdan. Move west 200
meters, toward your escape vehicle. Use
your binoculars to recon the road for the
enemy fuel convoy. Delocate the satchel as
the last vehicle (a fuel truck) passes over
them. Now run 400 meters southwest
toward your getaway vehicle. Get in and
drive to the town of Arudy in order to
complete the mission. Remember, this is a
timed mission, so don't take the scenic route
during the drive home.

**RETURN TO EDEN**

**Campaign**

**SITREP:** Secure airport at the north of
the island with an infantry assault. You will
have seven soldiers at your disposal, along with
two other teams in support, Bravo and
Charlie.

**OPORD:** This mission starts out with a
beach landing. Bravo team will cover your
left flank, while Charlie supports your right.
Your first objective is to rush the chapel on
the hill at grid D103. Approach from the
southwest; order your team members to
Engage At Will. As you approach, the
enemy will pop smoke. If they don't, make
sure you do in order to cover your approach.

Cleanse the hill of enemies, and then hold
for the Soviet counterattack consisting of
enemy troops and a T72 tank and BMP.
Order your LAW soldiers to take out the
vehicles while having the others take out
enemy soldiers. Bravo and Charlie teams
will remain in support. Next, pick up an
enemy RPG. Order your team to follow you
200 meters west, and then move stealthily
south in order to destroy the antiaircraft
Shilka parked there. Have your LAW soldiers
take it out or do it yourself. After it's
eliminated, move northwest for cover and
take out the nearby BMPs and enemy
soldiers.

Order Bravo and Charlie teams (after they
give the-ready signal) to assault the airport
at grid location D108. Send them a signal
(0-0-1) to attack and then radio air support
(Cobra gunships);—Designation November
for additional support (0-0-2). Use your
binoculars and sweep the area for stray
enemy soldiers. Order your teammates to
engage enemy soldiers, and then secure the
airport.
Commandos 2
Prima Games gives up the goods with their walkthrough of Das Boot, Silent Killer

In this mission, you have control of the Diver, the Sapper, the Spy, and the Thief. The commandos are split into two groups—the first three start in a boat offshore while the Thief remains hidden under the bunks where you left him at the end of the Night of the Wolves mission. For most of the mission, you control the Sapper, Diver, and Spy. Whiskey is also available and any of the four commandos can summon him.

FIG 1: Send the Diver, Sapper, and Spy into the water. Swim them toward the landing area, taking note of where the solitary guard is looking. He slowly covers a 180-degree arc, so you can swim past when he's looking toward the rest of the base. Send the Sapper to knock out the guard. Tie him up and steal his uniform and rifle. Bring the rest of the team ashore.

FIG 2: Using the Sapper's wirecutters, snip through the first barbed wire fence. Before you go through, press D to detect the mines that are hidden beyond it. There are four explosive charges arranged in a line across the section of fence you cut.

FIG 3: Defuse the mines and move on up the pathway. Pan the view to the technician working on the metal walkway in the facility beyond the wall. He'll spot you as you approach, as you'll be waving about a mine detector. Monitor the vision of the technician and activate the Sapper's mine detector. There are two rows of mines hidden before the second barbed wire fence. Be careful when you're working in the middle of the path.

The technician might spot you, and there's also a German officer who's smoking in front of the compound. Wait, and he'll move from a position under the tree to walk in front of the guard tower, to the truck, and back again. Monitor his vision to see when you can safely defuse the mines and cut through the second fence.

FIG 4: Sneak up to stand close to the guard tower. Lure the patrolling officer away with some cigarettes (the Diver has some). Knock out the officer and tie him up. Steal his cigarettes and uniform. Give the officer's uniform to the Spy.

Now use the Spy (dressed in the officer's uniform) to distract the soldier patrolling outside the gate. Make him look away from the gates. Lure away the soldier standing in front of the gates and knock him out or kill him. Dump the body before returning to knock out and tie up the soldier who's still talking to the Spy. Use this spare moment to select the Thief. Transfer the security papers from the last...
mission to Whiskey. Get the Spy or another character to summon the dog with the whistle. (The Thief may have to open the door to let him out.) When the dog arrives, give the security papers to the Spy to complete one of the mini-mission objectives. Now zoom out the view using the hyphen key and study the layout of the base beyond the large gates.

**FIG 3:** Apart from the Spy dressed in the officer’s uniform, don’t send anybody else into the base yet. Distract soldier A on the raised platform—keep him looking away from the gates. Sneak in your Sapper while soldiers B and C aren’t looking. Hide him around the back of the yellow tanks at D.

Let soldier B spot the Sapper. Knock him out when he runs to investigate. Move the Spy to distract soldier C. Make him face away from soldier A, and use the Sapper to knock out soldier A.

Send the Diver to kill soldier C with his throwing knife. Hide the body. Clear the rest of this area. Take out the sniper, E, on the balcony near the electrical station. Do this by hiding the Diver under the stairs and then using the Spy to talk to the Sniper. Press S to distract the sniper and then press E to direct him down the steps if you knock out the sniper on the balcony; soldiers beyond the wall will spot you. When the sniper gets to the bottom of the stairs, kill him with a throwing knife.

There’s only one more guard in this area, F, and he blocks the way to the large building—the submarine pen. Lure him out of position with cigarettes and distract him (press B) with the Spy. Using another commando, creep up behind the guard and knock him out.

Send the Spy up the railroad track to where two more German soldiers are talking. Distract them so they look away from the gates. Send the Sapper and the Diver crawling toward the gates and then to the side of the large building. If you don’t crawl here, you’ll be spotted and the alarm will sound.

**FIG 4:** The soldier standing on the balcony is a sniper. If you don’t kill him now, he’ll prove troublesome later.

**FIG 5:** Five enemy soldiers—A, B, C, D, E, and F—are stationed in this part of the base. Take them out quietly so you don’t set off the alarm.

**FIG 6:** The best way into the submarine pen is via the door at H. But you need to take out all of the guards and the patrolling lieutenant to make it.

To kill the lieutenant and grab the keys, lure him into the small passageway you used earlier. F, Like most soldiers, he’s a sucker for free cigarettes. Use the Diver to knife him when he’s close enough. Killing the lieutenant at F ensures that he dies beyond the range of the remaining officer.

Lure the last officer away from H and kill him.
Use G as a hiding place for this attack. You can now move all of your forces into the building. Send the Spy in first.

**FIG 7** In the next room, kill or knock out the two technicians - they're unarmed. Send the Spy down the ladder and distract the sentry, B, walking along the edge of the submarine pen. Make sure he's facing away from soldier A by the ladder. Send down the Diver and lay him flat behind the crates. Attack soldier A and hide his body behind the crates.

Next, creep up behind the distracted guard B and kill him. Again hide the body. Be cautious here, you may have to deal with another soldier who follows you down the ladder. Be on the lookout for him and kill him quickly.

**FIG 8** Maneuver the Spy so he distracts soldier D, who's patrolling beyond the small room at E. When his back is turned to soldier C, use the Diver to creep up and kill soldier C. Hide soldier C's body, and then kill soldier D. Again, hide the body. Search the bodies of the guards to pick up machine guns.

Look into the small room E. Send the Spy to distract the officer and then use the Diver to kill him. Search the wooden box here to find grenades, explosives, and a ladder. The switch here operates and opens the gates at the front of the base.

**FIG 9** Leave E and note the guard on the steps watching over the empty dock. To successfully assassinate him, you must first distract the guard wandering along the second dock area. F. Use the Spy to turn the guard away from the soldier you want to kill so the attack remains unseen. Take the body and hide it in E.

Distract the guard in the corner of the room at the end of the far dock. Turn him away from your soldiers and room E. When wandering guard F moves away, send in the Diver to kill the distracted guard. Remove the body before the wandering guard returns.

Send the Spy back to the dock next to the submarine. Move the Spy along the side of the dock opposite the submarine via G, so you remain hidden from the guards on it.

Lure soldier I to point G using cigarettes, and then use the Spy to distract him so he turns his back to room E. Bring the Diver up (crawling) behind the distracted soldier I and stab him. Dump the body in room E. Next, kill soldier J and unlock the door he was guarding with the key you took from the lieutenant on the roof. Carry the body inside.

Inside is a crew of the captured sub. Hold down Shift and click on a crewman to untie him. Crawl the Diver toward room G via J. Stay low to avoid the gaze of soldier H in the dry dock. You now need to get rid of soldiers K, L, and M. (See the earlier picture showing the area around the submarine.) Use the Diver to throw the knife and kill K - you can retrieve the knife later. Send the Spy along the edge of the submarine to distract soldier L. Kill him silently from behind. Send the Spy to distract soldier M, who watches over the sub from a position above the dock gates. When his back is turned, you can easily kill him.

Monitor the vision of soldier N, who guards the gangplank on the deck of the sub. Control the Spy and move him onto the sub and down to the body of soldier K. Pick up the body and hide it behind the coming tower. Retrieve the Diver's knife. Doing this allows you to lure soldier N onto the deck, ensuring that he isn't alerted to trouble by the dead body of a comrade. When the body has been moved, return to the dockside and attract the soldier N with a pack of cigarettes. Distract him so either the Diver or Sapper can sneak up behind him. All this work leaves the lieutenant O, who's guarding the door to the control room at the end of the dock. Lure him away from his position using cigarettes, and then use the Spy to distract him after he picks them up. Kill or knock out the lieutenant.

Do the same for soldier P on the high platform. (See the figure showing the area around the submarine.) Lure him with cigarettes, distract him when he picks them up, and then use one of the other characters to attack from behind. This allows you to safely enter the door previously guarded by lieutenant O.

In the room beyond, send the Spy to distract the officer when he's close to the lockers at the end of the room. Send in one of the other characters to knock out and tie up the soldier sitting on the bench. Then knock out the distracted officer.

Search the lockers to find sleeping pills, wine, grenades, another knife, poison, binoculars, and a first aid kit. Next, send the Spy upstairs.

Distract the soldier and turn him to his back is to the stairway. Bring up the Diver and punch the distracted soldier. This alerts the other soldier here. Quickly floor him with a punch. Tie up both men. Check the locker in the corner for more wine, binoculars, and a ladder.

The submarine's captain is being held in the next room. Unlock the door with the keys you found on the roof and free him. Clear out the men in the control room with a grenade. Search the box to find the Enigma codes and activate the switch in the corner to open the gates of the submarine pen. Leave the building with the captain.

**FIG 10** Send the Spy into the sub via the forward hatch - the closest one to the gangplank. Distract the guard at the end of the first room, and then send one of the other characters down the ladder to knock out the other guard. Kill the distracted guard.

Work your way through the sub, distracting and disabling the enemy soldiers. When the lower level is clear, climb up to the conning tower, killing the guards there. Move the captain and his crew aboard. Deactivate the underwater mines outside and the sub will be ready to leave.

Equip the Diver's diving gear (D) and jump into the water. Swim through the open doors and into the sea beyond. Dive (press B) and go to each of the six mines in turn. Hold down Shift and click on each mine to defuse it.

**FIG 11** For now, finalize the secondary objectives. Clear out the rest of the enemy soldiers in the submarine pen. Send the Spy into the dry dock via the ladder. B. Distract soldier A so he's not facing the other soldier working at the dock. Send the Diver or the Sapper to knock out and tie up the wandering workers. Afterward, knock out or kill the distracted guard. Return the way you came. Now turn your attention to guard C. Use the Spy to distract him at the end of his patrol route near point D, and then knock him out or kill him.

Follow the dock to get soldier E. Keep going to distract and disable soldier F. Double back and head for soldier G. Distract and disable him. Wait until soldier I walks away from the building and the remaining guards at H.

Lure one of the two guards away from H using cigarettes and use the Spy to distract him when he picks them up. When soldier I isn't looking, knock out or kill the lured guard and hide his body at point G. Lure soldier I down in the same way. The remaining guard at H should have his back to you and won't see your fist coming.

The submarine pen is now clear. You've probably noticed lots of little metal boxes lying around - the Thief can open them. To bring him over, send a German uniform to the Thief via Whiskey. Send the Spy to the Thief's location at A. Use the Spy to distract the soldier standing outside the Thief's door.

When the coast is clear, move the Thief (now wearing the German uniform) through the door. Walk, don't run. Move the Spy outside. Use the
Spy to distract the guard at B who's looking toward point C. This allows the Thief to move from A, behind the soldier at B, and to C without alerting any of the guards.

By the time you reach point C, the uniform will have been "used"—its effects are only temporary on most characters. Send another uniform to the Thief via Whiskey. Meanwhile, use the Spy to distract the guard at point D and make him look away from the double doors at E.

Move the Thief (now wearing the fresh uniform) to point E and into the submarine pen. Unlock the various metal boxes to find bazookas, flamethrowers, grenades, and a remote-controlled bomb.

Send the Spy to open the other set of submarine pen doors—the switch is in the building at the end of the far dock. Next, send the Spy to deal with the two guards patrolling the front of the building where the torpedo is located. Lure the guard to the left of the building using cigarettes. Place them in point A so you can avoid the gaze of other soldiers. After you lure the soldier away, knock him out using the syringe—two doses ought to send him to the floor. Tie him up and use the syringe on the other guard.

Now your team can swim out of the submarine pen doors and climb the steps at the front of the building. You won't get very far outside if you didn't deal with the sniper on the roof earlier. (See FIG 6, which shows the roof of the submarine pen.) If you didn't, you'd better do it now.

Send the Spy into the building first and distract and disable the first guard there. Use this tactic to get rid of the technicians. In most cases, even if one of the unarmed enemies spots you, he won't raise the general alarm. There's a bonus photo piece in one of the cupboards here. Plant the remote-controlled bomb you picked up earlier next to the torpedo and leave.

When you're in the submarine pen, detonate the torpedo charge. It destroys the torpedo and demolishes the entire building.

You need to do a little preparation for the remaining secondary objectives—the destruction of the yellow gas tanks and the three AA guns.

Take control of the Spy and visit locations A, B, and C. At A, enter the hut and turn off the electrified fence—do this without being seen, or you'll blow your cover.

Move to B and search the furniture to find a remote-controlled bomb, timed bomb, and grenades. The radio is also in this building. Use it discreetly. It allows you to specify a landing point for the Green Beret—he can parachute in if you need him. Find more explosives in the building at C.

Move the other squad members out through the submarine doors (next to the sub) and around through the entrance they used at the beginning of the mission. Make sure that you've already taken out the sniper on the balcony—you're going to approach the first AA gun via the power station. Cut the wire fence when the technician works on the first right-side generator. (See FIG 10.) Walk to the technician and knock him out. Tie him up and search him to find another remote-controlled bomb.

Next, use the Spy to distract one of the two soldiers guarding the power station gate. Distract the one patrolling between the AA gun and the electricity substations.

Move the Sapper through the substations and cut the wire behind the sentry outside the gate. Knock out the guard, tie him up, and carry away his body. Move the Sapper up to knock out the guard distracted by the Spy. Tie him up and carry away the body. Use the Spy to distract the soldier on the wall, and use the Sapper to plant a remote-controlled bomb next to the AA gun. Do the same for the AA gun on the wall—watch for soldiers patrolling beyond the wall.

Move the Sapper and the Spy to the large yellow tanks near the entrance to the base. Plant a timed bomb next to the tanks. Leave the compound quickly and head around the edge of the base (past the mines) toward the front of the submarine pen. Detonate the other remote-controlled bombs. Scroll across the map to view your handiwork.

One AA gun remains. Send the Spy to the watchtower beside the AA gun. Use the syringe to disable the guard looking out over the sea and tie him up. Move to the level below the one you just dealt with and restrict that guard's view of the water. Swim your squad from the submarine pen around the tower to the other beach.

Use the Sapper to cut the wire fence and check for mines beyond it—there is a row across...
Move the Thief from A, behind the backs of the guards at B, to safe point C. When guard D is distracted, the Thief can make it to E to join the other commandos.

The switch at A turns the electric fencing off at the power station. More explosives are at B and C.

This building is from the previous mission. The torpedo you need to destroy is inside.

The beach. Crawl diagonally up the beach using the rocks for cover. Don't approach the wire yet—there are more mines in front of it.

To give yourself time to find and defuse the mines, send the Spy to distract the soldier patrolling the fence. When he's done so, send the Sapper through to knock out and tie up the distracted guard.

Now send the Spy to the bunker ahead and distract the guard there—don't let him look toward the beach. Crawl through the trees and knock out the officer standing by the car. When the Spy gets in the car with the security papers (which allow him to drive into the base), the main objective is completed.

Now, to destroy the last AA gun, return to the beach. The Spy must distract the guard on the watchtower located opposite building A2. Doing so allows the Sapper to defuse the mines close to the wall of the base. Use the Diver's grappling hook (or the Thief and the ladder) to climb the wall, allowing the Sapper to plant the final charge next to the gun.

With a timed bomb, you have 20 seconds to run away. When the gun explodes, soldiers come to investigate—so don't hang around. Swim to the submarine pen, jump in the sub, and escape.

You can find one bonus photo piece in the barracks (6), opposite the Thief's original starting point. Two more can be found in the general's office (7,8), while another is located in a locker in the shower block (9). Slightly trickier, another bonus photo piece can be found in the subterranean bunker (10) near the large AA gun. The last bonus piece can be found in the small office (11) near the rear entrance of the base.

**Mission Secret**

**Bonus photo pieces required: 11**

This bonus mission simply involves guiding your commando's motorboat around a race course. The course itself has been marked off with mines—if you hit one, your boat will explode. As the mission objectives point out, hitting any of the buoys that litter the course will slow you down.

You need to complete the race course in less than three minutes to successfully complete this bonus mission, but it shouldn't pose a problem.
Command & Conquer: Yuri's Revenge

Tricks straight from Westwood's mind

By Chris Rubyor

The Red Alert franchise is ripe with bizarre units, fast gameplay, and interesting unit strategies. It's no wonder that the most popular game for Dirty Tricks by far is Red Alert 2. We at CGW decided to hit up a Westwood insider and have him give you the basic lowdown on how to dominate at any multiplayer game in Yuri's Revenge.

**Yuri's Faction**

Since Yuri's technology (psychics, genetics) uses an opponent's strengths against him, brute force and tank rushes won't work like they used to. Yuri can mind-control enemy units and force them to do his dirty work. And there's no bigger than Yuri mind-controlling your Allied paratroopers or Soviet Tesla tanks and feeding them into a grinder to make money. Even worse: One well-placed blast from his Genetic Mutator can turn a base defended by GIs and conscripts into a base overrun by hulking gray Brutes.

Makes playing as Yuri kinda fun, don't it? Here are some tips and strategies that might help you gain the minds of your foes a little faster.

Make sure to pump out a good number of Slave Minors. Don't forget, these units function as combination resource-gathering and processing facilities.

Combinations of units are absolutely essential for winning with Yuri. Try a mix of Brutes, Gatling Tanks, and Lasher Tanks for siege attacks. Or swap the Brutes for a Mastermind, a pair of Magnetrons, and a flying saucer to raid bases for their units and cash.

Pump out a few Brutes at the beginning of the game to counter any early tank rushes by an opponent. A little later, you can supplement your defense with a few Psychic Towers to gain control of any marauding units.

Tank bunkers offer a great deal of protection, and they're cheap to build. If your enemy is keen on airborne assaults, order Gatling Tanks into your bunkers. You've got a devastating defense against land and air attacks, and the armor rating of the tank is upgraded.

If a player tries to overload your Mastermind unit, have the units that are being controlled attack the invading unit.

If you're playing against the Allies and Robot Tanks are advancing on your position, have a few flying saucers handy. They can drain power, making the Robot Tanks go offline; your foes can neither move nor defend themselves then. Build a cloning vat as soon as possible; you can double the production of your infantry units at no added cost.

Chaos Drones mean big trouble for your foes. These units deploy a hallucinogenic gas that causes enemy units to go berserk and attack their own. Alone, they're pretty defenseless, to mix in a few Lashers and Brutes for protection.

The Virus unit is best employed hidden behind buildings and underneath trees. After all, they're spitters, right? Engineers, conscripts, and GIs go to their great reward in a noxious cloud of green gas.

**Soviet Forces**

In Red Alert and Red Alert 2, the Soviets were all about slow-moving, heavily armored units chock-full of firepower. In Yuri's Revenge, the basic Soviet style hasn't changed, but their arsenal now includes some lighter, faster units to help out against Yuri's forces. The Soviets also have Boris, a new hero unit; he's an infantryman with considerable firing range and the ability to call in MiG air strikes. He's also immune to mind control.

When attacking Yuri, make sure you incorporate Terror Drones and Dogs into your forces. They might be slow, but they're immune to Yuri's psychic attacks and can destroy Yuri clones and Mastermind units.

If playing as Iraq (in skirmish mode), fortify your base with battle bunkers and conscripts. Next, build four Desolators and deploy them evenly around your base. This works effectively against paratrooper drops and light rushes.

Keep your siege choppers on the outskirts of your opponent's base and slowly inch them in; they're easily destroyed by antiaircraft defenses. It's also wise to use Terror Drones and flank trucks to protect deployed siege choppers.

When using Boris, make sure he's well hidden among trees, or placed on higher ground from his target. Your opponent won't know what hit him until it's too late.

Build your industrial plant as soon as possible; this structure is essential for building large forces to overrun your foe. A good Soviet base always has two war factories and one industrial plant. Protect machine shops at all costs. They regenerate all your vehicles' health to 100 percent, and thus are priceless.

Many of the skirmish maps in Yuri's Revenge have elevated terrain. An effective strategy is to land and deploy siege choppers on the plateau and attack your enemy from above.

**Allied Forces**

Previously reliant on light, fast moving vehicles, the Allies now have some new units like the Battle Fortress that move a little more slowly but have vastly increased firepower. Tanya's been elevated to hero status, making her immune to mind control and giving her increased firing range and armor.

The new Guardian GI units make short work of heavy armor with their uncrushable bunker and antitank bazookas. Use them in groups of three around your base for extra protection against both land and air attacks.

The best assault unit against a Yuri base is the Robot Tank. It can't be mind-controlled, can travel across water, and can float across different elevations. But don't forget: They need power, and when their power supply is cut, they go offline and can't move or defend themselves. For added firepower, mix in a few Mirage Tanks.

**Cap Generators** are more precious than ever. Use them to avoid Yuri's mind attacks. The first one should always go next to your war factory.

If you've got Chrono Legionnaires, drop them in a Battle Fortress for a potent attack combo. This setup can be used to whittle down any Soviet or Yuri force, but be careful--a Yuri clone can still use its mind powers to control it.

Chris Rubyor is the online community manager for the Red Alert 2 franchise.
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Computer Gaming World
Rails Across America
Two capitalists lay down the track for success By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk


January 1890
Tom: Monterrey? Great (Fig 1), I'm starting Chick Lines Ltd. In the middle of Mexico while Bruce is dropped down on the Eastern seaboard. At least he's got Vanderbilt and Harriman to dog his steps. Starting in a rural area like mine has its advantages; I'm pretty much guaranteed the "Viva Mexico!" bonus for connecting all Mexican cities. But I'll need to muscle in on the higher-traffic action for some income. As soon as I've got $15 million to spare, I'll buy a shortline to use as a stateside base of operations.

Bruce: Starting in Richmond (Fig 2) gives me easy access to the lucrative routes in the Northeast. It also makes the Gulf-to-Canada bonus a priority. The Northeast corridor routes don't cost much to build because the terrain is flat and the cities are close together. That means I'll have money left over for the many trains I'll need. And I should still be able to make an early jump into the Midwest to grab a part of any transcontinental lines that get built.

March 1892
Tom: It's slow going because my routes aren't providing much of an income. These long railways across the frontier are expensive, so I have to watch spending carefully (Fig 3). One important tactic for early expansion in rural areas is to use influence cards to add resources in isolated cities. These can increase freight traffic and thus income. It takes only a few weak Labor cards, which are easy enough to get at the lowest Graft settings; the cards are also handy for Strikes.

Bruce: I've jumped out to an early lead over Tom thanks to my Regional Dominance, Railbuilding, and superior Operating Ratio. Even so, I've been aggressive in taking out loans, especially when interest rates dip. It looks like no one has the stomach for influence attacks yet, so I've been selling cards for extra money.

January 1896
Tom: I'm falling way behind in Prestige. I missed my dividend payments this year, so I lost the Prestige bonus. It's important to keep an eye on the Special Finances screen for Projected Dividends. When December rolls around, make sure you have that amount to spare. Similarly, if you're paying Graft for influence cards, remember your quarterly payments and mentally add this to the figure for Committed Income.

December 1896
Bruce: I'm keeping the lead, but Harriman is giving me a run for my money by developing around Pittsburgh and upstate New York while I build along the coast. To slow him down, I'm going to build into his big traffic hubs, Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Then I'll change my Attitude on the Politics screen to War. This rate war will slash both of our incomes in the cities where we connect, but it won't affect me at the big traffic hubs, where I don't have any competition. Since I have several lucrative cities all to myself, this should hurt him a lot more than it hurts me.

February 1899
Tom: Although my Prestige increase is keeping pace with the other guys, I'm way back in third place. My main problem is that it's hard to make money providing service to these backwater Mexican cities. It's time to grab a North American shoreline. I've made a $13 million offer on Clovis to Amarillo (Fig 4).

March 1899
Tom: "Rejected"! Those nongood sound so-so (Fig 5). I even tried to bribe the board of directors. Ingrates. Their lousy little line was worth only a couple of million anyway. Well, if that's the way they want to play, I've got a few cards up my sleeve. Namely Media Buzz, a Fund Raiser, and Mass Arrests, which are good enough to force an auction. Of course, before I do this, I'll make sure Bruce doesn't have the cash or credit to outbid me and keep me from getting a slice of the North American pie.

April 1899
Bruce: I see Tom's jumped the national border and made it into the U.S. I didn't have the cash to drive the bidding process higher, so he got a line in Texas for only $10 million. I had planned to take advantage of my profitable Northeast routes by running slightly older trains to reduce my expenditures, but with competition from Harriman, this would have simply shifted traffic to his competing lines. This is one of the reasons why carving out an area where you can maintain a monopoly is so important.

August 1899
Tom: So now I'm expanding from Texas to boost my income. In fact, I think I can make a bid for the first transcontinental line by moving west as well as east. My plans to connect Mexico will take a back seat for now.

September 1900
Bruce: Things are really heating up. I can no longer baby-sit each track, so I'm adding managers to most of them (Fig 6). Their $10,000 monthly salary is minimal compared to my $12 million monthly income. Since managers don't upgrade your track or engines, I periodically go to the Track List and sort my tracks by Congestion. For any track over 10 percent, I upgrade engines, signals, and track in that order. The manager will buy more engines to take advantage of the added capacity while I deal with other matters, like evaluating rival rail networks for weaknesses. I do this by checking the Regional Cargo section of the Annual Report to find regions where an opponent has only a slight edge over me.

Hitting him with a Strike can shut him down for six months. I can follow this up with Sabotage or a Safety Inspection on his tracks that carry the most cars. By also improving my own network, I can wrest control of that region and steal the Prestige from him.
April 1992
Tom: Fisk just broke into Mexico by bidding on the Nogales-to-Mexicali site. This means the transcontinental connection will have to wait and I'll have to devote my resources to quickly connecting Mexico before he blocks me. I'm laying new track with triple crews, because if he locks me out of a single city, my Viva Mexico bonus is lost.

January 1993
Bruce: I'm connected from Albany to Montgomery. In the meantime, Harriman has connected a lot of cities in Pennsylvania and Ohio, so that avenue of expansion is out for me--building duplicate track is a waste of time at this point because I'll be competing for traffic. Better to build into Texas from my southern lines. Before I head west, though, I need to wrap up the SO points for building Gulf-to-Canada by connecting to Montreal and Mobile.
Tom: Rats. Bruce got the Gulf-to-Canada connection, which will effectively offset the Prestige I'll get from uniting Mexico.

May 1993
Tom: I've connected Mexico and now I'm in second place with 314 Prestige to Bruce's 362. I'll need a transcontinental line to win. But those triple crews were expensive, and my income is still too low to really commit to connecting those long barren stretches of Texas. Time for a stock raid, perhaps? Harriman is sitting on $80 million. But I don't recall him having made any Influence attacks lately, so he might have enough money and Dirty Tricks cards to defend himself. The tricky thing about a stock raid is that as soon as you grab the money, you've probably used the cards you need to defend yourself from another stock raid. Plus, you've just advertised that you're defenseless and sitting on a wad of cash. So the best bet is to wait for another raider to move and then hit him while he's defenseless.
Bruce: My draw-out fight in the Northeast sapped much of my cash, so I tried to get some by making a stock raid on Harriman. Unfortunately, Tom must have been watching the reports pretty carefully; he immediately hit me with a stock raid of his own. He made off with 40 percent of my money. This is really going to hurt, as I have some big loans coming due soon.

October 1993
Tom: With my ill-gotten gains, the transcontinental line is done and I managed to reap a Prestige bonus of 102, shooting me into first place with less than five years to go. My goal now is to defend myself from Strikes and investigations by hoarding Publicity cards for defense. As long as I keep my income flowing at a reasonable level, I should be guaranteed first place.
December 1990
Bruce: Tom has 638 Prestige; I have 567. Adding resources, a transcontinental Prestige award, a strategic shoreline purchase, and a daring fifth-hour stock raid helped Tom from a sorry starting position to a decisive victory (FIG. 7 AND 8). This was a short game. In longer games, we would have had to deal with electrification, engines that get obsolete, and more careful use of loans. But as far as I'm concerned, Tom hasn't heard the last of me.
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The Ultimate Gaming Mac

What do you get when you give eight PC manufacturers a $4,000 budget to come up with something that truly kicks ass? You get CGW’s annual UGM story, that’s what!
It's that time of the year again. You know what we're talking about. The time of the year that's loved by advertisers but dreaded by editors: the holiday season. If you're a longtime CGW reader, then you also know that our January issue means one thing to tech-types: The Ultimate Gaming Machine. This year we tried our best to learn from years past. And you can bet that this year's story was as much of a pain in the ass as every other one.

So we tried to simplify things. We told every manufacturer the same thing: "Put together the best machine that you can for $4,000 or less." While some companies (Voodoo PC, Falcon Northwest, and Alienware) sent us machines at the top of the budget, other companies sent in machines that are below $3,000. But we weren't surprised by which machines wound up in the top three slots.

We also decided to keep the testing simple. We ran three test suites: MadOnion's 3DMark2001, Ziff Davis's 3D WinBench 2000, and our very own 3D GameGauge 2.5. We then averaged the three scores to give each machine a final score, which is what determined the ultimate winner. Sure, some are gonna argue that this was unfair, but most of these machines kick some serious ass. And with the exception of maybe one or two, you'd be well off getting any of them. So sit back and enjoy.
Voodoo PC came in a pathetic sixth out of seven machines last year. Apparently a lot can change in a year. When the MonsoonEGAD-XP showed up and we saw what those crazy, beer-swilling, hockey-playing Canadians had put together, our jaws dropped. This thing is easily the coolest-looking computer we’ve ever seen. Of course our cynicism kicked in—and we lauded the company for putting together a good-looking rig, we were sure that this would be a case of form superecling function.

The Monsoon is the only machine to ship with an ATI Radeon 8500 graphics card. Apparently, in the spirit of the “Canadian Cornet,” the Calgary-based company wanted to give the little country something to be proud of. It achieved a scant 17.2 frames per second in Quake III: Arena at 1024x768x16 and a 3DMark2001 score of 7978, no one could doubt that the boys up in Ashland know how to put together a machine. And considering Falcon’s commitment to stability, we weren’t surprised that our test machine never crashed, hung, or otherwise behaved strangely.

Rather than pinning their success on gimmicks, Falcon offers top-notch components and peripherals, like Microsoft’s Natural Pro Keyboard and Optical Mouse, EnerMax’s 365Watt power supply, and a Gigabyte GA7DX motherboard.

It was the benchmarks that put Falcon in second place. But it was the best performer of the GeForce3 machines, which left us wondering how it would have performed with the ATI Radeon 8500 that the winning Voodoo machine boasts.

VERDICT

Who knew? Had Falcon shipped their rig with an ATI Radeon, they might have snagged the top spot. But the Mach V is still a great machine.
3 Only three of the machines in this year's UGM story come with AMD's brand-new Athlon XP 1800+ (1.5GHz) processor. And interestingly, those three Athlon-based machines are the top three machines we tested. While none of the three scored the best Quake III: Arena frame rates—the Dell Dimension 8200 won that battle—they achieved the three highest 3DMark2001 scores.

The third-fastest Athlon XP machine, Alienware's Aurora DDR is a smoker. Sporting nearly the same components as the top two machines, the Aurora's performance comes as no surprise to us. Its 3DMark2001 score of 7899 is just a hair below the Falcon's 7916. But Alienware overclocked their graphics card so it repeatedly hung while running 3DMark2001; I had to crank down the clock speed in order to complete the test. How serious an infraction this is depends mainly on the user. We would trade a slightly lower Quake III frame-rate score or a few 3DMark2001 points for rock-solid stability.

Aside from that, the Aurora DDR is a great machine. Like all Alienware rigs, it looks great, and its component list is nothing to sneeze at. The machine came equipped with Microsoft Windows XP, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, a SoundBlaster Audigy, 256MB of PC2100 DDR memory, and 80GB of storage in a RAID array. Not too shabby.

VERDICT ★★★★★
The Aurora DDR is a solid performer, but the overclocked GPU caused problems. We'd sacrifice a few 3DMark2001 points for greater stability.

4 In spite of its competent components, Hypersonic PC's entry landed squarely in the middle of the pack. Based on Windows ME, the Sonic Boom 5.1 boasts a 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 256MB of RDRAM, an ASUS P4T motherboard, a really nice 19-inch NEC MultiSync monitor, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, dual 40GB IBM hard drives in a RAID configuration, and a SoundBlaster Audigy MP3+.

The Sonic Boom's shortcomings are due to its having a Hercules 3D Prophet III GeForce3 card instead of the newer GeForce3Ti 500. And we would have preferred for the Sonic Boom 5.1 to come with Windows XP.

But the Sonic Boom 5.1 still achieved Quake III: Arena frame rates of 192.5 at 1024x768x16, and its 3DMark2001 score of 7874 is nothing to sneeze at. It was one of four machines to ship with an aluminum CoolMaster case, and we're pleased to say that the Sonic Boom 5.1 is super stable and never crashed on us.

In a departure from the rest of the machines, the Sonic Boom 5.1 shipped with the Diamond MultimediaRio Digital Audio Receiver, a cool device that streams digital audio from your computer to your entertainment system via ethernet cable or a standard telephone jack.

Hypersonic is definitely one of the premiere boutique gaming companies, and their UGM entry proves that. If you're partial to Hypersonic PC, then we're sure that you'll be pleased with the Sonic Boom 5.1. Just be sure to get it configured with a GeForce3Ti 500 graphics card and Windows XP.

VERDICT ★★★★★
The fastest of the 2GHz machines, the Sonic Boom 5.1 did show us good performance. We would have preferred Windows XP, though.
The first test that we perform is always the 1024x768x16 Quake II Arena test. So you can imagine our excitement when Dell's Dimension 8200 achieved 92.5 frames per second. We couldn't help but think, "Could this be the year that the big company boots the little guy back?" And subsequent tests revealed that—if anything—this machine is at least a killer Quake rig. While the Dimension's 3DMark2001 score of 7367 is impressive, it's still nearly a half a G lower than the 7918 that the Falcon machine scored.

Shipping with a proprietary motherboard, the Dell boasts a 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB of RDRAM, a VisionTek XTASY 6964 (GeForce3Ti 500) graphics card, a 100GB Western Digital hard drive, and Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition. We're even fond of its Altec Lansing ADA490 speakers.

The Dell performed all tests flawlessly—never freezing or hanging—and we liked the IntelMouse 3.0 Explorer and multimedia keyboard. Last year's Dimension was a bitch to open up and work on, and it seems that Dell heard the complaints; this new Dimension is significantly easier to get into. Our only complaint is that you have to lie the machine on its side to open it. Which means that power users like us can't use the machine with the cover off. But maybe this is for the better. If you want a top-notch rig and are reluctant to go to one of the little guys, then Dell is by far your best option.

**VERDICT**

For those who prefer to buy from a big-ass company, Dell is it. The Dimension 8200 was both a rock-solid performer and very stable.

GMachines shipped their top-of-the-line rig with a 1.8GHz Pentium 4 processor. While the Omega wasn't the fastest machine we tested, we were pleased with the package that the company put together. A Microsoft Windows ME machine with 256MB of RAM, the Omega is based on the venerable ASUS P4T motherboard. The only real knock against the GMachines Omega is the components, which were at best top-of-the-line two months ago: 1.8GHz Pentium 4, 64MB GeForce3, Windows ME, and Klipsch ProMedia 4.1s. Swap these components for a 2GHz Pentium 4, GeForce3Ti 500, Windows XP, and some Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, and it's hard not to imagine the GMachines 3DMark2001 score of 7313 going up to nearly 8000—and therefore being more competitive.

Considering how stacked this field of competitors is, we must explain that the Omega's sixth-place finish is not necessarily indicative of its overall power. In other words, this machine flies. With Quake II Arena frame rates of 186.5 at 1024x768x16 and Unreal Tournament frame rates of 64.74 at 1024x768x16, this thing should please anyone who uses it. Essentially, the GMachines Omega was beaten out because the top five competitors were able to get the latest and greatest components closer to their release than the smaller GMachines. Also, the Windows ME installation that our test machine shipped with froze up on us a few times when we tried to install some of the networking components, but dealing with this problem was no harder than hitting the Cancel button.

With the exception of the key components of CPU, graphics card, and speakers, it's easy for us to recommend the GMachines Omega. Again, be sure to get your machine with either the 2GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon XP 1800+, a GeForce3Ti 500, and some 5.1 speakers.

**VERDICT**

The Omega is well put together. Its only real drawback wasn't really its fault—the big boys were able to put together rigs with superior components.
If your aim is dead center, shouldn’t your sound be too?

For dramatic 3D positional audio, add a center channel to your gaming experience. Creative Inspire™ 5.1 5300 is the most affordable Dolby® 5.1 speaker solution to feature a center channel in addition to four electronically contoured surround satellites, and a wood subwoofer for clean, solid bass. Designed to bring thrilling home theater sound to Microsoft® DirectSound® 3D games, like Red Faction™. Inspire 5.1 5300 creates a 5.1 soundfield with 6-discrete channels when combined with any multi-channel Sound Blaster® sound card. For the most riveting home theater gaming experience at an unbelievable price, Inspire 5.1 5300 is a direct hit.

Visit www.americas.creative.com to preview the entire Creative Inspire™ speaker line-up.
It sported a 2GHz Intel Pentium 4, 512MB of RDRAM, a 64MB GeForce3 card, and Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition, so it's an understatement to say that we were disappointed with the Gateway 700XL. While computers are more than the sum of their parts, this just takes the cake. The only rig in this round-up to score a sub-6000 3DMark2001 score, the 700XL has a faster CPU and twice as much memory as the Zephyr PC, which nonetheless beat the 700XL in nearly every test.

We've always liked Gateway machines, so it's difficult to level so much criticism at a company that at least has good customer support. But facts are facts: Adding benchmark insult to component injury, the 700XL ships with Boston Acoustics BA7500 speakers that in no way compare to Klipsch ProMedia 4.1s and a SoundBlaster Live Value sound card. We wouldn't be so quick to malign Gateway for going with last year's sound card if the rig shipped with FireWire ports but, while the case has a spot for one on the front, the machine lacks FireWire support. Interesting.

Now that we're done bitching, we'll say that the 700XL's Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF VX920 19-inch monitor is super crisp, and the 80GB Western Digital hard drive means that you'll probably never run out of disk space. We also liked Gateway's Multimedia Keyboard, and the 700XL's case is easy to open.

We expected more from Gateway, considering all the components in the 700XL. But as Dave Salvador is fond of saying, "Hope springs eternal." Maybe next year.

**VERDICT**
It's not easy being the little guy. And Zephyr's showing proves that. Their machine was well-built, but they were outclassed by the larger operations.

**VERDICT**
We expected more from Gateway with its great components. While you don't always get what you want, it is the cheapest machine in the roundup.

**GATEWAY 700XL**

**MANUFACTURER** Zephyr PC  CONTACT: www.zephyrpc.com  PRICE: $2,049

**Alienware, and Voodoo, some of the components hint at the company's commitment to performance. The machine that we tested ships with Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition. Storage comes in the form of dual 7200 RPM 40GB IBM DeskStar hard drives controlled by a Promise Pastrack TX2 Dual Channel RAID Controller, and the 19-inch Viewsonic G90b monitor is as nice as the others.**

While we can't recommend the Zephyr PC this year, we're confident that if the company can stick around, they'll soon be pushing up on the big boys.**
Your Quest for Power is Over

The amazing new graphics of EverQuest: The Shadows of Luclin™ will challenge you with more than just tough Quests. Get ready for these stunning new visuals with the fastest gaming PC made. The best games play even better on a Falcon.

Now playing faster on Falcon Northwest Gaming PCs

1-888-FALCON-1
www.falcon-nw.com
### The UGM Roundup

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<th>GMachines</th>
<th>Zephyr PC</th>
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### It's All about the Digits: The Numbers That Determined the Winner!

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<th>184</th>
<th>192.5</th>
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<td><strong>2395.67</strong></td>
<td><strong>2076.73</strong></td>
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</table>
TECH MEDIC

You’re at it! Let’s bring it down to about 5.
What are some durable loud speakers with a lot of bass? And what are the
best speakers under $100? I blew out the Boston Acoustics Digital BA735s
that came with my Gateway. And then I blew out their replacements in a day.

Dave

Damn, dude, your bass sounds like it’s way too crunk. First, when you’re
bumping Ludacris’ “Area Codes,” turn the bass down a little. Next, get
decent speakers. That $100 maximum is brutal, though. You should check
out Cambridge SoundWorks FPS2000 Digitals. They’re like $150, but they
can handle all the whack dirty south stuff that you’re gonna throw at ’em.

Now it’s “Which motherboard should I buy?”

I’m trying to piece together a new system and I need some opinions for a new
motherboard. While speed would be nice, my primary requirements are
stability and compatibility. I’m not planning on overclocking, and I’d love to
avoid the “that hard drive won’t work with this motherboard”-type of fiasco. I
do not want onboard video or audio, as I plan on getting a GeForce3 and a
SoundBlaster Live. And I have not committed to either a P4 or Thunderbird.
Can you give me a few suggestions?

Steve Motley

I’m a big ASUS fan. If you build an Athlon-based machine, get an ASUS
ATM266G. If you build a Pentium 4-based machine, get an ASUS P4T.

Mmum, MOMO

First, I’d like to give my sympathy to your son beating you on the PlayStation
and to tell you I think you’re a great addition to the magazine. What kind of steering
wheel and pedals would you suggest I get? I am leaning toward Logitech.

Robert Sweet

Get the Logitech MOMO Force wheel. It’s kind of expensive at nearly
$200, but it’s super sweet. The pedal base won’t slide around and the
steering wheel is covered in leather—fron, like, a cow.

What’s your fant-tasy?

Hey, what’s up? I want to keep up with technology, you know. Update my computer
and buy the latest things. I’m curious as to what you would upgrade
from this Dell 4100: Windows ME, Pentium III, 800MHz, 128MB SDRAM, 32MB
GeForce2 GTs graphics card, 20GB hard drive, 4x2 CD-ROM, 3x8x8 CD-RW,
SoundBlaster Live sound card, and Norman Kardon speakers. The system is
decent—I can play awesome games with a so-so frame rate—but it’s kinda slow
times. If I had money, what would I upgrade to improve speed?

Cleveland Bledsoe

I would stick with your current processor and hard drive and upgrade to
512MB of RAM, a GeForce3Ti 5600 graphics card, and a DVD-RW drive.

Upgrade time for Mister Sangha!

I love your section of the magazine—it’s the part I always read first. Tough luck
with your son whuppin’ you. I’m thinking about upgrading my system similarly
so I can keep up with December’s Lean Machine. I figured I’d use the ASUS A7TE motherboard
with the AMD Duron 900 like yours but with my existing 192MB PC100 SDRAM, an
ATI Radeon 6500 AGP instead of your Kyro, existing 139GB HD, existing
Samsung 8x DVD, and a SB Live Value. So the only new parts would be the
motherboard, processor, video card, and sound card. Suggestions on what I
should use or not use in that list or what I should add? A rough estimate
would also be greatly appreciated.

Nav Sangha

Prices keep dropping, so I’ve made what was once my Power Rig my Lean
Machine. Go with a 1.4GHz Athlon CPU and an ASUS A7J266 motherboard.
That mobo has two DDR slots and three SDRAM slots, so using your
existing memory shouldn’t be a problem. Also, consider getting at least a
20GB hard drive and one of the new Nvidia graphics cards like the
GeForce2Ti. That card costs about $150 and it kicks ass. (See December’s
Lean Machine for prices.)

Best Will Power Ever

The CGW editors love meetings. Whether it’s
a so-called quick one to discuss feature
such-and-such or a lunch meeting to
discuss one of our myriad redesigns, my
coworkers live for these damn things. And today
was no different as we gathered to discuss our
annual holiday gift guide.

Of course the usual CGW high links ensued: We
insulted our vaunted leader for being an elf-
loving, RPG-playing seventh-level necromancer (nuff?); we teased Thierry “Scooter”
Nyuen about his recent foray into the wonderful
world of human sexuality (with another person—a
woman, even); and Robert Coffey entertained us
all with some of the most disturbing, quasisexual
comments imaginable. Then, with about five
minutes left someone blurted out, “What about
hardware?”

And like every other meeting we have, that’s
pretty much how this went. “More important
sections behind them, they asked me what a hardware
person would warn for.

Kwanzaa. Normally, it seems, I
took their question
seriously, and told ’em: “I’d
want Windows XP, a
GeForce3Ti 5600, a new
machine with an Athlon XP
processor and 512MB of
DDR RAM, Logitech’s
MOMO Force wheel, and
maybe some new speakers.”

After a minute or so of
stunned silence, they
laughed at me, the popular
opinion being that hardware
afficionados are somehow
“less cool” than other

And now for your monthly
dose of bitter pills from
CGW’s resident
black sheep.

...
Fourth Annual Greenspeak Awards

Let's laugh and cry over the year in gaming by Jeff Green

Boy, are you in luck this month. For only the fourth time ever in the whole history of this universe, it's time, once again, for the Greenspeak Awards. Yes, it's that special time of year when we shave our back hair, put on our fanciest black gaming T-shirts, and gather together to celebrate another wild and wacky year in gaming. This year's ceremony (held in the parking lot of the local Waffle Barn) was more exciting than ever, as those who watched Sid Meier get naked and stage-dive during Huey Lewis' show-stopping closing performance will attest. You go, Sid!

Though a great time was had by all, there was one conspicuous absence. Yes, I mean you, dear reader. For without you, these awards mean nothing. All the parties and glitz and furtive backstage groping don't mean a thing if there's no one to play the games. So here's to you. And while we're at it, here's to me, too. For without you, there'd be no Greenspeak Awards, and our lives would suck just that much more. So, c'mon everybody-group hug. Now let's pass out some awards!

ClusterBall? Sounds like something a guy would need ointment for.

Least Fun Great Game of the Year
Black & White. I'm sorry, but I do not get this game. I know we gave it five stars and I know it's fashionable to respect it, like a PBS documentary, but I just can't have a little fun with my gaming. This was like having another job-a bad one. Stressing about whether my pet monkey was gonna eat his own waste or trying to keep the whiny populace happy and fed-jeez, I play games to get away from that type of pressure. If this is what being a god is like, forget it. I'll take Sim Peon.

We Cornered Mole to Test Our Products Award
The Cornered Rat, Funcom, and Stormfront, for World War II Online, Alliance Online, and Pool of Radiance, respectively. Bravo to all three companies for setting a new low in out-of-the-box game instability this year! The standards were already in the gutter, but these three managed to set the bar yards below sea level, with games that were appallingly buggy-ridden and unplayable. Next time, guys, don't bother to compile the code. Just send us the files and we'll put the game together ourselves.

Your Posture Shines Like Two Hairy, Shimmering Moons Award
To the dialogue writers of Max Payne. I do love this game, one of the year's best, easily. But, c'mon: "The sun went down with practiced bravado?" What does that even mean? If you're going to write faux-Chandieresque noir, at least write something that makes sense. I've seen lots of bad game writing in my day, but Max Payne's monk like the field cigarette breath of a washed-up, two-bit bum passed out in the back alley of hell.

Unfortunate Title of the Year
ClusterBall, from Strategy First. Maybe I have issues. Maybe it's because it sounds like something a guy my age would need ointment for. All I know is there's no way I'd ask the clerk for this game, no matter how good it is. Runner-up: Gorgon from JoWood, for sounding like the ointment I'd need to get for my ClusterBall.

Bust of the Year
The Tomb Raider and Final Fantasy movies, for proving once again what we knew already: That movies based on games, no matter how promising they sound, will suck. So let's just give up on our Hollywood dreams and get back to the games, mmmkay? On the other hand, if Cinemax announces a ClusterBall movie, I'm there.

Please Get This Off My Computer Now Award
To Bejeewed. Sometimes it's the most innocent-looking games that are the most insidious. At first, this little puzzle game looks like something you'd get your grandma, if her hands still moved. Do not be fooled. This game is a time-sink like no other. And if you are weak, it will suck you into that same hypnotic brain-freeze that Tetris did. You'll play until you're moving pieces around without even looking at them. "Just one more game," you'll say. While all around you the world moves on.

Reality Check of the Year Award
To September 11. That day made our livelihood and your hobby seem even more ridiculous than we already knew it was. Which is why we need it more than ever. Happy gaming all, and happy holidays. What Jeff doesn't know is that the staff pitched in and bought him a case of Gorgon for the holidays. Send your own ClusterBall herbs and remedies to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.
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