THOUSANDS WILL FIGHT.

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A NEW CONGLOMERATE SQUAD OF INFANTRY AND ARMOR PREPARES TO REINFORCE THEIR EMPIRE ON SARAHUS, WHERE HUNDREDS OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES ARE PRESENTLY WAGING WAR.

TECHNOLOGY EQUALS MIGHT.
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THE NEW CONGLOMERATE

New Conglomerate soldiers struggle to destroy the old established order and conquer the planet of Aurexia. Their primary objective is to "liberate" the planet through extreme force. Anarchy over oppression!

JACKHAMMER

This Jackhammer is the New Conglomerate's primary multi-barreled heavy assault shotgun. With solid ammunition capacity and rapid-fire capabilities, it is a devastating weapon for close-range engagements.

VANGUARD

Well-balanced, the New Conglomerate Vanguard brings speed, solid armor, and hefty firepower to battle. The main turret, which houses both a 150mm cannon and a 20mm machine gun, is capable of a 360-degree pivot, and can dispatch a deadly wave of destruction.

THE VANU SOVEREIGNTY

The Vanu Sovereignty soldiers fight to preserve and control the planet's alien technology, using a hybrid of human and alien technology to gain an edge against enemy empires. Adapt, evolve, ascend. Technology equals might!

LASHER

The Vanu Sovereignty Lasher fires concentrated energy orbs that launch nearby soldiers and vehicles at close range. Targets directly impacted by an orb receive maximum damage.

THRESHER

The Vanu Sovereignty Thresher is a heavy assault buggy built upon a gravitic drive system that replaces wheels with anti-grav pods that propel the vehicle. The deadly Flux Cannon serves as the primary weapon. The Thresher's hover capabilities allow it to strafe left or right and easily cross water during battle.

PROWLER

The Terran Republic's largest battle tank, the Prowler is heavily armed with a 360-degree 100mm cannon. A secondary gunner can control a Dual 12mm Rotary Chaingun, which is stacked upon the primary turret. The Prowler can lay down more cover fire than an entire squad of infantry.

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Terran soldiers remain united and loyal to the old Republic while struggling to control and reunify the splintering empires. Their goal is to neutralize and regain supremacy over those who oppose the Terran Republic. Loyalty until death!

CHAINGUN

The Terran Republic's Chaingun is a heavy assault machine gun designed to deliver high-impact rounds from a generous 30mm ammo belt. The speed at which it fires can easily rip apart enemy soldiers.

PROWLER

For more information on each empire's capabilities, armor, weapons and vehicles, visit www.station.com/planetside

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FOR POWER.
FOREVER.

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ENTERTAINMENT

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mean to be played
FROM THE CREATORS OF
COMMANDOS

Feed your insatiable hunger to rule the empire with this combat-heavy epic adventure.

Ambush your enemy using a variety of units, massive fortress sieges, devastating war machines and more.

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Battle for supremacy online in ruthless 8-player matches.

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Violence

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WHERE WERE YOU?

ROMAN MISSILE
DURING THE CRISIS?

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History changes in an instant. Never more so than in Rise of Nations, a new real-time strategy game from Brian Reynolds, lead designer of Civilization II. Experience the depth of turn-based strategy games and the fast-paced action of RTS that covers 6,000 years of history and 18 ancient civilizations. It's the most intense RTS of its kind. Think fast. Fight faster. Defend. Attack. bargain. beltried. plot and plunder. Do it all under the gun with zero margin for error. Nothing is historically impossible, and only the quick and the brazen survive.

MAKE HISTORY COMING APRIL 22, 2003
Battles are vintage C&C—overly micromanaged affairs that quickly devolve into chaotic melees between mobs.

Command & Conquer: Generals

C&C is back, but not better than ever.
Almost no aspect of this flight sim has gone untouched.

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Enter a new gaming dimension.

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WE ARE FREEDOM'S ANSWER TO FEAR.
OUR DUTY BEGINS WHEN NEGOTIATIONS END
FOR WE DO NOT BARGAIN WITH TERROR.
WE STALK IT, CORNER IT, TAKE AIM,
AND KILL IT.
WE ARE TEAM RAINBOW.

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down. Experience unmatched graphical realism and high velocity multiplayer action
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squad-based combat. Now we're rewriting it. Study up.

MATURE
Blood
Violence

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Create the ultimate interactive Jurassic Park.
Try to manage over 25 ferocious dinosaurs.
12 adrenaline pumped missions.
GET READY FOR OPENING DAY.

"...the best use yet of the Jurassic Park license."
- Gamespot.com

JURASSIC PARK

JURASSIC PARK
OPERATION GENESIS

universalinteractive.com
www.jpinstitute.com

Teen Blood Violence

Vivendi Universal games

bluetongue
Medals of Honor
The king of the dorks picks his games of the year

The cool thing about being editor-in-chief is not that I have power, because I don't. But because certain people, like my mother, think I do.

"My son runs a national magazine," she says, as she introduces me to the ladies in her Friday night bridge club. "There's 150 people in the office, and he's in charge of all of them, aren't you, son?"

"Well, no, Mom. I told you. There's, like, eight of us. And Dana makes all the decisions."

"Don't be so modest. And pull up your pants! He never could keep his pants up. It's those bulky legs of his."

"I noticed that," says one lady. "He should eat more," says another. "He's like a stick."

Anyway, the point is, I don't have a lot of power here, despite the highfalutin job title. And at no time of year is this lack of power made clearer to me than right now, when we pass out our Game of the Year awards. Because no matter how much I may want things to go a certain way, the fact is, we all have an equal vote here—mine doesn't count any more than anyone else's.

Not that I don't agree with the awards in this issue. I do. All are worthy. But we all have our personal favorites—those games that reach us or move us or speak to us—and my list is going to be just as different from the other CGW editors as yours is from your pain-in-the-neck siblings or friends.

So here's my own Top 10. I put it roughly in order, though this list might be totally different if I were to do it another day, or even in a different mood. My favorite game of the year, at least today, is honestly one I completely ignored when it came out. But now, it's the one game that has its claws in my brain and won't let go. Whatever, this isn't a beauty pageant. All these games are great for different reasons. Ranking them is stupid. The really cool thing is that 2002 was an unbelievably great year for PC gaming. We can only hope that 2003 will be even half as good. Happy gaming!

1. Warlords Battlecry II
2. Battlefield 1942
3. Grand Theft Auto III
4. Freedom Force
5. Syberia
6. Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast
7. Warcraft III
8. No One Lives Forever 2
9. Morrowind
10. Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief
“Alienware is on the front-line of an aesthetic movement that’s sweeping the entire industry.”

-Maximum PC
CONTRIBUTORS

DANA JONGEWAARD
A year and a half into the job, Dana's still not quite sure how she ended up working on a computer gaming magazine, but now she can't imagine a job environment without nonstop *Lord of the Rings* analysis interspersed with the occasional observation about the smell in the 8th floor men's room. When she's not yelling at everyone else about their missed deadlines, she's procrastinating her own work—this month it was *The Sims Online* review on page 104.

ERIK WOLPAW
Erik Wolpaw loves games. His other interests include four chairs that he's selling. All four of Erik Wolpaw's chairs must be purchased as a set. Only three of the chairs look like the one in the picture. Imagining yourself in these chairs? Stop imagining! All serious offers should be sent to Jeff Green.

RON DULIN
Ron Dulin loves adventure games, but he lives for experimental pop music. He's getting a band together. He has a car, a place to practice, about a hundred original songs, and an open mind to your ideas. No classic rockers, please. "I'm also missing a drum," says Ron. All serious inquiries or any information about the drum should be sent to Jeff Green.

MICHAEL JENNINGS
Our associate art director appeared on our steps out of the backwoods of Carolina to dance to the death with the graphic monkey on his back. Since his addition of a skull and crossbones to the CGW secret sauce, our magazine has mysteriously begun to glow in the dark. After hours you can find him scoring waves by the Frisco moonlight and indulging his fetish for adult cereal.
Parents: Don't Dilute Your Children

Why do players of bloody, violent games insist on filtering out "coarse language"? Every time I ask, I usually get the same response: "There could be children watching." Well LA-DEE-DAH! They're still seeing the gory violence. Sure, they can see a decapitated head on a pike oozing blood with maggots crawling around, as long as the head doesn't come alive and say, 'Damn! That f**king hurt!'

If you're blocking these words from your kids, you'll probably end up with a child without a sense of reality. Without that realism, they could cause something like Columbine. Videogames aren't the WHOLE cause; it's the parents diluting their children that causes this kind of crap.

Robb Frye

Robb, parents don't dilute children, they delude them; children dilute parents. That's how it works. Second, you make an interesting point, but we're not sure how censoring foul language can lead to murderous rampages. Third, you forgot to mention nudity as another example of our society's illogical morals: Ripping a woman's heart out is OK—just be sure her nipples don't show.

most expensive vendor.

This was such an amazing price that I went online to buy an identical system from Dell. I configured a system almost identical to the one in your shootout, but the price was $1,248 greater than the same machine in your article! What's going on here?

Hai Toomer

It must be a good deal, because we've had several inquiries about it. Those tricky marketers at Dell apparently created a special bargain PC for us, and then buried it on their site because they don't make money on it. You can click on www.dell.com/us/en/dhs/offers/specials_outrageous_dimen.htm, or from their site click on "Home and Home Office," "Hot Deals," and then "Outrageous Desktop Deals," where you'll find several customizable Dimension systems.

Shame! Moral outrage!

Dear Mr. Jeff Green,

As a loyal reader, I feel that it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk. In your February issue, the last page ("Scorched Earth"); I am guessing was an attempt at humor by the moron who's [sic] name is not fit for me to waste my printer ink on, wrote the most gratuitous display of repressed sexuality that I have ever witnessed in your once-fine but now-laudered periodical. While I realize that this country was built on free speech and that you did not write this offensive bit of tasteless literature, I am holding you responsible. Your job title is editor-in-chief. Your job is to let your staff write and then edit it.

I realize that no one likes to be told what to do, myself included. And maybe you didn't even see the "editorial." But

"I feel it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk."
...the right to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

Forget what you know about first person shooters.
Walk a week in the Postal Dude's shoes.
Freely explore full 3-D open ended environments.
Interact with over 100 unique NPC's including Gary Coleman, marching bands, dogs, cats and elephants, protesters, policemen and civilians, with or without weapons.

POSTAL 2 is all about choice; experiment with everyone and everything.
And remember...it's only as violent as you are!

"Brutal and controversial or hilarious and irreverent, Postal 2 pulls no punches."
—Rob Smith, Editor in Chief, PC Gamer

"Shoot me, kill me, it's only a game."
—Gary Coleman

"Finally—for real and for true—a game developer that doesn't give 3/16ths of a rat's ass what anybody else thinks. Anybody. ANYbody."
—Chris Hudak, Games Domain

"Drench 'em and light 'em. Postal 2 has such a way with gasoline."
—Computer Games Magazine

"Running With Scissors: great games, just don't go drinking with these guys."
—Aaron Paul, Gamer.tv

POSTAL 2
Ever have one of those days?

Whiptail Interactive

Rated T for Teen
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-777-3527 for more info.
"I hope younger readers realize that in real war, there are no respawns."

that article was without question the most thoughtless thing I have ever witnessed in your magazine. Two of my good friends, ages 5 and 11, have had they're [sic] access to your [sic] magazine cut off when they're [sic] mothers read Scorched Earth. Was publishing that article really worth the price of two faithful readers? And maybe more?

Gregory P. Hamblock III, Esq.
Beautiful Butte, Montana

Jeff Green responds: Thanks for filling me in on my role around here, Gregory. I wasn't too clear on that before; I thought my job was to buy staff lunches and get my beautiful butte kissed.

Pete, ease off on the sauerbraten and doppelbock. When have you seen advertisements be rigorously accurate? Besides, American boys fell just as dead from the German soldiers who weren't Nazis.

He should know
Hi, I just thought I'd let you know that game geeks like me love your mag. I'm 51 years old and a 'Nam vet (two tours as a Ranger). More than the other... um... competitors you have, your mag is humorous, informative, and fun to read.

By the way, I hope younger readers (read: draft age) gamers fully understand that in real war, there are no re-spawns. I sometimes worry that the fascination with military hardware in young minds that is fed by these excellent games dulls them into not fully appreciating the brutal horror of actual combat. I don't mean to sound preachy, but I remember a lot of quonset huts with whom gone in pieces, or worse in bags.

Robert Coffey: amazing in every way
I've been worshipping this guy since I read his column last month (Scorched Earth, January 2003). He is amazing in every way. How come he didn't take Green's spot sooner? I am off to sacrifice a small mammal tonight in his honor; tomorrow, I think it's baby night.

X-Airborne Ranger

Why No Laptop Coverage?
How come in your Ultimate Game Machine story there was no category for laptops? I own a laptop and I can never find any information in any magazines about them.

We only have limited space, so we have to focus on desktops. We review laptops individually, and occasionally will do a smaller round-up. Be sure to see our award in this issue for Technology of the Year—it might surprise you.

Chicks dig War and Peace
I read your magazine every month and I particularly like Get a Life. There are some handy tips for rising up the ranks of the social ladder rather than spending Saturday nights trying to figure out the Neveraime trials in Morwind.

Well, friends, I have discovered something guaranteed to impress the socks off most women: Read the 1,400-page monstrosity of a book that is Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. It was a long, hard journey, but if I can do it, so can you! And if it gets too tough, just do what I did and get the condensed 600-page version. Telling a girl you read War and Peace will definitely impress her more than telling her you completed every quest in Morwind twice.

Daniel Polera

Yeah, spending Saturday nights reading War and Peace develops that animal magnetism much more than playing games. Nothing turns a girl on like an epic story of starvation, war, and hopelessness.

Speaking of Tolstoy...
I've received CGW for about a year now, and I have one simple problem with it: the reviews. Maybe it's that all games with the word "sim" in them seem to get 3-5 star ratings, or maybe it's that Wil O'Neill can't tell a good computer from a pengun's wazo.

Because of my slight distrust for the accuracy of your reviews, I have tried to switch magazines many times, but each time, I find myself thinking, "What was that guy smoking when he wrote this review?" It made me wonder, "Why is this??? CGW sucks, so why don't I like these other magazines better?"

Then it hit me. It's your writing style. Although I find your reviews strangely inaccurate, witty writing does not make a good magazine. When I'm reading a magazine, I don't want just game ratings. I'm looking for bathroom reading, and in that sense, you guys really follow through with your snide remarks, sarcastic comments, self-hating editorials, and ironic humor. You don't just give me reviews, you give me a reason to look forward to my next trip to the crapper!

So, with all that said, you will find my subscription renewal amongst many others this month. My advice is, cool it with the sim reviews and don't lose anyone from your writing staff.

Aaron Jones

And now, humble pie
Sieve-noun, slang for "keeper." Used by game magazine editors to cover up the fact that the person who proofreads the table of contents does not know the difference between Peter Molyneux and Chris Roberts.

Jamie Adams

Thank you, smart ass. But your snarkiness would be more effective if you got it right. Actually, Chris Taylor developed Dungeon Siege.
YOUR ANCESTRY HAS MADE YOU A WARRIOR.
YOUR FATE WILL MAKE YOU A CHAMPION.

Somewhere between fantasy and history, your epic crusade begins in a medieval world ravaged by sinister spirits and demonic magic. As a descendant of King Richard the Lionhearted, it will take all of your wit, wisdom and will to save the fate of humankind.

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[Image: Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader advertisement page]
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BUILD YOUR LEGACY!

The mysterious new land of Malas beckons with custom housing and powerful new skills. Build a unique house, take on the role of Paladin or Necromancer, and expand your quest in the Internet's deepest role-playing experience.

Ultima Online™: Age of Shadows™... Lead the life you were born to live!
Ultima Online: Age of Shadows is the only online RPG with customizable housing.

Acquire powerful new skills in two professions: Paladin and Necromancer.

Find new adventures and over 40,000 new housing plots in the new land of Malas.

Dry Highlands
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The Xbox Live™ service is the world’s first no-holds-barred, ultimate online arena dedicated to high-speed gaming. Jump from game to game and play thousands of other players using one GamerTag. You can’t do that anywhere else.
YOU AIN'T GONNA RULE THE ULTIMATE ARENA WITH A NAME LIKE BUNNY23

Use your unique GamerTag to build your rep across all games. After all, you'll need it to grow your legend in this arena.

THOSE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD ARE VOICES IN YOUR HEADSET

With the hands-free Xbox Communicator, you can talk trash, call plays, disguise your voice, and even mute the sucker that won't shut up.

IT'S LIKE 50,000 OF YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS. ONLY THEY ALL WANT TO SCHOOL YOU

Play your old friends and make some new ones.
Just remember to show them who's boss.

USE THE OPTIMATCH™ SYSTEM AND QUICKMATCH TO FIND THE PERFECT OPPONENT

Quickly find the perfect game, with the arena and rules you choose, so you won't waste your time with rookies or get destroyed by grizzled veterans.

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*Estimated retail price. Actual retail prices may vary.
Some agents have a license to kill.

Others are too busy to file the paperwork.
Employ stealth and espionage or go in with all guns blazing—experience multiple styles of gameplay with high-tech equipment including a ZimaTech GPS Map Computer and night vision goggles.

Take on intense missions in a world-spanning storyline through three massive theatres of combat—Russia, China and the Middle East.

Choose from a huge armory of 57 authentically reproduced weapons—from basic combat knives and sniper rifles to portable rocket launchers and proximity mines.

Operate a stability-sensitive weapons targeting system—experience the hostile environment of a battlezone.

Join forces with up to 15 combatants—objective-based online multiplayer gameplay allows for complex levels of team coordination.

I.G.I.-2
COVERT STRIKE
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Outkast's new "Bombs Over Stalingrad" video is coming along nicely...and so is the stand-alone expansion for the sleeper hit IL-2 Sturmovik. Forgotten Battles promises a whole lot more of what made the first game great, with plenty of new additions. Here, we see a HE-111 taking fire while on a bombing run over enemy territory. Check out the searchlights, the incoming flak, and the full preview on page 70.
There's much smarter A.I. here.

Fly in dynamic campaigns with night missions.
RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

It may be Wolfenstein in name, but Enemy Territory is no mindless FPS sequel. The game is shaping up as a decent squad-based action game. This prequel puts you in command of a Dirty Dozen-caliber squad. Whether taking on the single-player campaign or joining your buddies in a multiplayer match, there's a lot to get a handle on: commanding troops, avoiding a hail of gunfire, or navigating with the onscreen map. This title is expected to ship out for combat soon.

You and your troops can earn ranks in the field.
Notice the slick onscreen use of a map.

New weapons, like the MG-42, let you go prone.
EMPIRE
EARTH

Gold Edition

The Strategy Game That Rewrites History.

Mastermind a civilization's glorious rise to power throughout any period of human history. This exclusive collection includes the award-winning Empire Earth™, its expansion Empire Earth™: The Art of Conquest™, and Prima's Official Strategy Guide. This is real-time strategy on a truly historic level.

“Never before has real time strategy spanned the ages as it does in Empire Earth™” —Computer Gaming World, 2001

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Massively Merciless

“Shadowbane's city system, economic system, and siege system all interact to add an entirely new dimension to online gaming.” - IGN

Change Your World
Physically affect the terrain, buildings, politics, and history of Shadowbane and discover the first MMO with a Dynamic World Model.

Unleash Grand Strategies
Experience a groundbreaking blend of MMO role-playing and large-scale strategy that blazes new paths of possibility – embark upon quests, run shops, build cities, and siege castles in your bid to create or crush empires.

Break the Mold
Build characters using a deep multiclassing system to create unique combinations of professions, classes, skills, and fighting styles as you progress – for boldly original characters you can’t play in any other world.
"The Next Great Online RPG."
- Computer Gaming World

SHADOWBANE
Persistent Challenge, Persistent World.
Behold, the GeForce FX
Like the hype preceding it, it blows a lot of hot air
By William O'Neal

The GeForce FX makes games like RealiSport Challenge look utterly amazing.
The GeForce FX 5800 is big, hot, and loud—and costs $150 more than its closest competitor.

We tested the GeForce FX on a 3GHz Pentium 4 with 512MB of RDRAM running Windows XP Home Edition (full system info next to benchmarks). We put the card through our normal battery of tests, including 3DMark2001SE Pro and 3D GameGauge 3.0. We were under tight time constraints, so we only tested in two different resolutions (1280x768x32 and 1600x1200x32) with 4x full-screen anti-aliasing (4xTSAA) both on and off.

Radeon has more memory
A lot has been made of Nvidia’s decision to equip the GeForce FX with 128-bit DDR2 memory as opposed to the 256-bit DDR memory on the Radeon 9700. While the Radeon’s 256-bit DDR memory is capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 19.0GB/sec, the GeForce FX’s 128-bit DDR2 memory is only capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 16.0GB/sec. Several months ago, Nvidia claimed its memory architecture was more efficient, and capable of achieving peak bandwidth closer to 20GB per second.

If you’re just looking at engine performance, our tests showed the GeForce FX to be more than 50 percent faster than the Radeon 9700. However, once we upped the ante with higher resolutions and various flavors of anti-aliasing, it seems the power of the GeForce FX’s engine clock gave way to the Radeon’s seemingly superior memory bandwidth. For instance, the GeForce FX scored 1510B in 3DMark2001SE Pro at...
1024x768x32 with no anti-aliasing, compared to the Radeon's 15670. While the GeForce FX did best the Radeon in this particular test, it's important to note that a 438 point difference isn't much, especially when you consider that the Radeon is more than six months old. Once we increased the resolution and added 4x full-screen anti-aliasing, things got interesting. It was at this point that the Radeon showed its true strength, scoring 6301 in 3DMark2001SE Pro at 1600x1200x32 with 4xFSA, compared to the GeForce FX's score of 5663!

**Neck and neck**

In game tests, the GeForce FX and the Radeon 9700 were so close, choosing one card over the other is a toss-up. Because of its superior GPU, the GeForce FX does a better job of dealing with titles that boast complex shaders, such as Comanche 4 and Unreal Tournament 2003. UT2003 is one of the few games in which the GeForce FX outperformed the Radeon 9700. At 1600x1200x32 with 4x FSA, the GeForce FX lead the Radeon 9700, scoring 16109 compared to 15670. The Radeon beat the GeForce FX in most of the other hardware tests. While this sounds bad for the GeForce FX, it's important to point out that the majority of the games in 3DMark2001SE Pro are DirectX 7 titles incapable of utilizing much of what the GeForce FX (or the Radeon 9700, for that matter) has to offer. The GeForce FX is clearly the better choice for gamers who value performance and responsiveness.

**How They Stack Up**

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**THE GOOD SAVAGE**

This "real-time strategy shooter" now in development from upstart developer 52. Games is something increasingly rare in this business: a non-derivative new idea. Marrying the RTS and FPS genres may at first seem unpromising, but once we saw the game, we were pleasantly surprised and excited. Read our preview in this issue.

**THE BAD MMORPG OVERKILL**

It's a familiar pattern: Game becomes popular; 8,000 other games try to emulate its success, gamers get sick of the whole thing. Such is the prospect now facing the massively overcrowded online genre, which is seeing way too many new titles, none of which are catching on in the way everyone optimistically expected. Maybe gamers just don't want to commit to multiple monthly fees. Or maybe everyone's just waiting for Star Wars Galaxies.

**THE UGLY PC GAME SALES**

A recent report from NPD Techworld showed PC game retail sales down 5 percent in 2002. In contrast to a 21 percent increase in console game sales, which isn't that surprising, considering the latest crop of console games and the power of the platforms. But these things go in cycles, and as the current consoles begin to show their age, PC games will again outshine their console siblings.
Enter The Matrix

The movie sequels look awesome, but what about the game? By Ken Brown

The world's faithful have something to believe in, like Judgment Day, or the Second Coming, when the Messiah comes and smites evil and takes us all to a floating Wonka-land of cocaine clouds and littering fairies. But for those of us sinners who don't believe, we can still have faith. The thing we believe in is that The Matrix: Reloaded and The Matrix: Revolutions are going to break the crusty accretions in our chests and make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves after a colonic.

Much of that faith comes from knowing that the creators, Andy and Larry Wachowiski, are doing both sequels, and that the signs as revealed to us during the Super Bowl are that the first sequel shall indeed manifest itself into a glorious vision. And that day is coming soon: May 15, in fact. Hallelujah, brothers and sisters! But what stretches the boundaries of our faith right now is the hope that the game won't suck. The prophesy claims the game will let you dodge bullets, run up walls, and flip through the air in slow-mo while unloading clip after clip of automatic weapons into agents and their minions. But we were deceived by the false prophet of Shiny's Messiah, and we're not about to be taken in again.

A little prayer may be in order.

Still, miracles can happen. And we won't have long to wait, because next month, CGW will take you behind the scenes at Shiny for an in-depth preview with hands-on gameplay of the PC version. And all will be revealed, whether Shiny begats a withering lamb like Messiah, or a kingly lion like Sacrifice.

For now, all we have faith in is Trinity. For she doth truly kick ass and takeeth our breath away.

It will make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves.

REALITY CHECK
Reality Check compares the ratings of the gaming press with Game Rankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.
Walker Combat

Imperial walkers you wish to fight, hmm? Die you will

By Ken Brown

Ready to join the Rebellion and take on Imperial walkers in Star Wars Galaxies? Since the lumbering behemoths attacked the Rebel base in The Empire Strikes Back, we’ve all wondered what it would be like to bring down a clanking all-terrain armored transport (AT-AT). Or, better yet, imagine driving the walker, lurked into its cockpit and blasting Rebel defenses with laser cannons while crushing puny resistors. Well, hang on to your blaster, Boba—you’re about to get your chance.

LucasArts producer Haden Blackman says Galaxies will feature plenty of combat with walkers, generally in designated battlefield areas. Upon entering the battlefield you’ll have to pick a faction (Empire or Alliance), which you can change when you leave the area. If you ally with the Empire and have enough faction points, you can even purchase and control walkers. But you won’t be able to sit in the cockpit and blast noobs when the game launches on April 15. John Donham and Dan Rubenfield at Sony Online Entertainment say cockpit control won’t be incorporated until after the game ships.

For now, Imperial leaders will control walkers like pets. They can be ordered to guard a place or thing, to patrol an area, to attack, or to defend. If the walker’s “owner” dies, the walker’s effectiveness is greatly reduced. If your walker gets killed, you can buy another one, but they’re not exactly cheap.

You’ll make a nice footprint

If you happen to be on the business end of one of these giants, you’d better be prepared. AT-ATs are impervious to handheld blasters. (Note to Jeff: throwing your blaster at it probably won’t do much either.) Running up to and trying to hit one with a melee weapon will just be suicidal (the designers aren’t sure if a walker will actually crush players, but it’ll likely cripple them). If you’re not a Jedi with a lightsaber, you’ll need specialized combat skills to go walker hunting. And the commando profession is specifically geared toward fighting large-scale battles: Commandos can make and use heavy weapons like rocket launchers, and thrown weapons like grenades.

If you don’t want to be a commando, you can try buying weapons from one. Or, if you have enough faction points, you can build and man Blaster turrets. There’s no hit location on walkers, though, so don’t bother trying to blow their turrets off.

Eventually, you’ll be able to buy and equip vehicles with various types of weapons. This holds some wild combat possibilities, but unfortunately, vehicular combat will have to wait for the space expansion scheduled for spring 2004. If you survive the battle and kill opponents or destroy their facilities, you’ll get more faction points with which to buy more combat assets (faction points are different from credits, which are the basic currency). Bringing down a walker will reward your team with a hefty bounty of faction points. But watching one of the Empire’s most feared weapons keel over and explode should be a reward in itself.
EverQuest: Planes of Power

Starting with special chemical prints of EverQuest’s incredible artwork, we meticulously airbrush the art to blend into our red/gold color-shifting paint. Then we submerge it under six layers of acrylic Clearcoat. Finally we bake it to a tough, mirror-like finish. A $599.00 addition, just one of the infinite aesthetic possibilities of Falcon Northwest’s custom PCs.

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Port of Booty Call

Tropico 2 lets you be a pirate king in the Age of Sail

By Di Luo

Enchanting, drinking, gambling, and slavery—Senator Lieberman would have an aneurysm over Tropico 2: Pirate Cove. Sequel to the acclaimed island-building sim that gave you the chance to be a dictator, Tropico 2 promises to make the political murders and imprisonment that characterized its predecessor look like children’s play.

We’ve been playing a preview version of the game, and so far, we like what we see. The game’s developer is now Frog City instead of PopTop, but Frog City’s experience making economic strategy games (Trade Empires and Imperialism) will come in handy, because Tropico 2 boasts an entirely new economic system.

As a Caribbean pirate king during the Age of Sail, you won’t need to work for a living in Tropico 2. Tossed overboard are the cheap cigars and commodities from the original. Instead, your entire economy will be based on illegitimate means.

Starting with a handful of captives, you must build up a logistics base to supply your pirates and build their ships. Once your buccaneers have their cutlasses, you can loose them to terrify the seven seas. If successful, they’ll return with gold for your chest and captives to expand your fields. Though you won’t have direct control of the ships in combat, you can set their aggression level and general combat tactics.

All the while, you have to keep your pirates happy by providing them amusement. Tropico 2 adds depth in this area by forcing you to balance the pirates’ love for lawlessness with the desires of your captives. If you’re too lax, your captives may flee or even revolt. Too strict, however, and your pirates will grow unhappy and desert.

With its irreverent attitude and the simple pleasures of pillaging and piracy, Tropico 2 will be a welcome breeze to chase away the stagnation of city-building games. Expect to start terrorizing in April.

GET A LIFE

Do you really need that expansion pack?

Nude For Satan

Barely edging out Fat Guy Goes Nutzoid for best movie title ever,

Nude For Satan is a prime slab of the underappreciated niche genre of Incoherent Italian nude Satanism films. Screw the subtitles—watch this with the horridly dubbed turned on and provide your own MST3K commentary.

If China Could Kill

When not being quoted by Duke Nukem, Bruce Campbell spends his time doing grunt-level acting for cult movies and TV shows. Don’t dismiss this humorous and fascinating autobiography; his rants cover such topics as the artful process of making Evil Dead and how you can tell if your show’s been cancelled.

Senor Cocoonut

Su Conjunto - El Bello Alemán

Worst idea ever or work of genius? It’s a collection of songs by Kraftwerk—pioneers of icy, robotic electronic music—reworked as campy, easy-listening Latin pop. Even more unlikely, it’s catchy as hell. The CGW editors now do conga lines around the office to the beat of “Trans-Europe Express.”

Scuba

We may not have a turtleneck or cap like Jacques Cousteau, but an increasing number of CGW staffers are taking the plunge and learning how to scuba dive. Actually, it’s a great way to spend the winter. Take your classes, de your pool dives indoors, then rationalize a trip to Tahiti as a way to get your certification. Go to www.padi.com for more info.
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Neverwinter Nights... a world without limits!
Italy, July 14 — Fighting is still heavy on all fronts and most of our battles raging throughout Italy, reports continue to stream in of never-before-seen tanks and bombers joining the conflict, a total of 45 military assault vehicles at last count. Just the light at battlefield1942.com.

BATTLEFIELD

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FIELD TRIP

Fast Talking and Gizmo Gawking
Our tech weenies check out the latest toys at CES
By William O'Neal and Darren Gladstone

As Microsoft and Sony continue waging digital war for control of your home, the once-humble PC is ascending to its rightful place as the real brains of the household. This explains why—after the parties, the schwag-fests, and the porn convention up the street—the two hottest tickets at this year's CES were for the Microsoft and Sony press conferences. At one, Bill Gates and Shaquille O'Neal went head-to-head in Midtown Madness 3 via Xbox Live. At the other, Sony President Ken Imai and Shaq scored points with Drew Barrymore when he showed off a high-tech watch you'd expect to see in Charlie's Angels 2.

But what these camera-friendly presentations didn't show are the battle lines being drawn in the living room. At comes to mind, PC products have had little success breaking out of the home office. Microsoft's new Media Center software aims to park a PC near your sofa. The goal: One device— with one remote control—will control all your entertainment devices, plus organize your video and photo libraries. It'll even link up with other computers in your house. Alienware is already building convergence PCs that will do everything a PC, DVD player, and MP3 player do.

Since the television really remains the focus of the living room, this year's exhibitors showed off plenty of digital TV sets with built-in tuners. Sharp's 3D set (still on the drawing board) particularly caught our eye. Its experimental technology uses curved TV tubes with different emitters that can convert any image to 3D—no doppy peripheral we liked was the Zboard (www.ideazon.com), a normal-looking keyboard with a lift-off face, which allows you to replace keys with overlays optimized for different types of games. The Medal of Honor keyboard actually offered spaced-out buttons for movement, actions, and weapon selection. The product is still being finalized and pricing hasn't been set, but we'll follow up with a review when it's ready.

All in all, it's good to see more PC products at CES...so we can look forward to more opportunities to meet the legends in adult entertainment at the convention next door. Rock on, Rocco!
Find all your favorite products under one roof—yours. Welcome to PriceGrabber.com—the fastest, most convenient way to locate and compare the best products and prices online. Just pick a category, click, and within moments you’re searching products by brand, popularity, features or price. While you’re at it, get the lowdown on products and merchants from buyers just like you. Bottom line? Whether you’re shopping for computers, software, electronics, movies, games or dozens of other products, PriceGrabber.com provides all the information you need to make the best buying decisions. Let the power shopping begin.
TerraQuest Crashes After Launch

Online gaming greenhorn learns lessons the hard way
By Rob Smolka

With the gold rush mentality in online gaming, dozens of developers have sprung up to exploit the burgeoning segment. But like the 49ers who raced to California to find their fortune, there were bound to be hard luck tales when some of these online startups found that gold wasn’t just lying on the ground.

The latest title to suffer a harsh wake-up is TerraQuest, an interactive mystery reminiscent of EA’s failed Majestic. The game was shut down early this year after failing to get enough paying players. MindQuest Entertainment, the company behind the game, had promoted it with the promise of awarding big cash prizes. The plan called for six monthly segments, each requiring a bigger monetary investment from players (starting at $25 and ending at $100 for the sixth month), with a grand prize of more than $250,000 awarded to the player who could solve the mystery first.

MindQuest will award $25,000 to the player who solved the initial segment, and they said they would refund all other registration fees. The company says it will regroup and try to make the game more compelling by modifying its structure. It seems obvious in retrospect that MindQuest would have some lessons to learn, since none of its founding partners had any experience in game design, according to the company’s site.

NEWS FEED

Rome: Total War
If blood in the game gushes like ink on the game: Total War website, expect the ground to run red when battering rams, and catapults hurling flaming missiles. For more screenshots and information, go to www.totalwar.com/rome.htm.

Vietnam War Shooter
Vivendi Universal Games is working with the developers of Medal of Honor: Allied Assault to create a historical first-person shooter set during the Vietnam War. Men of Valor: Vietnam will be developed by 2015 using the Unreal engine, according to the company.

2015 president Tom Kudrka says Men of Valor “aims to recreate the tension, risk, and excitement of the jungle battlefields of the Vietnam War,” much the same way their award-winning Medal of Honor did with WWII combat. The game will reportedly feature team-based action involving search and destroy missions around Danang, operations during the Tet offensive, and the counterattack on Hue. Various multiplayer modes will support co-op play or give you the option to play as NVA or Viet Cong guerrillas, as well as U.S. forces.

The game is slated for release in 2004 on PC and Xbox, and it will be published by Sierra Entertainment.
The Elder Scrolls III
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RPG Vault, Game of the Year
Telefragged, Best PC RPG Game
GameSpot, Best Xbox RPG of the Year
Xbox Magazine, Best Role-playing Game

XGR, Best RPG of the Year
Shack News, Reader’s Choice RPG of the Year
Xbox Evolved, Game of the Year
IGN, Best Xbox RPG Game
War Games

We spend a day at Fort Lewis playing with the Army's newest toys

By Bryan Stratton

The Stryker will be rolling into America's Army shortly after the real ones roll into Baghdad.

We know combat games make up a huge portion of the consumer videogames market, but you might be surprised by the impact videogames have had on the Army.

Take the Shadow 200 Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAV). This surveillance craft, organic to the Army's new Stryker recon brigade, is a small, pilot-less craft controlled by a two-man ground crew: one operator flies the Shadow, and the other controls a camera mounted on the craft, which provides real-time intelligence to the grunts on the ground. According to the Army's Lt. Col. George Juntiff, who is involved with the ongoing development of the America's Army game, the controls are no more complex than a joystick and throttle control—in fact, they're probably simpler than some of the more advanced flight simulators out there.

The Army has come to rely more and more heavily on computer-game tech as a means of training its troops on increasingly complex weapons systems. "Tanks and vehicles can go twice as far now as they could in the World War II and Korean War days," says Juntiff. The ranges of the latest weapons systems are measured in miles, not hundreds of feet. "To fully deploy them (in order to test them), we'd need a huge expanse of land, and who's going to give us that land? Now, we can do it all virtually and get the same experience."

For example, take the Army's new Javelin antitank rocket launcher, a successor to the shoulder-fired Stinger missile of the '80s. The Stinger simulator required a huge climate-controlled dome surrounding a bulky, non-portable computer. By contrast, the Javelin simulator is nothing more than a 12-by-20-foot room containing a modified Javelin that connects to a PC running Windows 98. An instructor feeds scenarios from the PC to the Javelin trainee, who scans, locks on,
The Army uses PC game technology to create military simulations, at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

and fires at targets seen through his sight. It's essentially a souped-up version of Duck Hunt with the screen built into the Javelin sight. All future military hardware will likely include a built-in training mode, so a soldier can push a button and practice using the actual weapon via a computer simulation—at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

Today's military simulators also have the advantage of being intuitive to a generation of gamers. Lt. Col. Juntiff, who admits to being a huge fan of SSI's Computer Ambush on the Apple II, explains, "My generation was growing up with the Atari and the Apple II. Now, we're at the senior ranks and the younger kids are the ones playing the Game Boys and the really high-speed computer games. And they're saying, 'Why not use these for training? This is a valid medium for training.'"

"[In early Army simulators], you were looking at green blobs and pixelated forms; it wasn't entertaining, but it wasn't designed to be entertaining, it was designed for training. But if you have an entertaining thing that's also accomplishing the training requirement of the soldier, well, that's a marriage made in heaven. You'll have a guy out there who's happy to practice, because he's being entertained at the same time he's being trained."

FRESH RECRUITS TO AMERICA'S ARMY

During our visit to Fort Lewis, we kicked the tires of various vehicles in a Cavaler unit of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division—some of which will appear in the next version of America's Army, slated for release this summer. Here's a look at some of what you can expect:

**STRYKER:** This new eight-wheeled recon vehicle looks like something out of Command & Conquer. Fast and rugged, it can make its way through just about any terrain, and can even climb hills. Outside, it's covered in thick armor plating and has a roof-mounted weapon system (either a .50 caliber machinegun or a Mark 19 grenade launcher). Inside, it's loaded with more gadgets than a Best Buy. The heart of the vehicle is a battle command system that displays maps of friendly and hostile unit positions. Stryker teams update the map via GPS and feed the information into a network that's shared with nearby friendly forces. The vehicle can seal itself off and filter its occupants' air supply if it senses radiation, chemical, or biological agents. Each Stryker team is equipped with small arms, plus an M240 heavy machine gun and a Javelin rocket launcher.

**JAVELIN:** These shoulder-fired weapons allow Strykers to hold their own against more heavily armored enemies. They are "fire-and-forget" weapons: Once the Javelin has locked on and fired, the operator's job is done. With a 98 percent kill rate and a 35-foot tank-killing blast radius, second shots are overkill. Javelins can be used against ground and air targets, and are equipped with night-sight technology. The Javelin's targeting system can distinguish a one-degree difference in a target's surface temperature.

**SPECIAL FORCES:** America's Army players who successfully complete several missions will get the option to enter Special Forces school. Special Forces soldiers will have new career choices, including pump-up versions of infantry, medics, engineers, heavy weapons specialists, and language specialists. Special Forces soldiers won't be limited to the assigned weapons; they'll be able to customize their M-4s with M-203s and night vision scopes. This is part of a larger effort to include an inventory system in the game, so players will be able to take equipment from enemy corpses and use it to improve their own weapons.

**DRONES:** The development team is working on incorporating unmanned aircraft like the Shadow 200. You won't be able to control the Shadow, but it will circle the battlefield and feed intelligence to the Stryker's command system. Larger battlefield maps are also in the works so that devastating weapons, like the Javelins and mortars, can be used at long ranges without throwing off the balance of the game.
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http://www.microsoft.com/games/freelancer
#14 Going it ALONE

by Scott McCloud

Here in 2003, the idea of a lone game developer creating whole games from scratch may seem absurdly impractical.

But while the battle for shelf space inspires an ever-escalating demand for big-budget dazzle --

-- and discourages the financially risky path of experimentation --

-- a few mavericks in the realm of online games have decided to go it alone.

Ferry Halim of California is one such maverick.

Halim's games, designed in Flash and aimed at children, are, at first glance, fairly simple creations.

But because their gameplay springs from a single imagination, there is an unmistakable coherence of vision to each one --

-- and a poignancy and beauty of a sort rarely seen in any medium.

And because Halim's instincts for what makes addictive gameplay don't have to be filtered through corporate committees, his games can be addictive indeed.

In a mere three years since immigrating to the U.S. from Indonesia, Halim has created more than 36 new games using off-the-shelf tools like Flash. Each game has its own personality, but they all reflect the childlike joy of invention that makes Halim's work unique.

"If you're developing by yourself, you don't have to follow anyone's orders," says Halim. "I'm not a follower."

It'll be interesting to see if any of the thousands of kids who play his games every day and gain access to those same tools as they get older --

-- will follow his lead.

*Halim creates all of the games himself, though he often seeks outside sources for the music. His games are available at www.orisinal.com

Check the credits for a game like Battlefield 1942 and you'll see over 150 names in categories ranging from "concept" to "level design" to "animation" to "special effects."
Civilization: The Boardgame

Eagle Games pulls off a decent conversion of Sid Meier's classic By David Wilson

It's not for everyone, but Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame will interest some PC players. Especially if you're into boardgames, or you've always wanted to play Civ multiplayer and you got tired downloading the latest patch of Play the World.

The SSG boardgame includes a treasure trove of little plastic pieces: men, ships, artillery, aircraft—nearly 800 miniatures in all. There are multiple types of cards representing the cities, the technologies, and the wonders. It also includes a giant game board—46x36 inches—that is so big that it comes in three pieces. The sections often get separated, requiring frequent repositioning unless you tape them together.

But the game authentically adapts the PC game, and the flow feels right. The initial phase of the game centers on exploration for eight different resources (oil, wine, rare metals, horses, iron, spices, coal, and gems). Players have to consider such matters as Happiness in their cities using some of the same variables found in the PC game. Advancements in technology also play a big role.

Unfortunately, combat has much more of a "rock, scissors, paper" feel than the PC game. When two forces meet, only one piece from each force can fight. If the players have more than one type of force (infantry, cavalry, or artillery) then each player chooses a piece to fight with. The choices determine one's advantage or disadvantage in the form of a die roll modifier, a modifier that often proves decisive.

Overall, the game plays like a cross between Avalon Hill's History of the World and Rio Grande's Puerto Rico. But fans of the PC game will not be disappointed. And if this game interests you, check out Eagle Games' upcoming conversion of Age of Mythology, scheduled for this spring.

New Wargame From SSG

Matrix Games releases Keating and Trout's Korsun Pocket By Bruce Geryk

Strategic Studies Group isn't a big-name developer like Blizzard, and their games aren't as flashy, but SSG's games shine where it counts the most: gameplay. In fact, many people consider SSG's Warlords Battlecry II a better all-around game than WarCraft III when you take out the gorgeous cinematics. Part of the reason for their success is a relentless focus on A.I., which is a specialty of legendary designers Roger Keating and Ian Trout.

Keating and Trout are probably better known among wargamers for their landmark Carriers at War. It's been a while since the two released a new wargame, but by the time you read this, their new Korsun Pocket will be available from Matrix Games. The name refers to the desperate German attempt to break out of a Russian encirclement on the Eastern Front in early 1944.

As a bonus, Korsun Pocket will include an updated version of SSG's The Ardennes Offensive (which incorporated the system used in Korsun Pocket). SSG previously released an updated, free version of The Ardennes Offensive on the Internet (sans music and sound), but according to Matrix Games' director of operations David Heath, this one is a "whole new ballgame."

You can still get the free version of The Ardennes Offensive at www.ssgus.com/ardennes-download.htm. For more information about Korsun Pocket, see www.matrixgames.com.
**THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS**

**Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided** (LucasArts) A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.

**Counterstrike: Condition Zero** (Sierra) This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

**Delta Force V: Black Hawk Down** (Novavox) Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire. Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives using combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Force soldiers.

**Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield** (Red Storm) Command an elite, multinational squad of special operatives against a hidden terrorist foe. Race against time to stop terror and unravel a mystery. Load your team in a desperate effort to battle a madman and foil his doomsday plot.

**Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb** (LucasArts) Join Indy as he travels to 1935 China to prevent a powerful artifact from falling into evil hands. You'll leap, punch, climb, and swim, in a race against evil Nazis and the Asian underworld to possess the mysterious Heart of the Dragon.

**Unreal: The Awakening** (Interplay) The long awaited follow-up to the ground-breaking single player opus Unreal. This sequel has the same absorbing story-driven gameplay, ferocious enemies, and nail-biting tension that made the original title the top choice for first person action fans worldwide.

**Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell** (UbiSoft) Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWIII.

**Master of Orion 3** (Interplay) Play one of 16 unique star-faring races or create your own custom race, and explore rich solar systems, complete with jump lanes, worm holes and hostile alien races. Engage in Colossal Space Battles that feature beautiful, tactical real-time combat resolution.

**Command & Conquer: Generals** (Electronic Arts) The U.S. and China are fighting against a rogue terrorist like state, the Global Liberation Army. The game supports well-developed air/land combat, a new feature for a C&C game, and new units and tactics that build on all the fun from past C&C games.

**Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome** (Electronic Arts) Up to six new maps to fight on, including Operation Husky (Gibiltera) and the battles for Anzio and Monte Cassino. This multiplayer-focused expansion pack gives you more of everything—maps, vehicles, weapons, and more fighting forces.

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The CGW Top 20

It's Blizzard's world—we just live in it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<td>(Blizzard/Vivendi)</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>(Take 2)</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>(LucasArts)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Medal of Honor: Allied Assault</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Electronic Arts)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Unreal Tournament 2003</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Battlefield 1942</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Neverwinter Nights</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>TIE: No One Lives Forever 2</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Sid Meier's Civilization III</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Aliens Versus Predator 2</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sierra)</td>
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</table>

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

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GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES

The game's most aggressive expansion pack to date. Get ready for a new level of customization and personalization. Lead the life you were born to live.

**Features:**
- Latest edition of the popular massively multiplayer online fantasy RPG
- Explore a new land for adventure and settlement, which adds over 40,000 houses to the game
- New custom house design tool lets you place custom features wherever you like.

**Regular Price: $29.99**
**Sale Price! $24.99**

Adventure, Intrigue, and opportunity in an insanely epic and fascinating science-fiction universe.

**Features:**
- Open-ended universe open for exploration
- Game advances based on decisions players make
- Players' reputations constantly evolve as they choose their missions, make allies or enemies and succeed or fail.
- Choice of distinctive styles of play for different gameplay experiences.

**Regular Price: $54.99**
**Sale Price! $44.99**

New technology delivers intense life-or-death action in the most breathtaking scenery and environments ever displayed in a computer game.

**Features:**
- Intense first-person shooter action combined with the magic of exploration and RPG-style character interaction
- Unique tactical challenges in each mission
- Tools for amateur level designers and mod makers

**Regular Price: $49.99**
**Sale Price! $44.99**

---

Check Out More Great Deals Online at amazon.com.
**PIPEDLINE**

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the channel **By Di Luo**

There's a world where games actually ship on time, where games never need patching and PCs never crash. Where giddy lingerer models bring you drinks and rub your feet when your gaming is done. But that ain't the world we live in, dude.

---

### KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
BioWare is developing this RPG and action hybrid for both the PC and Xbox. As a Jedi in the Old Republic 4,000 years before the movies, your party of three is fighting against thousands of Siths in a galactic war. Originally scheduled for a Q1 release from LucasArts, it's been delayed significantly. Lucas hasn't explained the situation, but according to their website, KOTOR won't hit the shelves till fall of 2003 for PC, and June for the Xbox.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>PUBLISHER</th>
<th>EXPECTED</th>
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<tr>
<td>1503 A.D. The New World</td>
<td>EA</td>
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<td>All American: The 82nd Airborne</td>
<td>Shrapnel</td>
<td>02 2003</td>
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<td>American McGoo's Ooze</td>
<td>Cartoon G</td>
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<td>Battlecruiser Operations</td>
<td>Dreamcatcher</td>
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<td>Black Moon Chronicles: Cye Networks</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>Winds of War</td>
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<td>Blitzkrieg</td>
<td>CDV</td>
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<td>Bread</td>
<td>CDV</td>
<td>02 2003</td>
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<td>Bubb Robb's Whistle Tip Rally</td>
<td>Lil' Sis</td>
<td>Wooo-woowoo!</td>
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<td>City of Heroes</td>
<td>NCSoft</td>
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<td>Civil War: Between the States</td>
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<td>Commando 3</td>
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<td>Driller</td>
<td>Intergames</td>
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<td>Emperor: Dawn of the New World</td>
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<td>When it's done</td>
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<td>Enter the Matrix</td>
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<td>Escape From Atocraze</td>
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<td>EverQuest II</td>
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<tr>
<td>EverQuest II</td>
<td>Sony</td>
<td>04 2003</td>
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</tbody>
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### COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO
This single-player version of the popular multiplayer Half-Life mod has had a journey more laborious than Ulysses. It's changed developers several times before settling down with Ritual Entertainment. We visited them recently and were impressed by what we saw. Despite having to redo most of the game, they seem on target and you should see the game by May. See the gameplay trailer on this month's demo disc and check out our full preview coming next month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>PUBLISHER</th>
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<td>Empire</td>
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<td>JoWood</td>
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<td>Halo</td>
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<td>Quake 4</td>
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<td>Rolling Thunder</td>
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<td>Rome: Total War</td>
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### SILENT STORM
For years, publishers have balked at any game unlucky enough to earn the label "turn-based." Sequels of great games like X-Com and Jagged Alliance were often cancelled because they were considered too difficult or obscure to sell. Thankfully, the Europeans are still "backward" enough to make these games. UK developer Silent Storm Interactive is currently working on Silent Storm, a turn-based 3D strategy game that takes place during an alternate World War II. It's planned for release from JoWood in Q3 2003. We'll give you more details on the game in a full preview coming soon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
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<td>XIII</td>
<td>Ubisoft</td>
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60 **Computer Gaming World**
DETAIL #66212

ITEM: Windshield debris
TAKEN FROM: #12 ALLTEL windshield at North Carolina Speedway
NOTES: Simulate native cicada (aka Tibicen chloromera) for realistic Rockingham visibility

Sopot’s Last Stand

Commonwealth soldiers attempt to fend off Red Faction rebels in a last ditch effort to save Dictator Sopot from certain demise. From the beginning, the Red Faction’s heavy artillery was underestimated by the Commonwealth Army, who are now paying the price.
COMMONWEALTH COUP

The Red Faction is using their entire arsenal in the latest attempt to

FROM THE AIR

The Red Faction customized Aesir is a maneuverable air assault vehicle equipped with optical zoom which allows for precise hits on enemy targets.

Aesir Fighter 2.0

Drop Point 5:37am
Troops assemble at the Sopot Harbor.

SOPOT CITY

CIVILIAN UPRISING

After Sopot's forces withdraw from the main city, several Red Faction rebels raided Harbor Island and desecrated the symbolic statue of the dictator.

For more up-to-the-minute coverage of the conflict, go to www.redfaction2.com

MATURE
Blood and Gore
Violence
D'ETAT
overthrow the Dictator Sopot.

Public Information Building 6:05am
Commonwealth Elite Guards attempt to fend off the attacking Faction soldiers.

The Rebels

SUPER SOLDIERS
ALIAS, the best of the Faction Super Soldiers, is shown here in demolition gear.

The Weaponry

There are only a few of the many weapons at the disposal of the Red Faction army.

CMRD-32 MAGNETIC RAIL DRIVER
First metal slug that go through just about any barrier without losing velocity. The targeting scope makes this weapon extremely accurate.

N.I.C.W. - NANOTECH INDIVIDUAL COMBAT WEAPON
Capable of delivering automatic armor-piercing rounds as well as launching grenades.

CAR-72 MILITARY ASSAULT RIFLE
A fully automatic, high-powered rifle in a light-weight compact frame.

The Slums 6:22am
Rebel soldiers continue to fight despite rumors of growing animosity between Faction leaders.
STAR TREK: ELI

Love and guns in the Star Trek universe By George Jones
The six-year run of Star Trek: Voyager may be over, but the Elite Forces unit is far from done with work. Trumpeting the original Star Trek: Elite Force, the sequel picks up where the show left off. And, Trekkie or not, there’s an epic story in the making that’ll make you want to sign on for the new mission.

The setup is this: After destroying a Borg sphere—an event that occurs at the end of the Star Trek: Voyager television series and serves as your first mission in Elite Force II—your crew gets unwillingly reassigned to desk jobs by an annoying Star Fleet bureaucrat. Thankfully, Captain Picard (voiced by Patrick Stewart) intervenes, reassembles your crew, and whiskes you off on a surprisingly atypical series of missions that involve alien-style creatures and two races new to the Star Trek universe: the Attrexians and the Idyll.

The Attrexians are a gnomish society centered on mining and construction. The Idyll, an elfish-looking race long oppressed by the Attrexians, are much more sophisticated—and mystical. The conflict between these two races, as well as the origin and nature of the alien menace, is central to the game’s main story line.

PLAY LONG AND PROSPER
Elite Force II’s plot is massive (at least three times as big as the original), which should please fans unhappy with conversations, and a slew of cool new weapons, including the mysterious staff and the radiation gun, which sports a secondary fire that resembles a nuclear blast.

FELL IN LOVE WITH A TREKKIE
But what good is a Star Trek adventure without a little onboard romance? Early in Elite Force II, you meet an engineer named Katarina Scott on a derelict ship. She’s the granddaughter of Scotty, the Enterprise’s engineer from the original television series, and she explains to players that she was able to keep a portion of the crew alive in the ship’s transporter amidst falling life-support systems by utilizing a technique that her thick-brogued grandfather actually developed on the original series.

Aside from sounding cool, this homage makes it crystal clear that Activision and Ritual truly get Star Trek. And it’s not just the history, they also understand the series’ continuity, science fiction, sense of adventure, and embrace of human behavior and emotion. As the story develops, you’ll even find yourself caught in a bit of a love triangle where your choices will affect the game’s ending. And no, we’re not saying who’s involved. You’ll just have to wait until Star Trek: Elite Force II pulls out of warp this May.

TE FORCE II

GAME STATS
TOGGLED ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: RITUAL
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
REVIEW: MAY 2003

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SAVAGE
Hey, you got your RTS in my FPS! By Darren Gladstone
It requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win.

Controlling freaks, action junkies, there's a game for both of you. Savage delivers a first-person-shooter beat down and a real-time strategy campaign at the same time—it all depends on how you want to play.

S2 Games is billing this multiplayer online game as a real-time strategy shooter. What the hell does that mean? It means you've got a choice up front: beyond just picking sides. Up to 64 people can join a match to gun for each other, earn gold and experience, and blow away enemies, while two commanders direct grunts in the field.

Imagine the multiplayer action of Battlefield 1942 (and a bit of EverQuest) mixed with a real-time strategy game. That's this relatively unknown title's biggest draw point. From the get-go, you either control the action in a typical RTS god's-eye-view fashion or carry out orders in first-person mode. Those with a good memory will recall seeing a similar blending of genres in Microsoft's space game, Allegiance. But this new slant puts you firmly on the ground and requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win. If a commander is pleased, he can allot extra money to a player, and when a player scores a kill, some gold goes to his commander.

STRATEGIZE OR TERRORIZE

When playing Savage as a real-time strategy game, you control the resource management and technological development of your tribe. In typical RTS fashion, you earn money by harvesting ore and resources as you develop your base with factories and watchtowers. There are workers to direct, ancient technologies to research, and troops to command by setting waypoints on the map and telling your troops (both players and NPC worker drones) where to work or focus an attack.

In first-person mode, you're the grunt getting your hands dirty—kill this bad guy, attack that structure, gather these resources. The guy in charge of tribe development better be good at running the show. His successful planning means more technologies with which to arm yourself and more money to buy your combat supplies. And if you're good, follow orders, and stay alive long enough, you'll earn experience. Kill random animals or enemies populating the map, and you'll be able to more efficiently cut through the competition and earn gold.

MAN OR BEAST

Savage is set in a far-flung fantasy world. Mankind has been blown back to the Stone Age and is rediscovering old technologies. Pick your side: human or beast. The human tribes strip the land of natural resources for their technology, which is based on magnetism, electricity, and chemical research. They have weapons ranging from axes and crossbows to rocket launchers and demolition packs. The beasts, on the other hand, rely on magic and the elements to fight the good fight.

Jesse Hayes, lead designer and COO at S2 Games, promises that network code will be optimized to support 64-player matches. In our office tests, we couldn't get the game to crash once. And though at the moment there is no plan for a single-player campaign or bots to be able to join your matches, Hayes assures us that the game is very customizable: "With a couple changes to the config file, you can create a whole new experience." Hayes used some conventional arms and military skins to create his own wargame. While Savage will be locked down at first, there are plans to open up the engine for the mods. They are working on a campaign creator, but Hayes says, "It's with the support of the modding community that we'll be a success." With this unique approach, it could be a hit when it ships in May.
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLE

Go plane crazy in this action-packed sim By Denny Atkin
A couple of years ago, only the most hardcore aviation buffs knew what an IL-2 Sturmovik even was. Ubi Soft's eponymous sim changed all that. The Russian-developed sleeper hit took the market by blast-knee-storm with its excellent flight models, spectacular graphics, and the inclusion of nearly 60 aircraft. But even with all the bells and whistles, IL-2 wasn't the perfect sim. Forgotten Battles looks to remedy that by taking the number of aircraft to a whopping 113 and adding a dynamic campaign, multiple flyable bombers, new combat theaters, and a host of other improvements.

STURMOVIK UND DRANG
Originally planned as an add-on for the original game, Forgotten Battles is now being released as a standalone product, containing all the original's features and a number of enhancements. With improvements extending far beyond the new campaign, you won't feel ripped off.

One of the most significant changes is one of the least publicized: improved A.I. In IL-2, you could watch "air combat of the insane," with computer-controlled pilots in crippled planes flying back into combat or circling flak-laden enemy airfields to their doom. Behavior is much more realistic now, with crippled aircraft turning for home, and healthy pilots even more skilled in their attacks. Forgotten Battles includes a new set of scripted missions, as well as the original game's superb mission editor. Once you've played through these dynamic campaigns, you'll find the expected Russian campaign, as well as the sinister Luftwaffe option. But you probably weren't expecting the chance to relive a Hungarian fighter ace's career or to defend Finland against Soviet (and later, Nazi) aggression in a Brewster B-239 Buffalo!

Campaign missions are randomly generated based on the current warfront. Your influence on the war is handled fairly realistically. You won't change the outcome, but successes or failures will affect supply lines, available aircraft, and other factors, appropriately accelerating victory or defeat.

Micromanagement fans will be giddy about the detailed airplane controls available: precise trim, propeller pitch, mixture setting, manual supercharger control, and more—all individually adjustable for each engine. Almost all of these can be left on auto, thankfully, for less intense players.

COMBAT ROCK
Where the original featured tons of aircraft never seen in a flight sim before, Forgotten Battles features an amazing 119 aircraft, of which at least 80 will be flyable. There's plenty of variety with American Iron (P-40s, P-47s, and A-10 P-51Ds), Nazi technology (He-111), and nerve-wracking Russian bombing runs (TB-3). The most interesting addition, though, is multicrewed bombers. Whatever your choice, chances are good you'll need to test the new engine fire extinguishers.

Almost no aspect of the sim has gone untouched. Graphics are spruced up, with more detailed aircraft textures, spectacular pixel-shaded water, and updated aircraft models. Five new gameplay maps include winter and summer versions of Hungary and Finland. A mountainous map for online combat makes for some breathtaking dogfights up and down the cliffs. The already impressive flight models have been tweaked; planes are now much harder to fly when damaged. Barrage balloons surround some cities, searchlights scan the night sky, and flak will home in if a light locks on your plane.

Despite its historical accuracy and slavish attention to detail, Forgotten Battles should be accessible even to first-time sim pilots thanks to the Quick Combat mode that lets you start in the air, point the plane at the bad guy, and start shooting. Hopefully, combat will start before the snow melts in Moscow.
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Command & Conquer:
GENE
RALST Vintage
C&C—for
better and
worse
BY DI LUO
In the days when “Ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-so” was considered a tasteless joke and Rambo movies were considered educational explorations of Asian culture, Command & Conquer: Generals would have been hailed as a keen and timely portrayal of current events with revolutionary gameplay and matchless graphics. Unfortunately for Generals, those days have gone the way of Strom Thurmond. Despite a spectacular-looking engine, intriguing units, and some original gameplay, Generals doesn’t capitalize on opportunities to be a shining light in the genre, and instead ends up as just decent.

**Reporting for duty**

The most captivating feature of Generals is the variety of units. Unlike many other RTS games, which slap different skins on similar units, the three warring sides are unique and well-balanced, each with its share of strengths and weaknesses. The Chinese, for example, are slow, weak, and medicore at the start. They have good defensive weaponry, however, and if they have time to build up their tech tree, they gain access to devastating nuclear weapons and the nearly unstoppable Overlord tank. The United States possesses fast and deadly forces. Their air force easily dominates the skies, and their ground units are matchless. This technology comes at a price, though: the U.S. requires large sums of money in order to field an effective force. It also has less versatile defensive structures and is susceptible to surprise attacks. Even the mobility GLA has advantages. Though its units are weak, they’re cheap and stealthy, and its bio-weapons clear out enemy fortifications with ease. Its buildings are also more resilient than the others.

The “generals” portion of the game is an interesting addition. As you kill enemy units, your alter ego in the game earns experience to buy special abilities like A10 strikes, bio-weapon bombs, and EMP strikes. These add more tactical considerations to the game but are hardly revolutionary for a genre that has been moving towards a more RPG feel for a while.

There are a couple of other steps forward in game mechanics. Resource management is easier than most other RTS games, since you only need to collect generic supplies instead of three or four different resources. There are now habitable buildings, including houses for fortifications and oil derricks that provide resources. Air combat is handled quite well and is an integral (and more manageable) part of any combined arms battle.

As always with C&C games, multiplayer is the highlight of Generals. With the variety of units and myriad possible strategies, the multiplayer remains fresh even after repeated play.

Generals supports maps for up to eight players, random side selections, and team play. Sadly, the only game mode included is a deathmatch-style slugfest.

**Can’t get out of boot camp**

A cliché of the gaming industry is that there is nothing new in the RTS genre. Since they’re continuing the legacy of the franchise that popularized the genre, Generals’ creators seem to revel in their pedigree. They make no effort to modernize the genre or even adopt many of conventions used by everyone else. The end result is a game that plays older than it looks.

The single-player campaign is short, comprising only 21 missions with around 15 hours of play. Objectives rarely take full advantage of the unit selection. Nearly all the U.S. and Chinese missions are against the GLA, and they usually involve building up a decisive force while beating off enemy raids. The GLA campaign attempts to be more imaginative by having unorthodox objectives—usually against civilian targets. However, they’re repetitive, with goals like racing against civilians to salvage supply crates, or destroying dozens of civilian buildings to collect a bounty.

The problems are exacerbated by a cartoonish and monochromatic presentation. One wonders if Generals’ developers had their tongue permanently stuck in their cheeks during development. They had no qualms about using current events for inspiration in creating their game world.

Instead of the cult-like Brotherhood of Nod, there is a world-spanning, turban-wearing, AK-toting terrorist organization built upon the anger of the disenfranchised peoples. Calling themselves the Global Liberation Army, they seek to “liberate” the subject peoples of the world from their oppressors—namely the U.S. and China. They will use any means necessary in their struggle, including bio weapons and terror tactics against civilians. Cultural sensitivity here extends only as far as refraining from the mention of religion. But you don’t need a cultural anthropologist to tell you who these guys are based on, since every GLA building looks like a miniature Mosque. The “near-future” Chinese force that opposes them brandishes cheesy sport-red stars, red banners, and troops with ‘60s-era uniforms. There are even big
An American particle beam slices through a Chinese factory like a knife through butter.

gongs at the Chinese bases—perhaps to call the troops in for a lunch of chop suey? The voice acting is suitably atrocious, with actors speaking in fresh-off-the-boat accents that would have made Fu Manchu cringe.

With the only "normal"-sounding faction being the gung-ho Americans, Generals gives one the distinct feeling of watching a "Big American Kicks Ass" movie from the Reagan era. Though micromanaged affairs that quickly devolve into chaotic melee between mobs. There are no formations, no easy way to select particular unit types from a group, and little unit AI. Unless attacked within their own weapon range, they won't defend themselves. Would an AI that shoots back be too much to ask for? The poor AI is evident in skirmishes against the computer as well. Even at the

THE END RESULT IS A GAME THAT PLAYS OLDER THAN IT LOOKS.

none of these factors are truly offensive, they are dated and unfortunate.

The interface also feels antiquated. Rather than using right-clicks to move troops and left-click to select them, Generals continues to use the left-click interface created for Dune II. You use the same button to select and order troops, and the right button has been relegated to simply undeselecting troops. It's clunky and difficult to get used to, since every other RTS uses the right-click interface, and the game doesn't allow you to re-map anything.

Other anachronisms are a problem. You can't set rally points on the minimap, and issuing guard and attack move orders on the minimap yields different results than on the main screen. Despite being 3D, Generals doesn't take advantage of the technology much. Rotating the camera is done with the number pad, an awkward procedure for right-handed folks. You can get close and enjoy the unit details, but even at the highest zoom level, you'll barely see more than a couple dozen units at once.

Battles are vintage C&C—overly hardest level, it isn't very good. With a strong defensive setup, you can take a nap while the game runs, without any ill effect. The standard computer tactic is to build small forces and launch incessant raids incapable of doing real damage.

The removal was a small victory for good taste, but does it really matter when your ultimate goal as the GLA is to spread anthrax on a global scale?

VERDICT

It's vintage C&C with some updated graphics.
Bambito: It looks a little ridiculous, but pound for pound, the best aquatic fighter is definitely the Sharkantis...

That's right. Take a shark and breed it with a praying mantis.

Trust me. This thing will knock you out and bite your ear off. 😈

Jack B. Quick: Shark Shark Shark.

If I hear another shark combo, I'll puke. When it comes to fighting in the water, the word “attrition” comes to mind. It's a numbers game.

I like to load up on piranhas and put them with a fast predatory feline. When you got an army of Piranha Tigers, you'll be King Neptune faster than you can say “Mermaid Sandwich.” Get my drift??? :-)

Jack, Philosophy student, Portland, OR
MASSIVE SEA BATTLE, AND SURROUNDED. NOW WHAT?

Traceydoll: Ok sharks are good, but why mess with bugs when you can take something vicious and mix it with straight-up nastiness. Give me a hammerhead shark and a crocodile and I'll show you a mean machine.

In a 30 min. fight to the death, it's sink, swim or be devoured.

Looks like Jack B. Quick may be in for a nice and slow death. You hear me, Jack? You got nothing!

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We hate to gloat. Well, OK, no we don't. We love to gloat. And as we reflect back on the past year, we have a lot to gloat about. Because, despite the drooling pontifications of so-called "experts," along the usual annoying blather of internet whiners and smug console fanboys, PC gaming not only failed to die in 2002, it actually had one of its strongest years in memory. In fact, you really have to go all the way back to 1997 (Half-Life, Grim Fandango, StarCraft) to find a year so overloaded with great PC games. In a way, it was too much. Even though we get to do this for a living, we still didn't have enough time to finish every game we wanted to finish. Heck, some of us are still trying to complete Medal of Honor—released way back in January. So, we can't imagine how you folks with real jobs coped with it all (we suspect pharmaceuticals). As a result, this year's awards decisions were tougher than ever for us, and the list of great games that didn't win anything here pains us more than it does you. All we can say is this: Buy them all. They're all great.

Now, sit back, relax, and get ready as the CGW editors don their best Cheeto-stained tuxedos and proudly hand out the 2002 Game of the Year awards!
GAME OF THE YEAR

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR GAMES NORTH

GTA3 PROVES TWO THINGS: IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO MAKE A GREAT COMBINATION OF LINEAR STORYTELLING AND OPEN-ENDED GAMEPLAY, AND SUCH GAMES CAN SELL MILLIONS.

informant for a rival drug cartel, you can just cruise around the city looking for trouble—or for more opportunities to make cash and get a better set of wheels. Players also have tremendous freedom in how they complete a mission; the CGW staff constantly discusses different approaches to similar missions, with some editors favoring car bombs while others choose sniper rifles. One simply uses a really big bus as an assassination tool.

The closest competitor to GTA3's design this year is [Morrowind], of all things, which provides flexibility within the confines of a linear, overarching story. However, GTA3 essentially improves upon our previous Game of the Year winner, Operation Flashpoint. While that game has a great open-ended design, our one reservation about awarding it Game of the Year honors was how insanely hardcore and niche-y it is. Operation Flashpoint is a great game, but it's also intimidating in appearance and difficulty, and demanding when it comes to players' skills. GTA3 provides the same genius design, but in a much more accessible wrapper for both newbies and hardcore players alike to appreciate.

It is also one of the few major games in which the player is the central villain. Spin it how you will, but not many other games allow you to cheat, steal, betray, lie, murder, and solicit
prostitutes (yet, players can offset the frank criminality by doing goodwill missions like being a firefighter or an ambulance driver, or even a vigilante cop). As a result, most people joined the bandwagon in denouncing this as a morally corrupt game featuring violence and pornography, but playing the game is no different than watching Goodfellas or The Sopranos or Scarface (from which Rockstar licensed the soundtrack for one of the game’s radio stations). Frankly, we applaud a game that is willing to dive into such morally ambiguous territory rather than sticking with some cookie-cutter “you’re a cop on the edge and out to get the baddest” type of scenario.

There was also the concern that we’re giving an award to a game that’s a port of a PS2 game. First off, the franchise debuted on the PC in 1998. Additionally, the game doesn’t feel like a port. It doesn’t stupidly tell you to use the Triangle and Circle buttons, the mouse-and-keyboard interface is actually much better than the PS2’s control pad, and the addition of an internal MP3 player makes GTA3 a natural PC fit.

Numerous little touches simply round out the rest of the game. The radio scripting is sharp, and while the graphics aren’t as amazing as, say, those in Unreal Tournament 2003, they still look damn fine and stay playable despite generating all the buildings, vehicles, and people in your way. The high production values allow for voice talent like Joe Pantoliano, Michael Madsen, Debi Mazar, and Robert Loggia, who all help to generate the atmosphere of a genuine mob movie.

While GTA3 wasn’t a unanimous winner, it still obtained the clear majority of votes from our staff. Other noteworthy games nominated for overall Game of the Year are Freedom Force, Medal of Honor, and Battlefield 1942. Freedom Force is a font of creativity and joy, but as much as we love the game, the design and style of GTA3 overcome it. Medal of Honor is the best shooter we’ve played in years, but GTA3 proves to be the better game overall, and while Battlefield 1942 is also a blast to play, again, we give the nod to GTA3 for its implementation of vehicular mayhem and mission design. Besides, GTA3 has the one thing Battlefield 1942 lacks: a flying tank.

Grand Theft Auto III is a brilliant game. Exploring such bold and taboo territory and offering a great example of open-ended design make it a worthy award winner, and Rockstar Games North deserves accolades for crafting such a superb game.
STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

FREEDOM FORCE

PUBLISHER: EA  DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES

The superhero game curse has been broken. Irrational's game, Freedom Force, is the best strategy game this year. Irrational crafted a respectful and loving parody of the Silver Age of comics, complete with the realistic "ward jazz"-style dialogue, original stories filled with improbable circumstances, and classic four-color art style of the period. Though it's a game saddled mostly in primary colors and word balloons, Freedom Force's use of a 3D engine ensures it resembles a game from 2002, not 1992. The sheer creativity behind the "comic universe" of this game is worthy of recognition alone.

But what appeal does Freedom Force have to the nonsuperhero dorks, the masses that won't stoop to wearing Green Lantern shirts or arguing about who should be cast as Ultimate Nick Fury? What is it about the game that's so good? Well, there's a great real-time tactical combat engine that melds pauseable action with completely destructible environments. Speed freaks can plough through the game without pausing, while tactically minded people can pause, survey the action, and figure out what to do. Don't have time to pull off a ranged attack? Grab the nearest lamp post and swing away. Your opponent's attacking from an elevated position? Destroy the building he's standing on. The RPG subsystem and the large built-in roster allow for lots of replay value—many CGW staffers talk about the different heroes and abilities used for particular missions. In fact, reviews editor Robert Coffey replayed the game using all the lame heroes (Eve, Sea Urchin, Mentor, etc.), and realized that they, in fact, don't suck—you just have to develop them like any of our favorite heroes (Microwave, Man O'War, E.T Diablio). There's also the ability to create your own heroes and use the Danger Room to set up a quick standalone skirmish. Besides, people who don't find one-liners like "Your evil is unwanted here!" amusing are probably too morose for life itself.

We respect Medieval: total War and its grandeur and flourish in simulating European history, but it doesn't quite grab us the way Freedom Force does (though our freelance writers were nigh-unanimous in picking Medieval for this category). We admire how Warlords Battlecry III is a perfect example of an honest-to-god RPS (role-playing strategy), but the RTS conventions—it's still all about managing an economy and amassing a larger force to brule your way to victory—kept it from grabbing the gold. Europa Universalis II is far too niche—yet even for us, Sid Meier's craft in SimGolf is good, but again, Freedom Force's creativity ultimately won us over.

GUULY PLEASURE OF THE YEAR

Magic: The Gathering Online
Yes, the pricing plan is ludicrous; yes, it's horribly unfriendly to newbies; yes, it's just this side of a pyramid scheme, but damn— as much as we want to hate it, Magic is still one of the most addictive play-every-day games, thanks to a brilliantly designed game underneath its irritating online manifestation. Oh, we want to hate it, we do, but we love it, we love it....

FUNNIEST GAME

Grand Theft Auto III
Both No One Lives Forever 2 and Freedom Force have loads of laughs, but we're giving the nod here to GTA3, largely because of its hilarious, irreverent radio station parodies—in particular "Chatterbox," which nails talk radio dead on and provides a steady stream of comedy amidst all the killing and looting.
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

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HIDDEN PLAYABLE CHARACTERS • GIGANTIC SOLDIERS • NEW DOGTAGS
NEW MUSICAL SCORES • EXCITING NEW STORYLINES

MATURE
Blood and Gore
Violence
Partial Nudity

PlayStation®2
RPG OF THE YEAR

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Memorable characters. Great graphics. Amazing tools. Fierce combat. Man alive, pretty much every nominee for RPG of the Year in 2002 has most or all of these, making this the best year for roleplayers since...well, maybe forever.

We were wowed early in the year by Dungeon Siege, a Diablo killer with spectacular graphics, real-time party-based gameplay, no level loading, and so many smart tweaks and twiddles that developer Gas Powered Games has practically added five pages of mandatory features to the design document of every action-RPG released in the next 10 years. Arx Fatalis...well, no one is going to imitate its twists, and it sounds impossible to make it as good as it is. Morrowind does.

Morrowind has hands down the most annoying interface of the year, but fortunately, it also sports sharp graphics (despite its entirely subterranean setting) and a great story that lets players solve the game's challenges in a number of ways. Icewind Dale II also lets you solve its more linear story in a number of ways—as long as those ways focus on your party killing the shit out of monsters and bad guys in one bruising battle after another. It is the last great game from a fading engine, and we love it. The big new D3D engine in Neverwinter Nights, and it gave gamers a fabulous toolset for creating their own adventures—too bad the single-player campaign prompted a staff-wide shrugging of shoulders.

But Morrowind puts it all together in a great big almost too big package. This game is bigger than huge, sprawling like an MMO RPG, but without all those annoying people. No two gamers experience Morrowind in exactly the same way. The intuitive, use-based experience system and 27 character classes (as well as the option to create a new class) allow you to be as hissy as you please. Our character is wholly yours, and a true reflection of the way you play the game. Just in case, Bethesda Softworks created a game-world so packed with rival guilds, political factions, and feuding clans, you can spend scores of hours exploring that portion of the game without ever touching the main story. Or, you can simply wander the gorgeous rendered landscape, freeing slaves, exploring dungeons, meddling in romance, and picking up random quests. And just in case the epic story line, massive environments, pitched battles, and great enchantment and spell-creation systems aren't enough, Morrowind shipped with an editor every bit as impressive (though not as user-friendly) as Neverwinter Nights', allowing users to edit every single item and aspect of the game, as well as create their own adventures, structures, character classes, quests, NPCs, pack mules, and more. In a year of big RPGs, none is more ambitious, more accomplished, or more deserving of RPG of the Year than Morrowind.

BEST GRAPHICS

Unreal Tournament 2003

In a crowded first-person-shooter world—where good visuals are everything—you've gotta do something really different to impress us. Enter UT2003. The weaponry and aliens may look cool, but the backgrounds, cascading skies, and detailed levels almost make us forget about how good the previous Unreal Tournament is—almost.

BEST TREND

Open-ended gameplay

One of the holy grails of gaming—letting players "live" in a game world and do whatever world want—this finally coming to glorious fruition. Two games do it masterfully this year: Morrowind and Grand Theft Auto III. Thanks to their unqualified success (especially GTA3), expect much more to come in the years ahead.
This is the toughest category we faced this year. There are five outstanding titles, and it's hard to find fault with any of them. *Jedi Knight II* is a blast, and the force powers and lightsaber control are perfectly executed. But the pacing is a bit off (everything before getting a lightsaber was "eh"), and we realized that what makes *JK2* so great is also what makes *Jedi Knight* great—which is why that game won Game of the Year in 1997.

*No One Lives Forever 2* is among the funniest and most entertaining games of 2002. We love the intelligence and wit, the incredible variety, and the wacky elements like machine-gun toting mimes and bananas-as-weapons. But the pacing isn't as brisk as the original's, and there are fewer thrills like the skydive gunfight in *NOFX*. Maybe Monolith spoiled us with the first game, and now we just expect too much.

In contrast, *Hitman 2* is a huge improvement over the original, and it's one of the best games of last year in any genre. The game's huge levels are always interesting, and you can play them any number of different ways. The five saves per level adds an additional challenge and adds a layer of difficulty by requiring you to work without adding frustration.

But in the final votes, it came down to GTA3 versus *MOH*, and that's where we deadlocked. Half of us love playing through the beautifully designed *MOH* despite its linearity. The other half argue that while *MOH* is a superb evolutionary advancement, GTA3 broke the mold with its wide-open gameplay that lets you play any way you want. Ultimately, it would've been a tie, had GTA3 not cloaked the field by winning Game of the Year. (In our view, Game of the Year transcends genre boundaries, so there's no point in duplicating the award.)

That doesn't take away at all from the best single-player shooter since *Half-Life*. More than any game we've played, *MOH* makes you feel like an action hero in a WWII movie, storming the beach, manning a machine gun from the back of a jeep, infiltrating enemy installations, taking control of a massive Tiger tank and blasting Panthers and buildings while crushing enemy soldiers under your treads. There are so many great moments—from viewing spectacular scripted events, to disguising yourself as a German officer, to infiltrating a submarine base, to calling in air strikes while peering through binoculars—that *MOH* remains the year's best shooter even though it came out in January of 2002. Had it shipped 10 days sooner, it would've been our 2001 Game of the Year. Good job, 2001! Now, give us the sequel.
SHROUDED ISLES: THE FIRST EXPANSION PACK FOR DARK AGE OF CAMELOT, THE FASTEST GROWING ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME EVER! THREE NEW ISLAND CONTINENTS, SHROUDED IN MYSTERY, CHAOS AND ADVENTURE ARE YOURS TO EXPLORE. EXPERIENCE IT ALL IN A STATE-OF-THE-ART NEW GRAPHICS ENGINE WHICH BRINGS THE WORLD OF THREE REALMS OF CAMELOT TO YOU IN SHARP, CLEAR, REALISTIC GRAPHICS AND AN AWESOME DISPLAY OF NEW SPECIAL EFFECTS WITH FRAME-RATES FASTER THAN EVER BEFORE!

- STUNNING NEW VISUAL EFFECTS WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART GRAPHICS ENGINE
- EXPLORE THREE NEW ISLAND CONTINENTS - ONE FOR EACH REALM
- DISCOVER THREE NEW PLAYER RACES
- EXPERIENCE TWO NEW CLASSES PER REALM
- EXCITING ALL NEW AMBIENT MUSIC SOUNDTRACK
- FIND NEW MONSTERS, TREASURE, ARMOR, WEAPONS, QUESTS AND MUCH MORE CONTENT
- MULTIPLE SERVER TYPES INCLUDING NEW “ONE WORLD” SERVERS WITH NO PVP AND ALL REALMS AVAILABLE TO ALL PLAYERS AT ALL TIMES
MULTIPLAYER GAME OF THE YEAR

BATTLEFIELD 1942

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE

War is hell, and so is trying to yank ourselves away from Battlefield 1942 long enough to finish this story. After countless Deathmatches, Battlefield 1942 survives the onslaughts of other contenders to be named the best multiplayer game of 2003.

Unreal Tournament 2003 has some seriously fast-paced action, while America’s Army seriously scares us as a not-so-subtle but very good recruiting tool. And Age of Mythology? Well, we couldn’t pick any game that is good at that. Seriously, though, Battlefield 1942 is a ridiculously addictive online warfare title. Sure, there’s a single-player campaign, but the real reason you want to play is the insane 64-player team Deathmatches.

The biggest selling point of Battlefield 1942 isn’t the realism, either. We saw people leaping out of planes directly into tanks waiting below. We witnessed fighters screaming in from above with snipers on each wing taking out all comers. We then witnessed a newbie exodus of players too intimidated to compete after seeing these kamikaze tactics firsthand.

So, what is it about Battlefield 1942 that makes it too irresistible to put down? It has to be the fast-paced action and elegant simplicity of setting up matches inside a variety of World War II campaigns. Air combat at Guadalcanal, beach landings in Normandy, storming Stalingrad, duking it out with the Desert Fox—the list goes on and on. Despite the realistic scenarios, Battlefield 1942 is the furthest thing from a sim game. In fact, if you’ve ever played a first-person shooter, you’re instantly at home—whether you’re running out in the fields, jumping into a tank, flying a plane, piloting a landing craft, manning a turret—you get the idea. Similar to Tribes, you quickly decide the role you want to take on in combat. Antitank, assault, scout, medic, engineer—pick an occupation and then man your station.

The only snags so far are finding people who want to play as a proper team as opposed to the every-man-for-himself Counter-Strike run-and-gun style. After all, how many people out there really want to volunteer for the tailgunner position in the back of a Stuka? And, while we’re at it, how many people do you really think will be ready to serve as medics?

For creating a game that blends the best bits of wartime action with a solid FPS and a wide variety of vehicles, we’re standing at attention for this battle-hardened title.

BEST SOUND

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Part of what makes Medal of Honor great is its convincing audio: the terrifying cacophony of gunfire on Omaha Beach, the shouts and cries of American and German soldiers, the distinctive “ping” of an M1 clip being ejected—it all makes you feel like you’re experiencing more than just a game.

BEST DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Neverwinter Nights

The last time we had good tools to make RPGs was freakin’ Adventure Construction Kit in 1984. Bioware has RPG gamers thinking about being RPG designers in the same way people thought about shooter design during the Doom and Quake days. If Half-Life’s tools can beget Counter-Strike, who knows what great user RPG will spring from NWN?
MMO OF THE YEAR

ASHERON'S CALL 2: FALLEN KINGS

Another year of MMORPG hype — and another year of waiting for that breakout hit. The big guns are still going as strong as ever: EverQuest, Ultima Online, and the rest have their hardcore devotees who will apparently fork over monthly fees until they drop dead. But none of the MMORPGs released in 2002, despite an avalanche of hype (including a Newsweek cover for The Sims Online), really hit it out of the park the way some folks (including us) were expecting. The Sims Online has its charms, but at this point, it’s more a curiosity than a success — though it’s also too early to write it off entirely. Earth & Beyond is another noble experiment — an attempt to take the game away from the elves and into an outer space sci-fi setting. We had lots of fun with this game, at first, but the more we play, the more we feel like we’re just playing EverQuest in space — thus betraying the very notion of its originality. Ultimately, it’s the most traditional MMORPG, Asheron’s Call 2, that proves to be the best game in a weak year. Which is not to dismiss its achievements. Actually, AC2 did an amazing job of fixing or improving virtually everything that was wrong with every other fantasy MMORPG, providing an easy, accessible, stable, and beautiful-looking online game world. The crafting is cool, a real story line keeps things moving, and the advancement paths provide for lots of variety. Microsoft and Turbine get lots of credit for an incredibly smooth launch and for really working to lose all the annoyances (hello, corpse runs!) that made those games so new to their usual. We never really left to the original game, but Asheron’s Call 2 is now the fantasy MMORPG to beat. Nice job.

WARGAME OF THE YEAR

COMBAT MISSION: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN

By sea, air, and land, wargamers got a bunch of great games in 2002. Whether it’s playing cat-and-mouse with aircraft carriers in the Solomons in Uncommon Valor (perhaps the year’s best PBEM wargame, launching the world’s largest-ever airborne operation in Airborne Assault, or slogging it out on the ground in France in Eagles Strike, wargame developers had some interesting new takes on World War II. But the best new game of all is a familiar face, Battlefront’s Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord won this award in 2000, and while the sequel—Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin—doesn’t change the genre the way its predecessor did, it still towers high above the competition. The game system’s armor-friendly focus is perfect for Eastern Front combat, and a host of improvements (including an updated graphics engine) ensure the top spot for a series that keeps pushing tactical wargaming to new heights. CMBB suffers from the same indifferent AI that plagues most wargames, but that doesn’t prevent it from offering plenty of challenge, and the multiplayer experience is unmatched. Like its predecessor, the game is great at creating memorable moments, and it leaves you recalling your troops’ exploits long after you’ve moved on to more mundane (and less entertaining) endeavors. Whether it’s the dice-turning ambush, the seemingly invulnerable lone tank, or the Squad That Wouldn’t Quit, CMBB makes the game come alive in a way possible only on the computer. That’s quite an achievement, and well worth the award of Wargame of the Year.
ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR

SYBERIA

Well, whaddya know! An Adventure Game of the Year award! Contrary to the bleating of certain Internet whiners, we here at CGW actually do like adventure games—a lot. But with most of the best developers abandoning the genre in the last few years, the pickings are mighty slim. Thank goodness for Syberia, an unabashedly old-school point-and-click adventure that very likely would have won this award even in a competitive year. Beautiful original artwork, clever puzzle design, and a transparent interface all support the one thing that always sets the best adventure games apart: a great story. Syberia’s odd tale of an American lawyer’s spiritual journey as she searches for the eccentric heir to a toy factory ultimately plays out as a poignant meditation on love, life, and destiny. It’s the most emotionally rich adventure game since the great Sanciarum and a worthy reminder of how rewarding this struggling genre can be when put in the right hands.

EXPANSION PACK OF THE YEAR

ANARCHY ONLINE: THE NOTUM WARS

For a category that generally doesn’t stir much debate, the competition for Expansion of the Year was incredibly fierce. Expansions for former Game of the Year winners The Sims and Operation Flashpoint are as outstanding as their source material. Shadows of Lucilin introduces horses, moons, and hallucinogenic system requirements to EverQuest, while Island Thunder finally makes Ghost Recon a 5-star game. In the end, the redemption packed into every box of The Notum Wars won our votes. Anarchy Online had one of the worst launches ever, but for the stalwart fans who stuck with it, Notum Wars comes through big time, adding a load of new gameplay features (like the land control and attendant rewards that led to sprawling clan wars) and virtually reinventing the game. And if you haven’t been playing forever, no problem. Notum Wars includes the full (and vastly improved) original AO, but with a brand-new, incredibly more newbie-friendly front end. All that at one of the lowest price points in PC gaming. The best thing? This is a “booster pack”—just wait until Funcom releases its full-fledged expansion later this year.

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

MADDEN 2003

If anyone was inclined to ring the death knell of PC gaming, they’d have to look no further than the pathetic PC sports-gaming arena, where most developers jumped ship to Xbox and PS2. What we have left is EA’s lineup and noble attempts like US Open Tour 2002 (almost, but not quite as good as Virtua Tennis) and Grand Prix A (one of the better racing games in years past). Thankfully, EA has yet to abandon us, and Madden 2003 is more than simply “the only title in town.” It’s a great game. Where Madden 2002 is nothing but a poorly executed port of the PS2 version of Madden 2001, the 2003 version is actually a new game that takes advantage of the power of the PC, including internet play and graphics that blow the PS2 version out of the water. Besides that, the developers smartly integrate some of the best tweaks and balances in the Madden franchise thus far. Say goodbye to cheap 80-yard pass plays and hail the return of the king of football.
The early frontrunners for 2002's Hardware of the Year award were ATI's and Nvidia's respective top-of-the-line desktop boards. The thing is, we've come to expect faster and more powerful graphics chips. But, until recently, we hadn't come to expect truly gaming-capable laptops. Both ATI's Mobility Radeon 9000 (M9) and Nvidia's GeForce4 4200 Go have at least 64MB of DDR memory and support for DirectX 8.1, and the GeForce even boasts AGP 8x support.

While the Mobility Radeon is currently the mobile graphics chip of choice, it's only a matter of time before Nvidia leapfrogs it. As it stands, a Dell Inspiron 8200 laptop with a 2.2GHz Mobile Pentium 4 processor and the 64MB version of the Mobility Radeon graphics card gets a 3DMark2001SE score of 7000 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. When the desktop GeForce3 board first came out, that's about what you got on a high-end desktop with a top-of-the-line graphics card! Furthermore, this machine is achieving Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast frame rates nearing 100 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off.

So, if you want a laptop but don't want to compromise gaming power, you can thank Nvidia and ATI for making laptop gaming much less of a compromise as it used to be.

**SPECIAL AWARD FOR HARDWARE DESIGN AESTHETIC**

**Logitech MX 700 Cordless Mouse**

With a price tag of $80, Logitech's MX 700 Cordless Mouse isn't cheap, but with a plethora of customizable buttons and a rechargeable battery, this is a wireless product that's actually worth the added cost. The MX 700 doesn't suffer the latency that plagued earlier cordless mice, and the remote base doubles as a battery charger.

While many still prefer to game with Microsoft's IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0, the MX 700 deserves kudos for innovation.

**BEST HARDWARE THAT DOESN'T MATTER**

**Logitech Z-680 5.1 speakers**

Logitech's Z-680 5.1 speakers are so versatile, CGW's hardware editor got rid of his AV receiver and uses the Z-680s as the centerpiece of his home theater. Spitting out a whopping 500 watts RMS, these babies are THX certified and support both Dolby Digital and DTS. The breakout box has connections for any device you could possibly think of, including coaxial, optical, and direct inputs. In other words, you can hook the Z-680s up to a PC, TV, DVD player, Xbox, PS2, or GameCube. Now, if only more PC games truly supported 5.1 sound.
Everything Might & Magic

Coaster of the Year

Publisher: 3DO
Developer: New World Computing

Nominees:
- Civilization III
- Play the World
- James Bond 007: NightFire

There is more than one game this year that makes us feel we were trapped in a giant cocktail shaker full of the muddy blue fluid from ten chemical toilets. Yes, there was a banner year for crap. How on earth could we pluck the single plumpest turd from the tangle of soggy tissue? Hard work, gritty determination, and a perverse predilection for wallowing in misery—that's how.

So, ungloved and unvaccinated, we reached in to our elbows and dished out a fistful of filth. First out of the poop-pot was James Bond 007: NightFire, the most aggressively unplayable game since the unrelenting hammer to the forehead we call Trespasser. Electronic Arts greedily gobbled up the superspy license...and, once it was done digesting it, started charging gamers $50 for what was left.

Bad as NightFire is, it is but a passing whiff of earthy flatulence on a midsummer breeze compared to the face-staining grunter known as Civilization III: Play the World. Frankly, this was the game to beat, a $30 add-on with one single goal—multiplayer—that shipped with one major distinguishing characteristic: nothing resembling playable multiplayer.

Compounding matters, Play the World savages the 5-star jewel that was Civilization III with a trio unmatched by two score of overly caffeinated M&M family members. Et tu, Sid? Et tu?

Beating out Play the World would take a Herculean effort and, regretfully, 3DO is more than up to the task. While its dream project, Army Men of Might & Magic, languishes in development, 3DO went to the Might & Magic cash cow one last fatal time, this time squeezing the now-dry M&M meat so hard that not blood, but black, gritty bile issued forth, forever spoiling the memories of two of the most beloved CGW Hall of Fame franchises. Yes, we know we gave Heroes of Might & Magic IV 2½ stars, and we're here to tell you we were wrong...so very, very wrong. This stillborn aberration features broken, unfriendly combat; simultaneously cheating and brain-dead A.I.; pointless changes to the core hero system; horribly designed campaigns; and...and...and...arghghh!! I just want to bite someone! 3DO got Day of Infamy bonus points by releasing Might & Magic IX at the same day. God. What can we say about that game? It's been sitting on the shelves for years, but this year's version shipped with a kitchen-size hefty bag duct-taped over its head. Everything about this once proud series is horrifically mutilated, except its storied length. So, not only is M&M boring, frustrating, infuriating, and a big stinking load of crap—it is boring, frustrating, infuriating, and a big stinking load of crap for a really long time.

In effect, 3DO stuffed everything Might & Magic into a pillow-case full of crumpled napkins before tossing it off a cliff into the pit full of shark teeth. The gooey mess left behind gets the award.

Worst Fans

Farscape

Just because we never watched your favorite show doesn't mean we don't recognize a lame game when we see one. Face it: The game is lame. And your show is cancelled. So, stop mail-bombing us and move on with your lives—those of you who have them.
BEST MUSIC ▲
Mafia
Ay, fahgeddaboudit! Any game that can instantly summon images of The Godfather ("make them an offer they can't refuse") and The Untouchables ("just like a wtf to bring a knife to a gunfight.") simply by turning up the volume can't be all bad. This little gem does a great job of capturing the mood of the Roaring '20s.

BEST USE OF A LICENSE
Skittles in Darkened Skye
Darkened Skye proves that if you're collecting supernatural trinkets, they may all be something tasty like Skittles. In fact, the license entertainingly subverts some otherwise crusty fantasy dialogue, such as when a wise old crone intones: "People knew magic then, and 'twas Skittles what fueled that magic!" The game may be average, but we salute the way it uses Skittles, of all things, so creatively.

BEST STORY
Freedom Force
Somehow, the writers at Irrational crafted an interesting story that integrates dinosaurs, gods, aliens, and time travel into one sensible whole. Every scrap of writing, from the origin stories to the corny one-liners to the great reveal at the end, is worthy of salute from us.

BEST ART DIRECTION
Freedom Force
Irrational Games' comic-book love is so complete in Freedom Force, it bleeds all the way out to the awesome, Silver Age-style install screens. From the primary-color scheme to the word balloons to the cheesy cut-scenes and dialogue, Freedom Force is a joyous, reverent comic homage, brilliantly executed by an inspired team of artists.

BEST CINEMATICS
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos
While some are disappointed with WarCraft III's gameplay, no one with eyes and a brain can argue with the virtues of the game's absolutely incredible cut-scenes, which feature some of the best CG animation ever. Some day, Blizzard should just go for it and make the movie it's obviously dying to make.

WORST USE OF A LICENSE ▲
James Bond 007: NightFire
A towering ass-terpiece of ineptitude, NightFire sloppily emasculates one of the most successful movie franchises with a dull, rusty straight razor. The A.I. is broken, the levels suck, the gadgets are pointless, and the cut-scenes look like especially blurry Davey and Goliath rejects. NightFire is not so much a game as it is an evil weapon worthy of a Bond villain.

SLEEPER OF THE YEAR ▲
Arx Fatalis
Who would've thought an Ultima Underworld wannabe from a French developer wouldn't be a big bag of stink? Certainly not us. Hence our complete surprise when JoWood's Arx Fatalis turns out to be one of the best RPGs in a year chalkful of 'em. Gorgeous, deep, and challenging, Arx is the game you should be playing now that you're done with Morrowind and Neverwinter.
“GAME OF THE YEAR.”
Xbox Game of the Year (IGN, Gamespy)

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*Computer Gaming World ~ 4 1/2 stars out of 5*

“The PC has been crying out for a game like this.”

*PC Gamer*
Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

"I want to take the mother-croaker out back, chop off his hindquarters and serve 'em up at a prissy Paris bistro."

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Unreal II: The Awakening
Too much of the good things, not enough of the great things BY ROBERT COFFEY

The harsh and not entirely fair way of describing Unreal II would be to refer to its subtitle and quip, "The Awakening is something you'll need after playing this game." Like I said, harsh and not entirely true, but just true enough that some wag somewhere is bound to say it. Unreal II has a lot going for it—things like state-of-the-art graphics, outstanding sound, and some viciously efficient A.I.—but while the game starts off strong, its personality steadily dribbles away, leaving you feeling you've played enough of it and never need to play it again. Compare that to the "I really want to play that level again" feel of games like Medal of Honor and Half-Life—games Unreal II obviously wants to emulate—and it's hard not to see the game as something of a letdown.

Pretty on the outside

Provided you've got the flame-spitting super-turbocharged computer of death that Unreal II really needs in order to shine, you cannot help but be wowed by the graphics. Simply put, this resets the bar in terms of what a game can look like, with incredibly rich colors, painstakingly detailed and gorgeously textured models, and some startlingly vivid weapon effects. This is a game engine that will be used for years and years to come.

Unfortunately, a lot of that graphical brilliance is wasted on a game that earnestly tries to bring the gameplay up to a similar caliber, but fails aggravatingly short about a third of the way in. At the very beginning, Unreal II is up to the task. Haunting sound effects and sparingly effective use of scripted events create an at times excruciating sense of tension in the first series of missions, as you investigate a ravaged mining facility. When the hordes of howling blue space monkey aliens finally start attacking and refuse to let up, the result is a bracing jolt of frenzied action that has you ripping through the levels with the very best sort of murderous glee. And the first appearance of the deadly quick Skaarj is a white-knuckle nightmare.

The game radically shifts gears in the next mission, as you wander a swampy landscape at night, trying to locale a stranded squad of marines. Absolutely nothing happens as you find your way through the murky night, yet the stormy weather and profound sense of isolation ratchet up your unease to the point that, when the inevitable attack finally comes, it's almost a relief.

Yeah, it's pretty, but it's still a jumping puzzle.
Less is more, more is too much
Not long after that, *Unreal II* starts deflating. The excitement starts to peter out somewhere after the scary giant alien spiders. In place of anything new or exciting, the game just starts piling on more and more stuff. More bad mercenaries in more powerful armor with more rocket launchers. More lengthy boss fights in locked arenas. More corridors. More hordes of enemies in morelopsided battles, and more smashing the reload key after you die more and more, the more you play.

The overdose of stuff is most obvious in the weaponry. *Unreal II* has a great armory with some devastating weapons, including the very first grenade launcher that matters in a single-player shooter. The problem is, it has enough guns for three games (each gun also has an alternate fire), and you just don't need them all, especially since you have what is arguably the most vital and useful gun—the assault rifle—from the very first moments of the game. It's great that there's a shotgun and a magnum and an energy pistol and a shock lance and a flamethrower and a gun that shoots space spiders, but I never, ever had any reason to use them. You won't either. And if you do, you'll be ignoring about five other weapons in order to do it.

*Unreal II* does have its moments, even during the saggy, routine parts. While fighting waves of other human types isn't that thrilling (and if I really wanted to fight smart humans with rocket launchers, I'd be playing *Unreal Tournament 2003*), a few missions let you order a small squad of fellow space marines into position and set up defensive turrets and energy fields. No one is going to confuse this with *Rainbow Six*, but deploying these guys/things gives these missions a more tactical feel and engages you more.

Late in the game—very late, in fact—*Unreal II* throws a few curves into play and revitalizes the action, giving the hoary "flee the disintegrating spaceship" mission a bit more flavor. It won't knock your socks off, though.

If *Unreal II* could maintain the tension and excitement of the early parts of the game, we'd be looking at a probable five star little. But it doesn't, instead settling for a dazzling new coat of paint on a particularly bruisine version of standard shooter gameplay. *Unreal II* is a good, enjoyable game made maddening by tantalizing glimpses of what it could have been.

**VERDICT**

You're going to like this shooter, but you're not going to love it.
The Sims Online
The biggest chat room in the world by Dana Jongewaard

On the surface, The Sims Online is exactly that: The Sims, online. Anyone who has played The Sims will be instantly familiar with how this world functions, because it looks the same as before. The same eight needs must be monitored, the toolset will be instantly familiar, and similar types of character interactions are available. So, as the biggest-selling computer game ever moves online, is it for better or for worse?

Somewhere in between.

Same game, different verse
New players can create up to three characters in three separate towns (each town is a server capable of housing up to 80,000 characters). Each new character starts out with 10,000 simoleans; additional money must be earned. When you create a character, you have the option to buy your own plot of land and build a house. If you choose to do this, you can invite people to be roommates. The more people living on a property, the larger the house can be. Roommates are allowed to add onto and redecorate the house as they desire, but property owners retain ultimate control—roommates who get too crazy can be kicked out, but when they leave, so do their possessions.

As in The Sims, your character can work to develop certain skills; for example, pumping iron, swimming, or riding the mechanical bull will increase your Body ability. One motivation for developing skills is that higher skill levels allow you to make more money. A character with a Logic skill of 10 earns more by solving a math problem and selling the solution than someone with a Logic skill of 1. The only other apparent reason to develop skills is to earn the additional character interactions that are meted out with skill increases.

The other measurable gaming activity in TSO is making friends. The touted advantage of making friends is networking (what is this, a job fair?), plus more gestures become available to your character as she makes more friends. Each Sim can grant up to 10 friendships, with no limit to the number of friendships coming in.

Awful lot of weather we're having, huh?
The big problems with TSO appear after you've been logged in for awhile. One very noticeable difference from any other online game is that, rather than offering an existing world, this game is essentially a scaffold for the gamers to create their own world. That's great if the gamers are creative people, but a lot of the people in TSO aren't. Instead, they use their characters as little more than chat room avatars. If you're lucky enough to stumble onto a property with players actually willing to play, or if you

GAME STATS

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Maxis
Genre: Sim
Certiﬁcation: Teen, Comic
Themes: Mischief, Mature Sexual
Violence: Free
First 90 Days
Free: Then $9.95 Monthly
Subscription Requirements:
Pentium III 600, 128MB
RAM, 1.6GB Free, Hard Drive Space, Internet Connection
Recommended Requirements:
Pentium II/200, Broadband Internet Connection
Multiplayer Support: Yes

Computer Gaming World
You’ll be praying for at least a competent if not sparkling conversationalist.

log on with a group of like-minded real-life friends, the game can be pretty entertaining; otherwise, the experience isn’t much more riveting than average water cooler chat. And when you’re trying to build your Logic with a chess match—a chess match you cannot accelerate like you did in The Sims—you’ll be praying for at least a competent, if not sparkling conversationalist.

Ways to win in The Sims Online? Well, right now, the only real “winning” is making it onto one of the Top 100 lists in your city, which offers you an achievement bonus. But, as of this writing, the only Top 100 list is “Most Liked Sim,” so if you don’t feel like chat room schmoozing, then there’s not much for you to work toward.

Easy street
The main problem with TSO is that you don’t really need money. Players who have homes receive money whenever other players visit, and they also receive a cut when a visitor makes and sell items while on the property; so homeowners offer incentives to entice people to visit. Which means that you can eat for free, sleep for free, be entertained for free, and even acquire skills for free—which in turn helps you make more money that you don’t need to spend. And if you don’t need money, there’s not a whole lot of reason to develop skills, and if you aren’t developing skills or making money, then what exactly are you doing?

Most of the properties online right now are dedicated to either skill development or money making. The property owners and roommates are taking the game pretty seriously, so they aren’t tolerating much harassment of other people, since there’s the potential that you’ll chase people off and cost the owners money. While that’s their prerogative, the silliness of The Sims was what made the game so fun. Here, there are no random zombies wreaking havoc, no burglars, no sad clowns, no career paths. And characters who try to shake things up on their own are usually banned pretty quickly. Which leaves you with a lot of Sims whose primary goal is making more money.

Frankly, it isn’t very fun.
The servers seem pretty stable, if a little bit laggy, but they’re not always very populated. Since the rate at which you acquire your skills and/or make money is directly related to how many other people are participating in the activity with you, it’s more efficient for you to visit full properties, and those are sometimes hard to find.

Maxis has more plans for The Sims Online. By the time you read this, new Top 100 lists like “Most Hated Sim” should be live. Player-made objects are also in the works, and death is scheduled to be coming sometime in the future. But for now, the game is pretty boring. If you like chat rooms, then this is your kind of game. If not, then steer clear.

VERDICT
Instead of providing lol, this game kind of suxorz.

Practicing the guitar all by my lonesome.

There are plenty of opportunities for the cage dancer in us all to get down and dirty.
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles

By Bruce Geryk

When Dark Age of Camelot was first released, it made its mark with classic EverQuest-style gameplay that cut out a lot of lardum, and introduced a high-level, cooperative, player-versus-player dynamic as the game's ultimate goal. If this didn't turn you on the first time around, there isn't anything here to change your mind. However, if you were on every night and found yourself getting bored with the original game world, you're probably already exploring Shrouded Isles' enormous new content.

For each of the game's three realms, Shrouded Isles adds one new race, two new classes, and a whole new continent to explore. The new lands are mostly stocked with monsters appropriate for characters Level 30 and above, so players will find themselves revisiting a lot of their old haunts if they decide to start new characters. For those with high-level characters, there are huge new areas to adventure in, and the addition of new dungeon areas makes high-level dungeon raids an enjoyable endeavor.

For a game that's so focused on upper-level realm-versus-realm combat, it's surprising that there's no new content in this area. The action remains restricted to frontier areas, so since the keeps that guard the realms themselves remain impregnable. Although Mythic is considering starting a server where these keeps are weak enough to allow for actual realm invasions, the player-versus-player component of Shrouded Isles is essentially the same as before. A major feature of the expansion is the graphics engine. While significantly improved over the original (especially the monster models), the terrain textures and water effects have already been surpassed by Asheron's Call 2, and some graphics (like Hibernia's cartoonish poofy-looking like vistas) seem dated. Nevertheless, thanks to good art design, Shrouded Isles extends the original's ability to create striking and memorable locations that give the game world a real sense of depth and character.

Mythic is constantly tweaking and updating the game from patch to patch, so comments on the specifics of gameplay will probably be obsolete before this review even makes it to the editor. What remains true is that Dark Age of Camelot has a large, active community and is constantly improving content. No one should play DAO without Shrouded Isles.

VERDICT

Plenty of new stuff for the already addicted.

Cossacks: Back to War

By Di Luo

Expansion packs are the reaches of the gaming industry. No matter how you stomp them, even the remote possibility of profit spawns them by the dozens. Technically not an expansion, Cossacks: Back to War is a standalone game that incorporates the gameplay features of Cossacks: European Wars and Cossacks: Art of War into a lackluster package with 101 scenarios, a tutorial campaign, two new nations, and a few extra units.

The Cossacks series takes place in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, and gameplay is traditional RTS fare except in scope. Cossacks supports up to 8,000 units on a map, and you'll regularly have hordes of peasants and massive armies. It's initially novel, but the massacric pleasure of creating armies of thousands, one soldier at a time, then watching them die by the hundreds, waves before long. There's just too much micromanaging for the game to remain enjoyable for long.

Cossacks makes no attempt to hold your interest with intriguing story lines or captivating campaigns. Some scenarios are fun, but only diehards will have the endurance to find the gems in the horde. These self-flagellating fanatics will certainly be entertained, but why pay when they can find plenty of custom scenarios to download for free?

VERDICT

Everybody now—Cossacks! Hunh! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again! Yeah!
ANARCHY RULES ON THE GIANT SLAVE SHIP HARBINGER
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1998: Unreal forever changes the face of the first person shooter.
2003: Unreal II - The Awakening...does it again.

"...spectacular graphics, varied gameplay... and a freaky arsenal of weapons to choose from... the shooter to beat in 2003."
CGW

"Without question...will change the face of first-person shooters..."
PLAY

"The graphics literally made me speechless...practically rival movies."
GameSpy.com

"And while the graphics are an excellent...draw, there's much more to talk about here - from the surprisingly compelling story...to the sheer variety of environments to the awesome balance and design."
pc.ign.com

"...the best single-player game I've seen since Half-Life and Return to Castle Wolfenstein. For you fans of single-player FPS, watch out - there's a new 800lb Gorilla coming. You have been warned."
actiontrip.com

"The defend-your-base missions that include commanding a squad of your own troops...are some of the most exciting gaming moments I have experienced."
XGR.com

"Pants-wetting visuals and physics...it's firmly placed to set the benchmark for this year's slew of FPS games...it's going to be a hard one to beat."
Computerandvideogames.com

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[Images of game scenes]
Impossible Creatures
Stalking the competition by Ron Dulin

Game State
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Relic
Entertainment
Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Target Audience: Teen
Comic/Adult
Violence
Pricing: $39.99
System Requirements: Pentium 350Mhz, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space
Recommended System: Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, Interceptor software, LAN, Internet (2-6 players)

Id joke: What do you get when you cross an elephant with a rhinoceros? Relic Entertainment, makers of 1999's excellent Homeworld, has built a whole game around the punch line. Impossible Creatures is a real-time strategy game with a single hook: You create units by combining animals. It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story. But the game is all style and little substance. Impossible Creatures doesn't have the strategic complexity of more recent RTS games, so while designing units can be entertaining, putting them to use is often a repetitive task.

Pulp fiction
Impossible Creatures takes place in the 1930s. The protagonist is James Chance, a scruffy adventurer who is contacted by his long-lost father. He learns that the senior Chance was involved with the development of sigma technology, which allows the combining of animals. You must help James put the technology to use, gathering animal DNA and creating bigger and better units as the plot grows increasingly silly. Relic has opted to ape sources like King Kong, 101 Dalmatians, and even Mad Monster Party for its characters, creating an occasionally humorous but not very engaging story on which to hang the missions.

These missions follow a fairly typical build-a-base, create-an-army, sweep-the-map blueprint. There are occasional deviations, giving you challenges like stopping a fire from reaching your base or finding a missing cohort. Most missions also require that you collect the DNA of resident creatures, and occasionally these will allow you to build significantly better units. The missions are fairly predictable, and the AI seems more scripted than dynamic. Also, your computer opponents always have better unit components than you do, so you're constantly fighting an uphill battle.

Building imperfect beasts
The best part of the game is designing your units. You choose two creatures and mix and match segments. There are some interesting combinations, such as flying hippo, and lobsters with bull's heads. The unit's final characteristics and statistics are determined by the chosen segments. For instance, slapping praying mantis legs on a bull will give the unit a powerful leaping/goring attack. It's fun to tweak the available combinations, trying to get the most beast for your buck. The possibilities are varied but, unfortunately,
The story is told both with in-engine cut-scenes and the sort of stylized art utilized in Homeworld.

He's even called "The King."

A bullrion stampede on route to an enemy base.

The chamepotomus uses its tongue as a ranged attack.

the useful combinations aren't. Though weaker creatures have some unique abilities, such as burrowing or poison, these characteristics often aren't as useful as pure might and defensive strength. What's worse, flying creatures are all but useless: They're usually weak, and antiaircraft towers are so powerful that they don't stand a chance. Flying whales look great as they sail around their home base, but try to free your Willybirds from an opponent and they'll be torn to shreds.

You can only keep nine creature designs in your zoo, so there's a constant need to rethink your army. The small number of available units seems like an artificial constraint in the single-player campaign, and it's most likely there to keep some semblance of balance in multiplayer games, in which you load one of your armies and have at your opponents. Multiplayer and skirmish games are all about who has the better army for the map, so the strategy all takes place before the match even starts. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can make games quick and painful when someone has a far superior force. You can also select from some predesigned armies, or have a random army selected for you. The latter, though, is a foolish choice. It's no fun finding yourself on an island map with no aquatic or flying units.

The rest of the game is straightforward. There's a small research tree that allows you to improve your base defenses and the efficiency of your harvesters. You can also research improvements to individual units' statistics, which is a helpful, if somewhat unsatisfying, way of strengthening your army. Base building is likewise straightforward, but buildings look so similar that even late in the game you may have to consult the pop-up help to determine which is what. Luckily, the animals look good when you zoom in and watch them work, though they all look similar when playing from the default distance—especially if you're fond of a particular torso.

The ability to play Dr. Moreau keeps Impossible Creatures from being a completely generic RTS, but the missions don't require strategy so much as huge armies and brute force. Most likely, the novelty of the campaign will wear off before you can access the strongest creatures and answer the riddle posed by the game with an elephant of your own.

It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story—too bad it's all style, little substance.

VERDICT

This by-the-numbers RTS fails to generate any magnetism, animal or otherwise.
Archangel
To hell in a handbasket BY DENICE COOK

While driving home one night, Michael Travinsky scours the radio for good songs. “Sympathy for the Devil” gets the ax. “Earth Angel” is staticky. “Highway to Hell” cuts out suddenly as a truck hits his car... Michael comes to in a medieval monastery, where resident monks promptly pronounce him “The Awaited One” and hand him the Sword of Light, an ever-purging magical weapon. Unable to remember his past, Michael accepts his supposed destiny to destroy every nasty thing that fouls the Earth. If only Michael could read the fine print on the sword—“Using this weapon depletes your spirit energy in three seconds, and you must then idle by a calendar to replenish energy”—he might be a little less likely to undertake this great quest. I know I would be.

It seems that the local Master of Archangel’s plot is almost nonexistent.

Darkness has unleashed a demonic army, and villagers are dropping faster than your Spirit energy bar. After brief tutorials on jumping, sneaking, and slashing, you’re sent out on a third-person adventure, where a floating head asks you to choose one of two battle forms you will be able to temporarily morph into throughout the game. The ghost form offers invisibility plus one combat spell, but takes twice-normal injury from the infernal. Alternatively, the warrior form’s slicing arm is more torturous to the tainted, while its armor-like skin takes half-normal damage from the damned.

Nearby enemies often target and beat the hell out of your supposedly invisible ghost form. The ghostly combat spell is also slow and weak. The warrior fares better in battle, but in either case, once spirit energy drains you become a human track star while waiting for it to refill.

While progressing through Archangel’s endlessly circling, map-bereft, identical-for-ghost-and-warrior paths, you receive item-gathering quests from NPCs. You also earn upgradable spells like Regeneration, Hypnosis, and Holy Protection by slaughtering the sinister, and can increase form-transformation time as well. Regeneration uses spirit energy to increase health; this is critical, as first aid kits are scarce. Sinfully, spells are accessible only via inventory scrolling, which freezes you but not your aggressors. Slaying scads of satanic sycophants transforms Michael’s appearance into that of a supposed archangel, but there’s little enemy variation, and even less A.I., and the copycat bosses just require repetitive slashing with the Sword of Light (in between those pesky spirit-energizing retreats). You can’t block attacks, either.

You collect knives, arrows, axes, and guns, depending upon which of the three inexplicably linked worlds throughout time (Old Ages, Berlin 2039, or Forgotten Place) you inhabit. As for those worlds, various monks and an angel make cut-scene appearances in them, but there’s little connection between lands. Archangel’s plot is almost nonexistent.

Although fire, water, and spell effects are decent and the settings colorful, Archangel’s dated 3D graphics feature grainy pathways and backdrops that sometimes leap forward from the shadows. Jerky, cookie-cutter character models are blocky and expressionless, and bystanders ignore battles.

The diverse soundtrack is divine, but the voiceovers range from good to damnable, and dialogue is lamer than a wingless angel. As far as heavenly gaming goes, this Archangel doesn’t just fall, it plummets from grace.

VERDICT

The light at the end of the tunnel needs a new bulb.
BEFORE WARCRAFT
THREE HAIRY NORSEMEN
SET THE STAGE
FOR A TRADITION
OF GREAT GAMING.

THE LOST VIKINGS™

THE BLIZZARD CLASSIC RETURNS.
NOW ON GAME BOY® ADVANCE.
Frogger: The Great Quest

It ain’t easy seein’ green... BY DARREN GLADSTONE

Frogger and I go way back: The arcade original had me frantically navigating rush hour traffic with a pile of quarters at my side. And now that I think about it, Hasbro’s 3D sequel in 1998 wasn’t half-bad either. But it’s all over now. In fact, after playing this insipid Rayman wannabe crap, I’m ready to take the little mothercroaker out back, chop off his headquarters, and serve ’em up at a prissy Parisian bistro.

The old green guy now has a more human demeanor (replete with an Old Navy-esque vest and cargo shorts), and you guide him through a half-assed console port by jumping, splitting out loopies, and performing frog fu chops. That isn’t too bad, but the uninspired, me-too gameplay and the problems that come with 3D platforming titles—plagues Frogger: The Great Quest every hop of the way.

Saying the camera controls are hard to manage as you try to navigate your way through the game is a gross understatement. Whether you are climbing up a tree (I’m assuming so you can hang yourself) or spelunking in a cavern, even the most basic areas become a constant battle of readjusting the camera angle on the fly. But the really annoying thing to watch is the painfully ported graphics.

The god-awful grainy graphics (maybe 800x600 resolution—if I’m being kind) should be considered a felony. OK, so maybe I’m not the target audience for this game. Maybe I’m being overly harsh here. But for the money that they’re asking, I could just as easily snag a title that’s a whole lot less offensive to my senses—for example, Rayman.

On its best day, Frogger is just a pale imitation of a good platforming title. The only thing “great” about this quest is finally being done with it. Hell, the fact that I needed to come back and revisit Frogger to fill up this much space on a page has made this my own personal Vietnam. Ribbit.

VERDICT

This game will make you wish he got run over by a truck back in 1983.
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PC
CD-ROM
Software

TEEN Violence
The city's ghoul invasion barely registers for our hero. But a shopping cart in someone's apartment? Now that's weird.

Silent Hill 2
No thrills and maybe two chills by Erik Wolpaw

Silent Hill 2 may be the world's first survival-Dada game.

The Silent Hill 2 box cover folds open to reveal small, dark screenshots amid enthusiastic quotes from reviews of the original PS2 version. Stuff magazine warns, "Don't play this terrifying action game alone," while Maxim calls it "hands-down the creepiest videogame ever." It's possible that America's men's lifestyle magazines somehow mislead confusion for terror, because Silent Hill 2 doesn't make much sense even when judged against the already lax sense-making standards of the survival-horror genre. Which might be excusable if it was scary—which it isn't—or if it featured decent combat—which it doesn't.

As the game starts, you've received a letter from your dead wife asking you to meet her in a town called Silent Hill. The search for her unfolds with a sort of dream logic—the logic that leads people to believe you'd be interested in hearing their boring dreams. Every character you run across appears to have one foot in a plot from some other game. Most of the dialogue and character actions make no sense, especially considering that the streets of Silent Hill are filled with monsters on a killing rampage. People go from being sarcastic to fearful to your best pal to your worst enemy, all within the span of a sentence. Virtually every word from the characters' mouths is as senseless as the puzzles. And it's all accompanied by a hugely inappropriate light-jazz soundtrack. Silent Hill 2 may be the world's first survival-Dada game.

Your main enemy is a beefy guy in a butcher's smock wearing what looks like a rusty sink on his head. To be fair, Pyramid Head (as he's called) is a weirdly creepy invention. Other than that, though, Silent Hill 2 is all hackneyed atmosphere and no payoff. The city is blanketed in thick fog (later replaced by thick inky blackness). For fog to inspire terror, however, it needs to obscure something terrifying. Instead, it merely obscures the places you need to go and the crazy objects you need to find to solve the harebrained puzzles, making the fog significantly more aggravating than scary.

The graphics engine is fully 3D, but the camera isn't really under your control. Command that rotates the camera behind you, but it only works sporadically. These camera problems, combined with stiff, awkward controls and a lack of monster variety, make combat very unsatisfying. With its backadasilical pace, clumsy action sequences, and surreal atmosphere that's more disjointed and disturbing, Silent Hill 2 is a nightmare, but only to play.

Verdict

It'll bore you... to death.

This wouldn't be such a puzzler if he'd just remember that the town is overrun with terrifying monsters.
Tsushima

By Raphael Liberatore

John Tiller and his development team are known for creating top-notch wargames without the "messy distraction" of eye candy. Tsushima, the second installment from HPS Simulations' Naval Campaigns series, offers balanced playability rarely seen in war simulations.

For those left out of military-history circles, Tsushima was a ferocious naval battle fought during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The Japanese Imperial navy defeated Russia's Baltic fleet near the Straits of Tsushima in 1905, and this decisive engagement ultimately dictated the outcome of the war.

Simplistic in design, Tsushima allows players to pick either the Russian or Japanese side, or both, with the eventual outcome resting solely on a player's strategic acumen. The tactical naval engagements are fought in real time and are balanced by the Objectives feature, which makes otherwise lopsided scenarios playable. You won't need to destroy the entire enemy fleet that outnumbers you three to one in order to score a win.

Many factors are involved in successfully commanding your fleet. You must understand the capabilities of the various steamships, including primary and secondary ranges, torpedo attacks, mines, opening and closing ranges, as well as ship speeds and damage assessments. Managing all of this and fighting against the deft A.I. can be daunting at times, especially if you're using the Fog of War option. However, there are several speeds of play, and you can issue orders while paused.

The game also provides a simulation of the smaller, individual portions of the epic battle. There's an alternate version where the Russians get to combine their Baltic and Pacific fleets for a massive engagement with the Imperial navy. Tsushima includes the battles of Yellow Sea and Ulsan, fought during the Russo-Japanese War, which allows the game to offer a variety of scenarios.

Tsushima has a multiplayer experience with more than two players (only one Admiral per side), and it comes with a full-featured scenario editor, allowing you to create and modify scenarios using a chart overlay along with naval charts of actual battles. If you're a naval tactician or a wargamer, then Tsushima is for you.

VERDICT

John Tiller takes another obscure conflict in history and makes it playable.

If Tsushima's battles get out of control, slow down the game speed or hit the Pause button in order to reassess your strategy.

---

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Neocron
In the future, life is...boring by George Jones

GAME STATS
PUBLISHER: CDV SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: REAKTOR MEDIA
GENRE: MMORPG
RATING: MATURE; SEXUAL
THEMES: STRONG LANGUAGE,
USE OF DRUGS; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99; $9.99 PER
MONTH; REQUIRED: PENTIUM II, 32MB RAM, 1.4GB HARD
DRIVE SPACE; 56K MODEM
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 128MB
RAM, HIGH-SPEED INTERNET
CONNECTION; MULTIPLIER
SUPPORT: LOT'S AND LOT'S

It's not often that pacing
problems plague a massively
multiplayer RPG. More often
than not, this is a genre that
overwhelms and paralyzes gamers with way too
much, way too soon. But not Neocron.
From the moment you enter CDV
Software's postapocalyptic online world,
you'll be confused, bored...and lonely.
Which is a shame, because as far as
concepts go Neocron has promise.
But structure and setting aren't
enough these days. Not anymore--we
gamers need fundamentally strong
gameplay in our online experiences to
stay interested and occupied. Falling
that, we at least need a large,
enthusiastic community in the game
world. Neocron, unfortunately, falls
shortly on both fronts.
Clue number one that Neocron is on
the wrong track: to get into the game's
backstory, you have to read 16 pages of
text at the back of the manual. What a
bummer--it's an interesting postapocalyptic
setting that should have been conveyed
in the context of the gameplay. Clue
number two comes the moment you exit
your alter ego's apartment and enter
the game world. You only have two apparent
options to build up your wealth: courier
missions or combat. Both will provide
a mind-numbing halt to your enthusiasm
for Neocron.
The courier missions consist of moving
from one part of the city to another,
picking up a package, then delivering it.
Yawn. The upside of these missions is
that you get to take in the spectacular
sights and sounds of the city, but still.
So, this leaves you with combat.
However, if you didn't select the
GenTank (genetically modified human
tank) character type, the typical newbie
diet of rats, roaches, and bats is going to
repeatedly kick your ass. Thankfully,
when you die, you respawn in your
apartment, where you only have to pay
200 credits to retrieve your backpack
and belongings. The problem is that you
start with 600 credits. Die four times
and you're out of cash, with no way to
get your belongings back until you get
more money. Oooh--looks like it's back to
being a delivery boy.
It's all so frustrating and depressing--
haven't MMORPGs evolved beyond these
basic boring notions of gameplay?
Open-ended online play does not mean
directionless, slow-paced gaming where
you have to pay your dues for hours
before anything exciting happens. Who's
going to wait around for that?
These game design issues are
compounded by recurring server errors
and crashes. And then there's the
lackluster social nature of the world.
Most of Neocron is a ghost town, utterly
devoid of human characters, which feels
decidedly nonfuturistic. While a
community of gamers does exist, it
tends to congregate in a few choice
spots that you'll have to stumble upon.
Unfortunately, gamers in Neocron aren't
all that friendly. You'll get answers to
your questions, but that's about it.
As you play deeper into the game,
Neocron does become a little more
entertaining and complex, with grander
missions and greater intrigue. But as it
stands, very few gamers will make it that
far--certainly not at the rate of 10 bucks
a month.

From the moment you enter CDV Software's
postapocalyptic online world, you'll be
confused, bored...and lonely.

VERDICT
Reakkto Media's shouldn't have
spent less time on Neocron's
look and more time on the
game's feel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>VERDICT</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America’s Army: Operations</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and it’s totally free</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonia III</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Deeper and better thought-out than many prettier</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MMORPGs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield 1942</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>The Multiplayer Game of the Year is a complete</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>blast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle Realms: Winter of</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Often dull and unchallenging, it adds little to</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Wolf</td>
<td></td>
<td>Battle Realms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilization III: Play the</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Inexcusably buggy as shipped; unplayable without</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td></td>
<td>the patch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat Flight Simulator 3</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Launched without adequate flight testing</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat Mission: Barbarossa</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>The closest thing we have to the perfect wargame</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Berlin</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadly Dozen: Pacific</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Budget price with better-than-average gameplay</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Divinity</td>
<td>12/02</td>
<td>An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and worst</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon’s Lair 3D: Return</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Buggy, poorly designed, and disappointing, it’s</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the Lair</td>
<td></td>
<td>still better than the arcade version</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth &amp; Beyond</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>EverQuest in space</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls III:</td>
<td>8/02</td>
<td>No surprise that the definitive, open-ended RPG is</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td></td>
<td>our RPG of 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls III:</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>This expansion hits on both the strengths and</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunal</td>
<td></td>
<td>weaknesses of Morrowind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EverQuest: Planes of Power</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>More fuel for the fires of die-hard EQ fans</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIFA 2003</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>A good soccer game with World Cup-quality</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>graphics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost Recon: Island</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>Stop-natch mission pack makes a good game into</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder</td>
<td></td>
<td>an outstanding one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.I. Combat</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>It’s Close Combat gone 3D and gone bad</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearts of Iron</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>An enormously ambitious WII strategy game with a</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lot of flaws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegemonia: Legions of</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Not enough strategy, not enough game</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitman 2: Silent Assassin</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Storm</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>A boring, buggy Medal of Honor title, with bad A.I.</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Bond 007: NightFire</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Almost got the first-ever half-star rating in CGW</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>The best MechWarrior yet</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medal of Honor Allied</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Taut, well-scripted add-on that’s just too short</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault: Spearhead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval: Total War</td>
<td>12/02</td>
<td>The ultimate historical strategy game</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASCAR Thunder 2003</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Solid, but not the same caliber as Rappor’s NASCAR Racing 2002</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>One of the best high-octane racing experiences around</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL 2003</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>The same old arcade hockey game, with updated rosters and downgraded A.I.</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No One Lives Forever 2</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Flashpoint:</td>
<td>10/02</td>
<td>Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.R.B.</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>This Homeworld clone abandons much of what that game did well</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plateau</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Every bit as bad as you’d expect it to be</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Nomads</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Pretty floating islands crash on the shores of mediocre gameplay</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RailSport Challenge</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>The fun of the Xbox version doesn’t quite make the jump to PC</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Hood: The Legend of</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>A fresh, deep squad-based game in the Commandos vein</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherwood</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RollerCoaster Tycoon 2</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SimCity 4</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>A fresh, gorgeous take on a classic, but you’ll need a beefy computer to run it</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers of Anarchy</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Save time and money and pull Fallout Tactics from your local bargain bin</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Trek: Starfleet</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>The Next Gen license is wasted on a game a few big patches away from being good</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command 3</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strike Fighters: Project</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Months of bug fixes, polish, and user-mods away from being worth your money</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Better than Links: the way Tiger is better than you</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasure Planet</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Starfleet Command for kids, with rocket-powered sailing vessels</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal Tournament 2003</td>
<td>1/03</td>
<td>Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revolitilzed gameplay</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WarCraft III: Reign of the</td>
<td>9/02</td>
<td>A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worms Blast</td>
<td>2/03</td>
<td>Worms goes Bust a Move and loses something in the process</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>If you gotta have whales and seals in your zoo, buy it</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CGW Recommends**

**Asheron’s Call 2: Fallen Kings ★★★★★**

With the original overshadowed by EverQuest, this first big next-gen MMORPG come with a bit of a chip on its shoulder. While it hasn’t totally blown us away, AQZ is doing a lot of things right: a great newbie experience, stellar graphics, and a forgiving skill system that makes sense.

**Arx Fatalis ★★★★★**

We admit our expectations weren’t the highest for this out-of-nowhere, French-developed Ultima Underworld wannabe, but maybe that’s why we were initially wowed. But by the time we finished the game, Arx had earned our respect, not just beaten our lowered expectations. It may have the most annoying interface of any RPG ever, but it looks great, plays better, and is as worthy of your time as any of the more ballyhooed RPQs from 2002.

**Splinter Cell ★★★★★**

Once upon a time, console ports were the absolute dregs of PC gaming—uniformly horrible, garish, buggy, wastes of time and money. Not any longer—if GT3 didn’t convince you those days were over, Splinter Cell definitely will. Loaded with atmosphere and cool gadgets, this amazing first-person sneaker is even better on the PC thanks to sharper graphics and mouse-look.
FINALLY, AN LCD THAT WON'T LET GAMERS DOWN

Hitachi's 17-inch flat panel is a gamer's dream come true.

Everyone wants an LCD monitor: The technology is hot, and it's taking the industry by storm. Furthermore, LCD monitors are more than just easy on the eyes; they're also ergonomic masterpieces capable of making tired old colors look bright and scintillating. But although everyone agrees that flat panels are damn sexy, LCD monitors have historically had a couple of huge downsides that leave the average gamer unwilling to buy one: price and resolution.

The fact remains that purchasing a decent 17-inch or 19-inch LCD monitor is going to sink you into a very deep hole. Add to that limited resolution and refresh rates, and it's no wonder that gamers shy away from them. Who wants to limit their Radeon 9700 Pro or GeForce4 Ti 4600 GPU to playing Unreal Tournament 2003 at 1280x720 simply because that's the highest resolution your monitor can handle?

By Raphael Liberatore  Photography by Arnold Tiosejo
Hitachi’s 17-inch CML174 LCD monitor, though, comes packed with innovation. It has a sleek enclosure and small bezel, which makes it the smallest 17-inch LCD on the planet using both DVI-D and analog. It also comes with a five-year warranty, making this one of the better values on the market. Viewing angles are more relaxed with the CML174’s SuperView technology, which provides a full 160 to 170 degree range. That’s especially nice considering how restrictive LCD viewing angles tend to be—basically, you have to sit directly in front of them to get the best visual.

Firing up a couple of games of Age of Mythology, Battlefield 1942, and Unreal Tournament 2003 in 1280x1024 at 60Hz showed excellent image quality. Saturation and clarity also are top notch, with blues and reds really shining through. The screen’s faster response times kept the action from choking. As a matter of fact, the 12 millisecond and 135MHz video clock frequency are way better than any other LCD monitor in its class. It has a lot to brag about.

If you crave an LCD monitor for gaming, then the CML174 is the one to get. Take it for us, you won’t be disappointed.

VERDICT 
Hitachi proves gaming on a 17-inch LCD is, in fact, rewarding.

The CML174 monitor comes packed with innovation.

Many Cards in One From Hercules
Gaming action takes on an entirely different perspective

K, you’re probably asking, “What the hell is a DV imaging card review doing in a computer gaming rag?” Good question. It may seem as though we’ve been hanging out at the bar with Wil a little too much, but we just thought you’d be interested in something cool from a company known for its quality gaming components. Hercules has been offering a plethora of video and audio cards for years, and the company has made watching and creating DVD movies on your gaming rig a treat.

So, what’s with the DV Action Pro? It’s really several cards in one. First and foremost, it’s a video editing card that allows you to create your own DVDs, CDs, and other media in MPEG1 and MPEG2 formats. The user-friendly software packages are extremely easy to learn, and the ShuttlePRO device is easy to navigate. Just drag and drop your scenes, music, titles, commentaries, transitions, and special effects with programs like MediaStudio Pro, DVD Authoring, or 3D Cool. Pretty neat, eh?

Second, and more to the point, the DV Action Pro allows you to play movies in DVDs, SVCDs, VCDs, and other media on your PC and home DVD player, creating less of a bottleneck on the processor. To use the DV Action Pro as a video capture card, you can attach a PAL or NTSC capable camcorder in any of the three FireWire ports. You can even capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and then e-mail them to all your buddies.

Now the world can have the DVD full of your gaming highlights that it’s been clamoring for.

VERDICT
It’s not technically a gaming device. But heck, knowledge is power, right?

You can capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and e-mail them to your buddies.
It's totally lethal. The amazing RADEON™ 9700 PRO is the fastest board powered by ATI's VPU technology, delivering the ultimate 3D gaming experience. It's the first to provide 8 pipelines for twice the rendering power. The first to fully support DirectX® 9.0. And the first to deliver the highest level of realism possible. Now you're unstoppable.
Affordable and Effective Optical Storage
A perfect CD-RW solution by Joel Durham

I take a near-perfect product to get this picky reviewer to type "none" in the cons category. However, with its CRW-4012A USB 2.0 External CD-RW drive, Asus has constructed quite a marvel: It does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

With speeds of 40x (write), 12x (rewrite), and 48x (read), it's a solid, state-of-the-art drive. Asus concentrates on usability, forgoing fancy-pants, tongue-style styling for functionality. The CRW-4012A is a simple computer-remarkably well, comparable to any internal unit. It wrote a 75MB file to a CD-R in 74 seconds, matching the time it took on an IDE 40x/16x/40x drive on the same PC to write the file. Both drives' transfer rates maxed around 41x, a bit ahead of spec. Asus' CPU utilization was lower than that of the internal drive, requiring only 6 percent of the processor's power for 8x transfers versus the internal drive's 10 percent. The Asus drive's only limitation is true for any external drive: It doesn't play audio CDs through the system speakers.

Asus has constructed quite a marvel:
The CRW-4012A does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

beige rectangle, 9x6x2 inches. It requires its own AC power and comes with a small adapter, and it's as portable as any product in its category.

Asus went all out on the documentation, including a friendly 26-page manual (we didn't know there was that much to say about a CD drive) and a foldout quick-start guide. Also included is a copy of Ahead Nero Burning ROM 5, an exceptional audio and data CD-burning software package.

In testing, the drive performed remarkably well, comparable to any internal unit. It wrote a 75MB file to a CD-R in 74 seconds, matching the time it took on an IDE 40x/16x/40x drive on the same PC to write the file. Both drives' transfer rates maxed around 41x, a bit ahead of spec. Asus' CPU utilization was lower than that of the internal drive, requiring only 6 percent of the processor's power for 8x transfers versus the internal drive's 10 percent.

The Asus drive's only limitation is true for any external drive: It doesn't play audio CDs through the system speakers.

VERDICT
Asus' External CD-RW drive is sleek, speedy, and easy to use.

Wear Your Condoms and Save Your Driver Disks!

The other day, I decided to install an AMD Athlon 2 card on my work rig: a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 with 1GB of DDR, a Radeon 9700 Pro, and an Intel DB455G motherboard.

I installed the card and proceeded with the driver installation…which was about 95 percent complete when the machine mysteriously rebooted, causing me to put my head in my hands and mutter, "Oh crap!!"

Eventually, the machine rebooted, but the hard drive was churning like an Amish farmer making butter. In my Device Manager, something called the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator "wasn't working," and neither was my Plextor CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo drive. I muttered some more, "This can't be good."

To make a long story short, the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator is, apparently, kind of important, not to mention difficult to reinstall. I poked around in my registry, but alas, that didn't help.

After a couple hours of dealing with that (and my IT guy reminding me that I'm "officially not supported by Ziff Davis"), I decided to build an entirely new rig. I yanked out my motherboard and hard drive and installed VIA's P4PB-400, 1GB of Corsair memory, and an 80GB hard drive "borrowed" from a machine I reviewed (I hope the manufacturer doesn't remember the machine it sent me had a RAID). I also put in a Radeon 9700 Pro and a 2.6GHz Pentium 4.

The physical installation took about 15 minutes, but I had misplaced the driver disk for the motherboard. Well, it took me all friggin' day to get that machine up and running. And the lesson I learned and am sharing with you all is this: Never, ever throw away driver disks.
SAVAGE™

Command Your Warriors  Or Engage In Battle

Real Time Strategy Shooter

COMING 2003

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If you’ve played such online games as Unreal Tournament or Battlefield 1942, you’ve no doubt encountered both good and bad game servers. When you find a good server, it’s akin to finding a little patch of heaven: The players are considerate (even as they hunt you down), the team-killers are absent, and your own side always seems to be in the groove. But, after a while, gaming on other people’s servers may seem stale. If that’s the case, it may be time for you to host your own.

If you’ve got a broadband connection, this can definitely be fun. But, as with most things PC gaming, there are pitfalls and difficulties to consider.

First, having a broadband connection doesn’t mean you can instantly put a server on the Net. You need to be aware of a few details about your setup:

- Is it always on, or is it a virtual dial-up connection, such as PPPoE? If it’s an always-on connection, putting up a server is as easy as launching an app. But if you have PPPoE, you’ll need to set up some type of virtual autodialer to keep the connection live. Many broadband routers can do this.

- What does your ISP think about your server scheme? Read the terms and conditions of your ISP contract; you may be expressly prevented from running any type of server.

- How many IP addresses do you have? If you have just a single address dynamically assigned by your ISP, then running a 24/7 server may not be practical, even if you’re using a router. Still, you can run a server for hours at a stretch (like when you’re in bed). You might want to consider investing in a second, dedicated IP address, which often comes at an additional charge.

- Do you have a good hardware broadband router? Putting your lone PC on the Net as a server means potential exposure to script kiddies and other unfriendly people who would be very happy to use your system as a slave for their denial of service attacks.

- If you have a router, it’s worth learning the ins and outs of techniques like port forwarding or port triggering. These allow you to set up game servers without exposing the system to the harsh realities of hacker life on the Net.

- Don’t forget your upstream speed. Some servers consume relatively little upstream speed. Others, like Battlefield 1942, consume as much as 32Kbps of upstream speed per player. A typical cable connection maxes out at 128Kbps upstream, or perhaps 256Kbps if you’re lucky. Trying to run a 32-player BF1942 server on this type of connection is like trying to drink an Icee with a cocktail straw: You can do it, but it’ll be a frustrating experience.

If you still think you want to set a system up as a game server, then there are just a few other details you need to know. First, find out if the game has a dedicated server package. Most shooters do, and few other multiplayer games do as well. A dedicated server doesn’t need a lot of beefy audio or graphics hardware.

Do some upfront research on the particular game you want to serve up. Become familiar with the needed commands, learn about connection logs, and be prepared to log on periodically as the administrator and boot out unruly people. Also, to help attract the right type of players, consider a server name that’s somewhat evocative of what you’re trying to present to the world.

You can also dip your toes more gradually into this strange and wonderful universe. Start by offering a password-protected server that only select people can connect to, and be careful about who gets the password. In the end, being the guy with the server is like being the host of a party: Whether or not people—and you, for that matter—have a good time is directly proportional to the amount of effort and passion you bring to your venture.

Finally, drop me an e-mail at loyd_case@zifdavis.com and let me know your server name. Some enchanted evening, I just might drop in.
Tech Medics

You've got questions, I'm not very helpful By William O'Neal

"Dude! You're getting a Dell!"

I am thinking about buying a Dell Dimension desktop PC because of the price. In the January issue you said, "One consistent knock against Dell is its machines' use of proprietary motherboards." Do I need to be that concerned about Dell's proprietary motherboards? Are their motherboards trash? Does Dell provide BIOS updates as needed? And lastly, their video and audio are actually cards and not built into the motherboard, right? I just wanted to make sure that their motherboards aren't flaky before I buy one.

Brent

Dell's motherboards are by no means "flaky" or "trash": in fact, I've never really had any problems with Dell motherboards. In my experience, though, Dell's motherboards aren't as fast as those made by other manufacturers, like Asus, Intel, or Abit. That said, with top of the line machines, we're talking about rigs that score 15,500 in 3DMark2001 with Dell motherboards, as opposed to 16,000 with competitors' motherboards. It's like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari. As far as support is concerned, Dell offers BIOS updates and I've always had an easy time finding drivers for their products on their website. And lastly, they do offer machines with onboard audio and video, but I would shy away from those configurations. For instance, the machine that I tested in January shipped with ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card and an Audigy 2 soundcard. You can't beat that.

Keep your money

I have a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor and I was wondering if I should go ahead and upgrade to the 3.06GHz Processor and wait for Asus to release their new BIOS for Hyper Threading, or just wait till an even faster processor comes out? Also, do you have any idea when Nvidia will release their new videocard?

Oberco

I don't think there's any gaming-related reason to upgrade from a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 to a 3GHz Pentium 4. Hyper Threading (HT) might be cool if you use applications that can take advantage of multiple processors, but since games don't, your money is better spent somewhere else.

"Comparing their motherboards is like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari."

Spend your money

Which is more powerful, the GeForce3 Ti 500, or the GeForce4 Ti 4200? Both are around the same price on the Fry's Electronics website. Also, can you suggest a good set of speakers in the $50 to $90 range? Thanks for the help, and I don't know why you get so much hate mail—you seem to know your stuff.

Jake

Get the GeForce4 Ti 4200. A good, inexpensive speaker set is the Inspire 2.1 2500 set from Creative Labs.

The Internet is your friend

I decided to get the Radeon 9700 Pro after reading a review by some guy in a gaming magazine. I opened up the box and discovered that it says I need Windows XP, 2000, or ME. I am still running 98SE, since it is pretty stable and has handled everything I do. Do I really need to change to XP for this card? Or is there another option?

Tom B.

I went to mirror.ati.com/support /driver.html and found 98SE drivers.

Emulation nation, baby!

Do any of the PC emulators for Macs actually work? I know you did a Mac review recently, and I like Macs better (I use them for video editing), but I am an addicted gamer. Are any of these good enough to support newer games?

David

I forwarded your message to Raphael Liberatore, CGW contributor and Mac guru, and this is what he had to say: "If you're talking about PC emulators like Virtual PC, they don't work well for gaming, especially if you're into shooters like Operation Flashpoint and Counter-Strike. The lag is noticeable even with a Dual 1GHz and GeForce4 Ti videocard. However, Virtual PC is functional with games like Celtic Kings and Age of Mythology."

Well, there you have it. You may have to pony up for a PC.
Killer Rigs
The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming system By William O'Neal

It's all about the components, kids!
People have been jumping down my throat because of my Leon Machine price. However, it's important to remember that my machine simply serves as a guideline. If you're on a strict budget, then swapping my 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro with a 128MB Radeon 9000 Pro will save you more than $150. Furthermore, going with a 550 16x Toshiba DVD-ROM drive as opposed to my Plexor Combo Drive will shave off an additional $100. If that isn't enough, you can go to a website like Pricegrabber.com and find an OEM copy of Windows XP Home for as low as $90. That alone will save you an additional $25! So, how's that for a lean machine? Methinks that $1,195 ain't too shabby.

Watch as Wil removes his foot from his mouth!
In the February issue I said, "Asus" AT78X Deluxe (nForce2-based) is a rock-solid Socket-A KT-400 motherboard.... Well, as many of you pointed out, a motherboard cannot boast both nForce2 and KT-400 chipsets. It is, in fact, an nForce2-based mobo. Now, if Jeff Green would just stop making me take those U.S. Air Force-issued Go pills in order to, in his words, "increase my productivity," I'm sure I'd stop making mistakes.

If only Jeff Green would stop making me take Go pills.

**POWER RIG**

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*1024X768X32, NO PSAA*
HITMAN 2: WIN FAST

Provided by Eidos and I/O Interactive

ANATHEMA
+ KILL THE DON
+ GAIN ENTRANCE TO THE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT
Enter the don's compound, then go to the garage and grab the sniper rifle that's next to the car. Without being seen or heard, snipe the don from within the compound walls. Enter his mansion and get the key off his body, then head to the basement. Use the key to enter the basement room, then turn around and run out of the compound and down the dirt road to complete the level.

ST. PETERSBURG STAKEOUT
+ KILL THE CORRECT GENERAL
+ DON'T HARM ANYONE ELSE
Get the sniper rifle from the locker in the train station. Go to the apartment building indicated on the map and look through any of the windows facing the Pushkin building to see the meeting taking place. Wait for Diana's description of the general and kill the right one. Get back on the train to complete the level.

KIROV PARK MEETING
+ KILL GENERAL MAKAROV AND HIS MAFIA BUDDY
Get the car bombs from the pick-up spot shown on the map. Then, go into the sewers and use the map to find the manhole closest to the bottom of the map. Attach a bomb to the underside of the car parked over the manhole. Next, head to the manhole closest to the top of the map. Wait for the limo driver to walk by the willie in the corner; kill him, take his clothes, and walk (don't run) to the limo and place the car bomb on it. Then, get back to your boat to finish the level.

TUBEWAY TORPEDO
+ FIND THE REMOTE BOMB
+ KILL YET ANOTHER GENERAL
+ FREE THE PRISONER
First, find the remote bomb and locate the elevator heading into the basement (it's a lot faster if you kill a guard and take his clothes). Use Stealth all the way to the bottom level; on the way, there is a security control box you should disable. Kill the general in the second basement and talk to the prisoner. Use your map to find the exit. You'll have to blow up a wall, using the remote bomb, to get into the sewer; it's shown as a point of interest on the map.

INVITATION TO A PARTY
+ KILL THE FOURTH GENERAL
+ SECURE THE SUITCASE
Dress up as a waiter, get the poison (find the pick-up spot on the map), and take a champagne glass from the kitchen. Poison the champagne and walk up to the general; he will take the drink. The ambassador will be the only person whose icon on the map is white. Stay with him until he opens the safe. Kill him, take the suitcase, and go back to the boat.

TRACKING HAYAMOTO
+ KILL HAYAMOTO JR.
+ PLANT A BUG ON HAYAMOTO JR.'S CORPSE
As soon as this mission starts, head to the front door of the house and kill anyone in your way. Walk right up to Hayamoto Jr.; kill him and everyone else in the room. Plant the bug on his body and run to the exit.
HOW TO...

HIDDEN VALLEY
+ THERE ARE REALLY NO OBJECTIVES FOR THIS LEVEL
Just kill a ninja, take his clothes, and use the underground passage to reach the exit.

SHOGUN SHOWDOWN
+ KILL HAYAMOTO SR.
+ SECURE THE MISSILE GUIDANCE SYSTEM
First, stealth your way to the missile guidance system in the museum under the basement. You'll need a keycard to avoid setting off any alarms; all guards carry them. Then head to the top floor and kill Hayamoto. Get in the helicopter on the ground floor to complete the level.

AT THE GATES
+ GET TO THE CASTLE UNDETECTED
If you use a sniper rifle, you can get to the castle without being seen. Shoot the generator that's to the right of the castle. Inside the castle are two security panels that you must activate. Then find the exit.

THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT
+ PLANT THE HACKING DEVICE
+ EXIT ON THE SKY BRIDGE
Locate the system administration room on your map. Go there and snatch the keycard off the desk. Then head to the server room. Place the hacking device on the computer and get to the far end of the sky bridge to exit the level. Use a silenced gun on this level or you'll have to kill every single guard.

BASEMENT KILLING
+ KILL CHARLIE SIDJAN
+ DISABLE THE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM
Obtain the smoke bomb from the pickup spot shown on the map. Set it off anywhere and head to the fire department room. Dress up like a fireman and you'll be given access to the basement via the stairs. Use your map to find Charlie in the basement. Next, head to the elevator near the surveillance screen, in the basement. Shoot the screen and get on the elevator.

THE JACUZZI JOB
+ KILL THE OTHER CHARLIE SIDJAN (TWIN BROTHER WITH THE SAME NAME)
+ STEAL THE MONEY
+ STEAL THE STATUE
This is a small level with only a few guards, so your best bet is just to kill everyone on the level. A machine gun will come in handy. Open the safe (an alarm will sound, but don't worry about it) and take the money that's in it. Then grab the statue off the pedestal in the room with the piano. Kill Charlie in the hot tub and call the elevator. A group of security guards will be waiting when the doors open; kill them and get on the elevator to exit the level.

MURDER AT THE BAZAAR
+ KILL LIEUTENANT AHMED ZAHIR
+ GET THE MAP FROM THE LIEUTENANT
+ KILL COL. MOHAMMAD AMIN
+ GET THE KEY FROM THE COLONEL
Go to the guard quarters. Grab the Dragunov rifle and shoot the men outside. This will make Col. Amin run toward you. Snipe him as soon as possible, so he doesn't escape. Pick up the key from his body, then snipe the men outside Lt. Zahir's shack. Enter the shack and kill the lieutenant. Take the map from his body. Then take his clothes and run to the exit.
**THE MOTORCADE INTERCEPTION**

* GET THE .50-CALIBER SNIPER RIFLE FROM YOUR CONTACT  
* KILL THE KAHN  
* DON'T KILL ANY U.N. GUARDS

First, snipe every guard on the level; they're easy to kill from a distance, and killing them now will make things easier for you later. Next, find your contact and get the M-195, a .50-caliber sniper rifle. Find a set of stairs that leads to a ladder to the rooftop. Wait there for the convoy. When it's close to you, shoot the engine of the first jeep with the M-195 (only the M-195 rifle will stop a car). Then snipe the Kahn through the windshield of the limo. Run to the exit and don't kill anyone wearing a blue helmet.

**TEMPLE CITY AMBUSH**

* MEET WITH THE AGENCY'S CONTACT  
* MEET WITH YOUR CIA BUDDY  
* KILL BOTH ASSASSINS AND TAKE PICTURES OF THEIR BODIES

First, head directly to the red hitman insignia indicated on the map. After you talk to the agency's contact, head to the next insignia, then find the two assassins in the marketplace (one is wearing a New York Yankees hat, the other a yellow Gilligan's Island-type hat). Kill them and take their pictures with the camera the second contact gave you. Take the pictures back to the second contact (the red insignia will still be on the map), then find the exit on the map to complete the level.

**TERMINAL HOSPITALITY**

* KILL THE CULT LEADER

The easiest way to complete this level is with a heavy machine gun. Sneak all the way to the back right-hand side of the main building, where you'll find a locked door. Shoot at it, and guards will run out. Kill everyone that comes out, and then head inside and shoot the cult leader (he'll be on one of the operating tables). Go back to the exit, keep shooting Agent 17 until he leaves, and get in the boat to complete the level.

**TUNNEL RAT**

* KILL YUSSEF HUSSEIN  
* TRANSPORT THE CARGO TO THE SURFACE

Enter the base via either entrance. Kill only those you must and sneak up to Hussein's room. Kill him and take his clothes. Find the cargo by using your map. Transport it to the surface and kill the guards outside.

**THE DEATH OF HANDELOR**

* GET THE KEY TO THE HIDING PLACE  
* KILL DR. VON KAMPRAD  
* HIDE DR. KAMPRAD'S BODY  
* KILL NO CIVILIANS

Gain entrance to the hospital (killing one guard and taking his clothes is the easiest way). Find the hitman insignia on the map; the key you must obtain is in this room. Next, you will see a point of interest indicated on the first floor map. Go there and put on the white patient clothes (a robe and slippers). On the way to Dr. Kamprad's office, talk to the nurse in the first floor main lobby. She'll take you directly to Dr. Kamprad. Kill the doctor and drag him to the hiding place indicated on the map. Be careful; if anyone sees her dead body, you'll fail the mission. Once she's hidden, find the exit to complete the level.

**ST. PETERSBURG REVISITED**

* KILL AGENT 17

Regardless of the direction from which you approach the Pushkin building, Agent 17 will be snooping at you from the closest window. To get past him, run straight at him while sidestepping back and forth. Don't run too close to the building or the guards inside will become alerted. Stop running when you are just out of Agent 17's view, and walk to the front door. Inside, locate Agent 17, sneak behind him, and use the fiber wire on him. Take his clothes and gun, and walk past the guards outside. Then go into the sewers. Snipe one of the two guards that you see here, take his clothes, and walk to the exit to complete the level.
SET UP A RAID CONFIG

Looking to squeeze as much power as possible from your system? Set up a RAID configuration. By Joel Durham

Most folks have one hard drive in their computer, and they hardly ever think about it unless something goes wrong. Other than optimizing your hard drive for performance, there's little anyone can do to overcome its primary characteristics in hopes of speeding up access and transfer rates or making it less likely to suffer a data-corrupting heart attack.

RAID, which stands for redundant array of inexpensive (or independent, depending on who you ask) disks, can solve those problems for you. While there are many levels, or types, of RAID, we're going to go through the most commonly used consumer ATA RAID approaches.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

To get started with RAID, you'll need a pair of hard drives (two identical drives work best), one ATA 100/133 cable for each drive, and a RAID controller. While more and more motherboards have RAID controllers built in, they're also available as an expansion card. Check your motherboard documentation to see if there's a RAID controller on the mobo, or just open your case and have a look. There will be two extra 40-pin IDE connectors (often labeled IDE 3 and IDE 4) if you're RAID enabled. If you must purchase a RAID controller card, look for something of high quality, like Adaptec's ATA RAID 1200A.

WHICH RAID FLAVOR DO YOU WANT?

The two versions of RAID found on non-server motherboards are RAID 0 and RAID 1. They're very different in their purposes. RAID 0, or striping RAID, writes and reads data simultaneously across both hard drives. Since the work of one drive is being done by two, data transfer to and from the RAID array becomes very efficient.

RAID 1, however, is for data protection. Using RAID 1, the computer writes identical data to both drives in the array, creating a perfect fail-safe should one of the drives go bad. It gives you time to swap out the dead drive and replace it, and the computer remains fully functional throughout the repair process.

In either case, the computer sees only one drive because the drives work in virtual synergy with one another. In RAID 1, it sees the drives bearing the capacity of only one drive in other words, if you bought two 120GB drives, RAID 1 will see them as one 120GB drive. In RAID 0, it sees one huge 240GB drive.

It's worth noting that RAID 0 doubles your chances of losing all of your data to a hard drive failure. Since the data is spread from one drive to the next, when one drive goes down, the other is rendered useless.

CONNECTING THE HARD DRIVES

This is the most straightforward step in this handy guide. Connect the drives with the proper cables either to your motherboard's RAID slots or your RAID expansion card. Give each hard drive its own channel (or connector), and make sure its jumpers are set to solo/master. Be sure to secure each drive tightly in its case. Now that you've got all those ribbon cables crammed in there, you might want to tidy them up for the sake of airflow. Use plastic cable ties to hold them in place. Never use something metal, like those little twist ties that come on loaves of bread.
MAKE SURE RAID IS ENABLED

Most RAID-equipped motherboards have an option in their BIOS setup programs to disable the RAID controller. Enter your setup program (you can usually do this by pressing DEL during the power-up self test). Check around for a RAID option; depending on the motherboard, it could be anywhere from "advanced chipset features" to "onboard devices." Make sure RAID is enabled. Of course, if you purchased a RAID card, you can skip this step.

CONFIGURING THE RAID BIOS

After the initial power-on tests, you'll be given a short grace period to enter the RAID's BIOS screen. This is different from the main PC's BIOS screen. It's in here that you check to see if your drives are recognized and choose how to implement RAID. Remember, RAID 0 is for speed, RAID 1 is for protection.

A typical RAID BIOS will let you choose the RAID mode, the drives you wish to use, and other important options via an easy-to-navigate GUI similar to the BIOS setup program. (Note—ALL of the data on drives added to a RAID array will be lost!)

INSTALLING THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Once you're happy with your RAID settings, you're ready to stuff the drives with Windows (or Linux or BSD or whatever flavor pleases you). Your POST screen may not show any drives attached, save for optical drives like CD- and DVD-ROM drives. However, if you enter the RAID BIOS, you should see your two drives as masters on RAID channels one and two.

Install an operating system by platching a boot OS disk in the CD drive. Windows Me, 2000, and XP all come bootable. During the process, if the computer fails to see any drives, restart the computer and hit F6 just as Windows Setup starts to load. Then pray that you didn't lose the little floppy disk with the proper RAID drivers, because you need it now.

After that, the installation should go smoothly. When the dust settles, you'll have a super-speedy or super-safe system on your hands!
MAKE THE MOST OF NIGHTFIRE

OK, so it was runner-up for Coaster of the Year, but somehow you got suckered into paying $50 for this insult to PC gamers everywhere. What are your options? We show you how to get something more from *NightFire* than utter agony.

1. **EXCHANGE IT AT A RETAILER NEAR YOU**

Many stores, from local shops to national chains, offer store credit—and sometimes even cash—for your old games. Expect about 60 percent of the original purchase price for your exchange.

2. **SELL IT ON EBAY**

Sure, $10 may be one-fifth of what you paid for it, but it's still more than what you're getting from it collecting dust on the shelf. And you can always make money on the shipping.

3. **MAKE CRAFTS**

You'd be amazed at how many neat objects you can make with useless CDs, and anyone of them would be a great gift for the brother who for Christmas gave you the complete set of *Farscape* on VHS that he picked up from his own garage sale.

4. **USE IT AS A CARPET PROTECTOR**

James Bond may have a tough time beating those bad guys, but he's great for protecting you from those nasty furniture indent.

5. **BATHROOM RECREATION**

Liven up those trips to the john by using the CD as a urinal target. Yes, James Bond can improve your accuracy!
Gamer's Edge

Now 40 percent less boring Edited by Dana Jongewaard

Combat Mission 2
The Russians are coming!

PAGE 136

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick is for our Multiplayer Game of the Year, Battlefield 1942.

On any map with a carrier, spawn as an engineer, get in a plane, and take off. Parachute out over the enemy's carrier and land on it, preferably undetected. Plant mines on the runway, so whenever a plane flies over them it gets destroyed. Use the crates to refill your mines. If you hide up in the bridge and keep yourself out of sight, people will never be able to take off. This works best on a map like Coral Sea or Midway, where virtually the only option is to spawn on a carrier. Also, if possible, get in the back of the plane with a tall gun and mercilessly gun down people who spawn at the back of the carrier.

Chris Jones

The Age of Mythology collector's edition will be coming Chris' way. If you'd like a chance to win Hitman 2, send us your dirty tricks for recent games in an e-mail with the subject line "Dirty Trick" to cqletters@ziffdavis.com.
COMBAT MISSION
Barbarossa to Berlin
Mazdorf is a small town along Reichstrasse 5, a vital road to Berlin along which Russian troops are advancing in the spring of 1945. The town runs north and south along the road for about a kilometer. There are wheat fields to the west and the Lietzen Forest to the east. The Russians, under the command of Tom Chick, hold the town with a single rifle company. Reinforcements will arrive from the north and east of Lietzen Forest to the east. The Germans, under the command of Bruce Geryk, are moving in force from the south and out of the wheat fields to the west. At the center of the town is a 100-point victory flag, with 100-point flags at the southern, northern, and eastern edges. The scenario ends after 26 minute-long turns.

Bruce, Turn 1
All good plans need a goal. Mine is to control two of the four objective flags in the town, including the large one in the center. Since I am German, I can count on scoring more casualties victory points than I concede. Combined with the objective-flag count, that should add up to a comfortable victory.

In keeping with the German concept of schwerpunkt (concentration of force), I'll focus my initial assault on the flag at the southern end of town. My recon platoon loads up and makes a dash straight for town. The scenario briefing suggests Tom has a weak force in town but will be getting reinforcements. I'll unload near the southern flag and use that as my jumping-off point for a drive on the town center.

At the south edge of the map, I have a single Panzer VIb King Tiger. With its 88mm gun, it can easily contest the central approach to Mazdorf. Barring the arrival of a platoon of JS III heavy, Tom shouldn't be able to get anything into town from the east. If he does, he could make mincemeat of my half-tracks. My only concern is that I won't be able to do anything if Allied tanks arrive from the north.

Tom, Turn 1
I'm going to wait till my T-34s are all here, which won't be until about halfway through the scenario. Then I'll make a run from the Lietzen Forest to fan out and fire at Bruce's Tiger from a variety of angles. Maybe I can button him up and get a few tanks to town to hold the flags.

In town, I'll hide A company's 2nd platoon, its HQ, and a Maxim machine gun at the southern flag. I don't expect them to live, but hopefully they'll delay anyone approaching from the south. Their job is to hold out long enough for reinforcements to get to the central flag, which is occupied only by A company's 1st platoon. B company, which is arriving with my T-34s, will take a short-cut through the woods to cross a 100-meter gap between the edge of the forest and the north end of town. They'll then work their way toward the center of town to hold the large flag.

Tom, Turn 3
I see six German half-tracks approaching from the south. I was trying to get my tanks to set up a line of sight through the gap in the woods without exposing themselves to the Tiger's 88mm gun. Sgt. Gorishny's tank stayed too far out and was promptly knocked out.

Bruce, Turn 4
So far, so good. Reinforcements from the west will come to my lone southern platoon to overwhelm whatever garrison Tom might have in the southern tip of Mazdorf. I have two half-tracks with 75mm guns mounted on them. I'm sending one along the woods to the east and the other along the wheat fields to the west. If they don't attract any attention, they should be in perfect positions to get side shots at any tanks my Tiger can't reach.

Tom, Turn 5
Now, there are also four half-tracks and four trucks approaching from the wheat fields to the west. Fortunately, it looks like Bruce is sending all his men to the southern tip of town. If he'd attacked the center of town where the large objective flag is located, I never would have had a chance to get B company there in time.

The 2nd platoon of A company has orders to hide and restrict their firing arcs, so they'll only open fire when targets are within 30 meters. Just a little further, Bruce...

Bruce, Turn 6
Ambush! At the southern end of town, Tom's Russians opened fire as I approached the buildings where they were hiding. Several squads took casualties before anyone could react.

Tom, Turn 6
I managed to cut down some infantry as they were disembarking and sent the rest scattering for cover. Now to weather the massive response from the machine guns mounted on all those German half-tracks.
their HQ. After I accidentally unloaded them from their trucks prematurely, an entire platoon of panzergrenadiers that arrived by truck are stuck west of town under sporadic fire.

**Tom, Turn 13**
OK, I'm moving my tanks out. I've given them orders to fast move to various points in the half-kilometer gap between Lieben Forest and Mardorf, at which point they will rotate and engage the Tiger. Sgt. Guriew is the first out of the woods. His T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris.

**Bruce, Turn 13**
Robert Fripp and Brian Eno once put out an album titled *No Pussyfooting*. I'm going to follow their advice, especially since I've been playing far too conservatively up to this point. This game is half over, and I need to move decisively. I'm going all-out for the two-story building next to the main flag. Tom's trying to break out of the woods with his tanks, but I'm confident the Tiger can pick them off before they get too far.

**Tom, Turn 14**
This was a bad idea. I've lost two more T-34s this turn, and two of them have run back into the woods. Cowards. This leaves three tanks out in the open, and they haven't even covered half the distance. The good news is that reinforcements have arrived from the north, including a T-34, which is rushing around the west side of town to head off all those half-tracks advancing on the center of town. A full-strength platoon has arrived in M5s, which will proceed along the road through the middle of town.

**Bruce, Turn 14**
Achtung Panzer! Tom got reinforcements. The M5 half-tracks and whatever infantry they're carrying aren't a problem, but that single T-34/85 is enough to rip through my entire force of half-tracks. I have a few panzerschreck antitank squads, but they aren't far enough forward to cause their tank any trouble. Unless I think of something fast, I'll be able to sit back and pick off my troop carriers one by one. I do have a bit of an ace in the hole: the one surviving half-track armed with a 75mm gun.

**Tom, Turn 15**
Vikes, some of his half-tracks have 20mm cannons. I'd forgotten about them until one of my M5s was destroyed. I've given the other M5s orders to pull into cover and unload troops. The new platoon will have to hump it to the middle of town on foot. There's about to be a serious firefight over the central flag. I can see Bruce's troops coming with half-tracks alongside them.

**Bruce, Turn 16**
Another ambush. After my last experience, I knew Tom would have troops in the large building near the main objective flag, which is why I drove two half-tracks up to it in the hope his troops would get nervous and break cover. Instead, the Russians held their nerve until my squad got inside. They opened fire from the upper floor and drove back my half-

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"Sgt. Guriew's T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris."
tracks with grenades. I have a tenuous foothold in this building, but it will be hard to reinforce.

The half-track with the 75mm gun is almost in position to take a flank shot at the T-34/85 that just arrived from the north.

**Tom, Turn 18**

All of the T-34s from Lietzen Forest have been knocked out except for the two cowards who ran back into the woods. Never mind the Tigers. They’re going to rush the town to try to get an angle on the half-tracks. I’m afraid it’s suicide. The eight dead T-34s in the field ahead of them aren’t a very encouraging sight.

A heated exchange is brewing up around the central objective—flag as B company slowly gets into position and Bruce’s half-tracks reinforce his approaching infantry. My lone T-34 from the north, commanded by Sg t. Akimov, is creeping around the west end of the town, rounding up the German half-tracks beautifully and scooping kill after kill. At one point, Akimov started traversing his turret to the right instead of firing at all those juicy half-tracks in front of him. There was a lone half-track 500m off to one side that wasn’t bothering anyone. Why did Akimov fire at it instead of the ones pinning B company down?

That’s when I noticed Akimov’s target was a SPW 291/9 Stummel with a potentially deadly 75mm gun on it. After a quick kill, he returned his attention to the other half-tracks. Three cheers for Combat Mission’s tactical A.I. and a medal for Akimov when he gets home.

**Bruce, Turn 19**

My Tiger has one armor-piercing round left. I’m sure he’ll make it count. But without that cork to bottle up Tom’s tanks, I have no way to stop him from crushing my troops in a T-34 sandwich.

**Tom, Turn 19**

The two surviving T-34s that ran off into the woods are closing on the town when I notice dirt being kicked up around them, as if they were being shelled by artillery. The Tiger must be down to high-explosive ammo, which is used against infantry and shouldn’t be a threat to my tanks. The Tiger has been deceived! So, I slow my T-34s down to let them pick off half-tracks more effectively. Also, more reinforcements arrive. Three T-34s enter the map from the northwest corner, above the wheat fields. Why does the cavalry always wait till the end to come to the rescue?

**“It’s a slaughter as the Russians pick off German half-tracks from different angles.”**

**Bruce, Turn 20**

This could be the German high tide. My King Tiger is down to firing high-explosive ammo at Tom’s tanks. I score a lucky kill on one, but there’s no chance I can hold back his armor without proper ammunition. In town, two squads pushing up toward the victory flag turn around just shy of a heavy building that would have given them great cover. I think I can control the central flag, but this is based only on troops that are visible to me. Given the amount of fire I’m taking from buildings across the street. Tom must have lots of infantry near the objective.

**Tom, Turn 20**

Yikes! One of my T-34s falls prey to an HE round. I didn’t think that could happen! So, Sg t. Gubarevich driving my lone surviving T-34 from Lietzen Forest isn’t taking his time hunting half-tracks anymore. He’s heading full speed toward covering Marxdorf as HE shells land around him. Go, Gubarevich, go!

**Bruce, Turn 22**

My King Tiger ran out of explosive rounds of any sort, and is now firing smoke! Talk about fanatic troops.

**Tom, Turn 23**

With a curtain of smoke rising behind him, Gubarevich reaches the safety of Marxdorf and gets back to the business of hunting half-tracks.

**Bruce, Turn 23**

Out of shells, my King Tiger commander opens the hatch, empties his pistol clip at the one Russian tank now marauding through the town of Marxdorf...and heaves the pistol at the enemy.

**Tom, Turn 24**

It’s a slaughter as Gubarevich, Akimov, and the three Ivan-come-latelys, all in their magnificent T-34s, pick off German half-tracks from different angles. There’s no place for them to hide.

Meanwhile, I’m stacking up infantry around the central flag. B company is holding admirably as the newly arrived platoon gets into place. I’m pretty sure I’ll control the central flag by the time the scenario is over. However, I’ve taken heavy losses (Bruce’s Tiger tank killed nine T-34s!) that need to be offset by controlling flags.

So, Gubarevich and Akimov are going to make a run for the southern flag that Bruce controls. I’m guessing he can’t afford to leave anyone to guard it and I’ll find it unoccupied.

**Bruce, Turn 25**

Sometimes success costs you. Probably spurred on by my lack of antitank fire on the west side of town, some of Tom’s tanks drove right past my anchor building and gave my panzer-schrecks flank shots they couldn’t pass up. I got two more T-34/85s killed and kept Tom from taking the southern flag. This gives me valuable casualty points and also consolidates my hold on the building closest to the main flag.

**Tom, Turn 26**

Argh. I got greedy and lost Gubarevich and Akimov to German antitank squads. I shouldn’t have let them get so close to town without infantry support. I spend my last turn getting as many men close to the central flag as I can. With fog of war enabled, you can’t be sure whether you control a hastily contested flag.

When the game ends and the smoke clears, it turns out the main flag is indeed mine. However, the battle is not. It was very close, at 2,360 Axis points (100 of which are from controlling the southern flag and the rest are for casualties inflicted) to 2,345 Allied points (500 of which are from controlling three flags in Marxdorf and the rest for casualties inflicted). Game to Bruce Geryk, although I can take small comfort in the knowledge that his Germans will lose the war.
SIMCITY 4: The Money Game

Simolean management from your friends at Prima Games
mleanos make the world go round.

Without them, there can be no transportation, zones, or schools—and if the treasury gets empty enough, there'll be no more mayor! Managing the piles of dough is, therefore, one of your primary concerns.

With several changes to the money game in SimCity 4, you need great skill to avoid building yourself a money pit of a city. Even late in a city's life, when many seasoned mayors are accustomed to going on financial autopilot, the money game constantly challenges you to stay ahead of monthly expenses and find new ways of enhancing income.

You set taxes in nine categories (by type and wealth level), and they're no longer based on land value. A lot of items—power plants, landmarks, rewards, and parks—now cost money to purchase and maintain. Loans are now amortized, resulting in higher monthly payments, less loan confusion.

The current treasury balance is visible in the mayor mode interface. To get beyond this number, call up your budget pane. The budget pane puts your city's financial transactions in one easy-to-read place. Clicking on any line item in either the income or expense areas brings up both income and expenses for the chosen item. This helps keep things in perspective and relieves you from having to swap back and forth between detail ledgers.

**Income**

Income is the money you have coming in on a monthly basis. Increasing this amount is harder than increasing expenses, and therein lies the challenge. Taxes are your primary form of income, and no city is successful without a skillful tax strategy. Your city's taxes are based on tax rate, building value, and occupancy.

You set the tax rate for each of the 12 developer types. Commercial office and commercial service are set collectively as commercial. This wealth-type breakdown lets you use your tax rates with fine precision to attract or deter the kind of developer you want. The tax rate does have some side effects, however. The degree of change you make affects mayor rating. Lower taxes to improve your mayor rating on every property of the changed wealth level. Raise them, and you'll make yourself unpopular.

Changing tax rates has an effect on demand. There is, however, always a tax rate that has no effect on demand, but this neutral rate declines as population increases. Lowering a tax rate from this neutral rate stimulates demand, while raising it above neutral dampens demand. The ratio of the rate you select versus the neutral rate dictates the amount of the demand boost/penalty: the more you vary from the neutral rate, the more dramatic the effect.

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**Expenses**

Everything you provide your Sims in SimCity 4 costs money on a monthly basis. You can alter some of these budgets. Many items can be funded locally at individual buildings, or centrally through the budget. If budgets have been set locally, the slider in the budget pane reflects the average funding of all applicable buildings. Moving the slider resets every building to the same funding level.

The transportation department shows monthly costs for all your transit stations, airports, seaports, and transportation networks. Seaports and airports can be underfunded or underfunded individually, but road maintenance and mass transit must be underfunded or any business deals by plopping an army base, casino, federal prison, missile range, or toxic waste dump in your city, the income amounts from each appear on this line item.

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**RCI buildings in the game have inherent building values. This value is changed only if the property downgrades to a lower wealth type (i.e., an $500 building becomes inhabited by $50). A change of one wealth level drops the building value 25 percent. A two-level drop decreases building value 50 percent. The only income-producing ordinance is to legalize gambling. If you pass it, you'll receive a guaranteed $500 per month. On the downside, you'll see increased crime. The spoils of incoming neighbor deals (garbage import or power/export) appear on this line while a deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Because only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, enact incoming deals late in the month. If you accept any business deals by plopping an army base, casino, federal prison, missile range, or toxic waste dump in your city, the income amounts from each appear on this line item.**

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**Quick Tip**

Buildings with high value can help increase your per Sim tax revenue.

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**IN THE OLD BUILDING**

Building RCI buildings, along with many rewards, landmarks, and business deals, can cost a fortune. This is meant to encourage the preservation of old development.

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**If you can't manage efficiently, the treasury will empty and there'll be no more mayor.**

Recreation facilities can raise the desirability of an area, drawing in Sims and raising your tax profit.
When times get tough, you can take out a loan— but it's not always advisable.

Public safety encompasses the fire, police, and corrections departments. Police and fire department funding reflects in their coverage area and effectiveness. Fire stations and police stations are funded individually (via the query box of each station) or collectively. The department of corrections can only be funded collectively through the budget ledger. Health and education systems are funded locally, but you can collectively control them from here. An underfunded health and education structure can operate at top grade if the demand for the facility is less than its capacity. Structures that are over capacity will have strikes regardless of funding level. Health and education can be funded locally or collectively. The utilities department covers all of your utility infrastructure, including power, water, and garbage. The sanitation department must be funded collectively. Power plants can be funded locally or collectively here, but power lines can only be funded collectively. No water elements are individually funded. Water tower and pump capacity can be altered by the level of funding.

All city ordinances are enacted through this budget entry. Some don't appear in the list until you meet certain prerequisites. The costs of all outgoing neighbor deals (garbage export or power/water import) appear on this line as long as the deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see and make both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, so enact outgoing neighbor deals early in the month (as with the income entry).

City beautification includes parks, recreation structures, and landmarks. Parks and recreation structures are funded through the collective parks and recreation funding slider. All landmarks are included in one line item, and funding is controlled collectively in the budget. If you have any governmental rewards (e.g., mayor statues, city hall, bureau of bureaucracy, etc.), they're funded collectively from the government budget.

**Loans**

When times are tough and you need cash, take out a loan. It's not always advisable, but you can do it. You can borrow up to $2,000,000 for each loan, and carry $2,000,000 in total outstanding debt or 10 loans at any time. Money is borrowed in $5,000 increments over a period of 10 years at 8.5 percent. Payment amounts are amortized; every payment includes a portion of principal and a portion of interest.

Only take out loans when you anticipate increasing revenue in the near future. This can be for any reason, but usually involves what you're spending the loan proceeds on (mass transit, zoning, etc.). If you're already operating at a deficit, a monthly loan payment increases it. Unless you can increase revenue or reduce expenses to cover your existing expenses plus the monthly payment, the loan only delays your dive toward imprisonment.

When you're operating at a profit or need to make a large capital investment that will (directly or indirectly) increase revenue enough to cover the loan, a loan is a good idea. If traffic in your city is terrible and you need a good public transportation system, a loan may get things moving. If you think loosening your traffic problem will affect your tax collections (Sims returning to abandoned homes and back into the tax base), then take out a loan for a subway system. This is good city management. Taking out a loan to buy a landmark or stop the bleeding of a deficit budget is not.

**Overfunding and underfunding**

The funding sliders are great weapons in the bottom-line war. They can save money or buy you time. On the other hand, they can undercut and sabotage your city if not used properly, costing you more in the long run than leaving everything at full funding. Funding above 100 percent can get you nice benefits, but also can be a waste of money. Its effect depends on the department. For many buildings, such as fire stations and police stations, funding is tied to efficiency. Raising funding above 100 percent provides moderate increases in efficiency (+10 percent efficiency at 120 percent funding), usually not worth the extra money. Other kinds of buildings, such as schools and healthcare buildings, link funding to grade (capacity versus usage). In these cases, funding beyond 100 percent expands capacity (though less so than changes between 0 and 100 percent). Such a building is considered underfunded only if the set funding level causes it to operate over capacity.

Underfunding is an attractive way to save money and, if done selectively, can be effective. It also can be costly and disastrous, especially in important departments. You may get away with it for a while, but the longer you do it, the longer you risk a strike. Strikes occur in some departments if funding or grade falls below certain levels. When a department is on strike, effectiveness drops to 20 percent for the duration of the strike. Strike conditions vary by department.
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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IF YOU PURCHASED A SUBSCRIPTION TO THIS OR ANOTHER MAGAZINE, THE FOLLOWING PROPOSED CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT MAY AFFECT YOUR RIGHTS

This notice describes a proposed nationwide settlement of class action lawsuits relating to magazine subscriptions that have been reached in In Re Magazine Antitrust Litigation, DO Civ. 98-0814 (LAX) (the "Action"), and preliminarily approved by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York (the "Court").

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR THE PAYMENT OF MONEY OR OTHER COMPENSATION TO THE CLASS MEMBERS BUT INSTEAD SOLELY ADDRESSES CERTAIN INDUSTRY RULES AND PRACTICES THAT WERE DIRECTLY CHALLENGED IN THE ACTION AS BEING UNLAWFUL (SEE "THE CLAIMS IN THE LAWSUIT" SECTION BELOW).

This announcement is intended to give class members notice under Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Order of the Court dated September 20, 2002, as modified by the Court’s Order dated January 10, 2003 (the "Order"). If you did not receive the notice before the Hon. Richard Conaway Case on May 23, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. to determine whether you can certify the proposed settlement under Rule 23 (b) to the proposed settlement of the Action is fair, reasonable and adequate (a) a final judgment shall be entered dismissing the Action with prejudice to the class as a whole, and (b) to approve class counsel’s application for attorneys’ fees and expenses. The result of this notice summarizes the terms of the proposed settlement. You may obtain a copy of the settlement agreement, the Consolidated Amended Class Action Complaint (the "Complaint"), and a list of the magazine subscriptions at Issue in the Action, at www.magnazines.org or by writing to The City Garden Group, Inc., the Administrator of the Notice Program, at Magazine Antitrust Litigation, P.O. Box 9000 R 6041, Merrick, N.Y. 11566-9000 (the "Administrator"). ANY QUESTIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING THIS NOTICE OR THE SETTLEMENT SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE ADMINISTRATOR AT THE ADDRESS LISTED ABOVE OR BY CALLING 1-888-290-0088. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE ADMINISTRATOR WITH QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR CURRENT SUBSCRIPTIONS UNLESS THOSE QUESTIONS RELATE TO THE CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT. DO NOT CONTACT THE COURT, COUNSEL, TO THE PARTIES, COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, OR ANY PUBLISHER REGARDING THIS NOTICE. THE ADMINISTRATOR, WHERE APPROPRIATE, WILL REFER ANY QUESTIONS TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON.

THE CLAIMS IN THE LAWSUIT
The Complaint was filed on or about October 2000, against the Magazine Publishers of America ("MPA"), a consumer magazine trade association, and fourteen magazine publishers (collectively referred to as the "Publisher Defendants"). The Complaint alleged an agreement among the Publisher Defendants and others to artificially inflate the minimum purchase price or minimum discount on magazine subscriptions through the execution of MPA Guideline 4(a) and the collective action among publishers to adhere to the MPA’s 50% Rule (as referenced in (4) of the Complaint) or the similar rule of the IPA internationally pertaining to its definition of "paid circulation." The Complaint alleged that the Publisher Defendants and others conspired to do two things: (i) to increase the prices charged to consumers for magazine subscriptions, and (ii) to increase the amount of money that they charged to consumers for magazine subscriptions. The parties have reached a settlement to resolve the claims in their entirety. On September 20, 2002, the Court preliminarily approved the settlement.

THE TERMS OF THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT
The proposed settlement, the defendants have agreed to do the following: (i) The MPA shall delete in its entirety MPA Guideline 4(a); and (ii) the defendants shall pay the costs incurred in connection with the Action, including the costs of the notice program involving class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses awarded by the Court up to $1 million.

In exchange, the Plaintiffs have agreed that, if the settlement is approved by the Court, the defendants will not be required to pay any of the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses. The defendants will be required to pay the costs of the notice program involving class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses. The defendants will be required to pay the costs of the notice program involving class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses. The defendants will be required to pay the costs of the notice program involving class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses.

In summary, the settlement is the following: (i) The MPA shall delete in its entirety MPA Guideline 4(a); (ii) the defendants shall pay the costs incurred in connection with the Action, including the costs of the notice program involving class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and expenses awarded by the Court up to $1 million.

YOUR RIGHT TO OBJECT TO THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT
You have the right, in person or by counsel, at the hearing on the proposed settlement in order to comment on, or object to, the terms of the proposed settlement. To do so, you must file a notice of your intention to appear, which includes the basis for your objection, a statement of the particular provisions of the settlement that are objected to, and a complete description of the objection with copies of any documents or materials to which you refer in your objection, and the approximate time period of each such submission and to serve copies of the notice and all other papers you intend to rely upon by hand or first class mail on Plaintiffs’ counsel no later than 25 days before the hearing. If you do not file a notice of your intention to appear, you may not object at the hearing.

YOUR RIGHT TO OPT-OUT OF THE SETTLEMENT
Although you have the right to appear at the hearing, you have NO OBLIGATION TO DO SO. If you do not wish to participate in or be bound by the proposed settlement, you can excuse yourself, i.e. "opt out." To opt out, MUST send a request for exclusion in an envelope POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN May 5, 2003 to the Administrator of the Notice Program, P.O. Box 9000 R 6041, Merrick, N.Y. 11566-9000. The request for exclusion must state your full name, the magazines to which you subscribed and the approximate time period of each subscription, and the address to which your magazines will be sent. IF YOU CHOOSE TO OPT OUT OF THE SETTLEMENT, YOU will be removed from the mailing list of the magazines to which you subscribed and will not receive any more issues of those magazines.

EXAMINATION OF PAPERS AND INQUIRES
For a more detailed statement of the matters involved in the Action, including the Consent Decree and the order of the Court, you may visit the office of the Clerk of the United States District Court, 501 Pearl Street, New York, New York, during business hours. Copies of the papers relating to the settlement are also available at www.magnazines.org.

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Scorched Earth

Moot Gesture of the Year

CGW's awards don't mean nothing By Robert Coffey

For this month's Scorched Earth, I had planned to play virtual ferret in the Skinner box that is The Sims Online to see just how long it took the pigeons to kick me out of their coops. Alas, it proved dishearteningly easy to get systematically banned everywhere, the magic banishment words coming courtesy of the 6-year-old catchphrase machine that is my son: "Talk to the weenies." Guileless, direct, a phrase of simple beauty and unmatched efficacy, it pretty much killed the column, thanks to the wussified inhabitants of Alphaville and Blazing Falls.

Thus, I was left stewing about how there was no way I was going to give the denizens of this spiritless netherworld my vote in the impending Game of the Year tumber-meeting, and if anyone else on the staff so much as suggested it, I vowed to surgically staple them to the cluttering skinless dinging that was our last intern, damning them to a torrent of Faroese trivia and his unsettling fixation with nude male Greek statury. OK, I admit I get a little worked up at times. But as I happily reflected upon the image of my coworkers desperately huddling themselves with melon bushers in order to blot out the Image of the unctuous demihuman cruelly sliced to their hip, I thought, "What is wrong with me?"

No really, I did. After all, it's not like our awards mean what they once did.

Remember back when this magazine ran roughly 3,000 pages a month? Back then we had a staff, two score and twelve of the hardest game men the world had ever seen. Did any other mag have editors whom were present at the dawn of our hobby? We did, and we were better for it. Did any other mag boast a toothless old prospector and a guy who dressed like a clown? We did, and we were, um, well, we sure were different for it. And every one of these swarthy, exacting bastards, clad in the exact same grey mock turtleneck, would once a year gather in a verdant, dew-bejeweled glen under a blazing full moon, slathering bear grease on their ruffled, oak-hard bodies as they descended into the pit to grapple with their brethren, until one would emerge victorious, roaring a wordless epiphany of triumph, the mangled ear of their opponent clenched in their blood-smeared teeth. That was how Adventure

Talk to the weenies.

Game of the Year is used to be decided. But now, our stuff diminished by rampant cannibalism and the loss of advertising dollars, the awards meeting is but a shadow of its former glory. There are fewer of us, less conflict, a diversity of opinion, and often, it seems, we are not the worse for it. Would Grand Theft Auto III have cruised to victory if there were one old-school her-based gamer left on our staff? Probably. But I can't help but feel that it would have earned its status a little more if there had been stronger opposition.

I believe that the paper-triangle football playoffs we use to break ties nowadays produce more right decisions than wrong. But our decisions remain moot in the extreme. Why? Because while there are fewer of us, there are more of them—more of the swarthy guy in a dorn room plastered with Howard the Duck posters who's got his own website so he can try to con a few free games out of a guttural PR person. And when this leech manages to score a couple copies of Hooters' Road Trip and Mystery of the Nautilus, and not Hitman 2 or Morrowind or any real game, well, what kind of crap do you think he's voting on for Game of the Year? Next time you're browsing EB or visiting Walmart or burling the house of the people next door, take a good look at the game boxes. There's a Game of the Year version of just about everything, right up to Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing. Great for the marketing weasels, awful for the gamers.

This is the same slack selection process behind the millions of "World's Greatest Dad" t-shirts stretched over every other fat bastard slowing up the Orange Julius line at the mall whilst tragically go unrecognized.

Fortunately, despite the winnowing of our stuff, it seems pretty clear that with each and every one of us a towering genius, the quality and accuracy of our awards is as sound as sound can be. But to do what about the tribes of half-wits muddying the crystal-clear blue waters of CGW's unsailable imprimitur? A suggestion. The next time you're accosted by a garishly emblazoned box declaring Soldier of Fortune 2: Game of the Year, respond like so: Talk to the weenies. You'll be glad you did.
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