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"If this E3 was any indication, it's going to be a hell of a year for PC games."

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EDITORIAL

Best in Show

Coming up at next year's E3: the swimsuit competition!

E3—The Electronic Entertainment Expo—is the year's Big Event of the gaming industry. The whole year revolves around it. Companies are either spending a gajillion dollars getting ready for E3, dealing with the fallout because their game looks so crappy at E3, or stressing out about next year's E3. All in an effort to garner positive spin and hype from the mothey collection of fools, half-wits, and shrewd men who are going to be buying the press (present company included, of course). While E3 always tends to be a lot of fun, in the last year or so there has been, unfortunately, an increasing air of shrill desperation to the proceedings. Why? Because everyone wants that damn "Best of Show" award. Now, it's not enough just to show your game and get a positive reaction to it. Now, you have to win the award or somehow you've "failed." It's turning into a beauty contest.

It's maddening to deal with, on our side, because even though we contribute to the problem by making these idiotic Best of Show lists in the first place— as we do in this issue—it should also be understood that if we didn't put your game on this list, it doesn't mean we didn't think your game was cool. For example, for any number of arbitrary reasons, Halo for the PC is not in our Top 10, but for me personally it was one of the best things I saw this year. Now ship it already.

What's most important to understand, for both the finished companies for you, dear reader, is that these lists, at best, mean nothing more than "most promising" or "coolest looking in theory, we suppose." Because these are unfinished games. (Our Game of the Show for the last three years—Star Wars Galaxies, Republic, and, ahem, Halo—are still not out yet.) Many of these "best in show" games may bear little resemblance to the actual finished products— if they ever ship. You want one word to describe E3 in its totality? Try this one: Superficial.

Sorry, I don't mean to be cranky, I love E3. And I love you, too. This year's show was actually the most satisfying one in years, with the PC justly regaining much of the spotlight stolen by the consoles. So stop listening to my whining. There are lots of great games inside.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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MARK ASHER
Swashbuckling gallant, raconteur, bon vivant, one of the people the people watchers peep at—contributing writer Mark Asher is none of these because he's too busy playing games until a quarter to three and worrying about life's ineluctable mysteries, such as why Sea Monkeys don't really look like monkeys. On his deathbed, he will be asked if he regretted spending so much time playing games, and his answer will be: "Only Black & White."

HARRY CAMPBELL
Born the son of an FBI special agent, Harry's dad was convinced that Harry was destined to pursue a life in law enforcement. However, all those pictures of J. Edgar Hoover his father positioned around the house had the reverse effect. So he pursued a career that didn't entail the use of a firearm and required little personal responsibility as possible—the career of an illustrator. Harry lives in Baltimore with his wife Melissa and two energetic sons Ian and Evan.

TOM EDWARDS
The only staff member not to go to E3, copy editor Tom Edwards spent his time alone in the office pretending he was Hank Williams, rifling through coworkers' desks, and working on his upcoming PC release, El Gatito de la Muerta.
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TOP 10 PICK OF 2003 - COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

MATURE SEXUAL THEMES VIOLENCE
Letters

Don't be afraid to care at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Diary of a Mad Housewife

Husband: Didn't you say you had homework?
Me: Mmmmm...Bookworm....

Husband: Have you eaten yet today?
Me: Look! I spelled "insipid"!

Husband: Don't you work today?
Me: But, sweetie, I just got to Level 30!

Husband: It's 4 a.m. You should go to sleep.
Me: But I have seven burning tiles!

Baby Cheesy

Actual genuine fan mail!

Thank you for one of the best issues I have ever had the pleasure of reading [July 2003]. You may have been faced with an overwhelming slew of bad games [to review] but boy, did you ever make up for it! Reviews of The Sims 2, an article about the NV35, Halo, Republic, and a decent tech review by Wil. And the more I read of Tom and Bruce's Gamer's Edge matches, the better they get, so keep them coming. You guys rock! Oh yeah, kudos and 10 points to whomever used the Aliens reference on page 67: "Game over: man. Game over." Truly a classic.

Peace out.

Jimi

Harold and the purple vomit

Just a comment about the Sims 2 cover [July 2003]. I love how the father is cheering on his redhead son, who's beating up his little sister as the scantily clad mother ignores the crying youngster. The best part, however, is how no one notices that the baby on the floor is vomiting up a bright neon purple-colored substance. Exactly how many crayons did the little tyke have to eat to come up with that shade of purple?

DEVo

SEXy time!

In the June issue, someone said I am tired of opening a magazine (even a computer gaming magazine) and seeing pictures of real/fake scantily clad women. Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't pictures of "scantily clad women" the whole point of a computer gaming magazine?

Christian

women's the whole point of a computer gaming magazine?

Last month, a letter was sent to you on the topic of porn. I agree wholly with his opinions, for I am female, and the pictures are not "cheesecake" for me. I think that a gaming mag should be a gaming mag...not an edited Playboy mag.

Rowen

OK, just to show that we aren't completely sexist here at CGW, here's a little something for the ladies this month.

Actually, D was referring to Groucho Marx

Dudes (and dudettes),

Di Luo needs to go back to poli-sci class. In his July review of Tropico 2:
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MAIL BITE

I'm just writing to let you know that William O'Neal is the man, I wanna be just like him, except not black. If you got a problem with Wil, you got a problem with ME.

Visk

Computer games this month must really suck for you guys to put the freaking Sims 2 on the cover. My condolences to whoever had to do the article.

Sam Allison

Is Robert Coffey just a nasty hateful writer, or are you guys purposely giving him games that stink?

Landshark

Pirate Cove he says the game is "a dissertation on Marxist economic theory," where the "product of the proletariat's labor is used to increase the happiness of the ruling elite." That sounds pretty intellectual (lots of syllables), and it does describe how communist societies generally end up working in practice, but it's incorrect. A Marxist would say that Tropico 2's economic model describes a capitalist society. In a Marxist society, the slaves in Tropico 2 (the proletariat) would rise up against the ruling elite (the pirates) and oust them. All labor would be for the common good, and the product of that labor would be spent among everyone equally. Not that I'm some commie pinko...

You're my favorite gaming magazine because of your smart writing, but sometimes you tend to outsmart yourself. Then again, I tend to nitpick.

Jason Drury

Robert Coffey: love and hate

It was extremely refreshing to see your Scorched Earth article in the June 2003 issue of CGW. I also wanted to commend you on the first zero star CGW review (in the same issue). I read with horror and disbelief that a game like Postal 2 was created, and with the profound satisfaction that the publisher and developer are being cut out on their lack of context for the statement they're apparently trying to make.

Thanks for taking on the tough topics and shaking my fellow gamers and me out of our collective Trailer Park Tycoon-induced stupors so that maybe we'll open our eyes and see what kinds of messages are being shoved subliminally down our throats. At the risk of sounding clichéd, "Thanks for keepin' it real, guys!"

Jason Fields

After reading your article "The Gong Show," I've come to two conclusions. 1) You have no sense of humor, and 2) you need a new career, since you can't seem to handle this one. The majority of people find stereotypes amusing because they are smart enough to realize that not everyone in a group acts a certain way. You don't seem able to distinguish between insulting stereotypes and mocking the idea of stereotypes.

The computer games industry has a lot of controversies; since you can't seem to cope with the high stress of controversy, maybe you should find a different job. Like living in a tree in order to prevent it from being chopped down. Trees have feelings, too (or at least the Sierra Club thinks so).

Seth Cunningham

Mr. Coffey went "postal" in his semi-hysterical "review" and I use the term lightly (of Postal 2 [July 2003]). To review the review: Mr. Coffey's politically correct diatribe underscores why games like Postal 2 are necessary. Mr. Coffey ignored the gameplay, graphics, and sound to criticize the game's politically incorrect sense of humor. And this game does have a sense of humor—your reviewer doesn't. I played the game, and I very much like it. The review told readers almost nothing about the game. All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a humorless prig. Postal 2 deserved better, much better, than Mr. Coffey's hatchet job. I give this review no stars.

Jonathan Sprague

I was reading your July 2003 magazine, and you said the only thing worse than Postal 2 was boxed syphillis. Well, I sell boxed syphilis and I don't like you jerks bashing my product. I don't say the only thing worse than canned AIDS is CGW, do I?? DO ?? ?? Other than that, your magazine is all right.

Barry Levites

And more politics!

As a long-time subscriber to your magazine, I was disappointed to see two different stupid and pointless jobs at Republicans in your July 2003 issue (page 53, Cheney, and page 54, Bush). Although this may shock you, some of your readers are—gasp—Republicans! I know it may be hard for you to grasp since you apparently live and work in the San Francisco area, but a sizable segment of the population isn't made up of liberal Democrats.

I don't care what your politics are—what I subscribe to your magazine for is our supposedly common interest in computer games. Why your staff feels it necessary to turn your magazine into an opportunity to make their personal political views known is a mystery to me. I don't recall jokes about Clinton when he was president. I complained about this very thing a year or so ago (Will O'Neal was the culprit then). If you want to ignore me, mock me, or whatever, go right ahead—just remember: I don't have to be your customer.

Brian Bursiek

"All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a prig."
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Always Evolving. Constantly Growing. An online world that grows richer and more vibrant each day. Dark Age of Camelot quickly became the most critically acclaimed MMORPG of the year and has continued the quest to reign supreme over the lands. Since then, adventurers in our lands have seen the addition of hundreds of new monsters ravaging, scores of new quests to complete, have discovered ways to create magical items and epic new areas, fraught with perils and rewards, to explore. Last winter saw the release of the first expansion pack, Shrouded Isles, revealing three new continents, three new races, six new classes, and a graphic engine that made Dark Age of Camelot the envy of its competitors. Now we're introducing the most robust player housing found in any MMORPG. If you haven't visited our world before, it is time to discover the magic of our Realms; if you are someone whose absence from Camelot has been sorely missed, it is time to come home again, to the challenge, danger and enchantment of the Dark Age of Camelot.
Last year's expansion, The Notum Wars, actually made Anarchy Online fun to play. Now, Funcom is turning its online world on its ear with Shadowlands. There's a deep story here, no doubt, but the long and short of it is this: The greedy Omni-Tek corporation unintentionally forces open a hole in reality while trying to research the Notum ore. What they find on the other side is the Shadowlands—a metaphysical dimension deep in the throes of all-out war. Omni-Tek sides with the vicious Unredeemed, the fight rages on—oh, and a vortex is threatening to destroy all existence on this plane. Got all that? Good, maybe you can explain it to us before next month's preview.
Why do big, evil monsters have to look so big and evil? Here's one of the Unredeemed in all his cloven-hooved, scaly glory.
ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

As a part of Operation: Enduring Nerd-dom, we see here a crack troop on patrol in front of the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo. Ira "Wild Man" Messershmldt (names have been changed due to classified intel), in the gun turret, leads Easy Company through the show floor. We've got our own reports from E3, where we've seen the rebirth of PC gaming—and it is good! Check out our feature on page 56 to see the best of the show.
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Crazy riffs from the gaming beat Edited by Ken Brown

Child’s Play?

Lawmakers continue to try to restrict kids’ access to violent videogames By Ken Brown
Politicians continue to fight to restrict kids' access to Mature games, but they haven't won a case yet. On June 3 the Eighth U.S. Court of Appeals again found that games are protected under the First Amendment. Lawmakers don't like the fact that kids can buy games with violent or sexual content, but the court found no compelling reason to regulate the sale of Mature games at retail.

Games are in good company since movies, music, and videos aren't regulated either. There is no law saying a kid can't go into an R-rated movie. Theater owners voluntarily adopted a policy not to allow children under 17 to view those films. According the FTC, kids can get into an R-rated movie in about half of the theaters they visit. But the FTC's numbers for minors who attempt to buy M-rated games is closer to 80 percent. Some retailers have been unwilling to even adopt a policy to prevent the sale of Mature games to kids, let alone try to enforce it.

Which has caught the attention of politicians like Mary Lou Dickerson of Washington. In May, Washington State passed a law sponsored by Dickerson that would impose fines on retailers for selling violent videogames to minors. If it survives the inevitable constitutional challenge, Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17. Violators from store owners to clerks could be fined up to $500 per incident.

"I believe violent videogames do harm children," says Dickerson. "I'm both a mom and someone who has worked extensively with at-risk kids. I also was trained in operant conditioning in graduate school and I know the power of these games to operantly condition players."

Dickerson says recent research shows that violent games can lead to aggressive behavior in children. She also cites real-life incidents of violence such as murders in Minneapolis and carjackings in Oakland that she believes were inspired by Blood Omen and Mortal Kombat games. She also referred to the April school shooting in East Germany that resulted in the deaths of 16 people plus the assailant. After the massacre, stories emerged that the troubled student played Counter-Strike. Much like Columbine, the murders triggered a national debate about the impact of videogame violence, with some German legislators calling for an immediate ban on sales of first-person shooters.

"I'm not saying all videogames are evil. Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17.

I know there are a lot of great games out there, and a lot of very responsible players and very responsible parents. What I am for is blocking the access of some ultra-violent games from minors," says Dickerson.

...And in this corner

The gaming industry and retailers want no part of Dickerson's law. The Interactive Digital Software Association and the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association are preparing a suit against the constitutionality of the Washington statute. IDSA president Doug Lowenstein says, "I think it's the wrong solution for this problem. We're very confident that this law is unconstitutional and it will be struck down."

Lowenstein admits that retail enforcement is "spotty and needs to get better." But he says lawmakers have exaggerated the problem for their own political purposes. He cites his own FTC.
"There is no evidence—none—that there are tens of thousands of minors buying Mature-rated games."
Violators could face a fine of up to $1,000 the first time, up to $5,000 the second time and a minimum of $5,000 and/or 90 days in jail for subsequent offenses. Lowenstein doesn't think much of the Baca bill: "If you think that by criminalizing the sale of these games you make it any easier to implement, you're wrong. The practical issues are there. They can be overcome, and they will be overcome, and some stores are getting much better at it. If you look at stores like KB or Toys R Us, they are doing a very good job."

Baca's bill is also anathema to Halpin. "Should laws pass and succeed in the long-term, it is likely that many retailers will pull M-rated product from their shelves for fear of seeing their employees cart off to jail for selling a Mario Brothers game. M-rated games would likely be next."

Halpin's dire prediction is unlikely to come true, but we'll see if the Washington statute actually takes effect on July 27.

"We're very confident that these laws are unconstitutional and they will be struck down," says Lowenstein. "The way it's written, I see no reason why you would have no idea what content would be covered by it."

The recent appeals court ruling clearly backs that up: "If the First Amendment is so weak that the painting of Jackson Pollock, music of Arnold Schoenberg, or Jabberwocky verse of Lewis Carroll, we see no reason why the pictures, graphic design, concept art, sounds, music, stories, and narrative present in videogames are not entitled to a similar protection. The mere fact that they appear in a novel medium is of no legal consequence. Our review of the record convinces us that these 'violent' videogames contain stories, imagery, age-old themes of literature, and messages, 'even an ideology,' just as books and movies do."

The one form of entertainment that is not protected by the First Amendment is pornography. Should games be regulated the same as smut? Lowenstein disagrees. "The analogy to porn is ignorant and stupid. There's a clear body of law that says that you can regulate obscene content. The Supreme Court has said so, and there's a specific test to define that. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that you cannot regulate violence, which is why we're confining in the outcome of the Washington case. There has never been anything comparable with respect to violence whether it's in games, in films, in books, or in other medium."

So it's unlikely that the Washington statute will survive its pre-enforcement challenge. If it fails, it will also make it less likely that other governors will sign such bills, since the state would have to pay the legal fees of organizations bringing suit (namely the IDSA and retailer groups).

But the issue isn't going to go away. With games like GTA3 selling in the tens of millions, it's inevitable that there will be more games—with even greater levels of sex and violence—that continue to push people's buttons. Perhaps by then more parents will pay attention to the ratings system and take an interest in what their kids are playing.

**WHAT THEY SAID**

"A ton of kids play this game (GTA3), and it's a status symbol in Washington State. The kids who have it get points for having sex with prostitutes and then brutally beating them to death. They get points for each time they kick that prostitute in the crotch. Is that what we want to teach our kids?"

—REPRESENTATIVE MARY LOU DICKERSON, WASHINGTON

"I think that adult content in videogames should be dealt with in the same way that adult magazines and videos are handled. I would say that if [the new law] is on par with the laws that handle adult magazines and videos, then it is a fair law."

—CHRI$ TAYLOR, GAS POWERED GAMES

"I am not for censorship and I'm not for blocking the sale of any game. I'm a former journalist, I don't like censorship."

—REP. DICKERSON

"I would say she's a better politician than she is a constitutional lawyer."

—DOUG LOWENSTEIN OF THE IDSA, REFERRING TO MARY LOU DICKERSON

**THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY**

**THE GOOD SID MEIER'S PIRATES!**

Yes! You young'uns may not remember this one, but the original Pirates!, released in 1987, is one of the great PC gaming classics, a way-ahead-of-its-time genre blender that, along with Civilization, ensured Sid Meier's status as a legend. Fireaxis' surprise E3 announcement that Sid is remaking the game, complete with a brand-new 3D engine, is cause for rejoicing indeed. All we know is, we can't wait to make Will walk the plank.

**THE BAD ENTER THE MATRIX**

Gee, you couldn't see this one coming, could you? Yet another lame game based on a movie franchise. The bummer this time is that the franchise is an awesome one, and the gameplay possibilities seem fantastic. But once again, we have a shoddy product rushed out the door to cash in on the unsuspecting fanboys. The other few million will end up in a landfill somewhere, next to those 5 million Atari E.T. cartridges. And rightly so.

**THE UGLY 3DO GOES BUST**

Like an old, sick horse, 3DO is finally being put out of its (and our) misery, and as sad as it is, we can't help but think that it's about damn time. The truth is, this company has been in a long, slow decline for years now, criminally destroying and sullying the names of at least two great franchises—High Heat and Might and Magic—in the process. Remember what Neil Young said: "Rust never sleeps." Good night, 3DO.
The Brains Behind Bookworm

Q&A with Jason Kapalka, the man who taught us all what “qua” means

By Jeff Green

After losing two months of my life to Bookworm, I sat down with the designer, Jason Kapalka—also the brains behind Bejeweled—to find out why he keeps torturing us with compulsively addictive puzzle games.

JG: Even my mom knows Bejeweled now.
JK: Yeah, lots of people in my bowling league play PopCap games. It’s definitely different from the traditional computer game demographic. Personally, I like more hardcore games, but some are unnecessarily complex these days. Were trying to bring our games toward a simpler standard.
JG: So, did Bejeweled make you rich?
JK: It depends on your standards of “rich.” I own a third of the company, so a lot of it is on paper—It’s not money in the bank. We’ve sold nearly 500,000 units of Bejeweled in all its incarnations across different sites and platforms. But we’re not obscenely rich because we’re at nearly 20 employees.
JK: Tell me one thing about Bejeweled I don’t know.
JG: Microsoft actually came up with that name for The Zone. Before that, it was Diamond Mine. In retrospect, Bejeweled is obviously a good name, but at the time it sounded terrible to me. It sounded like a topical reference to Bedazzled, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie.

JK: We couldn’t define every word, because that would’ve made the program too large. The plan was to define only harder words, but, again, how do you define “harder” words? There’s no foolproof way. Ultimately, we just tried to define all the tricky short words. We figured those who make 10-letter words know what they mean already.
JG: What’s the maximum size word, by the way?

"Bejeweled’ sounded terrible to me—like a topical reference to Bedazzled, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie."

JG: Let’s move on to Bookworm. How did this game come about?
JK: It started out as an experiment by our head programmer, Brian Flete. We wanted to make a word game that wasn’t timed. It would have been easy to include a timer—to do so many words before time ran out—but that made it harder to come up with interesting words, which is what we wanted. After we had the basic theme, development time was about six months.
JG: Six months? How many people worked on the game?
JK: Four. Along with Brian, Nick Newhard
JG: Yeah, I know.
JK: Okay, so what’s up with Bookworm’s language filter? Some words seem to get censored, but others don’t.
JG: Yeah, this was tough. There were many debates over what’s offensive and what’s not. What about real words like “fellatio”? It’s a great word, but do we really want that sitting on PopCap’s high score board online? We still monitor the board to remove potentially offensive words that players post.
JG: The other annoying thing is the dictionary. It seems random what you guys choose to define.
JK: Twelve letters. Some players have complained about that, believe it or not.
JG: What’s your best word? Mine is “elevation.”
JK: I’m not that good, actually. The best word anyone at PopCap has made is “apparition.” But “elevation” is pretty good.
JG: So what’s up next for you guys?
JK: Something new for us: an RPG. It’s called PopQuest. It’s like Diablo Lite or NetHack for Moms. And of course the inevitable Bejeweled 2 and Bookworm 2.
JG: Oh no.
JK: Oh yes.
SimCity 4: Rush Hour

Grand Theft SimCity By Thierry Nguyen

Will Wright's other big Sims franchise is getting its first expansion pack this fall. SimCity 4: Rush Hour Expansion Pack (a working title if we've ever seen one) will focus on enhancing the way people get around in their SimCities. Now you can add transit features like ferries, buses, subways, and light rails to your town. Players get more information about and control over their transportation options; one example is displaying not only the bus' travel route but the route of its commuters, showing you who is using it from where. Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your Sim's car and drive it around town. It's still being tested out at press time, but the team plans to possibly add the ability to control the helicopter and even a tank as potential aids.

As always, there's the requisite new disaster, which is the three-stage alien invasion. First, a massive spaceship beams up some poor Sim for an alien abduction, then it blasts some buildings down; the scenario ends with a bunch of little U.F.Os flying out and shooting up the place. Since players can now personalize points of interest, you'll feel more attached to Scooter Lane or Scooter Point when the aliens demolish them.

Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your Sim's car and drive it around your city.

Now you can put down names on everything. We want to make an "EA A OES" sign.
#17 MIND GAMES

Part One

At E3, trying to hook up with my friend Bernie.

So, where can I find you?

I'll be at Atari! at 1 p.m.

by Scott McCloud

When I got there, Demo Guy was showing Bernie the differences between combatants in the new Terminator game.

Compare this to, say, Battlefield 1942...

The only difference between the Americans and the Germans was the kinds of guns they used!

But the unintentional irony of the statement points out how games often tend to reduce everything down to mere tactics.

Writers know that the key to good characterization is in knowing what each character wants.

Varied desires means varied and interesting conflicts.

When creating characters in software, though, it's easiest to fall back on just two basic motivations.

Can you imagine personal ads organized that way?

Hmmm. Let's see... trying to kill me... trying to kill me... trying to kill me...

Hey, here's one: "SWF 24... Bystander."

Stylish productions like No One Lives Forever create effective characters through dialogue and voice acting.

But as soon as the real gameplay begins, you really only need to know one thing about the people around you.

Introducing true characterization into actual gameplay won't be easy --

-- because as sophisticated as tactics-oriented A.I. has become --

-- having even the simplest conversations with our machines is still science fiction --

Good morning, Dave.

-- for now.

To be continued.
Medal of Honor: Breakthrough

New add-on for Allied Assault coming this fall By Ken Brown

Since Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault isn't scheduled to ship until early 2004, EA is hammering together another add-on for Allied Assault to keep your trigger finger warm. Medal of Honor: Allied Assault-Breakthrough will be set in the European theater from 1943 to 1944 and will feature 11 new single-player levels in locations ranging from Cassino Pass in North Africa, to Messina in Sicily, to the battle of Monte Battaglia in Italy.

The game will have nine new multiplayer maps, including the monastery at Monte Cassino, the streets of Messina, and Anzio Beach. A new multiplayer mode entitled Liberation will require captured teammates to be rescued in order to continue the fight.

The last MOH add-on, Spearhead, was a rocket ride that didn't last long. Here's hoping Breakthrough will be just as thrilling but offer a little more game for the money.

Welcome to sunny Sicily.

NEWS FEED

SHADOWBANE HACKED

Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Shadowbane players were thrown into an uproar in late May when hackers wreaked havoc with the game. Wired.com reported that the inhabitants of an entire town were transported to the bottom of the sea, where they drowned. City guards attacked local residents, and swarms of new creatures suddenly appeared and slaughtered stunned players. Even newbies in neutral areas were hacked up by ax-wielding ogres, according to Wired. Wolfpack Studios and Ubi Soft posted a message acknowledging that a "serious attack" had occurred and vowing to "prosecute (those responsible) to the full extent of the law."

When the companies figured out what had happened, the game was restored to a previous point before the attacks began. Ubi Soft banned all of the members from two clans for "using teleport exploits." The members of those clans—whether or not they were involved in the hack—will lose all their property in the game, their cities will be left to die, and they will also be banned from other Ubi.com games.

MAX PAYNE 2 COMING NEXT MONTH

After a long dream sequence, Max Payne seems to be finally emerging in time for his big sequel. Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne is scheduled to ship this fall. Pick up the September issue of CGW for the exclusive first preview of this stylish, sexy, noir romance shooter.
Lords of EverQuest

In your face, Blizzard! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! By Robert Coffey

Okay, so maybe it's not a direct response, still it's hard not to see Sony Online's foray into RTS gaming as some kind of a reaction to Blizzard's moving their Warcraft franchise into the Sony-dominated MMORPG world with World of Warcraft. Maybe it's coincidence, maybe it's revenge, or maybe it's just lust for the almighty dollar, but EverQuest is moving into a brand new neighborhood.

Lords of Everquest is looking to bludgeon Warcraft by giving gamers more more more. More units, more players in multiplayer games, more magical items and artifacts, and more hero units. The game takes place some 10,000 years prior to events in the current version of EQ, and has to do with the Shadowrealms fighting the un, not Shadowrealms for the typical complete and utter control of the world.

Yeah, OK, whatever. What really matters is that virtually everything in EQ is making the jump—and that includes both spells and monsters. Developer Rapid Eye Entertainment (made up of New World Computing vets, which is a very good thing) is promising a single-player campaign that could take 70+ hours to complete. Also, for the first time ever, Sony will deliver free, that's right free, online multiplayer gaming via a very Battle.net-like matching system. Our initial peek at this game was positive, with the 3D engine doing a fine job with terrain and rendering the plethora of units and heroes very well. The spell effects, however, were serviceable, if not particularly impressive.

Stay tuned for hands-on impressions of Lords of Everquest when the beta test begins. We're intrigued as to whether Sony can beat Blizzard at its own game.

FREE GAMING: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Shareware and freeware

In this era of 4GB installs, it's easy to forget that games don't have to be complicated to be good. Here are three titles with play value that far exceeds their simple mechanics.

Starcaster

$24.95

www.meopod.com

Starcaster is best described as Asteroids on steroids. Action plays out on vast maps packed with enemies, asteroids, and bases; the entire game is tied together with a simple storyline and role-playing elements. It's a great combination, and graphics are colorful and varied enough to dispel complaints about the low fixed resolution.

Gearbolt Rage: Infinite Pain

Free

www.o3software.net

Don't let the screenshot fool you—a static image can't convey the bloody, nonstop action of this freeware tribute to the click-and-play gem Destruction Carnival. Seven weapons randomly appear on the screen, and it's your job to pick them up and destroy waves of enemies. Sounds easy, but everything moves so fast that it's hard to dodge bullets and guard dogs, let alone shoot anything. The game takes up only a few megas of disc space, making it a terrific laptop diversion.

Car Thief 4

$19.95

www.maximegames.com/carthief

Players are tasked with stealing cars across the U.S., with a variety of stats like locksmithing and electronics that improve with practice and training. Specialists can be hired to compensate for weaknesses, but they take a cut of the money, making it even tougher to pay off loan sharks or upgrade tools. It's packed with just enough surprises to justify the price.
DAY OF DEFEAT
World War II Online Action From the Makers of Counter-Strike!

Back the Attack!

“One endlessly-playable package.”
— PC Gamer

IN STORES NOW

Connect with voice support.
Battle with authentic artillery.
Play WWII’s greatest battles.

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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

**Flight Simulator 2004:**
A Century of Flight (Microsoft)
The next milestone in the award-winning Flight Simulator franchise.
Experience history at the controls of historic aircraft, such as the Spirit of St. Louis, and the world's first successful powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer.

**Homeworld 2** (Sierra)
Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.

**Counter-Strike: 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.

**EverQuest II** (SOE)
Add significant improvements over the original massively multiplayer online role-playing game with a completely new, cutting-edge 3-D engine with a host of technological features that generate an unparalleled, visually stunning 3-D world.

**Madden NFL 2004** (EA Sports)
The most complete, authentic sports video game ever. In-depth features like free online gameplay, new Quick Match play, League play, tournaments, and more career stats allow you to create championship caliber plays.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

**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.

**Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne** (Blizzard Entertainment)
Following in the tradition of previous Blizzard expansion sets, this game provides gamers with a vast new chapter in the epic Warcraft saga. Revisit the war-born world of Azeroth where a new threat has arisen throughout the land.

**Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Undrentide Expansion Pack** (BioWare)
NNWN's first official expansion pack includes a new 40-hour single player campaign plus game features new to Neverwinter Nights, such as additional D&D skills, feats, classes, monsters, weapons and spells.

**Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness** (Eidos Interactive)
Lara Croft returns in Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. Accused of the murder of her one time mentor Von Croy and pursued by the police, Lara is drawn into a dark world of blood, betrayal and vengeance.

**Enter the Matrix** (Action)
Features awesome gunplay and spectacular martial arts that bend the rules of the Matrix. This game is an integral part of the experience, with a story that weaves in and out of the Matrix Reloaded, the sequel to the Academy Award®-winning film.

All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at amazon.com.

Get thousands of game titles at amazon.com/videogames

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CGW Top 20
The gamers have spoken

Road to Rome: paved with
gold and soaked in blood.

C&C: Generals nukes the
competition.

Spearhead: WWII roller
coaster of love.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome (EA)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Command &amp; Conquer: Generals (EA)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Medal of Honor: Spearhead (EA)</td>
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<td>Unreal II: The Awakening (Innovages)</td>
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<td>Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubisoft)</td>
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<td>SimCity 4 (EA)</td>
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<td>RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 (Innovages)</td>
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<td>Medieval: Total War (Activision)</td>
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<td>Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Indiana Jones and the Emperor’s Tomb (LucasArts)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Day of Defeat (Activision)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Vietconq (Gathering of Developers)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>EverQuest: Legacy of Ykesha (SOE)</td>
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<td>Bookworm (PopCap Games)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Civilization III: Play the World (Firaxis/Alawari)</td>
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<td>High Heat Baseball 2004 (3DO)</td>
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<td>Impossible Creatures (Microsoft)</td>
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<td>Galactic Civilizations (Strategic First)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Praetorians (Eidos)</td>
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The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers’ favorite games from the last six
months. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.
PIPELINE

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

A note on the dating system: the quarter system that we list many games in divides the year into quarters with Jan-Mar being Q1, Apr-June being Q2, and so on. We can only give you approximate dates because the companies are often uncertain about the exact release dates.

1. **OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2**
   - Bohemia Interactive is hard at work on the sequel. Though details are scarce, we know that the game will take place between 1968 and 1974 during the wars by proxy between the two superpowers. They'll take place in three different locations: Southeast Asia, Central Europe, and Angola. While there will be graphics improvements, Bohemia promises the feel of the game will be true to the original.

2. **DUNGEON SIEGE II**
   - Continuing the trend of announcements without screenshots, Microsoft unveiled plans for *Dungeon Siege II* during E3. Though it uses the same engine as the original, the graphics have been touched up quite a bit. Gas Powered Games, the developers, have been working on the sequel since the original came out, so they've had a lot of time to focus on gameplay. We expect it toward fall of 2004.

3. **VICTORIA: EMPIRE UNDER THE SUN**
   - *Victoria: Empire Under the Sun* will focus on the later stages of the Industrial Revolution, from 1835 to 1920. The diplomatic model will be akin to *Europa Universalis*, with alliances, limited colonial wars, and national prestige. The military side will be more like *Hearts of Iron*, with divisional-size units and tactical decisions playing a major part. This title should be finished near the end of the year.

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### Game Releases

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<td>Armed and Dangerous</td>
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<td>Battlefield Command</td>
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<td>Battlefield Vietnam</td>
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<td>Call of Duty</td>
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<td>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</td>
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<td>Half-Life 2</td>
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<td>Half-Life Counter-Strike: Condition Zero</td>
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Bob Tribal shows off the snazzy new (or retro, since Tribes: Vengeance is a prequel) Phoenix medium armor.

Two tribesmen trade fashion tips in Tribes: Vengeance.

Behold the glorious landscaping power of the Unreal engine.

TRIBES: VENGE

Single-player strikes back with, you guessed it, a vengeance

By Thierry
While many players enjoy plugging bullets into Jerry in Battlefield 1942, they're unwittingly paying tribute to 1999's Tribes. Incorporating both heavy teamplay and easy-to-use vehicles, Tribes helped kick-start the whole "cooperative teamplay" dynamic in online multiplayer-action games and introduced slang like "skilling" into the multiplayer-shooter vernacular. The unfortunately early release of Tribes 2 snatched away goodwill from the fans, and the collapse of Dynamix as a company pretty much put the kibosh on the franchise as a whole. Until now, that is, thanks to Tribes: Vengeance.

Since Dynamix is no longer around, Tribes will continue with the most surprising of developers: Irrational Games. Being developed in Irrational Canberra (the same studio that worked on Freedom Force), Tribes: Vengeance will be the first Tribes title with a true single-player component. Where the previous games used single-player as a tutorial only, Tribes: Vengeance will have a fully fleshed-out campaign that draws upon a lot of the Starsiege lore seen only in manuals, among other enhancements (such as multiplayer and the current Unreal engine).

**SECRET TRIBAL RITUALS**
Producer Chris Mahnken is being exceptionally coy about specific game details. In light of the fact that Tribes: Vengeance is scheduled for a late 2004 release—the game is still in a very early state. "There are going to be jetpacks, skiing, and the disc launcher, but everything else is up for grabs," comments Mahnken. "There will most likely be four vehicles, two air and two ground, but nothing more specific than that right now." Mahnken doesn't want to commit to naming any specific vehicle, only to have it removed in testing.

Despite Tribes: Vengeance taking place roughly 300 years before Tribes, the weapons and vehicles will still look pretty slick and modern. Mahnken has an actual explanation for why tech looks roughly the same, despite the 300-year gap: Tribes 1 and 2 featured only the tribes, with no presence of the Empire, and are far, far away from the center of technology. The tribes are so backwater in the earlier games that everything they have is considered "old, beaten-up crap," à la Talonite. The perpetually up-to-date Empire possesses such vastly superior technology that for them, 300-year-old tech is roughly equal to weapons from other Tribes games.

As for multiplayer, Irrational recently hired Michael "KinetiPod" Johnston, a well-known member of the Tribes community, to helm the multiplayer design. Since he created the popular Team Rabbit 2 mod for Tribes 2 and knows the community inside and out, die-hard fans should feel relieved that Irrational is planning to hit both single- and multiplayer with full force.

The launch of Tribes 2 was a major debacle, but with the realistic time frame and the developer behind it, Tribes: Vengeance could easily wipe the tarnish off the Tribes name.
There are plenty of things to interact with in the environment, including this turret.

FREEDOM
Patrick Swayze, eat your heart out By Darren Gladstone

You can knock out the lights and leave bad guys fumbling around in the dark.

“They can take away our development time, but they’ll never take OUR FREEDOM!” Apparently, some parts were inspired by Braveheart.
Forget everything you know about World War II. The Russians, not to make Communism a household ideology, developed and dropped the first A-bomb. Germany crumbled, Japan gave up, and Europe quickly fell under the boot heel of Stalin. Who is left to stand up to the Red Menace? Not us. America is being invaded. In EA's Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty, IO Interactive, the creative force behind the Hitman series, has been working on Freedom for some time now, and all we've got to say is "Viva la revolución!"

RISE TO POWER
Not since the Reagan-era classic Red Dawn has there been such a jingoistic tale of resisting the Communist menace. In this guerrilla warfare adventure, you're cast as an everyday Joe turned underground soldier. There are 19 levels spanning nine open-environment neighborhoods to explore, and each has minigames you can solve along the way to your larger goal: liberation.

 Tear down a propaganda sign here, raise a flag there-as you begin fighting back, you get more street cred. Unlike IO's previous games, you're far from alone in gunning for your objectives. Sure, things start off small, but as time moves on (the game takes place during all four seasons in New Moscow—err—New York City), our hero gains charisma and the ability to recruit others to the cause.

The neatest aspect of Freedom is the recruiting and commanding of your troops. The open-ended levels will have you rescuing some people and drafting others scattered throughout a war-torn New York City. By the end of the game, you'll have as many as 12 freedom fighters covering your back. Unlike Rogue Spear, though, this third-person squad-combat game focuses on action. Point at a location onscreen and you'll be able to quickly issue commands. More important, in a first-hand demo we saw the computer-controlled comrades behaving well under fire.

SMART SOLDIERS
A astute eyes may have caught this game at E3 2002, but there was a lot of work that needed to be done back then-mostly on the A.I., according to assistant product manager Anthony Calazza. But now it's starting to look fairly buttoned down. Troops duck for cover, smartly move to proper positions, and even brace against walls and look around corners before advancing. When near turret positions, they do a decent job of holding the line. If only some gamers played this well. Lead designer Mads Prahm also promises plenty of unscripted intelligence driving the

Unlike Rogue Spear, this third-person squad combat game focuses on action.

Russians. "They will react to how you play, choosing you around corners and into buildings if you run away," says Prahm. When aren't bossing troops around, Freedom supports eight-player multiplayer matches.

Now that IO has worked out most of the A.I.-related bugs, the focus of development is on graphics, gameplay, and levels. The terrain changes through the course of Freedom (as the game progresses, New York City reverts to its pre-Giuliani squalor), and the Glacier graphics engine has been polished to a keen shine at this point. The new prerequisite dynamic lighting, rain, snow, and smoke effects are already in place. Whether shooting out lights down a hallway with a machine gun or lobbing a Molotov cocktail into a car (there will be about 12 weapons in all), that's what looks pretty good.

At press time, the game was only 40 percent complete. Not bad, but IO has an ambitious schedule laid out by Electronic Arts. In order to hit its late fall deadline, the developer needs to blast through the remaining 60 percent of the development process and do some beta testing and bug killing. After consulting former play tester and CGW whipping boy, DI Luo, it seems like there's a lot to do in a short amount of time. This means one of three things: 1) the developers will light a fire under their asses and get it done, 2) the release date will be pushed back, or 3) the game will release simultaneously with a 25MB patch. Let's hope for choice No. 1.

GAME STATS

MADS PRAHM

U.S. ELECTRONIC ARTS

ION INTERACTIVE

GAME: SOLDIER OF

ACTION/ADVENTURE

ELECTRONIC ARTS FALL 2003
Heroic? No.
Effective? Yes.

XIII
There goes the comic book code

By Di Luo
Amnesia is all the rage these days. Between The Bourne identity and John Doe, there's a glut of memory-impaired übermenschen who can kill with their pinky fingers and play a mean Mozart at the same time. Add one more to the pileup, XIII, the first-person shooter from Ubi Soft, is looking to fill the amnesia slot in the game market.

A BLANK SLATE

Based on a successful series of Belgian comics, you begin on a deserted beach with nothing but a gunshot wound, a funny XIII tattoo on your neck, a key, and hordes of enemies out to annihilate you. While attempting to clear out the cobwebs, you also happen to be the prime suspect in the assassination of the president of the United States.

We may have seen it all before, but we haven't seen it like this.

Fighting against mysterious terrorists and government organizations, you must try to regain your memory and uncover the truth that lies behind the vast conspiracy.

We may have heard it all before, but we haven't seen it like this. XIII is highly stylized and designed to make you feel like you’re flipping through the pages of a gritty graphic novel. Thanks to grizzly cel-shaded graphics and the Unreal II engine, there's a surprisingly adult vibe here. Although after you've lodged a glass shard into someone's head during the game, it isn't as surprising.

Playing to the comic aesthetic, there are some interesting conventions carried over from the books. There will be the requisite “BAM!” “BOOM!” and “ARRRGGH!” sounds that correspond to the onscreen violence. Gunshots result in fountains of blood, and explosions send bodies flying. Good shots with certain weapons even conjure pop-up comic panels with grisly close-ups of the hit.

The comic-book conventions assist in gameplay as well as in the gruesome visuals. “We wanted to tell a story by using everything used in (comic books),” says associate producer Damien Morel. To illustrate that point, we saw “tap, tap, tap” appear onscreen to represent the sound of enemies walking around a corner. Occasionally, you'll even get pop-up panels warning you of impending ambushes and close-ups of key areas you need to visit.

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

XIII's 13 missions (which cover 34 levels) run the gamut of spy-thriller conventions. There will be infiltration missions where your character begins unarmed and intense VIP escort missions where you must fight off dozens of enemies in order to keep your charge safe.

To do the job, you'll have the usual array of weapons and gadgets. There are 13 standard weapons, including crossbows, assault rifles, and rocket launchers, each with an alternative fire mode. You'll need to choose your weapons and tactics carefully, though, because you can only hang onto four weapons at a time.

And when you run out of bullets, you can improvise with objects: Chairs, bottles, ashtrays, and shards of glass can turn into deadly weapons in your hands. Heck, you can even take your enemies hostage and use them as a human shield. “We really want people to interact with the environment in as many ways as possible,” says Morel.

The story-driven missions and comic-book feel can easily give you a very memorable single-player experience, no doubt, but it looks like Ubi Soft is putting a good deal of attention into the multiplayer as well. Since this game is coming simultaneously to just about every platform known to man, Ubi Soft is looking to create unique multiplayer modes specific to each platform. What's in store for the PC? Expect the usual Deathmatch and Capture the Flag. No word on what it'll be called, but one of Morel's favorites is a cover me/escort-type mission that has one player running through the level and the other acting as a sniper providing support.

GAME STATS

Platform: Ubi Soft
Genre: Ubi Soft
Platform: First-person
Comic Book
Release Date: 03 2003

www.computergaming.com 51
You whippersnappers think you've got it made with all your fancy scooters and Jet Skis. Well, you don't know what's coming until you've been on the 6:22 to Wichita! At least PopTop's Railroad Tycoon 3 hasn't forgotten what that's like.

The first, and most obvious, change to the Railroad Tycoon series is that it's now fully 3D. Not only is the game much prettier, but by letting action unfold in a "real" world, PopTop also requires a ton of horsepower to play? Think again. Railroad Tycoon 3 will run on a mere Pentium II 350 with a 16MB TNT1 card. Of course, all you fancy-pants gamers with newfangled rigs can run the game at up to a 1600x1200 resolution.

Track laying is done essentially the same way as in previous games, but this time, bridges, tunnels, and overpasses (made of stone, wood, or steel) are automatically put in when needed. Gamers can also add up to two sets of double tracks in their stations (up from one) to better manage train traffic. The folks at PopTop say there should be about 45 different locomotives to choose from, with designs from the 1830s to the future, and artistic players will be able to customize skins.

The strategic map view has a zoom, so you can now view two entities that are close together. A speed control and custom hotkeys let you stay on top of the action, and there's even a feature that lets the camera follow an individual train's route. Improved multitasking lets you do things like buy or sell stock while following a locomotive's progress. Naturally, there's multiplayer competition as well, and as of this writing, it will probably include support for up to eight players. Look forward to riding the rails when Railroad Tycoon 3 pulls out of the yard this fall.

Not only is the 3D game much prettier, but it will make gameplay more versatile.
Do Not Disturb!

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If you're out of sick days, call in Undead...
Wizards are always mucking things up. Even with Michael Jordan on their team, they couldn’t...oh, sorry—not those Wizards, I mean the ones in Triumph Studios’ latest fantasy game, *Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic*. In this latest Age installment, mages have caused an imbalance in nature by playing too fast and loose with the natural order. They’ve used too much magic, and now the Shadow World’s nasty denizens threaten to consume all that’s good. Naturally, everyone is blaming the magic users for this debacle, and it’s up to you to set things right.

New to the series? This turn-based empire-building game has you spread your influence over the map by controlling territory and resources—essentially mages for magic and gold for buying the services of heroes and constructing buildings and other items. Naturally, you have competition, and when you square off against an enemy, the game switches to a tactical battle mode where you pit your fantasy forces against your foe.

In development since the release of *Age II*, the game offers plenty of new goods that Triumph has cooked up in its cauldron. Most notable is a new desert race dubbed the Nomads. Able to relocate cities by packing up and moving out in a caravan, they can help spread your influence. And living off slave trading, these wanderers make for a very unique race that can capture enemy units.

A magic-item forge has also been added. With the forge, gamers can create magical weapons, but the cost is extremely high, making these items quite valuable. In addition, a slew of new units (40 to 50 at the time of this writing) and around 30 new spells have been put into the game for a total of more than 150. That should give even veteran gamers plenty of magic to research. If you’d rather focus on the bigger picture, there’s no need to get your hands bloody. Triumph added an Auto-battle mode that quickly resolves conflicts. There’s also another added twist: Enemies will surrender if you have an overwhelming force.

Age veterans will find plenty of ways to dig into the game after finishing the single-player campaigns. Whether you’re in Skirmish mode or crave eight-way multiplayer matches, you can utilize a number of tweaks to the map generator. First, you pick a game style: Battle Scenario, Epic, or Empire. Next, a slew of options, including settings for terrain, treasure, and number of heroes, let you create just the type of world you want. A new customization feature lets more hardcore creative types import their own artwork to the game, as well as edit all of a unit’s individual stats, basically giving the creative gamer a fantasy-strategy construction set to tinker with.

Stay tuned for more updates as we wait for the game’s release this coming September.

**AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC**

Fantasy empire-building enters new territory **By John Marrin**

www.computergaming.com 53
Money can't buy everything, just premium ad placement. So what is undiscovered game development talent supposed to do? Rely on word of mouth alone? Not here, friends. Each month, we'll keep our eyes peeled and ears to the ground, picking the best and brightest titles under production worldwide. Your job is to check out these titles and make the developers so big that they won't return our calls.

**SPACE EMPIRES: STARFURY**

**IRON SHARPIE GAMES**

**EUGR: ROLE-PLAYING GAME**

**AVAILABLE: JULY 2003**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** In the swirling maelstrom of computer gaming trends, few markets remain as staid as the 4X genre. Developer Malfador Machinations knows this; it has struck gold four times over with the cult classic Space Empires series. In its latest incarnation, the franchise boldly ventures into unknown territory: an RPG. Rather than control entire galaxies, as in previous installments, interstellar conquistadores command a lone ship, pursing the path of pirate, merchant, or mercenary. Is this the next Freelancer?

**BEST UNHEARD:** In space, no one can hear you squeal with girlish delight. Sold only online in Sharpiere's Game's virtual store, the unwashed masses could easily overlook this sweet-looking game. Return customers might not appreciate the change of pace either...look what a sweeping makeover did for Master of Orion 3. As the game is still in the beta stage, it's too soon to tell if Starfury will wind up rocking to success or suck like a black hole.

**PRIEST**

**IRH: JC ENTERTAINMENT**

**EUGR: MMO RPG**

**AVAILABLE: JULY 2003**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** H.P. Lovecraft meets High Noon—what's not to love about that? Here's the only MMO set in a twisted Wild West scenario, where monsters roam free and scheming archangels threaten heaven's very sanctity. Disgraced priest Ian Isaac's

**PLANT PRISON**

**TOP: SCHRINE INTERACTIVE**

**TOP STRATEGIES**

**AVAILABLE: CHRISTMAS 2003**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** Ach du lieber Ze Germans are at it again, crafting yet another intriguing tactical strategy game. As one of two characters who've just crashed-landed on a (dull) prison planet, escape is paramount. Controlling several dozen units, you'll explore futuristic locales from a top-down, isometric perspective, doing battle with varying gangs and evil imperialist forces.

Simulated social structures actually come into play across 30 levels and 16-player network confrontations, as does a suitably pleasing amount of blister fire.

**BEST UNHEARD:** We know what you're thinking, but no—there isn't a shower scene in sight. Graphically, the game resembles Fallout Tactics (which means it looks kind of dated), but the chief drawback operating here is inexperience. Both the developer, Numlock Software, and publisher, Schrine Interactive, of the project have little to no track record regarding game development. That isn't to say these guys won't be capable of pulling an ace out of their collective sleeves, but then one never gets a second chance to make a first impression.
LORDS

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LONG LIVE THE

CGW ASKS THE QUESTIONS EVERYONE ELSE IS TOO LAZY TO ASK
NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.
For the first time in two years, the CGW editors were able to enjoy the annual E3 convention in Los Angeles without once having to endure the dreaded "What's up with PC gaming?" question. Why? Because this year, the answer was all over the show floor: It's thrilling.
With the hype and novelty of next-gen consoles wearing off, PC gaming reasserted itself in a big way, grabbing a surprisingly significant share of the E3 buzz. We need no more proof than Half-Life 2, which was by everyone's account the hands-down game of the show, regardless of platform. At times, the lines to see the Half-Life 2 demo were four hours long—there's how excited people were. And the amazing demo only justified the hype.
The bigger story, however, was not this one game, but the fact that there were so many PC games—and so many promising ones. We went into this show a little weary and jaded—because that's how we are here—but we left completely invigorated and excited, remembering why we love this job.
If this E3 was any indication, it's going to be a hell of a year for PC games. Read the next 10 pages to find out why.

E3 SUPERCUT

PC!

BY THE EDITORS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
HALF-LIFE 2 OR DOOM III?

THIS IS PRETTY DAMN easy, since we saw a full-blown Half-Life 2 demo and only a looping trailer of Doom III. Since Half-Life 2 was the one at the show with a presence, it kinda wins the "best PC shooter of E3" question by default. Doom III skill has an amazing engine with the best lighting around, but Half-Life 2 totally dominated the show with its use of characters, graphics, physics, and gameplay. Id has a lot to live up to—Half-Life 2 is pretty much making straightforward shooting galleries irrelevant.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

10: MYTHICA/GUILD WARS ETA: 2004

OF ALL THE massively multiplayer games we saw at E3, the two that made the biggest impression got our attention because they clip the "massively" off multiplayer and lose the turn-based combat. Microsoft's Mythica charges players to become a Norse god with honest-to-god action-based combat conducted in private realms (see "MMORPGs: too much of an OK thing?" on page 60).

Guild Wars from NCsoft also lets you undertake your action-packed adventures in private battlegrounds and features a unique leveling system: Players acquire skills they can select prior to missions, basically composing an eight-skill "deck" that ideally complements the rest of their party's skills. With support for guild tournaments, missions for 100-plus players, and no monthly fee, Guild Wars, like Mythica, is a 2004 release.
Thankfully, the days of everyone and their great aunt making an RTS are long gone. After all—does mankind really need another Tribal Rage or Dominion? With few exceptions, the real-time strategy genre was notably unrepresented at E3. In fact, the closest things to big-time traditional RTS titles were add-ons for Warcraft III and Age of Mythology. Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age is OK, but struck us as little more than a tightly focused Empire Earth, while Lords of the Realm III and War of the Ring are just depressing. The true bright light is Kohan’s sequel. In short: It’s looking like the real-time genre is right about where RPGs were a few years back—a bit played out and in need of fresh ideas.

And it looks like RPGs are once again in need of those ideas, at least for lone players. The vast majority of the RPG genre seems to be moving online—Lineage II, Mythica, EverQuest II, and on and on and on. Oh, Bethesda was showing the latest Morrowind expansion and Pirates of the Caribbean, but those two titles alone made up almost half the single-player RPGs shown. Knights of the Old Republic looks like a perfectly serviceable RPG, Temple of Elemental Evil is impressive, and Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines is just too sad for words. Bottom line: If you’re looking to role-play over the next year, be prepared to do it with strangers.

**THE RUNNERS-UP**

**ARMD & DANGEROUS** From the minds that brought you Giants: Citizen Kabuto comes this messed-up action game. Best new weapon: A corkscrew you drill into the ground and use to flip the entire screen upside down, launching enemies into space.

**CITY OF HEROES** Finally, a game that lets us wear tights without eliciting puzzled stares from our coworkers. This superhero MMORPG is shaping up nicely, as Cryptic Studios keeps loading the game with tons of cool superpowers and beautiful character and environmental graphics.

**DEUS EX: THE INVISIBLE WAR** Warren Spector swears he’ll fix all the problems of Deus Ex with TIEW. Mum’s the word on the story, but everything we’ve seen—signature Spector gameplay and slick Unreal-powered environments—looks good.

**EVERQUEST II** Sony Online’s monster sequel is looking better than ever. The EQ demo, featuring a battle with a humongous red dragon, gave us hope this will be more than just a rehash. Let us pray.

**FINAL FANTASY XI** Sure to be first. On console fans. FFXI is coming out for PC first. It looks cool, there’s a huge online world to explore, and...well, it’s Final Fantasy. And you’ll be able to play online with PS2 gamers.

**HALO PC** The closest thing Xbox ever had to a killer app is finally coming to PC and it looks pretty sweet. Gearbox is putting a lot of work into Halo’s team-based, vehicle-centric online multiplayer, and we couldn’t be happier.

**KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC** It’s a BioWare RPG in the Star Wars universe. One of the NPCs is a smart-ass assassin droid. What’s not to love? It may feel a little too console-y, but it’s still good gamin’.

**MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM** The creators of Medal of Honor: Allied Assault are putting together an intense depiction of the Vietnam war that seems inspired by movies like Platoon.

**THE MOVIES** Peter Molyneux’s next game shows lots of promise. We loved the idea of making movie trailers and sending them to friends. Let’s hope there’s more of that and less of the RollerCoaster Tycoon-style stuff they demo’d.

**UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004** Epic relents and gives the people what they want: assault and vehicular combat with hovercraft, flying vehicles, Halo-style dune buggies, and more.

Anyone remember how much Pool of Radiance sucked? Troika sure did, and the company has taken what it learned from Fallout and Arcanum and created a sweet-looking Dungeons & Dragons RPG. Combining signature Fallout gameplay with the D&D setting and some stunning good looks, this game lets your party of five (you can recruit additional mercenaries along the way) solve the classic pen and paper module: New twists include starting the game differently according to your party’s alignment—evil parties start off by slaughtering townspeople, while the good are summoned by the king on a quest. And your followers level up with you, so you can theoretically have a Level 10 Chicken of Choice.
MMORPGs: Too Much of an OK Thing?

Massively Multiplayer Games were out in strong force at E3—more than 20 titles were shown. While the kinds of games ranged from medieval fantasy (most popular) to superhero to an occult western (Priest), there was one notable design trend across the board: story-driven content. Designers hope to achieve this through numerous quests and something many of them referred to as “pocket dungeons.”

Pocket dungeons are private areas spawned for individual players or groups. For example, in the superhero game City of Heroes, we tried a pocket dungeon mission that took us into a lost city beneath the bustling metropolis. That secret area was created just for our group of spandex-wearing do-gooders. No other players could come in. Many other games, including World of Warcraft, Mythica, and Guild Wars, have similar schemes. Will these kinds of innovations be enough to excite gamers who may view the MMORPG genre as flooded with clones? Probably not, since the basic gameplay doesn't seem to have changed much. We expect many to hang on as niche titles, if they hang on at all.

Notable games at E3 included Mythica and Guild Wars (see Top Ten for more info), The Matrix Online, which showed off some cool slow-motion action moves; Warhammer Online, with some amazingly detailed character graphics; Middleearth Online (you can be evil and still fight Sauron); Horizonz, which promises to be a “crafters’ dream”; and Mu, a nifty-looking Diablo clone from Korea. Most are 2004 titles, so expect bandwidth to be sucked up next year.

Maxis is revitalizing its signature franchise by introducing human mortality and procreation. Even after Bob Newbile dies of old age, the introduction of successive generations and digital DNA means you’ll be shaping the personalities and traits of his (and other Sims’) infinitely branching family tree. Throw in a gorgeous 3D engine, new gameplay elements like the Life Score, and a facial animation system that brings your Sims’ emotions to vibrant life and it appears Maxis is on target for achieving its stated goal of bringing The Sims back to hardcore gamers, and vice versa.

Top 10 Games from E3

8: The Sims 2 ETA: Spring 2004
The Great Escape

Shot down behind enemy lines.
A prisoner of the Nazi war machine.
You must guide your band of heroes in the
greatest escape in history.

Strike at the Reich with an
authentic WWII arsenal.

Condemner motorcycles, jeeps,
and other military vehicles as
you speed to freedom!

Attack from the shadows as you sneak
past Nazi guards and the Gestapo.

PlayStation 2

Gotham Games®
WHO'S MAKING MEDAL OF WAR?

Since EA's successful Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, three major historical-combat games have been announced, and we've seen some confusing moves among the developers. Let's try not to get all too confused and see what's happening.

Let's start with EA's Medal of Honor franchise. Allied Assault was developed by 2015, EA unceremoniously dumped 2015 in favor of developing the sequel (Pacific Assault) itself at its Los Angeles studio (EALA). 2015, high and dry, decided to make a Vietnam-era shooter (Men of Valor: Vietnam), which actually looked damned good at E3.

But some 2015 employees didn't want to make a Vietnam-era shooter, so they drafted up ideas for improving upon a Medal of Honor-style game. They broke off from 2015 to create a new company (Infinity Ward) and a new WWII shooter, Call of Duty, which earned a berth in our Top 10 E3 games list.

Of these three games, the only one we haven't seen running is Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault. But we know that all of these titles have unique features, and we believe each will be a worthy contender for the FPS combat crown.

So, are you ready for the quiz? Here's your cheat sheet:
- Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault, World War II, EALA/EA
- Call of Duty, World War II, Infinity Ward/Activision
- Men of Valor: Vietnam, Vietnam War (duh), 2015/Valvendi

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

7: XIII ETA: WINTER 2003

HERE'S A GAME idea we can't seem to get enough of: comic book graphic violence melded with a first-person shooter. What's not to love? Even after all the times this Soft! has rolled through our offices touting this game, we were still wowed by what we saw on the show floor at E3. Gorgeous and inventive use of cel-shading, some variety in multiplayer modes, and slick new twists on the FPS genre make this cartoonish contest one of our top picks from the show.
ARE CROSS-PLATFORM GAMES BAD FOR THE PC?

THIS IS A LOADED QUESTION because cross-platform titles can be both good and bad. On one hand, some titles are coded for the lowest common denominator—that is, if a game comes out on all platforms, you’ll often find that the PC version is an afterthought (hello, OD: NightFire). When done right, though, it’s magical, and you wind up with a great game that looks awesome on a hopped-up PC. Case in point: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. Yes, the PS2 had it more than six months ago, but the PC version looks crisp, and what the hell—if the gameplay ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

As for the trend progressing upward, we’re starting to see some good come of this, thanks to the latest powerhouse platforms. Take Xbox, for example. Since Xbox games are based on the Windows 2K kernel, some serious cross-pollination with the PC only makes sense. Already, titles like Doom III, Counter-Strike, and Half-Life 2 are Xbox-bound. With all the good console games we’ve seen, who’s to say that pattern can’t work in reverse? For cross-platform games to really work, we need each version to take full advantage of the system it was made for. Hey, Rockstar! If you’re listening, how’s about a 32-player riot in Vice City?

PLEASANT SURPRISES AT E3

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME We’ll admit that we almost steered clear of Ubi Soft’s booth in hopes of avoiding another Dragon’s Lair 3D-like debacle. But after giving our collective loins (not a pretty sight, trust us), we got an eyeful of this cool-looking revamp. Is this the heir apparent to Jordan Mechner’s classic? That’s still to be determined, but this 3D tilt on the original shows serious promise.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL We were hesitant about this, as we really looked forward to Troika’s Arcanum only to find ourselves with mixed feelings about it. But it looks like Troika both fixed what was wrong with Arcanum and preserved and enhanced the mix of Fallout and Dungeons & Dragons, which puts this game into our Top 10 list.

LINEAGE II Lineage, Korea’s biggest MMORPG, never really grabbed our attention—but its sequel certainly has. Lineage II makes the Unreal engine its own, creating a world of towering buildings that features tremendous depth and layering, incredible spell effects, and mind-blowingly beautiful player-controlled dragons. Riding those dragons will be a key part of Lineage II’s enormous castle sieges when it ships this winter.

ROME IS GOING to be a landmark strategy game. From its epic widescreen battles to the finely detailed armor and shields on each soldier, there’s never been a strategy game as stunningly cinematic as this one. Picture thousands of soldiers in formation attacking castles with siege towers, battering rams, catapults, war elephants, war dogs, and more. No other game has even come close to the sweeping spectacle of this one—and we saw it running at E3. Plus, unit control will be easier, with conventional click-and-drag RTS mechanics.

ROME: TOTAL WAR ETA: SUMMER 2004
IS IT ALL ABOUT THE SEQUELS NOW?

PAST E3S HAVE BEEN sequel-driven, but this year’s show seemed especially so. At first glance, most games we saw were either direct sequels (we noticed a lot of games with a “2” after the title—and one with a “3,” if you can believe that), or reboots of older franchises. This trend is affecting both PC games and console—folks were all aflutter over Halo 2, Metal Gear Solid 3, and even the revised Pac-Man game. In years past, we’ve managed to find a standout new game to proclaim as Game of the Show (such as the original Halo, Star Wars: Galaxies, and even Republic), but this year, our big titles tended to have numbers after their names. Even the grand guru of PC gaming, Sid Meier, announced Pirates 2, a sequel to a 15-year-old game. Thankfully, there are still some original games to watch for, despite this year’s sequelomania—and the originals constitute more than half of our Top 10 games from the show.

ARE THERE ANY GOOD LICENSED GAMES?

A FEW, FOR YEARS, LICENSED games—games based on other media, like TV shows, movies, or comics—were practically guaranteed to suck. Gamers recognized the games for what they were: cheap, lazy shovelware cynically designed to take fans’ dollars without bothering to provide decent gameplay. Those kind of licensed games still exist, for sure (hi, Farscape!), though more common is the licensed game that tries to be good but still can’t rise above the mediocrity (hi, Enter the Matrix). This year’s E3 was crammed, as usual, with licensed games—American Idol, Buffy, Futurama, Starsky and Hutch—that we avoided like the plague. But a notable few that we saw—Tron 2.0, Return of the King, Star Wars: Galaxies—give us hope that a license does not have to equal “teh suck.” Call us crazy. Call us naive. But if kicking ass as Gandalf turns out to be as cool as it looked at E3, we may eventually forget all about the trauma that was Survivor.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

5: CALL OF DUTY ETA: FALL 2003

This is the combat shooter the old warhorses at CGW are actually most excited about. It looks and plays more like WWII combat, with more soldiers, cinematic battle scenes, and smarter AI. We saw AI soldiers throwing down covering fire while we advanced, and when we put down covering fire, A.I. soldiers jumped through windows to take enemy buildings. The campaign lets you play from three perspectives: an American paratrooper on D-Day, a British Special Forces commando, and a Russian foot soldier at Stalingrad. A big plus: blood. We love the Medal of Honor series, but you can’t have realistic combat without blood.
Extinction
Is NOT An Option!

We have the courage. We have the tactics. We have the artillery.

VOLUNTEER FOR THE USC.
Command your own elite squad, be brutal and be feared! Your boys know how to party: with jets, buggles, tanks, APCs and a deadly arsenal, blast the Breed to smithereens!
For the sake of the Earth's future.

COMING IN THE 2nd HALF OF 2003!

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DEPENDING ON WHETHER YOU consider Microsoft Train Simulator 2.0 to be an actual game or an interactive screensaver, OK, that may be a little harsh, but the truth is that this year’s E3 featured tons and tons of Microsoft games on Xbox and something less than a handful of titles for the PC—hardly surprising, considering that a highly placed Microsoft staffer admitted to us that Microsoft has no plans to announce any new PC titles before the year’s end. Ouch. So what—other than the choo-choo—was Microsoft showing this year? A trailer for the sequel to Dungeon Siege, a new Flight Simulator, the Rise of the Titans expansion for Age of Mythology, the Xbox port Halo, and—the only truly new title—the MMORPG Mythica. None of these titles was godawful—Mythica looks promising and the graphically upgraded Halo appears to have absolutely killed multiplayer—but compared to recent history, it’s hard not to conclude that the giant from Redmond is throwing all of its resources behind its console and leaving the PC behind. Only time will tell if this refocusing is a permanent thing.

DOES MICROSOFT EVEN MAKE PC GAMES ANYMORE?

GAMES WE’RE WORRIED ABOUT

LORDS OF THE REALM III Giddy anticipation rapidly became bitter letdown when we saw the latest incarnation of this storied series. By going fully 3D, completely real-time, and really focusing on multiplayer, Lords has seemingly abandoned everything that made us love this game, and has instead become a pallid Total War clone.

BLACK & WHITE 2 Maybe we’re overcompensating for our Black & White review, but we’re not sure whether the sequel can redeem the original. Graphically, the game looks great, and Lionhead will make creatures smarter and easier to train. But adding Age of Empires-style city-building and armies could make the game unwieldy or unfocused.

FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS Maybe it’s because it was running on a PS2. Or maybe it’s because it was a too-short demo in a too-loud room at E3. Whatever the reason, we walked away a bit worried about this one because it looked far more action-oriented than we expected. Stay tuned, though. We could be totally wrong—and we hope we are.

OK, SO JUST because we got an autographed photo of Bruce Boxleitner at E3 doesn’t mean we’re biased. We still thought this game rocked. Mono Roth’s 21st century update of the 1982 movie is looking wilder and more fun than ever. What seemed like a horrid idea a year ago has now manifested as one of the most original, startling-looking shooters we’ve ever seen. Running counter to every other game’s focus on “realism,” Tron’s deliberately artificial digital universe is a beauty to behold. And Monolith, the maker of such outstanding shooters as NOLF and Aliens vs. Predator 2, knows its gameplay, too. We can’t wait.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

4: TRON 2.0 ETA: AUGUST 26, 2003
WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THESE FOREIGNERS?

IT USED TO BE THAT the majority of good PC games came from American developers. Now, we're seeing development houses all over the world bring in top-notch titles for the PC. Why is that? Well, while the big boys stateside are looking to make games for consoles, foreign developers with a PC in the basement and a dream are putting together some fantastic stuff. Where do you think last year's hit Battlefield 1942 came from?

We risked the tiny booths scattered around E3 and game away with a look at some very cool—and very promising—stuff from those dang fur-in-ears. Take GSC's Stalker: Oblivion Lost. We've had an eye on this game for a while, and before the start of E3, THQ announced it was picking up the North American rights. Clearly, we were on to something there. Another nod to the underdog: You're not hearing much talk about Encore's Cold Zero, Tri Synergy's UFO: Aftermath, or stuff from the Korean contingent (JC Entertainment's Call of Cthulhu-inspired horror/fantasy MMORPG Priest and NCsoft's Guild Wars)—but you should.

KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS from TimeGate was one of 2001's biggest surprises—a truly original fantasy-strategy game that, amazingly, beat out Civilization III for our Strategy Game of the Year award. Now, TimeGate is back with the official sequel, Kohan: Kings of War. Based on what we saw at E3, it looks like a solid follow-up.

Kohan's unique, company-level gameplay remains but has been tweaked so it's much more newbie-friendly. And a brand new 3D engine seriously ups the game's look, with gorgeous-looking fantasy units and towns no longer abstracted—now coming to life. It's the best fantasy-strategy game we saw. Now it just needs a publisher.
SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT PORTABLE GAMING?

AFTER THIS YEAR'S SHOWING AT E3, we'd have to say "Hell yes!" Though maybe someone should ask Jeff again, since he's too busy playing Pokémon Sapphire on his GBA SP. Sprint PCS is quick to show how dedicated it is to pushing the gaming segment for its users. Sanyo's 8100 is the current cream of the crop, doing a pretty tight job on graphics and games. Even cooler still is what's on the horizon: Samsung's SPH-A600, which will let you flip the LCD screen over on itself and dock the phone in a mini gamepad, so it handles like a GBA. Sprint's game selection looks promising but is still best suited for less taxing titles—we played triggin' Deer Hunter 3D (it wasn't) and Ms. Pac-Man.

Nokia is trying to explode in the cell phone-gaming space with the N-Gage—a chunky, funky cell phone that'll play games, MP3s, and even radio when you're not chewing up talk-time. It'll sell on October 7 to the tune of $300 with 10 launch titles. Are you ready to spend that kind of money? We're not. This ambitious cellie strives to be more than a phone, but while the games we knocked around—such as Tomb Raider—looked OK, we've seen better.

That kind of dough for a spiced-up cell phone may seem excessive, but there's plenty of room for a powerful PDA. Enter Tapwave. This tiny company showed off the Helix (tentative codename) behind closed doors and impressed the hell out of us. This thin thing boasts more features than you have room to go on about here, including a 3.8-Inch LCD with 480x320 resolution, ATI 2D graphics chip, Fishhammerer's 3D software engine, two SD card slots, and IR and Bluetooth support. Tapwave has already signed on Activision, Atari, and Midway to make Helix-specific games. And let's not forget that this is also a fully functional Palm OS 5 PDA, able to juggle contacts, play MP3s, and show crisp video at 40 frames per second!

Sony threw down the gauntlet by announcing a portable PlayStation (PSP, for short), which the company is touting as the Walkman for the 21st century. Still more than a year away, it's an interesting notion: PSP-caliber games on a tiny hardware model. No prices cited, no games announced—there wasn't even a prototype device to show off! Still, Sony promises extensive support from the likes of Electronic Arts, a built-in memory stick slot (for digital audio), and an optical drive that'll play tiny 1.6GB discs. We wonder how much juice the disk drive and LCD will eat up—and if we can wait until the official release in fall 2004.

So, what's the venerable GBA doing in light of all this competition? Nintendo is trying to bolster all its GameCube games with GBA support (some cool Pac-Man and Link adventures are in store), but after the announcement of Sony's PSP, Nintendo's stock has dipped lower than Mario's mustache.

A ONE-LINE DESCRIPTION could read "Dungeon keeper meets NOLF," but that still doesn't quite describe Evil Genius. Designed by Dennis Hassabi's (fresh off Republic: The Revolution), Evil Genius has you managing a classic '60s spy movie-style secret Island base built underneath a volcano, all while leading off secret agents and sending your own minions off on various missions. Featuring supervillain accoutrements such as exploding coconut trees, food mixers, and libraries as torture devices; ubiquitous henchmen in brightly-colored jump-suits; and the ability to capture a secret agent and gloat to him about your secret plan, Evil Genius will let you build your doomsday device come 2004.
GEE, WHAT A SURPRISE: The sequel to the best first-person shooter ever manages to garner our Best In Show. The demo was so good, it made our fellow console magazine (EGM) jealous of the PC, and it pretty much dethroned Halo 2 as the king of shooters at E3.

New features in the E3 demo included a driveable dune buggy and actual models for things like the antlion pheromones and the physics gun (a weapon that picks up nearby objects and manipulates them). In one of the gameplay demos, Barney quips, "Remember when we thought Black Mesa was as bad as it could get?" before running out into a wrecked street with other A.I. humans and engaging in a firefight against the Combine (we assume those are the main enemies).

Gabe Newell, founder of Valve Software, made a big deal about the underlying physics of Half-Life 2 by demonstrating all the physics-based gameplay. In one level, a friendly A.I. sets up a bunch of booby traps that Freeman triggers, such as directing giant garbage containers to crush Combine soldiers, or giant metal beams to swing and smash Combine against the wall, or propeller-based contraptions to shred up headcrab zombies. Other physics-based gameplay scenes included barricading doors with nearby objects, using barrels or radiators as shields, and watching Newell fling giant "T" and "U" letters onto a giant strider. Valve combined the awesome physics engine with its amazingly detailed character animation to make a surprisingly believable gameworld. Add the signature gameplay, and Half-Life 2 easily became the most exciting game of E3.
If you bought all these games, it would cost about $186.

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- DYNASTY WARRIORS 4
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- GUNGRAVE
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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

Each time the game calls for some derring-do, a cut-scene kicks in and the derring gets done without input from you.

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Rise of Nations
Another good RTS by Di Luu

GAME STATS
- DEVELOPER: BIG HUKE GAMES
- GENE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
- ENGAGING: TEEN; BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
- PRICE: $49.99
- REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 900MHZ, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D HARD DRIVE
- SPACE: 250MB
- NETWORKING: NO
- INTERNET: 2-8 PLAYERS

It has been more than a decade since the first PC RTS was developed and the genre has evolved quite a bit since the days of Dune II. Instead of three sides, you now have dozens. Instead of plain 2D graphics, you now have magnificent 3D. Despite the changes, the basic concept remains the same: harvest, build, research, and conquer. Rise of Nations, like the latest crop of big-budget RTS titles, continues this tradition of “evolution not revolution” and successfully adds new wrinkles and intricacies to an oversaturated genre. And like its brethren, it is good—but without being amazing or breathtakingly original.

Real-time Civ
The developer behind Rise of Nations is best known for his work on turn-based games. Brian Reynolds was the chief designer for Civilization II and Alpha Centauri while working with the legendary Sid Meier. RON is his first release since leaving Firaxis to form his own studio, Big HUKE Games. Reynolds borrows unabashedly from his turn-based past, and RON is so full of concepts from his previous games that it is probably the most complicated and involved game in the genre.

Gameplay revolves around the building and control of cities. Many structures, such as libraries and granaries, must be built inside your city’s radius, and the loss of your capital means automatic defeat unless you take it back within an allotted time. Cities also extend a national border, which affects where you can build and the amount of taxes you can collect; it can even cause attrition damage to enemy units when they invade your territory. Just the addition of the borders would have made RON stand out in the genre, but the list of new complications is breathtakingly long. There are 38 distinct civilizations, a huge tech tree that spans eight different ages, spies, commandos, generals, supply wagons to counter attrition, and trade routes. Add to this a global resource market reflecting supply and demand, wonders giving concrete benefits to your civilization, and six different resources to harvest. The list goes on, and RON at times seems to be an exercise in seeing how many different strategy gaming conventions the designers could cram into one little package. While many of these aspects work for a turn-based game like Civilization, in hectic real-time, it can become quite overwhelming.

Too much of a good thing?
Big HUKE Games must be given credit for making improvements in the economic game. While there are many resources to manage, the peasants are highly automated and will generally be smart enough to gather resources or build structures on their own if left idle. Resource-gathering structures, such as mines and farms, never run out of supply; so you won’t need to scramble to find virgin forests or another gold mine. There is also a global market where you can purchase or sell the primary resources of food, oil, wood, and metal. If the world supply is abundant, prices will be low, but if everyone’s trying to grab the...

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resource, the price gouging would make OPEC envious.

Other than dispensing with the cumbersome use of troop transports over bodies of water, RON's combat model is also more complicated than those in most conventional RTS games. Units attacked on the flanks and rear or while crossing a river receive extra damage. There's a rock-paper-scissors factor in how various units match up—which might change depending on the tech level of the forces—and a general can do things like entrench his forces or even create decoys to fool the enemy. Throw in attrition, supply, spies, and commandos into the mix, and you'll probably need four hands and eight eyes to manage everything properly at normal speed settings. The attrition was a nice touch, but the other stuff is mostly window dressing for people lacking the aforementioned appendages.

Also breaking the mold of the genre is the single player campaign, which eschews the story-driven campaign in favor of a Risk-style map. You begin with one province and must lead your civilization to global domination before the game advances past the Information Age. As you conquer territories, you gain special resources and bonus cards that grant benefits in battle. It's no Medieval: Total War, but it's serviceable and interesting enough to warrant a play through.

Like any good RTS, RON shines in multiplayer mode. With a large selection of nations, game styles, and maps, it offers a lot of bang for your buck. All the new game concepts allow for varied styles of play and help keep the experience fresh in each game. Unfortunately, connections over GameSpy are a bit iffy at launch time, and getting a full game of eight players can feel like a day in the life of Tantalus.

Though newbies probably shouldn't touch this game with a 10-foot pole, RON is worth the price of admission for die-hard RTS fans. It seems to offer more of the same, but it does it better and bigger than most. There has been enough added to keep even the most jaded players playing. It will certainly wrest the title of "the last great RTS" away from Age of Mythology, but in the end, it's still just another RTS.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

Bigger and better, but feels almost like an expansion pack to the last generation of RTS.
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City was a big surprise. Its predecessors were silly and simple top-down racing games with a crime-spree twist. So it was shocking when Rockstar applied the series' basic formula to a three-dimensional world and ended up with one of the most exciting, and arguably best, games in recent memory. *Grand Theft Auto III* received a great deal of attention due to its amoral gameplay, but what was overlooked in all the hot air and hand wringing was the fact that the game itself was revolutionary, giving you unprecedented freedom to go almost anywhere and do almost anything in a huge virtual city.

**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** doesn't alter the substance much, but it does give the game a stylistic overhaul. The big change is the setting. Gone are the modern-day, gritty streets of Liberty City. *Vice City* is set in the 1980s, in a town that looks like a made-for-cable version of Miami, with sockless men in pastel blazers shooting it out amidst palm trees and neon-lit strip clubs. The vehicles, including flashy speedboats and renowned Ferraris and DeLoreans, evoke the era, but nothing seals the deal like the soundtrack. The licensed songs may make you miss the parody music from *Grand Theft Auto III*, but the music selection is both large and varied, running from Latin jazz to new wave to hair metal. And an argument can be made that songs like Cutting Crew's "(I Just) Died in Your Arms, Tonight" and Autograph's "Turn up the Radio" are funny enough on their own.

**Simulating neon-lit murder**

Apart from the setting, however, the basic formula remains intact. You perform tasks for competing crime lords: stealing vehicles, killing thugs, and trying to stay away from— or just sever an artery on—the long arm of the law. The missions rarely get repetitive, and the variety is one of the game's strengths. There are boat races that end in shootouts with helicopters, drug deals that end in timed bolts across the whole of *Vice City*, and tank heists that end with a battalion of soldiers chasing you through the streets. Almost every mission requires you to perform several tasks, and on the whole, the missions are much more interesting than those in *Grand Theft Auto III*.

You'll get most of your missions as you follow the story line, which involves a cocaine deal that went bad for both parties, and the protagonist's attempt to make things right with his bosses. But, as in *Grand Theft Auto III*, you can create a crime spree of your own without even visiting any of the major characters. You can steal cabs and pick up fares, steal ambulances and deliver patients to the hospital, or you can just
Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to.

Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to.

rampage through the streets and see how long you can survive with the police, the FBI, and the army on your tail. Vice City also allows you to purchase buildings, such as dance clubs and apartment buildings, that provide additional save points and, later in the game, can provide you with income.

Handles much better than your jalopy

While the majority of the scripted missions are great, there are a few clunkers that are notably frustrating, including a mission in which you must guide a radio-controlled helicopter and plant some bombs at a construction site. The PC-specific control scheme is not suited for the task, and as such, it will likely take you numerous tries just to figure out how to operate the thing. But this problem is the result of one of the game's strongest features. The controls have been completely redesigned for the PC, and running around on foot uses the standard WASD keys and the mouse. Though it seems like a simple change, it makes Vice City not only an excellent console-to-PC translation, but also the rare port that is actually better than the original.

Vice City was obviously an expensive production, and the money shows in more places than a Michael Jackson song on the radio. The characters' voices are provided by actors such as perennial psycho Ray Liotta, independent film staple Luis Guzman, and no description necessary Burt Reynolds. More important, though, the characters themselves are distinct and funny, and the dialogue is great. The game may rely on toilet humor much of the time, but it is undeniably funny toilet humor. And the occasional subtle moment shows that there's an intelligence at work behind the ass jokes, like when a host on Vice City Public Radio announces that the station is for "teachers and librarians."

As a sequel, Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. The minor improvements—such as better missions and the addition of motorcycles—are enough to make the game worthwhile for anyone whose moral barometer can handle a game in which mass destruction and murderous rampages are not only encouraged, but also required.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A minor overhaul for one of the best games in recent memory.
Day of Defeat
A two-year-old mod holds its own against BF1942

BY JEFF GREEN

There really any argument, at this point, whether Half-Life was the best PC game of the past 20 years? If so, just consider this. Not only is Half-Life itself a certifiable masterpiece, yet to be equaled by any competitor five years after its release, but the tools released with the game have allowed users to create free mods that, in some cases, have become classics in their own right. Exhibit A, of course, is Counter-Strike, a squad-based multiplayer mod that has ruled the online world for years now, and is the only amateur game to reside in CGW’s Hall of Fame.

Now we have Exhibit B: Day of Defeat, another squad-based multiplayer mod, set in WWII, which further solidifies Half-Life’s amazing legacy. Like Counter-Strike, Day of Defeat has actually been around awhile (since January 2001) as a free download, but it became so popular that Valve Software wisely “adopted” the game and added new content; the company has now released Day of Defeat as a retail product. The result is a pretty great game, easily recommendable, that, though it suffers in some ways due to its age, holds up surprisingly well, even in comparison to newer, awesome titles like Battlefield 1942.

Set in the European theater in 1944, Day of Defeat pits two squads (Axis versus Allies) against each other over 15 different multiplayer maps—10 of which were created for this retail version. In contrast to Battlefield 1942, Day of Defeat is strictly infantry-based—there are no vehicles or air units whatsoever.

Day of Defeat makes up for the lack of vehicles with a couple neat tricks of its own.

and the map designs reflect this difference. While Battlefield 1942 features huge, open environments, the Day of Defeat maps tend to be smaller, narrower, and more claustrophobic, in feel, with a generous, clever, well-planned collection of tunnels, crawl spaces, ledges, and nooks and crannies to skulk around and (though I would never do this) camp. The maps are small enough for newbies to comprehend, but complex enough to require multiple sessions to discover how to best plot your moves and strategies. The retail version’s new minimap is a welcome addition. It can toggle to a near-full-screen display, further easing the newbie pain—clearly marking routes and dynamically marking the location of friendly units.

While the lack of vehicles may burn out Battlefield veterans, Day of Defeat makes up for it, somewhat, with a couple neat tricks of its own. Best of all is the weapon-handling, which really takes some practice to master. The recoil on some of the weapons is brutal, making it nearly impossible to fire a decent shot while moving. You can avoid this by using a bipod. But the setup incurs a similar delay—and you must remain stationary while firing.

(Using the scope on the sniper rifle incurs a similar delay.) Day of Defeat’s respawn system is much friendlier than Battlefield’s, penalizing you with, at worst, a 10-second delay before thrusting you back in the action. For those who die often, like me, it’s a serious reduction in frustrating down-time.

Day of Defeat’s biggest problem is simply the fact that it’s based on a now-aging engine. The textures and objects can’t help but look dated and jaggy, and some of the animations really just don’t cut it anymore. On the other hand, the newly redone character models are quite detailed, and the sound, with whizzing bullets and explosions adding real tension, is fantastic.

Day of Defeat is not going to stop the juggernaut that is Battlefield 1942, but it does get props for being here first, and for ably holding its own against the newer game. Shooter fans with less-than-stable-of-the-art systems could do a lot worse.

VERDICT
Day of Defeat is a great squad-based game mod marred only by its age.
Regardless of the mission's main objective, you can usually count on a lot of combat taking place along the way.


Bandits: Phoenix Rising
Forget Mad Max...we've got Fennec! by Rob Smolka

GAME STATS

**Top** me if any of this sounds familiar: Earth is a barren wasteland with very limited resources. Groups of bandits driving heavily armed vehicles made of spare parts battle over what little is left after a global catastrophe. One of the characters is a thick-broned Scot who says "crrrap" a lot. There's also a powerful doomsday weapon called the Phoenix that everyone would love to get their hands on, and it's hidden within the walled city of Jericho. All we're missing is Tina Turner in chain mail waving that she doesn't need another hero. None of this is too problematic if the gameplay is exciting, and Bandits comes through in spades. The two characters—Fennec and Rewdall (a Scottish midget)—whose car you control are quite funny and add a lot of charm to the proceedings with their banter. The 20 or so missions, while not terribly innovative, are nicely varied and give you plenty of opportunities to test out the awesome physics engine and the large selection of weapons you'll get to add to your vehicle. Bandits is also easy on the eyes, with great detail in the cars and enough special effects to make Hollywood jealous. Combat is one of the game's strongest features. Even though

**You'll want to play Bandits like you would a first-person shooter—using the keyboard and the mouse.**

Scottish midgets whose car you control are quite funny and add a lot of charm to the proceedings with their banter. The 20 or so missions, while not terribly innovative, are nicely varied and give you plenty of opportunities to test out the awesome physics engine and the large selection of weapons you'll get to add to your vehicle. Bandits is also easy on the eyes, with great detail in the cars and enough special effects to make Hollywood jealous. Combat is one of the game's strongest features. Even though

**VERDICT**
A fun first-person shooter dressed up in a third-person racing game's clothes.

www.computergaming.com 77
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance
Loses both substance and style on the PC by Che Chou

Terrorism. Rogue nations. Nuclear war. These were urgent themes that dominated Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty. 2001's stealth-action blockbuster on PS2. While the game's topical elements persist, MGS2, which arrives on the PC in the form of a bonus-laden director's cut, feels outdated two years down the line. The problem here isn't so much with the game's content, which remains as ambitious and poignant as ever, but rather with Konami's sloppy porting efforts to the PC and the two-years-too-late release date.

Taking place a short while after the events of Metal Gear Solid, part deux opens with returning covert-ops roughneck Solid Snake investigating rumors of a new type of Metal Gear, a bipedal tank capable of launching nuclear strikes with little preparation. And what an opening it is: Producer/director Hideo Kojima combines Hollywood's action-movie tradition with the stylistic flair of Japanese animation for an epic bungee-jumping sequence off the George Washington Bridge onto an unsuspecting oil tanker. The event is a breathtaking, one-of-a-kind experience rarely seen in PC games, setting up nicely for an excursion into MGS2's narrative-driven stealth-action gameplay.

Similar to titles like Thief or Splinter Cell, MGS2 encourages players to keep out of sight. To that end, the game gives you plenty of ways to stay stealthy and deadly. Solid Snake has the ability to punch, kick, choke, shoot, and tranquilize (in first-person perspective no less) his enemies, as well as the option to hang from banisters and hide under boxes, within lockers, and under tables should such situations arise. And even while the gameplay, with its slightly lethargic AI and simplistic cat-and-mouse routines, does nothing in the way of realism, MGS2 is nonetheless an exceedingly deep game worth exploring once you learn its rules. Having mastered its philosophy, you can challenge your skills in MGS2's many story-free VR training missions that boil the game down to its purest form.

That said, much of MGS2's excellent playability has been mangled by the game's terrible transition to the PC. For starters, this game begs for a game pad controller of some sort (I used a Microsoft Sidewinder). Even with a console-like controller in hand, however, MGS2's default button layout makes for an awkward (or even unplayable) experience. To make matters worse, much of MGS2's controls were optimized for PS2's Dual Shock 2 controller—which features eight analog buttons and two analog sticks. Without the use of analog buttons, simple actions like putting your gun away (by slowly lifting your finger off the trigger button) or gradually leaning around corners are obliterated, making the game clumsy and difficult.

Underneath the shoddy user interface and disappointingly high system requirements (in resolutions higher than 800x600, expect to see lots of slowdown) is a bold game that needs to be experienced. The question is, should you play MGS2 on a PC? Well, not if you can help it.

VERDICT

This is supposed to be MGS2: The Director's Cut, but the sloppy port makes this more like MGS2: The Chimp Next Door's Cut.
Stalingrad, 1943: Russia bombarded invaders with the Katyusha launcher's hail of rockets.

Port Royale
It's Pirates! with cheese BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

For those who think Sid Meier's Pirates! is one of the few Games That Should Be Remade (and now apparently will be), the makers of Patrician II may have just answered your prayers—Port Royale loosely follows Mr. Meier's buccaneer blueprint but takes it to new strategic depths.

Set in the 15th and 16th centuries, as settlements in the Caribbean were coming into prominence, Port Royale allows you to sail for the Dutch, the English, the Spanish, or the French, trading goods, running errands for local governors, and fighting (or joining the ranks of) pirates. The game is impressive in its open-endedness, allowing you to trade goods, develop towns, or find a profitable balance of the many options.

Limiting yourself to just one means of income can be a troublesome path. Port Royale features a somewhat complex system of supply and demand. As you sell goods, the price decreases, and as you buy them, the price escalates. This system makes it difficult to find a single source of income—Vera Cruz may be paying premium prices for tobacco today, but tomorrow could be a different story. Operating businesses is similarly tricky: Once too many of the same sort opens in a town, the overabundance of goods drives prices down.

As a result, you're constantly adjusting your strategy to keep gold supply high. One method is to run often-lucrative missions for governors; in towns where you are sufficiently respected, the local government will offer you tasks like delivering goods or hunting down a particularly troublesome pirate. As your experience increases, you can hire additional convoys, and these can even be automated to run certain trade routes for you.

Once you've explored the map and have a few convoys in your fleet, Port Royale gets exponentially complex. It is at this point that the game is the most enjoyable, because there are so many interesting choices available at any given moment. Unfortunately, the early game can be tedious, and once you've commanded 10 fleets from the Yucatan to Havana, it's difficult to find yourself with few known ports and few assets to your name.

It can be difficult to get into—the manual is thin for such a complex game, and there's a notable lack of in-game feedback. But taking the time to learn its ins and outs is a worthwhile task: Port Royale offers a great blend of combat and economic strategy.

VERDICT

After a slow start, a different (and better) pirate game emerges.

www.computergaming.com 79
Medieval: Total War—Viking Invasion

Odin’s war cry by Raphael Liberatore

The game map may highlight only the British Isles and the Viking home of Western Scandinavia, but there’s just as much to do here as on the bigger maps of the original game.

Last year’s Medieval: Total War blew away many gamers with its masterful scope and design. So it’s welcome news that Viking Invasion provides the same exhilarating blend of strategy and tactics while enhancing both the campaign game and 3D combat.

Creative Assembly has also streamlined the tech tree, tossed in several more units and building types, added more epic historical 3D battles, and included the Dark Age period. Simply put, this is an outstanding expansion.

Viking Invasion’s most prominent feature is the Dark Age campaign, which takes you back to the eighth-century British Isles, where Vikings ravage the region with lightning fast raids using sleek longboats. Creative Assembly does a great job re-creating this fascinating part of history. Each of eight new Dark Age factions—Picts, Welsh, Mercians, Irish, Scots, Saxons, Northumbrians, and Vikings—has its own set of unique units, culture, economy, and religion. Compared to Medieval’s three large campaign maps of later medieval Europe, this campaign is more focused; therefore, it takes less time to complete.

New units such as the strong attacking Saxon huscarles, the two-handed sword-wielding Irish gallowlasses, raging Viking berserkers, and fleet Irish cartmen, along with several other unit types specific to the eighth-century British Isles, provide an engaging world of warfare and offer new strategic challenges. The noncombat strategy portion of the game is enhanced by spies and assassins (who have benefited from upgrades), taverns, brothels, and drinking halls. Armed with the appropriate upgrades, assassins now have a greater chance of eliminating higher-ranking enemy generals, while spies will find they have a better chance of subterfuge.

Viking Invasion is about warfare, and Creative Assembly deftly introduces a handful of features to its already excellent 3D real-time tactical combat without muddying the battle system. The pre-battle system is a welcome addition, allowing better management of forces before, during, and after combat. Not only do you get to organize reinforcements before the first arrow flies, but you also get to save the game before the fighting begins—just in case things don’t go as planned. Spies also have the distinct ability to scout enemy forces and formations in the province you’re about to conquer.

Benefits aren’t limited to just the new Dark Age campaign either, as the expansion adds plenty to the original game—including three new factions (Hungarians, Angonese, Sicilians) to the later three campaigning ages. Armchair tacticians can form armies from 25 unique unit types, such as the Byzantine lancers, agile Sherwood Foresters, Steppe heavy cavalry, and fierce berserkers. Building upgrades are more manageable and provinces are easier to control, which makes administering your holdings more fluid. For example, the Vice and Virtues report at the beginning of each turn allows for easier overseeing and rewarding of loyal generals.

Viking Invasion is practically a full sequel. The depth and scope of this add-on ensures that fans of Medieval: Total War will be keeping the game on their hard drives for a long, long time.

Compared to Medieval: Total War’s three large maps, this Dark Age campaign is more focused.

Verdict

The brand-new Dark Age campaign, lots of new units, and plenty of new gameplay make Viking Invasion a must for Total War fans.
Normandy, 1944: U.S. paratroopers assaulted German forces with daring drops behind enemy lines.

RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds
An up-and-down journey around the globe by Thomas L. McDonald

It's not that Wacky Worlds is a bad expansion pack. It delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on set: new scenarios and elements. The problem lies with RollerCoaster Tycoon 2. After the original RCT managed to cling to the top 10 best-seller list for more than two years, just like PC gaming's very own lampray, an audience was primed and ready for a next-gen RCT experience. Instead, they got RollerCoaster Tycoon with a modest spit polish. If designer Chris Sawyer were looking for an ideal way to squander the goodwill and brand-name recognition created by RCT's stellar gameplay, mission accomplished.

Wacky Worlds delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on.

Wacky Worlds builds on this aging foundation but adds nothing to the overall playability of the game. The general specs appear to line up quite nicely, with new content based upon the seven continents. This adds a nicely diverse set of architectural styles, such as igloos (which, technically speaking, would be Arctic rather than Antarctic), a mixed Chinese/Japanese/Indian style, Wild West structures, and the like. Themes extend from the look of buildings to the rides, concessions, and major landmarks, including giant Buddhas, the Great Wall of China, Shackleton's Endurance, and other doodads to dress up your park.

What, exactly, does all this amount to? Well, about 250 odd, new "elements," which can be cross-pollinated using the scenario editor, allowing you to mix and match themes from different continents. As far as the effect on gameplay, well, it's almost nil. Many concessions and rides are simply old rides with new graphics. While the 17 new scenarios— at least one for each continent—are uniformly good and often interesting, there is, this late in the life of the game, an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. Even the best games can get tired with age, and these repeated attempts to inject new life into the old RCT design rather than expanding upon that design results in little more than a face-lift and a tummy tuck.

VERDICT
It adds some window dressing and a smattering of new scenarios to a game well past its prime.
Empire of Magic

Looks like strategy, plays like an RPG by George Jones

Empire of Magic

PC games were high art. Empire of Magic would be identified and perhaps even lauded as the first shot of the post-neo-Diablo or post retro Diablo anti-real-time movement. But gaming is firmly rooted in the here and now, so SummitSoft's import from the Slovak Republic will simply be identified and unfairly written off as a cheesy old-school new-school RPG in which Diablo meets Heroes of Might and Magic.

Heroes of Might and Magic could easily steal a few pages from Empire of Magic.

It's an unfortunate and possibly erroneous tag, but understandable. Empire of Magic may possess a crude look straight from the early 1990s, but it puts forth a style of play that, while rough and unrefined, also feels fresh enough that RPG gamers will enjoy the experience, if only for a short while.

The setup is classic fantasy role-playing. There's a mystery about in a mythical empire, which is being overrun by corruption and the undead. As Yano, the dashing horseman hero, you get pulled into a story that spans 15 long scenarios involving long journeys, massive battles, optional subquests, and characters whose attributes, spells, and skills improve over time.

Empire of Magic puts forth a refreshingly retro model of the RPG: Particles (created by simply stacking three units together) have action points that limit their movement and actions; an End Turn button signals the AI's turn to move NPCs and enemy units; combat zooms in on the terrain for a level of tactical strategizing; a diary displays quests and subquests. This methodical attitude looks and feels like that of Heroes of Might and Magic but also calls to mind the pleasurable—and not-so-pleasurable aspects of the fantasy role-playing games of yesteryear.

A great example of Empire of Magic's duality comes in the third scenario. Transplanted to a desert land, you encounter a massive battle outside a castle pitting good sheiks and guards against the great RPG intro monsters: skeletons and zombies. Watching the little AI sheik icons move around and defend their land proves entertaining.

But when you win, you get no reward and are sent all the way around the castle through more zombies to a stairway, where an NPC forces you to travel back around the castle and all the way to the north and through more zombies to complete another minquest before he helps you. The scenario is fun in spots, but the FedEx-type missions get tedious real soon.

Still, the Heroes of Might and Magic series could easily steal a few pages from Empire of Magic, which maintains interest with a consistent hero and contigous story, which, while overused, connects all 16 scenarios together and weaves non-player characters in and out of the plot. Unfortunately, Empire of Magic doesn't borrow or steal from other RPGs. The combat model, a mere game of checkers compared with Heroes of Might and Magic's chess, unfairly carries over action points into battle. A long walk-up to an enemy encounter will have friendly units with no action points, which makes for repeated failure and ultimately a slow, crawling pace.

Compounding this flaw is the lack of a constant flow of rewards and incentives to keep gamers excited.

Patient and tolerant gamers might feel rewarded with Empire of Magic. After all, it's not so bad to slow down every once in a while.

Verdict

An odd duck of an RPG, Empire of Magic both entertains and annoys.
**Revisionist History**

**O.R.B., Vietcong**

By Thomas L. McDonald

O.R.B. version 1.04 offers an attractive set of enhancements along with a few fixes that improve overall gameplay. At the top of the list is a spiffiy 3D tactical screen, which replaces the crummy old 2D one. Four new playable units (two frigates for each race) have arrived on the scene, along with one new alien carrier for each the Kyulak and Elatan. Eight skirmish and multiplayer scenarios, a few weapons, and some fresh sound effects round out the state of additions. The capital ship limit is up to 20, and the build screen now has a Pause function.

On the maintenance side of things, multiplayer stability is significantly improved, with code enhancements implemented to make O.R.B. run more smoothly. The loading time is (thankfully) better, but whether or not it reaches the "200 percent faster" claims of *Strategy First* is up for debate. That's not really something you can quantify across all computers. The company is also touting better A.I. and improved explosions. On the first count, the A.I. does seem a little better, or maybe it's just cheating better. Good A.I. is like Justice Stewart's famous definition of pornography—"I know it when I see it"—but O.R.B.'s A.I. pulls the plow. On the second count, why yes, explosions do look a bit more explosive.

If you toddle on over to the official site (www.orb-b.com), you'll also find the second package of three new maps by the Phoenix, along with a 1.04 upgrade to his first map pack.

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Vietcong version 1.01 claims a "significantly" improved frames rate. "Significantly" is another one of the unquantifiable words in PC gaming, since everyone has a different notion of what "significant improvement" is. Vietcong could really use an improvement that a reasonable person might call "significant" or even "adequate." I'd call v.1.01 a "marginal" improvement. The Pterodon engine still kicks few asses and takes down no names whatsoever.

While framerate was by far the most serious problem dogging Vietcong, there are a few other fixers in the patch: no more respawning inside another player during multiplayer, a functional team autokick option, and supposedly better cheat protection, though I couldn't verify this last improvement.
When The Matrix Reloaded came out, a number of movie reviewers sneeringly likened the film to a videogame because of the relentlessness of action sequences and the precedence they were allowed to take over matters like character development or the telling of a coherent story. This was a cheap shot—not against the movie, which deserved it, but against videogames. In recent years, game designers have demonstrated amply that a well-written game—such as Half-Life, Deus Ex, No One Lives Forever—can be more than a series of fights strung end to end.

Unfortunately, as games go, Enter the Matrix is a step backward. It's basically just a series of fights strung end to end. While it's easy to get excited about the prospect of using all those funky powers from the movies (running up walls, dodging bullets in slow motion, kicking a bad guy across the room), the reality of it isn't all that thrilling after you've tried out all the moves once. Meanwhile, the scenery is drab, the levels are monotonous, and the whole screen starts to stutter each time it fills up with too many combatants. And several times, I died—even on the highest brightness setting, I couldn't tell that I was about to walk off a ledge. Add to this the disappointing fact that your choice of characters is between generic (background characters Niobe and Ghost, and you're looking at a game that is seriously short on charisma. (Don't even ask about the game's nearly unplayable driving and sniper sequences.)

And yet, there is something rewarding about Enter the Matrix. something deeply, viscerally satisfying, and that's the part that has nothing to do with playing a game. Each time the action stops for a cut-scene—some animated using the in-game engine, others filmed on the actual sets and featuring the movie's cast—your heart leaps. In the very first scene, when Ghost justifies the way he reloads his gun with an allusion to the philosophical writings of David Hume (1711-1776), you know you're in for something above-average dialogue.

Yes, it would be better if the game were more fun to play. It's frustrating that each time the game reaches a climactic moment that calls for some major derring-do, a cut-scene kicks in and the derring gets done without any input from you. But that doesn't change the fact that the cut-scenes are great fun to watch. It's ironic: The Matrix Reloaded may have been a better videogame than it was a movie, and now along comes Enter the Matrix, and it turns out to be a better movie than it is a game. Sometimes you just can't win. But then, any student of Hume already knows that.

Verdict: Play it for the movies, don't play it for the play.

Just like in the movies, there's gunplay aplenty.
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The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II
A different kind of tomb raider by Denice Cook

Developer Omni Adventures has a skeleton crew in more ways than one. First, its games are created almost entirely by husband-and-wife team Jeff and Karen Tobler, and second, both of its works are archaeological puzzle adventures. The Omega Stone, sequel to Omni's 2000 release Riddle of the Sphinx, manages more diversity by adding locales such as the Bermuda Triangle, Easter Island, Stonehenge, and the Yucatan's Chichen Itza to the Egyptian spelunking of the first game. And although The Omega Stone's doomsday prophecies first sound as timeworn as its adventure game topics of Egypt, Atlantis, and the Knights Templar, its plot actually has more backbone than a Celtic cemetery's. The story seamlessly blends historical facts with engrossing fiction, adding another twist with every book, letter, or scroll you uncover. Challenging puzzles also emerge from the landscapes and link ancient symbols and archaeological artifacts to future chaos.

However, while a cohesive story and organic puzzles make the game a gem, it doesn't mean this Stone is flawless. Though some skull collecting leads to two creepy puzzles, exploring the dark catacombs under Chichen Itza to get the skulls becomes drawn out and disorienting because of the long look-alike paths. Moreover, the dim graininess of the caverns sometimes turns your excavations into pixel hunts. (Yes, Stone's graphics are an improvement upon its predecessor's, but they're still grainy in spots and somewhat blurry overall.) It's also surprising that an archeologist in the year 2012 isn't equipped with a lantern or a mapping device. Subteneous skullleggery aside, there is one other annoying area later at a pash mansion, where you must navigate a garden maze twice.

But overall, The Omega Stone's puzzles are absorbing and intricate. A moonlit cemetery harbors stones with markings paralleling those seen in ancient texts. How you correlate these stones to manuscripts you find about alchemy and how you use materials such as crystal, sulfur, and mercury will determine whether you save the world or not. Oh, and did I mention that you can be incinerated, blown up, or electrocuted during the game? At least The Omega Stone is an exciting puzzle game, and the ending creatively explains the link between the locales you've visited. Despite Stone's imperfections, this nicely improved sequel is worth digging up.

Uplink: Hacker Elite
L33T! by Di Luo

Like the anti-establishment hackers that the game tries to depict, Uplink goes against the norm of modern games. Instead of 3D graphics, you have a low-res, bare-bones look resembling something from the CGA era. Rather than giving you instant gratification, the game rewards research, preparation, and covering your tracks thoroughly. And it's damn fun. As an enterprising hacker, your goal in Uplink is to make money and upgrade your equipment as you get rich. You accept missions through a bulletin board, hunt out targets on a world map, bounce your connections around to hide your steps, and then attempt to crack your target. Once in, you'll use various specialized tools to copy information, sabotage files, and forge records. Some of the more complicated missions will even involve cracking security devices protected by voice recognition and file encryption. While the early missions are cakewalks, the more challenging ones can be quite exciting, especially when seconds mean the difference between rich rewards and incarceration.

It takes a while to actually get into the somewhat convoluted conspiracy story in Uplink, and the gameplay eventually becomes repetitive, but for a while, it's a breath of fresh air in a gaming world with stilted ideas.
The Sims: Superstar
Bella Goth gets her 15 minutes of fame by Elizabeth McAdams

Almost everyone has fantasized about being famous, and now in The Sims: Superstar you can find out what it would be like-albeit virtually. Superstar allows you to venture down three new career tracks and actively determine and witness how your Sim's career advances. As in previous expansions like Hot Date and Vacation, a brand-new location (in this case Studio Town) has been included. Here, you can follow your dreams and become the next singing sensation, the latest ingénue actress, or a sexy model. Whichever career you choose, you'll gain your own entourage of groups as you manipulate the new Fame-focused gameplay. It's all about who you know and who knows you in Studio Town.

Perhaps the best part of living the life of a celebrity is the luxuries—spa treatments, sushi dinners, and a butler await you in Superstar. After a truly exhausting day working the catwalk, you can relax with a steam bath and a visit from Inga, the Swedish massage sensation.

The Fame part of the game gives "starpower" to each Sim who has signed up with an agent; each star you receive unlocks areas of the game, and the possibility of getting new objects and interactions will motivate you to invest quality time in Superstar. Obviously, the game becomes more challenging as you progress, and your Fame may decay if you play lazy from Studio Town too often.

Superstar takes a small cue from the console versions of the franchise.
When real-time games seized their first beachhead, hardcore wargamers were dismissive. Good, realistic wargames could not, the common wisdom went, be done in real-time, primarily because RTS games eschew lavish tactics in favor of fast pacing. Time and titles such as Close Combat and Sid Meier’s Gettysburg have proved that realism and real-time are not mutually exclusive, but a good, large-scale realistic World War II game has yet to roll into battle. Sudden Strike didn’t do it, nor did World War II: Panzer Claus. Blitzkrieg doesn’t, either, but it has a fun time trying, largely succeeding with a game that can best be described as “realistic.”

Blitzkrieg accomplishes this by modeling the statistics that matter and placing them in a real-time context. For example, armored units have ratings for front, rear, and side armor strength, and each unit tracks shells and machine guns independently. Tanks can throw a tread or be disabled without being destroyed, and a battlefield repair unit can get them up and running again. Units expend their ammunition as they fight, requiring fairly constant attention to logistics.

Clearly, much research went into this game, and much of it is apparent in the gameplay. The problem comes down to one of scale. For a game to be realistic, it needs to work with historical orders of battle, which were vast and complex. Blitzkrieg deals with infantry abstractly, placing men on the field as part of a generic squad that can be moved as a single unit in marching, assault, or defensive formations. Although this effectively removes it from the realm of realistic wargame, it creates a remarkably playable game that captures the feel and many of the tactics of WWII operations.

The other large flaw is the quirky handling of air power. All aircraft (fighter, bomber, recon, and airstrip planes) are assigned to a single pool and can only launch one mission at a time, and then you have to wait for an arbitrary cycle to end before you can access the pool and launch another mission. This effectively eliminates fighter support and relegates bombing to a rather confusing supporting role. Aircraft follow a preset route and cannot be controlled once they take off.

The maps provide a handsome 2D terrain complete with functional elevations and plenty of roads, rivers, houses, buildings, supply depots, and places for ambush. Infantry can pile into buildings for house-to-house fighting, dig in, build bridges, lay mines, and establish various defensive structures. The units and vehicles themselves are 3D and to scale, which gives its up-and-downside. They do look quite good, complete with impressive special effects, without a zoom or rotate feature, individual infantry units such as the sniper simply vanish into the map.

While there’s no shortage of gameplay spread among the three campaigns (Axis, Allied, and Soviet, each with seven long missions), extra features are somewhat wanting. A Skirmish mode didn’t make the cut, and a paltry three stand-alone missions are all that exist beyond the campaigns. Multiplayer modes feature Assault and Flag-Capture set on a dozen or so unique maps, but Internet play is a bit sluggish.

Overall, however, Blitzkrieg delivers the best World War II real-time gaming experience to date. It may be a bit of a faint praise, but with so many stale RTS games, it’s good to find one that can hold your attention.

**VERDICT**

A sturdy meat-and-potatoes real-time wargame that even manages a bit of realism.
 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation
Another one bites the dust  BY DANA JONGEWAARD

Game Stats
Publisher: UBI SOFT
Developer: 369 INTERACTIVE
Genre: BAD TV SHOW
Licensee: LDLING
Mature: BLOOD AND CORE.
Violence Rating: ESRB: T
Recommended System: Pentium II 300, 128MB RAM, 350MB Hard Drive
Space Required: Pentium II 500, 256MB RAM, 550MB Hard Drive

Lots of people will buy CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and enjoy it. They will write reviews on Amazon.com, raving about complexity of gameplay and excellence of the graphics. Most of these people, however, wouldn't recognize a quality computer game if it bit them in the ass. CSI: the game offers you the TV show's music and intro, voice acting from all of the show's regular cast members, and dialogue from the show's writers. Your character is a new member of the force, and in each of the five cases, you work to solve the mystery with a different partner from the TV cast.

It's not a bad game, but neither is it a good one. Playtime is incredibly short unless you're stupid; I easily polished off the game in one day at work, in between several meetings and a long martini-laden lunch. The graphics are less scary than those in some equivalent games ("cough" Law & Order), but you still get stuck watching long, boring cut-scenes of conversations between characters.

Playtime is incredibly short unless you're stupid.

Heroes of Might and Magic 4: Winds of War
Dial "M" for murdered franchise  BY JONAH JACKSON

Game Stats
Publisher: 3DO
Developer: 3DO World Computing Centre
Turn-Based Strategy
Current Everyones
Mature: Blood
Violence Rating: ESRB: T
Recommended System: Pentium II 400, 256MB RAM, 128MB Video RAM, Internet (6-6 Players)

3 Do: 3DO customer service, how may we help you?
Me: Hi, I just bought the new HomM4 expansion pack and...
3DO: You mean Winds of War, the second all-new expansion pack loaded with new features and maps.
Me: Um, yeah. Anyway, I think I'm missing the manual, I have only a flimsy CD liner that vaguely mentions three new units and six new creature generators.
3DO: No, sir, you're not missing anything. That's it.
Me: But where is the information about the improved AI?
3DO: There isn't any. It's the same AI.
Me: How about the random scenario generator?
3DO: No random maps, you can always use the map editor to make your own.
Me: Did you improve that?
3DO: Not much, but we did include several maps that were actually designed by fans. You could use those as a model.
Me: You mean you're charging $30 for a bunch of content that wasn't even designed by you?
3DO: Yes.
Me: New spells?
3DO: No.
Me: New artifacts?
3DO: No.
Me: Useful ones?
3DO: No.
Me: So, aside from a bunch of new maps, is there anything that makes this expansion pack worth the money I spent?
3DO: There's some more of that irritatingly repetitive style of music. Oh, and did you play the campaign in which the king is named Spazz Maticus? That's some hilarious writing.
Me: Uh-huh. Thanks.
3DO: No problem. Feel free to call again. And look for our next exciting expansion, HomM4: Goblins Gone Wild.
[click]

VERDICT
Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes.

VERDICT
The degeneration continues.

You mean you're charging $30 for a bunch of content that wasn't even designed by you?
REVIEW INDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

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<th>GAME</th>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>VERDICT</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1503 A.D.: The New World</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>The game's depth keeps things interesting, if not addictive</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Conquest</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>Impossible to control, impossible to play</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>Great new maps and weapons enhance an already-classic multiplayer shooter</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BloodRayne</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Mildly distracting, fairly generic, totally tasteless</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino Inc.</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Been there, done that business sim with hookers</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Championship Manager 4</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheminarius: Journey to the Other Side</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>Puts the &quot;bone in &quot;bone,&quot;</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Age of Camelot: Shredued Isles</td>
<td>4/03</td>
<td>Plenty of new stuff for the serious BAOE addict</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>This surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devastation</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclave</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>20 to 30 hours of gameplay, not one of them worth a damn</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europa 1400: The Gaedl</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>There are three or four games lurking here, all of them enjoyable</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EverQuest: The Legacy of Yshtia</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>It's about time for Sony to ease up on the constant EO expansions</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>The finest space sim since Freespace 2 and Privateer</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galactic Civilizations</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Triumphs where M03 fails-the best 4X space game in years</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Run-of-the-mill blood sport</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grim</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>This pallid Indiana Jones clone is hamstrung by horrible controls</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardanger</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>This sci-fi Diablo clone is tepid at best</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Heat 2004</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>A great franchise goes in the wrong direction</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Warriors</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>Better than hogs, but not by much</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HZ1: Covert Strike</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>The paragon of WWII flight sim</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>It may look a little funny, but it's definitely worth the effort</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bonus of a T-rex eating people</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laser Squad Nemesis</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Incredibly addictive play-by-email tactical strategy</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line of Sight: Vietnam</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Keep this lousy shooter out of your sights</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Orion 3</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>This disappointment demands too much and provides far too little</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVP Baseball 2003</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>This is the PC baseball game to buy this year</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASCAR Racing 2003 Season</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>Papyrus' last NASCAR game goes out with a whimper</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New World Order</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Just about the louester shooter ever</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal 2</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Mortem</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Five-star story undone by two-star dialogue</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praetorians</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>This rewarding game eases the pain of waiting for Rome: Total War</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Race Driver</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>The self-proclaimed &quot;carPG&quot; is utterly lame</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PureSim Baseball 2003</td>
<td>5/03</td>
<td>If you're looking for a great text-based baseball GM sim, this is the game for you</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Surpasses the earlier RS games in every way to become the definitive tac-sim</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Decent console port with finicky camera control</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Empire</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>Forget those champagne wishes and caviar dreams—this is closer to Denny's</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>You say you want a revolution? Not this one you don't</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent Hill 2</td>
<td>4/03</td>
<td>It'll bore you...to death</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sims Online</td>
<td>4/03</td>
<td>More chat room than game, this is the first blemish on the Sims empire</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropico 2: Pirate Cove</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>This competent city-builder has little to set it apart</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal II: The Awakening</td>
<td>4/03</td>
<td>Only the early parts of this FPS match the outstanding graphics. Saginess ensues</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietcong</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Vietnam shooters finally come of age in this solid title</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars</td>
<td>6/03</td>
<td>There's a whole lot more to this racer than &quot;rednecks turning left&quot;</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CGW RECOMMENDS

A Tale in the Desert

This MMORPG is worth checking out if you're more into the social aspect of online gaming than the combat. Is there another online RPG that lets you pursue a career as a leader, an artist, or an architect? If you're a gamer who hates gameplay over graphics, this Desert is worth exploring.

Shadowbane

In Shadowbane, players are encouraged to work together to build and maintain their own sprawling cities—and then go out and destroy the cities of their enemies. This game showcases the plundering character advancement and dungeon-crawling typical of MMORPGs. In order to let players rapidly develop powerful characters suited for Shadowbane's signature castles sieges.

Bookworm Deluxe

Want to feel inadequate? Check out the unbelievably high scores online for the latest insidiously addictive puzzle game from evil geniuses at PopCap. Part Boggle, part Bejeweled, all mind-consuming, this voracious gobbler of time has done more to impede CGW's productivity than Nickel Beer Night. Download and register it at www.popcap.com at your own risk.
Gateway Finally Does Gaming Right

Gateway's 700XL features great components and upgradeability at a good price
I was shocked when the people at Gateway contacted me a few weeks ago about their latest gaming rig, the 700XL. You see, for the past couple of years, I've consistently slammed Gateway for shipping gaming rigs that failed to live up to the promise of their components. Outfits from Dell to Alienware use the same components that Gateway uses, yet their machines consistently outperform Gateway's offerings. What is Gateway doing to slow down these machines? Well, that question is moot, as the latest 700XL does more than simply live up to the promise of its components; it actually manages to perform quite well.

The first thing I do when a machine shows up is open the case to check out what's going on inside. Gateway shipped the 700XL with some impressive components, most notably Intel's 8475PRZ (Cantower) motherboard. As a starting point, you can't beat that motherboard, which has an 800MHz front side bus and support for DDR 400 memory. The 700XL also rocks a 3GHz (800MHz FSB) Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of DDR 400, two 250GB hard drives in an incredible 500GB RAID configuration, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9600 Pro. Not only do these components contribute to the Gateway, matching Dell's similarly equipped Dimension XPS (reviewed in the July issue) in nearly every test, but they also help make the rig pretty damn similar to the Falcon machine I also
reviewed in that issue. The Gateway scored 2589 in 3DMark2003 at 1024x768x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on. Compare that to the 2629 the Falcon scored and the 2532 that the Dell managed. In actual game tests, the 700XL's performance was similar to the Dell's, scoring 56 frames per second in 3DGameGauge at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on; the Dell scored 57 frames per second. In fact, while the Gateway dominated the Dell in benchmark tests, the two machines were so close in actual gameplay that it was easy to call the competition a draw in that area. It's also important to note that the Gateway sports more bells and whistles than the Dell, is nearly $500 cheaper, and includes an 18-inch LCD as a display that works surprisingly well with games.

While the 700XL beats the XPS in many tests, the fact that it's significantly more upgradeable is an enormous advantage. Also, while the Dell shipped with its proprietary Intel 850-based motherboard, the 700XL shipped with Intel's D850P85 motherboard. And unlike Dell's case, Gateway's is more standard. You can quickly remove the panel and access all of the components, and because it has a more standard ATX configuration, you can easily change the motherboard or even upgrade the power supply. Other touches that make the Gateway appealing are its eight USB 2.0 ports (two in the front and six in the rear), as well as four FireWire ports (three in the front and one in the rear). Hardware types are gonna wonder about Gateway's continued decision to go with Boston Acoustics speakers, but the fact remains that the BA790s are great.

For gamers interested in getting a gaming rig from a more mainstream company, there used to be one choice: Dell. Now, with its revamped 700XL, Gateway has established that when it comes to those mainstream gaming rigs, it's no longer a one-horse race. **VERDICT**: A great choice for gamers who want to buy a machine from a more mainstream outfit.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL</th>
<th>GATEWAY 700XL</th>
<th>DELL DIMENSION XPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$3,999</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating system</td>
<td>Windows XP Home Edition</td>
<td>Windows XP Professional Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>3600 Pentium 4</td>
<td>3600 Pentium 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>Intel D850P85 (Cantonwood)</td>
<td>Dell Intel 850-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>1GB DDR 400</td>
<td>1GB DDR 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard drive</td>
<td>Dual 250GB 7200rpm in 500GB RAID array</td>
<td>Dual 250GB 7200rpm in 500GB RAID array</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics processor</td>
<td>Radeon 9500 Pro</td>
<td>Radeon 9500 Pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soundcard</td>
<td>Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2</td>
<td>Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary drive</td>
<td>DVD-RW drive</td>
<td>16x DVD-ROM drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary drive</td>
<td>16x/4x/4x CD-ROM drive</td>
<td>DVD+RW drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>18-inch Gateway FPD0830 (flat panel LCD)</td>
<td>18-inch Dell LCD (flat panel LCD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Boston Acoustics BA790 51 speakers</td>
<td>Logitech Z-680 51 speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard</td>
<td>PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse</td>
<td>Logitech USB Optical wheel mouse</td>
<td>Logitech Without mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed (Performance)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgradeability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCORE</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Got wireless?

There was a time—not so long ago—that I not only didn't own a cell phone, but also didn't even really see the need for one, other than for emergencies. For a long time, I felt the same way about broadband Internet access. I spend all day on my company's T1 line, so why should I spend $50 a month to do what I can do at work for free?

Of course, I bit the bullet and became like every other cell phone-owning member of Generation X. Now I am never without my cell phone and whenever a fancy new one comes out (with features I'll never use), I have to have it. You don't believe me? I was one of the first people to get Samsung's SPH-5500 model, and downloading 50 Cent's “In da Club” as a ring tone actually made me happy. The DSL connection I finally ponied up for makes me just as happy—few things are as simple and convenient as an “always on” broadband connection. The latest technology I've reluctantly adopted but now can't live without is wireless Internet access. A while ago, Actintec sent me its 802.11b wireless-ready gateway and router. It sat in a box in my office for a whole year before I even took it home. When I finally set it up, I was floored by how easy it was to get it up and running, and sitting on my couch with a laptop that's wirelessly connected to the Internet is the bomb. Belkin recently sent me its 844g wireless solution, and it's even more impressive than Actintec's. If you're like me and you use both desktop and laptop computers, then there's no reason for you not to jump on this bandwagon. While it's easy to think you don't need wireless Internet access at home, once you get it going, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it.

The DSL I finally ponied up for makes me happy.
Compared to behemoths from Gateway, Dell, and Falcon, iBuypower's strangely named Zillion Pro PC is a breath of fresh air. It doesn't rock the biggest, baddest component list around, but it's a terrifyingly solid nForce2-based machine that gets the job done at a reasonable price.

What the Zillion Pro tells me is that you don't have to drop three large on a top-notch machine to get the most out of the games currently available. The machine we tested was built around MSI's K7N2-Delta nForce2 motherboard, and it came equipped with 1GB of DDR400, AMD's Athlon XP 3800+ processor, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9600 Pro—which explains why the Zillion Pro performed so well. Its scores were lower than those of the Gateway 700XL, but not by much. That's astonishing when you compare their prices.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL</th>
<th>IBUYPower Zillion Pro PC</th>
<th>Gateway 700XL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$3995</td>
<td>$3159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating system</td>
<td>Windows XP Professional Edition</td>
<td>Windows XP Home Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>AMD Athlon XP 3800+ (1000MHz FSB)</td>
<td>3.6GHz Intel Pentium 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>MSI K7N2-Delta nForce2 (400MHz FSB)</td>
<td>Intel 875PM (Caterwood)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Memory</td>
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<td>48X DVD/48X DVD-RAM drive</td>
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**SCORE**

**4.60**

**4.70**

It's a solid nForce2-based machine that gets the job done at a reasonable price.

The Zillion Pro's 3DMark2003 score of 2533 at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on totally competes with more expensive Pentium 4-based machines. That said, in some game tests, the Zillion Pro didn't perform as well, compared to the Pentium machines, at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on. But we're really talking about only a few frames per second. In other words, while you can run games at 1600x1200 with all the features turned on, don't expect the Zillion Pro to be as fast as some Pentium 4-based machines—but you should have no problem running games at 1024x768 and 1280x1024 with the features on.

As I mentioned, the Zillion Pro's price is great. And this computer is also an extremely upgradeable machine, and many people seem to think Nvidia's nForce2 audio is better than Creative's. The Zillion Pro comes with some excellent peripherals, like Viewsonic's 19-inch E90F-SB monitor and Klipsch's GMX D-51 speakers (which, as we all know, work perfectly well with the onboard nForce2 audio solution).

Ultimately, the first question I ask when someone is looking to get a new rig is "How much are you willing to spend?" If your answer to that question is something less than "My kids' inheritance," you'll doubt appreciate this rig.

**VERDICT ★★★★ ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
The War to Replace the Keyboard and Mouse

Ideezon's Zboard is actually a good idea by Darren Gladstone

On't get me started on how the keyboard and mouse combo is the only way to go when it comes to controlling games. Companies ranging from Belkin to Saitek have tried to reinvent the gaming wheel with unsightly hunks of plastic. Finally, after countless harebrained ideas, something half-decent comes along—Ideezon's Zboard.

It's a pretty simple concept when you think about it. You're going to need that keyboard anyway, so why clutter your valuable desk space with some semifunctional lump of modern art? Instead, Zboard's base remains the same, but you can remove and latch on preprogrammed game-friendly keyboards. The Zboard comes with a relatively generic-but amply tactile-keyboard. It starts veering into the cool range when you slap on game-specific overlays like the one made for Medal of Honor.

Keys are spaced specifically for the staunchest FPS fan, and it works wonders in the game it's designed for. There are two problems with the execution here, though. First is the fact that this keyboard is PS/2 only. That's not a big deal for most desktop owners, but many without legacy ports will be left in the cold. Second, and more important, is that you can't use the keyboard with other first-person shooters. So, you're basically expected to shell out 20 bucks for every game you like playing if you want to take advantage of this keyboard. This keeps Zboard from earning better marks, but if Ideezon can create some firmware upgrade/software patch, this could be the must-have item in every gamer's arsenal.

VERDICT

It's about time someone came up with a good keyboard solution. Now just fix it!

This Controller Blows—in a Good Way

Sweaty-palmed gameboys will be happy to know there's a peripheral built just for them by Darren Gladstone

Gamer's must be a freakish, sweaty lot you'd never want to meet in public. At least that's the impression I got using Nyko's Air Flo controller—this console-inspired gamepad has a lot of ventilation holes and a fan built into its frame. Nyko released similar controllers for the consoles last year, and now it's the PC's turn at bat.

For paws that tend to overheat, this controller is manna from heaven, but I'm here to tell you, folks, if your hands sweat this much, maybe you should put the controller down and get yourself some Gold Bond powder. Gimmicks aside, the Air Flo actually feels good. The rubberized hand grips and responsive buttons slip into your hands nicely, giving you a very PS2-like gamepad.

The Air Flo works well enough as a plug-and-play device, whether blasting air on your damp mitts or not. The one thing you should be aware of is that as a USB powered controller, you probably won't get ample juice from an unpowered hub for the Air Flo to work properly.

VERDICT

Sturdy? Check. Feels good in the hand? Yes. Lots of holes and a fan? Who cares?
DEFINING A CULTURE, CREATING A NATION

XBN
XBOX NATION

THE ADVANCED XBOX MAGAZINE

PICK ONE UP ON NEWSSTANDS EVERYWHERE.
On most Friday nights, a bevy of cars pulls up outside my house and a motley crew makes its way down to my basement. They think they're here to play LAN games. OK, so they are here to play LAN games—but there's an ulterior purpose for their visit. The Friday Night Follies LAN party actually exists to test system and network stability. If games are the most demanding applications a PC must run, then multiplayer networked PC games are even more demanding.

During networked games, I've seen graphics—hardware problems I would never see during a single-player game. I've seen audio work beautifully in single player and then crap out during multiplayer. Curiously, playing online—even over a broadband Internet connection—doesn't seem to offer quite the same test as playing over a LAN.

Of course, the members of the Friday Night Follies gang have varying perspectives on all this. One is an Apple employee who continually complains about how much Windows sucks. For some reason, PC hardware seems to fail more often when he uses it. Said failures completely vanish when I sit down at the same system—and these issues aren't specific to one system, either. Perhaps there's some technological irony at work.

The Follies crew and me, we have a deal: They don't complain about the need to frequently reinstall games and play on systems totally different from those they were on last week. In return, they (usually) get a great gaming experience on recent or even bleeding-edge hardware. Manufacturers of PC hardware who ship me gear before it's released may get a little nervous as they read this, but most of the Friday Night Follies crew isn't in the tech business. Even the Apple employee never talks business—he's not in marketing, and I don't bug him to leak stuff about Apple.

Network gaming has become an integral part of my testing process. When I bring up new hardware—be it a motherboard, CPU, graphics card, or sound card—I always hold final judgment until I can see how it performs in an intense LAN gaming session.

Over the years, I've developed a list of pet peeves and bad habits exhibited by many PC multiplayer games. In a unanimous gesture, I offer them here in the hope that game developers might heed the call.

- LAN game servers that feel compelled to check the master server. Never mind that the LAN may not actually be connected to the Internet.
- Games that require a CD per person for LAN gaming. I recall fondly the days when Age of Empires or Warcraft II allowed three players per CD. For seven grownups, it's no big deal to buy a copy per person. But a parent who wants to play a multiplayer game with their kids will have to buy two or more copies. This is about as likely as Jeff Green winning a Pulitzer for his column.
- Games that don't report their version number in a very visible place. Hint: The Main menu would be good. If you patch a multiplayer game, you usually have to patch every copy because you typically can't play together with different versions of the game. It's astonishing how many games make it freaking impossible to find the version number!
- No multiplayer saves. This really bugs me, especially in long games. Curiously, the worst offender is a game that allows a weird sort of partial save: Your character can be saved, but not the world state. I speak, of course, of Dungeon Siege. When you restart a multiplayer game, your character encounters the same conversations, is presented with the same quests, and carries around the same useless quest items, even though he's already done all of this 20 times before.
- My last pet peeve isn't really a peeve so much as it is a plea: Please, please let's have more games that offer co-op play. I personally don't care if the AI sucks, if the game isn't balanced in co-op mode, or what whatever other silly excuse a developer may have.

Multiplayer co-op gaming is as much about the social experience as it is about the gameplay. Serious Sam was a somewhat uninteresting, repetitive shooter in single-player mode. Playing co-op, though, was an absolute blast. Let's see more of that.
Does anyone really watch DVD movies on their PC?
I'm looking into buying a new PC and wanted to ask about DVD drives. Why would I want one? Am I missing the killer app? I have no desire to plop down in front of my PC to watch a movie. Are games going to be released in DVD format soon? What's the compelling reason to spend money and an expansion slot on a DVD drive? Thanks and have a happy Easter—though I don't want to read about the O'Neal family Easter egg hunt in the next issue.

Steven

Great letter! I agree with you about DVD drives—I think they're pointless for most people. Years ago, there was talk of releasing games on DVD, but I haven't heard much about it recently. If I were buying a machine right now, I'd just get a really good CD-RW drive.

Some PCs go "Woo-WOO000000000000000000!"
I'm looking to get an Ultimate i5 computer from ABS. I was just wondering if you've ever tested these computers. If so, I want to know how loud they are. Currently, I have an HP Pavilion, which runs louder than I'd like. My ears ring for a short time after using it! Thanks for your time, and keep up the great job at CGW.

Richard Carpenter

While rips from other manufacturers have been noticeably loud, I've never found ABS machines to be particularly noisy. This highlights a couple of points: 1) I haven't rated machines on how loud they are, and 2) because I haven't noticed how loud an ABS machine is, you can take that to mean they aren't too loud.

We need better fact checkers. Hell, we just need fact checkers!
In your June 2003 issue (#227), you stated that the ATI Radeon 9800 Pro costs $300. Well, first I thought it was a misprint, but I also noticed that the Review section listed the same price (page 113). It clearly says the price is $300. If this is true and not a misprint, can you tell me where you bought the Radeon 9800 Pro for $300? If it's a misprint, can you tell me, so my soul can rest? By the way, good magazine.

That was the creek. The Radeon 9800 Pro is $400. The 9700 Pro is $300. Sorry, dude.

Suckling at the government teat
What kind of machine should I put together to run Alias Wavefront's Maya software (I'm going to school to learn computer animation and modelling)? Should I get dual or single CPU's? What about videogame configurations and so on? Also, would you recommend a particular company from which I should buy said system (Alienware, Voodoo, Falcon NW, etc.)? I know there is an nForce motherboard (powered by Nvidia), but will it work only with Nvidia-based graphics cards, or will it also work with, for example, the ATI Radeon 9800?

Eric

9800 Pro or 256MB GeForce FX
5900 Ultra (NV35) graphics card, and a RAID configuration. As for who to buy the machine from, any of the companies you mention will be able to hook you up, although I suspect that Alienware can offer you the best price. I spoke to a friend who works at Nvidia, and he told me that while the nForce1 and nForce2 don't support dual CPUs, the nForce3 will. Of course, nForce3 motherboards won't be available for a while. Also, nForce mobos work with any graphics card.

Stick with what works
Why does Motherboards.org rate the Gigabyte board as the best board to use with an Intel chip, while you continue to stick with an Intel motherboard? Is there something I'm missing?

Bob

Not really. I stick with Intel motherboards because, while they may not be the fastest around, they're plenty solid, and I've never had any problems with them. If a few extra frames per second is worth it to you, then feel free to go with Gigabyte boards. I know that many of the boutique system builders use them, which speaks volumes about their quality.
Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming machine By William O'Neal

I was going to start off by saying that a reviewer's life is never easy. Then I realized that...well...it actually is. When your day's decisions revolve around which top-notch 256MB graphics card to put in a machine you just built—ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra—you're gonna be hard pressed to find a sympathetic ear. I'm sure, however, that critical words will be flying faster than the proverbial turd that propelled the fan. Ya' heard?!

Tests seem to show that the two cards mentioned above are pretty darn close to each other, performance-wise. But because I got the GeForce FX first, I decided to build this month's Power Rig with that card. These cards are so close that many reviewers—including Dave Salvator—are calling this match a draw. With the exception of the graphics card, I only changed one other component on my Power Rig: the soundcard. Since cash is, in theory, no object with the Power Rig, I dropped Creative's Audigy 2 Platinum EX in. The breakout box adds nifty features like S/PDIF and optical audio-out.

My Lean Machine is the same as last month's: AMD's Athlon XP 2200+ is so cheap that it's practically free, and that nForce2 motherboard is awesome. Be sure to come back next month, as I'm considering upping the graphics card power in the Lean Machine. That should make Ken Brown happy.

The cards are so close that many are calling this match a draw.
Gamer's Edge
Helping you suck less Edited by Dana Jongewaard

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield
Ready...set...attack!
PAGE 102

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH
This month's Dirty Trick is for Medieval: Total War.

Here's a way you can steal provinces from your allies! First, find a territory you want and make sure there are a lot of Catholics in it. If not, send over a bishop to convert the populace. When there are enough converts, send in an inquisitor. Soon an inquisition will run rampant through the territory and the peasants will be very unhappy. Hopefully, a rebellion will be sparked. When the rebels conquer said territory, bribe them with an emissary to fight for you. You have just successfully stolen both a territory and an army from your allies!

—Steven Palmer

WIN
Steve's deviousness has won him a free copy of Freelancer—nice work, Steve! If you have underhanded tactics to use in multiplayer matches of recent games, send them to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com with a subject head of "Dirty Trick." Next month's winner will be rewarded with a copy of Grand Theft Auto: Vice City.
How To...  
RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD

Pentagon envy: planning the perfect mission By Raphael Liberatore

Planning Raven Shield missions like a professional takes plenty of intelligence, the right mix of gear, and loads of patience. We all know shooting skills are important, but what good is taking out targas if you indiscriminately kill innocent hostages in the process? To avoid this casualty of war, it's important to fully understand Raven Shield's Briefing, Gear, and Planning Rooms before inserting steps into a mission. Let's study Operation: Lion Shadow, a classic hostage rescue mission, for instruction. As we engage, terrorists have seized a bank with the intent to destroy critical documents. Thwart this act of terrorism by planning the perfect mission and successfully carrying it out.

1. BRIEFING DONE RIGHT
Begin with the Briefing Room, where Control provides a detailed overview of the operation. Control members offer tactical analysis, terrorist background, mission objectives, and various news wire reports. Pay attention to the type of mission and mission objectives that your operatives must perform.

The Briefing Room also offers a 3D view of the mission map, where various tension zones are highlighted for review. Study the location of tension zones, enemy emplacements, and preferred routes for securing mission objectives. Operation: Lion Shadow encompasses straightforward COB objectives: You'll need to eliminate terrorists and keep them from destroying records while rescuing hostages. By understanding these particular objectives, you'll better ascertain which operatives, how many teams, and which weapons and equipment are required.

2. THERE IS NO "I" IN TEAM
The Gear Room is where you pick operatives and equipment and assign them to teams. Create red, green, and gold teams for the best possible combination. Assign assaulters to two teams, with an additional team containing a sniper and another assaulter. Make sure the sniper has a high Leadership score. A demolitions expert should accompany the red assault team for that extra punch when breaching vault doors. All three teams should contain an operative who has been promoted to the top position and has a high Leadership score. Ding Chavez is the best operative and should be used primarily as your POB character.

3. USED GEAR FOR SALE
Since Operation: Lion Shadow is a daytime urban operation, choosing a camouflage uniform with medium to heavy body armor is the best way to go. While lighter body armor may allow operatives to react more quickly, heavier armor will afford more protection in the tight spaces where firefights may be encountered inside the bank. Also, take along a heartbeat sensor to get a handle on terrorists' locations.

4. WEAPONS 'R' US
Weapons selection should be tailored to mission type. Since Operation: Lion Shadow requires rescuing hostages in close quarters, you'll want to provide your teams with silenced submachine guns like the MP5SDS, MTAR-21, and P90. All three weapons are excellent submachine guns for COB. Silenced weapons are best used for hostage rescue ops since they limit the number of bad guys you alert. Load up the team with silenced pistols like the USP .40 cal or Beretta 92FS. You'll also want to take along army issued Flashbangs, which are a necessity for clearing rooms in COB. Not only will they temporarily blind terrorists as your team storms each room, but you run less risk of accidentally killing hostages. Have operatives from each team carry smoke grenades, breaching charges, and tear gas in their second item slots. Smoke grenades cover your team's movement, while tear gas will temporarily subdue terrorists. Make sure you equip your sniper with the PSG-1 or M82A1. Bullet types can also play a vital role depending on the terrain. Go with FMJ rounds for primary weapons since the bad guys will probably be wearing body armor as well.
PLAN LIKE THERE IS NO TOMORROW

Raven Shield's heart and soul takes place in the Planning Room. It's here that you plan the seed for future fruition or utter failure. Study the map and search for terrorist positions, choke points, entry points, exit points, hostage locations, and special objectives. Familiarize yourself with planning icons and camera commands. Keep your teams in balance by covering threat areas with snipers and/or overlook watch teams while moving teams into position. Make sure you coordinate team advances on each objective with similar waypoints. Go codes, and rule of engagement (ROE) speeds so teams remain fluid and active using the same commands. Planning the perfect mission takes practice and, above all, patience, so make sure you allocate considerable time for the planning phase.

GO GO GO

Make sure you look over each team's route with the idea of notating grenade orders. Some teams may be ordered to utilize a specific grenade at a precise location on the map. Don't forget to utilize flashbangs to disorient enemies; or toss a frag grenade to wound or eliminate pesky terrorists. In crowded rooms, add a breaching charge order to assist the computer-controlled team past enemy defenses. Keep an eye on waypoints, ROE, and Go codes. ROE should be set at Assault, where your team will fire at will. Go codes are an integral mission order and should not be treated lightly. Most of the time, it's best to order Go codes only when all teams are in position and can move into action simultaneously. Other times, it may be more advantageous to ignore one particular Go code in order to eliminate a nearby terrorist before ordering the Go code to your other teams. If one team has a breach order, consider tossing a flash-bang grenade into the same room. Always order Go codes immediately after grenades explode. The hold command is also important; don't hesitate to use it. Sometimes, it's necessary to keep the other teams in position while you scout ahead or eliminate a particular threat. Be patient.

INSERT HERE

Raven Shield's default mission plans are extremely well thought out. The default plan is a fantastic tool to utilize if you're having problems understanding the dynamics of planning. Study it and learn from it. Follow team waypoints and Go codes for better clarity on seizing objectives. The Observation mode is also useful for uncovering weak areas in your plan. If you're having problems with the mission, the default plan can be tweaked and modified to fit your needs. The Planning Room also offers a 3D view of the area of operation, which can be launched by selecting one of the teams and hitting the Play icon. The 3D camera will show the appropriate team's route in the upper-left corner of the Planning Room map. Return to the Planning Room and make adjustments where you or your computer-controlled teams struggle, hit bottlenecks, or suffer casualties. Through trial and error, you'll develop a cohesive and ultimately successful plan.

OBJECTIVE OVERRIDE

Remember, your mission is to liberate the bank, rescue the three hostages, and prevent the destruction of valuable financial records. These terrorists are well armed and prepared to defend themselves at all costs. Set your weapons to semi or full auto and stand alert. Use the heartbeat sensor when unsure of possible terrorist positions. You can also jump from team to team if necessary.
SHADOWBANE

The newbie's ultimate starter guide to Shadowbane

By Di Luo
It's two years later, the graphics are subpar, and the game's plagued by lag and network problems. Yet Shadowbane is still attracting thousands and stealing our time everywhere. The game's main draw seems to be the myriad possibilities for character development and the opportunity for full-scale guild wars. For the newcomers among you who are daunted by the sheer number of options, GW has compiled a few hints to help you along.

It builds character
The center of any MMORPG is, of course, your character. Shadowbake's dozens of occupations and disciplines all stem from four basic classes: fighters, rogues, healers, and mages. While most options aren't open to characters under Level 10, the way you develop your character in this initial stage will impact your character for the rest of its existence and may cripple you severely if you choose the wrong options. Shadowbake is very unforgiving, and you'll never get a poorly spent ability point back.

You should, of course, study any race carefully before choosing it, since the race affects basic abilities quite a bit and may also restrict the classes open to you. Only Humans, for example, can be confessorers, while Minotaur are restricted to fighters.

Once you've chosen your race, you must adjust your attributes. You may subtract up to five points from any ability to use as you see fit. Take advantage of this and put these points into your character's primary attributes. For fighters, this is strength or constitution, rogues want dexterity, and spellcasters should get intelligence. Generally, all of the attributes that aren't primary to your class should be lowered. Intelligence is the only exception, as it affects the maximum level of all your skills, making it important for every class to have its intelligence at an average or better level.

Additionally, you can add traits to your characters. This can be useful, but you should never overindulge. Your character only has a limited amount of space for rune stones, and each trait takes up a slot. You'll need these slots later to augment your abilities. The traits you should focus most on are the runes that increase your primary attribute or special abilities like ambidexterity, which grants fighters the ability to use dual weapons.

Fighter
The backbone of any army, fighters are also the most newbie-friendly class. All you really need is a good weapon, some armor, and lots of muscle, and you're ready to charge in and hack away. Decide on what kind of fighter you want to be from the start, though. If you wish to be the tank at the forefront of every battle, you should focus on strength and constitution. Most melee weapons are not modified by dexterity, so you can usually ignore this stat. Conversely, warriors who rely on finesse and missile weapons should concentrate on dexterity since it helps in dodging as well as the missiles. Centaurs, Dwarves, Half Giants, and Minotaur are all good race choices for this class.

Rogue
Rogues in Shadowbake can be quite effective. With a high dexterity, they can dodge most attacks, wield a weapon in each hand, and backstab enemies with devastating effect. Since player killing and guild wars are common, assassins and thieves can have a grand time stealing and ambushing the opposition. Rogues can also become scouts who focus on hunting down the thieving scum.

Fighters are tough and can take down huge beasts by themselves. It's still inefficient, though.

There are many talents and traits available, but you shouldn't take more than four so you have room later for disciplines and attribute boosts.
of Shadowbane and act as the eyes and ears of their groups.

**Mage**

With the mage, it's all about intelligence. Everything from your skills to the damage you can inflict depends upon it. Make intelligence as high as possible, and you're halfway to a successful character. Mages are violent spellcasters, and many focus on ranged spells that damage or hinder the opposition. Being able to lob massive amounts of damage from afar earns them the nickname of "nuker." With the lowest number of hit points, mages should always have some support in combat.

**Healer**

Healers are the rarest yet most indispensable class. They keep a group alive, provide buffs that increase everyone's abilities, and are invaluable in support. They do lack damage-dealing ability, though, and are thus very difficult to solo with. That said, you can usually count on finding a group in desperate need of a healer's attention. Healers should also focus on intelligence since it determines the outcome of their spells. A few healer classes, such as the crusader and confessor, do focus on combat. These healers should have decent strength and constitution while serving in their second-line combat duties.

**Road map to success**

**Levels 1-5:** Shadowbane is one of the fastest games in which to level up, and it should only take an hour or so for the first five levels. Outside of every village are spawn points for low-level fodder like snakes, spiders, and lizard men. Get yourself a group and pick on them. Focus your points on upgrading your primary stats and save up your money for training. You won't need to buy equipment for a while yet. The monsters around the towns are so pitiful that you can even solo this part, although it generally takes a bit longer to level up.

**Levels 6-10:** Things will get a bit more interesting after Level 5. You'll find that it takes way too long to level up if you continue to sit around town. Start hunting for bandit and goblin groups, which are located in the northern and central parts of the island respectively. Camp those spawn points and watch your experience increase. Focus on your primary stat, and once you max it out, move on to the next most important one.

**Elamai Maisey**

Stick to the snakes, spiders, and lizards when you first get started. Anything tougher, and you'll be looking for your corpse regularly.

for your class.

When training your skills, remember that Shadowbane has a soft cap. While you can technically train a skill to as high a level as your intelligence allows, it is often impractical due to pricing issues. After you've reached a skill level at which the game items are suitable for your character's current level, the training price will jump astronomically. Unless you have a lot of money donated by friends, just wait till you level up to keep training.

**Levels 11-20:** This is when you set your character's eventual path. At Level 10, you can pick a profession for your class. There are dozens of possibilities, and the Shadowbane
manual is pretty worthless at describing what they actually do. Head over to the Shadowbane forum at shadowbane.com—people there seem to be a lot more knowledgeable than the manual.

In the lower levels of Rank 1, you should stick to fighting bandits until they become “blue” for you. You should then head to the Bogs. These can be quite tough, and there is even the occasional Rank 3 monster in this area. Make sure you have a good group with you since dying now actually penalizes you more than just making you drop your stuff.

Levels 21-30: It’s time to start playing with the big boys. Once you reach Rank 2, you’ll be forced to pledge your allegiance to one of the cities outside of the newbie island. When you get there, you need to be careful since the safety zone that protected the newbie island no longer applies. Player killing becomes rampant, and thieves and assassins wait around every corner to prey on hapless newbies. If you’re a real tough fighter, try not to wander outside of the city by yourself.

The city you choose also dictates what you fight and what items you get. I personally prefer Khar, since there is a large variety of creatures to fight and the city’s layout is relatively simple, unlike the mess that is King’s Crossing.

The monsters that you can fight for experience here are too varied to list, but as a general rule, it’s never a good idea to fight monsters more than a rank higher than your current level unless you have a group to back you up. Of course, soloing is the most ineffective method of leveling up anyway, so ant social types should either give up or swallow their hatred of fellow gamers.

You should also lay down the groundwork of your future here. Network a bit, find possible guilds to join, and figure out what powerful runes you might want to buy. Runes will give you access to new disciplines and skills, and they increase your maximum abilities. They are quite pricey, however, and can range into the hundreds of thousands in gold.

When you finally make it to Rank 3, it’s time to join a guild and take part in the more interesting parts of Shadowbane. The regular cities don’t have trainers that will be of much use to you by this point, so players who continue to focus on mindless monster hunting will find their growth stunted. Besides, why play a game about guilds and wars if all you want to do is camp a spawn point?

Fighters should always intercept attacking monsters and keep them away from the spellcasters. Taunt and run if necessary.

A good group is essential for the bigger monsters. Support characters provide front-line troops with a variety of buffs to increase survivability.
How To...

RISE OF NATIONS
The best way to play the first 10 minutes of Rise of Nations By Di Luo

Teams
When choosing a team, a lot of your decision depends on the map choice. Although some nations are definitely better than others depending on your style of play, Aztecs gain resources from slaying enemies, which gives an edge in rushing/aiding battles early on. The Japanese are also good for rushing since they have good unique units in the earlier ages, create barracks units more cheaply, and also get food production bonuses. Mongols are great for raiding but don't have the lasting power of some other nations. Germans not only have a long list of unique units from the Classical to Information Age, but they also gain economic bonuses for all their cities, making them equally competent in peace and war. The British are also a good choice due to good taxation rates, which reward an economic game. They have a good complement of units and bonuses for their defensive structures. The Spanish are great for early exploration and controlling the oceans. In a map full of islands, they can dominate territorially, but they require a good economy to churn out units due to their lackluster military. The Egyptians, Romans, Chinese, Mayans, and Koreans are all good defensive civilizations. Most of them have either economic bonuses or can build forts and towers cheaply. They favor a slow approach and wars of attrition where they expand their borders slowly while building up huge economies.

Breed
Once in the game, the first thing you should do is select your initial city and hit Shift-V to start a building queue of five peasants. Unless you're the Koreans, who get peasants for free at the start, you'll need to churn these out in droves to build up your economy quickly, falling behind in the initial few minutes can doom your entire game.

Research
A handy shortcut is the L key, which takes you directly to the library. You'll find that you need to visit this place often. Always research science first. This lowers the cost for other research and increases the benefits of exploring ruins. Doubling the result of ruin finds in the beginning is essential in building your empire. Next, you should research civics to build a new city quickly, followed by economics to increase your commerce cap. Military and age advances can wait until you're maxing out on your population cap, unless you're fighting off rushers who come at you early and often.

Build
Your initial city will always start with farms and lumber production. With your first batch of peasants, build up to the maximum number of farms and fill up the lumber slots. These two resources are the game's basic building blocks, and you can never have too much of them. You should also build a temple, a market, and some caravans as soon as possible to generate wealth, an important resource after the first age. Iron can wait slightly longer unless you're fighting off rushers.
5 EXPLORE
Don't forget to send your scout exploring. If you find yourself overwhelmed, use the auto-explore feature. It's not as efficient as using waypoints (hold down Shift and right click to do so), but it's one less thing for you to worry about. You need to explore to find ruins, unique resources, and enemy cities. Ruins give you the resource that you have the least of, so it's sometimes wise to hold off your explore until your most desired resource is the lowest of the lot.

6 EXPAND
The national borders play an important role in Rise. They provide wealth through taxation, inflict attrition damage on your opponents, and limit where your opponents can build. Also, farms are limited to five per city except for the Egyptians, so you'll need quite a few cities to support a large army, especially in landlocked maps without fishing. You should expand to three or four cities as quickly as possible.

7 DEFEND
While towers aren't particularly powerful, it's good to have at least one at some point during the game. You can only research attrition technologies here, and they are quite useful in limiting your opponents' attack routes. You'll also need to build barracks and stables early on so you can generate units in case of an attack. The economic and military models in Rise are designed to favor infantry, so you should never neglect either mounted or foot units if your nation has good bonuses in one or the other.

8 ATTACK
Unless you're after a completely peaceful victory, it's not a bad idea to send some raiding units out early. Opponents often become paranoid and defensive if a few of your probes come close to doing real damage. If they're busy building forts and looking after their bases, you'll have time to expand your borders without much opposition.
GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS

An insider's guide to galactic domination By Jeff Lackey and Brad Wardell
Galactic Civilizations is deceptively simple to play. With a few simple clicks of the mouse, you can launch a ship, colonize a planet, attack a star base, threaten another civilization, and feed aphrodisiacs to your daisies. But it doesn't take long to realize that there's a lot more depth and complexity to this game than meets the eye. We asked the man behind the curtain, lead designer Bend Wardell, to provide you with some insider tips and tricks for conquering the known universe.

The difference in how you're treated when you're strong and when you're weak. (Strong is a lot more fun.)

You can please all of the people some of the time...
The citizens in Galactic Civilizations are ungrateful. And while you may eventually be on the path of reeducating them to be more appreciative of your excellence, you'll still have to put up with their unreasonable demands for food and shelter and services.

The good news is, the better the planet, the easier it is (initially) to have happy people. Our experiments have led us to conclude that people generally are happier when they live in a nice place than when they live on a hellish ice ball. Galactic Civilizations has dozens of planet classes; however, the first 14 planet classes are basically useless (see "hellsic Ice Ball" above) without serious terraforming efforts. Earth-like planets tend to range between classes 15 and 19. Planets above class 19 have citizen morale so high that they're hard to describe. So we won't... (See Planet Class & Morale chart.)

Of course, not everything is perfect in happy

PLANET CLASS & MORALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLANET CLASS</th>
<th>MORALE BONUSES</th>
<th>ADJUSTED MORALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>103%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>109%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>118%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>125%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>133%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>140%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>148%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>155%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>164%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>173%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

set at the beginning of the game), building up morale: galaxy's resources, propaganda, destabilization, being in debt, and unique events unique to that planet. But these three factors are the main ones to focus on in your attempt to keep your people happy.

Can't we all just get along? No

You've brought the human race into the 23rd century and are minding your own business when the Dorgin Empire announces that it needs your civilization's carcasses to power its death furnaces. Was it something you said? Your diplomatic relations in Galactic

TAX RATE & MORALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAX RATE</th>
<th>MORALE PENALTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>-49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>-64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>-81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Civilians are based upon these main factors:

+ Military might It's more complex than a direct comparison. A master diplomat can have a weak military, but avoid war by using

In the early race to colonize good planets, you can't afford the time to build colony ships—take advantage of reusing.

The minor races are a good source of income—surely they'd never use these capital ships on the humans....

To win an election, you really need only half the population to like you. Don't get obsessed with high morale ratings. As long as 50 percent of the people like you, don't sweat it. It can be tempting to lower taxes temporarily to boost approval ratings with the people, but remember, people come to expect ever-increasing entitlements. So don't lower taxes and then jack them back up unless you're prepared for some very unhappy people!
Go for trade first and then immediately for Deflector technology so you can build defenses. The combination of a decent defense and active trading can help you avoid war early in the game.

**Relations Tip**

Diplomatic skills to keep everyone else at war. If the Drongin are starting to get nasty with you, use diplomacy to try to get other powers to go to war with them. The Drongin will ignore you when Altarian and Torrian dreadnoughts start parking in their backyard.

**Trade Tip**

Trade with a civilization equal to better relations. If half the Drongin’s economy is based on trade with you, they’ll think twice about going to war with you. You can build up your trade with a given civilization by enhancing star bases on your trade ships’ paths.

**Morality Tip**

Being evil in Galactic Civilizations may seem like the easy path, but it makes life tougher diplomatically. Become too evil, and the good races may seek regime change on Earth. Evil races tend not to get along that great with one another either, but they won’t hold it against you. They also won’t generally go out of their way to destroy good.

**Tactical Tip**

The A.I. is designed to play like a human and it knows the human tricks of the trade. Build a force by their planets, and they’ll take notice and possibly preemptively attack you. Same with offensive star bases.

**Cultural Tip**

If you don’t spy on a race, you won’t know their traditions either. This increases the odds of a diplomatic incident.

**There’s more than one way to skin a Drongin**

Every strategy game that comes out tends to boast multiple paths to victory. Then you play it and discover that every path but conquest is tedious to the point of wanting to go back and reread Vogon poetry. But Galactic Civilizations is different—real! You not only have conquest, but you also have the political, technological, and cultural paths to victory. Here are tips on how to win via each one.

**Conquest**

Kill lots of stuff.

**Cultural**

If you can get 90 percent of the sectors to be under your influence and remain at peace with the living civilizations, you win. Gain control of influence galactic resources and build star bases throughout the galaxy with cultural magnification modules on them. There are several wonders that can greatly enhance your cultural influence as well. Follow communication theory to interstellar business, and down that path is the mother lode of influence technologies.

**Technology**

The key here is to keep everyone at peace with you. Ironically, to win this way, you need to combine your diplomacy skills with your technology skills. The reason: Even if you remain at peace with everyone, one civilization will eventually conquer the others in the time it takes to become a Vorlon-like being. And at that point, you’ll be next no matter what. Your challenge is to maintain a balance of power in the galaxy. Send ships and money and technologies to whichever civilizations seem to have the best chance of maintaining their independence.

**Tax Rate**

Government Income 48%

**Spend Rate**

Government Expenditures 100%

**OK, we’re trading with the Torrians, who are war with the Drongin, but we’re friends with the Drongin and at war with the Arceans, but the Arceans are friends with both the Torrians and the Drongin.” Diplomacy can be very tricky in Galactic Civilizations.**

**The little square next to the sector ID number will show you the civilization influence points for that sector.**

**Evil and smart: You’ll have to keep a sharp eye on these guys.**

**Setting your tax rate too low (such that morale is more than 50 percent) is a waste of resources.**

To have a chance of winning, you must find and take resources and inhabitable planets faster than your rivals do.
Propaganda can be an effective way to convince your people just how great they have it.

Galactic waterparks and shopping malls can convince other races of the superiority of Human culture.

Sure, you can conquer a planet, but there's a special satisfaction in having them voluntarily defect due to your cultural superiority.

Battleships and Death Stars are cool, but good trade routes are critical to any successful dynasty.

The other civilizations won't idly sit by while you invade their space with starbases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>POTENTIAL FRIEND/ENEMY</th>
<th>LIKELY VIEWPOINT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>One of the gang, but still won't trust them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Doesn't trust them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Freaking Goody Two-shoes. Kill them if they're weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Evil, Neutral, Good</td>
<td>Just doesn't care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>Must be wiped out no matter what the cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Can visit, but must keep shoes on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>If they're not completely defenseless, future allies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AGGRESSION LEVELS
- Passive
- Not Very Aggressive
- Fairly Aggressive
- Bloody Warmongers

RESULT
- Rarely looks at your military might
- Occasionally looks at your military might
- Regularly looks at your military might
- Is looking at your military might as you read this article and the game is turned off. Did doughnuts last week in Jeff Greene's yard

Good and evil
Humans start out as neutral civilizations. The game has a scale from 1 (demonic) to 100 (angelic). Pure neutral is 50. Different events will occur during the course of the game, in which your actions will tilt you one way or another. For instance, converting excess population to foodstuffs would be considered an evil action.

One key thing to keep in mind is that no one said good guys never perform any military action. Look back through history and remember at least one time that a "good guy" sent military forces to some far-off place for regime change or...whatever. If the regime is evil, it greatly increases their odds for military action, but even if they are good, military action can happen depending on the aggression level. To find out the aggression level of a given alien civilization, click on the info button on the negotiation screen.

Sulu, set a course for home
As you can see, becoming the head pooh-bah of the galaxy can be a tricky undertaking. For even more tips, tricks, and insults, head over to www.gal civ.com.
THE ART OF WAR AND THE JOHN TILLER GAME OF THE MONTH

By Di Luo

You've seen the reviews, you've seen the screenshots, and you must be wondering how even our intrepid reviewers can wade through so many titles without committing hari kari. Here are a few tips to help you in the latest generation of hex-based wargaming.

ON THE VALUE OF LOGISTICS

Get a book. If you like, get a military history book to set the mood, but definitely get a book. Or turn on the TV, or the radio, or a game of solitaire. Anything really, as long as it distracts you enough to keep you from falling asleep and damaging your keyboard with a badly placed headbutt. When playing larger scenarios, each turn will take the A.I. 30 minutes or more to move its units back and forth with the purpose of a drunkard fresh off a merry-go-round.

ON THE VALUE OF HOPE

Hopeless causes are good things. Unlike real life, where all you'll get is a bullet in the head or years in a Russian POW camp, forlorn hopes are the only way to keep a Tiller game against the A.I. interesting. Pick the most lopsided scenario possible and take the weaker side. Since your enemy has the tactical acumen of a rock, it will never press its advantage. You can spend the next few hours target practicing and picking its army apart piecemeal. It's not particularly entertaining except for alternate history buffs who want to brag about routing a Russian corps with one SS division.

ON THE VALUE OF FRIENDS

If you're one of the lucky few who actually has friends brave enough to venture into the obscure world of wargaming, the Tiller games can be fun. While most games can be played by e-mail or through a direct TCP/IP connect, you're better off with the PBEM, since few people have the patience to sit around for the hours needed for even the smallest of scenarios. Be warned that this breed is nearly as rare as a good Star Trek game. Indeed, this writer will propose marriage and undying devotion to any female who voluntarily plays a wargame and puts up a good fight.

ON INTELLIGENCE

In order to succeed in any wargame, you must understand the system. Always read the manuals, since even games from the same designer might have very significant changes. In Tiller's black powder-era games, units can fire after expending all their movement points, whereas his more modern games use movement points for both fire and movement. Playing all his games the same way is usually a recipe for disaster.

ON PRINCIPLES OF WAR

The military doctrines of the modern world all agree on the importance of surprise and mass. If playing against a real person, study the ground. You should try to approach the enemy unseen or with as much cover as possible. Attack where you are least expected and concentrate at least 3 to 1 odds against the enemy. If you spread yourself thin and attempt to be strong everywhere, you will instead be weak everywhere. Overwhelming force somewhere will allow you to roll up the enemy's flanks or break through the middle, split his army, and defeat him piecemeal.
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Join Shoe and the rest of the Ziff Davis Media gaming editors as they invade your screen with the latest game news and releases that will jumpstart your weekend!

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Include Me Out!
Why MMORPG is pronounced “More pigs”

By Robert Coffey
robert_coffey@stiffdavis.com

As I was meditating in my traditional English rose garden the other day, sipping upon a piping hot cup of a particularly delightful Darjeeling, I thought to myself, "What should I kill by any means necessary to improve not only my life but, by extension, the lives of the worthless curs called 'mankind' whose very presence despoils this green and pleasant planet?" I thereupon began composing a list of things the world would be better without: movies starring chimps as unlikely sports stars, Tyne Daly, the designated hitter, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games. And while my peculiar but easily suggestible Uncle Richard has already promised to deal personally with the "Daily Dilemma," there's precious little I can do about the rest. Except the MMORPGs, and what I propose is this: Everybody follow my lead and stop playing them now.

If this is the future of gaming, then the future of PC gaming is an anesthetized demi-world where narcoleptic gamers are reduced to monthly fee-paying veal calves. These products are as far from fun as Tyne Daly is from mankind's current rung on the evolutionary ladder (memo to self: explore possibility of pitching movie featuring Tyne Daly as unlikely sports hero). Whose bright idea was it to create a virtual world and then invite every halfwit with a credit card to join in? I already participate in a massively multiplayer game called My Hellish Daily Life, and the last thing I need to do is spend time interacting with this pretentious suspendee-wearing cretinous captain of industry holding up the Starbucks line because he's imperiously holding up one finger to shush the barista while he chats with Chuck on his super-slim cell phone—just because this clown decides to go online and call himself Lonrick the Impudent, I'm supposed to chuckle good-naturedly and be his pal? I don't think so. And don't start telling me about PvP servers: until My Hellish Daily Life features PvP, I'm just not interested.

Quite frankly, these games are the laziest pieces of work known to man. If MMORPG designers were held to the same standards as other manufacturers they'd be issuing recalls about five seconds after going live. Instead, they cough up half-finished games with half-slapped together servers to eat up half your discretionary income. At this year's D.I.C.E. summit, the group working on Star Wars: Galaxies confessed they are counting on the hardcore gamers to create the infrastructure and social framework for their game—having thus shunted off responsibility for the most important part of their product to pants-wetting fanboys they have commenced cutting features in order to keep missing their original ship date. The Sims Online was relying on players to create a bright and vibrant world as well, and look how great that turned out.

Despite my creeping sense of dread, I wouldn't call Galaxies a debacle in the making—but don't let that stop you.

Pop quiz: What game is this? "You are one of three factions fighting for dominance in a world torn asunder?" Is it Asheron's Call 2, Earth & Beyond, or Anarchy Online?

And that points to the biggest problem with these games: They're all the same and they're all the same in most of the bad ways. Each and every title bends over backward to make sure the early game experience actively discourages you from playing. For the love of God, if you're making one of these games, lighten up the first part so gamers aren't ratcheting for hours (and making your rats bipeds and calling them drudges doesn't count). Why should I pay $9.95 a month to kill rats when I can club the vermin feasting on what I like to call "The Hitchhiker Study" in my crawlspace for free? Mix it up a bit, give us laser beam-shooting rats, or, better yet, make a whole army of flesh-eating Tyne Daly zombies and equip gamers with an ice pick and some rock salt.

That's something I'd pay $12.95 a month to do.
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