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NAME: Irwin Finkle

SCREEN NAME: The Exterminator

PROFESSION: High School Principal

SPECs: Husband, Father Of Four

WEAPON OF CHOICE: Plasma Gun

NOTES: Cold-blooded killer who won't think twice about putting one in the back of the head of his enemies.

TURN-ONS: "Preying on you and others with weak screen names."

FAVORITE PREY: Chaos Raptor

MANTRA: Only in death does duty end.
Cover Me
Our Jedi Academy review is "first," but so what?

Review covers are weird. I'm not sure why we do them, and I'm not sure I want to do one again. The deal is this: A game company, like LucasArts this month, gives us the final version of its game to review, withholding it from our competitors (like Field and Stream), and in exchange for the exclusivity, we put that game on the cover of the magazine.

It sounds good in theory. But in practice, it's a bit of a nightmare. The deadlines are tight, the timing never seems to work, and even if we do manage to get the article done, the payoff of "exclusivity" is usually shot to hell before the issue even comes out because some darn website (usually in Germany) will somehow manage to beat us to the punch anyway.

But, you know—whatever. It's all a bit stupid, if you ask me. It's not like we're talking about state secrets here. So we get to review Jedi Academy before anyone else—big deal. Like that matters. No one cares who reviewed the new Tomb Raider movie first. The important and relevant part is that they told you it sucked. The same thing goes, or should go, for games. It's not the first reviews that should matter to you, but the ones that do the best job of critiquing the game in a manner that's meaningful to you. Maybe that means our reviews, but maybe it's someone else's. Personally, I hope you trust us more than the other guys, because the more you do, the less likely it is that I'll have to go flip burgers or empty garbage, both of which at my age would be really bad for my back.

There is one more troubling thing about review covers. What if we don't like the game? Now, we do tell the game company in advance that getting on our cover is no guarantee of a positive review (just ask the folks at Westminster Studios, who got stung by our Command & Conquer: Generals review). Still, let's be real here. By putting a game on our cover, we're transmitting the message that that game is important—we're hitching our star to the game, and we are giving that game free publicity. But if it turns out to be a disc full of doo-doo, what exactly is the point? Are we helping readers, by warning them off early, or are we confusing them with a mixed message? These are the kind of conundrums that keep your friendly neighborhood editor-in-chief up at night.

So, with all this said, what do we think of Jedi Academy? I'm not telling. You have to go read the article. Then, after reading it, ask yourself whether LucasArts is still happy it gave the game to us for the cover. I'm not sure there's an easy answer.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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BY DAY Denny Atkin plays games on very, very small computers as editorial director of Handheld Computing magazine (www.kindatmag.com). Before he moved to a WiFi-equipped igloo on Vermont’s frozen tundra, he was Computer Gaming World’s features editor for a half-decade. He’s actually been reviewing games since 1987, when the most games were played using Amigas, Commodore 64s, or stone knives and bear skins.

RYAN SCOTT
The new kid on the block at CGW, Ryan has inherited the grueling position of CD editor. In between listening to Wil O’Neal scream about Madden 2004 and reading some of the disturbing e-mails and web links that get forwarded around by the neighboring GMR staff, Ryan is hard at work producing CGW’s monthly demo disc. He also finds time to, you know, play games sometimes too.

MARITZA REFUERZO’S DOG
My name is Charley C. Rino. I’m a beagle. I turned four last month. Those are banana chips on my birthday cake. My daddy baked it for me because he’s a loco beagle daddy. My mommy doesn’t have time to bake because she works at the CGW copy desk. One of these days, she hopes to find time to be a loco beagle mommy who bakes dog cakes and writes novels for a living.

MICHAEL JENNINGS
This month marks the end of associate art director Michael Jennings’s furious first year with the CGW crew. The milestone was only slightly overshadowed by the celestial celebration of Mars nearly colliding with the earth nearly 60,000 years ago. Coincidence? Who knows? Lately, however, we’ve noticed two things: 1) The honeymoon is officially over, and 2) we’re now getting an extra serving of outer-space graphics.

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The GPU of TRON 2.0
Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Eat Us

I am truly indebted to you all. Thanks to the case of your September 2003 demo CD, I was able to successfully dislodge the chunk of Baby Ruth bar stuck in my braces. Oh, and your magazine rocks and stuff like that. Yay.

John Kinney

Switch to decaf, Coffey

I always turn to the last page of CGW magazine first, eager for cynical humor. Mr. Coffey's reviews are always entertaining, but the Scorched Earth editorials seem bleaker each issue. Maybe you all could take him outside for a little sun, rent a Monty Python movie for him, or persuade him to see his doc about some Prozac. Please, keep the grim cartoonists away from his page, too. Save them for Jeff Green, who was almost a little too perky this month.

Beth Vehre

Unfortunately, Robert has welded his DVD player shut and has Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer running on a nonstop loop. If you'd like to talk to him about this personally, go ahead—don't say we didn't warn you.

Blizzard buzz

I am looking for any information on Diablo III, and you guys seem like the type to know if this is true. Is it being made, release dates, etc.? Any information would be appreciated.

Fred

Well, Fred (if that is your real name—nd if it is, well, sorry, dude) we are pleased to present the first ever screenshot of Blizard's next überhit. It's a radical rethink of the franchise, but we're betting gamers will love it. Keep the drool to a minimum.

Thou shalt steal

Your September 2003 issue stated (in the CW Recommends column) that "Max's signature bullet-time effect is still one of the coolest things never successfully ripped off in gaming—no even by the Matrix game." The Matrix sort of invented bullet-time. How can it be a rip-off in the Matrix game if Max Payne really ripped it off from the Matrix movie? I really like your mag, but don't make comments like that if you don't know what you're talking about.

RPH Hershey, Pennsylvania

And the Matrix ripped it off from The Great Gatsby, which blatantly stole it from Thessalonians. But what we were trying to get at was that the effect has never been done as well in a game since Max Payne.

Enter the Matrix aped its own special effects about as successfully as it aped an actual game.

Bring me the head of Theory Nagooyan

I submitted two designs for the Scooter's head for the E3 contest you held. I never saw a winner announced, never saw pictures of what was actually done to his head for E3, not even a comment buried somewhere in the magazine. I am curious. Am I the only schmuck that fell for a practical joke? Or did the contest not happen? Or did someone win and I just missed the info about it? Please let me know as the curiosity is killing me.

Thanks, Chris

Sadly, Chris, none of the handful of designs we received were feasible or, frankly, all that good. However, as a consolation prize to all those who participated, we have decapitated Scooter and are carving up his noggin into handy souvenir-appropriate chunks. So if you get a human ear and a bit of scalp in the mail, don't be surprised.

So you wanna be a game developer...

I'm a big time RPG fan, and I wish the gaming companies would make more unique RPGs. I see a lot of them with the "golden path." You pick the best weapons and the best skills then slaughter everything in the fantasy world-boring. In any RPG there should be several instances where your
WELCOME TO THE JEDI ACADEMY

YOU WILL NOT LEAVE THESE HALLS AS YOU ENTERED THEM.
YOU WILL UNLEARN ALL THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.
DEDICATE YOUR LIFE TO A HIGHER PURPOSE.
USE THE KNOWLEDGE YOU ATTAIN HERE WISELY.
THE FORCE IS A POWERFUL ALLY. AND A TERRIBLE FOE.
DO NOT BE SEDUCED BY THE DARK SIDE.
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STAR WARS
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JEDI ACADEMY

You are a new student at Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy. Continue an ancient tradition as you learn the powers and dangers of the Force. Customize your character. Construct your own lightsaber from handle to blade. And develop your fighting stance—from the classic single-blade to the rare and powerful double-bladed lightsaber. Then hone your Jedi skills in single player missions or light it out in multiplayer modes. May the Force be with you, young Jedi.
character will be stumped no matter what class or how powerful his weapon or magic. How about including monsters that are immune to slashing weapons? Also, NPC interaction needs improvement. If I'm a thief and can pickpocket NPCs, then why don't NPCs pickpocket me as well? That could make for some interesting dilemmas if an NPC took a quest item from my character.

I have read many reviews and letters from other readers that complain about game developers that refuse to allow us to save when we want. Why do developers continue to do this? They apparently believe it makes the game more engaging or challenging or something beneficial. Some of us can't afford the time it takes to redo the same entire level because the trap at the end kills us. I believe it was *Anachronox* (and correct me if I'm wrong) that gave you the option of saving at the predetermined save points or letting you switch to save whenever you like. Isn't this the way to go? Bob, who am I kidding, I'm also the guy that wants a co-op *Doom III*.

Chris Bantz

**Pretty on the inside**

I was reading my September magazine and noticed you still haven't changed Jeff Green's picture on the Editorial page. That picture is starting to give me the creeps every time I open CGW. Jeff is the scariest thing to orbit the earth. NASA needs to shoot some nukes and hit him so he burns up in our atmosphere and stops hijacking satellites to post his pictures.

Illa Orkin

Jeff did submit a photo of him and the missus at home. Does this work for you?

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Kim Ecroyd

While we can argue about this until the cows and/or Wil O'Neal stagger home, we'll just say we think you'll be a happier guy once you read our Hall of Fame feature on page 120.

Bad idea of the month

Do you know if any company is in the works to produce CBS's show Big Brother or ABC's show The Mole at all? I have been wondering this for a very long time and would greatly appreciate it if you have any information about it.

Mikelster

Considering the big pile of suck that was Survivor: The Interactive Game, we hope to God no one is thinking of making another reality show PC game. Unless it's Queer Eye for the Straight Guy—we love the Fab Five's new look for WIJ.

I DID NOT ORDER THIS MAGAZINE AND I WILL NOT PAY FOR IT. YOU NOW OWE $75 FOR MY TIME WRITING THIS REJECTION LETTER.

Tim Brumfield

**To say Half-Life is the scariest game ever is absolutely inexcusable.**

I have been reading your magazine for almost 10 years now, and have held my tongue when you made some clearly erroneous statements in the past, but this one is inexcusable. Considering that I know people who were emotionally traumatized by System Shock 2, and the fact that I still get cold shivers down my spine when I think of some of those levels, I must protest the statement made about *Half-Life* being the scariest shooter ever. To say that *Half-Life* is scarier is like saying that R.L. Stein is scarier than Stephen King. Sure, Mr. Stein can scare the crap out of my 9-year-old sister, and *Half-Life* had its moments where it made me jump a bit, but it came nowhere NEAR to how freaky and disturbing *SS2* was. I never finished the game because I wanted to be able to sleep at night again. I know people that only made it to Dec 4 and stopped playing after they found the ghost of the evil doctor telling the nurse he was about to butcher that she "would be the mother of them all." Sorry guys, but if *Half-Life* scares Dana, then don't let her play *SS2* or you might end up having to commit her.

Aaron Edmondson

**Mail Bites**

I was just thinking about how games remind me of women. They are both alluring and frustrating.

Riffraffori

I'm getting my mag, but not the CD. Not that it matters, I have broadband.

Darin Wade

Jeff, blink your eyes, wipe the tears away, and read this: GET OVER IT, DAMMIT!

Anthony

Everyone loves Loyd

Loyd Case, I want to thank you for "Friday Night Follies" in the August issue. I am lucky enough to have a great group of friends that enjoys LAN parties two or three times a month, and I've always felt the co-op aspect of games has been largely ignored in computer gaming. You were correct about every-thing in your article: the lousy trend of games requiring one CD per person, games that hide their version numbers, problems with LAN servers, a lack of multiplayer saves, and the worst crime of all, a lack of quality co-op modes. Every year more homes are getting more computers. Two of the friends in my LAN group have computers in every child's room, in addition to their own. Maybe if the multiplayer and cooperative modes in computer games were made with LAN situations in mind, the effect would snowball and those little "converse things" would become obsolete.

Horatio Hornblower

**Fresh out of Fallout**

I've heard that a bunch of people (over 27,000) have signed a petition saying "We want a Fallout 3." Do you know anything we don't?

Eric Lambert

Sorry, Eric, as all regular readers of CGW can attest, we know nothing.
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When: Anytime
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Select an entrée:
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PlayStation®2 | XBOX | GC
The more we see of this comic-book killer, the more we want it. A new build recently showed up in the office, and despite the non-localized French text (Jeff put on a fancy beret and translated for us), we still really got into this game. The style, the sweet narratives that have you jumping back and forth in time, and all those comic book nods make this one to watch—and to play.
STALKER: OBLIVION LOST

Let's talk about the history of this one for a second. Nvidia likes Stalker so much, it actually went on tour to pimp the title and help it find a publisher. We liked it so much, we've already written about it a couple times. THQ liked what it saw and bought the North American distribution rights. That brings us to where we are—waiting until next May, when this FPS-style action/RPG is supposed to come out. Until then, check out a sample of what's in store for you in an irradiated, post-apocalyptic Russia.

36 Computer Gaming World
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The 5th Panzer division punishes the US 2nd Corps in their initial assault, inflicting grievous losses.

February 22, 1943 Tunisia, Kasserine Pass
Take back the Pass. Fight through German lines, encountering allied and axis tanks and troops. Steal a German tank and inflict continuous casualties on unsuspecting Nazis.

May 7, 1943 Allies Take Tunisia

*Requires Medal of Honor Allied Assault® to play.
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**July 13, 1943  Sicily, Italy**
Glide into Sicily under the cover of night with a dead pilot at the controls, crash land in the Italian countryside and find your unit. The assault on the boot begins.

**January 22, 1944  Anzio Maneuver**
Destroy Germany's K5 rail guns, making the landing at Anzio safe for the Allied 3rd.

**October 6, 1943  Bizerte Canal**
Cross the Canal under heavy fire and hit the ground running. Engage the enemy in street combat to take command of the German port city.

**May 17, 1944  Exiting Monte Cassino**
German Panzer divisions surround you. They can't get away this time. Smash, thrash and exploit the heavy armor with the new British PIAT Anti-Tank Weapon.

Eleven single-player levels that will determine the fate of Europe.

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Read Me
Rocket-powered gaming with a whiff of baloney Edited by Ken Brown

FIELD TRIP

Id Opens the Gates of Hell
Doom III terrifies us at QuakeCon
By William O’Neal

The Hellknight doesn’t usually stop for small talk.
The single-player experience is what we're concentrating on—that's our focus.

Anyone who has played a recent Id game, like Quake II or Quake III, will no doubt be taken aback by Todd Hollenshead's words. We sat down with Hollenshead, Id Software's CEO, and Tim Willits, the game's designer, at this year's QuakeCon in Dallas to get some hands-on time with the game that, along with Half-Life 2, marks the uprising in the PC gaming. And from what we saw, it appears that Id is definitely on track to create an awesome story-based game that, along with the other games, may actually be fun to play—sometimes even by yourself.

Hollenshead continues, "From a single-player standpoint for Doom III, we pretend that Doom I and Doom II didn't happen; Doom III is basically a retelling of the original story." Actually, that shouldn't be hard at all, since there wasn't much of a story or plot in either game. Once again, you're a space marine who's been assigned to a security detail on Mars, where the Union Aerospace Corporation is located. Soon after you arrive, all hell breaks loose. If Id's a literary counterpart, it would be Dante. The Dallas-based company has had a long-standing obsession with the notion of hell, and Doom III falls right in with that, requiring the player to battle any number of demons, zombies, and assorted other "forces of hell." Your objective: Figure out where all of these nightmare creatures are coming from and eventually go to hell itself.

The game takes place in 2145, the object of the "Doom III experience," according to Hollenshead, is "to be very intense and terrifying." And suffice it to say, it is. On an emotional level, the few missions we saw hearkened back to the fright we experienced during the original Doom games—you know, when you'd hear an indie on the other side of a wall and you'd pee in your pants.

Many things combined to make the original Doom games so frightening, including the newness of the medium (personal computers), the originality of the monsters, and the immersiveness of Doom's first-person perspective—complete with head-bobbing action. Doom III will be frightening for some of the reasons that it shares with its predecessors as well as a few new ones. One, the game's story line—the idea of battling it out with the "forces of hell"—is as old as Christianity itself. And two, the tech advancements that Id has made to the first-person perspective make it even more immersive.

Hollenshead identifies several facets of the technology will help deliver Doom III's terror. "We have a great rendering engine, we use real-time dynamic lighting and shadowing, we have a new animation system, advanced artificial intelligence, and we wrap that all up in six-channel surround sound." While this may sound like a company's CEO tooting his own horn, it all seems to be coming together quite well. A lot has been made of the game's use of Direct X 9, which enables all of the shadows and lighting to work. In actual gameplay, are not just a game, but also integral to creating that frightening feel. During a multiplayer match, we were frightened by our own shadows more than once. When the original light source (like an overhead fluorescent tube) moves, the shadow moves accordingly. We were even able to see our character loading his shotgun via the shadow. In single-player too, dynamic lighting comes into play—for example, if you cast a shadow on a wall, you'll see the shadow of a monster engulf it.

In addition to boasting striking visuals, Doom III will take advantage of six-channel audio. This means that while you're being blown away by all the pretty pictures, you'll also be able to hear demons coming up behind you. Look for Doom III to ship sometime early next year. While Id says the game will run on a 1GHz PC with 256MB of RAM and a "decent" graphics card, the full experience will definitely require some hardware.
Ultima X: Odyssey looks to be a dazzling advancement over UO

What a difference five years makes. Ultima X: Odyssey, the next game in Origin’s pioneering series, looks absolutely nothing like Ultima Online. Then again, what would you expect when you base a MMORPG on the Unreal Warfare engine? In one giant leap, Odyssey is about to propel Ultima from the graphical middle ages to the top tier of massively multiplayer games coming in 2004.

UO fans won’t see much that’s familiar in the new game. Sure, players are once again thrust into the virtual world of Britannia, assuming the roles of warriors and magic-users in the fight against evil. But the action unfolds more like a World of Warcraft or even a first-person shooter at times (no big surprise with the Unreal engine). There is a big emphasis on the swinging of the axe and timing your magic spells as ettins come marching in. All of the menus, hotkeys, and character management do a fantastic job of keeping you in the action.

Combat flows well, especially in groups. A handy quest system allows groups of players to undertake NPC missions. And, as is becoming a trend amongst MMOs trying to create a better single-player experience, adventures occur in private areas and dungeons.

Those craving player-versus-player combat will be able to kill through consensual duels. Taken a step further, player guilds can stage massive battles with one another in private gladiatorial arenas, where spectators can actually place bets on the outcome. UXO is said to contain a PvP ladder system as well, allowing for the best of the best to make a name for themselves.

Weapons, armor, and other items collected through adventuring can be leveled up and augmented with powers gleaned from Ultima’s hallmark Virtues. This makes for a number of cool possibilities, allowing you to create unique items. These items can, of course, be bought, sold, and traded between players.

Several different races, including Humans, Gargoyles, Dwarves, and Elves are available for players to choose from; character abilities will be highly customizable as well, allowing for a large degree of flexibility in character design. Though the initial release will lack features that could disappoint current Ultima fans (such as crafting, housing, and mounts), it is shaping up very well in its pre-beta state. The gameplay has a great flow, the visuals are clean and impressive, and the interface seems simple enough for anyone to pick up and play. We’ll bring you more on this exciting new advance before its release early in 2004.

Players are once again thrust into Britannia, assuming the roles of warriors and magic-users.
NEW OBJECTIVE BASED GET-OUT-THERE-AND-KICK-SOME-ASS MODE.

NEW SOLDIER-CLASS IDENTIFIED: BRITISH COMMANDO, GERMAN ELITE.

7 NEW WEAPONS, 3 FOUND: THROWABLE ONE-SHOT KILL KNIFE, SHOTGUN, GRENADE LAUNCHER.

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*Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons requires Battlefield 1942 or Battlefield 1942 Deluxe Edition to play.

PC
SOFTWARE

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Iwo Jima

SO SECRET, YOU DON'T KNOW THEY EXIST UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD.

DID IN. OCT 3 1942
Love and Death

Max Payne 2 is set to unleash a double-barreled blast of both

By Ken Brown

Two years after Max Payne introduced us all to bullet-time and blew a bloody swath through the seedy underside of New York, Max Payne 2 is cocked and loaded to unleash more vigilante justice on the henchmen that bled the city. The Fall of Max Payne is nearing completion and scheduled to ship in late October, according to publisher Rockstar Games. Late-breaking details from Rockstar shine new light on the story and gameplay dynamics.

In the time period since the first game, Max has left the DEA to rejoin the NYPD where he soon becomes embroiled in an underworld arms struggle. Small-time mob captain Vinnie Gognitti, who Max loathed in the first game, has allied with a major force in the crime world and is attempting to monopolize the gun trade. A power struggle ensues with Vladimir Lenin (who armed Max in the first game), and Max's partner winds up dead with Max again framed for murder. Max must settle the score, with a little help from sexy sidekick Mona Sax, which could turn Max Payne 2 into some kind of first-person smoocher.

Rockstar says the game's combat has been highly polished to enhance the game's cinematic style shootouts. Enemies are said to land on objects properly, and they blend over railings when shot at or roll down the stairs like good virtual stuntmen. When Max dies, he's also within the same physical simulation, and reacts appropriately to the environment.

Physics enhancements will also make it harder for Max to hide. Weapon-firing will blow boxes to pieces, so you'll have to be careful about what you hide behind. Speaking of weapons, there will be five new ones in the game, but Rockstar wouldn't tell us what they are. The A.I. has been improved so that enemies won't just instinctively know where you are—they'll hunt you down based on where you were last heard or seen. If any NPCs are in the area, they'll take cover and avoid danger (like flames and grenades).

Judging by the screenshots we've seen, Max Payne 2 should blow away more than just the bad guys when it hits the streets. Here's hoping it'll play as good as it looks.

Max Payne 2 should blow away more than just the bad guys.
Lead as history’s greatest heroes in 3 gripping, story-driven adventures.
Rule any of 7 completely unique civilizations, across the Medieval Age to World War II.
Having outgrown Milwaukee, the Geek Pridefest also known as GenCon took place in Indianapolis this year. For four days in late July, the epicenter of gaming shifted to the Midwest as tens of thousands of gamers clad in black XXL T-shirts and weighed down by boxes of miniatures, bags of funny-shaped dice, and stacks of rulebooks and boardgames converged at the capital of Indiana. They met to play games, meet old friends, buy lots of stuff, get out, and deplete the city of its supply of Mountain Dew and Twinkies.

Not all the games were made out of paper at GenCon, however. A number of PC game companies were showing off the latest builds of upcoming titles. Microsoft was showing Mythica, the Age of Mythology expansion, and the Dungeon Siege expansion. We cited a list of complaints about Dungeon Siege (too easy, not enough tactical options, boring loot drops, etc.) and were told that all of these complaints were being addressed in the expansion. Atari was showing the MMO game Horizons and the impressive Greyhawk: The Temple of Elemental Evil, which uses the newly released Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 rules. We had hands-on time with it, and it looks and plays great at this stage of development—so we're ready for a good party-based, turn-based RPG, it's been too long.

We weren't as impressed with Vivendi's PC version of The Hobbit, which played like a console game. We also played a beta of its Lord of the Rings RTS game, though none of the story elements were in place, so gameplay was unconvincing vanilla RTS stuff. We felt the same after we played Sony Online's upcoming RTS game, Lords of EverQuest. It's not enough to slap a hot license on a game—make the game not too.

White Wolf was showing Activision's Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines, which uses the slicker-than-ogre-snot Half-Life 2 engine. The big White Wolf news is that its World of Darkness series is ending—so beware to all you vampires, mages, hunters, demons, werewolves, or maybe those just wearing rented mouse costumes, because your world is coming to an end. And it's got something to do with a wyrm, which is the scary way to spell "worm." Activision's Vampire game will contain some of the story elements of this apocalyptic ending.

For a few days this summer, "Indianapolis 500" referred to the number of people dressed as knights, vampires, and zombies who could pose for an S&M catalog. We had a great time returning to gaming roots long forgotten.
Opening the Valve

As there ever been a PC game so hotly anticipated with so little known about it? Despite the fact that Valve vows it will release on September 30, there have been no new details since E3. Valve founder Gabe Newell flatly stated that he doesn't want gamers to know any more about the game until they play it. Whether you agree with that or not, it doesn't seem to have dampened anyone's enthusiasm.

We do know HL2 picks up after the events of the first game. Edge magazine reported that the sequel will have 12 chapters representing approximately 36 hours of playing time. Gordon Freeman has joined ranks with the G-Man (the guy in the suit who offered Freeman a job at the end of the first game). Freeman's attractive new sidekick, Alyx Vance, is the daughter of a Black Mesa scientist, and both become trapped in an Eastern European city (City 17) when aliens invade at the start of the sequel.

Gordon will have his trusty crowbar, shotgun, MP5, and alien weaponry, but Valve has emphasized that players will need to use their imaginations because weapons won't always solve a problem. This is where the game's impressive physics engine comes into play—you can use objects as tools (for example, to deflect bullets and knock over automatons), or you can target things that cause a chain of events (dropping huge objects onto enemies). Gordon will also be able to use several land-based vehicles like jeeps and APCs.

Following the incredible success of Counter-Strike and Day of Defeat, Valve has wisely taken the mod community into account, already releasing tools so developers can start bolling away for the next big thing built from HL2. Unfortunately there's still no word on whether or even if Team Fortress 2 might come out—rumors of Counter-Strike Condition Zero running into trouble, it's clear Valve will have its hands full just shipping HL2 and CZ this year. Here's hoping they live up to expectations.
RECOMMENDATION

The Red Menace

General Luo's top 10 games of all time

Editor's note: Our former disc editor Di Luo was known for two things: an absolutely invincible strategy gamer, and hating just about everything. We thought it made for a good combination until he cleared our clock in Age of Mythology: GC Generals, Rise of Nations...well, you get the idea. But since he was so good at strategy games, and since he hated almost all of them, we wondered: What in God's name does he like? Incredibly, he had no trouble coming up with this list.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms (1989)
This grand game of personnel management and war set in ancient China introduced me to the world of strategy games. One of the deeper challenges of the late '80's.

Civilization (1992)
What Top 10 list isn't this on? Nothing has matched the magic and grandeur first invoked by Civ. A decade later, I still remember my 400-year war with the English.

Panzer General (1994)
A great beer-and-pretzels game. It kept the strategy of wargames but also streamlined the interface and actually made the hex-based map and units look good.

Master of Orion (1994)
Conquer planets or blow them apart. Unleash bio warfare catastrophes on your foe or turn them into dust with a fleet of death stars. No 4X game since this can match the original.

The first truly successful squad-based strategy game. Its mix of role-playing and strategy made me love my troops as my own children. Oh how it hurt to throw that shipload of raw recruits into the assault on California as cannon fodder for my elite troopers.

Fallout (1997)
This post-apocalyptic RPG was part Road Warrior and part DOOM. For once, you could solve problems without killing people, and stats other than combat skills mattered. Bonus points for an ending that didn't adhere to the happily-ever-after clichés.

Gettysburg (1997)
This game destroyed my college career—felt from a 4.0 GPA to a 2.7 in one semester. Gettysburg was real-time but had the pace and tactical aspects of a turn-based game. The co-op portion provided the best multiplayer gaming experience I've had.

The Operational Art of War (1998)
There are wargames that did a better job of modelling specific conflicts, but none had the scope of TOAW. The scenario maker allowed for games that ranged from worldwide confrontations to company-strength skirmishes.

Jagged Alliance 2 (1999)
Another squad-based classic. Had a nice mix of humor and role-playing with the tactical elements. Most original and entertaining character creation ever.

Planescape: Torment (1999)
An RPG that respected the gamer's intelligence. Some thought it wordy, but I found the story compelling and loved the fact that moral decisions affected my alignment and the game's ending.

Quick Poll

When are you buying Half-Life 2?

12% The day it comes out
23% The first chance I get
22% When I hear if it's any good
4% I already pre-ordered it
29% Not interested
11% After I read the review

Survey results from Gamers.com.

56 Computer Gaming World
The Hobbit
The Prelude to the Lord of the Rings
Welcome to Middle Earth

The adventure of a lifetime beckons
thehobbit.sierra.com

Sierra Entertainment Presents

PlayStation 2

Everyone
Violence Comic Mischief

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When thirty-something programmer Tony Ray got hooked on Team Fortress Classic in 1999 and subsequently found his clan, Uranium 235, consistently falling against clans using cheat scripts and aimbots, the righteous father of two decided he'd seen enough.

"We were playing one day," Ray explained. "And the cheating was just out of control. Almost every match was disputed." Ray emits a quiet white hot intensity when describing the rampant cheating in TFC. "I started getting so angry at these guys, and I thought to myself, 'Those little...man, we're going to bust those punks.'"

A successful network and business programmer, Ray went back to his Houston home and began coding a 10,000-line program that would allow a game server to check gamers' systems for imperfections that indicate the presence of a cheat.

"Initially, only 10 servers tried it," Ray recalls. "But once the program detected the first cheat—Death Adder's aimbot—it took off like wildfire." Ray pauses, relishing that first sweet push. "People who didn't believe cheaters were out there started believing real quick." One thousand leagues picked up PunkBuster in its first month of release.

These days, PunkBuster supports Quake III, Return to Castle Wolfenstein, and Soldier of Fortune II, but Ray and his globe-spanning crew of 16 (mostly volunteers) are just beginning to capture the gaming industry's attention. "I have monumental respect for those guys," enthuses former Blizzard North co-founder Bill Roper, who witnessed firsthand the devastating effects cheating had on Diablo. "It's a thankless task, and it requires so much work."

Andre Ray, online producer for Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield and a new PunkBuster devotee couldn't agree more. "Cheating kills the fun factor," Roy says. "When a few bad apples show up with their cheats, it drives the real players out."

Not anymore. PunkBuster is on the beat, and publishers that need ongoing support are even paying Ray and his group to police games. Up next: massively multiplayer online games. "We're really interested in ensuring that massively multiplayer games are fair," Ray states, getting that white-hot look again. "We kind of see ourselves as a doping commission of sorts (for gaming)."

With cheats everywhere and multiplayer play increasing, it seems Ray and his avengers will definitely be busy for a while.

"I can't stand cheating." -Tony Ray

Five Years Ago, November 1998
Back then we were awash in games, some of them good (Final Fantasy VII, Heart of Darkness), but most of which stunk (3D Hunting Trophy Whetfell, Nam, and Fox Sports Golf '99). There were so many racing games that we rounded up 14 of them for a feature. We were also awash in blood, between our review of Blood II, an ad for Carmageddon 2, and the two-page Gravis Xterminator ad showing a suburban home with a pool of blood running down the driveway. Nice.

Ten Years Ago, November 1993
We weren't always so discriminatory towards console games. Ten years ago we ran a big review of EA's Bill Walsh College Football for the Sega Genesis. If we tried to do that today, half of our readers' heads would explode. Elsewhere, our feature on "On-Line Gaming" explained how to get started in the nonstop thrill ride of modem-to-modem play. We're just grateful that the term "lacking in" didn't stick.

Fifteen Years Ago, November 1988
Fifteen years before Battlefield 1942, there was Battlehawks 1942, a flight sim that Lucasfilm promised would have "movie quality" graphics. Sorry to quibble with Lucasfilm, but they looked more like a coloring book. CGW couldn't complain at the time, what with a mostly black-and-white layout that looked like a chess newsletter. It made the ads for Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Pirates look like swimsuit models in the Sahara.
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THE THREAT

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PC Games

Space trade/Combat games are rare - good ones even more so. If golden oldies like Privateer, Heart of thevenerable Elite series ever floated your space boat then X² will be a game to look forward to.

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Computer Games Magazine
RATING: 90%
Alloutgames.com

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Sniper Elite
WWII shooter promises a tough test of marksmanship By John Houlihan

Breath and squeeze, breathe and squeeze. That'll be your mantra for Sniper Elite, the WWII shooter scheduled to infiltrate the U.S. from Europe just in time for the holidays. The game is set in April 1945, as Berlin disintegrates during the final days of the Soviet offensive. You play a German sniper recruited by the OSS (precursor to the CIA) to perform covert ops in what will become the opening rounds of the Cold War. Drawing inspiration from movies like Enemy at the Gates, the emphasis will be on stealth, infiltration and sniping, but just as important will be using your wits to make a clean kill and an equally clean getaway.

Mixing first- and third-person action, Sniper Elite promises a true hardcore emphasis for players who want the ultimate test of marksmanship. The advanced sniping and aiming model includes wounding, with body- and object-specific hits—you'll even be able to shoot grenades out of enemies' hands. Developer Rebellion says its Aures engine is being used to create a dynamic, nonlinear gaming environment, and the designers are using detailed plans and historical photos to recreate authentic scenes from the period.

Can Sniper Elite survive a duel with Hidden & Dangerous 2? We should know before the year is out.

### Extended Play: Homebrew

Samurai and crash test dummies

Look, Mom, educational games! Brush up on those rusty physics skills and hone your inner samurai with one freeware game and one shareware game.

**Truck Dismount**

Free

[jet.ro/dismount](http://jet.ro/dismount)

Release your inner sadist and learn a thing or two about physics with this quirky and somewhat gruesome freeware game. Like its predecessor, Stair Dismount, Truck Dismount is all about physics. A blocky crash test dummy is placed in, on, or under a truck that's sent hurtling into a wall. The more damage done to the hapless passenger, the higher your score, and the simple interface offers countless combinations. You can make the truck go slower or faster, add or remove the windshield, and even place a ramp or two in front of the wall for some serious hang time. Combine all that with an online top score list and you should never again get bored at work.

Samurai

$19.95

[www.klear.com](http://www.klear.com)

This excellent conversion of Reiner Knizia's out-of-print boardgame Samurai plays out on a hex map of Japan and involves exerting influence to capture cities—but this isn't your typical wargame. Players must use their resources to exhort clergymen, peasants, and nobles to support their factions. To win, you need to gain more support from two of these groups than your opponents do. Focus too much on one area and you'll suffer in others, but spread your influence across too many areas and you risk losing everything.

The excellent illustrated tutorial will have you up and running in no time, but don't expect to master the game quickly. Up to four people can play Samurai, but right now, it's nearly impossible to find opponents for an online match. Here's hoping it gets the recognition it deserves.
ONE ELITE UNIT...
INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS...
BRING IT ON.

“COMMANDOS 3 JUST BLOWS ITS PREDECESSOR AWAY.”
- GAMESPOT

Prepare for a variety of strategies as bombing raids alter the environment, requiring you to change your tactics on the fly.

Navigate detailed interior and exterior environments using ambushes, assaults, stealth and sabotage to disrupt enemy advances.

Experience WWII warfare head-to-head in all new deathmatch multiplayer campaigns.
"RPG HEAVEN..."

(Greyhawk) is at the top of my can't-wait-to-play list"
- PC Gamer
DISCOVERING GAMES

#20 THE LEARNING CURVE

My 8-year-old is really into Yu-Gi-Oh.

She wanted the PS2 game for her birthday and got it --

Yeah!

-- but when it came time to learn the game, the huge rambling tutorial almost did her in.

Still, she mastered it, as I knew she could, and when we got a demo for the PC game in the latest Shonen Jump, she didn't need any help at all.

Arcane or complex rules can be a barrier for casual players and newcomers.

But such cognitive puzzles can engender a sense of loyalty among players with the skill to put it all together.

If you've invested time and effort into memorizing dozens of keyboard commands --

-- or an arsenal of resource-hoarding techniques --

-- or the twists and turns of a maze like landscape --

-- and provide one more thing to lord over those who don't.

You're asking me??

-- your knowledge can resemble a very personal kind of power.

It can lead to a sense of fellowship with those who get it --

Meh --

what?

by Scott McCloud
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Mobile Mojo Risin’

By William O’Neal

Laptops with upgradeable graphics make us hot. Now that laptop graphics have finally caught up to their desktop brethren, you really do have the choice to go portable. But mobile gaming still carries a hefty cost: Gaming-capable laptops are expensive, and the lack of upgradeable graphics means that your $3,000 investment may be obsolete in a year or two.

Voodoo PC and Alienware want to change that by offering upgradeable graphics. The two have different upgrade methods: Voodoo requires the user to send the unit back so that they can do the upgrade; Alienware offers graphics that they call “user upgradeable.” The companies haven’t released details on what the cost might be, and we haven’t had the chance to test Alienware’s vaunted Area-51M. But we did receive Voodoo’s Envy M460 and put it through its paces.

The Envy M460 boasts a 2.6GHz Pentium 4 processor and ATI’s awesome 64MB Mobility Radeon 9600. We tested the Envy M460 at 1024x768 and achieved a 3DMark 2003 score of 1050. The machine also averaged 45 frames per second with the suite of games comprising 3D GameGauge 3.0. While that appears low, consider that we ran the tests with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering turned up. Turning those two features down will improve performance dramatically.

If you’re interested in a gaming-capable laptop but worry about obsolescence, take a closer look at these systems. You might have to pay a little more when the time comes, but it beats buying a whole new machine.

The Voodoo Envy M460 ($3,299) includes Windows XP Pro, 2.6GHz Intel Mobile Pentium 4, 512MB DDR 333 RAM, 60GB hard drive, 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600, 16x DVD reader/24x CD burner, 15-inch SXGA monitor, two USB 2.0 ports, FireWire, and PC card port.

Tired of being treated like a criminal for sharing music online?

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Join Shoe and the rest of the Ziff Davis Media editors as they invade your screen with the latest game news and releases that will jumpstart your weekend!

HOTWIRED's Big Video Game Hunting hosted by Erica Hill on CNN Headline News. Now airing at 2 different time slots every Thursday! 7:45 pm, 10:45 pm Eastern (4:45 pm, 7:45 pm Pacific)
**This Month's Top 5 Pre-Orders**

- **Half-Life 2 (Electronic Arts)**
  Research scientist Gordon Freeman finds himself on an alien-infested Earth being picked to the bone, its resources depleted, its populace dwindling. He is thrust into the unenviable role of rescuing the world from the wrong he unleashed back at Black Mesa.

- **Counter-Strike: Condition Zero**
  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.

- **Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark Expansion Pack (Bioware)**
  This expansion will make numerous additions to the original game, including the new epic characters rules that will let players take their characters from the already high character level of 20 all the way up to 40.

- **Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (LucasArts)**
  It is the Golden Age of the Republic and the Galaxy is reeling from a recent conflict with the Dark Lords, and the ongoing battle between the Jedi and the Sith rages on. Your actions will decide the outcome of this war—and your destiny as a Jedi.

- **URU: Ages Beyond Myst (Ubisoft)**
  The most immersive and ambitious Myst experience ever created. Bigger, better, and more innovative than any of the previous Myst adventures. Players will be part of an ever-expanding world that brings more areas to explore and more mysteries to solve.

**This Month's Top 5 Releases**

- **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.

- **Halo: Combat Evolved (Microsoft)**
  The PC adaptation of the hit console sci-fi shooter is based on the original concept. The action is set on a mysterious alien ring-world, and your objective is to uncover its horrible secret, and destroy mankind's nemesis—the Covenant.

- **Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Outcast (LucasArts)**
  This expansion takes place about 15 years after Return of the Jedi. Kyle won't become the Jedi who travels the universe trying to make a living doing jobs for the New Republic. One day, he is sent to a moon where he discovers a secret that will change his life forever.

- **Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Breakthrough Expansion Pack (Electronic Arts)**
  You assume the role of US Army Sgt. John Baker as the Allied forces battle from North Africa up the Italian peninsula. Look forward to new campaigns, new weapons, and the new liberation mode for multiplayer.

- **Sim City 4: Rush Hour Expansion Pack (Electronic Arts)**
  Get your SimCity through the chaos of traffic. Build your city to happiness by taking control of your city's transportation including roads, rail, air, and waterways. Solve missions from chasing down bank robbers to catching carjackers, and earn rewards and other vehicles.

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**CGW Top 20**

Need a good game? Look no further

Nothing beats the streets of Vice City.

Frozen Throne casts its spell on Warcraft III fans.

Metal Gear 2 sheds its skin and reveals some substance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Rockstar)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne (Vivendi)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance (Konami)</td>
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<td>Rise of Nations (Microsoft)</td>
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<td>Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubisoft)</td>
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<td>Midnight Club II (Rockstar)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Star Wars Galaxies (LucasArts/Sony Online Entertainment)</td>
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<td>Enter the Matrix (Alaris)</td>
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<td>Freelancer (Microsoft)</td>
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<td>The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon (Bethesda)</td>
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<td>Day of Defeat (Activision)</td>
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<td>PlanetSide (Sony Online Entertainment)</td>
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<td>Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NavLogics)</td>
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<td>The Sims: Superstar (Electronic Arts)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Medieval Total War: Viking Expansion (Activision)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Vietcong (Gathering)</td>
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<td>Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 (Microsoft)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Tron 2.0 (Disney Interactive)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Galactic Civilizations (Strategy First)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>The Hulk (Atari)</td>
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The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of readers' favorite games from the last six months. To vote, visit our website at www.computer gaming.com.
With every holiday season comes a flood of new games, each hoping to finagle its way under more than a few Christmas trees and Hanukkah bongs. A lot of this year's holiday releases look pretty good, too—here's a few you might be interested in checking out.

1. **Final Fantasy XI**
The wildly popular console RPG series finally goes multiplayer. We've been taking a look at the PC beta of this upcoming MMO, and it looks interesting. There are a few different player races and classes to choose from, and the setting looks to be fairly detailed. Series purists might be put off by Final Fantasy XI's drastic departure from its predecessors, but those of you who haven't yet drowned in the MMO sea might find something to like here.

2. **The Sims: Makin' Magic**
What do you do with a game that's done everything? That's right, you add magic spells to it. EA's next expansion to its popular franchise will let your Sims cast a variety of spells to help them perform tasks, such as housecleaning, playing tricks on the neighbors, or even making people fall in love with them. EA promises this will be the last Sims expansion pack (finally)—in no small part to The Sims 2 being just around the corner.

3. **Lords of the Realm III**
If imitation is a form of flattery, then LOTR3 pays major compliments to Medieval: Total War. Like the Total War series, there is a strategic map divided into resource-bearing territories and the opportunity to lead 3D troops in real-time battles. But instead of creating units at a barracks, you assign knights to the land, which in turn creates units automatically. We're not sure LOTR3 can match Medieval's overall depth, but we're eager to find out.

**Compiled by Ryan Scott**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age of Mythology: The Titans</td>
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<td>Airport Tycoon 3</td>
<td>Global Star Software</td>
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<td>Armed &amp; Dangerous</td>
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<td>Battlefield Command</td>
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<td>Beyond Good &amp; Evil</td>
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<td>NBA Live 2004</td>
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<td>Neverwinter Nights: Heroes of the Underdark</td>
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<td>Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time</td>
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<td>Railroad Tycoon 3</td>
<td>Gathering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown</td>
<td>Capcom</td>
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**New Games**

- Rome: Total War
- Sam & Max: Freelance Police
- Secret Weapons Over Normandy
- Shaker: Wrath of Angels
- Silent Hill 3
- The Sims: Makin' Magic
- The Sims 2
- Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
- Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic
- Stalker: Oblivion Lost
- SWAT: Urban Justice
- Syberia III
- Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Turtles in Time
- Terminator 3: War of the Machines
- Thief III
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004
- Tribes: Vengence
- Trinity: The Shattered Effect
- Ultima X: Odyssey
- Unreal Tournament 2004
- Vampires: The Masquerade-Bloodlines
- Wargods IV: Heroes of Etheria
- World of Warcraft

**Coming Soon**

- XIII
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NEED FOR SPEEDS

A good excuse to say “skid marks” in print By Darren Gladstone
The Fast and...Oh, You Know

Surprisingly, Vin Diesel said it best: "I live my life a quarter mile at a time. For those 10 seconds or less, I'm free!" That's the mantra behind Need for Speed: Underground as you blaze through rain-soaked city streets looking to earn street cred and money through drag racing, circuit racing, and high-octane street sprints in more than 100 different events. And there's still one mode yet to be announced.

True to the Need for Speed series, Underground has you driving real cars, real fast. You'll find 20 licensed sets of wheels including Mitsubishis, Subarus, and Toyotas. Of course, a big part of the street racing culture is modding said cars until they're barely recognizable, and you'll find all that customization available here. In fact, executive producer Chuck Osieja promises billions of ways to pimp out your ride. Audiobahn, HKS, MOMO, Neuspeed, Nitrous Express Inc., StreetGlow, TurboNetics—the list of modding-related manufacturers with gear here goes on and on. You can also get a custom paint and decal job done on your car. At last count, there were more than 71 billion different looks available for each car in the game.

AT THE MOVIES

While you'll be quick to notice the amazing eye candy that laces Underground, it's the cameras and the motion-blurring effects that'll leave your head spinning. For this, they drafted a movie-special-effects wizard, Habib Zargarpour, onto the team. "As our visual effects director, he's achieved a frightening sensation of speed," says Osieja. How? Simply by adding camera shake to driving. "Other driving games have had camera shakes in them, but there is actually a technique to implement it that allows the human brain to be 'convinced' by the effect," he continues. If it's implemented correctly (which, coincidentally, it appears it has been), you can add 20mph to the "feeling" of speed without actually changing the game's framerate.

Zargarpour used the same process while creating the pod racing sequence for Star Wars Episode I. A driving game, though, is nothing without background scenery to blow past. There are no real cities in this game, but the scenery is inspired by real-world locations. While it looks like a city on the surface, Osieja says, Underground is really a race track under a city's skin. "This way, you don't have to worry about driving too many 90-degree corners you can't do successfully at over 100mph."

Another departure from reality is the utter lack of Johnny Law. Why is that? Programming A.I. logic for the 5-0 requires a lot of extra time, but even more important, Osieja says, he didn't want this game to feel like NFS: Hot Pursuit 2.5—instead, the emphasis is on the racers. He went on to hint that while this game is all about urban street racing, the white-knuckle cop chases present in Hot Pursuit 2 will be back in another game down the road.

We've also heard that you'll be able to challenge other PC or PS2 racers over the Internet. Combine that with the open-ended customizability, and you can be the proud owner of some serious online bragging rights for the player with the best ride. And at least we'll be able to turn out sooner rather than later. Originally slated for a Q1 2004 release, the EA Black Box team has been firing on all cylinders and—gasp—the game is coming out ahead of schedule. Your pink slip is on the line just in time for the holidays.

Executive producer Chuck Osieja promises billions of ways to pimp out your ride, including custom paint and decal jobs.

Take to the rain-soaked streets.
Warning to the Cate Archer fan club: While Contract J.A.C.K. is a prequel to No One Lives Forever 2, you do not get to play as your favorite femme fatale. Cate makes only a brief appearance as an NPC—so if she's your only interest in the series, move along.

To tell the story of what happened between NOLF 1 and 2, Monolith is trying something completely different, if for no other reason than to keep themselves interested. This time, you get to play as a bad guy—John Jack, a contract killer for H.A.R.M. The plot? A third-rate Italian criminal organization, Danger Danger, is trying to take H.A.R.M. down—and you're hired to stop them.

The single-player game is comprised of 10 missions in three settings and almost completely forsakes NOLF's stealth gameplay for a more straight run-and-gun approach. Don't be surprised when you find yourself blasting away badder bad guys on the aim as you ride.

Multiplayer has been enhanced as well, with 15 new maps and a new team mode called Demolition. In Demolition mode, one team must set off three bomb targets while the other team defends. Our hands-on with the Demolition maps was a blast—though maybe not enough to make you stop playing Battlefield 1942.

Contract J.A.C.K. still gets by on the series' great humor, though this time it's heavier on the Poip Fiction than the Austin Powers. Will it make Cate's fans happy? We'll find out this winter.

Monolith has upgraded the arsenal, trading spy gadgets for firepower.

Moon level. As such, Monolith has seriously upgraded the arsenal, trading in Cate's spy gadgets for all sorts of firepower, including a laser cannon, a crossbow with explosive projectiles, a Tommy gun, a shotgun, an AK-47, and incendiary grenades that light enemies on fire. You'll also have two vehicles—a Vespa scooter and the snowmobile—equipped with weapons that will auto-

**GAME STATS**
PRODUCT: **J.A.C.K.**
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH
GENRE: ACTION
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2003

**CONTRACT J.A.C.K.**

Because you can't be Cate Archer forever  **By Jeff Green**
This is where I took on three guys... and made them cry like babies.

Wireless multiplayer game play
Game card titles from top publishers
Supports 3D graphics
Bluetooth technology
MP3 music player—FM radio
Built-in mobile phone

n-gage.com
Graphically brilliant, action-packed, and sporting a slew and a half of interface and gameplay tweaks that most RPG creators are still trying to catch up to, Dungeon Siege was, if not exactly a breath of fresh air at least a breath of reality, really good clean air. Still, some gamers complained that this party-based real-time smash fest tended to play itself more than it let you play it. If you felt that way, then the Legends of Aranna expansion might just be the solution. If you didn’t, well, you’ll just unconditionally love this add-on.

Aranna features a brand-new single-player campaign starring you as the orphaned child of two brave adventurers who sallied forth to fight evil and never returned. Twenty years later, you’re all grown up and that pesky Ancient Evil and its requisite Powerful Artifact have reared their ugly heads again. You guessed it, it’s up to you to stop the madness.

As Dungeon Siege is to traditional action-RPG gameplay, so is Legends of Aranna to Dungeon Siege: The focus is on enhancement. In the first game, you were all grown up and that pesky Ancient Evil and its requisite Powerful Artifact have reared their ugly heads again. You guessed it, it’s up to you to stop the madness:

You are the orphaned child of two brave adventurers who sallied off to fight evil.

Giving you some way to tread water while you wait for Dungeon Siege 2 to come out next year. For example, a whole new set of Orb spells has been added to let magic users more fully participate and benefit from battles. In the original game, casters were often relegated to casting heal spells on the bruisers in the party, thus robbing them of the experience they needed to advance. No longer. Orb spells create circling balls of magic that keep the mages in the experience-gathering pool by dishing out fire or electrical or whatever damage to monsters while freeing the caster to focus on keeping up party members’ hit points. New glyph spells will let magic users drop various magical landmines prior to combat, again letting them both fight and heal.

You can expect Aranna’s difficulty to exceed Dungeon Siege’s, and the game includes a ton of new loot, including expansive matched sets that grow more powerful when used all together. While all the new content won’t be available in the original single-player game, all the interface enhancements and new spells will be. What is Legends of Aranna’s last considerate improvement? It ships this fall, with the full version of Dungeon Siege in the box, for a reasonable $35.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER RAD SOFTWARE
GENRE ACTION RPG
RELEASE DATE NOVEMBER 2003

DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA

Not to be confused with the Segal classic Under Siege By Robert Coffey
This is where I got further with Lara than anyone else.
PREVIEWS

Not surprisingly, they also lost George's luggage.

This assassin isn't so happy to see you.

There's plenty of globe-trotting to be had here.

"Hey, big boy, care to let me in?"

BROKEN SWORD SLEEPING DRAGON

A new 3D stab at graphic adventures By Darren Gladstone
Adventure games are a dying breed here in the United States; just a handful come out each year, and fewer still are any good. Why? To be blunt, point-and-click graphic adventures just don't work anymore. Ask Charles Cecil, the Managing Director behind Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon. "Roberta Williams started using [point-and-click] in her games well over a decade ago and they worked fine back then. It just doesn't translate well into a three-dimensional world." We have to agree, but after sitting through a fairly impressive demo of this new take on the adventure game, we think The Sleeping Dragon might breathe a little life back into the genre.

As other classic adventure series have attempted, the Broken Sword series is now making a transition to 3D. Those who remember the original games will first notice that this isn't a hand-drawn 2D cartoon world you're exploring—there are detailed environments, but there's a whole lot more to this game than simply looking for clickable hotspots on the environment. As George Stobbart, the patent lawyer from the first game, and Nico Collard, the sassy French reporter from the second game, you interact with objects in a 3D world to solve a conspiracy that'll have you globe-trotting to seven different parts of the world.

Besides concentrating on the highly polished CG graphics, the Dragon development team is very focused on how it wants to tell this story. "We drew a lot of inspiration from movies because they best lend themselves to the adventure genre," says Cecil. Pointing to such films as Raiders of the Lost Ark as examples, he explains the desire to create dramatic tension. One way that's been achieved in the game is through cut-scenes, which normally hog up a couple minutes worth of time and interrupt the game flow, but here provide little bits of narrative that don't take you out of the game for more than a few seconds.

A big pet peeve that's plagued fans of the older games: locked camera angles. It sure looks nice, but it's damn annoying to navigate. Here, the elegant solution is panning the camera through the 3D world. "Taking with a director at Pinewood Studios, we got input on camera angles and it's helped us a great deal," says Cecil. "The director taught us a few tricks that allowed us to create a much more cinematic experience." Whether simply lifting the camera angle or tracking around a room as you move,

"We drew a lot of inspiration from movies because they best lend themselves to the adventure genre."

Broken Sword 3 also incorporates simple action elements without forgetting its roots. Take one of Nico's early scenes in the game: An assassin surprises her and aims a gun at her head. To fight the assassin off, you must hit a context-sensitive button at just the right time—get the timing wrong and you die. But rather than penalize you for poor motor skills, the scene restarts and gives you another go. You'll also find jumping puzzles—sort of. But Cecil says quick to take a cheap shot at Tom Raider, which we salute, by the way), "you won't fall off a ledge for walking too close." The whole point is to find where you need to go, not to penalize you for missing a jump by inches.

At press time, Cecil and company are working out the final bugs and ensuring Dragon is neither too easy nor too hard. The game seems a little linear, but what the heck—the whole point is to tell a story, and after playing a few levels ourselves, we think it looks like an interesting one. We figure you'll probably be living the adventure for 20 to 30 hours when The Sleeping Dragon awakens this November.
When you get tired of running the railroads and building the next Disneyland, you'll need a break. Where ya gonna go? Vegas, baby! In Vegas: Make It Big, you're charged with running the king of all business ventures: the infamous Las Vegas Strip. As is the norm in tycoon-style sim games, you'll start with little more than a grimy two-bit casino, which—with a bit of wheeling and dealing—will evolve into a vast multiresort empire. That's right, instead of boring, old buildings, you'll be making Sin City what it is today: trademark thematics, tourist attractions, and all the amoral trappings that come with them.

Developed by UK-based Deep Red (which was responsible for 2001's excellent Monopoly Tycoon), Vegas aims to immerse players in a detailed Las Vegas business simulation. It presents a wide range of features and options for the growth of your cash cow—attractions, shops, restaurants, gaming tables, slot machines, and security are but a few of the aspects placed under your control. Want to book a horse race or boxing match? How about a roller coaster atop your hotel to keep the kiddies happy? Need to hire more pit bosses to deal with your no-good, cheating quests? You can do it all.

As you construct your gambling mecca, you'll need to make careful decisions about what types of clientele you'd like to attract. A variety of guest types, ranging from vacationing families to corporate high rollers, are out there just waiting to be lured into your personal playground. Each guest has varying tastes—while an exotic dance club might attract the big spenders and poor losers, Mom and Dad aren't likely to take the kids out for an evening of lap dances (well, not your parents, anyway). Guests will leave feedback detailing their impressions and desires, and it's your job to keep them happy, which could mean anything from booking a magic act for the kids to hiring some charismatic card dealers in order to keep the money flowing out of your hapless customers' pockets.

The game is presented in full 3D, with quite a few character and building models. True to the tackiness that pervades Las Vegas Boulevard, 10 visual themes are available, including a Greek temple, a neon-heavy space station, and a medieval Japanese palace. Though none of the Strip's real-world resorts are present, the game's handy built-in editor should provide plenty of opportunity for creative minds to whip up their own familiar themes and environments.

Most any type of entertainment venue you could imagine is available for construction, with several unlockable buildings as well. Add several gameplay modes (single-player campaign, mission, and sandbox play) and factors such as competing casinos, special events, and full daynight cycles, and you've got what could very well be a dynamic and well-rounded simulation of the life of a Vegas magnate. When the game is released in October, will it crap out or be a high roller in sim circles? Our bookie says odds are sim fans will get a kick outta this one.

Yeah, like you're going to go see a movie in Vegas.

Build all the attractions, from malls and casinos to bars and strip clubs.

Instead of boring, old buildings, you'll be making Sin City what it is today.

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
Sim City goes to Sin City By Ryan Scott
There’s never a dull day in Gravenville. As Ghost Master you’ll command a mischievous horde of 47 different gremlins, phantoms and wraiths to stalk the sisters of the sorority house or torment the town’s other citizens in 14 graphically intense scenarios based on classic movies. Rattle some chains. Lurk about. You’ll be hooked in no time.
Sony Online Entertainment has invaded our offices no fewer than four times to show us every new morsel developed for the upcoming RTS based in the EverQuest world. After seeing a recent build, we're happy to report that the game is finally shaping up in its effort to take on the likes of Warcraft. We figured this would be the best time to give you a late hands-on update before the game ships this November.

Formed by a bunch of New World Computing refugees, Rapid Eye Entertainment has finalized the code, wrapped up the single-player campaign, and is now tweaking the finishing touches of the title. This translates into a whole lot of game to wrap your meaty little hands around. The single-player campaign is destined to absorb 75 hours of your life by allowing you to control more than 60 different unit types. Your armies and heroes—the "lords," that is—can gain experience and wield hundreds of different types of items and artifacts. And that's not even mentioning the 125-plus spells and special abilities that your troops can earn along the way.

Smacking down people on the Internet, though, is where the fun really starts. The free Battle.net-like peer-to-peer matchmaking service will find you suitable competition, and 12-player games and a 50-person population cap per side can lead to some massive 600-unit melées. Won't it be impossible to get a handle on all that action at the same time? Not really; SOE is making extra efforts to include shortcuts to function keys for special abilities, so you won't need to fumble through panels to order up a lightning bolt.

Those unfamiliar with the whole EverQuest lore won't be left out. Since the game takes place 10,000 years before the events of the online multiplayer franchise, there's plenty of freedom to be had in terms of story. Of course, those who can identify the three different factions you can control (the Eldar Alliance, the Shadowrealm, and the Dawn Brotherhood) will get a kick out of all the effort and details that have gone into creating units.

No better place shows that detail than the world itself, which can be cranked up to a 1600x1200 resolution with the help of a beefy 3D card. And players are able to fully scale and zoom through the environment. In the build we recently knocked around, there are lots of nice environmental touches that flesh out the maps. Rocky terrain, the edges of forests, and small structures and cabins are littered throughout. You can even reduce the number of lame onscreen menus, letting you resize or even remove panels to see more of the game world. What a thoughtful touch.

This game has the potential for 600-unit melées.

An RTS with some serious pedigree By Darren Gladstone
AGE of MYTHOLOGY
THE BOARDGAME

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150 Wooden Resource Cubes

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38 Unique Sculptures
216 Cards Featuring 100 Unique Pieces of Artwork

Deep, Flexible Strategies

Easy to Learn Rules

EAGLE GAMES

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The goofy moniker "neon-gothic" accurately describes the game's style.

Drake is trying to rise above comics' code level of violence.

What is it about the undead and handguns? By Darren Gladstone
The Ultimate Strategy Boardgame Is Now Available On Your PC!

War! Age & Imperialism is a game of empire building, exploration, economic expansion, technological advancement, diplomacy, and tactical battles in the age of Imperialism (1830 – 1900). You rule one of the great powers of the era as they attempt to carve out an empire. Should you build up your army or your economy? Negotiate or attack? Spend on research or a new fort to protect the frontier?

Praise for the Boardgame

"... the ultimate face-to-face multiplayer hardware for gamers." - Computer Games Magazine

"... 5 out of 5. We had to spank the other monkeys to keep them away." - Game Monkeys.com

"... another winner from Eagle Games." - Gamer's Pulse

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Sci-fi shooters are good. Cyberpunk RPGs? We dare say they're even better. Medieval strategy games scratch that proverbial itch, too. Maybe one or two observant publishers will hear our plea and latch onto a few of these potential hits. They win, we win.

**ALPHA BRAVO ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL**
**FROM MHIADON**
**REAL ACTION**
**AMUSEMENT 03 2003**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** In 2366, it seems that terrorists still plague humanity. But Kyle Hardlow and the Alpha Bravo Zero unit don't take guff from nobody. Unfortunately, the peacekeepers stand accused of crimes they didn't commit—hence the novel flashback sequence that details their third-person team-based adventures throughout the galaxy. In this striking tactical blaster, you'll lead five specialists into some sticky situations...and hopefully gather enough evidence to clear their name before the single-player campaign is through.

**BEST UNHEARD:** Despite its promising setup (we dig custom outfitting wingmen with grenade launchers and machine guns), the title is hardly original. Like CDV's Breed, it doesn't attempt to raise the bar, but it does push that bad boy to the breaking point. Innovation is always welcome, assassination attempt and embark upon a sprawling third-person role-playing adventure brimming with story-driven sequences. Distal by design, the game does sport one feature that makes us smile: an emphasis on balls-out action.

**KNIGHTS OF HONOR**
**FROM SUNFLOWERS**
**EQUIP REAL-TIME STRATEGY**
**June 02 2004**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** Real-time sieges, hero management. Peasant uprisings. Fusing empire-building with titanic battles, Knights of Honor plays like a cross between Civilization and Medieval: Total War. Players erect structures and maintain a thriving economy, and must be able to defend their homeland from the potential attacks from more than 100 other...

**OUTTA SIGHT**

The best games you've never seen by Scott Steinberg

but some truly original features would give the program a better chance of standing out amidst the holiday rush. Then again, so would a publisher with a marketing budget and an American distribution deal.

**SINGULARITY**
**FROM WHITE KNICKLE GAMES**
**STRATEGY ROLE-PLAYING RAVE**
**AMUSEMENT 04 2004**

**SPREAD THE WORD:** In the not-so-distant future, megacorporations rule. War is constant. The internet is omnipresent. For mercenaries looking to score a quick buck, life don't get any better. Enter hacker Tall Cates and gang leader Darnese Gage. Swept up in grand conspiracies, they survive an realms. From maintaining diplomatic relations to plotting troop formations, virtually all elements of medieval rule are accounted for. Like they say, it's good to be king.

**BEST UNHEARD:** As with many German outfits, Sunflowers is big on micromanagement...witness Anno 1503. Though it's popular with European audiences, that convention doesn't seem to be much appreciated by American gamers. While the team's newest unveiling seems like a fantastic concept, we fear that with so many subsystems simulated in one fell swoop, the risk of an epic design bogged down in minutiae is significant. Here's hoping our brawny- and beer-loving friends don't lay siege to their own sales.
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BREAKING NEWS

- Naval fleet crosses Mediterranean Sea
- Satellite photos reveal GLA movements

Super weapons strike at the heart of opposing Naval Forces.

Send units quickly into enemy bases with a tunnel network.

Heavy armor overwhelms laser targeting technology.
**Here are nine of them.**

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<tr>
<th>Ta Hun Kwai</th>
<th>Tsing Shi Tao</th>
<th>&quot;Anvil&quot; Shin Fal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lightning-fast assaults with armored divisions, including Emperor tanks.</td>
<td>Instills fear with vast, nuclear arsenal and fleet of tactical nuke MIGs.</td>
<td>Transports troops with Helix 2 and storms positions with overwhelming numbers.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Malcolm &quot;Ace&quot; Granger</th>
<th>Alexis Alexander</th>
<th>&quot;Pinpoint&quot; Townes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hi-tech forces, like King Raptors and Spectre Gunships, establish air supremacy.</td>
<td>Fortified positions defended by an arsenal of super weapons and Aurora Alpha jets.</td>
<td>Surgical strikes with the Avenger and other advanced, laser-sighted weapons.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Prince Kassad</th>
<th>Dr. Throx</th>
<th>Rodoll &quot;Demo&quot; Juhziz</th>
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<tr>
<td>Uses GPS scrambler to camouflage troops and kills with stealth sniper attacks.</td>
<td>Merciless use of chemical weapons and the GLA Toxin Networks.</td>
<td>Bombings, booby-traps, rocket attacks and Combat Cycles embody lo-tech ingenuity.</td>
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**Next-Gen Weapons:**

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<th>30 New Units and 20 Upgrades</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Chinese ECM Tank: Jam frequencies to cause enemy missiles to stray from intended target.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The GLA Battle Bus: Mobile death fortress turns into a stationary bunker when damaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States Spectre Gunship: Lay waste to anything unfortunate enough to be in your sights with 50-caliber shells from multiple machine guns.</td>
</tr>
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**15 New Missions Rattle Veteran Generals**

All-new missions span the globe across three campaigns. Choose your side and immerse yourself in tomorrow's headlines, today.

**9 Leaders or 9 Lunatics?**

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PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS DEVELOPER: RAVEN SOFTWARE GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER PRICE: $49.95 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450MHZ, 128
ES DOWN A BIT TOO EASY

BY JEFF GREEN

MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD, 1.3GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 600MHZ, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
Moving down bad guys while riding a tauntaun on Hoth. No, you don’t split one open and use its guts for warmth. Darn.

OK, let’s cut to the chase about the new Star Wars movies: They blow. The most remarkable thing about Episode II, in Jed, is that it actually manages to be worse than Episode I—which, after the debacle of Jar Jar Binks, is quite a feat indeed.

The truth is, over the years, it’s really been the games that have kept our interest in the Force alive—by tapping into the spirit of the original trilogy far better than the bloated new movies. Along with classics like X-Wing and, more recently, BioWare’s stunning Knights of the Old Republic (see page 114), LucasArts’ Jedi Knight series, beginning with Dark Forces in 1994, has done a fantastic job of plunging gamers into the heart of the Star Wars universe, with great storytelling matched by equally first-rate gameplay.

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy is the fourth entry in the series, and it’s the first game to fundamentally alter the formula. The results, unfortunately, are mixed. I’m not sure if it’s a result of trying to appeal to Xbox gamers or more casual players in general, but what used to be one of the tougher shooters around has been made much easier and lighter this time. But, though it is certainly the weakest Jedi Knight game so far, I still had a good time all the way through it. Lacking in ambition and inspiration, Jedi Academy nonetheless gets by on the sheer joy of wielding that lightsaber and mowing down bad guys.

31 FLAVORS—ALL VANILLA
As in the previous games, Jedi Academy takes place post-Return of the Jedi, with the Empire destroyed and Luke Skywalker now playing Mr. Chips to eager young Jedi wannabes at the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4. Unlike previous Jedi Knight games, however, you are, surprisingly, no longer playing Rebel Alliance agent Kyle Katarn, the series’ signature protagonist. Kyle, like Luke, has been reduced to the role of an NPC, giving you advice along the way and occasionally fighting alongside you.

So, if you’re not Kyle Katarn, who are you? Good question. When you first boot up the game, you’re taken to a character creation screen, which may make you believe that you are, well, creating your own character. Not so. Yes, you have a few race and gender choices (Rodian male, Human male or female, Kel Dor male, Twi’lek female, Zabrak male), but the fact is, no matter what you pick, you are going to be the exact same character in the same linear, scripted story line: the cleverly gender-neutral-sounding Jaden Korr, a young Jedi newbie.

Other choices you make here, like your clothing and the hilt and color of your lightsaber, are equally superficial—these are aesthetic decisions that have nothing to do
The graphics, while far from state-of-the-art, still offer nice moments on certain levels.

Skywalker and Kotori tell that fetching blood lame-ness about the menace of the Disciples of Ragnos.

with gameplay. What would have been nice (if the developers had wanted players to feel their decisions actually mattered), would be to offer advantages and disadvantages based on the race you choose—an extra Force power or weapon or capability of some kind. It's a little silly to go through the motions of offering players "choices" when those choices don't really mean anything. If we're all just going to play Jaden Kor, then just say so, create the character for us and don't waste our time.

RAISING THE DEAD
Once the game actually begins, it begins well enough, with your ship crash-landing near a Massassi temple on Yavin 4. The opening level serves as a basic tutorial and sets the story line in motion, which, to sum up quickly, has Imperial remnant troops siphoning Force powers from around the galaxy in an attempt to resurrect Marka Ragnos, a Sith Lord who died 5,000 years earlier. As far as Star Wars stories go, there've been worse—at least there's no talk of midichlorians here. Where Jedi Academy differs from its predecessors is in the structure of the game after the opening level. While pieces of the bigger story, and your role in it, emerge and become more critical as you proceed through the game, a huge chunk of Jedi Academy involves being sent on a series of smaller, often unrelated missions in order to test your skills and prove yourself as a new Jedi. At each stage of the game, you'll be given a list of five missions; you must complete four, in any order, before you'll trigger the next act. (You can also go ahead and finish the fifth mission, too—which is what all but the laziest of players will do.)

The mission-based structure is smart and

TEN YEARS OF STAR WARS PC GAMES

Well, pull my lightsaber, Chewie! They've been making Star Wars PC games for 10 years now! Where the heck did the time go?

Here's a full list of all the Star Wars games for PC, minus some compilations, re-releases, and kiddie stuff we don't care about. The original CGW ratings and issue numbers are also included; note that before 1994 we didn't include numeric ratings because back then our readers knew how to read words and judge for themselves. Just kidding. We love you guys.

1993
X-WING (n/a, #107) Outstanding Star Wars space sim. The original classic.
REBEL ASSAULT (n/a, #115) Short, fun shooter—one of the first, must-have CDs.

1994
X-WING: IMPERIAL PURSUIT (n/a, #113) The first X-Wing expansion.
X-WING: B-WING (n/a, #115) The better X-Wing expansion.
STAR WARS CHESS (n/a, #116) It's just like chess, except Luke is your king, Yoda!

1995
TIE FIGHTER (5/5 stars, #123) X-Wing's superior sequel. A classic.
TIE FIGHTER: DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE (n/a) More 7/5 Fighter goodness.

1997
YODA STORIES (5/5 stars, #156) Makes Killarri, or deaths, look like a good time.
X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER (5/5 stars, #156) Good multiplayer, but poor solo play.
GLADIATOR
SWORD OF VENGEANCE

NOTHING LESS THAN TO THE DEATH
IN THE ARENA, WARRIORS WILL CLASH. BLOOD WILL BE SPILLED. CHAMPIONS WILL BE MADE.
IN AN ANCIENT EMPIRE, EVIL WILL ALTER THE STRANDS OF FATE, AND THE GODS WILL SEEK VENGEANCE.
NOT EVEN DEATH CAN STOP A TRUE HERO. FEATURING NEW AND EXCLUSIVE DEATH MOVES. THE END IS SEVERE.

WWW.ACCLAIM.COM/GLADIATOR
pretty cool, in general, giving players a small
bit of nonlinearity and decision making, while
allowing the developers to zoom players all
over the galaxy in a variety of settings and
mission types. The missions run the gamut
qualitywise, with some being more fun and
inspired than others. While huge chunks of
the game are devoted to standard (and not overly
thrilling) FPS run-and-gun, the more memo-
rable missions try to mix it up a bit. In one,
you have to rescue prisoners of a Hutt crime
lord while avoiding a giant rancor. Other
missions will put you on the back of a
tauntaun, behind the wheel of a swoop racer,
and in a brutal duel against the galaxy's most
notorious bounty hunter.

Nothing brilliant, but a nice change of pace
from running around corridors and jumping on
crates—and some good, classic (if overly
obvious) Star Wars-y references. For some,
especially casual gamers, that's going to make
the game good enough.

HEY, DUMMY, I'M OVER HERE
The big problem, for me, is that the game is
just too easy—and I normally stink at shooters
like this. I beat the game on the Normal
setting without ever being significantly
challenged once, even during the few boss
battles. Though many people complained
about the lack of a lightsaber during the first
half of Jedi Knight II, here we have the oppo-
site problem. By giving us the lightsaber from
the first minute of the game, certain enemies,
like the myriad stormtroopers, imperial
officers, and Tusken raiders, are nothing more
than cannon fodder right from the start.
In addition, though the game makes a
pretense of letting you choose your weapons
at the beginning of each mission, this decision
proves to be about as meaningful as the
"character creation": a few minutes into most
missions, you'll have all your weapons anyway.
In one mission, you are imprisoned and lose all
your weapons, including your lightsaber. The
bad guy, out of boredom, challenges you to
ecape. It's a great beginning, but then they
blew it: Two minutes into your escape, you
already have a blaster rifle. How much better
and more challenging would it have been to
make you play the entire level with no
weapon, forcing you to use your wits instead?
It's just too easy.

It doesn't help matters that the A.I. is weak,
too. Enemies that are easy to mow down even
when alert are made even less challenging
when they fail to acknowledge your existence
or can't come close to aiming their weapons at
you. With a disruptor rifle or other long-range

You're running a quartet of one lightsaber battle
after another—often against multiple enemies.

One of the game's better missions has you rescuing
prisoners while avoiding a giant rancor.
Outlaw. Renegade. Hero.

Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown

From daring archery ambushes to swashbuckling swordfights, from the battlefield to the jousting field, live the legend of Robin Hood. Use every ounce of cunning, strategy and wit to bring the tyranny of Prince John to an end!
Another fan-favorite character makes a cameo in the mission, where he remains a complete pain in the ass.

Yeah, sure, use a jetpack. Way to cheat.

RAVEN AND LUCASARTS GET SOME POINTS FOR NOT JUST REHASHING THE SAME GAME AGAIN.

Raven and LucasArts get some points for not just rehashing the same game again and trying to mix things up a little with the mission structure and new character. But they could have (and should have) taken it much further, offering us real decision making and moral choices along with the FPS action.

As it is, what they've created here is Jedi Lite—an easy game, totally digestible by casual fans, with tons of references to the movies' more popular characters and locales. Is that a bad thing? Well, hardcore gamers and longtime fans of the series will most certainly be disappointed. But what are you gonna do? LucasArts went for a populist, crowd-pleasing entertainment this time around. And given the painful boredom and portentousness of the movies (as well as the impenetrable Star Wars Galaxies), who can blame them? There are worse ways to spend your time than slicing bad guys in half with lightsabers. (Like, say, standing in line for Episode III.) If this is all you demand from your Star Wars games, then may the Force be with you. But given what we've seen BioWare do with Knights of the Old Republic, it's clear this franchise can be so much more.

VERDICT

The least inspired Jedi Knight game yet still has some thrills.
"Watch out Blizzard, Bioware and Black Isle! The competition is about to heat up with the release of this surprisingly remarkable sequel."
— PC Gaming World

"...it is the most captivating game I have played lately."
— Computer Games

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BEHIND THE GAME

BIOWARE BREATHEs NEW LIFE INTO STAR WARS

MASTERS THE
Right now, someone is playing Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, and all we can do is wait. And wait. And wait. That’s the worst part: knowing that Xbox owners—Xbox owners!—have spent the second half of this past summer celebrating one of the greatest games of all time while being left out. (Damn you, Microsoft!)

Does this mean BioWare has forgotten its PC roots? Hell, no. The Edmonton-based developer is feverishly working to make the PC version of KOTOR even more impressive and ready for release this fall. “We’re excited about the PC version,” confesses BioWare co-founder and co-CEO Dr. Greg Zeschuk, who shares BioWare’s CEO position with longtime friend and fellow physician Ray Muzyka. “There, we’ll be able to do things the Xbox simply can’t.” Obviously, it’s going to look a whole lot better on a PC, at a whopping 1600x1200 resolution. New side quests, which they couldn’t fit into the Xbox version, will be available. And, to be honest, Ray and Greg were a little gun-shy about mentioning other improvements. After all, who wants to make all those promises and then have to yank them out for one reason or another? All they want to do is make a great game.

“We don’t tend to dwell on our success here,” Zeschuk continues, trying to explain why it was important BioWare moved past the back patting so quickly. “If you focus on how great something is or was, you get left behind.” Serious and calmly confident, the two CEOs, who founded BioWare after practicing medicine for a number of years, occasionally joke that between the two of them, they have half a brain. But in conversing with BioWare’s bigwigs, the truth emerges: These guys have a fundamental grasp of the professionalism necessary to become a top-tier game developer. Baldur’s Gate and Star Wars make up part of that path.

A MILESTONE RPG

In July 2000, LucasArts president Simon Jeffery announced a partnership with BioWare for a Star Wars RPG set 4,000 years before Star Wars Episode I. The collaboration represented LucasArts’ long-term strategy of building relationships with the world’s top game developers. “Together,” Jeffery explained in the press release, “we aim to create a milestone role-playing game set within a unique and largely unexplored area of the Star Wars universe.”

Mission accomplished, Simon—and then some. Immediately upon its midsummer debut, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic blew up like a Death Star, selling an astonishing 250,000 Xbox copies in its first four days on route to becoming the fastest-selling Xbox game ever. None of CGW’s sister publications at Ziff Davis have rated it below a nine out of 10.

The magnitude of KOTOR’s success appeared to stun even LucasArts, a publisher that is accustomed to racking up impressive sales numbers. But LucasArts producer Mike Gallo stopped the moment he began working with BioWare four years ago. “These guys know how to make role-playing games, and they really know how to build epic stories...Every decision they make is made along the lines of, ‘Will this make for a better game? That makes for a high level of quality.’”

Nothing embodies this decision-making process more than the game’s combat system, but early on, it didn’t work so well. “At year ago, the game was almost entirely playable, but we just weren’t happy with the combat model,” Muzyka admits. In response, the KOTOR team scheduled two one-hour meetings that rapidly turned into eight two-hour meetings, resulting in months of extra development. Now, Knights of the Old Republic successfully combines the intuitiveness and power of turn-based combat with the visual appeal of swooping 3D camera angles and the frenzied strategizing of real time.
SILENT HILL 3

Don't bother closing your eyes.
Because what you see isn't half as disturbing as what you don't.
NONSTOP ACTION
Knights of the Old Republic begins in epic Star Wars fashion, with your custom-designed character narrowly escaping a devastating space attack by a Sith fleet and central villain Darth Malak by ejecting via escape pod. While the overarching meta-goal—in one version of the story, at least—revolves around saving the galaxy from the Sith, the joy lies not in the end results, but in a wildly open-ended journey that will leave even the crustiest gamers breathless.

The nonlinear missions, quests, character subplots, mini-games, weapon load-outs, character improvements, and space battles would fill every single page of this magazine, so here’s the short version: From completing seemingly inconsequential tasks that loop back around later in the game to gleefully wading through the Diablo-esque slew of weapons, items, upgrades, and armor, there’s more game in KOTOR than you can wrap your mind around. At least, the first time through. Strong character development amplifies this feel-good sensation. Like protagonists in a good screenplay or novel, each of your traveling party’s nine main characters transforms as the game progresses. The outcast Wookiee Zaalbar returns to his home world Kashyyyk and confronts his personal demons and the widespread slavery of his race. The insecure Republic soldier Carth must learn to trust his companions. These relationships develop even more in the PC version—BioWare is incorporating new side conversations between your party members.

More important than the characters, the quests, or the loot are the nonjudgmental, flexibly powerful notions of light and dark, which force gamers to make some difficult moral decisions. “The dark side is more than being rude to the secretary,” Zeschuk laughs. Everything you do reflects upon your character’s standing in the Force, which affects how the KOTOR universe—and your own companions—responds to you. “Good and evil,” Muzyka explains, “make up a lens that nearly every element of the game gets focused through.”

Even BioWare expressed surprise at the amount of complexity the moral ambiguity adds. “Early on,” Muzyka remembers, choosing his words carefully, “we made a conscious decision that every single conversation had to have valid choices...good, neutral, evil, and sometimes funny. As a result, KOTOR has more than 14,000 lines of dialogue—and the PC version promises to have even more conversational choices. But what the designers found was more interesting than they were able to imagine. “Somehow, the assembly of all these lines became greater than the sum of the parts. The world—as well as the light and dark themes—really came alive through all these character relationships.”

Galo seconds the notion. “One of the greatest comments I heard was from a guy who was playing as a dark Jedi and began getting some really evil options that were starting to affect his party members. He was really starting to feel bad about it!”

TWISTS AND TURNS
Near the halfway point of the game, your character can choose to become an ad hoc lawyer in a murder trial with a presumably innocent man’s life at stake, a sequence that is meticulously played out, from your opening argument to your closing statement. Gamers who lose the trial—it’s no cakewalk—will be hard-pressed to not respond emotionally when the accused is sentenced to death...or to prison for the rest of his life. It’s a powerful moment in gaming that’s amplified by one thought: Knights of the Old Republic has many more surprises in store.

For example, BioWare revealed that players will encounter a major plot twist, one that, according to Muzyka, the entire KOTOR team feels is the most elegant they’ve ever created. “You know those key gaming moments that give you a chill down your spine? I think we created one of those.” We, on the other hand, think it’s one of those moments that transcends games and is just damn good storytelling.
JIVE TURKEYS
NEED NOT APPLY

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16 Episodes and 3 TV Specials to Explore in 10 square miles of Bay City Streets!

PlayStation®2

Violence

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System Shock 2
Take a good look at the other games in our Hall of Fame and you'll mostly see titles that have been recognized for being the sort of groundbreakers that inspire a hundred inferior clones. Not so for System Shock 2, and that's probably just as well, since we seriously doubt anyone could come close to matching the overwhelming sense of dread and fear this singular sci-fi FPS/RPG hybrid pumps out. Featuring the scarier sound design since Doom, this is a shooter where the focus isn't on killing enemies but just surviving them, generally by the skin of your teeth. If you aren't hiding behind crates in the game (or under your desk at home), you can confront the daunting story-driven challenges in SS2 through three very different character classes, each providing a gaming experience where the only similarity is relentlessly gripping tension. Not enough gamers played this game when it came out, but those who did will never forget the experience.

We welcome four classic games and a scooter-riding nerd to the fold.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn
It's hard to imagine now, but not too long ago, role-playing games—especially Dungeons & Dragons games—were considered dead. But in 1998 the genre was jointed back to life by two medical doctors who came from out of nowhere to release the brilliant Baldur's Gate—and the genre has been thriving ever since. But for Drs. Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk and their geeky compadres at BioWare, that was just a warm-up act. Baldur's Gate II, released in 2000, takes everything that is great about the original BG—the smart, literate storytelling; the complex but addictive combat; the nonlinear, sprawling quest structure—and multiples it to the nth degree. We loved BG2 at the time, but with three years' perspective, it is clearly emerging as one of the great RPGs of all time—brilliantly executed, this is one of the most ambitious games ever created. Those now drooling over Knights of the Old Republic—this is where BioWare's genius began.

The Sims
Any half-wit with too much free time can boat a lumbering boss monster, but how many people can reach the pinnacle of their career without shortchanging their family, friends, and growing financial responsibilities? The game that eclipsed Myst as the biggest PC title ever has endured the inevitable “hardcore gamer” backlash, but the simple truth is, The Sims was and is an involved-to-the-marrow hardcore gamer's game. Resource management, character development, level design, NPC interaction, personalized reward systems—it's all in there, and, utterly unlike any other game, virtually every element is entirely in the player's hands. Yes, the biblical-sized flood of expansions has diluted the core game with too much whimsy, but what other game presents as many unique stories, situations, challenges, defeats, and victories? More than any other title, The Sims focuses on and triumphantly delivers PLAY to the gaming experience—and really, isn't that what it's all about?
**Will Wright**

What more can be said about Will Wright? The man was guaranteed a spot on this list more than a decade before he created what would turn out to be the best-selling game of all time, *The Sims*. In fact, at one time, *The Sims* was considered to be just a wacky side project (with little chance of success) by the man primarily known for 1997’s landmark *SimCity* (and other *Sim* offshoots) at Maxis. As much a scientist and theorician as a game designer, Wright pulls his gaming ideas from the most disparate of sources and puts them together to study, with glee, the effect they have on us, the willing lab rats who are his audience. No one comes up with game ideas like Will Wright, and no one executes them with half his intelligence and, crucially, sense of humor. Keep experimenting on us Will—we are only here to serve.

---

**Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within**

One of the best adventure games ever made, *Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within* has slipped off the radar in recent years because of its full-motion video, a once “cutting-edge” idea that has become so discredited and out of fashion that it’s almost embarrassing to bring up. “Interactive movies”—yes, right. But Jane Jensen’s masterful adventure rises above the limitations and conventions of the format and remains the one FMV game still worth hunting down and playing. Jensen’s storytelling skills, which combine psychological and supernatural horror, are far more literate and sophisticated than those of most game developers, and, when meshed with the game’s brutally tough puzzles, make for one of the most engaging games for adults ever created. The series lost it with an unfortunately inferior third entry, but *Gabriel Knight 2* remains a landmark in computer gaming—the rare game we can seriously consider to be a work of art.

---

**THECGWHALLOFFAME**

**PEOPLE**

- Dan Bunten Berry, Game Designer
- John Carmack, Programmer
- Ron Gilbert, Programmer, Game Designer
- Sid Meier, Game Designer
- Roberts Williams, Game Designer

**GAMES**

- *Alone in the Dark* (Sierra, 1992)
- *The Bard’s Tale* (EA, 1995)
- *Battle Chess* (Interplay, 1987)
- *Battlesnake* (SierraSoft, 1995-present)
- *Betrayal at Krondor* (Tablanics, 1991)
- *Civilization* (MicroProse, 1991)
- *Command & Conquer* (Westwood Studios, 1995)
- *Counter-Strike* (Sierra, 1999)
- *Crusaders: No Remorse* (Origin, 1993)
- *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* (LucasArts, 1999)
- *Day of the Tentacle* (LucasArts, 1993)
- *Diablo* (Blizzard, 1997)
- *Doom* (id Software, 1993)
- *Dungeon Master* (BYTE Software, 1997)
- *Earl Weaver Baseball* (EA, 1986)
- *Empire* (Interplay, 1987)
- *EverQuest* (Sony Online, 1999)
- *F-19 Stealth Fighter* (MicroProse, 1990)
- *Falcon 3.0* (SierraOnLine, 1990)
- *Fallout* (Interplay, 1997)
- *Gettysburg: The Turning Point* (SS, 1984)
- *Grim Fandango* (LucasArts, 1997)
- *Gunship* (MicroProse, 1986)
- *Harpers* (606 Pacific, 1993)
- *Heroes of Might and Magic II* (New World Computing, 1997)
- *Kampfgruppe* (SS, 1985)
- *King’s Quest V: Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder* (Sierra, 1990)
- *Lemmings* (Psygnosis, 1999)
- *M-1 Tank Platoon* (MicroProse, 1989)
- *Measure of Magic* (MicroProse, 1994)
- *Might and Magic* (New World Computing, 1996)
- *Myth* (Sierra, 1996)
- *Panzer General* (SS, 1994)
- *Pirates* (MicroProse, 1987)
- *Quake* (id Software, 1996)
- *Railroad Tycoon* (MicroProse, 1990)
- *Red Baron* (Sierra, 1997)
- *The Secret of Monkey Island* (LucasArts, 1990)
- *SimCity* (Maxis, 1997)
- *Simplicity* (Ea, 1984)
- *StartCraft* (Blizzard, 1998)
- *Starflight* (EA, 1996)
- *Tetris* (Spectrum Holobyte, 1988)
- *Their Finest Hour* (LucasArts, 1998)
- *TIE Fighter* (LucasArts, 1994)
- *Tomb Raider* (Eidos, 1996)
- *Ultima III* (Origin Systems, 1985)
- *Ultima IV* (Origin Systems, 1986)
- *Ultima VI* (Origin Systems, 1990)
- *Ultima Underworld* (Origin Systems, 1992)
- *War in Russia* (SS, 1984)
- *WarCraft II* (Blizzard, 1999)
- *Wasteland* (Interplay, 1986)
- *Wing Commander* (Origin Systems, 1990)
- *Wing Commander II* (Origin Systems, 1991)
- *Wing Commander III* (Origin Systems, 1994)
- *Wizardry* (Sir-tech, 1991)
- *Wolfenstein 3-D* (id Software, 1992)
- *X-COM* (MicroProse, 1994)
- *You Don’t Know Jack* (Spectravideo, 1990)
- *Zork* (Infocom, 1981)
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Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.
Reviews

We love games, we hate games

Edited by Robert Coffey

This game takes aggravation to a whole new level—blind apes could design better balanced levels than these.

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Pirates of the Caribbean has a terrible interface, some serious bugs, and only a tenuous connection to the film it's named after. It's two and a half games in one: part role-playing game and part Age of Sail combat simulator, with a skimpily trading game thrown in for no good reason. With so much stacked against it, it's surprising that the good parts almost make trudging through the problems worthwhile endeavor.

Rudderless

The worst problem is the interface. Not only is it unintuitive and cumbersome, but it's also inconsistent. Occasionally, the key to execute a command is the space bar. Other times, it's the Enter key. The arrow keys are used to scroll through menus, while the Page Down key is used to scroll through dialogue boxes (which feature a font so massive that you might think you accidentally purchased the large-print edition of the game). Neither the manual nor the included addendum makes any reference to many of the keyboard functions, so your only chance of finding important features is through trial and error or clumsy fingers.

Another problem is the camera. On land, the camera swings around like a drunken monkey on a chandelier. You can switch to a first-person view, rather than the default third-person, but it's worse. Nathaniel Hawk, the game's hero, has a swagger even when he's standing still. POTC is the first buccaneering game that might induce seasickness. But if you can find your sea legs and acclimate to the game's utterly bizarre controls, you'll find that both the RPG and sea-combat elements are decent enough to hold your interest. The role-playing aspect is definitely the lesser of the two, with a strange, meandering story that completely falls apart near the end. Some of your assignments are illogical, such as being required to destroy a fort and capture a whole town to free a prisoner, though you are free to stroll around town and even walk into the prison itself unmolested. And while...
there are a few nonessential missions to be found, many of them are broken.
The main story missions eventually lead to the game’s only tangible connection to the movie, though you’ll hear rumors of a ship called the Black Pearl early on. The connection feels tacked on and most likely was, considering the game began its development as a sequel to Akella’s Sea Dogs. And the story elements that tie the game to the film make little sense in either setting.

A long walk on a short plank
POTC is open-ended, letting you progress through the story at your own pace. But its world is big and empty, with random encounters that are too difficult at the beginning and boring by the end. You can go many places, but if you aren’t sticking to the plot, you won’t find much to do other than attack ships and trade goods.

Ship-to-ship combat can be great, especially when you have powerful vessels in your fleet. There are two combat settings, arcade and realistic, but those wanting a hardcore Age of Sail-style sim won’t find it here. You earn character abilities that allow you to execute quick turns in battleships or board from greater distances, and while these may seem silly for those who want to act out their Patrick O’Brian fantasies, they add diversity to what would otherwise be a slow and tiring experience.

It has a few great moments, but it seems like an incomplete collection of half-finished ideas.

VERDICT
Two half-good games don’t equal one good one.
Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic

Towers above the rest BY JONAH JACKSON

Fans of Master of Magic have been waiting for the Age of Wonders series to pull all the aspects of a great turn-based strategy game together, and Shadow Magic does it. With the inclusion of a highly customizable random-map generator, three new playable races, and small but significant gameplay additions, developer Triumph Studios has addressed just about every player request and criticism. The latest Age of Wonders game is a huge amount of fun and a great choice for any turn-based strategy fanatic.

The new campaign, in which each player controls five wizards through a series of loosely related scenarios, is somewhat formulaic but still enjoyable. Fifteen additional pre-created maps showcase some of the changes, most notably the strange new Shadowland, which provides maps with a third level that already includes surface and underground locations. Shadowland is home to the evil Shadow Demons and their long-suffering enemies, the Syrens. The terrain, which serves as a backdrop for the campaign story, is harmful to non-native races, although the effect can be countered by spells and unit abilities.

The real meat of Shadow Magic, however, is its random-map generator. Players can choose from five general templates, each geared toward a different playing experience, or delve into the dozens of configuration options. Random scenarios range from small, combat-intensive maps to vast epic games of exploration. Some of the largest maps, which have three different levels of land, can provide dozens of hours of gameplay. When using the advanced settings, players can restrict terrain types and races, select the frequency of various map locations, and choose which spheres of magic are playable. For players not satisfied with random maps, Shadow Magic includes a fully featured editor for creating custom scenarios and campaigns.

Shadow Magic adds new spells to every sphere of magic (including a whole new category of unit-enhancement spells), new units to every playable race, and three new races. There are also city upgrades, including an item forge, which gives players the ability to craft their own magical items for hero units. Shadow Magic's changes make the game superior to its predecessors, even without the new graphics or radical redesign of a traditional sequel.

There is, arguably, one area needing improvement. Even at 200 pages (including the sections available only on the CD), the manual is still the game's weak spot. There is too much detail to fit into any printed manual, but there are some frustrating omissions in the existing text. The description of spell effects remains strangely vague in many cases, and some key tables of statistics are simply missing. This complaint is a minor one, though, and really the only blemish on an otherwise fantastic title that will satisfy AOW veterans and newcomers alike.

VERDICT ★★★★★
A great strategy game that's worth purchasing for the random-map generator alone.
Spirits haunting the hotel leave clues about their untimely demises for you to find.

Dark Fall: The Journal
Frightful is delightful BY DENICE COOK

With some of the bigger developers abandoning adventure games for other genres, amateur independents have stepped forward to fill the gap. Jonathan Boakes, Dark Fall: The Journal's sole creator, is one talented example. This game's perpetually unnerving ambience, interesting puzzles, and unique ghost story may very well help you forgive its graphical flaws.

Your brother, Peter, is an architect remodeling a long-abandoned train station and its adjoining hotel. He takes residence there alongside other ghost hunters who are conducting a research project to discover why 12 people vanished from the area one night before the station's 1947 shutdown. After a frantic phone call from Peter, you rush to the site yourself, only to find it abandoned once more.

You catch glimpses of both the tortured souls who were the Station Hotel's past inhabitants and the ancient cause of their torture. Antique phones ring up fearful whispers, and rolled floorboards creak as shadows pass. The departed guests' belongings and journals remain for your perusal, and deserted ghost-analyzing equipment is yours to use in solving Dark Fall's mysteries. You capture images of spectral wraths, dissecting them with computer-assisted precision. You also don ghost-sensitive goggles, which not only reveal hidden messages, but also enable you to view rooms as they existed when the so-called Dark Fall entity's victims disappeared.

There are no onerous adventure-game devices here like mazes, sliding tiles, timed sequences, or insane pixel hunts. Instead, the puzzles encompass the hobbies and lives of those who stayed at the Station Hotel. An astronomer's telescope hints at otherworldly discoveries, and an artist disguises his fearful findings at the hotel within his artwork. Some of the puzzles involve information that's been stored away by the hotel's frightened guests, but even the safes and locked boxes grow naturally from the story.

The simple, 90-degree turns of Dark Fall's side-view navigation may feel tremendously dated, but the restricted movement underscores the feeling that you can't outrun the Dark Fall entity. You come to realize you'll need one extra bag at this hotel, a paper bag to breathe into.

The rustiest nail in Dark Fall's coffin is its 640x480 resolution visuals, which, although portraying startlingly gore-free antiquated run with anxiety-inducing splash, are about as cutting edge as a 1940s butter knife. However, despite the grainy graphics, this eerie adventure will fit the chill in the nicely.

VERDICT

The only thing missing from this eerie game's box is a change of underwear.

www.computergaming.com 129
Madden NFL 2004
The Madden series gets even better by William O'Neal

What differentiates each version of Madden from its predecessor has typically remained the same: updated rosters, better graphics, and tweaks to the gameplay. While Madden NFL 2004 has all these updates, revisions, and tweaks, it also sports one of the franchise's most significant changes: the addition of Playmaker controls.

Anyone who's played a Madden title knows what to expect from this latest iteration: many ways, that's both Madden 2004's greatest strength and its biggest weakness. In the series' 14th year, it's no surprise that the PC version's graphics are awesome. Player models look more realistic than they have yet, with some players sporting cornrows, tattoos, and individual touches such as short pants and long-sleeved shirts.

The gameplay in last year's title is pretty tight, so EA Sports didn't have to muck around with it too much during the off-season. In previous years, the running game was too difficult, while the passing game was unrealistically easy. In Madden 2004, however, the gameplay feels balanced, so a decent running game will be key to victory. In other words, don't expect too many 80-yard touchdown receptions.

Like the PS2 version, Madden 2004 for PC supports online play, but it feels more like a bullet point than something you'll find yourself using very often. Sure, it works, but to truly enjoy a head-to-head game of football, you have to be able to talk trash while watching that Pond look on your opponent's face when you break his back.

The game's Franchise mode is as deep as ever, which helps you create a sense of ownership with your team. In this mode, your season begins at training camp, where you can boost up nine players' skills (through a series of drills) prior to the preseason. To use the new Playmaker controls, you'll need a good 10-button dual-analog gamepad, and while EA Sports doesn't "officially" recommend the Logitech Dual Action, the game seems to have been designed with this controller in mind. Playmaker essentially lets you control individual "off the ball" players before and during plays by using the controller's right analog stick. For instance, you can change your primary receiver's route before the snap, or you can change the direction of a running play if you see something in the defense that you'd like to exploit. After the snap, you can use the right analog stick to control blockers in the line of scrimmage, or direct the receiver's route to the ball during a scramble.

Playmaker is cool, using it after the snap takes some practice, since you must learn how to control both the player with the ball and another player. Only by the end of my first season was I anywhere close to proficient with it. That said, the before the snap capabilities of Playmaker are enormously useful. On defense, Playmaker lets you control players to one side of the field or cheat for the run or the pass.

The Madden series is kind of like Christmas: You know what to expect every year, but you get excited anyway. This year, EA once again has done a great job of making it a merry Christmas.

VERDICT

Easily the best Madden game yet, but be prepared to buy a Logitech Dual Action controller.
Serious Sam came out of nowhere. It's mindless, it's fun, and, most surprising of all, it's cheap. Twenty clams buys you a manic, action-packed, frenzied FPS with a surprisingly crisp graphics engine. Why mention all this when I'm supposed to be reviewing Will Rock? Because Ubi Soft's new FPS is a flat-out copycat. Bargain-basement price, throwaway plot, gorgeous graphics—the bellwethers of the burgeoning cheapo-shooter genre are all here. The problem: I've played Serious Sam. I've seen Serious Sam. And this, sir, is no Serious Sam.

The dulcet tones of Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock" and the visual of a cyclops chewing its cud on the menu screen do not adequately prepare you for Will Rock. Well, maybe they do. The disposable plot casts you as Will Rock, wiseass boyfriend of some archaeologist's daughter. Terrorsists grab the girl in order to sacrifice her to Zeus. Granted power by Prometheus, you must oird your lairs for an all-out rumble with the Greek gods of old.

But who the hell cares about all that? Don't even bother trying to explain why the gods would stagger around with shotguns, machine guns, and acid-launching rifles in coliseums. This is all about mindless fun as you blast apart beautes straight outta Clash of the Titans. Countless well-animated creatures of legend are here and coming at you from all directions. I was particularly impressed with end-level bosses like the cyclops. And then there are the statues that come to life and hurl around globes, discs, and various beams of light—and crumble into stony piles when they're decimated.

So, at what point does Will not rock? Well, while those creatures look nice, there's a certain lack of creativity here. Where Sam employs harpies, charging bull creatures, and my favorite-beheaded kamikazes that run straight at you and explode, Will Rock's foes are just mauling it in, copying what's already been done. Eagles drop fireballs, satyrs swipe with bows, skeleton centurions charge at you... and I couldn't care less. But I give credit where it's due: This game did make me crack open my dusty ancient-civilization textbooks to find out if a killed minotaur could split and reform like Terminator 2: Judgment Day's liquid-metal T1000.

Another big knock against Will Rock: the jumping puzzles. In my humble opinion, jumping puzzles shouldn't be in FPS games—so few are actually done right (like Half-Life, for example). Will Rock is littered with tired jump-over-the-gap puzzles. Multiplayer partially redeems the game with some well-paced maps, a co-op mode, and a treasure-hunt match that has you racing and fragging around maps as you look for loot.

I know Will Rock isn't gunning for the likes of Half-Life 2. But what this game boils down to is the good ol' reliable FPS formula: Move into an area, main, kill, find lever or key to open door, save, loiter, rinse, and repeat. While it looks good, the beauty is only skin deep.

VERDICT

To quote a Twisted Sister classic: We're not gonna take it!
Trials of Atlantis: the latest expansion to the award winning online roleplaying game: Dark Age of Camelot. Explore the ancient ruined civilization, find powerful magical treasure, and discover the Atlantean lore.

- Nine new Master Levels, gained only by passing each of the nine Trials of Atlantis.
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Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader
Fighting the bad fight by Robert Coffey

What can you say about Lionheart? You could say it's set in an alternate 16th century Europe where magic and monsters are a very real presence. You could say it uses the much loved SPECIAL role-playing system that was introduced in the even more-loved Fallout series. You could say it features beautifully rendered game maps and lovely (if sporadic) music.

Or you could just say it's a really lousy game. That's a lot more honest and much easier to say than "Lionheart is an aggressively unpleasant, schizophrenic experience that steadfastly ignores every significant interface advance of the last half decade while serving up a steaming helping of repetitive, unbalanced, uninspired aggravation masquerading as play." Yep, that's something else you could say.

If you're into digitized coniferous vegetation, you'll find lots to like here.

Fair renaissance
What Lionheart does do right is the setting. Those beautifully rendered game maps really are beautiful—well, at least in the cities and towns. Anywhere, really, where there are buildings. From the streets of Barcelona to the secret Druid sanctuary, every brick and flickering torch seem to have been placed just so. Not so for the wilderness or dungeon areas—and there are tons of them—which are as generic as generic can be, albeit with some pretty nice pine trees. So if you're into digitized coniferous vegetation, you'll find lots of evergreens to like here.

The setting filters over to the story in Lionheart, with lots of superstar cameos from the likes of Miguel de Cervantes, Nostradamus, Shakespeare, Joan of Arc, and Leonardo da Vinci. The roles of these historical NPCs include providing simple quests, fighting alongside you, and playing major roles in the game's story. About that story—you'd think given the pains the developers took with the setting that they'd leverage this in the plot. But they don't. Not really. Instead, you're given the same kind of Ancient Evil Threat of most every other game, only with the Knights Templar and the Spanish Inquisition wedged in there. Instead of Crystals of Power, you're tracking down holy relics in between boss fights against demons.

No one expects the Spanish Inquisition... to suck
All this would seem to make Lionheart just a prettily average and maybe dull kind of game. But it's worse than that. This is a pretty bad game, and it gets bad in a number of ways.

The initial large portion of the game is spent in and around Barcelona as you receive quests galore. At this point, at least, Lionheart seems like it will live up to the Black Isle pedigree as you juggle at least a dozen different quests, join a
faction, and generally get the lay of the
land. Then, it all pretty much
stops and becomes a tunnel-vision
linear exercise in monumental hack-and
slash frustration. Lionheart can't decide
what kind of game it wants to be, and in
the end, it doesn't deliver much of
anything. It's not a rich quest-driven
game because all ends pretty early, and it's
not an action RPG because it's
so horrifically unbalanced.

Seriously, this game takes aggravation
to a brand new level. Once the game
devolves into rigidly linear hack-and
slash, it overcompensates for its lack of
depth by overpowering the monsters
and underpowering your character and
your weaponry and armor, as well as
leaving useful power-ups almost entirely
out of the picture. Blind apes could
design better balanced levels than those.

So instead of the nail-biting tension
and frenzy à la Diablo II, you're left with
all the bad parts of EverQuest—trying to
draw single enemies away from
the massive groups that would overwhelm
you, barely beating them, then enduring
interminable waits as your character
heals up again in real-time because
you can't waste the two health potions
you have (since you'll need them for
the inevitable lopsided boss battle).

But you'll still die. A lot. And the Quick
Load key seems to work only during the
middle part of the game. But, hey, at least
you're fighting exciting new creatures
such as undead and, um, Englishmen. And
they all move at the speed of light, so you
can't even target them, even when the
game is paused.

Just to hammer home the frustration,
Lionheart has asiduously and per
versely ignored a few things that
gamers have started to expect as a
given in their RPGs. Like an annotatable
map, Lionheart features big, sprawling
levels, yet the automap won't let you
mark where on the woefully underlit
smear of goo the friggin' exit is. Or
where on the incredibly intricate city
map the bookshop you need 15 hours of
playing time ago is located. The game
also cries out for a loot highlight key,
since the busy character art obscures
the equally busy (with the bonus of tiny)
item art.

Frankly, that's just the large blunt tip
of a world-record-sized iceberg of
programming incompetence. I could go
on about party-member A.L. that lets
your companions get stuck in corners or
ignores your commands of "Stay where
you are" by circling the area and
drawing enemies to you. I could wax
poetic about the limp spell effects,
boring combat, and virtually nonexistent
sound. Or the way it resets certain
settings every time you reload. Or even
the frequent crashes to my desktop
(when I had the audacity to exit a
building or open my inventory).

But I've run out of space here, so I'll
just say this: Whatever hope of pleasure
Lionheart once had has been cruelly and
efficiently suffocated.

VERDICT
Unbalanced, tedious, buggy, and
lacking in imagination—and those
are its good points.
Nexagon: Deathmatch

The future of arena combat looks bleak

BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

GAME STATS

PURCHASE STRATEGY FIRST
BUYING STRATEGY FIRST
GAMER REAL TIME STRATEGY
READER'S TIPS: BLOOD,
VIOLENCE RATED: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500,
64MB RAM, 40MB HARD
DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D
CARD RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
500, 32MB RAM, 80MB
HARD DRIVE SPACE,
GEFORCE 2 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER LAN, INTERNET
(2 PLAYERS)

One form of revenue deals with selling thralls. But don’t sell too many or you’ll limit your ability to rest injured, or replace dead thrall.

Defending the Nexusphere can get tedious. Upgrading the inner sanctum with turrets, traps, and walls does offer some form of protection against the horde... until they demolish it.

Thralls come from one of four hordes: techms, strumons, gandros, or alfrums. Each horde possesses a somewhat unique sanctum style.

Nexagon’s combat system is painfully bland. Every time one of your thralls comes in contact with the enemy, the game pauses. This gets real annoying, real fast, especially since implementing commands is so basic, with a command set containing only attack, defend, and facing orders. Similarly, though your thrall gain levels over time, this does not seem to equate to better skills and attributes. No matter how much my thrall leveled up, they always seemed to be the ones getting knocked down in combat. All of this is made worse by the thrall’s lousy pathfinding (most of the time, they simply don’t follow your orders, or lag badly when doing so), sluggish and clunky camera controls, a non-intuitive interface, and a shabby manual and uninformative tutorial, forcing players who don’t immediate uninstall the game to learn things on the fly. And the final icing on this rather bland cake is a nonexistent online community, which means even the most diehard R1’S fan playing this game out of desperation will lack for a more challenging human opponent.

The concept wasn’t bad, but Nexagon: Deathmatch’s uninspiring execution and lack of depth make for a forgettable gaming experience. If this is what the distant future holds, then I’m glad I won’t be around to see it.

VERDICT ✰✰✰✰✰
Rock/paper/scissors is a more challenging strategy game.
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in the gaming world, few things exemplify corporate greed as well as poorly made expansion packs. Europa Universalis: Crown of the North falls squarely into this category. From start to finish, it is a poorly conceived, ill-executed, and time-wasting piece of cornerware designed to suck money away from both fans of the much-lauded series and unsuspecting newcomers.

The centerpiece of Crown is a six-faction struggle for Sweden during the 13th century. Instead of EU’s imperial policies and the conflict of world religions, you have counties that you can upgrade one building at a time. You can also make decisions on earth-shattering matters—for example, you can control the way your nobles react to sea-monster sightings.

The scaled-down game proves to be as mundane and repetitive as watching cows graze. Your thousand-strong armies are created 25 men at a time, each of the 10 levels of development in a province’s six buildings must be done one at a time, and the same multiple-choice policy decisions are repeated ad nauseam throughout a campaign game.

The interface makes it worse. Many essential actions require you to hunt out hotkeys due to the lack of onscreen buttons. There is also no repeat button, so you’ll have to race from one county to the other, giving the same commands over and over. It’s as if the designers wanted to create a finger exercising tool to induce repetitive stress disorders (and thus get some worker’s comp). The tedium would be tolerable if there were actually a game here. The full campaign can be finished in less than three hours, even if you play the “weakest” factions at the Hard difficulty level. What passes for A.I. will upgrade its provinces in peace but rolls over like the French before a German advance during war. The economy also poses no challenge. With a core of three or four fully upgraded counties (which can be easily achieved), you can support as many armies as your weary fingers can build and still come away with huge surpluses. The lack of strategic challenges simply exacerbates the limitations imposed by the confined geography of Sweden.

Crown is almost redeemed by its value. For $29.99, you’ll also get the original game and three user-created mods. Unfortunately, corporate greed is evident here as well. The papery thin manual does nothing to explain the game to new players, and all the mods, including the Swedish campaign, have been given so little attention that misspellings are rampant—even the game’s readme file has a disclaimer about it.

This glorified screen saver will no doubt disappoint EU’s fans and drive newbies away from trying its far-superior predecessor.

VERDICT ★★
This disaster of an expansion is less appealing than lutefish.
from conception to reality

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Official XBOX Magazine July, 2003

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go. do. play.
The Great Escape
Make that The Fair to Mediocre Escape BY RYAN SCOTT

While you can argue the merits of movie-licensed games ad infinitum, at least you can understand the rationale behind trying to take advantage of a hot movie property. But capitalizing on a 40-year-old, albeit classic, WWII ensemble piece starring a cast of middle-aged men who are now almost all dead and probably known to gamers under the age of 35 only as The Rockford Files Guy, The Bald Doctor From Halloween Guy, and That Sheryl Crow Song Guy doesn’t really lend cachet to a mediocre stealth-action game, now does it?

The Great Escape makes a good attempt at remaining faithful to the movie. Plenty of familiar characters pop up throughout, and several level names (such as Captain Hills’ debut mission, The Cooler King) echo themes from the film. You play as a variety of characters from the movie, progressing through a number of objective-based levels as you work toward escaping a German POW camp. Goals typically involve meeting with various individuals, finding a particular item, or reaching a certain location. Objectives are tracked in your notebook, which contains an area map that considerably points you toward your next target.

Though the game contains some gunplay, much of your time is spent slinking around in the shadows. You have to be quick and use the environment to your advantage, hiding and skulking about as you narrowly evade the enemy. Stealing a guard uniform or two will give you some occasional breathing room you’ll appreciate, since guards are very unforgiving once they spot you. Engaging in combat is generally pointless, and getting caught forces you to restart the entire level or from your most recent save.

And that’s the game’s biggest annoyance—the finite number of saves allowed during each mission. Much of The Great Escape’s challenge/frustration comes from inconsistent A.I.; guards occasionally spot you out of the blue and just as often develop acute blindness as you stand in plain sight. You’ll routinely make trial-and-error runs, which is made problematic by the limited number of saves you’re given. Some of these levels are long, too.

The game tries to liven things up with a few motorcycle chases toward the end, but the vehicle controls are meant for console not PC awkward and ruin the experience. The game’s graphics also fail to help the excitement factor. Although the overall aesthetic design fits the source material pretty well, the textures and character models are just plain bad. Conversely, the game’s sound is actually one of its highlights, utilizing plenty of music from the film. The voice acting is a double-edged sword—most of it sounds decent, but you’ll hear a lot of the same samples over and over.

In the end, The Great Escape provides a passable stealth gaming experience. Casual fans are advised to steer clear, while the most hardcore stealth-action aficionados might find something to like here. Emphasis on “might.” Whatever your tastes, just keep in mind that this is no Splinter Cell—but then, it’s no Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, either.

VERDICT
Not quite as bad as a month in the cooler, but not much better either.
True power cannot be contained.

Magic: The Gathering

Battlegrounds

www.mtg-bg.com
F/A-18: Operation Iraqi Freedom
Protecting the skies and exploiting the war by Denny Atkin

F/A-18: Operation Iraqi Freedom opens with President George W. Bush's announcement that operations to "disarm Iraq" have begun. How do you quickly create a flight sim based on a conflict in which the shooting hasn't stopped? It helps if you've had the game engine lying around since late 1997. OFF isn't really a new game. Rather, it's a slightly updated version of the nearly 6-year-old F/A-18 Hornet: Korea, with new missions, Iraqi terrain, and an upgrade to OpenGL 3D from the original's 3Dfx Glide support. The core game remains the same: a campaign composed of pre-scripted single missions, simple radar and weapon systems, and the same allied and enemy aircraft.

Though you'll encounter target names familiar from recent CNN reports, the missions are fictional. This is necessary for gameplay purposes and is admittedly in better taste also, given the freshness of the event. If you want to fly historical missions, you can create your own with the included editor.

The new Iraqi terrain is the biggest enhancement over Hornet: Korea. Based on satellite data, it looks superb from high altitudes. At low levels, though, it's a muddy mess. Cities are flat textures with no buildings—downtown Baghdad is visible only from above 5,000 feet, so forget about that impromptu attack on Saddam's palace.

Other enhancements include detailed textures on the F/A-18, a new 3D cockpit, improved view keys, and user-modifiable missions. Much of OFF still screams '97; though, aircraft show no visual damage, and A.I. plane textures are extremely basic. The flight model is relatively simple, as is the enemy A.I.

Despite these problems, OFF is an entertaining, accessible simulation. Its basic flight model and simple radar mean new pilots can pick up the game easily without memorizing the detailed PDF manual or enlisting in Navy flight school. While eye candy doesn't dazzle, you're not likely to be counting polygons when avoiding SAMs and dogfighting flanks. And the polygon-light engine runs smoothly even on older systems.

In the end, Hornet: Korea players will find OFF to be more of the same in a new setting. If you want to relive an old favorite, this is a decent sim that brings nothing new (or even recent) to the party. Hardcore flight sim players will want to take a pass, as they'll find the game mostly useful as something new to complain about in online forums.

VERDICT

Nothing really new here, but worth a look if you need a new sim for a slow system.

Combat Command 2: Danger Forward
I love a man in a hex-based uniform by Di Luo

Combat Command 2 came out a few months too late for its own good. Even though it has A.I. that can occasionally find its ass with both hands in small battles, a good construction kit, and a wealth of scenarios, its polish and gameplay pales against recent giants like Korsun Pocket and Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin.

CC2's company-level phase-based combat engine is awkward but serviceable. The two-hour turns are divided into phases for reinforcements, movement, defensive fire, and assaults. While this works OK, the phases break up the game's rhythm, making it difficult for newbies to get into. The byzantine interface further compounds the problem by hiding info with small fonts, unmanageable windows, and confusing combat-resolution tables. It requires too many clicks to control large formations in combat, and the simple inclusion of an Undo button would have been greatly appreciated.

Still, CC2 offers a lot to war gamers who can look past its faults. The scenario editor proves quite flexible, although it's limited to Europe's Western Front. The gameplay is original since it focuses on command and control factors that are rarely the prime concern of other games. The battles are at manageable scales and are playable in hours rather than the weeks it takes for John Tiller's monstrosities. The manual is also well done, explaining many of the system's intricacies that are not easily evident onscreen.

If you can look past the warts, you'll find a lot to sink your teeth into. How-

VERDICT

A great scenario editor can't lift this average grand-strategic war game above Korsun Pocket.
THE LORDS OF STRATEGY RETURN

“Cast aside the fallen Hero and welcome back the Warlord...”
-Computer Gaming World

WARLORDS IV
HEROES OF ETHERIA

TACTICS-INTENSIVE TURN-BASED STRATEGY
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http://warlords4.ubi.com

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If you've ever watched Psycho and felt more empathy for Anthony Perkins than for Janet Leigh, you're probably the sort of person who will enjoy Ghost Master. No, you don't get to stab anyone in the shower, but as the unseen master of an army of chain rattlers, you do get to scare the bejesus out of a bevy of towel-clad coeds in the hope of driving them, screaming, into the streets. And that's just for starters.

Like Peter Molynux's Dungeon Keeper, which puts you in control of all the monsters infesting a dungeon, Ghost Master lets you choose from a wide range of creatures, each with distinct powers and limitations, and then place them in strategic locations where innocent souls are bound to stumble across them. You can tether a gremlin to a TV set and instruct him to make it go off the fritz, you can plant a poltergeist in a cluttered room and have him hurl objects through the air, or you can take a hulking, hook-handed horror out of Clive Barker's nightmares and make him split his own head in two for the entertainment of the groundlings.

Each time one of your beastslyes scares one of the game's Slimy mortals, your stock of plasm goes up, permitting you to wield even scarier powers. Clear one of the game's dozen levels, and you earn gold plasm, points you can use to train your foot soldiers in new techniques. On each level, you also come across restless spirits who will join your happy band if you find a way to free them from their shackles, as well as a few other puzzles that give you something to do other than run around going "Boo!"

It's well thought out, inventive, and quite a lot of fun—though it would be more fun if it were just a little easier to play. Keeping track of a half-dozen ghosts and perhaps a dozen mortals in every room of a four-story building can be a chore. The controls allow you to pan, tilt, rotate, and zoom the view, but for all that, I constantly found myself readjusting things to get a better angle. Generate too few scares per minute, and your plasm level drops, causing an annoying alarm to sound and a vicious cycle to begin: less plasm, fewer scares, fewer scares, less plasm.

Then there's the problem of the visuals. They're fantastic. You can get a cinematic close-up view of any character at any time. You can even peep at the coeds on the toilet to satisfy your inner Norman Bates. But you really can't do that and play the game at the same time—while you're enjoying the great visuals, you're not issuing orders, harvesting plasm, and so on.

Ghost Master is, unfortunately, better in concept than in execution and more fun to watch than to play. But for anyone with a perverse streak and a taste for well-curdled blood, it still makes for a good way to pass a dark and stormy night.

**VERDICT**

This game is clever, stylish, and fun to watch, but it's a little too hard to control.
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THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY
Chariots of War
As wide as the ocean, as shallow as a urinal BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

Using ancient civilization's violent dawn, the Middle East was the world's center of commerce, technology, and of course, warfare. Hundreds of factions continuously struggled to gain precious resources and to expand, and as civilizations grew, each vied for dominance over its neighbors. In order to capture this tumultuous story, the maker of the turn-based strategy game Legian has coughed up Chariots of War. The Legian engine has been improved a little, resulting in a handful of minor game upgrades, and the game's historical breadth and scope are noteworthy. These features, however, are the only notable aspects of the game.

Turn-based combat is the game's primary focus, and resource collection, building construction, and tech-tree management are the vital keys for empire expansion. The game offers two single-player campaigns and four smaller region-specific games. Except in the region-specific maps, players may choose among 10 ethnic groups to play, with a total of 64 factions on the map. This kind of breadth in a game usually gets both historians and strategy gamers excited, but each factional unit and building lacks distinction from race to race, which gives the game a generic feel. Developer Sillerine provides only a handful of unique unit types, like the Sea People's warband and midianite camels. Throw in bland, outdated graphics and poor sound and you've got flat, uninspiring gameplay.

Trade and diplomacy features are superficial at best. For example, expanding empires are penalized for conquering neighbors, which, by the way, is the whole point of this game. Warring factions must buy goods at escalated market values, while peaceful factions receive discounts on the open market. For a game in which military conquest is the only way to expand, this feature misses the point. Diplomats are also ineffectual, unable to negotiate peace treaties or alliances—why even bother?

Chariots of War's focus on warfare is severely hampered by a turn-based system divided into two phases: predeployment and combat. Predeployment involves choosing from a simplified assortment of formations and tactics and then utilizing orders like advance, hold fire, or charge. Surprisingly, there's no battlefield commanding once combat begins. You're forced to watch your army carry out overly simplified movements until the battle is over. Victory is based solely on your predeployment choices, rather than your leadership during the fray.

Unless you're a die-hard fan of Legian, Chariots of War's lack of any depth is certain to leave you disappointed. These chariots are doomed to run in endless frustrating circles.

The game's historical breadth and scope are about all that's noteworthy.

VERDICT
As dry and inviting as the Arabian Desert.
If you bought all these games, it would cost about $395.

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- BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS
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CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

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<th>GAME</th>
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<th>VERDICT</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bandits: Phoenix Rising</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Fun FPS dressed up in a racing game's clothes</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Mother Trucker</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>This big-rig game is better than it has any right to be</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>CSI</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of Defeat</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>A great squad-based game marred only by age</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciples II: Guardians of the Light/Sevants of the Dark</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>More cartoony goodness (and evil) at a bargain price</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>This solid expansion effectively increases the landmass of Morrowind to exceed that of Earth</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire of Magic</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>This odd RPG both entertains and annoys</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endless Ages</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>Something new in the massively multiplayer field that's worth a look</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter the Matrix</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Play it for the movie, don't play it for the play</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVE Online: The Second Genesis</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>We'd hate to see the first genesis of this MMO space game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI Challenge '99-'02</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>A must-buy for Formula 1 racing fans</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>CGW's 2002 Game of the Year gets some '80s-style clothes in this sequel</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes of Might &amp; Magic 4: Winds of War</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>The degeneration continues</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hulk</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Best comic-book game—not named Freedom Force—you can buy</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korsun Pocket</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>It sounds like a microwaveable snack, but it's the best hex-based wargame ever</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Online</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>A tedious exercise at best</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval: Total War—Viking Invasion</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>This expansion is a must for Total War fans</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Criminally sloppy port of a great console game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>The most fun you can have in a plane without guns</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnight Club II</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>What it lacks in multiplayer, it more than makes up for in fun</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>A much better single-player game than the original game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Decent archaeological adventure game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PlanetSide</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>Humankind's first persistent world MMO shooter is surprisingly good</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Royale</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>After a slow start, a quality pirate game emerges</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayman 3: Hoodium Havoc</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>Decent console port with finicky camera control</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Faction II</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>Edged out only by Wolfenstein as worst console port so far this year</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of Nations</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>The latest, greatest historical RTS</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on for an already dated game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowbane</td>
<td>7/03</td>
<td>A big focus on PVP and city building sets this MMORPG apart</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sims: Superstar</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Another solid addition to the planet's best-selling game</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Trek: Galaxy II</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>Like playing one of the less-compelling TV episodes</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>Might get a whole lot better</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>Not as bad as the movie—oh wait, yes it is</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tron 2.0</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>Best movie-licensed game so far this year</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trope 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>Uplink: Hacker Elite</td>
<td>8/03</td>
<td>Intriguing premise and quality execution make this a winner</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WarCraft IV: The Frozen Throne</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>Some nice new stuff, but you pay in micromanagement</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II: Frontline Command</td>
<td>10/03</td>
<td>Bad interface, boring missions, and no realism, but the documentary footage is OK</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2: Wolverine's Revenge</td>
<td>9/03</td>
<td>Save your money and buy the forthcoming X-Men 2 DVD instead</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CGW RECOMMENDS

**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**

This critically acclaimed follow-up to Grand Theft Auto III puts you in control of tough-as-nails gangster Tommy Vercetti and his blossoming criminal empire. An excellent port of the PS2 version, Vice City features ultrasharp visuals, as well as several helpings of rockin’ ’80s music. There’s also quite a compelling story to augment all the carjacking, foot-capping, bitch-slapping fun!

**The Hulk**

First, the movie, now the game. Funny how that works, isn’t it? Unlike most movie-licensed games, The Hulk is actually pretty good. Rest assured, the green guy has got plenty of ways to smash, crash, and pulverize his unfortunate enemies into little red stains. Even if the Bruce Banner levels are a bit lame, everything else adds up to a satisfying gaming experience.

**Tron 2.0**

Twenty years has provided plenty of time for an upgrade, and this TRON sequel delivers. Tron 2.0 boasts plenty of action and a good assortment of levels and items. Shooter fans should find a lot to like about this one—as long as you don’t attempt jumping puzzles the way Darren does.
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Who Says Bigger Is Better?

Shuttle's small form-factor PCs are taking the industry by storm

By Loyd Case
The Shuttle is an elegant, relatively quiet system that's perfectly suited for LAN parties.

Shuttle PC has made quite a name for itself with its line of sleek, quasi-cubical small PCs dubbed XPCs. They've spawned a host of imitators, including Falcon Northwest's FragBox, which we reviewed in last month's issue. But Shuttle still is the leader, and for good reason. Its elegant heat-pipe solution for CPU cooling maximizes cooling efficiency while minimizing fan noise, for example.

We recently got our hands on a Shuttle SN45G, a classic Shuttle aluminum cube that uses Nvidia's NForce Ultra 400 chipset. This is Shuttle's first XPC without integrated graphics, and it fully supports DDR 400 memory. As with all XPCs, assembling the final product is an exercise in patience and careful handling, due to the cramped quarters inside the case. Each XPC comes with a plethora of I/O options, including multiple USB 2.0 ports (front and back), multiple FireWire ports, and the usual keyboard and audio connectors. The SN45G packs an audio upgrade, too, since it uses Nvidia's MCP™, complete with real-time, DSP-accelerated Dolby Digital encoding.

Although the internal quarters are tight, access is easy, since the whole affair is fastened with thumbtacks. Even the highly polished heat-pipe assembly screws down into the motherboard with spring-loaded screws, so you won't have to fear gouging the motherboard with an errant screwdriver when assembling the heat sink. If there's an Achilles' heel, though, it's the machine's 200-watt power supply. While that amount is perfectly adequate for most processor/video card combinations, we did encounter instability while using a Radeon 9800 Pro and an Athlon XP 3200+. When we built a less ambitious system using an Athlon XP 2500+, the whole affair ran smoothly as silk. The SN45G also proves to be a bit finicky about some earlier Kingston HyperX memory we have, but later versions ran fine.

In the end, the Shuttle XPC is an elegant, relatively quiet system that's perfectly suited for those LAN parties. Just be careful about how you load it up.

VERDICT
It's compact, lightweight, and fairly silent. If a bit limited by the power supply.
Philips Acoustic Fusion 610
Philips’ PC speakers still have quite a bit of work to do

By Dave Salvator

Philips has been a key contributor in propelling technology forward in consumer-electronics products. Its PC audio hardware, however, has had a rather spotty track record. Sure, the Acoustic Edge soundcard is a solid offering, but Philips’ PC speakers have left us unimpressed in the past; in particular, its MMS-306s are a sonic train wreck. The main culprit: Philips’ NXT flat-panel technology. Rather than walk away from its flat-panel technology, Philips has improved it, and a second-generation implementation (NXT’s SurfaceSound flat-panel technology) is featured in the AF610s. While the NXT panels in this speaker set are a marked improvement upon those in older Philips speakers, these improvements may not be enough to turn Philips’ fortunes in the PC speaker market.

The AF610s do pretty well at reasonable volume levels, but the NXT-based satellites lack the necessary headroom to maintain clear output at higher volumes. There is a noticeable hole in the midrange frequencies, and the result is an overall hollow sound that lacks body. More minute sonic details, such as guitar picking and strumming and the sounds of some percussion instruments, are fine. Low-end response is generally solid, and here, the AF610s turned in their strongest performance. On more percussive material, like a Red Hot Chili Peppers album, the unit’s subwoofer does a good job of reproducing kick drums and bass lines, and the speakers never seem to be lacking bass response.

During DVD movie playback, dialogue sounds good in the center channel, and the NXT panel’s clarity is fine at both low- and high-volume levels, since this material generally doesn’t suffer from the dynamic range compression we heard while playing explosive and percussive tracks. Furthermore, low-end response is generally very solid, and we got good rumble from our Twister test scene. That said, film soundtracks exhibit many of the same qualities we heard in our music-listening tests and sounded good until we began pushing the volume levels.

Despite the considerable progress made in improving the NXT-panel performance, we cannot recommend those speakers. There are just too many other good 5.1 speakers out there for the same or less money. Creative’s $80 Inspire 5200s and Monsoon’s $150 M505s both represent better values, and the audio quality of Monsoon’s satellite speakers is clearly superior to that of the Acoustic Fusion 610s.

VERDICT
A decent set of speakers, but Philips’ NXT panel technology still isn’t ready for prime time.

Tech Power
By William O’Neal

Laptops with upgradeable graphics?!

I remember years ago when laptop manufacturers began shipping machines equipped with ATI’s BMB Rage Mobility graphics chip. As a hardcore mobile guy, I was ecstatic—I was finally able to play Quake II on a laptop, albeit at 640x480 and achieving paternally low framerates in the high teens and low twenties.

Years later, when Nvidia released the GeForce 4, and ATI released the Mobility Radeon, true laptop gaming was born. Yes, the Madden, FIFA, and Links series could run on laptops equipped with less chips, but we wanted to play Quake III, Half-Life, and Unreal Tournament. However, something was still missing—upgradeability, the eternal problem of PC gaming. Everyone knows today’s high-end desktop graphics card will be run-of-the-mill in six months, and we reluctantly accept that. But dropping $3,000 on a gaming laptop only to know that six months down the road you’ll be dying for more graphics power is not only a bitter pill to swallow, but a big one, too. Which brings us to the next inevitability: laptops with upgradeable graphics capabilities.

Upgradeability is a great thing for laptop users. But there are bound to be some bumps along the way as manufactures figure out how best to implement it. As it stands, in order to replace the graphics chip in the Voodoo Envy profiled in Reel News, you have to return the unit to Voodoo and pony up serious coin. The graphics chip in the Alienware Area 51 is-per Alienware—‘user replaceable,’ but like the Voodoo option, it ain’t cheap.

Laptops, unlike desktops, are pretty complicated, and serious steps must be taken in order to make all that stuff work in that little box. What happens when ATI or Nvidia comes out with a powerful chip that, while it may fit into your machine, needs more power? Will you also need to replace the power supply? Only time will tell.
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PCFX's Leviathan III is one fast newbie by William O'Neal

Tech Stats
Manufacturer: PCFX
Price: $3,469

BY THE NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>PCFX LEVIATHAN III</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$3,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating system</td>
<td>Windows XP Professional Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>ABIT F7T i865PE (800MHz FSB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>1GB Kingston HyperX dual-channel DDR 1000 PC3500</td>
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<td>Hard drive</td>
<td>Dual 220GB Seagate Barracuda 7200RPM drives in a 240GB RAID-0 configuration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphics processor</td>
<td>256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra</td>
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<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Creative MegaWorks 61 THX 6.0</td>
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<td>Mouse</td>
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<td><strong>SCORE</strong></td>
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When you think it's safe to make a computer purchase, some new company arrives on the scene and complicates things. "Damn," you mutter. "It took me months to get comfortable with a newscast such as ABS, ViciousPC, and iBuyPower. Now I have to figure out if PCFX knows what it's doing." OK, so maybe you didn't actually have that conversation with yourself; maybe it's just me.

The Leviathan III is a seriously stacked machine housing a top-notch list of parts: a 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB Kingston HyperX dual-channel DDR, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra, all built around an ABIT F7T i865PE motherboard. It is one thing simply to put the parts together—but the magic, so to speak, can be found in how well the parts work together. In the case of the Leviathan III, they work really well. Rocking with dual 220GB Seagate Barracuda hard drives in a 240GB RAID-0 configuration, the Leviathan III outperformed the iBuyPower Titanium-XP we tested in October. Of course, the PCFX machine costs nearly $3,500 more than the similarly configured iBuyPower rig.

I ran the standard suite of tests on the Leviathan III, including 3DMark2003 and 3D GameGauge 3.0, at 1280x960 with 4x anti-aliasing and 8x anisotropic filtering turned on, and the numbers are impressive. Its 3DMark2003 score of 3155 is awesome, as is its 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 80 frames per second. At those settings, the Leviathan III achieved speeds up to 100fps in Dungeon Siege and 110fps in Serious Sam: TSE.

A major issue that often befalls top-of-the-line machines is heat, and PCFX uses a pretty innovative case design to solve that problem: An air duct (or vent) above the CPU fan pulls hot air directly from the CPU fan and blows it out the side panel. This keeps the temperature inside the case down, since it isn't trapping that hot air from the CPU. Lower temperatures typically mean a more stable machine, though Serious Sam: TSE and 3DMark2003 hesitated a few times during testing. The tests, nonetheless, completed successfully without any intervention on my part.

The Leviathan III is a bit pricey for a rig from a small company, but it's plenty fast and the components are awesome. All in all, it's a good machine.

Verdict

This machine is a screamer, but at $3,469, it's a tad pricey.
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AMD Jumps the 64-bit Gun
Is the Athlon 64 FX-51 ahead of its time? BY WILLIAM O’NEAL

AMD is in a tough position. On one hand, it’s in a no-holds-barred battle to the death with Intel for the lucrative title of Fastest Desktop Processor. On the other, it’s trying to downplay the significance of megahertz (or clock speed) altogether. “Debunking the megahertz myth” is how AMD refers to it. And it’s this apparent schizophrenia that serves as the backdrop to what may prove to be the Sunnyvale, California-based company’s biggest release yet: the Athlon 64 processor.

Depending on whom you talk to, AMD is either sending out mixed messages or simply trying to point out the multiple selling points of the Athlon 64 FX-51 processor. It’s a bona fide 64-bit processor, but AMD is quick to point out it also displays excellent performance in the 32-bit productivity applications and games. You see, AMD needs a leg up on Intel, and being first to market with a 64-bit processor that’s able to take full advantage of the next Windows OS (which is codenamed Longhorn) when it comes out could be a big deal.

While that’s all well and good, it’s not clear whether Longhorn will ship in the second half of 2004 or sometime in 2005. And when pressed for a more specific release window, Microsoft didn’t have much to say. In other words, the Athlon 64’s 64-bit designation may be moot for some time. Which is why AMD is quick to point out that the 64 FX-51 displays awesome 32-bit performance as well—a claim our tests supported.

BY THE NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL</th>
<th>ATHLON 64 FX-51</th>
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<td>UT2003 Betmatch</td>
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We tested an AMD Athlon 64 FX-51 reference system against our 3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 Power Rig. The Athlon system featured the 64 FX-51 processor, ASUS SKR8 nForce3 motherboard, 1GB PC3200 registered memory, and a 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. The Power Rig has an Intel D875PBZ motherboard, 1GB PC3500 memory, and a 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra.

The Athlon machine bested the Pentium in nearly every test, slowing down only to tie it in IL-2: Sturmovik and Comanche 4. In other words, it seems that the Athlon 64 FX-51 is the fastest CPU for gaming. However, where AMD has always been the leader in low costs and upgradeability, there definitely remain the questions of how much the CPU will cost and how much longer AMD plans to support the 940-pin socket that the Athlon 64 FX-51 uses, as well as the 754-pin socket that its little brother, the Athlon 64 (non-FX), will use.

So, do you run out now and plunk down the plastic so you can have the fastest processor, even though there’s no assurance that your motherboard will be usable when the next Athlon 64 FX is released? If Microsoft’s new OS, Longhorn (a 64-bit OS), were coming out tomorrow, then the decision would be a no-brainer. However, if we’re just talking about 10 more frames per second in 32-bit games, then the cost and risk are more significant.

If anything, with the Athlon 64 FX-51, it’s good to see the underdog finally go the distance for a round. Not only does this processor outperform the 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor in many tests, benchmarks, and games, but it also shows, running at a scant 2.2GHz, that there’s more to power than megahertz, something that Apple’s been telling us for years. But it’s definitely early, and the jury, as far as we’re concerned, is still out.
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- 1x 8X DVD-ROM Drive
- 52x24x52 CD-DV Drive
- 1.44MB Floppy Drive
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- 6.1 Channel Surround 3D Premium Sound
- 10/100/1000 Mbps Ethernet LAN
- Creative Labs Inspire 5.1 Speaker System
- 19” ViewSonic® Perfect Flat 1600x*90, 21” LCD Monitor
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Loyd's Cracked Case

Shady pixels By Loyd Case

Graphics technology has certainly come a long way from gaming’s infancy. And even in comparison with the first true 3D games like Quake and Tomb Raider, graphics have made spectacular leaps, especially in the last few years. However, next-generation 3D shooters like Doom III and Half-Life 2 still won’t have the same level of detail as 3D movies like Shrek do.

Why not? In 3D-rendered movies like Shrek, almost all of the 3D is done with the use of sophisticated programs called shaders. Pixel shaders can operate on either individual pixels or groups of pixels, while vertex shaders programs operate on the underlying geometry.

Some of these shader programs may be thousands of lines long and take minutes or hours to render on high-performance workstations or servers.

The reason you don’t see shading technology of this level of sophistication in games is that the hardware isn’t quite capable handling it yet. A GeForce FX 5900 Ultra can, through some clever programming, run shader code that is hundreds and hundreds of lines long, but there’s no way that it can run that code at 60 frames per second. The good old general-purpose CPU will have to be faster, too, since 3D game elements like collision detection still live in the CPU’s domain.

The modern desktop graphics processor, starting with the GeForce3 line, is programmable. While earlier GPUs certainly had some limited ability to change content (e.g., pixels or polygons), it was the GeForce3 that really brought the idea of programmable graphics hardware to the personal gaming desktop.

Unfortunately, the majority of today’s games don’t exactly take the fullest advantage of shader technology. Part of the issue is simply that the programmers haven’t really caught up yet. The design cycle of games is roughly 18 to 24 months, so it’s only recently that we’ve begun to see more common use of shaders. Most of these shaders are used for effects, like the translucent, shiny water you see in The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind. But most games—even games that make some use of shader technology—still use older techniques, such as multipass texture mapping, fixed-function transform, and lighting pipelines.

If we envision a future in which shaders are arbitrarily long and still enable framefrates of 60fps, interesting new ways of building games can occur. For example, instead of texture maps—those enormous graphics files that can eat up hundreds of megabytes of disc space—you can use synthetic programs to generate textures. A synthetically generated texture is called a procedural texture. If a game could use nothing but procedural textures, then it would need a lot less hard-drive space, since all that texture data would be calculated on the fly. Also, you’d never see huge pixels when zooming in very close to the virtual object, since the detail of the texture is one element of the calculation. So instead of MIP maps or other level-of-detail tricks, the shader would be able to calculate the right detail on the fly.

As you might imagine, this sort of thing is extremely computer-intensive, and even the fastest graphics card/CPU combination can’t come close to doing it in real time. However, some limited procedural texturing is done in some games to create certain effects like realistic flame or smoke. Still, for the most part, today’s games are stuck using large texture maps.

So the graphics and CPU race is by no means over. Shaders are still in their infancy, at least when it comes to real-time applications on your PC. Expect to see future generations of graphics cards that can generate procedural textures on the fly and create virtual environments with excruciatingly detailed environments. But don’t expect to see it for at least a few more years.
Tech Medics
Our tech guy likes girls By William O'Neal

Where, oh where do all the speakers go?
I'm considering upgrading to a 5.1 speaker set, but where do I put all the speakers? Most desks aren't designed to support surround sound. Have you seen any creative solutions or products on the market to address this issue?

Matt

Creative makes speaker stands that allow you to place speakers behind you. They're called the MT-1100s, and they cost around $50 for two. You could also mount the speakers on the walls around you.

Taking sides in the GHz war
I was wondering how the AMD XP series of processors stack up in comparison with Intel's 3GHz 800MHz FSB processors. Are there any processors from the XP series that can keep up with the new Intels? More important, what will I need in order to play Half-Life 2?

Ryan

AMD's Athlon XP 3200+ (which runs at 2.2GHz) is pretty fast, but it's not as fast as Intel's 3.2GHz Pentium 4. Also, while the Athlon supports only a 400MHz frontside bus (FSB), the Pentium supports an 800MHz FSB. These CPU differences are less important if your machine has 1GB of memory, as well as a 128MB or 256MB graphics card like ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. Machines with either of these CPUs will be able to run Half-Life 2 if you also have a capable DirectX 9 graphics card.

You know, Vederman is from Canada, too...eh?
In your May 2003 issue, you said one could find a Radeon 9700 Pro for about $220 at some sites. Would you please tell me which sites these are, as I'm sorta short on funding for my upgrades? (In Canada, everyone's trying to rip you off!) Oh, and a question: RAID is cheaper than faster drives, so why does anyone buy 15,000rpm drives or 10,000s when one can RAID two, 7,200s and get more speed?

Farrell

That Radeon price was a typo. My bad. But Pricegrabber.com is a good place to get good prices. The thing about RAID is that it's risky. If you have two drives in a RAID-0 config and one of the drives dies, then all of your data is foiled. Two drives double the likelihood of losing your data if something bad happens.

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**Killer Rigs**

The best recipes for building the ultimate gaming rig By William O'Neal

A lot of interesting things are happening right now in hardware, most notably the recent release of AMD's Athlon 64 FX-51 processor. I recently received a reference machine from AMD, and while I'm truly impressed with its 32-bit performance, I decided to keep my PowerRig running a 3.2GHz Pentium 4. Even though my tests showed that the Athlon 64 FX-51 averages about 10 more frames per second than the 3.2GHz Pentium, I'm not sure those 10 extra frames are enough to warrant a motherboard and memory change. That said, my PowerRig is the same as last month.

In the Lean Machine, however, I did make some changes. I upgraded the processor to an 2.1GHz AMD Athlon XP 3000+, and I'm sticking with the 128MB GeForce FX 5600 Ultra. I'm super-pleased with my Lean Machine, and it's still a great gaming rig for any titles that are out now. I'm also sure that it will be able to handle titles like Half-Life 2 and Doom III once they're released.

I tested my Lean Machine with the same settings I used for the PowerRig (1280x960 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on). Because of the limitations of the graphics card, I'd recommend that you crank down some of those settings during actual gameplay.

**My Lean Machine should be able to handle titles like Half-Life 2 and Doom III once they're released.**

### POWER RIG

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<th>COMPONENT</th>
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<td>Operating system</td>
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### LEAN MACHINE

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Jordan
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STAR WARS GALAXIES

From Prima's Official Strategy Guide

City Life
Cities in Star Wars Galaxies share many features. The amenities that a city offers are vital to your health, advancement, and financial success. Some are controlled by and dependent on the game programmers, so you could use them even if you were the only player in the galaxy. Mission terminals, for instance, can be used by a solo player without input from another real-life player. Other services are usable only with the cooperation of other human players. The auction system of the bazaar terminals depends on players putting up materials and goods for sale and other players who put up credits to buy those items.

Not all settlements and towns have every feature (there's no shuttle port in Tatoine's Wayfar, for example), so check city maps when entering a metropolis to see what is offered and where it is located.

GETTING AROUND

Most features can be found in a city either on your in-game map or with the /find command. Press Ctrl+H to get an overlay map of the city you're in. Major buildings are labeled; use Ctrl+Mousewheel to zoom in on the overlay map. The /find command is also useful. To find a building in a city, type /find [NAME OF BUILDING] in your chat line and press enter. A waypoint is placed at the nearest location. You also can use the /find command to find trainers.
Wandering into the wild unprepared could get you killed by this beast.

**Training**

Professions in Star Wars Galaxies are like jobs. You have a set of skills that you perform, and as you use those skills, you gain experience. Gain enough experience and you can boost your skills, acquire bonuses to existing skills and commands, and get new commands.

To advance your skills, no matter what profession you choose, you need to have credits and the correct number of the right type of experience points. If you have both of those, then you're ready to find someone wiser and more experienced than you are to train you in the skills you want to acquire.

One option is for your character to find an NPC (nonplayer character) trainer—a computer-controlled character whose sole purpose is to teach players new skills. NPCs are profession specific and can be found in and around cities and towns. Many can be found wandering outside, usually around other trainers. You can also locate them in the different guild houses that are in the larger cities. The Combat Guild, for example, usually houses brawlers and marksmen.

The other way to acquire skills is to hook up with a more experienced player. Someone who already has the skill you want to learn can train you. The advantage to this is you can probably get the training for a much cheaper price than what the NPC trainers charge. The disadvantage is that it may be difficult to find a player with the specific skill you want to learn.

If you reach the exalted profession of bounty hunter, you can take on the lucrative missions offered by the bounty-hunter mission terminals. The big difference between these and the regular missions is that you don't get a convenient waypoint. You'll need to buy a droid to track down your target, and once it finds the mark, it will send you a waypoint. However, there's always the possibility that the target moves before you get there.

**NPCs**

NPCs populate many of the areas in Star Wars Galaxies. These characters, which are controlled by the game program, wander around to give the cities a lived-in feel and to provide some services for players. We've already talked about NPC trainers, but you should be aware of other NPCs.

Several individuals parade around the metropolises. Some are in a hurry, others are strolling or patrolling the neighborhood. These NPCs aren't very interesting; they may say hello or bark an order at you, but on the whole, they just mind their own business and won't hold a conversation with you. Other NPCs don't move from their spot. You always find them waiting or gabbing in the same area.

You also may encounter other types of NPCs like nobles, who stick around. Try using the Radial menu to strike up a conversation with some of them. It may not always work, but now and again, you'll find a character (a noble, perhaps) who needs something done. They give you missions similar to those you'll find at the mission terminals. Other stationary NPCs are recruiters for different factions. Take the time to get to know the inhabitants of the cities you frequent—often, these interesting beings will offer you the chance to make some extra money or develop new connections.

**HOW TO HIRE AN NPC TRAINER**

1. Approach an NPC trainer and use the Radial menu. Choose the Converse command and start a conversation.

2. You get three choices: 1) "What skills can I learn right now?" 2) "What skills do you teach?" and 3) "Stop conversing." Choose "What skills can I learn right now?"

3. You will get a list of the skills you can learn from that trainer. Sometimes it's more than one. If you make a mistake, simply choose "Can we start again?"

4. Click on the skill you want. Provided you have the cash in your bank account, you are trained instantly. Just like that, you've gained a new skill and all the bonuses that come along with it.
When teaching a skill to another player, select Teach from the Radial menu and you'll see this list. It shows which skills your student is ready to learn.

Some NPCs are found in the wilderness. Look for camps and other structures with several nonplayer characters hanging around. Try to begin a conversation with them to see if they need anything done. Sometimes these missions will earn you a badge.

Quick Tip
You can improve your skills by hiring one of the NPC trainers inhabiting the cities.

to get to your box, you need to be on the planet where you joined the bank.

Banking
Credits make the solar systems spin, but it's nice to have a safe place to put things. Banks are your repositories for cash and items that you don't want to lug around on your character's body. When you finish a mission, your reward is deposited directly into your bank account. Then, when you pay for services like cloning, the price is deducted directly from your account.

The banking terminals can be found either in a bank structure (in larger cities) or simply hanging around against a wall (in smaller settlements). Approach one and target it with the radial menu. You can then choose from a menu of services covering withdrawals, deposits, or the safely-deposit-box feature. The safety deposit box can hold items that you don't want to keep in your personal inventory, like extra weapons, minerals, or clothing. One thing to remember, however—if you join a bank on one planet, you can't access your safety deposit box on a different planet. You can still deposit and withdraw credits, but

Travel
The name of the game is Star Wars Galaxies—emphasis on galaxies. That's a lot of ground to cover, and you can't do it all on foot. Luckily, a pretty reliable system of shuttles can take you from city to city and planet to planet.

There are two types of travel centers, the shuttle port and the spaceport. They aren't found in every city. Smaller towns may have only a shuttle port and the smallest settlements won't have either, so you have to reach them by vigorous jogging. The shuttle port is for inter-planet travel, while the spaceport is used for travel between planets. Of course, this isn't a free service. You need to spend a bit of credits to hop around the galaxy. Prices vary, but expect to pay 750 credits for a trip to another planet and 200 credits for a city-to-city ticket.

To use the shuttle service, first find a shuttle port or spaceport. Within the spaceports (and to one side of the shuttle ports), you will see the travel terminal. Use the Radial menu to access the terminal and you'll see a screen with a map
Shuttle arrives. When your ride shows up, use the radial menu again to board the shuttle. You also can go to your inventory and use the ticket to get on. One loading screen later and you'll be at your destination.

Cloning facilities
Accidents happen and mistakes are made. Chances are your character will be bested in combat at some point—probably several times. However, with cloning technology being as good as it is in Star Wars Galaxies, death's sting has been pulled. When you die, you can respawn at a cloning facility. You control which facility you spawn at and what equipment your clone has when it spawns. If you have a favorite city, a place you want to go after you die, head to that city.

Mission terminals offer a chance to earn credits.

of the planet and all its available shuttle locations. Under that map is a button that toggles between the planetary maps (which are for the planet you're on) and the galactic maps (which are for all the planets you can travel to). Under that are two pull-down windows.

The first one is for destination planet. Click on it and choose which planet you'll be traveling to. If you're going to another city on the same planet, choose the name of the planet you're on. Next is the destination city. You can choose from all the available shuttle stops.

You may need to make a layover on your journey. If you're on Corellia and you want to get to Naboo's moon, Rori, you can't get a direct flight. You have to buy a ticket to Naboo, then buy a second ticket to Rori. It's expensive, so plan ahead. If you want to buy a roundtrip ticket, check the Roundtrip box. This makes the ticket more expensive, but not as expensive as two one-way tickets. Once you've made all the right choices, click on the Purchase Ticket button. Wait for a message that indicates you've successfully bought your ticket, then press Exit.

Now you have a shuttle to catch. Find the ticket collector, a silver protocol droid who lets you know when the next shuttle is arriving and takes your ticket when it's time. At the shuttle ports, the ticket collector is to the left of the travel terminal. In the spaceports, you have to walk deeper into the complex, through a long hallway, until you come to the outdoor launchpad. You find the ticket collector there.

Use the Radial menu to get the shuttle status. The droid tells you how long until the next

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city's cloning facility and find the cloning terminal. Store clone data at that specific facility, which costs 100 credits.

The second service available at the cloning facility is insurance. It may sound like a racket, but it'll save some headaches as you play. Approach the insurance terminal and target it with your Radial menu. You see two choices, Insure All and Insurance Menu.

Choose Insurance Menu and you'll see a list of your current inventory with numbers next to each item. Those numbers are what it costs in credits, to insure that particular item. If you choose Insure All, you simply insure everything your character is carrying; the price for that service will be hefty.

We suggest insuring just those items that help you get back to your corpse. Your best weapon and armor are at the top of that list. If you die, you can run back immediately after being cloned and loot the items that you left behind.

The Healing Process

There are three forms of injury in Star Wars Galaxies. The first two are represented in your HAM bars. When you're in perfect health, your HAM bars are filled with red, green, and blue. If you're in a fight and take attribute damage, then the color drains out of one or more of your HAM bars, leaving it white. Attribute damage regenerates on its own, so you don't need anyone's help to fix it. How fast it regenerates depends on your constitution, stamina, and willpower attributes.

If you're hit hard, you get wounded. A wound shows one or more of your HAM bars down, leaving it black. This black damage does not regenerate and needs medical attention to be healed. A wound lowers that attribute. If you have a 500 health attribute and take a 500-point health wound, you now have a 450 health attribute—at least until you get it treated.

The third form of damage that you can take is battle fatigue. When you've been in a nasty fight, your character can be traumatized. The horrors of battle or the stress of struggle can rattle the sanest mind. After a few encounters, press Ctrl+I+C to bring up your character sheet. Near the top, you'll see a battle-fatigue indicator with yellow numbers inside. That's the amount of trauma your character has suffered. The more battle fatigue you have, the less effective treatment will be for attribute damage and wounds. What can you do about it?

The way that you can treat battle fatigue is by relaxing. Walk into a cantina and you'll see knots of NPCs talking, chairs for sitting, a bar, and a few player characters dancing and playing music. Pick an entertainer and use your Radial menu on him or her. If she's dancing, select Listen. If he's dancing, select Watch. Then relax and enjoy the show.

Check your character sheet periodically to see whether your battle fatigue has dried up. When it hits zero, you're ready for phase two, the hospital. Before you go (if you have the means), tip the entertainers who helped you out. Type /tip [CHARACTER'S FIRST NAME] [AMOUNT] to slip them a few credits. They've done you a service, so show your appreciation.

The hospital isn't a pretty place, but it's very necessary. Once you've cleared away any battle fatigue, find the nearest hospital and have a seat. Often, there are many players clamoring for the attention of the player-character medics and doctors.

You could take on novice medic skills, buy your own medpacks from the medicine dispensers, and then heal yourself. If not, you'll have to wait in line. However, you can do three things to jump ahead in that line. First, you can buy medpacks for yourself at the bazaar and offer...
The smaller terminals in a cloning facility allow you to store clone data. The bigger terminals are for insurance purposes.

If you look really closely, you can see Robert Coffey shaking his skinny Tw'lek ass in the background.

Crowds can be thick in a hospital—you have to find a way to stand out.

For a little extra cash, try selling off your garbage to this guy.

If you step into a cantina that is devoid of player characters, you may not be out of luck. Have a seat and wait. Just being in the cantina heals battle fatigue, albeit very slowly. Do something else for a while as your character mends.

Quick Tip

them to a medic in return for immediate healing. This is a bit crass, so the medics and doctors often just make their own. Your second option is to simply shout that you'll pay an exorbitant fee to any medic who starts healing you right away. Again, this is crude, but it gets the job done. The most elegant way to get preferential treatment is to offer organic material to the medics. If you have scav skills and have been diligently extracting resources from your kills, then you should have a large amount of hide, meat, and bone. Medical professionals use this material to make medicine and gain experience points, but they don't go hunting very often. So, trade them organics for healing and you'll make a friend. Of course, you could simply wait your turn.

As with the entertainers, before you go (and if you have the means), tip the medic or doctor who helped you out. Type /tip [CHARACTER'S FIRST NAME] [AMOUNT] to give them a financial boost.

Buy and sell

Star Wars Galaxies conveniently includes an eBay-like auction house through which anyone can submit items or bid on them. Use bazaar terminals to sell items or bid on items that other players want to sell. This is a great way to find weapons, armor, and items crafted by master artisans. Or, if you're an artisan yourself, you can find components or material for your own creations. The bazaar terminals link all the planets together in a virtual marketplace where goods can be traded and bought. All you need are credits.

When you're an artisan with low skills, the generic crafting tool is enough to build your items. When you gain more skill and earn more complicated schematics, you'll find that your abilities have outstripped the small machine. At that point, you must turn to the large crafting stations to produce your objects. The public crafting stations found in most cities give you the power you need. They are not generic, so you have to find a weapons-crafting station for weapons, a furniture-crafting station for furniture, and so on.

When you're roaming about the wilds, you'll run into hostile NPCs. Looting their bodies once you've defeated them often yields broken bits of equipment. This stuff is useless to you, but someone may need the parts. Keep broken items you find and visit the junk dealer when you get back to town. This character will buy your trash. It may not be a big payoff, but it's better than lugging around garbage.
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
STAR WARS
GALAXIES

By Ron Dulin

Starting out in Star Wars Galaxies can be daunting. This guide will help you make some basic professional decisions and will also outline some helpful commands and features that make playing the game both less repetitive and more rewarding.

The solo artist
For those who shun social interaction, it is possible to create an almost entirely self-sufficient character. Even if you don't want to solo all the time, having a wide array of skills will make it easier when you can't find a group.

The ideal solo character will specialize in a combat skill (either marksman or brawler), and complement his fighting specialization with scout and medic skills. Scout skills will let you set up camps and create traps, making both testing and hunting much easier. Medic skills will allow you to heal yourself at those camps. The only time you'll need to go back to town is when your battle fatigue gets too high.

If you take scout, you may as well take artisan as a fourth skill. All the traps and camps you create will give you crafting experience, which will quickly move you up the ranks of engineering. Eventually, you'll be able to make your own weapons and armor.

You don't have much to lose by learning the basics of a new profession—although it costs only 100 credits, the experience doesn't translate to other professions, and you can always get your skill points back later by surrendering the skill. The one area this doesn't apply to is combat experience.

Command shortcuts
Almost any action can be performed by typing the / key and then the action. This can be very helpful when lag is high. For instance, if you want to invite someone to a group, just target the player and type /invite. Open the action window (Ctrl-A) and click on any of your actions. In most cases, the slash command will be listed in the description. Alternatively, type // (that's "slash slash") for a list of slash commands.

Here are some very useful commands that can make surviving, or just running around, that much easier. (Note that variable information is designated with brackets. These brackets should not be included in the actual command.)

/assist When fighting tough opponents, nothing is worse than a group in which everyone is fighting different creatures—and getting slaughtered as a result. The solution is the /assist command. Use it by targeting the "puller" (i.e., the person who is in charge of luring enemies back to the group), and then typing /assist.

/changeclass [dance name] or /changenview [song name]
Entertainers can instantly switch styles with either of these commands. This command can be used in conjunction with /flourish [H] or /flo [H] to instantly add a flourish to your performance.

/corpse This command allows you to loot a corpse from a

Missions made easier
Can't find a group, but having trouble completing destroy missions on your own? There's an easy solution: Equip a weapon that you aren't proficient with and then access a mission terminal. Mission difficulty is based on your equipped weapon, so by doing this, your assignments will be much, much easier (though you'll earn fewer credits as well). Just don't forget to equip your weapon of choice once you have the missions.
Window dragging

In the chat window, you can't see combat messages. In the combat window, you can't see chat messages. While it's possible to create your own chat window preferences, there's a much easier solution. Simply click on the tab for the combat window, and then drag it away from the main chat window. It will remain in its own window, allowing you to have both visible simultaneously.

It is also possible to expand your toolbar slots in a similar way. Move the cursor over the bottom of your toolbar, and then drag down. This will open an additional set of twelve slots, which can be activated by pressing Shift+F1-F12.

distance. The corpse must be within visual range.

/find This useful command, when used in cities, will create a waypoint to the nearest location you specify and even present you with a handy line to follow to your destination. For instance, /find cantina will lead you to the nearest cantina (use /find with no destination for a list of viable locations). You can also find basic trainers—simply use /find trainer_[profession] (i.e. /find trainer_scout). Finally, when you reach your destination, type /find clear to delete the waypoint. The /find command can also be used in the wilderness to create a waypoint back to the city.

/harvest hide and /harvest bone Quickly harvest resources from a corpse without having to use the radial menu.

/health damage and /healwound These commands allow you to quickly heal damage and wounds without accessing your stimpacks, though it will still use a stimpack. As a macro, they will save you the trouble of constantly having to replace the stimpacks in your toolbar. You can also use them on yourself (/health damage self or /healwound self).

/logout This is a better way to quit than /quit, because you won't leave yourself in potential danger. You must be sitting in order to use /logout.

/mood [mood] Changing your mood adds color to your chat. See the action window (Ctrl+A) for a list of moods. To clear your mood, type /mood none.

/tip [amount] Easier to use than the Trade screen, /tip allows you to give someone money instantly. Just target the player and use the command. Use it with entertainers or medics after they've healed you or with players who teach you new skills. Being strapped for petty cash is no excuse. You can use /tip [amount] bank, though a 5 percent surcharge will apply.

/unstuck Use this to get yourself to a safe location when you find yourself physically trapped in the environment.

/waypoint Creates a waypoint to coordinates you specify. Type /waypoint [xx yy] (with xx and yy being the actual number coordinates). Alternately, targeting something and using /waypoint will automatically create a waypoint to your target if you have no target, the command will create a waypoint where you’re standing). This is useful for finding a group that you’ve been separated from or for finding a shop in the wild. It is also great for recording the locations of special mission terminals in cities. These commands can be renamed and even e-mailed to other players.

The world map can be brought up with Ctrl+V; it will let you set waypoints to any location or basic trainer on the planet.

The tip command will provide you with a route to the destination you choose.
Making macros

Macros are the single best way to ease the frustration of repetitive actions. Every profession can benefit from taking the time to set up a few useful macros. More advanced macros will allow you to execute a complex series of actions with a single command or keystroke.

To set up a macro, open the action window (Ctrl+A) and click on the macros tab. Choose "new macro" and select a one-word name and an icon. Then type the slash commands you want to include in the macro, separated by a semicolon and then a space, or with line breaks.

Here are some useful commands for creating complex macros:

/pause [n] This will pause the macro for the number of seconds you designate. Note that the number doesn't always translate into real-world seconds, and it seems to vary from computer to computer. You'll need to play around with the /pause command to figure out how it translates for you.

toolbarPanel[#] One of the two most useful commands in setting up macros, this command will switch your toolbar to the appropriate panel. It must be used with the /ui action command. It is important to note that the toolbars are numbered starting with 00, so if you want the macro to open toolbar five, you'll use /ui action toolbarPanel05.

toolbarSlot[#] This is the other most useful command, and it also must be used with /ui action. This command designates which toolbar slot will be activated. These slots are numbered starting with 00 (and can go up to 23 if you have expanded your toolbars).

If you want the macro to throw a trap and you have that trap set to slot five, use the command /ui action toolbarSlot05.

%TT This designates your target as the subject, which is good for emote and spoken macros. For instance, using /cheer %TT while a player named Joe is targeted will result in your character cheering at Joe.

Consumer alert

Familiarize yourself with what differentiates an excellent version of an item from a merely average one and always be sure to examine an item closely when purchasing it. This is especially true of deeds. All deeds look the same, and they can be renamed, so some scam artists will try to pass off worthless deeds as valuable. Read the description carefully to make sure the medium house you're buying isn't actually a small farmer.

Note the condition of this Mahari armor—if the owner wasn't selling it at a good discount, it would be a terrible deal.
Macro menu. Choose "new macro," and select a name and an icon. In the text box, type the following: /stand; /ui action toolbarPaneOf4; /ui action toolbarSlot00; /ui action toolbarSlot01; /ui action toolbarPaneOf7; /sit. Once the macro is finished, drag the icon to one of your toolbar slots, and it's ready to go.

Aliases
An alias is a means of creating a macro that is executed with a slash command. The formula is /alias (name) (command); (command). So, for a simple example, you could create a greeting alias to automatically bow and say hello to someone. To do this, you'd type /alias greet /bow: Hello 9ET. After creating the alias, type /greet to execute it (so, for the example given here, you'd type /greet). To remove an unwanted alias, use /unalias (name).

A basic macro
Once you have a basic grasp of creating macros, it's time to put them to work for you. We'll create a macro that stands you up, equips two pieces of armor, opens the toolbar with your combat commands (for purposes of this exercise, we'll say that's toolbar two), and then sits you down. First, switch to toolbar five. Then drag your chosen armor pieces up to the first two slots. Now open the /ui action command. This command designates that you are executing a user interface command. You can see a list of the possible subcommands by typing /ui, but the two most important uses are outlined above.

Loading aliases
Things get more complex here. Not only can you create aliases in-game, you can also do so outside of the game. These macros will allow you to create very long strings of actions, allowing you to dance all night without touching a key or perform all of your combat moves with a single command. Open a text editor and simply type (name):

[command]; (command), and then save the file to your Star Wars Galaxies main directory as (name).txt (or whatever you'll remember). To use the alias, type /load [name].txt; then type /name. Using the /load command, you can call up other aliases from within command sequences, though you should know that the game has a built-in filter that prevents you from looping these.

As an example, go ahead and create a text file named boogie.txt. The file should consist of the following text: boogie; /dance; /pause 100; /smile; /dance; /pause 100; /applaud; /sit. Next, create a text file called disco.txt. The text will be disco; /stand; /dance; /pause 100; /cheer; /dance; /pause 100; /load boogie.txt; /boogie. In the game, type /load disco.txt, then /disco to execute the two files.

More bang for your buck
Slicing and power-ups can significantly improve weapon and armor performance. Slicing can only be performed by smugglers, and if the attempt fails, you won't be able to slice the item again. Power-ups can be purchased, but can't be removed until they are used up. Both slicing and power-ups will cause an item to degrade more quickly.
**KORSUN POCKET**

Hex-based wargames have met their match

By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk

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**Tom, pregame**

Send help! I've been chained to my computer by Bruce Geryk, who is forcing me to play a wargame, something I haven't done since there were cassette tapes in my car—loads of Sangal's cassette tapes. And this was a car with a cigarette lighter that wasn't then to charge cell phones. It ran on non-nuclear fuel. You get the picture.

I know what you're thinking: "Oh, a wargame—I guess I'll just flip to Robert Coffey's column." But please don't leave me here. Bruce is really into this whole retro wargaming thing, so you and I have to humor him until I can free myself. With any luck, I'll even beat him in the process.

The wargame is SSG's Korsun Pocket. We're playing the full campaign scenario by e-mail. The manual is more than 120 pages long. The title page reads "Korsun Pocket Manual," which prompted my friend Trevor to say, "if that's just the pocket manual, I'd hate to see the real thing." But Korsun Pocket is actually a relatively simple and accessible wargame. The name refers to the battle that took place around the town of Korsun, where the Soviets were able to cut off and surround a pocket of elite German troops, most of whom became casualties of war. So when Bruce asked which side I wanted to play, I figured I might as well have history on my side by choosing the Soviet winners.

Here's the deal: I have considerable forces to the east and west of Korsun. My best bet is to follow the course of history and bring them together south of Korsun, probably around a town called Zverevskoje. A dedicated advance north can get into trouble around the town of Gerditschke due to a lack of crossings over the Bolotino-Irwin River.

Furthermore, a northern drive will neglect all these Victory points (VP) for southern towns. In Korsun Pocket, what's important is not just what you capture, but also where you capture it. Checking the Victory-point schedule for each location can provide a sort of road map. While my main effort will be in the southeast, I can't ignore a couple of northern objectives. Konstantinov and Smola are each worth 25 VP. If I can take them by turn 5, Budischke is worth the same amount, but it needs to be taken by turn 2. So, here we go...

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**Bruce, pregame**

I chose the Axis because it will force Tom to set the tempo of the attack while I bide my time and hit him with well-coordinated counterattacks. Even though the Soviets are on the strategic offensive throughout this game, the German panzers still pack a lot of punch. Thus, there will be a time to use that to its full extent. A skillful retreat coupled with counterattacks at the appropriate time will win me the game.

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**Tom, Turn 1**

The way to attack in this game is not with massive frontal assaults. Instead, I pick out weak points using the Combat Advisor. (Bless you, SSG, for including this wonderful tool!) Once I've pushed ahead with overruns, it's time to start beating up on stronger units. Since losses are incurred against the strongest units and timed replacements can easily undo any progress you make if you don't outright destroy your target, this is all about hitting one place as many times as you can in one turn. Soviet artillery, which Stalin called the "god of war," is an invaluable asset here.

But before I can make any sort of meaningful advance, I have to clear out all these confounded forts. The Germans have a line of forts set up, which means I'm wasting most of my early efforts knocking down walls instead of killing infantry and smashing tanks. I also need to keep my armored units close to the front line, ready to exploit any breakthrough—but without being so close that Bruce can see them and anticipate my advance.

---

**Bruce, Turn 1**

As expected, my fortifications soak up the bulk of Tom's attacks, and my dug-in units watch as Mr. Zhukov-wannabe starts poking his divisions through my front lines. I have no hope of stopping him on this line and can slow him down only at the cost of sacrificing the bulk of my army, so my strategy for this turn is simply to run like hell.

It's especially important to save the 3rd Panzer Division, since once it's rebuilt, it will form the core of my early counterattack capability. I use my precious replacements for these guys this turn, since several units are down to one step, making them vulnerable to elimination. Destroyed units are worth substantial Victory points (right-click on any unit in the KIA display to show its value), not to mention the effects of having fewer units to attack (or defend) with.

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**Tom, Turn 3**

It's going very well. It must be pretty discouraging for Bruce to see his units so handily knocked back. I'm making fine progress from the west with the 5th Guard Tank Corps. The 5th Mechanized Corps just showed up for the party. However, without more infantry, these guys are like a massive fist on a scrappy arm, so I'm using my motor...
pool to move some infantry from the north to soak up the damage while I punch ahead. At the same time, I need to keep Bruce’s defenses spread out, so I’m using two airborne divisions in the north to push toward Orolovets. If he shows signs of weakening up here, I’ll be ready to wheel my tanks corps around like a right hook, working my way behind his defenses. It’s all about shuffling your units around on the line.

Bruce, Turn 5
After quickly bringing the rest of the 5th SS (“Wiking”) Division down from its starting position far to the north, I have a couple of powerful formations that can give Tom a bloody nose if he isn’t careful with his units. Good candidates for attack are those in clear terrain. Infantry units without any armor or antitank protection, cavalry units or independent tank brigades that have only two steps. If you can get an overrun against a two-step unit and reduce it, you have a good chance of eliminating it with a subsequent attack. I’ve already taken out a couple of independent tank brigades, which Tom got a little too aggressive with.

Tom, Turn 9
OK, I knew things would slow down as the Germans started to regroup and form new defensive lines, so I shouldn’t be too discouraged. One of the problems I’m starting to have is keeping my artillery up with other units as I charge ahead. It’s even harder to keep the fast-moving Soviet rocket artillery in place because it has such a short range. Bruce already surprised me by taking out some of my rocket artillery when I least expected it. He’s supposed to be retreating anyway.

As I take losses, I realize that where to put replacements is a tough decision. One thing I’m keeping in mind is the divisional integrity bonus, which adds a percentage bonus to a coherent division. Therefore, adding replacements that boost combat value to a unit with a higher divisional-integrity bonus translates directly to more points on the combat result tables. Yeah, it’s very dry and mathematical, but that’s part of how you win war games.

Bruce, Turn 12
Don’t be afraid to use the Combat Advisor to identify likely candidates for attack. The Advisor can’t tell you if an attack is a good idea overall, but it can help you gain a sense for which enemy units are exposed. This is a bit more useful for the Germans, who are more likely to make isolated high-odds attacks in order to disrupt the Soviet flow and to gain VP. Just make sure that a 10-1 odds attack doesn’t leave your troops open to encirclement the next turn. Of course, if you’ve turned the Advisor off when you started, you won’t have access to this information. But neither will your opponent!

Tom, Turn 15
At this point, Bruce is ahead by 397 Victory points. That’s still technically a draw, but I’m way behind schedule as far as taking major cities for large capture bonuses. My airborne divisions didn’t reach Orolovets before turn 13 (much less turn 6 when it’s still worth 100 Victory points). I’m starting to think I should have concentrated everything down south. The drive to Orolovets was just a casual sink with almost no Victory-point return for me.

Bruce, Turn 20
The arrival of the 23rd Panzer, 24th Panzer, and the leading elements of 1st SS Panzer divisions gives me a lot of flexibility. Historically, these forces were sent to relieve the pocket. Since the pocket hasn’t even formed in our game yet, I’m free to use these powerful forces to counterattack. Tom is having some trouble in the west, so that’s where I’ll commit my fresh units. I’ll also use my available replacements to build these units up as they approach the front. Since taking a replacement stop uses up a unit’s combat capability for the turn.

Tom, Turn 21
Since we’re playing with hidden units, it’s a bad idea to rush your armor forward to reveal enemy forces. Until it’s revealed, a stack of four full-strength panzer units looks just like a supply truck, and once you realize what you’re up against, you probably don’t have a lot of movement leftover for a retreat. The solution is to move the slower infantry units first; even though they may not be able to reach enemy units, they may get close enough to tell whether you’re facing a panzer division or just a construction-engineer battalion. Once you
know this, you can commit armor. I hope I remember this in the future so that I don’t keep stranding my armor in front of Bruce’s advancing panzer divisions. Where did he get all those things, anyway?

Bruce, Turn 23
Detachments are something I don’t see many players use, yet they can be incredibly useful. They don’t weaken the unit that leaves them, and they have a couple of effects. The first is the penalty to enemy movement. The more important one, though, is that units attacking from a hex containing an enemy detachment contribute no tactical shifts to combat, which has an enormous effect on combat results. This makes detachments great for protecting an exposed line of units, since attacking from multiple hexes is an easy way to gain combat shifts. If all those hexes contain detachments, that negates the bonus. A combination of detachments and interdiction by aircraft can drastically slow the Soviets’ progress. When combined with the right weather, these things can bring an Allied assault to a temporary standstill.

Tom, Turn 25
At this point, I should probably be grabbing all these towns way down south—the ones below my advance. They have the same low capture bonus no matter when I take them, and the Germans start getting victory points for them only on turn 26. So they’re probably secondary objectives once I’ve closed off Bruce’s troops. But there’s the small matter of not having closed off Bruce’s troops. The Korsun pocket isn’t a real pocket yet; it’s more of a great big American party where they’re drinking beer and flipping me the bird. In typical Soviet style, this should be the time I start purging my officers.

Bruce, Turn 30
I made a colossally dumb mistake: In trying to keep up the pressure on Tom’s western pincer and 5th Guards Tank Army, I let four mechanized units, including three from my powerful 1st SS Panzer Division, get caught on a single-hex spur of land on the river just south of Berezniki. Unfortunately, I wasn’t watching the weather carefully enough and forgot that it was going to turn to thaw, which trapped the panthers against the river with no way out. The 1st SS units are each worth 60 VP, and unless I rescue them, I’m sure Tom will destroy them all. There is also a recon unit from the 17th Panzer Division trapped with them, giving Marshal Chichkov more than 200 VP for wiping out these unfortunate soldiers. That’s more than you get in capture bonus for the most important cities!

Tom, Turn 34
I was enjoying some mild successes with the weather keeping Bruce’s unit bogged down, but now it’s back to frozen, which lets him easily skate across rivers and such. Zipping his forces back and forth in his little area, quickly moving reinforcements where he needs them. The irony of driving back the German line is that both of his fronts get closer to each other and he can shuffle his units around more easily. A luxury I don’t really have. And where is he getting all this full-strength armor?

Bruce, Turn 40
At one point in this game, I think I was leading by as many as 2,000 VP. No matter how big a lead the Axis player builds, however, he’s eventually control only a handful of objectives and the Soviet player will be making up ground each turn. The trick is to build such a lead that he won’t be able to make the ground up by turn 48. I’m currently 1,400 VP to the good.

Tom, Turn 46
Well, two turns out and I’ve pushed Bruce back about as far as I can. My lines are ragged, my advances are stalled, and my troops are depleted. If Bruce would do me the kindness of leaving out some stray units, I could pound on them for a few extra Victory points. But that’s the luxury of being the defender: You don’t have to move your lines around all the time.

GAME END
Bruce (Axis): 5,066 VP; Tom (Allies) 3,927 VP; Result: Axis win by 1,139 VP (Decisive Victory).

Tom’s postgame
OK, this whole idea of pushing in the north and south was misguided. Plus, there was all that stuff about rushing ahead with my armor and basically handing it to

Bruce. “Here, have some Victory points,” I might as well have said. The burden of skill is heaviest on the attacker, which put me at a disadvantage that I should have anticipated. All this is basically a fancy way of saying that I think I suck at wargames.

Bruce’s postgame
The German player in Korsun Pocket needs to fight like a lightweight boxer; He has to connect with his punches while making sure he immediately backs off, lest he get caught in close after delivering his blow. In this game, I was able to keep Tom off balance by inflicting damage on his mobile units. This meant they were less effective. Except for the debacle with the 1st SS Panzer Division, I was able to keep my mobile formations from being surrounded after they counterattacked. As long as the Axis player has an army, he has a chance.

The pocket has a lot of full-strength German armor, which has a nasty sting.

The final position.
FIND OUT WHAT THE GAME INDUSTRY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW.
Is That a Light Saber in Your Pocket...
...or are you just happy to see me? By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Hey, baby, are you having a good time? How'd you like to have a "great" time, daddy? Fussie. Let me give you a private dance, baby. C'mon, baby, don't you like what you see?

"Giggle!" You're naughty! Pet! Kiss! Yeah, that's it, sugar. Tick! You just sit down and let me do all the work, let me make you feel all good inside and out, daddy, all of this is just for you, baby, just for you...and don't forget to slip a tip in my g-string when we're done. Just a tip, you bad boy, "giggle" not your whole hand!

Yeah—I'm a whore. And, man alive, am I ever good at it. I probably have more credits than any other dancer in Star Wars: Galaxies, so I've got that going for me. But I've paid a price. I feel so dirty a steel wool loofah couldn't get all the ink off. And I'm tired, oh so very tired from servicing the endless stream of men, all those men and their ceaseless demands...

My life of online debauchery began innocently—and professionally—enough; I decided to try out the dancer profession just to see if the Galaxies designers had found a way to make such a dull-sounding class interesting to play. Almost immediately I discovered two things: No, they didn't, and no, they didn't. But these online games are all about making your own fun, right? So I decided to make my own fun by providing fun. Less than an hour into the game I was aggressively soliciting every male character that entered the cantina for "private dances." And once I assured them that I was indeed a woman, a 23-year-old waitress at a Black Angus who used to work at a Hooker but had moved after a bad break-up with my boyfriend Mike, they started lining up and—presto—the Moenia cantina became my own gentlemen's club complete with horny smugglers rushing to withdraw more money for just one more dance.

At first my rates were modest, but the beauty of a player-created economy is that the players decide what they want to spend, and I was happily surprised to discover most players wanted to spend more than I was asking. Lots more. So I stopped asking—just reminding them gently for tips—and was soon raking in thousands of credits an hour. Within moments of logging on every night, regular customers would send me tells that they were catching shuttles from across the galaxy to come visit me. They'd arrive at the cantina and beeline to a back room where, with no prompting, they'd take off their pants, sit down, and start typing "lick over and over as I shook my Twilek moneymaker for them."

While the other entertainers in the cantina were desperately begging for tips, I was being pilled with jewelry, free droids, and expensive clothing by regular suitors convinced I was a lonely busty, sleazy-singing co-ed and not a married father of two with Tourette's syndrome and a Gary Gilmore haircut. Oh, they tried to win my heart, but I am a saucy carefree lass, chary of giving her heart to any pilot no matter how much he pays me for the privilege of stripping to his skivvies while I sit in his lap cooing "Oh, baby, that's so nice" while he types "lick over and over and over again.

Now, after a month of squidly-diddling every Mon Calamari with a few thousand credits to blow on virtual lapdancing, I think the time has come for me to hang up my gold bikini top and hot pants. Why? Well, for being able to use phrases like "my gold bikini top and hot pants" for starters. For the infinite brain-busting implications horrifically inherent and wrong on about every single conceivable plane of existence in the chilling inquiry "Ever suck a Tusken's wang?" For that uncomfortable moment of clarity the other day at lunch when I caught myself in all seriousness lauding the generosity of "my two favorite boyfriends." All that and a general ratcheting up of suspiciously misspelled dirty talk has inexorably led to the retirement of Paris Beldar, pleasure dancer supreme.

But don't let my misgivings dissuade you from the very profitable life as a private dancer. Here's a little tip, free of charge: If someone is reluctant to accept your solicitations, just start calling him "daddy" and he'll cave. And if he's a Wookie, call him "Fuzzy-wuzzy bear" when you write on his digitized lap, and you'll double your tips. Trust me.
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