KING KONG LIVES!

PREVIEWED INSIDE: GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER, BLACK & WHITE 2, THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION, STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II, AND MORE!

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW
BUH-BYE, WINDOWS XP!
HANDS-ON WITH VISTA, MICROSOFT'S NEW OS

ONLINE GAMING'S NEXT BIG THING
HUXLEY
MMOFPS, UNREAL ENGINE 3, ENTIRELY KICK-ASS. WORLD-EXCLUSIVE REPORT.

ONLINE IDIOCY—WE LOVE IT!
WOW RAP MUSIC, STUPID BATTLEFIELD 2 TRICKS, AND AN INTERVIEW WITH LEEROY JENKINS!
Winner, Best RPG of E3

— Game Critics Award, GameSpot, IGN, GameSpy, Xbox Evolved, Console Gold, Daily Game, Games Domain

“Oblivion is, at this time, the best-looking game I have ever seen in my life.”

— Xbox.com

“The biggest title for the Xbox 360™, and the one I’m most looking forward to.”

— GamePro Magazine

“One look at Oblivion will shatter your conceptions about what is possible in a video game.”

— GameInformer

The RPG for the Next Generation

Cutlery
www.peacefulgod.com

If you had the power, would you create or destroy?

Play good. Play bad. Play God.
If you had the power, would you create or destroy?
Play good. Play bad. Play God.
Available September:
www.destructivegod.com
THE MOST ANTICIPATED UPCOMING MMO.

SOURCE: IGN VAULT MMO STUDY, JUNE/JULY 2005

© 2005 Atari, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach, Dungeons & Dragons Online, Eberron, Stormreach, Dungeons & Dragons, D&D and Wizards of the Coast and related logos are trademarks of, registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast Inc. and/or other jurisdictions, and are used with permission. Hasbro and its logos are trademarks of Hasbro, Inc. and are used with permission. Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Atari, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other jurisdictions. Turbine and the Turbine logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Turbine, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other jurisdictions. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.
The Grand Finale of the Greatest Adventure Game

MYST V
End of Ages

Decide the fate of a civilization in this triumphant final chapter of the Myst saga. Embark on an epic journey into the heart of a shattered empire as the only explorer who can still save it— or destroy it with the wrong choices.

Special Limited Edition

Beautifully designed and packed with bonus content, the Limited Edition offers Myst fans a memorable gift that marks the end of this amazing series.

www.mystoffgame.com
IN STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II, THE SEQUEL TO THE BEST-SELLING STAR WARS™ GAME EVER, YOU CAN FIGHT ALL NEW BATTLES ANY WAY YOU WANT—ON NEW PLANETS, AS A JEDI, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, IN SPACE. ON NOVEMBER 1ST, YOU FIGHT AGAIN.
CONTENTS
November 2005 Issue #256

78
HUXLEY

COVER STORY
HUXLEY
Guts, sci-fi gear, and glory!
We take you on a world-exclusive guided tour of this
FPS/MMO's persistent universe.

20 Editorial
Would our editor-in-chief notice if every game in
the world except WOW shut down?

24 Letters
If we had a nickel for every loving comment
we received this month, we'd be one-fifteenth
of the way toward a Snickers bar!

32 Radar
We kick the tires of Windows Vista, check out
games like King Kong and Ghost Recon Advanced
Warfighter, and troll the depths of the Internet in
our new Public Access column.

91 Reviews
Finally, some good games! This month, we
deliver our expert opinions on Dungeon Siege II, Fable: The Lost Chapters, and Advent Rising. Plus, we unveil a couple of exciting
new monthly features.

32 KING KONG

38 PROJECT OFFSET

52 GUILD WARS

54 WARHAMMER RTS

62 GHOST RECON
## Game Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Advent Rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Black &amp; White 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Codename: Panzers, Phase Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Crown of Glory: Europe in the Age of Napoleon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dark Messiah of Might &amp; Magic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Down in Flames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Dungeon Siege II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Fable: The Lost Chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Guild Wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Huxley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>The Matrix Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Serious Sam II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Star Wars Battlefront II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Warhammer RTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>WinSPMBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Madden NFL 06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>World of Warcraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Tom vs. Bruce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Scorched Earth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tech

The newest bad-boy graphics cards are in town—Nvidia's GeForce 7800 GTX line—and we rate the top five speed demons. Then watch and tremble as we build a new behemoth-sized Killer Rig.

### Tom vs. Bruce

Tom and Bruce wage war over the Crown of Glory.

### Scorching Earth

My buns demand both hands!

---

### This Month on 1up.com

- **Grognards.1up.com**
  - If CGW contributor Bruce Geryk's new wargame column isn't enough for you, check out his 1UP page for even more hardcore strategy-gaming discussion.

- **BestRig-Club.1up.com**
  - Got a killer gaming setup? Think you're pimpin' the best rig on 1UP? Show it off here, at the Best Rig Club!

- **SolidSharkey.1up.com**
  - Mobile Games Editor Scott Sharkey speaks his mind on MMOs, Internet typos, life in San Francisco, and lots of other random topics.
"As close to war as you'd ever want to get." — Official Xbox Magazine
SEQUEL TO THE GAME OF THE YEAR

CALL OF DUTY 2

In the follow-up to the 2003 Game of the Year, Infinity Ward returns to bring you more cinematic intensity and chaos of battle than ever before, in WWII’s most climactic battles. Join your well-trained squad and choose your missions, then enter epic conflicts that span the European Theater, or go online for intense multiplayer action.

www.CALLOFDUTY.com
Dell recommends Microsoft® Windows®
XP Media Center Edition 2005

*LIMITED WARRANTY: You can get a copy of our limited warranties and guarantees by writing Dell USA L.P., Attn: Warranties, One Dell Way, Round Rock, TX 78682. To purchase warranty only or for information on other service options please call 1-800-695-0505 or visit dell.com/upgrade/conditions. TRADEMARKS/COPYRIGHT
NOTICES: Intel, Intel Inside, Intel Inside logo, Pentium, and Celeron are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. Microsoft and Windows are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. ©2005 Dell Inc. All rights reserved.
Don’t let the polished exteriors fool you. Beneath lurks raw power in its purest form. Now you can play with savage fury, get the bad guy before he knows what hit him and unleash the twisted gaming genius within. The Intel® Pentium® D Processor with new dual-core processing will take your XPS 800 into another realm. The scorching graphics and screaming sound capabilities will kick your senses into overdrive. And your play-it-safe side will value the elite XPS Telephone Support, 1-Year Limited Warranty and the savings from buying direct from Dell. Ready to run your opponents into the ground? Experience XPS today.

Intel® Pentium® D Processor with new dual-core processing is available as an option for Dell XPS 800 desktop.

To start your XPS experience, call 1-800-695-5406 or visit dell.com/cgw
For hearing/speech impaired: 1-877-DELL-TTY (toll-free)
You with Sound Blaster X-Fi
Them with Motherboard Audio
Them ... PWNED!

Power up to
Xtreme Fidelity™

Sound Blaster X-Fi gives you the power of an advanced CPU dedicated solely to audio, providing up to 40% more frames per second based on performance testing in Battlefield 2™.

Sound Blaster X-Fi immerses you in a sphere of sound with 9 virtual speakers delivered over standard stereo headphones, and 128 virtual speakers over 5.1 or 7.1 speaker systems. Now you’ll hear exactly where your opponents are well before you see them...or they see you.

Motherboard audio just doesn’t measure up. Sound Blaster X-Fi™ delivers a no-compromise promise of both lightning-fast gaming AND immersive audio enhancements — all at the same time!
Hear it. Believe it.

www.soundblaster.com

"I can hear my opponent, no matter how far away he is, or in what direction. The Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty with X-RAM gives me positional audio that's better than anything I've experienced with headphones. If you're a serious gamer, you shouldn't be gaming without it!"

Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel

FATAL1TY

www.fatal1ty.com

CREATIVE
ONE LOVE

One addict asks: Do I really need more games?

UGH. ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER FOUR FREAKIN' hours in World of Warcraft. It's ridiculous. Someone disable my account—please. (Um, not really. Ha ha!) I have a huge pile of new games to play, and I haven't played any of them because I cannot get myself to stop playing WOW. The only exception at all is the game that I was forced to play because I was reviewing it this month—Dungeon Siege II. And though I enjoyed the game to some extent, I still felt at times while playing it that I was "wasting time" that could have been better spent in my "real" game—WOW.

I know I'm not alone. I know that many gamers let all their game time get absorbed by a single title. This has been the case for forever, but it's even worse now with the MMOs, since the monthly fee of most of these games simply demands a certain commitment. It's like a gym membership that way.

And not to start this issue off with any nervous hand-wringing, but I wonder: Is this good for gaming? Will games become less "disposable" if we all stick with certain titles for months or even years on end? What does that mean for the future? How do new titles ever stand a chance?

This is what I am wondering as I look at the cover of this issue, which features the amazing-looking Huxley. Never mind the time commitment. Just how many monthly fees is any one gamer willing to pay? How many different characters in how many different games am I willing to devote to leveling up? I'm getting tired just thinking about it. That doesn't mean I'm not interested in Huxley, or any of the other games coming down the pike. It just means that I need to clone myself, win the lottery, freeze time, or maybe all of those at once. Why must my life be so hard?

JEFF GREEN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"The sun's not yellow. It's chicken."
New Playing: Bob Dylan's "Tombstone Blues";
World of Warcraft
1UP.com Blog: evijeff.1UP.com

OUR DEFINING SONG LYRICS

KRISTEN SALVATORE
MANAGING EDITOR

"Everything is going up. Everything is going up. Nothing moves along. Everything is fine, fine, fine."
1UP.com Blog: kristens.1UP.com

RYAN SCOTT
EDITOR (REVIEWS)

"Damn, it feels good to be a gangster."
New Playing: Office Space soundtrack; Shutdown Union
1UP.com Blog: cваhy.ryan.1UP.com

SHAWN ELLIOTT
EDITOR (REVIEWS)

"Lights flicker on the frame of a tight spout. Watching scots in a stained silveret and boxers shorts."
New Playing: Video Games; Street Fighter II
1UP.com Blog: cваhy.1UP.com

LOGAN PARR
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHER

"Has anybody seen a dog dyed dark green? About two inches tall, with a strawberry blonde tail. Sunglasses and a bonnet and designer jeans with appliques on it?"
New Playing: B-Side: "Duchess Lorraine" 1UP.com Blog: logan.1UP.com

MICHAEL JENNINGS
ART DIRECTOR

"And then after the smoke is cleared, Mo and KS will peak out our heads. We've been watching the riots."
New Playing: Interstellar's "City Hall"
1UP.com Blog: cgj.jennings.1UP.com

SEAN DALLASKID
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

"Mira le a mi mismo. Entérate. ¿Qué pasa contigo mi hermano? Ven, animé. ¿Qué pasa contigo?"
New Playing: Gorillaz' "Latin Simona"
1UP.com Blog: The_dallaskid.1UP.com
IT'S IN THE DARKEST DAYS
WHEN A LEADER MUST STEP INTO THE LIGHT.

A battle party is only as strong as its leader. In the unforgiving world of Dungeon Siege II, you will gather warriors, build their skills and adopt exotic creatures. Only then can you battle the ancient sword of Zaraphot and the tyranny that sweeps Aranna. Whether you go it alone or choose a multiplayer campaign in this sequel to the million-selling Dungeon Siege, the fate of the world lies in your hands.

www.dungeonsiege.com

MATURE 17+
Violence
Blood and Gore

Microsoft game Studios

GAS Powered Games

POWERED BY gamespy

ATI
New kickass game engine.
Wild new physics and game environments.
New, obscenely powerful weapons.
Blowing crap up was never this much fun.
Seriously.
BLOW $#!% UP... AGAIN.

SERIOUS SAM II

Available Now!

www.serioussam2.com
Selection. I like Steam, too—when it works.

I do not, however, like the idea of episodic gaming. [Valve cofounder] Gabe Newell likened games as they are now to film, and then compares episodic content to television. I see it more as a means of milking customers for all we’re worth. Depending upon the pricing structure and how long the episodic game goes on, we could pay $50, $100, even $200 for one game. So now are normal games going to become like MMOs as far as pricing goes? All I have to say is: “F*** that!”

Dan Lindberg

STILL STEAMED IN IRAQ
Editor-in-chief Jeff Green’s editorial “Still Steamme’d?” [CGW #255] struck a nerve with me. I bought Half-Life 2 on an online auction site because I got deployed to Iraq (I’m still here), and I quickly found the steam client for the game upon installation. Due to the necessity of Steam, I have not yet been able to play the game because I have no internet connection. Why the hell does Valve even bother to print CDs if it’s going to force-feed us an online download anyway? Not everyone has convenient internet access, and I, for one, will be very cautious when considering buying another Valve product.

Don Finnell

Senior editor Darren Gladstone responds: It’s a pain, but you can play Half-Life 2 without Steam. It just requires some extra grunt work. First, unfortunately, you still need to find a broadband connection somewhere in the DMZ. Go online to unlock the game files, checking off the “Remember my password” box. Next, right-click on the game in the Launch menu and make sure it says “100% acquired, ready for offline.” Then right-click on the Steam icon in the System Tray. In Settings, uncheck “Do not store account information on this computer.” Once disconnected from the Net, you’ll be able to start in offline mode.

PC GAMING ISN’T DEAD, DAMMIT!
I don’t read PC-only gaming magazines too often, but whenever I do, I always see editorialists ranting about how PC gaming isn’t dying or complaining about how some elitist somewhere said otherwise. I don’t think too many gamers really worry about this—we’re too busy enjoying the games we’re playing! You’re giving too much free publicity to the doomsayers. By continuously bringing it up, you’re only making the casual crowd think that there’s some truth to this stuff. Some things do go away if you simply ignore them.

Paul

OK, OK. You’re right. Complaining too much about the nonexistence of PC gaming is like standing in the playground as a kid and saying, “I’m not a nerd! I AM cool! Sniff.” Not that we ever did that.

WHO’S THE PARiah NOW?
There’s a problem with your “Pop Culture Pariah” story from CGW #255: The premise that the news media still has credibility. With the information age really hitting its stride, the distortions made by the mainstream media get exposed more every day. Don’t worry about the media. Just keep your integrity and I’ll

"THE DISTORTIONS MADE BY THE MAIN-STREAM MEDIA GET EXPOSED MORE EVERY DAY.” —STEPH FORTIER

MAIL BYTES

Is it me, or does Editor-in-Chief Jeff Green look like an older David Duchovny? —SpicyMuffin

U guys are the PC GAMING AUTHORITY!!!!!!! YA!!!!!!!! U GUYS RULE!!!!!!! —Yogi K.

Is [CGW columnist] Robert Coffey even capable of non-hate? —William Hollar

The new look is refreshing. It’s almost like having an extra cheese slice on the burger. —Joe

ENTER TO WIN A $300 AMERICAN EXPRESS CHECK!
Tell us what you think of our magazine—be part of the 2005 Computer Gaming World Editorial Study.
Participants are entered in a drawing for a $300 American Express check!
Log on to:
www.surveymonkey.com/cgwoct
Password: CGWOct

CGW 256
AND THEY SAY GAMERS CAN’T READ!
THE ULTIMATE
FANTASY HOCKEY
MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE
UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
FEEL THE POWER

- **Ultimate Control**: Command every aspect of your chosen franchise – sign star players, determine training regimes, scout the competition, and lead your dream team to victory!

- **Unrivaled content and database detail**: Over 15 playable leagues, 2,400 teams and in excess of 25,000 players and staff members.

- **Modern, high-quality visuals**: Highly customizable interface, customizable interface skins, increased resolution, and real-time in-game plays.

- **Detailed rules**: Set your in-game rules, regulations, and much more.

- **New training camps**: Try out new line combinations or refine your tactics.

For a “Free Trial” go to www.sega.com/nhlhockeymanager
keep buying your mag...unless I see that Lenin guy on the cover again. Those glasses don't fool me.

Steph Fortier

I was disappointed by the lack of depth in John Davison's article "Pop Culture Peril." It was a game cheering piece, but it offered no real critique on the current trend toward explicit violence in the gaming industry.

Do videogames provoke criminal behavior? Probably not to any great extent, as your chart appears to show. But game developers are reaching into some very dark places and they are desensitizing gamers to extreme cruelty, sexism, and violence.

CGW has taken a stand in the past against extreme violence in games. I trust you guys, and in the future, I expect a deeper analysis of this issue than what I found here.

David Enna

A NECTROLITH BY ANY OTHER NAME

My brother Jake and I think Tom vs. Bruce is so great that we decided to name our Dungeon Siege II pats after them. Bruce is my level 29 dark naid, and Tom is my brother's level 29 necrolith. Just thought you should know.

Cole Hoffgard

That's...great, Cole. Just do us a favor and don't name any puck mules after us, OK?

REVIEWING THE REVIEWS

I enjoyed your well-written review of Battlefield 2—and I didn't even intend to play the game. I'd like to see more in-depth reviews of highly rated games! I do have a question, though. I noticed that Stronghold 2 (a two-star game) got two pages, and Fantastic 4 (a two-and-a-half-star game) got a full page. Between those two reviews were FlatOut (four stars) and TrackMania Sunrise (also four stars). My question is: Why were two lesser games given so much magazine space? If CGW's focus is to promote superior games, why not give the extra space to the higher-rated games?

Steve Broesder

Reviews editor Ryan Scott responds: You raise some really good points here, Steve. What it really boils down to is, we have no idea how good or bad a game is going to be when we assign word counts to our writers. Some games (like Battlefield 2) are reasonably safe bets, but a lot of games end up being great, even though there might not be much hype behind them. On the flip side, some high-profile games turn out to be real stinkers. We try to use our best judgment as to what our readers are looking forward to, and that's essentially how we arrive at our coverage decisions. Just try to remember not to pass over those smaller reviews—in the words of Yoda, size matters not.

I've been a faithful reader of CGW since issue #1. It used to be a top-quality, well-written magazine with writers like Scorpio, who gave thorough, balanced reviews of games. Even if they hated a game, they gave specifics about what was wrong with it, what was needed to fix it, and what worked.

You have forgotten why people buy the magazine, which is for the reviews! The rest is just fluff. In Issue #255, there are 64 pages of previews and ads before the first review. There are a total of seven pages of reviews covering nine games, followed by 10 pages of hardware. Even if all the games were bad, which I doubt, there should have been a minimum of a page of text describing their flaws and good points.

Julian Bigger

GOING POSTAL

First off, I love your magazine. My only complaint is this: Why is it that when I receive my new issue, the magazine looks like somebody threw it in a puddle and ran over it with a car? Do you people have anything to do with this? Maybe I should get ahold of my mailman and yell at him, because it's probably him who reads my magazine each month. I'm surprised he doesn't steal my demo CD, too!

Zach Geisel

If it's any consolation, we only do it to your issues, Zach.

A total of seventeen stars for Riddick

Reading writer Robert Coffey's "Scorched Earth" in CGW #254—the one in which he complains that all movie-licensed games turn out to be total garbage—made me stop and think about how many movie-based games have actually been good.

Case in point: The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, which is possibly one of the best and most innovative first-person shooters since the original Half-Life. Please—for the sake of all of us who have bought a good movie-based game—lighten up, will ya?

Kyle W.

You're right—we were way too hard on The Chronicles of Riddick, our five-star, 2004
HEROES of the PACIFIC

Join the great pilots of the Pacific.

AVAILABLE NOW

26 real missions including Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima.
Fierce online multiplayer battles for up to 8 players.
Epic battles with over 150 on-screen planes.
Pilot 36 authentic WWII aircraft.

www.heroesofthepacific.com
ULTIMATE GOAL

Shape the face of the new world.

www.ageofempires3.com
IMMEDIATE GOAL

Make it through the next ten minutes.
THE CITY HAS ITS DEMONS... BUT SO DO YOU.

Discover the dark secrets of the inner city.

Fight teeming hordes of nightmarish enemies.

Monstrous action pays off... with your survival.
THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND

You're out of prison but still not free. Now the battle rages on two fronts: in the city - and in your mind.

www.sufferingtiethatbind.com
KING KONG

...and you smell like one, too!

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

THE THOUGHT OF ANOTHER KING KONG movie should not excite us, but since it's being made by Lord of the Rings übergod Peter Jackson, we are hot and bothered in the extreme. Our expectations would also be low, in theory, for the inevitable King Kong videogame, but again, the creative force behind the project gives us hope. In this case, it's French designer Michel Ancel, the man who created Ubisoft's outstanding Beyond Good & Evil, and the man Peter Jackson handpicked after Jackson played that game.

Getting screens and info out of Ubisoft is harder than taking down the big ape himself, but we did manage to snag this awesome shot of Kong battling a giant bat. That's you playing as the king of swing, by the way (the other half of the game puts you in control of human hero Jack Driscoll in a first-person perspective). Would you like a banana? / Jeff Green
THE ELDER OBLIVION

Massively single player

PREVIEW

THE PC MARKET DOESN'T SEE MANY good single-player RPGs these days. Diablo-style action-RPGs continue to gain in popularity, and the mainstream acceptance of massively multiplayer online games has ensured you'll never have to play alone again. Meanwhile, the Baldur's Gates and Elder Scrolls of the world remain fond but increasingly distant memories. Fortunately, a few publishers still understand the unique and immersive appeal that traditional RPGs provide. First-person RPG The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, which came out in 2002, is undoubtedly the best recent example of what can be done with the genre, and developer Bethesda Softworks is well aware of that, as executive producer Todd Howard and his team have dedicated the last three years to the series' next epic chapter: The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion.

"[We've] really set out to create the RPG for the next generation of hardware...[and] of videogames," Howard explains. "[We looked] at everything we'd done with Morrowind, Daggerfall, and Arena, as well as what else was happening in our industry, and figured out what we could do to move RPGs, and videogames in general, forward. We wanted to make sure every aspect of the game was improved, whether it was starting from scratch or just tweaking and tuning. The big things were the A.I., the combat system, and the graphics."

THE WIDE WORLD OF OBLIVION

Morrowind fans can definitely attest to the absurd level of detail present in that game. Howard has even loftier aspirations for Oblivion, and he's helping to craft another intricate world complete with hundreds of complex NPCs that intelligently go about their daily lives—and this time, it's made even more believable by over 2,200 pages of recorded dialogue. "It's a ridiculous amount of speech," Howard points out. "It started as a crazy idea, like all great things, and we just kept going. It really is amazing to have this much character and speech in a game.

Howard estimates that it would take two around-the-clock recording studios a full month to tape everything, making Oblivion one of the most ambitious voice-acting endeavors ever.

But, of course, NPC A.I. is merely a tool to help tell another involved Elder Scrolls story. Like its predecessors, Oblivion is set in the vast world of Tamriel; the focus this time is on the capital province of Cyrodiil, where—following
the assassination of the emperor—you're tasked with locating a long-lost heir to the throne. Meanwhile, the gates of Oblivion (a sort of hell dimension in Tamriel) remain open, paving the way for a massive demon invasion.

HELL SPAWN
When you're not exploring the 16-square-mile empire of Cyrodiil, expect to spend a large part of your time in the depths of Oblivion. "Each [part of Oblivion] is sort of its own dungeon crawl in a sense," says Howard. "[You] visit several of these as part of the main quest, but you also continue to see random gates appear in the world as long as the main quest remains unfinished, and each of these can be visited as well."

Combat is, of course, a major part of these dungeon crawls. The fighting system in Oblivion is deeper and more skill-based than those in previous adventures, thanks to a number of new Havok engine-powered options, which Howard outlines for us: "You control the blocking, you control what moves you do, you control [the] timing, and so forth. It plays like an FPS, but it's not a 'twitch' experience. I don't know if everyone will take to it, but most people who've played it think it's a ton of fun."

WREAKING HAVOK
The fighting engine isn't the only thing that benefits from the newly implemented Havok engine, though. Oblivion's physics are massively upgraded from those in Morrowind: Arrows stick inside objects, magical telekinesis spells can fling objects about, and shadowy stealth movements prove even more effective in helping you avoid unwanted attention. Howard is certainly happy with his new toy: "I tell you, it never gets old when you paralyze a guard in midswing and watch him tumble down the stairs, still in his swing pose, with his limbs realistically bouncing off every surface. I love Havok!"

And for those who ponder whether Elder Scrolls will take the multiplayer route anytime soon, don't count on it—if Howard knows one thing, it's his audience. "Multiplayer is not really something we've ever seriously considered." Works for us.

Ryan Scott
DARK MESSIAH
OF MIGHT & MAGIC
First-person fantasy's saving throw

Probability of British accents: bloody high.

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

"IF YOU WERE TO LIVE LIFE IN AN enchanted world, how would you want to experience it?" asks Romain de Waubert de Genlis, producer of Dark Messiah, Arkane Studios' in-your-own-eyes take on the Might & Magic series of role-playing and real-time strategy games. "The first-person point of view helps us create a more immersive and—to a certain extent—more immersive experience. You can't see the creatures lurking in the shadows behind you, and it's only when you stand at a dragon's feet that you realize what it means to be five stories tall." Sorcery with hot keys: cool enough. First-person magic-making in a fantasy and governed by gravity: supercool.

Not that Messiah is all wand waving and mumbo jumbo. "Whether you use your muscles or your mind is up to you," adds de Genlis. "We all start the same, but none of us shares the same experience; no one ends up the same." Conan-fit warriors—the most heavily armed and armored of Messiah's three character classes—top heads with gruesome gusto; silent-but-deadly assassins stalk the shadows undetected, bow and dagger in hand; and Messiah's mages—potentially the best thing to happen to abracadabra since Harry Potter—cast spells. The catch, according to de Genlis, is Valve Software's Source engine: "Its physics and potential for physical interaction let us create a lifelike world with causes and effects." Put a patch of ice on the floor, and the enemies on your heels slip and slide. Set fire to a structure, and its burning boards become makeshift missiles. Spell casting via dice: suddenly not so cool. / Shawn Elliott

MULTIPLAYER MIGHT

While producer de Genlis insists that "it's too early to get into details about the online part of the game," he does divulge that a team-based 32-man multiplayer mode is in the works. "We're fortunate to have an engine that powers physics-heavy games like Half-Life 2. From there on, it's easy to imagine what you'll get with Messiah's multiplayer: heroic fantasy, leveling up, and loads of action."
start something PHOTOGRAPHIC

START GOING BEYOND POINT AND CLICK.
IMPROVING YOUR COMPOSITION. TWEAKING THE COLOR.
FINDING YOUR STYLE. ARCHIVING OUTTAKES.
START BEING YOUR OWN DARKROOM.

Windows xp

With a world of software and devices
that run on Windows® XP, the choice is yours.

Go to windows.com and start anything you like.
YOUNG GUNES

With little money and big hopes, three buddies are building the next big game engine

THE INSIDE STORY

BEFORE DOOM, JOHN CARMACK WAS making games with an Apple II in his mother's house. Then there's Sam McGrath. Who? While working on S2 Games' indie hit, Savage: The Battle for Newerth, McGrath planned to start his own company. While you may not have heard much about him, you will soon enough. All it took was a demo video of his new game, Project Offset.

McGrath is building the next killer game engine, but without a huge team or a fantastic budget. It's just him and two friends—brothers Trevor and Travis Stringer, artists who also helped with Savage—working out of a small apartment in Riverside, CA, with, as clichéd as it sounds, dreams of making it big.

NOT ANOTHER SHOOTER

It all started about a year and a half ago. Sam, Travis, and Trevor had been talking about creating their dream game while developing Savage. The idea: an epic fantasy FPS. "Most first-person shooters these days are based in World War II," says McGrath. "Don't get me wrong, they are fun, but we haven't seen a fantasy game that isn't an RPG since Heretic and Hexen."

Then you have Ubisoft's upcoming Dark Messiah: Might and Magic. Currently in development using Valve's Source engine, that game will also allow you to hack, slash, and spell-ling in the first person. The question now becomes, how will a new intellectual property compare to a known franchise?

A big focus for Offset is to create a massive universe and an immersive story. "We've been inspired by Half-Life 2 and Call of Duty, which have just amazing single-player scenarios," says McGrath. The plan involves adding a few RPG elements, such as being able to upgrade weapons and choose different character classes to play through the game.

The best way to describe the epic nature of multiplayer is by providing an example. The two teams, good and evil, play very different games. The objective of the evil team during a castle siege is to break down the castle walls with siege weapons and slaughter the innocent NPC women and children inside. The good side will

need to hold the castle and light the beacons, waiting for reinforcements to arrive.

RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

The trick becomes finding the right engine to do everything that McGrath wants to accomplish.

"We were struggling with the tools that we were using, banging our heads against walls. The 3D packages out there that we tried were taking a long time to hash out."

It took a few months of trial and error before the team realized that the development tools currently available weren't at the level they needed for next-generation gaming. "I don't think that game creation needs to be complicated," says McGrath. "It should be fun and simple."

With that in mind, he began work on an engine built for artists and mappers.

"We want to give them as much opportunity to create their own universes as well," McGrath says. People will be able to build within the engine using the editing tools, and when Project Offset is finished, the team plans to release its source code.

Offset wants to keep things small the first year, working mainly on the engine. Then they really want to ramp up and go into full production. Many other parts of the game still need fleshing out, including the physics and gameplay scripting engines. That's going to require more people and more money.

Getting a new company—and a new game

(continued on page 40)
HUMANITY HAS A NEW HERO...

Wage war with new units for each existing race

Command an all new race across harsh winter environments

Expansion to 2004's RTS Game of the Year*

Battle it out online with enhanced multiplayer gameplay
> engine, for that matter—off the ground is no easy task. Sam saved every penny he's earned, and that's what has funded Project Offset up to this point. The focus so far has been on building the engine, but cash is running low. That's why the team started posting demo videos on the Internet. "We're shopping around our game ideas and showing our technology to various publishers," says McGrath. They might even license the tech out to game developers. However, nothing could prepare them for what happened next.

Brothers Travis and Trevor Stringer complete each other's thoughts so quickly that it's hard to discern who is saying what. "We were blown away by the initial response. It was just overwhelming. In the period of a week we'd received 1,000 e-mails, and we're trying to respond to every single one of them because we don't want to make anybody mad. We've got a lot of people just wanting to help us out. Some people are saying how much we've inspired them. Others are just psyched to see a game like this come out."

At this point they aren't making a huge chunk of money. "But it's enough to pay our bills for a while, which is really nice," says McGrath. Having cash on hand means no last-minute deals. They've heard from every big-name publisher out there. "However," adds McGrath, "we're not going to take any deal that doesn't let us at least retain the rights to the engine, so we're being very cautious for sure."

Sam, Travis, and Trevor Stringer have already learned a few important lessons: Save your money; you'll need it. Check your ego at the door because game design is a collaborative process. Don't sign anything, no matter how tempting, unless a lawyer has looked at it first. And by far the most important thing, according to McGrath: "You have to go in thinking, 'We can do it.' Just believing that you can achieve the same kind of quality [as in the Unreal Engine 3 or Source Engine] makes all the difference."  

**WHAT IS PROJECT OFFSET?**
The little engine that could

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It was built with the goal of reducing development time and costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It uses a fully 64-bit floating point HDR rendering pipeline for cinematic color precision—probably even more than your monitor can handle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Its advanced shader system allows artists to create elaborate effects without a programmer. What would take a programmer hours to create can be done by an artist in seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It supports texture-based shadowing (using hardware, when available).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It has cinematic-quality motion blur working uniformly on every object.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

> "WE WERE BLOWN AWAY...IN THE PERIOD OF A WEEK WE'VE GOTTEN OVER 1,000 E-MAILS." —TRAVIS STRINGER

![Image of a character with a detailed face] The level of detail in the face is amazing! This overripe wizard is sporting more wrinkles than a shih tzu.
DARKNESS FALLS...

It is 363 AD and the last Emperor of the unified Roman world is dead. His successors now rule a divided Empire. Each calls himself supreme ruler and each would happily see the other dead. Beyond the frontiers of the sundered realm new enemies are lurking. This will be a sword-time – an age that is arrow-bitten and deadly. The Barbarians are at the gates in the official expansion pack for Rome: Total War.

- A brand new campaign game
- 10 new playable factions – defend and unite the Eastern and Western Empires, or burn them to the ground as one of 10 new factions, including the Huns, Franks, Saxons and Goths
- 100+ new units – each with their own tactical strengths, weapons and abilities, including Schwimm and Shieldwall formations, swimming and axe-throwing, crossbows and Catapults
- Barbarian Hordes – march your entire people in search of a new homeland

You were there for Rome’s glory. This September you can be there for the Empire’s fall.

Requires original Rome: Total War game to run.

www.sega.com
PREPARE FOR THE ULTIMATE WAR...

QUAKE 4

In a war for Earth's survival, against an unrelenting enemy - the only way to defeat them, is to become one of them.

- Battle outdoors using tanks and walkers
- Fight with the support of an elite squad
- Annihilate the alien enemy with an arsenal of hi-tech weaponry
- Compete online in fast action, arena-style multiplayer

...THE INVASION BEGINS

HOLIDAY 2005
STAR WARS
BATTLEFRONT II
Five steps to a Force-full sequel

PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios GENRE: Shooter RELEASE DATE: October 2005

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
SURE, BATTLEFRONT—THE Battlefield-style shooter in which workaday star warriors suit up for signature battles in the series' scene-stealing vehicles—became a best-seller. But Associate Producer Dave Baker claims developer Pandemic could've done a better job of appealing to PC owners one better than their console-playing counterparts: "Every programmer and designer on the team wanted to do something special for the PC platform—we simply ran out of time. With the sequel, however, we're investing some serious effort in the PC version."
Here's how. Shawn Elliott

LIGHT AND MAGIC
The first Battlefront looked a lot like the game's TV-bound versions. Disturbance in the Force? We thought not. Pandemic promises improved visuals in its saga-spanning sequel. "Presentation-wise, we're taking advantage of the PC's power," Baker says. "It's completely shader driven and allows us extra lights per pass and increased precision in the pixel shader. We're also supporting environment mapping (which involves applying flat textures to curved surfaces) and specular mapping (casting light on curved surfaces)." In Padawan terms, pulled-from-the-trilogy locales like the molten Mustafar and platinum-plated Coruscant come to life with a gyrewizardry worthy of Industrial Light & Magic's legacy.

HEADS UP
"We've added a new, more intuitive heads-up display for PC players," says Baker. "It should help you determine where everything is on the battlefield, and it also makes things that much more clear and concise in multiplayer matches, as the onscreen messaging is well organized and easier to follow. Plus, revised recouts and tracking info in space should make starfighting more fluid and fun."

SEE IT! CHECK OUT THE TRAILER ON THIS MONTH'S DISC
HOW YOU LOOK AT IT

PC gamers prefer first-person perspective. Pandemic gets the point and has added this POE to Battlefront II’s 30-plus vehicles (a selection that includes Revenge of the Sith’s V-wing and clone speeder, along with a few venerable Star Wars classics). "It gives you an enhanced sense of speed in space," Baker boasts—perfect for slipping through a screen of TIE fighters and blasting a proton torpedo into a star destroyer’s docking bay. Jedi “heroes” (only a faction’s highest-scoring warrior can wield the Force), however, stick to the far-and-away third-person solution. Force-choking foes cold with Vader or Gisung ’em as the four-saber-wielding General Grievous wouldn’t work as well otherwise, we’re guessing.

ONLINE ALLIANCE

Pandemic is making Battlefront II’s online multiplayer more appropriate to the platform, too, which means 64-man skirmishes for those with light-speed Internet links (the first Battlefront matches that number in LAN play only, but then, when was that gonna happen?). In addition, Baker says, “Dedicated servers should run smoother and be more administrator friendly. We’re improving the matchmaking services and browsers to be PC friendly and less console based. And we’ve also added buddy lists, stat tracking, and battle commands, which make coordinating tactics with teammates easier.”

STAR WARRIORS

Say what—stormtroopers hitting something? Producer Dan Pettit says it’s so: “We’re working on AI. It’s definitely a necessity in order for us to deliver an enhanced single-player experience.” But Imperials and Rebels, federalists and clones, and cannon fodder of all stripes need more than marksmanship to conquer the galaxy. “Whether friend or foe,” Pettit adds, “they now need to consider strategy for current objectives [and] react to what the player does.” If you jump in a Jedi starfighter and start dogfighting in space, for instance, your AI allies should defend your capital ship by manning its several turrets. And for those who haven’t boarded the broadbandwagon (or are online but want a bigger match without waiting for servers to fill up), Battlefront II offers more computer-controlled friends and foes than its console cousins do. “More units means it’s more like the movies,” says Baker. “Who doesn’t want to battle it out on Hoth with 50-some stormtroopers rushing the bunker?”
PROVE THAT YOU'RE NOT REALLY THE
60 MINUTES WI

We spend 30 minutes apiece with visionary developer Peter Molyneux's Black

BLACK & WHITE 2
LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, BLACK & WHITE 2 is a god game that puts you in the role of a deity whose evil or benevolence depends on your choices. Your disciples—in the preview I played, the Greek civilization and a creature of my choosing—do your bidding as you attempt to bring their civilization to prominence. Whether you do so by economic and cultural dominance or military power—the RTS portion of the game—is up to you.

/Kristen Salvatore

00:01 The opening cut-scene introduces me to two creatures who explain that they are my good and bad consciences. My good conscience sounds like a kindly grandfather with a vaguely British accent. My bad conscience sounds like an extra from The Sopranos.

00:09 My consciences urge me to choose a creature to raise, explaining that the way I treat my creature will turn him into a kindly and mischievous pet or a weapon of destruction. The cow keeps grinning and shaking her udder at me, so I reject her overt cuteness factor and go with the monkey.

00:13 I'm supposed to be able to control the entire game via the mouse, but the cursor has become a disembodied hand that, much like a boy at a junior high school dance, doesn't always grab where it's supposed to. Arrow keys, you are my friends.

00:16 I meet my villagers, who are immediately attacked by the Aztec army, which is a little weird since my villagers are Greek. A great battle scene ensues. You can zoom way in, pretty much right into the faces of the villagers, most of which are currently contorted with fear.

00:24 I learn how to move my little Greeks out of danger, although I can pick up only one of them at a time, so I have to spare maybe 10 of them. They end up in a new, peaceful place to start a new, peaceful town. I start tending to their needs, which, if I do a good job, will ultimately amount to making them a great and prosperous people. I can do that in two ways: either help them build such a great town that other towns want to migrate to it—or train them to be killing machines that go out and take other towns. I decide that for now, instead of making war, we're going to...

00:31 Make love, baby! My villagers' current desire, according to the desire status box, is to become "breeders." I make them into breeders by picking them up and dropping them on top of one another. It's a lot like a Craigslist personals ad. Before long, my town is filled with waddling pregnant women who, when it's time to deliver, lie down wherever they happen to be standing, which is usually in the middle of the street. Five seconds later, they get right back up and go back to whatever they were doing.

In one case, that was hauling wood. They are tough ladies, these Greeks.

00:35 I wake up my sleeping creature, who immediately eats one of the pregnant villagers. It's my job to avert him toward good or evil by punishing or rewarding such behavior, so I give him a scratch by moving the mouse (and thus my disembodied hand) forward and back, which teaches him that snacking on pregnant Greeks is just fine. I feel bad about that, so I move the mouse back and forth, causing my disembodied hand to slap him across his little monkey face. Then I feel bad about that...but it's a really satisfying sound. I continue sweeping the mouse back and forth, feeling a little like Joan Collins on Dynasty.

00:30 I can tell my creature to do things other than eat villagers, so I set him to work building villas for my Greeks. Hey, it's an RTS—the amount of stuff you need to think about can get overwhelming, so I'm happy to have the extra pair of hands. The game's wonky controls are getting to me, too, and I'm starting to wonder whether I want to keep at it. Then I see the following in a word bubble above my creature's head: "Sometimes I'll poo on trees."

I may not drop everything when Black & White 2 comes out—especially if the controls remain so tough and the framerate so finicky—but for the promise of pooping on trees, I'll probably give it at least another few hours.

/Publisher: Electronic Arts  /Developer: Lionhead Studios  /Release Date: October 2005
THE MOVIES

WE'VE ALL BEEN RAILROAD TYCOONS and run empires, but I always knew I could make it in Hollywood. Enter The Movies, a Tinseltown sandbox that starts with you creating silent films and eventually leads you to making special-effects blockbusters. The main game has you dealing with the day-to-day issues of building a movie studio. The real fun for most folks, though, might come from making their own in-game flicks and sharing them with the world at large. Call my agent. Let's talk.
/Darren Gladstone

00:00 Welcome to showbiz. My time with movie-studio sim The Movies starts slowly in the silent era. Pop-up hints spell out the basics for a humble beginning. Nevertheless, being a big schemer, I begin with ambitious plans for expansion: creating my own virtual entertainment empire, Krustykloo Productions. (In retrospect, I should've worried about getting my studio to the "talkies" era before creating another Industrial Light & Magic.) Working in a huge lot, I drop down production studios, stages, and the odd porta-potty, but for some reason I'm sure the strategy's about to bite me in the ass.

00:08 The interface is growing on me. I'm loving the utter lack of menus and complicated trappings—and then it gets confusing. You see, when I grab a person, these opaque lines pop up to suggest where I should put him. Should I take actor A to rehab or to a set, or simply fire the bum? Arrows start pointing me in too many different directions at once. It's like some messed-up sign on the Styx turnpike near the eighth circle of hell exit. But hey, at least I can turn it off. What's cool, though, is that when I mouse over a building, it cuts away to a floor plan that clearly illustrates all the things I can do in the structure.

00:15 Remember that nagging sense that I'd screwed up? Turns out I need to pave the lot to connect all of its locations together, and that quickly gets expensive since I spaced everything out. Here I am with my first film in the can, and I've nearly bankrupted the studio. That's why God invented cheat codes!

00:16 With this sim stuff, it's moviemaking time. I quit back to the Main menu, and it turns out that all that hardcore machinima-wannabe moviemaking I've been dying to try is here...and without the "did you do this, did you do that" hassle. So even if I don't want to play The Movies' game mode, I can cut to the chase and create my magnum opus—the sordid tale of an alien in the Wild West and a donkey named Clarabelle.

00:20 With scripts in development, I can pick my flick's pacing and map out its action. On the set, I can select backdrops, props, and costumes (advancing through the "proper" game got me some new gear to work with).

00:25 I'm now obsessing about which direction to take my masterpiece. So many options! Did I mention that you can also record your own voices for those miniflicks? The pressure is building. I just realized that there's going to be an online film competition, with a panel of Hollywood judges awarding prizes for the best clips.

00:30 Stop bothering me. You know that this is a closed set, right? Go on! Scram! Oh, and check out www.themoviesplanet.com, where you can download the promotional StarMaker program—a version of the actor-generating engine that the actual game will use—and get a head start on birthing your own celebs.
PUBLIC ACCESS
A finger on the pulse of PC-gaming fringe culture

GAME MAKERS MAKE THE GAMES. WE BUY 'EM.
But what happens next isn't necessarily what anyone expected,
especially when a game goes online. /Shawn Elliott

FAMOUS FOR 15 MINUTES

IN CASE YOU MISSED THE MASSIVELY CIRCULATED "Leeroy Jenkins" video clip recorded in
MMO World of Warcraft, here's the setup: A
guild of high-level players prepares to raid the
Rookery dragon's den. "Abdul" crunches
numbers, calling a "33.3—repeating, of
course—percent chance of survival." Other
players suss out their plan of attack spell by
spell. And then, as the hugely technical strat-
agy is still taking shape, it happens: Clueless
miner/engineer Leeroy Jenkins comes back
to his controls, shouting, "All right, chums, let's
do this," and charges directly into the dungeon.
With the help of interviewed.todeath.com, we
tracked down troublemaker Ben Schulz, the
one and only Leeroy Jenkins.

CGW: You play with the Pals for Life guild,
right? How do the guys like Leeroy's stunts?

Ben Schulz: Yep. So I pull some sh*t every
once in a while...everyone in the guild does.

CGW: What were you doing while you
were AFK?

BS: Getting—and then eating—Kentucky
Fried Chicken, of course.

CGW: So was it staged? It sure looks like
you're going out of your way to stir up a
whole lot of sh*t.

BS: We like to let folks wonder. Besides, it
makes forums more fun and whatnot.

CGW: Have you had any trouble getting
pickup groups in Iron Forge [the main hub
city for Alliance players]?

BS: For a while, I couldn't speak in general
chat because it stirred up so many people
and I wouldn't get a word in. You know,
some people would start yelling my name,
and others would tell me to "go drink
bleach." Lately, I've been able to function
more or less like a "normal" player.

CGW: How has Leeroy's fame affected
your life?

BS: Aside from a few interviews like this
and getting attention in-game, it hasn't.
Well...when I told some guys in a game shop
that I was Leeroy, they went a little apesh*t.
Oh, and I sell shirts. That's all.

CGW: Word is that developer Blizzard likes
your work....

BS: That's what I hear. I have talked to
Blizzard, but I haven't really been able to get
anywhere with it...which is unfortunate, since
I'm looking for a job.

CGW: What does Abdul calculate with?

BS: His brain. Abdul's a smart fellow.

Unfortunately, he had his account
banned, so let's
send some letters to
Blizzard about getting
him back. Otherwise,
who'll crunch
our numbers?

CGW: Has superstar
William Hung's agent
contacted you?

BS: Huh? I have no
clue who Mr.
Hung is or why
his agent would
contact me.
YOU ARE THE ANSWER
LOSING THE WILL TO FIGHT

IT SEEMS STRAIGHTFORWARD—A BLUE Angels feat of synchronized flying—until one pilot plunges from his plane. But that too is part of the show. Free-falling over the open ocean, he streaks through some clouds and stops, abruptly but safely, in the cockpit of a helicopter hovering below. Mission accomplished for the so-called Sir Community (www.thesircommunity.com) of Battlefield 2 stuntmen.

Other favorite daredevil feats (some on display on this month's CGW demo disc) include more complicated pilot transfers. "I'll fly a plane close to the runway where someone else is waiting with a satchel charge at his feet," explains community member Eric Szymaszek. "Then I bail out before I pass overhead while he blows himself up and into the cockpit."

Stuntman Calt prefers the "C4 jump": "We have multiple [special operatives] place charges on the back of a Humvee and then detonate 'em in stages as it climbs a slope to send it flying."

"Sometimes one stunter orchestrates the action; other times you figure it out yourself first, and then everyone gives it a shot," Szymaszek says. "We may or may turn the battlefield into a big sandbox with stuff happening here and there. The one and only thing you can't do is kill."

"It's something a bunch of forum hobos can have fun with," adds community founder Justin Kelly. "But it's also something that takes lots of timing and precision; something to be proud of as you grow and progress."

Connected by a shared experimental spirit and "can't we all just get along" leanings, Sir Community members make their own space for collaborative, noncompetitive expression—one that gamemakers aren't providing, at least not deliberately. "Other games let you get around in jeeps, whereas Battlefield gives us the ability to blow them over mountains. We just have to figure out how to do it," says Szymaszek. "And it turns out that you can do wild stuff—stuff that's more fun than straightforward combat."

Yo! Wow Raps

GET READY TO reimagine rap as the CNN of the guild hall. When producer Andy Crosby and MC Kenny Battle aren't killing in character conversations as Noxaza and Kenricke, the wissacred World of Warcraft players make laugh-out-loud, un-hip-hop music (sample lyric: "I was helpin' out some guildies on a run of the stockades / but the Stormwind school for wenchies was due for a party raid.").

"We play WoW all the frickin' time, so it seemed like a natural fit," Crosby explains. "We're down with what everybody knows but doesn't always talk about—dumping grays [useless items] off at the bank, spamming looking-for-group chat channels—you know, everyday life in Azeroth."

Battle sees fame in the future: "I want to headline BlizzCon."

"We'd have to get helmets and swords or something, though," Crosby adds, "and ladies doing that night elf thong dance they do."

Sample the duo's songs at www.soundclick.com/jiggle07."

CRAZY CAT LAD

"FIRST OFF, I HAPPENED TO HAVE ONE HORDE ACCOUNT," EXPLAINS WORLD OF WARCRAFT Angus Chassels, "and then my coworkers convinced me to create an Alliance character on the same server. I never intended to trade from one side to the other, and, in fact, it hadn't occurred to me that you could. So...[soon after, though, a possibility presented itself: Chassels saw promise in the exotic pet trade—supplying the Horde with Alliance cats (an otherwise inaccessible commodity), to be exact.]

Investing as much energy in wow's economy as a Wall Street speculator would on the stock market, Chassels spent 30-70 minutes swimming from Theramore to Gadgetzan. "It's not someone doing something, but it is something."

Chassels spent more than 3,000 gold. "It feels more like playing the stock market than farming."

So far, no one has complained about Chassels' business. Most likely, he says, because cats are a luxury: "No one's getting Death Ray of the Ancients or whatever from selling tabbies," he says.

"And while the [money] does make life a little easier, it also levels, so no matter how much cash you have, you can't use the items (Blizzard's way of tempering the economy and money schemes). My goal is to start a store someday and sell pets on the side, but Blizzard will have to make buying a storefront an option."
POST-MORTEM

At first, Guild Wars generated skepticism—after all, how could anyone hope to maintain an MMO with no monthly fee? Six months later, NCsoft's gift-horse game is still going strong, a massively populated world of swords, spells, and...erm, strip tease that ArenaNet community relations manager Gail Gray says is still growing, with even more options for PVP buffs and hardcore roleplayers alike. We asked Gray to offer her thoughts on the game as it hits its half-year birthday. / Ryan Scott

GUILD WARS RAGE ON AS AREANET LOOKS AHEAD

CGW: You've managed to turn an off-the-beaten-track MMO into a bona fide success—surprised?
Gail Gray: It's easy to say now, but we were confident that Guild Wars would be a global success. We're gamers too, so we knew that we had the experience and the vision to make a great game. Add to that a no-subscription fee business model, and it seemed to make success even more of a sure thing.

CGW: The flexible character class system didn't hurt either.
Gail: The dual-class system hit a chord with players. GW isn't the first to offer it, but we've incorporated a few twists on the usual scheme, particularly with the depth of the skill and attribute system. Experienced RPG players are having a blast creating combinations and seeing the way that these new character play through the game in different ways; new RPG players are enjoying the benefits of instanced missions and a comfortable learning curve.

CGW: We've gotta say, though, having four character slots is a little limiting for folks (like us) who enjoy experimenting.
Gail: There will come a time when players will be able to have more than four character slots. If you think about future installments in the GW saga and the strong possibility that each of them might offer new professions, four character slots just won't be enough.

CGW: Anything else you'd change—say, a particularly overpowered or underpowered class combo, for example?
Gail: Offering 450 skills is bound to cause a lot of concerns about balance and fair play. Players have seen the "doughnut" in enough games to be somewhat wary of elaborate progression systems. But balance has been our first and main focus from day one, and it continues to remain our primary objective even now. We've been able to stream modest changes, and we've held major events such as our PVP Extreme Weekend (PVEX) in late August to verify necessary changes.

CGW: Sounds extremely extreme. Seriously, though, how do these events help you expand Guild Wars' PVP options?
Gail: August's event showed us that increasing the rewards for PVP play was both necessary and wise. The feedback we received before the event provided us with a lot of guidance on what players wanted most. We reacted with a substantial boom to faction points and with special rewards for PVP accomplishments...and the players loved it. We're going to keep watching the gameplay progression and reward systems to ensure that both PVP players and cooperative players are adequately rewarded.

CGW: Beyond PVP, what are you doing to keep Ascended (post-level 20) players playing?
"ONE OF OUR OBJECTIVES IS TO MAKE A GAME THAT CELEBRATES GUILDS IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE."

—BAILEY GRAY, ARENA.NET COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGER

GUILD WARS

GG: Our summer update, Sorrow’s Furnace, introduced two large new areas—areas specifically intended for Ascended characters, although others are welcome to give them a try. They offer new quests, new monsters, and cool new [item] rewards.

CGW: Any secret additions in store for the different guild halls?

GG: One of our objectives is to make a game that celebrates guilds in every way possible. We’ll be adding new guild features in the coming months with our free live updates, and with next year’s release. While the list isn’t final, some of the guild and guild hall improvements we’re considering include guild storage, personalized guild hall features, crafters and traders within the guild hall, guild templates for characters, and the option to toggle capes on and off.

CGW: Take the capes off? Promiscuous players already strip down to the fig leaf for dirty dance-a-thons. First off, why don’t characters’ mouths ever move during cut-scenes?

GG: When the programming team added the ability to synchronize dancing with players of the same type, the whole place exploded.

CGW: OK, now for a pair of real riddles. First off, why don’t characters’ mouths ever move during cut-scenes?

GG: Because they have the amazing ability to emit sounds and communicate their messages without such mundane things as mouth movement! OK, fine...due to the fact that GW has been localized into six languages thus far, we felt that our development time was better spent creating more content rather than expanding the time and effort to lip-sync dialogue to various languages. We’ll continue to refine the immersion of the story, and having more realistic facial animation is definitely something we’ll look into for the future.

CGW: Fair enough. Why can’t we seem to get the underhand gandy against Guild Wars’ Korea-based guilds?

GG: Koreans are exceptional gamers, and once they sink their teeth into a game, they become formidable foes. We’ve seen it in several other extremely popular games, and now we’re seeing it—and loving it—in GW. You could say that the top Korean players take their gaming very seriously; we’ve been told that the guilds that are frequently in the top ranks of the GW ladder spend quite a bit of time working on strategies and countertoordinations, improving their builds, and staying in touch with one another as they prepare for a day of gaming. They pride themselves on their study of the game, and in being able to turn on a dime once they identify the strategies being used by their opponents.

CGW: And finally...what’s next for the game?

GG: The next installment is scheduled for release in the first half of 2005. We have global tournaments coming up, we’ll continue to have weekend events, and we’re committed to making ongoing balance changes to keep the game fresh and challenging. The design team tracks fan requests, and they’re well aware that some of the most popular requests are for additional professions or races. Either or both of these things are pretty likely in the next installment of Guild Wars, but only time will tell.

There’s more where this came from. Check out cgw.guildwars.1up.com for the full interview!
SCI-FI RTS JUNKIES ARE STILL HOT FOR THQ'S WARHAMMER 40,000: Dawn of War—especially with the Winter Assault expansion pack now hitting store shelves. Fans of the more traditional sword-and-sorcery Warhammer fantasy license have been left out in the cold, but that ends next year thanks to Namco’s tentatively titled Warhammer RTS, which brings Games Workshop’s tabletop miniatures game back to its Tolkien-inspired roots in an all-new, massive-scale real-time strategy epic, courtesy of Armies of Exigo developer Synergy Interactive.

One of the first questions hardcore Warhammer players are likely to have is, What factions are represented? While the miniatures game features over a dozen different armies, Synergy is concentrating on four for its creation: Empire, Chaos, high elves, and skaven. Other factions beyond these four also pop up, but in more of a limited capacity; you can supplement your army with alternative units throughout the game, including dwarf gunners, goblin warriors, or even a few vampire undead squads.

SQUAD TACTICS

“Squad” is the key word here: Synergy says battles take on the sort of Braveheart-caliber scale embraced by games such as Rome: Total War, as you command multiple squads made up of several dozen units each. Warhammer RTS eschews the typical base-centric conventions of most RTS games, instead focusing almost completely on battlefield tactics. You craft an army in advance via a simple point-based system (similar to that of the tabletop game), which means what you see on the field is pretty much what you get for the duration of your military career.

Warhammer’s single-player mode encompasses two different campaigns. One features the good-aligned Empire and high elves, and the other puts you in control of the nefarious Chaos and skaven armies. Territories throughout the Warhammer world become your battlegrounds, and many areas have both primary and optional secondary objectives, which helps to deter the typically linear RTS gameplay model. More and more territories fall under your banner as you blaze a trail across the game map, and if your army hits a rough spot along the way, you can even request reinforcements from allied neighboring areas.

And if you scoff at single-player campaigns in RTS games, Warhammer provides a clever incentive to give this one a second look: Once you finish up the campaign, you can import your battle-hardened army online to wage war against other players. The multiplayer game presents several scenarios based on historical battles from established Warhammer fiction, as well as a siege-style mode in which one player fights to defend a fortress while his opponent works to bring the house down.

PAINTIN’ PEWTER

For the truly geeky Warhammer fans out there who just can’t be satisfied by the included multiplayer scenarios, Warhammer offers a flexible editor right out of the box. This tool gives you everything you need to create original scenarios and multiplayer maps, customize terrain, and repaint your army. Just think of it as your digital Warhammer paintbrush.

/Ryan Scott

WARRHAMMER RTS ESCHWEWS THE TYPICAL BASECENTRIC CONVENTIONS OF MOST RTS GAMES, INSTEAD FOCUSING ALMOST COMPLETELY ON BATTLEFIELD TACTICS.
VIRTUAL STUPIDITY

The dumb things gamers do

A WISE MAN ONCE SAID, "IF SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS TO YOU, IT'S COMEDY; IF SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS TO ME, IT'S TRAGEDY." CALL IT DARWIN'S EVOLUTIONARY THEORY IN ACTION, CALL IT SCHADENFreude—Misery just loves company. So here at CGW we decided to hand out awards for some of the dumber moments in gamingdom. We want to assure you, though, that the game industry doesn't have a stranglehold on boneheaded moves. It just seems that way sometimes.

UNFAIR TRADE

Hate it when you loan something to someone and it's never returned? A Shanghai gamer leased a buddy in the game Legend of Mir 3 a rare dragon saber. In exchange, his "friend" sold the sword online for 7,200 yuan (approximately $890). The irate gamer brandished a saber of his own and stabbed the former friend to death. He is standing trial and may receive a life sentence with no possibility of leveling up.

CRIME.EXE

A Chinese exchange student was arrested in southern Japan for brazenly mugging people—in Lineage II. The felonious PVP'er used a gang of software bots to beat up and rob people of valuable virtual objects. Those items were then fenced through an auction site for real-world cash.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

A 22-year-old Australian gamer paid $26,500 to buy an island in the game Project Entropia. The virtual paradise, complete with an unfurnished castle and beautiful beaches, is now his. We don't know who's crazier: the guy spending that much real-world money on a digital domain or the people lining up to rent beachfront property from him.

CRIME DOESN'T PAY ENOUGH

A crafty con man with a shrink-wrap roll and blow dryer was robbing game stores in West Bountiful, UT. The scam worked something like this: take recently purchased games to a hotel room, unwrap them, pull out the disc, and insert a blank one. After resealing the boxes, he'd return them for full credit and sell the games on eBay. Some handy tips to avoid suspicion: 1) Don't buy blank CDs from the same store you're ripping off. 2) Don't stick around town for too long after the scam. 3) Don't deposit thousands of dollars in a local bank all at once.

DOUBLE DUMBASS

SMOOTH MOVE NUMBER ONE:

A Jacksonville, FL, man played Grand Theft Auto: Vice City with a child. SMOOTH MOVE NUMBER TWO:

He played said game with a child while on the phone with a coworker. Allegedly giving game advice, the man shouted, "There's a bomb in the building! Everyone needs to get out!" Hearing this, the panicked coworker evacuated the restaurant where they both work. The police, being huge fans of GTA, introduced the man to some real felons.

EXIT THE DRAGON

A notorious criminal in the Chinese underworld, dubbed Evil Dragon by the local press, was wanted for murder and kidnapping, to name a few "greatest hits." What ultimately brought the cops to his door was his online gaming habit. After learning what games he played, the police tracked him down in-game.

FAMILIAR PNAGE, PART 1

The "Parents of the Year" award goes to a couple from Incheon, South Korea. The two stopped by a local Internet café to clock in a little time playing World of Warcraft. Too bad they forgot about their 4-year-old at home in the real world. A few hours later they returned to find their child had died from suffocation. "We were thinking of playing for just an hour or two and returning home like usual," the couple told police, "but the game took longer than that." Word has it the prison warder has a level 50 tauren shaman.

FAMILIAR PNAGE, PART 2

While not fatally dumb, public embarrassment is always funny. Brion, a level 67 night elf hunter, got grounded by his mom in World of Warcraft's message boards: "Pardon me for hijacking the thread, here...but, Brion—if you don't want your mother to know you were up and on the computer at 3:29 in the morning, DON'T post on a forum that she reads. Busted. Grounded."

THE BRB AWARD

A South Korean man keeled over and died after a 50-hour marathon of RTS gaming. The 20-year-old man got up only for bathroom breaks and quick naps over three days. He had recently quit his job to spend more time playing games. When confronted by concerned friends, he reportedly said, "I'll finish this game and go home." He died of heart failure a few minutes later.

Darren Gladstone
THE ULTIMATE DANGER CALLS FOR THE ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

X-MEN LEGENDS II
RISE OF APOCALYPSE

September 21, 2005

X-Men-Legends2.com

Upgrade, customize and unleash a massive arsenal of over 180 superpowers.

Co-op online and off with up to 4 players.
ELECTRIC MAYHEM

Messing around online, one game at a time. This month's victim: The Matrix Online

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE PLAY BAD GAMES? IS IT JUST TOO hard for them to admit that they wasted 20 (or 50) dollars? Are they like cultists who give away all their worldly possessions and then can't back out when it comes time to down a Kool-Aid and Drano cocktail? Then again, maybe they're just able to see something the rest of us can't. Maybe there's some hidden merit in a game that others dismissed out of hand because of superficial flaws. And so, we take the blue pill, with reporter's notepad in hand, and enter the Matrix.

Our journey started simply enough, with us wondering what people thought of The Matrix Online and Sony Online Entertainment's recent acquisition of the game from developer Monolith and publisher Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. Then it just got weird. Scott Sharkey

Scoop: Why are you still playing this game?
Teknorat: I guess the live events, the desire to find out what happens next—that and the community. A lot of people here have a close bond that you can't find in other MMOs.

Scoop: How do you feel about SOE buying The Matrix Online?
Teknorat: While on the one hand I'm sad to see Monolith go—let's face it, they put a lot of work into this game—on the other hand I feel SOE may have a positive influence overall. Sony gets some bad press over the way it maintains its MMOs, but people should keep in mind that Warner Bros. will not let The Matrix franchise die. I think on the whole, we should be optimistic.

Scoop: Who would win in a fight: Neo or Godzilia?
Teknorat: Godzilia, of course. Neo would throw the fight, collect his bribe, and go home for beers. Uh, what press are you with, exactly?

Scoop: How long did it take you to reach level 50?
Tigga: About three months....

Scoop: Three months. Wow. So why are you still playing this game?
Tigga: For the story and because I still have abilities to buy.

Scoop: Describe in single words only the good things that come into your mind about your mother.
Tigga: WTF. LMFAO.

Scoop: Why are you still playing this game?
NeonAngel: I enjoy walking around, fighting the other players, and the challenge of getting to level 50.

Scoop: How long have you been playing?
NeonAngel: About...a week now.

Scoop: If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?
NeonAngel: Hmm, maybe a willow tree.

Scoop: Do you have time to answer a few questions?
IChokeU....

Scoop: Why are you invisible?
IChokeU....

Scoop: Thank you for your time. [Curious, I followed him around for a few minutes. I later discovered, thanks to keen investigating skills, that IChokeU was sneaking around and looking up the digital dresses of virtual women and taking screenshots of them. Sadly, I'm not kidding.]

Scoop: How long did it take you to get to level 50?
Gawk: Total game playtime was 14 days, 12 hours. [I just made level 50 on Saturday.]

Scoop: Why are you still playing?
Gawk: PVP.

Scoop: Are you the One?
Gawk: No.

Scoop: Shucks.

WHY ARE YOU STILL PLAYING THE MATRIX ONLINE?
FOR EVERY CHOICE, A CONSEQUENCE. Will you be a noble warrior, a fearsome villain, or something in between? Fable: The Lost Chapters broadens the RPG adventure and the possibilities of the award-winning original, for both Microsoft Windows XP and Xbox. More lands to explore, more journeys to take, more lives to be lived. Look deep into yourself, and discover what you might become. www.microsoft.com/games/fable
The AMD Athlon™ X2 dual-core processor enables everyone to do more in less time by delivering exceptional multi-tasking capabilities and increased performance on digital media.

Dual-core technology is like having one processor responsible for running programs in the background while a second runs the application you want to work on. The AMD Athlon™ X2 dual-core processor brings true parallel processing to the desktop and can increase computing performance by up to 80%.
EXCLUSIVE INTEL!

GUNG HO XBOX OWNERS GOT TO SUIT UP FOR TOM CLANCY'S Ghost Recon 2 last November, but when it came to the tactical shooter's PC version, someone called the abort code. Had developer Red Storm forgotten Reccon's PC roots? "We didn't want to just port something from the Xbox with prettier graphics," says brand manager Adam Novickas. "The console version [of Ghost Recon 2] had a different feel that wouldn't have worked for PC gamers. Without the time and resources, we had to make a tough decision."

Now, Red Storm is investing its energy in Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter. The series' return to the PC means a return to detailed tactical maps, polished graphics, and of course, realistic near-future military gear. An Xbox 360 version is in the works, but what you won't find here is watered-down A.I. or over-the-shoulder console-ish third-person views. Novickas promises that this time "we'll deliver the game that PC players really want"—and ideally, in time for the coming holidays. Your full debriefing follows. / Darren Gladstone

HIT THE DECK!

Every FPS lets you go prone, crouch, and lean around corners. But when was the last time you dived for cover? It's probably the most obvious and realistic thing you'd do in a firefight, and it's being incorporated here. Caught out of position, soldiers can slide on their kneepads or lunge out of harm's way. You, your troops, and the enemy can (and will) use what's in the environment to avoid taking a slug to the chest.
WAR ISN'T PRETTY—OK, MAYBE A LITTLE

Big surprise: Recon will look great on your rig. Sure, the Xbox 360 and PC versions are similar when it comes to atmosphere. PC gamers, however, get treated to high dynamic range lighting and advanced shaders that’ll drop you in the middle of the hot zone and leave you squinting as you move from shade into the midday sun. Advanced Warfighter also takes advantage of advanced physics. This is one of the first games to test the waters of Ageia’s physics hardware technology (a separate card, due this winter, that handles in-game physics, allowing for thousands of objects to be manipulated while freeing up the computer to handle other tasks, like AI). Early adopters will have an absurd amount of environmental interactivity. Cheapskates: Don’t panic. You don’t need to go out and buy more hardware to play the game. The NovooleX software physics renderer, which works in conjunction with the physics cards, is potent in its own right and works as well as Havok.

TACTICAL COMMAND

Thanks to modern technology, battlefield command data is always there for you—even in the field. A Cross Com menu lets you command individual members of your four-man squad (more on that on page 38), but the real tactics come into play with your in-helmet aerial schematic of the battle zone. Like previous tactical Tom Clancy titles, the overhead map provides a more strategic view of the fight and enables you to give orders when you are away from the battle.

In missions where you control more than one squad, you can set up “Zulu” codes from this screen so you can execute flanking maneuvers midnight without having to call up the overlay map. You aren’t just commanding a couple men, though. When the need arises, call in Apache helicopters to swoop in close and provide air support for tactical strikes. And don’t forget your eyes in the sky: Unmanned drones remotely soar over the battlefield and report back the latest intel.

When it comes to tactics, savvy PC strategists can sense weak AI, and Novickas is pushing for more dedication to tweaking bots. AI gets further improvement for PCs, and the key to this is making the actions of the enemy more challenging and believable. Methodical bots will not succumb to cheap tactics. If they see your drone, they’ll shoot it out of the sky and then call in reinforcements to hunt you down. You’ll hear enemies communicate with each other in the field, and if they get into trouble, Novickas says they have an eerie drive for self-preservation. To emphasize the point, a number of soldiers are dropped into the middle of a car-strewn street. As vehicles blow up or get moved, the AI reacts to events and looks for safe ground.

This is all well and good for single-player campaigns, but what does it mean for Internet gaming? Well, the team isn’t ready to talk about that area just yet, as its plans are nowhere near final. Novickas did, however, cough up that “there will be PC-exclusive modes that focus more on tactics and strategy. Obviously, we’re not trying to be Battlefield 2,” he laughs. “The fights [in Advanced Warfighter] are smaller and more intense.” While there’s no official word on persistent stat tracking (à la BF2), we did learn that Red Storm is considering a sort of commander mode that puts one player in the command center to issue orders.

Novickas and the team also recognize that “the online community is what gives our games a long life, and we plan to support them.” Tools will be made available for would-be gamers and, from the look of early demos, they could be as simple to use as Crytek’s Far Cry kit. The editor works in-game, so you can see exactly what your changes on the map are doing to the game world.
UNIVERSAL SOLDIER

You may look at the technology here and think, “Yeah, maybe I’d see this in Aliens or Starship Troopers,” but this is all real and it’s being field-tested today. Don’t believe us? Check out the U.S. Army’s Future Force Warrior program at www.natick.army.mil/soldier/war.1.

Tomorrow’s troops will be equipped with a high-resolution display—the Cross Com monocular. Satellite and real-time data is fed to the eyepiece, and thanks to helmet-mounted cameras, it’s easy to keep track of squad members and see what they’re seeing. You also have a free-roaming UGV drone that you can deploy to ferret out enemy positions. Instant communication and instant access to everything happening on the battlefield is what will keep your team alive. Advanced Warrior is doing a pretty thorough job of putting you in a Ghost’s khakis.

That doesn’t mean all the kinks have been worked out by 2013. The Ghosts are one of the few teams field-testing this new gear, and they just so happen to be in Mexico City as things get grim. Careful not to spill too much about the single-player campaign, Novickas warns that at one point your goal will actually break down and you’ll have to go back to communicating in more “primitive” ways. You know, like actually talking. What gets us thinking, though, is how good a training tool this game could be for next-generation soldiers.

FUTURE FIREPOWER

You can’t stop terrorists with kind words. Fortunately, numerous new weapons bolster America’s arsenal. Here’s a taste of what’s to come.

FN SCAR AND HECKLER & KOCH XM8 RIFLES

A modular rifle, the XM8 will become the backbone of future fighting forces. The U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), though, has more specific needs. They wanted a more reliable rifle that could accommodate various caliber shells. With the SCAR, you can modify the rifle for various sniping or assault purposes and grab clips from fallen enemies—even if they’re using AK-47s.

XM-29: This experimental weapon is camera-equipped. It’s mounted on the ground, and it sends the image of the soldier to a vessel. Now you can get a first-person view of your weapon in the real world, too.

“COUNTERSNIPER” RIFLE: While Novickas didn’t have its number designation on hand, this weapon will allow combatants to see through walls. Then, equipped with high-caliber ammunition, snipers can penetrate obstructions to eliminate hiding targets.
GOOD VS. EVIL

PLAYER VS. PLAYER

EverQuest II

Desert of Flames

WHERE ADVENTURE COMES ALIVE™

Discover the mysteries of an exotic new realm in the first Expansion Pack for the critically acclaimed MMO, EverQuest II.

Desert of Flames brings PvP Arenas, vertical movement, and over 30 new areas to adventure and explore.

Enter the arena to fight for the title of Arena Champion with a robust battle formation and ranking system.

Confront Warring Factions, access Guild Vaults, and play up to Level 60 with Level Range increases.

WAIT TO TRY EQII! DOWNLOAD A TRIAL AT www.TRIALOFTHEISLE.COM
Welcome
to the new way to buy & sell Video Games!

- Free Listings until 2007!
- Create Your own Store
- Featured Product Listings
- Rating System
- Bulk Uploading

GAME SWAP ZONE
www.gameswapzone.com

BUY OR SELL
PLAYSTATION • PLAYSTATION 2 • XBOX • PSP • GAME CUBE • N-GAGE • GAME BOY • PC GAMES • DVDS • AND MORE
SERIOUS CO-OP

Can 16 people play well together? We tried to do just that in Serious Sam II

PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Croteam GENRE: Shooter RELEASE DATE: Out Now

CO-OP HANDS-ON

You can never have too much of a good thing. Or can you? If ever a game put that saying to the test, it's Serious Sam II. Following its predecessor's well-deserved reputation for over-the-top action, this sequel gets a pure shot of BALCO-grade steroids with 16-player cooperative play. (Well, Computer Gaming World's playtest was cooperative until someone turned on the friendly fire option.) Words like "insane" fail to describe the utter chaos that ensues when a full group of fraggers takes on this game's ginormous horde of monsters. /
A deep audible gulp comes from somewhere as the install disc drops into the tray. What am I thinking? Putting Beta 1 of an untested operating system—Windows Vista, the upcoming successor to Windows XP—on my computer? Well, it promises right here in the Vista reviewers’ guide that there will be “less downtime, fewer IT hassles, and greater productivity.”

It’s time to put your money where your mouth is, Microsoft. Writing an entire article in the new OS without backing it up is the tech equivalent of operating without a net. Well, here goes nothing.

**VISTA: THE IT BUILDR**

Being a beta (and an IT-centric beta, at that), this Vista has a number of things that may not be of much interest to the average gamer. It also doesn’t help that since this is such an early version of the new Windows—build No. 5112, to be precise—a lot of stuff will affect the gaming crowd hasn’t been included yet. Nevertheless, since the OS will replace XP and will, therefore, affect all of our PC-centric lives in the near future, we dug right in.

With Vista, things are supposed to be different right at start-up. Microsoft promises a responsive OS that’ll fire up quickly, so long as you’ve got at least 512MB of RAM. Our test computer, a basic 2.8GHz Intel PC with 768MB RAM, went from off to ready in about 45 seconds—a full 20 seconds faster than the same machine running Windows XP. Taking it a step further, a fresh top-of-the-line monster machine with 1GB of RAM took longer to load XP than the less-powerful rig took to get Vista running.

**MS OS X**

Once it boots up, the Windows interface itself isn’t all too dissimilar to what you’re already used to seeing...on a Mac. Hey, not complaining here, just pointing out the obvious. Seriously, though, right now it looks more like a finely tuned Windows XP with a few Mac inspirations thrown in. The whole point here was to streamline and give the OS a polish—and give games a higher profile.

In Vista, you don’t dig to find files. Contextual search tools are everywhere. Even the top navigation inside Windows lets you quickly jump up or down levels and see the folders you’re working in. The real fun, though, comes when you click the Start button. A contextual search bar is right there. Typing in “do” calls up all the programs on your PC that start with those two letters, and up pops the shortcuts you’re looking for. For those using Google’s experimental Gmail, it’s not too far off from what you see happening there. The next thing you’ll notice is the Games folder, on the Start menu next to My Documents and the all-important shortcut to Music. It’s official: Gamers are no longer second-class citizens.

The Games link opens up a whole directory housing shortcuts to everything from Solitaire to Doom 3. It will become your hub. The best way to describe the layout is to compare it to Media Player 10. Inside the window, you’ll see a game’s box art, ESRB rating, and publisher and developer credits. A back-end server, similar to the CDBB system that gives you music info, provides basic credits for each game. Mr. Gates and friends: You need to contact Mobygames.com. That website is an incredible database of gaming information, box art, and screens dating back to Apple II titles. Making gaming a big part of the OS could, in theory, make this a big target for advocate groups who want to crack down on gaming. Thankfully, parental controls for Windows Vista have been in the works for a long time now.

The admin account on your computer can set all sorts of playing parameters as determined by the ESRB. Only want the kids to play E-rated games? Click a button. You’ve just shut the tykes out of Half-Life 2. Then there’s the activity logger that allows you to see everything that they tried to access (see sidebar on p. 70 for more). Want to lay down the law that Junior

For the Five IT Administrators Reading CGW for Networking Advice

Here’s the high-level breakdown of this build: Security is fundamental. Whether it’s utilizing firewalls, offering protection from malware, or just making sure your kids don’t screw up the PC while you’re away, Vista promises to have your back.

Also, networking and connectivity go hand in hand, and that’s another big part of the new Windows. It already looks a hell of a lot easier to set up a wireless network. A Bluetooth-like discovery mode lets you see people with Wi-Fi support and easily check off whether you want to allow them access to your network.

**VISTA LOOKS LIKE A FINELY TUNED WINDOWS XP WITH SOME MAC INSPIRATIONS.**
In 1858 the U.S. was a house divided.
In 2012...it shatters.

SHATTERED UNION

Become the leader of one of seven factions vying for control of a fractured United States during a second Civil War! Form alliances, invade cities and mind politics in this turn-based strategy game that could be a sign of things to come.

Available Now
www.shatteredunion.com
> can only play between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. after school? Done. Let's say you don't want him to play any T-rated games that have the use of alcohol; you can lock those out as well. As long as the ESRB tracks it, Vista can block it.

Those, sadly, are the only gaming-centric parts of this build of Vista. Now for a couple game tests: World of WarCraft played without a hitch thanks to ATI's beta drivers. Reflective surfaces like poles in Half-Life 2's City 17, on the other hand, looked opaque. Doom 3 spelled doom for Vista, but to be fair, there are "known issues" with that game, possibly because it makes calls outside of DirectX.

But who are we to complain? Microsoft isn't exactly shipping the OS tomorrow—more like the end of 2006, if even that early. Expect more-detailed coverage here in CGW when Beta 2 comes out. For now, though, we're done. One day, a few minor driver issues, and a game crash later, we survived. Time to hit Save. / Darren Gladstone

**COMING UP IN BETA 2... HOPEFULLY**

**WINSAT**

When done, Vista will ship with the Windows Assessment Tool (WinSAT). It isn't available yet, but this applet will be one of the keys to better game performance. WinSAT is a logging tool that automatically scales the OS and games for your PC. It works something like this:

As a game installs, WinSAT polls the game and even tests (offscreen) the performance levels of your graphics card. How many onscreen objects can your system handle? Does the machine have a physics accelerator card or multicore CPU? You get the idea. That information is stored in the background and WinSAT, knowing exactly what your machine is capable of, optimizes each game so that you'll get the best experience possible. It won't run in the background the whole time, but it is capable of detecting major performance drops. It'll pinpoint new installs or malware that is screwing things up.

**DIRECTX 10**

Here's something to chew on: The next-gen game consoles will effectively be working off of DirectX 9+. PC games are going to get a hell of a lot better. At Vista's launch, there will be support for DX10 and a legacy version of DX9. The specs are still in flux and are only being shown to developers at this early stage, but what we do know is that the focus is on stability and removing old, unnecessary parts of the application program interface. There will also be strict requirements for future 3D cards. These cards will need a new geometry shader function and common shader core between pixel and vertices for unprecedented levels of detail.

**ONE DAY, A FEW MINOR DRIVER ISSUES, AND A GAME CRASH LATER. WE SURVIVED. TIME TO HIT SAVE.**
Who says money can't buy love?

Intimately elegant and intuitively intelligent every Saitek product glows with striking good looks and eye-catching style. Perhaps it's their sculpted lines and perfect curves that make them so irresistible. Or perhaps it's their incomparable features and abilities that set them apart from all others. Then again it could be their sophisticated intelligence and programmability that caters for every need you have. Maybe it's the way they feel or the way they respond when you gently touch them, instructing them to do what you want. It could also be the superior craftsmanship, passion and attention to detail that goes into making the world's most loved and wanted PC game gear. And when all is considered there is little else to explain the ultimate exhilaration and satisfaction you'll discover the moment you unwrap yours.

ECLIPSE
- The keyboard for use in any light! Eclipse's brilliant TruVu illumination defines each key - even in total darkness.

CYBORG EVO
- The fully adjustable joystick for left or right handed gaming
- 12 buttons, and 8-way hat are fully programmable
- 3D Rudder Twist
- Also available in FORCE FEEDBACK and WIRELESS versions

P2600 RUMBLE FORCE PAD
- New Mouse-Look function for First-Person games built right in!
- Dual Stick design with D-Pad and 10 programmable buttons
- Rumble Force vibration feedback

X52 FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM
- The world's most advanced Flight Controller with Seven axis Stick and Throttle.
- Two stage trigger, three hats, mouse cursor controller and multiple buttons for over 300 programmable commands
- Precision control through non-contact detectors
- Multi-Function Display with back-lit LCD
- Comfortable rubber grip surfaces
- Stick adjustable for all hand sizes

www.saitekusa.com
FRAGLAND
The game of attending QuakeCon—and surviving

THE RULES

It was 10 years ago that a tribe of 30 hardcore gamers first gathered at a Best Western in Garland, Texas to play Quake and Doom for the whole weekend. What started out as a small festival has since become “four days of peace, love, and rockets” at the Woodstock of gaming. QuakeCon has grown into a huge geek party, a festival for the hardcore. Activision brings out its big guns to show off new titles to the faithful while hardware manufacturers trot out the new goods for the gearheads. People travel from all over the world to compete for prizes (prize money this year totaled $150,000) and props, or to simply hang with a bunch of like-minded folks. An estimated 8,000 gamers are on hand to play and party day-in, day-out for 96 straight hours. Couldn’t make it to Texas for the festivities? Don’t worry, just grab some dice and play along at home. The first one to make it out the Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center with both liver and sanity intact is the winner.

/ Darren Gladstone

DOOM: THE MOVIE!

Question: Will film critics complain that the movie has “monster clusters?” Fans were treated to a roundtable discussion and showing of the first-person view segment (no sound here, the audience was stone silent) of a new software from id Software. Todd Hollenshead talked about the interactive film that made him feel as though he was in the game. However, the real highlight was watching Hollenshead say, “Universal found duct tape on Mars.”

QUAKE 4 MULTIPLAYER!

First off, there are no vehicles in Quake 4 multiplayer! This is strictly old-school action, inspired by Quake III: Arena. “But,” Raven Software’s Brian Raffel muses, “we can’t stop modders from creating a mech deathmatch level.” What we are seeing at right now are eight or nine DM maps, five capture the flag maps where one side is Syrogs and the other Las. The difference between the two teams is strictly superficial, one tournament map, and arena CTF. For the sake of QuakeCon, 12 players (the game should support 16 by launch) squared off on the Fragging Yard map. Here are some pointers: 1) The zoom scope on the machine gun does more damage. 2) Learn to lead targets with the rail gun. 3) The hyperblaster is good in tight firefights. 4) Don’t call the best player a “nerd.” He may single you out.

START!
PEOPLE LINE UP A DAY EARLY!

Take aspirin after absorbing everything Carmack says. Miss a turn. See a demo of Xbox 360 Quake 4. Move ahead one. Fast.

Someone remixed the Doom 3 music. Sweet! Slap on headphones and miss a turn.

Chow time! Domino’s delivery guy is beat but making a killing. Pay $10.
THAT'S A COMPUTER?
Welcome to the world of hardware. We all know what a computer is, but do you know what it's like to build one from scratch? Take Troy Fryogle, Watching the Heilwood movies wasn't enough for him. He built a rig that won the NZP$15,000 prize. The modding community has never been stronger.

READY TO RUMBLE
Behold the new Doom 3 champ: Gopher! In a tense match he beat back Rocketboy to secure the $25,000 prize. PURRHI walked away with $10,000 for winning the Quake II retro deathmatch and used/check6 controlled Enemy Territory to the tune of $5,000. We were also surprised to see why so many women were at the show this year until we remembered that the organizers started a Ms. QuakeCon competition. Personally, I think the champion should be chosen based on merit, regardless of gender.

ID'S JOHN CARMACK SPEAKS
Anybody who recreationally talks about building a rocket ship is bound to see things on a whole other level. "Everyone is saturated with the hype of the new consoles," he says, "and they will become more important." Now, more than ever, we can essentially target the Xbox 360, PS3, and PC with more or less a common code base. "The big shocker was that he said initial work will start with the Xbox360 on all games going forward. He loves the development platform (he can code closer to the core), and says that it makes things easy to port over. "There's always the trade-off on the PC of flexibility versus rigid consoles." It's much easier to code for the console and best up for the PC.

What about multi-core processing? "Game code is nasty... and especially harsh for multi-core," says Carmack. "Early on, the results will be ugly... and the big advances won't come until the generation beyond the Xbox 360 and PS3."

WINNER!
YOU SURVIVED QUAKECON
Sneak in some hands-on time with Stubbs the Zombie. Miss one turn.

FATALITY MEANS BUSINESS
A lot happens during QuakeCon for someone like Jonathan "Fatality" Wang. The new PC gamer says that he's spent $30,000 on an Old West-style gun collection for a bit point. "Someone new is always looking for an old gun," he said. "The QuakeCon is the place where you buy them." Fatality is always looking for new guns to test out. If he could, he'd store one in his own back pockets! When asked if he was drinking, he responded, "I could but I don't, I never drink!"
100 BUCKS

IT'S BURNING A HOLE IN YOUR POCKET. GO SPEND IT

FIGURES
Mage Knight 2.0 Starter Set
$20 MAGEKNIGHT.COM
Reviews editor Ryan Scott took a sneak peek at Mage Knight: Apocalypse during a recent visit to Namco, and it's continuing to shape up. Want to get a feel for what the MK universe is all about? Let the action ensue with the Mage Knight 2.0 Starter Set, which is part Magic: The Gathering, part action-figure collection.

RINGER
Ring Thing
$10 THINKGEEK.COM
One ring to open them all! On those late gaming nights, you never know when you'll need to crack that next bottle of Bawls—or Budweiser. The Ring Thing is the real lord of the rings. The only downside of this useful bauble is that it won't turn you evil. Damn!

MUSIC
DM & Jemini: Ghetto Pop Life
$17 AMAZON.COM
Danger Mouse is a turntable master. He produces tight hooks, good beats, and a sound you can pick out anywhere. You may have heard his work on the Gorillaz's new disc, Demon Days, but that's just a small taste of what DM has accomplished here. Partner-in-crime Jemini serves up the lyrics that make tracks like "The Only One," "Ghetto Pop Life," and "Don't Do Drugs" move you. Check out www.dangermouse.net.com for free tracks and samples.

PULP
Infinite Crisis
$4 DC COMICS.COM
A chain of events in DC comicdom over the past year has been leading up to this moment. Something serious is about to go down, and we hear one classic character is on his or her way to comic heaven (our guess: Wonder Woman). After this limited series finishes up, the entire DC universe skips forward one year, and the survivors are still picking up the pieces.

TOOL
Utili-Key
$10 THINKGEEK.COM
Any self-respecting geek feels naked without at least some gadget on his person at all times. And what better way to go MacSayer style than with a handy tool that hangs on your key chain? A Leatherman is nice, but check out this six-in-one tool. It looks like a key, but as soon as you unfold it, you've got everything you need to crack open your PC.

PIPEDAINE
Save some money for these upcoming games

OCTOBER 2005

PUBLISHER

25 to Life
Eidos Interactive
Age of Empires III
Microsoft
Black & White 2
Electronic Arts
Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood
Ubisoft
Call of Duty 2
Activision
City of Villains
NCsoft
F.E.A.R.
Ubisoft
Heroes of the Pacific
Red Mile
Jaws Unleashed
Majesco
Missile Command: The Year Of The Drone
Dreamcatcher
Serious Sam II
2K Games
Shattered Union
2K Games
Stacked
Mythic Media
Stubbins the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse
Anypay
The Movies
Activision
TimeShift
Alari

NOVEMBER 2005

PUBLISHER

Auto Assault
NCsoft
Battlefield 2: Special Forces
Electronic Arts
Civilization IV
2K Games
Conflict: Global Tension
2K Games
Dyson's World 4
Koei
Gun
Activision
Hammer & Sickle
CDV Software
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
Electronic Arts
Star Wars Battlefront II
LucasArts
The Chronicles of Narnia
Buena Vista
The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe
Buena Vista
The Matrix: Path of Neo
Alari

DECEMBER 2005

PUBLISHER

King Kong
Ubisoft
The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II
Electronic Arts
TALL/WINTER 2006

PUBLISHER

America's Army
U.S. Army
Special Forces Overmatch
Codemasters
Crime Life: Gang Wars
Konami
Dominions III
Stardivision
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers
THQ
NEA Lion 06
Electronic Arts
Need for Speed: Most Wanted
Electronic Arts
NHL 06
Electronic Arts
NHL Eastside Hockey Manager 2005
Sega
Quake 4
Activision
SUN: Soul of the Ultimate Nation
Webzen
The Apprentice
Legacy Interactive
The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer
THQ
TOCA Race Driver 2006
Codemasters
TrackMania Sunrise eXtreme
Enlight
Vietcong 2
2K Games

POCKET CHANGE: $1.00
We built the Turbo-Cool®1KW the way we’ve made power supplies since 1985 — with proven, upscale technology, uncompromised quality and conservative, honest ratings.

**Turbo-Cool®1KW’s Next-Gen Specs:**
- 1000W Continuous and 1100W Peak
- Fits Std. ATX Cases (20” min. depth)
- +12VDC Rails Total 66A (70A Peak)
- High Efficiency (85%) with .99 PFC
- Amazingly Quiet Cooling System
- Complete Array of Output Connectors
- EPS12V, SLI, and SSI Compatibility
- 5-Year Warranty; Unbeatable Support
ENJOY ALL YOUR ENTERTAINMENT WITH AN IBUYPOWER MEDIA-FX PREINSTALLED WITH MICROSOFT® WINDOWS® XP MEDIA CENTER EDITION.

ENJOY TV, MOVIES, MUSIC, PHOTOS, AND MORE—ALL AT YOUR FINGERTIPS WITH A SINGLE REMOTE ON AN IBUYPOWER MEDIA-XP PREINSTALLED WITH MICROSOFT® WINDOWS® XP MEDIA CENTER EDITION.

WWW.IBUYPOWER.COM

- Intel® 1845 Chip 1066MHz FSB HT Ready Main Board
- Intel® Pentium® 4 Dual-Core Processor 920
- Celeron 1024MB Dual Channel DDR2-667 Memory
- S-ATA 250GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
- 16x Double Layer DVD±R/RW + CD-R/RW Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ 7800GT 256MB 16X PCI Express Video Card Powered by Xidma
- TV Tuner Card w/ Remote Control
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- FREE Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter
- Free 1-Year 24/7 iCare Deluxe Technical Support + On-Site Service

FROM $1159

- Intel® 1915 Chip 600MHz FSB HT Ready Main Board
- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 630 with HT Technology
- Celeron 1024MB Dual Channel DDR2-667 Memory
- S-ATA, 160GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
- 16x Double Layer DVD±R/RW + CD-R/RW Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ 6600 256MB 16X PCI Express Video Card Powered by Xidma
- TV Tuner Card w/ Remote Control
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- FREE Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter
- Free 1-Year 24/7 iCare Deluxe Technical Support + On-Site Service

FROM $1099

- Rodinex™ X-1 Gaming Case
- AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ 4 Chip Motherboard
- 16X PCI Express
- Corsair 1024MB DDR400 Memory
- 160GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
- 16x Double Layer DVD±R/RW + CD-R/RW Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ 6200 w/TurboCache 256MB 16X PCI Express Video CardPowered by Xidma
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- FREE Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter
- FREE 1-Year 24/7 iCare Deluxe Technical Support + On-Site Service
- Optional TV Tuner Card + Remote Control Add $70

FROM $769

IBUYPOWER RECOMMENDS MICROSOFT® WINDOWS® XP MEDIA CENTER EDITION 2005.

Order Toll Free 888.462.3899

©2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
A FIRE-IN-THE-SKY CATACLYSM SPARKS a new era of shared existence between surviving Sapiens and their swifter, sturdier, stronger offshoots, a species of genetically gifted Alternatives. Confined to separate city-states (read: servers), each species’ citizens buy and sell, swap and barter. They swagger and chat on street corners, scheme and build alliances in back alleys. And—their eyes on a limited source of a new, near-limitless energy—each species leaves its sprawling sanctuary to wage war in the wilds. Welcome to the brave new genre-bending world of massively multiplayer online first-person shooter Huxley.
Webzen's brave new genre-bending world

BY SHAWN ELLIOT
NOW ENTERING NOSTALONIA: POPULATION 5,000

It all begins in the big city, a busy hub to everything Huxley has to offer. From here your one-of-a-kind character colludes with friends and conspires against foes, settles in and sets off to war.

COOPERATION, PAGE 84

Offers for class- and cash-boosting cooperative missions arrive via e-mail notices and Nostalonia’s nonplayable citizens.
1 COMMUNITY, PAGE 82
Citizens mix, mingle, shop, and swap in the city's swarming immensity. Wealthier types traverse it in their own vehicles.

3 COMPETITION, PAGE 86
Enlist in an existing clan or recruit members for your own. Then, enter battle areas to wage online war for the world's remaining energy source.
COMMUNITY

TODAY, THE SAPIEN CITY OF Nostalonia's streets and squares and transfer stations are still. (Korean developer Webzen's urban planners won't zone their metropolis of tomorrow for residency until sometime in '08.) And yet it all looks lived in, as if citizens have only just shuttered their windows and caged their shops under curfew. A hot evening glows upper stories and roofs in light, balconies and cornices contrasting sharply with the drab facades beneath. It's a mash-up of modern science and old-timey steamworks, of Western symmetry and Eastern neon.

Lead designer Sang Hun Kim asks us to picture stragglers leaning against streetlamps on the edges of sidewalks, to imagine sharing the space with 5,000-some other occupants and scores of nonplayable characters (NPCs), much as MMORPG players in World of Warcraft and Guild Wars do. To the first-person aficionado whose worlds often exist largely to wage war in, day one is disorienting. Toils and limited transportation prevent recent arrivals from losing their way in the city's 50 labyrinthine square blocks, but its densely developed boroughs are daunting. Accommodating NPCs offer tourist-safe itineraries, but this is your home, and it's only other human inhabitants who have the street smarts you'll need to survive.

COVET THY NEIGHBOR

Citizens in the streets of this Sapian city-to-be (pick the Alternative path and you'll live in that species' capital, "a cyberpunk answer to the Sapiens' steampunk aesthetics," says Kim) traffic in small talk. Snippets of chitchat hint at conspiracies in conspiracies—often involving Huxley, a behind-the-curtain scientist—and violent run-ins with so-called Hybrids (see box). Often, we imagine, an object-obsessed citizenry asks, "Where'd he get that?" and "How can I get one?"

"Koreans and Chinese don't demand a lot of diversity in their characters' appearances," says Kim, "but North Americans—who we're designing Huxley for—are different, which is why we're letting you customize your character's facial features, hairstyle, and fashion." When a tall-walking clan of champions swagger by in tailor-made helmets and armor, you tend to talk. And when you see that the group has its own hall of heroes, clan flag flying overhead, it's settled: You have to be one of the kids who's doing his own thing.

In the meantime, however, affluence accumulates incrementally. No longer tethered just to the places your feet can take you, you begin taking trains to new sections of the buyosphere, and soon after, you find your own set of wheels. Your apartment (a virtual space accessed via menu, unlike the top-ranking clans' actual command centers) fills with boots, gloves, guns, and war booty. But first you've got to make money....
- A guy-to-girl ratio of 6:1...yup, it's still a shooter.

- Encompassing industrial districts, uptown malls, and seaside developments, Sapien and Alternative metropolises stretch for miles.

**ALTERNATIVES**
Children of the postapocalyptic atom, Alternatives created a city called Eaka in the ashes of Eastern Europe.

**SAPIENS**
One of Huxley's two playable races, along with Alternatives (right), Sapiens are surviving humans who find sanctuary in Nostalonia, a city-state combining old and new architecture and Eastern and Western culture.

**HYBRIDS**
Said to be the sterile offspring of Sapien-Alternative cross-species pairings, nonplayable Hybrids haunt Huxley's underground.
CLASS ACTIONS

Status matters, but so does how you play. It's not a stratified society of entitled heroes and wretched have-nots. We encourage cross-class party play. Higher-level players can get experience points for helping out lower-level players, and the bigger the level gap, the bigger the bonus.

Some missions take you within the walls of the opposing faction's capital.
COOPERATION

2 NOSTALGIA'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE is nil. Sort through the hubbub (Huxley's hobnobbing citizens lounge and gesture on command like MMORPG idlers), make your name known among NPC brokers and merce and middlemen, and your e-mail inbox begins to bulge with assignments.

Often, entry-level wet work has to do with hunting Hybrids—morlock-like misfits who venture to the surface in smash-and-grab gangs. "Say that Hybrids swipe a weapons cache from a supplier," Kim says. "You'll then need to either put together a party or hire [computer-controlled] mercenaries to track them down and get the guns back." Players collaborate closely, but combat is the priority, not puzzles. "Design by numbers says all 10 players in a party need to stand on pressure plates to open a door or disarm a trap. We do it differently. One goal might be to get everyone in a group across a bridge while staving off hordes of Hybrids. You can't all go at once—success requires strategy, coordination, and communication. It takes fast trigger fingers and faster thinking."

"Striking action, speed, and stability are at the heart of Huxley," Kim continues. "We prefer Unreal Tournament's twitch play to the slower, more plodding pace of some military shooters. And that, of course, calls for sure-fire stability, which is why we're wedging Unreal Engine 3 with Welzip's own networking and server technology. At the same time, we want more. We want players to start living now lives in the postapocalyptic world we're creating, a world of continuous change in which characters grow and form the communities you get in other MMOs."

BUILDING CHARACTER
After Hybrid hunts or other knottier capers, you'll find yourself flush with cash and no shortage of outlets in which to spend it. Brick-and-mortar shopping, impromptu person-to-person transactions, and supervised, taxable trading all figure into Huxley's consumer economy.

Commodities include single-use articles (e.g., amplified rader) and guns—gads and gobs of guns. "One of our babies—call it the delayed-action sniper rifle—shoots time-bomb bullets," Kim says. "Get him and you'll hear a beeping sound for five seconds and then blow up. Plus, when one player takes a slug, other party members can hear the countdown, too—it puts 'em into a panic as they try to sort out who hit the bullet and get clear before it goes boom."

While purchasing power gets you gear, it's all-important experience points—also acquired in combat—that let you equip it. According to Kim, "Huxley's level system isn't the same as those in most MMOs. First, we're setting the initial level cap at 50. Then every 10 levels comprise a class (the first class is levels 1 through 10, second class is levels 11 through 20, etc.). It's when you change classes that you gain the licenses that let you use additional guns, gear, and gadgets. Still, even slight differences in damage and defense can upset a hyperactive shooter like Huxley, so you won't see a dramatic disparity between lower- and higher-level players. "Regular RPG growth systems make no sense in FPSes," Kim says. "You know, why should someone do more damage because he's 'stronger' than an opponent using the same weapon?"

"WE PREFER UNREAL TOURNAMENT'S TWITCH PLAY TO THE SLOWER, MORE PLODDING PACE OF SOME MILITARY SHOOTERS."

—LEAD DESIGNER, SANG HUN KIM

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GAS GIANTS

Didn't PlanetSide patent the supersized, persistent-world shooter? Not so, says Huxley's lead designer, Sung Hun Kim: "We're making the first true MMOFPS. Sony's game was good—we held its strategy and innovation in the highest regard and have spent long hours in it—but it lacked the intensity and twitch factor of stuff like Unreal Tournament or Quake. Huxley's PVP is fast and powerful. We're placing more weight on players' skill than on their characters' stats so that a talented player can prevail over a better-armed enemy, even with a basic rifle. Plus, we're offering compelling single-player and cooperative components along with extensive community support.

Huxley is huge, a persistent world where players own individual housing, interact with NPCs, and build relationships with other users. Its narrative and game-play connect naturally to each player's growth. You won't find these features in PlanetSide."
IN THE WILDS BEYOND THE CITY'S WALLS, WAR-BATTERED trees stand like scarecrows in saw grass. Beneath, mining stations extract the rare, energy-yielding Lunarite resource; above, armies amass here and there—at first in high-flying fast-attack craft and then in dropship-deposited armored personnel carriers.

While cooperative campaigning earns experience and cash, 120-player army-versus-army clashes (Huxley’s PVP solution) buy bragging rights and rank. "Communication and coordination are crucial," Kim says, and the best way to assure you'll have both is to organize yourselves in fighting outfits, "to create—and recruit for—your own clans. If members arrive at a war zone wielding rocket launchers and wearing heavy armor, they'll only have a small chance at winning in close-quarters combat. On the other hand, a group of guys with a wide range of rifles and armor—a clan in which each member contributes a small part in a planned approach—will have the advantage."

Chest-thumping matters, but the benefits of soldier-tested, Patton-approved battle plans are material, too. According to Kim, "Successful clans control whole city sections back home [in Nostalonia]." Certain buildings become theirs to decorate with emblems and banners, and even neighboring businesses begin offering members-only discounts to their warrior society's celebrated class. More important, your heroism keeps the current flowing in Huxley's power-parched cities.

TO WAR!

Look at the power-transfer stations and processing plants—links in an electrically engineered chain crisscrossing the planet's barren ridges—as capture points in Battlefield 2. As with the bunkers and mud-brick blocks in Electronic Arts' Jack-of-all-trades game, your goal is to seize and secure them, except events at one node here affect the entire network. "Every action in the battlefield alters other areas in real time," Kim says. "For example, let's say we have battle area A and battle area B; where energy from the mines in A supports a nearby base in B. So, if enemies capture A, B then loses power and its defense systems go down."

A case study in convergence—splicing first-person shooting with roleplaying, and Epic's Unreal Engine 3 with Webzen's own networking code—Huxley also saves space for mano a mano melee within its world at war. "Four players from each faction can descend into the Lunarite mines and fight for the energy resource in the middle of massive engagements," Kim says. "It's Quake Arena-like close-quarters combat."
TRANS PACIFIC TITAN

Where'd newcomer publisher Webzen get the chops—and cash—to pull off an undertaking as hugely daunting as Huxley? Think: Korea's MMO-crazed masses and China's one-thousand-million-man market. The company claims its Asia-only MMO Mu has wrangled more than 56 million registered users worldwide. Now $150 million richer, Webzen's eight studios are working on as many new titles, including the North America-bound Huxley, All Points Bulletin, and Soul of the Ultimate Nation.
Win an Xbox 360™
and these great games every day in November!

Just go to www.1UP.com
and sign up to win!

Sponsored by:

2K SPORTS and 1UP.com
You can play with others or play with yourself

**Multi-player**

- Battlefield 2
  - $49.95
- World of Warcraft
  - $49.95
- Matrix Online
  - $44.95

**Single-player**

- Silent Hunter 3
  - $39.95
- Gary Grigsby's World At War
  - $39.95
- Dungeon Siege 2
  - $48.95

www.chipsbits.com

EVERY GENRE • ALL PLATFORMS • BOARDGAMES • HARDWARE • HINT BOOKS
HARD-TO-FIND GAMES INCLUDING STRATEGY & SIMS PEN & PAPER
SPECIAL OFFERS & BARGAINS • PHONE OPERATORS AVAILABLE • PROFESSIONAL SERVICE SINCE 1989

PO Box 234, Dept. 11410, 2520 VT Rte. 100N, Rochester, VT 05767 • INT'L 802.767.3033 • FAX 802.767.1124 • US 800.699.GAME (4263)
CHANGE IS GOOD

AS YOU THUMB THROUGH THE REVIEWS SECTION, take note of two changes that debut with this issue. First up is Line of Attack, our new monthly war-gaming column by longtime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk. The market for war games is pretty healthy, and there are far, far too many of them for us to review in the magazine every issue. If these games are your cup of tea, Line of Attack is the perfect place to get a heads-up on what you should be playing—and looking forward to—each month.

The other big addition is the Next Level page. While we traditionally don't review patches at CGW, we do want to keep our readers informed about popular mods in the PC community, as well as crucial patches to online games like Battlefield 2 and City of Heroes. To kick things off, we give you the final word on one of the biggest MMO patches in recent memory: World of WarCraft: Battlegrounds. Enjoy these new sections—and if there's a mod or patch that deserves our attention, let us know at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

REVIEW STANDARDS

We review only final, gold, released-to-retail code, no betas or "near-final, reviewable" builds. We don't review patches, with the exceptions of those for online games like MMOs that autoupdate as a standard part of their operation and those selected for our patch review page. We do this so we are reviewing exactly what you, the consumer, are buying.

All games are rated on a simple five-star scale. One-star games are utter garbage, three-star games should appeal to die-hard fans of the genre, and the rare five-star game is an instant classic. Only the best games—receiving four and a half stars or better—are awarded an Editors' Choice.
IF WE RATED GAMES BASED ON EFFORT alone, *Dungeon Siege II* would get a perfect score. In fact, if you made a checklist of or conducted focus-group tests on everything action-RPG fans might want in a game—as Gas Powered Games and its corporate overlords at Microsoft no doubt did—you might come up with a game just like *DS2*. You want tons of monsters to kill? Check. Hordes of that law? Check. An expandable party system, coop multiplayer, and a branching skill tree? Check, check, and check.

But here’s the thing: All the features in the world don’t make a game great if they’re just tossed in; there needs to be a sense of accomplishment, reward, and forward momentum. *DS2* throws so much stuff at you all the time that, despite the pleasures to be had, it ends up being more exhausting than anything else. This is one game that needs to scale back and let us really earn our rewards before handing them to us on a silver platter.

**IT'S MY PARTY**

*DS2* returns us once more to the generic fantasy world of Aranna, where good and evil battle, elves with pointy ears brandish longbows, and princesses wind up missing. In spite of all this, *DS2*’s story is actually much more engaging than that of its predecessor; it starts off in a fairly unconventional way, with you on the wrong side of the law, captured and forced into doing the bidding of the good guys. Over the course of three long acts—each divided into multiple chapters with tons of quests and subquests—the story plays out (with the occasional somber Peter Jackson-esque cut-scene) in a compelling manner, though it’s nearly undone by often interminable and poorly written stretches of dialogue, made worse by laughably bad voice-acting.

In any event, you start by creating a character from among four playable races: magic-based dryads and elves, melee-centric half-giants, or generalist humans. You don’t explicitly choose a class; you simply become a certain class—fighter, ranger, nature mage, or combat mage—by fighting monsters and earning skill points in a particular style. These points are dumped into a branching skill tree that allows you to further customize your character (by adding stun damage or fortified armor to a fighter, for example). There’s more freedom here than in most games of this type; you can fight in any way you like and earn skill points in any class, though obviously it’s much more effective to concentrate your points in one specific area.

As you explore the world, you meet characters who offer to join your party... just one initially, but up to four during your first playthrough—and by the third time, if you have 150 or so hours to spare, you can recruit up to six characters. As expected, these extra warriors help to fill in any combat specialties you might be lacking in.

The best party member, oddly enough, is your pet—which happens to possess *DS2*’s coolest innovation: He can eat any of the loot you acquire (sort of like a living garbage disposal), and his abilities improve based on what you feed him. Not only is this a good way to spare yourself repeated trips to vendors, but it
also transforms your pet into a near-indestructible monster of a party member. As I explored the wide world of Aranna, I could always count on my pet scorpion to survive any battle, no matter how bad it got.

The gigantic area maps employ the generic basics of the genre (jungles, deserts, snowy mountains, etc.), but still make for fun exploration thanks to the detailed, multilevel terrain and all sorts of secret areas hidden away in the nooks and crannies. Players who enjoy the peculiar pleasure of watching automaps fill in will have much to keep them busy. On the other hand, the interface is boxy and clunky; many in-game windows, like character panels and inventory screens, are small, cluttered, and hard to read. After 40 hours, I still couldn't remember which armor slot was for hands and which was for feet.

**TOO MUCH OF NOTHING**

But as harsh as it sounds, the real problem with *DS2* is the game itself. As Diablo taught us, much fun can be had from clicking buttons of monsters to death and collecting their loot... and during long stretches of *DS2*, I convinced myself that I was having a good time. But when you get right down to it, none of it—neither the combat nor the loot itself—is very compelling.

The monster A.I. is excellent at times, knowing, for example, to target my weak nature mage first. But it was far too easy early on to keep him alive and constantly autocasting group heals on my party, so there was rarely a threat of death... and when it did come, conventional genre annoyances like corpse runs and monster respawn were all present and accounted for. As the hours accumulated, the entire game began to feel a bit like mowing the lawn. That is to say, a chore.

Worse, *DS2*’s monsters rarely drop anything of interest. When every other item is "rare" or "exceptional," it’s hard to believe that they are either. Barely halfway through the game, I had so much money and so much good armor that I just stopped picking stuff up—frankly, there's just too much of everything and not enough that stands out. It’s the game’s fundamental flaw; I don’t need to collect 400 pieces of armor if only three of them are ever going to be any good. I don’t need 55 spells in my spell book. If I’m never going to use anything but the very first two I selected, and I don’t need to kill 8,000 monsters if only 10 of them total are actually going to present me with any kind of challenge.

The best games of this genre—like, yes, *Diablo*—enticing players with a steady carrot-and-stick mechanic, constantly dangling something cool in front of our noses. *Dungeon Siege II* errs by giving you way too much, all the time... ultimately diminishing the impact of everything you do. I don’t want or need a whole bag of carrots. I just want one. / Jeff Green

**LET’S PARTY!**

With action-RPGs, multiplayer can often be more rewarding than the single-player experience—and it’s not bad at all in *Dungeon Siege II*. Up to four people can play cooperatively over a LAN or the Internet, using their single-player characters. In couples mode, three players can each bring an additional party member or pet in from their single-player games, while in party mode, each player can import two party members or pets each. When the single-player game starts wearing you down, try this instead—it will boost your enjoyment a great deal.

**VERDICT**

It’s still not *Diablo*.
ADVENT RISING
Not quite the second coming

AFTER SEEING “EPIC SCI-FI ACTION” BOLDLY proclaimed on Advent Rising’s box, some of you are probably expecting something akin to War of the Worlds: The Game inside—and if so, prepare for disappointment. The lofty aspirations in this cinematic experience are plain to see, as Advent features eight superpowers, lots of guns, and a serious God complex. But for all the ambition and good intentions, the game is plagued with overly complex controls and a few irritating bugs. Could someone please double-check the definition of “epic”?

PLAYING THE “ORSON SCOTT” CARD
Any game that claims epic status needs a sweeping, original story line, which we (sort of) get in Advent, courtesy of noted science-fiction author Orson Scott Card. Here, you play as ace pilot Gideon Wyeth, one of the last surviving humans in the universe. Luke Skywalker and other Jedi who discover the powers of the Force in the Star Wars universe, it seems that the humans of Advent’s future possess the potential for some serious Matrix-caliber techniques. They just need a little push—for example, the total destruction of their home planet.

As you guide Gideon around the post-Earth universe, you are faced with periodic “choose your fate” moments (do you save your brother or your fiancée?). You never really have to sweat the consequences, though, as all paths seem to lead to the same inevitable conclusion. The narrative isn’t all it’s cracked up to be; in-game dialogue is minimal, and Card largely fails to take into account the fact that this is an interactive medium. Every few minutes, some tense event triggers yet another mini cut-scene, revealing some tiny morsel of Gideon’s personality. Would it have killed developer GlyphX Games to make a few of these cut-scenes interactive?

What was a handy targeting mechanic for the console version of Advent is now a serious deterrent for PC gamers. There are times when we fought with the camera controls just to lift a rock and lob it at some alien’s noggin.

Fortunately, the technical issues don’t go much further than that. The PC version of Advent isn’t saddled with the same number of bugs and performance issues present in the Xbox game, though we still encountered a fair share of quirky moments—from aliens standing in midair to characters walking up through the ground—but no true game stoppers surfaced. Ultimately, Advent Rising shoots for the stars but barely breaks orbit. / Darren Gladstone

CARD LARGELY FAILS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FACT THAT THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE MEDIUM.

AFTER SEEING “EPIC SCI-FI ACTION” BOLDLY proclaimed on Advent Rising’s box, some of you are probably expecting something akin to War of the Worlds: The Game inside—and if so, prepare for disappointment. The lofty aspirations in this cinematic experience are plain to see, as Advent features eight superpowers, lots of guns, and a serious God complex. But for all the ambition and good intentions, the game is plagued with overly complex controls and a few irritating bugs. Could someone please double-check the definition of “epic”?

PLAYING THE “ORSON SCOTT” CARD
Any game that claims epic status needs a sweeping, original story line, which we (sort of) get in Advent, courtesy of noted science-fiction author Orson Scott Card. Here, you play as ace pilot Gideon Wyeth, one of the last surviving humans in the universe. Luke Skywalker and other Jedi who discover the powers of the Force in the Star Wars universe, it seems that the humans of Advent’s future possess the potential for some serious Matrix-caliber techniques. They just need a little push—for example, the total destruction of their home planet.

As you guide Gideon around the post-Earth universe, you are faced with periodic “choose your fate” moments (do you save your brother or your fiancée?). You never really have to sweat the consequences, though, as all paths seem to lead to the same inevitable conclusion. The narrative isn’t all it’s cracked up to be; in-game dialogue is minimal, and Card largely fails to take into account the fact that this is an interactive medium. Every few minutes, some tense event triggers yet another mini cut-scene, revealing some tiny morsel of Gideon’s personality. Would it have killed developer GlyphX Games to make a few of these cut-scenes interactive?

What was a handy targeting mechanic for the console version of Advent is now a serious deterrent for PC gamers. There are times when we fought with the camera controls just to lift a rock and lob it at some alien’s noggin.

Fortunately, the technical issues don’t go much further than that. The PC version of Advent isn’t saddled with the same number of bugs and performance issues present in the Xbox game, though we still encountered a fair share of quirky moments—from aliens standing in midair to characters walking up through the ground—but no true game stoppers surfaced. Ultimately, Advent Rising shoots for the stars but barely breaks orbit. / Darren Gladstone

CARD LARGELY FAILS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FACT THAT THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE MEDIUM.
IT'S WAR
TAKE COMMAND!

BATTALION WARS

Jump into the trenches and lead your troops through real-time, 3-D combat. Set the strategy or pull the trigger yourself. Either way, it's world war, and you get to decide the outcome.
FABLE: THE LOST

Quest for glory

EVERY FABLE HAS A MORAL—OR SO WE’VE been told. Fable: The Lost Chapters, spun from the mad game-design genius of Lionhead Studios head honcho Peter Molyneux, is a different kind of story...one that doesn’t always know what it wants to be but sometimes manages to be a fun little tale in spite of itself.

Fable’s story is simple: You’re an orphaned youth in search of your long-lost sister—who was abducted from your ransacked hometown by notorious forces right before your very eyes. After years of rigorous martial training at the local Heroes’ Guild, you set out to explore the world, find your kidnapped sister, and earn a bit of fortune and glory in the process. Generic Fantasy Plot No. 237 strikes again!

SO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO?

Though the Heroes’ Guild has what is possibly the most uninspired name ever, it serves a functional purpose, acting as a central hub area for your quest. New missions are acquired here, and when it’s time to rest up or spend your hard-earned experience points, you can return to the guild from almost any location thanks to handy teleport pads scattered throughout the world of Albion. During missions, a minimap points you toward your next objective, so you’re rarely left wandering around without knowing where to go next.

But this also tends to make you feel a bit railroaded through the game. Missions follow fairly linear paths and usually involve simple tasks along the lines of killing a certain enemy or escorting an NPC to a distant location. These errands are rarely difficult and tend to go by quickly, making for a short main story that most players can probably coast through in a single weekend, assuming most side areas are ignored. The twitch-based combat is the only tricky part, and the sheer number of bandits, undead, and other typical fantasy fare can be overwhelming...that is, until you discover the magic trick to staying alive: the Block button.

WAGES OF WAR

Fable’s action-RPG combat system is an awkward clickfest. Lock-on targeting features a poorly implemented camera, and the keyboard controls don’t lend themselves to the precise movements you’ll often wish you could make. The Block key inadvertently makes up for these failings, as it makes you completely impenetrable to most common threats during the early to mid areas of the game—no matter how swamped you are or what direction you happen to be facing.

FABLE ULTIMATELY ENDS UP OFFERING A MORAL CHOICE SYSTEM WITH NO REAL CONSEQUENCES.
Once you realize this, most battles boil down to near-constant blocking and carefully trading blows using either a charged-up melee attack or a barrage of powerful magic spells, depending on which path your character takes.

Character development comes with a wide degree of freedom; the experience points you earn are spent toward improving three distinct disciplines, which essentially translate into fighter, magic user, and thief archetypes. Some attributes (such as health and damage resistance), are necessary no matter what type of hero you’re building, but you can generally shape your character any way you see fit. The system works well, but the big downside is that it doesn’t actually impact the story; you still get the same foes, the same quests, and even the same handful of hack-and-slash stealth areas (thief or not). Fable’s freedoms are something of an illusion, and the game’s strange ethical alignment mechanics make this even more apparent.

**SHADOWS OF DARKNESS**

The “good or evil” question has been posed to players in Western-developed RPGs dating back to the early days of Ultima. Fable tries to do the same, but it ultimately ends up offering a moral choice system with no lasting implications, save for multiple endings and a few late-game scenarios. Certain missions present good and evil variants (defend the village or join in the bandits’ raid), and you have the option of attacking and killing most random NPCs or vandalizing peaceful cities, but the worst typical consequences are a few guard fights and the occasional NPC who runs in fear from you. Your actions impact your appearance a great deal (as does your choice of equipment), but beyond that, this entire mechanic seems inconsistent and underdeveloped. Sometimes, you can weave into a group of characters and kill one off with no visible fear from onlookers—certainly not the reaction you’d expect.

The ethical trappings are only part of a larger issue, though. A lot of Fable’s additional content—including houses for sale, marriages to pursue, and lots of tabloids and taboos to wager on—is never really the focus of your actions. It’s easy to glance over a lot of it without even really noticing the additional depth, which results in much of the material feeling somewhat hollow and tacked on. It’s a shame that much of this charm is so peripheral, as the game boasts some nice production values and a fairly solid set of mechanics (once you acclimate to the combat, that is). Then again, it comes from the mind of a designer known for overambitious, incomplete ideas. What’s the moral of Fable? We aren’t really sure. /Ryan Scott

Fun and ambitious, but not nearly as substantial as it wants you to think it is.

Sync's Got Gaming Covered

Whether it’s the Swedish Game Girls, hottest Japanese imports, new reviews or catching up with the greatest arcade players of all time, Sync delivers the entire gaming experience.

You’ll get 10 cutting-edge issues for only $10.

Simply call or log on to subscribe at the special rate!

1-888-340-4452

(please mention code 4CBV7)
**Codename: Panzers, Phase Two**

Tank rush!

Publisher: CDV Software Developer: Stormregion Genre: RTS ESRB Rating: T Required: Pentium III or Athlon 1.0GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space, DVD-ROM drive Recommended: Pentium 4 or Athlon 1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 128MB video card Multiplayer: Internet, LAN (6-6 players)

**Developer Stormregion Tries To**

Add a human element to its Codename: Panzers sequel through in-character mission intros and cinematic sequences. Unfortunately, the story lines wind up feeding like convoluted distractions from the game’s action. Jarringly bad voice acting doesn’t help matters, but the cut-scenes have a pleasing old-fashioned rewired feel to them. In short, the presentation is a mixed bag—as is the gameplay.

The single-player campaigns focus on obscure battles of WWII, including the Italian army’s struggle for North Africa, the Allied invasion of Italy, and the partisan fighting to oust the Germans from Yugoslavia. These missions feature a variety of objectives, making the game feel less mundane than the usual wartime fare.

**Army Men**

Instead of traditional resource management, Panzers employs a Panzer Generals-style “prestige” system. Completing objectives earns you points, which are used to buy units for the next mission, thus forming a customized core that you keep throughout the campaign. Your troops earn experience points in battle, and their armaments can be upgraded. This makes the first several missions quite engaging, but the gameplay soon flounders as you realize how useless your infantry units are. The weakest tanks pulverize them within seconds, and the barren maps offer few fortifications to hide in.

As a result, you’ll find your armies composed entirely of tanks and support vehicles, making most of Panzers’ army management superfluous. Then again, this helps you outlast the monstrously huge CPU-controlled armies through simple attrition. The braindead A.I. fails to respond to threats beyond its immediate line of sight, so disparate elements of the enemy army will never back each other up. Some missions encourage alternative solutions through clever tactics, but the optimal strategy is usually slow, grinding, and repetitive.

Panzers’ multiplayer is also frustrating. It seems like an afterthought, with few maps and only two game modes: a vanilla deathmatch and a “domination” mode in which opposing sides vie for control of sites that produce reinforcements. Due to the feeble infantry, these skirmishes end up just being boring duels of armor and artillery. As in much of this game, the execution is uneven, leaving the audience with a big ball of unfulfilled potential. / Di Luo (from 1UP.com)

Somewhat repetitive, but never so bad that it’s offensive.

**WINSAMBT**

Publisher: Shrapnel Games Developer: Shrapnel Games Genre: Tank Simulator ESRB Rating: NR

The Steel Panthers series has been around for years, and Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles remains the definitive modern tactical-level war game. Steel Panthers: Main Battle Tank (or SPMBT for short) started as a mod that added many improvements to that game but ran only on clunky MS-DOS systems. Shrapnel Games has fixed the problem with WinSPMBT, a fully Windows XP-compatible version of Main Battle Tank. It may be a port of a 3-year-old title, but it’s still a respectable game—even with such obvious signs of age. Fortunately, you can download it for free from www.shrapnelgames.com or purchase a special “enhanced CD version” that enables resolutions above 800x600...for the unbelievable price of $39.95. My advice: Just stick with the download.

/ Bruce Geryk (For more war-gaming gearhead, visit Bruce at grognards.1UP.com)

Old-school war-gaming in every sense of the word.
MADDEN NFL 06

Play it the way Randy Moss would

WITH EVERY OTHER PC FOOTBALL SERIES dead and gone (anyone remember Front Page Sports: Football?) Madden NFL 06 is not just the reigning king of PC football—it's the only option PC gamers have. But no matter how much the EA "haters" seem to flow (especially following the publisher's exclusive licensing agreement with the NFL), it's hard to find fault with the Madden games. Unsurprisingly, Madden 06 is another deep, engrossing football simulator...with some extra features and a semi-irritating learning curve.

One bit of standard Madden gameplay still applies: You definitely want to use a gamepad. During those last-second plays, the wonky keyboard controls make it too easy to accidentally send a player diving for the goal line that's 20 yards away when you actually intended to hustle through that newly opened hole and make the opposing team eat dust.

KICKIN' IT

Gamepad or not, the new kicking system causes some headaches. The precision-based kicking interface is easy to understand but amazingly difficult to time properly. In previous Madden titles, you could always count on that extra point after a touchdown, even during your worst games...but not in Madden 06, where you inevitably end up missing those supposed gimmes time and time again. Fortunately, skilled players can recoup some of those lost points with the series' newest gameplay feature: quarterback vision control.

Quarterback vision (which, contrary to its name, does not impart a first-person perspective) provides a semi-authentic interpretation of life as a quarterback. Each quarterback possesses a unique visual radius, which varies depending on how talented he is. For example, the Patriots' Tom Brady has a very wide range of vision that encompasses numerous receivers, whereas many, err...lesser quarterbacks have extremely limited throw areas to work with. This definitely takes some getting used to; the frustration mounts when you see an open receiver to your left, yet your right-facing quarterback is unable to toss the ball to him without penalty for passing outside of his visual area. This unique form of tunnel vision eventually grows on you, though; by keeping your throws within the passing cone, you steadily learn how to improve your passing game with smarter and better plays—which is ultimately a good thing.

FRANCHISE PLAYER

Once you get past the vision control quirks, Madden 06 is essentially the same in-depth game that Madden 2005 is, but with better offensive A.I. and more key commands. You can still take a winning team to the Super Bowl in franchise mode, customize your own player in create-a-player mode, and even follow your custom player through an entire career in superstar mode, which plays like a sort of weird amalgamation of the two. And—most important—it's still easy to smack down your buddies over the Internet. Armchair quarterbacks should appreciate the new options, and longtime fans are treated to more of the same kick-ass gameplay that has made Madden the unstoppable juggernaut it is today./Sean Dallas Kied

THE MADDEN CURSE

Several athletes have sustained injuries or performed poorly on the field following their Madden box cover stints. Is the Madden curse just an urban legend, or is there some serious black magic going on? Here are the hard facts!

Eddie George, Tennessee Titans (2001): His game went south one season after he showed up on the box.

Daunte Culpepper, Minnesota Vikings (2002): Culpepper's team choked hard in 2002...despite being preseason Super Bowl favorites.

Marshall Faulk, St. Louis Rams (2003): Faulk was sidelined for most of the 2002 season thanks to numerous injuries.

Michael Vick, Atlanta Falcons (2004): He played a mere five games during the 2003 season after breaking his right leg during the first quarter of an exhibition game.

Ray Lewis, Baltimore Ravens (2005): The first defensive player to grace the box—and the first to come away unscathed.

Donovan McNabb, Philadelphia Eagles (2006): Time will tell!

Another incremental step, but still a great game of football.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT

⭐⭐⭐
CHANGE THE FACE OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

- **OVERHAULED INTERFACE**: RTS style, intuitive interface allows you to manipulate units and cities with greater control and faster speed.

- **3D LIVING WORLD**: Detailed environment where animals roam and smoke billows from small huts, set in a vibrant and colorful world.

- **NEW FEATURES**: Introducing religion, Holy Cities, missionaries, Great People, variable scale games and loads of new civic options: Imagine a communist regime with freedom of the press — or a republic without it.

- **A MODDER'S DREAM**: An unprecedented level of modding power including: Worldbuilder editor, XML, Python Scripting Language, and coming soon: The Civilization IV SDK — mod the A.I., create your own models & interface and transform the gameplay to meet your vision.

- **MULTIPLAYER**: Built from the ground up with dramatic improvements: Era starts, variable game speeds, hot join, team play and a bevvy of connectivity options: LAN, internet, PBEM, hot seat, питос and more.

---

SID MEIER'S

CIVILIZATION

NOVEMBER 2005

“*It has our dictator glands pumping conquer-juice into our bloodstream by the gallon.*”

— GAME INFORMER

1468  1894  1930  1945

www.CivIV.com
What should you play today?
Names in blue indicate Editors' Choice games

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act of War: Direct Action</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerial Strike</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 51</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armies of Exigo</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bard's Tale</td>
<td>Oct 06</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball Mogul 2006</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield 2</td>
<td>Sep 06</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BloodRayne 2</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers in Arms:</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road to Hill 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Combat:</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First to Fight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chronicles of Riddick:</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape From Butcher Bay—Developer's Cut</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat: Task Force 121</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cossacks II:</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleonic Wars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown of Glory: Europe in</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Age of Napoleon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous Waters</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domination</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doom 3:</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurrection of Evil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drogon</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRIVR</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dungeon Lords</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Warriors: Vietnam</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire Earth II</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantastic 4</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fate</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FlatOut</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Force vs. The 3rd Reich</td>
<td>May 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Grigsby's World at War</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTR FIA Racing</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guild Wars</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-Life 2</td>
<td>Feb 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearts of Iron II</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage of Kings: The Settlers</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial Glory</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Ops: Escalation</td>
<td>Feb 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights of Honor</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy: Dark Shadows</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lego Star Wars</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Admiral Returns</td>
<td>May 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Matrix Online</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval Lords</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVP Baseball 2005</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASA CarrSim Racing</td>
<td>May 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBA Live 2005</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Speed Underground 2</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL Eastside Hockey Manager</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscure</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painkiller: Battle out of Hell</td>
<td>Feb 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pariah</td>
<td>Sep 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playboy: The Mansion</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Persia:</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrior Within</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project: Snowblind</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychonauts</td>
<td>Jun 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotonic</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raging Tiger</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Area</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Mysterious Island</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTL: Path of the Emperor</td>
<td>Oct 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Sight</td>
<td>Jul/Aug 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel: Descendants in Time</td>
<td>Apr 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sid Meier's Pirates!</td>
<td>Feb 05</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The Bard's Tale
- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- SWAT 4

104 • COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
THE NEXT LEVEL
CGW's guide to the latest must-have patches and user mods

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLEGROUNDS

PUBLISHER: Blizzard Entertainment DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment
WEBSITE: www.worldofwarcraft.com

The long-awaited WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLEGROUNDS PATCH (which went live this past June) has a detonating impact on player-versus-player gameplay in Blizzard's popular MMORPG. The average player can now participate in PVP action without being exposed to the ruthless and unnecessary ganking that plagues PVP-specific servers; indeed, the gameplay on those servers seems to have calmed down as more players turn to BATTLEGROUNDS as a means to relieve their scalding aggression.

Each of BATTLEGROUNDS' two areas features a distinct type of PVP gameplay. Warsong Gulch (for levels 21 and up) is a 10-on-10, too-fast-too-furious capture-the-flag arena; and Azeroth Valley (levels 51 and up) features a day-long, Battlefield-esq, 40-man team battleground. The next patch (which wasn't quite ready when we went to press) will introduce the Arathi Basin, which sits snugly between the current two options. In short, there's something here to get your competitive blood boiling, no matter what level you are. The competition in both battlegrounds is much more restrained than in standard PVP, and players earn honor points for using clever strategy instead of going on haphazard killing sprees. You earn some pretty sweet equipment (purchased at a special shop) for attaining a high PVP rank, and nothing really compares to being on a winning Warsong Gulch team.

But the scoring system's bell curve means high-end PVP ranks and reward gear aren't available to the casual player... or anyone who is unable to pour 20 hours a day into matching each server's score leaders. "Casual" level 60 players should resign themselves to having subpar PVP gear until the current high rankers fall off, and players below level 60 should keep leveling, as honor point awards are drastically reduced at lower levels. As always, die-hard players have an easier road to the top—but despite this disparity in the rewards system, the core gameplay in BATTLEGROUNDS is enough to offer an adrenaline rush that's both satisfying and dangerously addictive. They don't call it "WarCrack" for nothing. #Karen Chu

VERDICT

A wonderful cure for your massively multiplayer PVP itch.

www.CivAnon.org

"My daddy loves his Civ more than he loves me."

Don't let this happen to you. CivAnon can help.

The end of Civilization begins here.

"My daddy is a Civ junkie."

CivAnon & The 12 Steps Conquer your addiction.

Sid Meier, author or Pusher?

"WarCrack" for nothing.
A NEW AGE IS DAWNING. DUAL-CORE processing means taking your PC designs in new directions, so this month we've created a brand-new Killer Rig built from the ground up for skin-busting speed. The Temjin X2 SLI DIY system is no joke. Inside Silverstone's magnificently sturdy and thermally sound Temjin T.06 full-tower chassis, we've installed AMD's flagship Athlon 64 X2 4800+ 2.4GHz dual-core processor, which sits pretty in Nvidia's NF4 SLI configuration.

EYE OF THE STORM

Now, when attempting to build a superfast machine, the first rule of thumb is to focus on the CPU, since the processor is the core foundation of a machine's performance and endurance. Once the CPU's in place, you build outward from there with the best components possible. Frankly,

The Guts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>$145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Supply</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard</td>
<td>$179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>$370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory 2</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Drives</td>
<td>$340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD-ROM Drive</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floppy Drive</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>$1,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboard</td>
<td>$89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse</td>
<td>$45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating System</td>
<td>$349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COST</td>
<td>$5,312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

we've been waiting to build this machine ever since AMD announced its rocket-fast dual-core processor line—plugging its phenomenal Athlon 64 X2 4800+ 2.4GHz dual-core CPU with retail heat sink and fan into our Killer Rig was a dream come true. Yeah, dual-core multithreaded gaming is still basically patiently waiting for developers to catch up and really take advantage of the technology, but even with the current dearth of optimized dual-core games, this processor rocks single-threaded instruction sets. Best of all, it begs for overclocking. Thank you, AMD, for bridging the gap between performance, reliability, and tweakability in your products.

But no system can dominate without a stable motherboard, which here is the Asus A8N-SLI Premium. It's a good upgrade from Asus' world-class Deluxe model, made more extraordinary thanks to its abilities to handle AMD dual-core processors and feature true PCI Express x16 graphics (non-SLI) support, more PCI Express slots with wider PCI Express placement on the board, and SATA II support for faster bandwidth speeds. But most important, Asus upgraded its NF4 SLI Northbridge cooling solution with an innovative copper heatpipe design.

MOTHER OF ALL MOTHERBOARDS

This motherboard carries the standard array of dual RAID, dual Gigabit LAN, 10 USB 2.0 ports, and dual-channel DDR RAM support in an awesome motherboard design, with the only blemish being the disappointing lack of IEEE 1394a 800Mbps FireWire support. As for audio, the A8N-SLI Premium sports Realtek's built-in ALC850 audio chip with support for 7.1 surround sound.
sound in Dolby Digital. Though we often prefer diverting audio processing power from the CPU and mobo for the best possible low-latency loads for gaming and improved audio sampling and resolution, we skipped installing a dedicated soundcard for now. Why? We’re holding a berth for Creative’s new kick-ass soundcard, the Sound Blaster X-Fi.

Next up is the chassis, and what a beauty the Temjin TJ06 full-tower case from Silverstone is. The thermal characteristics make this a choice pick for handling the intense heat of overclocking. We opted for Silverstone’s Zeus 650-watt SLI-compliant power supply since it is one of the few chosen power supplies to receive Nvidia’s SLI stamp of approval. This setup was fleshed out with mod lighting and four lighted 120mm and 80mm chassis fans, and the noise was still kept below 50 decibels thanks to the case’s great insulation.

We then filled out the system with a group of A-list components to give us that crucial edge: one full gig of Corsair XMS Xpert TwinXp1024-3200XL PC3200 RAM and another gig of XMS TwinXp1024-3200XL PC3200 DDR400. Then, we laced on two Western Digital Raptor 74GB 10,000 rpm SATA hard drives in a RAID 0 (striped) configuration. The PCI Express slots are locked and loaded with two fast EVGA e-GeForce 7800 GTX 256MB GPUs. Final touches include a dual-layer DVD burner from Mad Dog, a CD+/-RW from LG, and a standard Sony 1.44MB floppy drive, all with mod cabling from www.xoxide.com.

For style, we matched the black Temjin case to Saitek’s dark Eclipse keyboard with backlighting and my favorite optical mouse, Razer’s high-performance Diamondback. Want the perfect AV experience? Deck out the rig with Dell’s awesome 24-inch LCD monitor and the Logitech Z-5500 Digital 5.1 speaker system, the best PC speakers on the market for cranking pure Dolby surround sound.

With Windows XP Pro with SP2 loaded, a RAID striping array installed, and updated drivers, it’s time to tweak the CPU frequency and voltage settings using the Asus utilities. The videocard was overclocked using Nvidia’s nTune utility. This crankin’ It’s yielding some of the most impressive Splinter Cell Chaos Theory, Far Cry, and Doom 3 scores to date.

The Temjin X2 SLI Killer Rig is a keeper. In addition to containing the perfect selection of A-list components and hardware to give us our performance edge, its mod lighting and killer chassis make it a looker, too. If only every system were this visually appealing—but just didn’t cost as much! /Raphael Liberatore

Making Sense of 3D GameGauge Lite

Each system goes through an exhaustive series of benchmark tests in order to assess overall performance and raw speed values. Benchmarking consists of both the industry’s undisputed reference synthetic benchmark utility, 3DMark05, along with CGW’s own real-world game benchmarking suite, 3D GameGauge Lite. 3DGG Lite consists of a brilliant collection of A-list action games like Splinter Cell Chaos Theory, Doom 3, Unreal Tournament 2004, Far Cry, and Painkiller. 3DGG Lite video configurations are set at 1280x1024 resolution with 2x antialiasing and 4x anisotropic filtering enabled, except for Halo, which gets no benefit from either technique.

Results are then tabulated and posted as a raw geometric score for your reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3D GameGauge Lite</th>
<th>TEMJIN X2 SLI</th>
<th>BEST</th>
<th>WORST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>105.7</td>
<td>111.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW OUR GRAPH WORKS: We graph a product’s benchmark scores to demonstrate how it compares to the scores of other products we’ve reviewed in the last six months. During that time, the lowest 3D GameGauge Lite score we’ve seen is 40; as of now, the highest is 111.7.
STOP DROOLING!

If you’re saddled with an older PC it is simply not worth spending those extra dollars on a new GeForce video card. But if you really need a new one, consider a modest video card like the GeForce 3400 GT, which is all you need to play a few ultra-fast games at the speed you need. However, if you want to upgrade, it should also cost less than the GNP of Japan.

We shoved five top-rated Geforce 7800 GTX videocards, all tweaked and ready to jump off the starting line, into the ultra-fast CyberPower Gamer Ultra XLC. We had one goal: to see if any one of them outperformed the others.

Finding out which card is the top GeForce 7800 GTX SLI performer is one thing. For us, the real winner also needs to have a good warranty, support, software packaging, and availability. Obviously, it should also cost less than the GNP of Japan.

It’s no surprise that all five cards throttled through our recently upgraded 3D GameGauge Lite v2.0 test. (See facing page for an explanation of 3D GameGauge Lite v2.0.) In fact, six and a half measly points separated the cards’ final 3D GameGauge Lite scores. But despite the narrow performance spread, each card has its own claim to fame. The EVGA grabbed the 3D GameGauge Lite performance title, while BFG Tech secured the 3DMark05 winner’s spot, and both earned extra credit for substantial lifetime warranties and excellent support. Asus packs the best utility software bundle, while Leadtek boasts the best gaming bundle of the group. It’s also worth noting that both Asus and BFG Tech offer FarStone’s great Game Drive utility with their cards. Both Leadtek and XFX offer fast, reliable frame-rates for less moolah than the others, and prices should drop even further in the coming months.

All five 7800s offer something worthwhile for gaming, which made rating them more difficult than usual. But only one card gets everything right: Asus. The five-star score speaks for itself. Tweakers, though, need to check out the EVGA board. It’s smoking! / Raphael Liberatore

THE “E” IS FOR EXCELLENT!

P2-N528-AX e-GeForce 7800 GTX 256MB DDR3 PCI Express GPU

Most NVIDIA cardmakers offer three versions of the 7800 GTX—entry-level vanilla, midrange with slight overclocked specs, and enthusiast-level with extreme overclocking. EVGA proves its GeForce mettle in a big way: It has the only entry-level card in this shoot-out. Unlike most of the other competitors, the e-GeForce comes out of the box with near plain-vanilla clock settings.

EVGA proves its mettle with the only entry-level card here.

Compared to the competition, you’d think it would be dead last on the performance charts. On the contrary, it was our overall 3D GameGauge Lite champ. With its 400MHz RAMDAC, high-speed GDDR3 memory, and Direct3D 9.0 Shader Model 3.0 support, this racer runs slightly faster than its counterparts. The difference is especially evident in Splinter Cell Chaos Theory. Doom 3 frames were ultrafast and sweet looking to boot. Imagine what can be done in overclocking.

Give EVGA points for its online support and lifetime warranty. Add the VIVO connector for watching HDTV broadcasts or editing video, and the EVGA becomes a superb choice for the gamer wanting the best GeForce 7800 GTX game muscle available.

MAX FORCE

Pushing the limits of 3D

Crank up the settings on those two games and you’ll make most computers cry—unless you’ve packing some NVIDIA GeForce 7800 GTX muscle.

Far Cry

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory

108 > COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
7800 GTX SHOWDOWN

BFG EQUALS BIG FUN GAMING

BFG 79256GTX GeForce 7800 GTX OC 256MB GDDR3 PCI Express GPU

BFG TECH HITS THE GROUND running with its overclocked GPU. Having an engine that stretches past the 425MHz mark definitely helps this card push the envelope. The proof: BFG Tech earned the fastest 3DMark05 scores of the roundup, flat-out dusting the competition. This card chews through Doom 3 and Far Cry frames like they were a can of Pringles. However, it choked slightly during Splinter Cell Chaos Theory, which greatly affected the card's overall 3D Lite score. Throw in FarStone's fantastic Game Drive utility in the box and this is a no-brainer.

However, this is the most expensive of the five cards reviewed. But with BFG Tech's lifetime warranty, nifty online gaming portal, and 24-hour technical support, shelling out a little more dough for performance is not that hard to swallow. It's not like any of these cards are cheap.

IT'S NOT FAT, THERE'S JUST MORE TO LOVE

EN7800GTX TOP/2DHTV/256 GeForce 7800 GTX 256MB GDDR3 PCI Express GPU

ASUS' REPUTATION PRECEDES IT. SO even before testing this card, I expected a contender. The company's TOP enthusiast-level 7800 videocard is a little hefty, due to its rather large thermal configuration, but this bulk has a purpose. It will cool any extreme overclocking tweak you happen to set, but there's really no need to fuss. The 7800 TOP possesses serious overclocking specs right out of the box, with a ramped up 486MHz (from 435) core and 1.3MHz (from 1.2) memory clocks. Not only is it fast, but modders and Grateful Dead fans will be drawn to its psychedelic orange-yellow glow.

In game performance, the EN7800GTX TOP ranks next to the top in almost every benchmark. It posted the second-highest 3D Lite score, missing first place by a wee margin. It's a little pricey, but it includes a solid software bundle (including FarStone's Game Drive utility). Asus is clearly the winner of this competition.

THE 7800 TOP POSSESS SERIOUS OVERCLOCKING OUT OF THE BOX.

REVAMPED AND UPGRADED: 3D GAMEGAUGE LITE V2.0

Since our 3DDG Lite benchmarking suite was getting a bit long in the tooth, we decided to test it out with new games such as Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil and Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory. Chaos Theory pushes videocards to the limit with its cutting-edge DirectX 9.0 game engine and sports high dynamic range (HDR) rendering mode improvements via Shader Model 3.0.

When testing our videocards in SLI, each GPU goes through an exhaustive series of benchmark tests to determine overall frame rate performance, raw speed values, and DirectX 9.0 support. Benchmarks consist of the industry's undisputed reference-quality synthetic benchmark utility, 3DMark05, and our own real-world game-test suite, 3D GameGauge Lite v2.0. 3DDG Lite consists of A-list action games such as Far Cry, Unreal Tournament 2004, and Rainbow Six: Vegas. Benchmark scores are configured at 1280x1024, with 4x antialiasing and 4x anisotropic filtering enabled.

Final scores are tabulated from raw scores. It's that simple.
**GET THE LEAD OUT!**

WinFast PX7800 GTX GeForce 7800 GTX 256MB DDR3 PCI Express GPU

LEADTEK'S WINFAST GRAPHICS BOARDS have always been top performers. So imagine my surprise when the WinFast limped across the finish line with the lowest 3D Mark05 and Far Cry scores. At least the Leadtek card didn’t come last in the end by performing when it was needed most in *Doom 3* and *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, testing, with both running at superb frame rates. Under supersampling, *Chaos Theory* looked wonderfully detailed. When the final bell tolled, the WinFast 7800 GTX videocard netted a highly respectable 3D Giga Lite score.

Leadtek offers a very good selection of games bundled with its 7800, including *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* and—go figure—*Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*. The rest of the package includes WinFox II, along with stacks of DVD and video authoring multimedia programs. Leadtek brings plenty for the money, making it a winning combo of performance and value.

**THE FORCE IS STRONG**

PV-T70F-UN7 GeForce 7800 GTX 256MB DDR3 PCI Express GPU

THE XFX BOARD FLIES OUT OF ITS distinct X-shaped box, overlocked and primed to light the motherboard on fire. We got a crystal-clear picture of its capabilities during the Far Cry portion of our 3D Giga Lite benchmarking, where it blasted through every Far Cry map at blistering frames. Final tally: Is this right? 189?! No other card came close to the XFX in this category. One the flip side, similar to BFG Tech’s card, the XFX 7800 GTX’s stellar performance fizzled under duress, netting the lowest Splinter Cell Chaos Theory score of the competition. How does this happen? *Splinter Cell’s* HDR rendering model is a killer for sure, but the XFX card stumbled big time. XFX reclaims points for its new double lifetime warranty program. Not only are GeForce 6 series cards grandfathers into the deal, but if you donate your card to a buddy, he’s covered. Crazy!

THE XFX BLASTED THROUGH FAR CRY MAPS AT BLISTERING FRAMES.

**NVIDIA'S 670 DONE RIGHT**

Other than the typical speed boosts associated with a new graphics card line, Nvidia’s new reference-level GeForce 7800 GTX leapfrogs past ATI with a killer GPU, the G70. Yeah, it sports some slight modifications over the 6800 Ultra, like the slightly fatter pixel shader pipes (per clock). However, the most impressive architectural feature is Nvidia’s transparency adaptive antialiasing (TAA). It improves image quality through a more elegant polygon operation utilizing either multissampling (TRMS) or higher-resolution supersampling (TRSS) technologies. By taking advantage of the 7800’s beefier horsepower and utilizing the performance-heavy supersampling mode, you'll see why the G70, the heart of the 7800, is currently the best graphics card for gaming.
**CUTTING EDGE GAMING SYSTEMS - FANATICAL SUPPORT**

**Arachnid SLI**
- Dual AMD CPU and Dual Core combined
- IWILL Motherboard
- Dual nVidia BFG OC 7800 GTX in SLI
- Support for up to 8 displays
- Up to 8GB Corsair DDR RAM
- 74GB 10,000 RPM Raptor
- 16x Double Layer DVD Burner with LightScribe™
- Creative Audigy 4 8 Channel Surround Sound
- Hyundai 19” 8ms LCD, 400GB hard drives and more available online...

**Sting 917X2**
- AMD Athlon FX57 or Dual Core X2 4800+
- Asus Deluxe Motherboard
- Dual nVidia BFG OC 7800 GTX in SLI
- Support for up to 8 displays
- Up to 4GB Corsair DDR RAM
- 74GB 10,000 RPM Raptor
- 16x Double Layer DVD Burner with LightScribe™
- Creative Audigy 4 8 Channel Surround Sound
- Hyundai 19” 8ms LCD, 400GB hard drives, liquid cooling and more available online...

**Widow FX SLI**
- AMD FX57 or Dual Core X2 4800+
- Asus Deluxe Motherboard
- Dual nVidia BFG OC 7800 GTX in SLI
- Support for up to 8 displays
- Up to 4GB Corsair DDR RAM
- 74GB 10,000 RPM Raptor
- 16x Double Layer DVD Burner with LightScribe™
- Creative Audigy 4 8 Channel Surround Sound
- Hyundai 19” 8ms LCD, 400GB hard drives, liquid cooling and more available online...

**Sting 917**
- Intel P4 670 3.8GHz
- 2MB Cache
- 17” Widescreen 1900x1200 ClearView Display
- nVidia 6800 ULTRA 256MB or ATI X800 PE 256MB
- Up to 2GB Apacer DDR RAM
- Up to 200GB Hard Drive Space
- 8x Double Layer DVD Burner with LightScribe™
- TV Tuner, GB LAN, modem, MP3 player, 802.11 and more available online...

**GAMING DESKTOPS**

**GAMING LAPTOPS**

**Arachnid SLI**
- Available from $3,390

**Widow FX SLI**
- Available from $2,979

**Sting 917X2**
- Available from $4,446

**Sting 917**
- Available from $2,695

Ask how we custom assemble your desktop in 7 – 10 days and laptops in 24 hours.
3 year parts and labor warranty standard on every desktop
Toll-free, 24-7 American tech support for as long as you own your WidowPC system

Prices, configurations and availability may change without notice. Taxes (if any) and shipping charges are not shown. WidowPC cannot be held responsible for errors in photography or typography. WidowPC and WidowPC spider logo are trademarks of WidowPC, Inc. All other trademarks and registered trademarks are property of their respective owners.
THE KNOCKOUT PUNCH

Fatal1ty A8N SLI NForce4 PCI Express Socket 939 motherboard

Abit also provides some of the nicest IDE cabling found in a motherboard, plus great support and comprehensive installation manuals, giving even the most green DIY builder ample backup.

Overclockers and tweekers will think they’ve died and gone to geek heaven. The extensive BIOS layout and uTuner utility let you adjust voltages, PCI Express clocks, DRAM frequency ratios, and CPU bus speeds.

In tests using Doom 3 and Splinter Cell Chaos Theory scores were through the roof. Behold a 3DMark05 score of 11k when both the AMD Athlon FX-67 processor and a pair of XFX GeForce 7800 GTX videocards are attached to the motherboard. Indeed, you may have already seen one of these impressive scores in the latest desktop PC reviews—that’s because all the high-end machines are flossing the A8N. / Raphael Liberatore

Fatal1ty A8N SLI $195

Finally, thanks to Abit, we have a motherboard worthy of the most discriminating hardware enthusiasts.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT

INTEL BATTLE BOARDS

We compare three Intel Pentium Dual-Core LGA 775 955X chipset motherboards

YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING “TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN one”? It holds true for gaming hardware. Enter dual-core technology. Instead of one CPU running the show, two complete processors work in tandem to tackle more complex operations. AMD got an early lead in the dual-processing space, but now Intel is starting to fight back.

Intel’s Dual-Core Pentium D Extreme Edition 840 processor with HyperThreading is basically two 90nm Prescott 3.2GHz CPU cores located on the same die, each possessing an 800MHz FSB, 16KB L1 and 1MB L2 cache. Time to put three of the hottest Intel-based dual-core capable 955X chipset motherboards through the paces and see Intel's Pentium D CPU in action. / Raphael Liberatore

WHY: Similar in design to the Fatal1ty A8N SLI motherboard, this is an overclocker’s dream that is fully accessible for tweaking—even during gameplay. Tons of cooling features make it more than capable of handling Intel’s hot processor thresholds. The colorful design, nice cabling, and AudioMax riser card make the AW8-MAX tops in the “modding” category. There are also plenty of SATA II storage features, and the dual RAID rivals the Intel board’s configuration, especially since Abit chose to include two FireWire 800Mbit ports. The AW8-MAX is one killer dual-core mobo.

PROCESSOR TECHNOLOGIES: Enhanced Memory 64 technology (EM64T), enhanced Intel Speedstep technology (EIST), and X-D-bit FRONTSIDE BUS (FSB) 1066/800/533 RAM: DDR2 - 8GB Max x 6 - 667/533 - dual channel EXPANSION SLOTS: 1 PCI-Express x16, 2 PCI-Express x1, 2 PCI slots SATA/RAID Ex SATA-II, Dual RAID - Intel ICH7R, M6T support, and Silicom Image PCI-E SB3132 SATA controller PORTS: 8 USB 2.0, 2 IEEE 1394a, and 2 IEEE 1394b ports ONBOARD AUDIO: 7.1 AudioMax (Intel high-definition audio with Dolby Master Studio support) PRICE: $222

WHY: With its A-list features, the P5W-D2 Premium sets the bar sky-high for Intel dual-core systems. The supercharged set of overclocking utilities is primed for serious gamers. There’s also extra frosting: A PCI-Wi-Fi TV Edition tuner card, a great software bundle, and 800MHz DDR2 RAM support. 400Mbit FireWire is the only downer here.

1. ABIT AW8-MAX

2. ASUS P5W-D2 PREMIUM MOTHERBOARD

3. INTEL DESKTOP BOARD D955X BK

WHY: Intel may have created dual-core technology, but its D955X BK is being taken to school by the cutting-edge sophistication of Asus’ and Abit’s boards. The D955X BK doesn’t have the capacious overclocking features, it’s great for RAID array or HDD storage capacities, and it comes with too extensive a software bundle to even list. Costing more than the Abit and Asus boards, the D955X BK just pales in comparison.
Simply plug Hawking Technology's HBB1 Broadband Booster into your home network and instantly reduce lag. Sounds straightforward—and here's the big shocker: It works. Annoying lag is most commonly associated with home networks hosting multiple computers. If your ISP utilizes Quality of Service (you may need to ask your ISP), the HBB1 is perfect for you.

At the heart of the booster is Ubicom's IP3023 network processor, which eliminates data lag through the uplink via Ubicom's patented StreamEngine technology. An eight-way multi-threaded 32-bit processor clocked at 250MHz automatically manages data flow without the need for you to get your hands dirty.

With StreamEngine, the Broadband Booster "shapes" networking traffic by minimizing the impact of large-packet, low-priority transfers on latency-sensitive networks while eliminating delays caused by DSL or cable modem connections. Put into simple terms, StreamEngine manages the network by examining and classifying the data flowing out of the network. It's a nifty process in which packet transfer speeds get a boost from real-time-sensitive applications such as gaming and VoIP, and the booster is unconcerned about when or in what order it arrives at its destination.

To further remove concern is a single blinking LED to assure you the system is working. It may be another box to plug in, but at $5.50, the price is right for hitting fast LAN speeds without buying expensive gaming routers.

**DATA SPEED DEMON**

**HBB1 Broadband Booster**

Even though there's a lot of networking mumbo jumbo going on here, what it all boils down to is this: If you're dead set on ditching lag and you're on a budget, then the HBB1 is your best bet./Raphael Liberatore

**HBB1 $5.50**

Reduce lags and networking headaches with this smart utility.

**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**

**VERDICT**

IF YOU'RE DEAD SET ON DITCHING LAG AND YOU'RE ON A BUDGET, THEN THE HBB1 IS YOUR BEST BET.

---

**MICROSOFT'S MAJOR DISCONNECT**

Wireless Optical Desktop (Multimedia Keyboard 2.0A, Optical Desktop Receiver, and Optical Mouse 2.0A)

MICROSOFT USUALLY MAKES SOLID hardware—"usually" being the operative word here. But the new Wireless Optical Desktop, which combines a multimedia keyboard, optical mouse, and desktop receiver, just doesn't cut it.

Hardwise, the Wireless Optical Desktop starts off looking like a winner. The multimedia keyboard comes jam-packed with easily accessible shortcut buttons and, like Microsoft's wired units, offers firm but quiet keystroke feedback. The optical mouse is also well conceived. It sports a tilt wheel feature for slowly moving the cursor sideways or just mapping additional World of Warcraft functions. Too bad few games outside of WOW support the tilt wheel.

As for actual performance, the mouse offers decent high-speed precision and motion for shooters. Just don't clare compare its buttons to those on the phenomenal Razer Diamondback. And that's not even mentioning Microsoft's omission of side mouse buttons. Well, OK, we'll mention it.

HELLO? IS THIS THING ON? The real problem is that the receiver doesn't work. Microsoft claims the keyboard and mouse have longer battery life than previous hardware and can automatically detect interference and lessen radio intrusion so that you don't have to worry about interruptions. Bull. Throughout extensive testing, the keyboard and mouse experienced several pauses during gaming and nongaming operations, even with fresh batteries.

Considering we're evaluating this set for gaming, there's no reason to recommend this combo when you can easily buy Logitech's LX700./Raphael Liberatore

**Wireless Desktop $50**

We've got one word for you: Logitech.

**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**

**VERDICT**

---

**Tech Commando**

Commo from the hardware front lines

AFTER COUNTLESS DAYS OF REBUILDING PCs, I thought nothing could intimidate me. I was wrong. Eighteen-hour days of demolishing my old kitchen and remodelling it from scratch gave me a new respect for contractors. The plate will look great in a couple weeks: new maple cabinets and granite countertops, new appliances, rewired electrical outlets and lighting, and new slate for the floor. Sure, this little project costs a bundle, but by doing it myself I saved approximately $10,000 in labor. More important is that I used the excuse to upgrade to cordless power tools. Having the right tools for the job saved me hours of time while adding precision to my kitchen remodel.

Like my cordless tools, the GeForce 7800 GTX is a great upgrade option. The 7800 is a world-class, high-end videocard designed specifically for gaming enthusiasts (especially those using SLI) willing to spend extra money for the ultimate in graphics performance. The best thing about the new 7800 series graphics card, aside from the unkillable transparency adaptive antialiasing (also round up on p. 108), is its availability. Unlike Nvidia's 8600 series launch (finding a 8600 Ultra card was like needle-hunting in a haystack), this time Nvidia flexed its muscles and got its partners what they wanted, so supply channels will fill orders in large numbers. Much to a difference a year makes. The GeForce 7800 GTX is the current top-dog graphics solution for gaming, and if you read the roundup in this very issue, you'll see why I just love this beast. As CGW's Tech Commando, I'm just fortunate I don't have to spend $500-plus to get one (or two for SLI)./Raphael Liberatore
FLAT, FLAWED

VX924 LCD monitor

THE GAMING LCD MARKET IS GETTING mighty crowded. Still, ViewSonic manages to stand out with this sharp-looking X-series 19-inch monitor. The VX924 LCD monitor is heavy on style, sporting cool two-tone brushed-aluminum trim and a thin bezel designed in black. Compared to the blah-black cases out there, the VX924 is a looker. Fortunately, that beauty is more than just skin deep.

The VX924 delivers what gamers crave in an LCD monitor. With ultrafast response times, the VX924 plows through 3D-intensive games like SWAT 4 and Half-Life 2 with nary a jagg or ghosting. Rated at 3ms, the VX924 owns the fastest LCD response time of any consumer monitor to date—a benefit that shooter fans will definitely enjoy. Put it all together, with its hypersonic 4ms response rate, 550:1 contrast ratio, proprietary OptiSync input controller, sync-on-green, and XtremeView ultra-wide 150-degree viewing angle technologies, coupled with a 270 cd/m² contrast ratio, and the VX924 screams gaming.

So if this is such a great monitor, why only 3.5 stars? With all of its game-enhancement genius, the VX924's image gets tarnished by a couple of engineering snafus. For one, the lack of height adjustment is just plain dumb. If you're considering this monitor, make sure your chair is adjustable, especially if you have trouble meeting roller-coaster height requirements. A lack of software-monitor adjustment tools is also annoying, but I can live with this shortcoming.

Both are minor quibbles when compared to a larger concern: how the VX924 handles color and uniformity. I noticed this problem while looking at the richly colored environmental palette of Blizzard's World of Warcraft—the VX924 showed slight color variations from top to bottom. The image at the top of the monitor appeared duller than the bottom image; this problem was even more evident when I compared the same screen location on a nearby NEC-Mitsubishi 1970GX.

Despite some color and uniformity flaws, ViewSonic has delivered a solid, good-looking LCD gaming monitor. Game performance is exceptional, so it's a good choice for shooter fans who haven't taken the LCD plunge yet.

/Raphael Liberatore

A-List

CPU
Best Performance Processor
AMD Athlon 64 FX-57 2.6GHz CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $1,015)

Best Performance Dual-Core Processor
AMD Athlon 64 X2 4800+ 2.4GHz CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $860)

Best Budget Processor
AMD Athlon 64 3500+ 2.2GHz "Venice" 90nm CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $219)

Motherboards
Best Performance Motherboard
Ati Radeon X1600 Extreme 256MB DDR3 video card
(Avail - www.ati.com - $175)

Best Budget Motherboard
SiS7525-512MB 128MB DDR3 video card
(Avail - www.boards.com - $95)

Graphics Cards
Best Performance Graphics Card for AGP
Titan GeForce FX5950 Ultra (256MB DDR3)
(Avail - www.ai.com - $940)

Best Performance Graphics Card for PCI Express
Nvidia GeForce 7900 GTX (256MB GDDR3)
(Avail - www.nvidia.com - $550)

Best Budget Video Card
Nvidia GeForce FX5200 (256MB DDR3)
(Avail - www.nvidia.com - $350)

RAM
Best Performance DDR RAM
Corsair XMS3-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Best Performance DDR2 RAM
Corsair XMS2-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Best Budget DDR RAM
Corsair XMS3-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Hard Drives
Best Performance Internal Hard Drive
Seagate ST9200120AS 200GB 7200 rpm SATA II"SCSI"
(Avail - www.seagate.com - $200)

Best Performance External Hard Drive
Western Digital WD1000EB 1TB 7200 rpm SATA II"SCSI"
(Avail - www.westerndigital.com - $300)

Monitors
Best LCD Monitor
Dell 2005FPV 20" LCD monitor
(Avail - www.dell.com - $129.99)

Best Budget LCD
 NEC-Mitsubishi 1970GX 19"LCD monitor
(Avail - www.necdisplay.com - $359)

Best CRT Monitor
 NEC-Mitsubishi 1970GX 19"CRT monitor
(Avail - www.necdisplay.com - $359)

Sound
Best Sound Card
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS (64-bit) Sound card
(Creative Labs - www.creative.com - $349)

Best Budget Sound Card
MusiDog 512MB 32-bit Sound card
(MusiDog - www.musidog.com - $79)

Speakers
Best Speaker System
Logitech X-5400 Digital 5.1 speakers
(Logitech - www.logitech.com - $400)

Best Budget Speaker System
GigaWorks ProAmber GS30 5.1 speaker system
(GigaWorks - www.gigaworks.com - $200)

Headphones
Best Headphones
Zalman ZM-3100S headphones
(Zalman - www.zalmanusa.com - $42)

Game Devices/Peripherals
Best Gaming Mouse (Basic)
Viper Gaming Harpoon Optical Mouse
(Razer - www.razerzone.com - $50)

Gaming Notebooks
Best Performance Notebook
Dell Inspiron XPS 430 notebook
(www.dell.com - $3,400)

Best Budget Notebook
Viper Gaming Harpoon notebook
(Megar Gaming - www.megar.com - $1,299)

Networking
Best Gaming Router
D-Link DIR-615 Gigabit 8-port Router
(D-Link - www.d-link.com - $159)

Best Switch
SMC 1508T-24 10/100/1000 Gigabit 24-port Switch
(SMC - www.smc.com - $119)

Best Network Adapter
Belkin Fast Ethernet Network Card
(Belkin - www.belkin.com - $110)

Gaming Notebooks
Best Performance Notebook
Dell Inspiron XPS 430 notebook
(www.dell.com - $3,400)

Best Budget Notebook
Viper Gaming Harpoon notebook
(Megar Gaming - www.megar.com - $1,299)

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

A-List

CPU
Best Performance Processor
AMD Athlon 64 FX-57 2.6GHz CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $1,015)

Best Performance Dual-Core Processor
AMD Athlon 64 X2 4800+ 2.4GHz CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $860)

Best Budget Processor
AMD Athlon 64 3500+ 2.2GHz "Venice" 90nm CPU
(AMD - www.amd.com - $219)

Motherboards
Best Performance Motherboard
Ati Radeon X1600 Extreme 256MB DDR3 video card
(Avail - www.ati.com - $175)

Best Budget Motherboard
SiS7525-512MB 128MB DDR3 video card
(Avail - www.boards.com - $95)

Graphics Cards
Best Performance Graphics Card for AGP
Titan GeForce FX5950 Ultra (256MB DDR3)
(Avail - www.ai.com - $940)

Best Performance Graphics Card for PCI Express
Nvidia GeForce 7900 GTX (256MB GDDR3)
(Avail - www.nvidia.com - $550)

Best Budget Video Card
Nvidia GeForce FX5200 (256MB DDR3)
(Avail - www.nvidia.com - $350)

RAM
Best Performance DDR RAM
Corsair XMS3-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Best Performance DDR2 RAM
Corsair XMS2-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Best Budget DDR RAM
Corsair XMS3-18400-4400 1GB 550MHz DDR2 RAM kit
(Corsair - www.corsair.com - $200)

Hard Drives
Best Performance Internal Hard Drive
Seagate ST9200120AS 200GB 7200 rpm SATA II"SCSI"
(Avail - www.seagate.com - $200)

Best Performance External Hard Drive
Western Digital WD1000EB 1TB 7200 rpm SATA II"SCSI"
(Avail - www.westerndigital.com - $300)

Monitors
Best LCD Monitor
Dell 2005FPV 20" LCD monitor
(Avail - www.dell.com - $129.99)

Best Budget LCD
 NEC-Mitsubishi 1970GX 19"LCD monitor
(Avail - www.necdisplay.com - $359)

Best CRT Monitor
 NEC-Mitsubishi 1970GX 19"CRT monitor
(Avail - www.necdisplay.com - $359)

Sound
Best Sound Card
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS (64-bit) Sound card
(Creative Labs - www.creative.com - $349)

Best Budget Sound Card
MusiDog 512MB 32-bit Sound card
(MusiDog - www.musidog.com - $79)

Speakers
Best Speaker System
Logitech X-5400 Digital 5.1 speakers
(Logitech - www.logitech.com - $400)

Best Budget Speaker System
GigaWorks ProAmber GS30 5.1 speaker system
(GigaWorks - www.gigaworks.com - $200)

Headphones
Best Headphones
Zalman ZM-3100S headphones
(Zalman - www.zalmanusa.com - $42)

Game Devices/Peripherals
Best Gaming Mouse (Basic)
Viper Gaming Harpoon Optical Mouse
(Razer - www.razerzone.com - $50)

Gaming Notebooks
Best Performance Notebook
Dell Inspiron XPS 430 notebook
(www.dell.com - $3,400)

Best Budget Notebook
Viper Gaming Harpoon notebook
(Megar Gaming - www.megar.com - $1,299)
I've just ordered a new top-of-the-line Mach V Exotix gaming PC from Falcon Northwest with an Athlon 64 FX-57, but now I'm having second thoughts about my choice of CPU. Would the X2 4800+ be a better buy than the FX-57 in the long run? All the stuff I've been reading about the coming of multithreaded games and multithreaded drivers from Nvidia is making me think that the FX-57 might turn out to be a bad choice if, in a few months, videocard drivers will take advantage of the dual-core CPUs. I don't feel very good if all of a sudden the X2 4800+ is able to wipe the floor with the FX-57 in most current and older games. And it looks like the big multithreaded game engine everyone is waiting for is the next Unreal Tournament engine.

Richard D. Ryan

Since you're running a couple of 7800 GTX cards in SLI, don't look for dual-core-optimized drivers from Nvidia to give you much of a speed boost at all. Real gains will only come from some of the geometry assists that Nvidia's drivers do on CPUs, and that mostly benefits midlevel and low-end videocards. All the really cool games are limited by pixel shader processing ability, memory bandwidth, and the like.

Max Chauhan

Having said that, many games are limited by CPU power, and with all the physics middleware and game engines moving to take advantage of multicore CPUs (thanks to multicore next-gen consoles and future PC CPUs), the day will come when dual core matters a lot.

There won't be games that benefit much from dual core in the next few months. Don't expect to see many games that take advantage of dual core until well into 2005. Right now, be happy that you have one of the fastest gaming machines you can buy, and worry about replacing your CPU with a dual-core chip in a year or two when it will really make a difference.

Richard D. Ryan

I got a Dell computer about a year ago and decided that I should upgrade the videocard. I currently have a Radeon X800, a PCI Express card. Is a Radeon 9600 or 8800 better than my X800? Because a friend said that he could get me a Radeon 9600 for cheap, I don't really want to spend over $400 on the videocard.

Mathew Breeden

It sounds like you have a decent cable modem connection, which should make it easy enough to enjoy the game the way it's meant to be played. So what you have is not "lag" (network latency). You have other computer performance problems. Gamers often confuse lag—slow network response caused by the game servers or your Net connection—with poor PC performance (bad framerate, slow loading times, and so on). So what can you do? If you barely meet the minimum system requirements, make sure you turn down all your video options in the game menu. Don't run programs in the background while you play WOW. Defrag your hard drive. Definitely run an up-to-date virus scan and spyware scan to make sure your system resources aren't being sucked up by nasty programs you don't even know you're running! And make sure you're audio, video, and system drivers are up to date.

Unfortunately, this probably won't solve the really long loading you're experiencing to get to the graveyard screen. You'll probably notice that your hard drive is accessing furiously during this time. The best thing you can do is upgrade your RAM: Massively multiplayer games like WOW run best with 512MB or 1GB of RAM. Or just try not to die so often.

Got questions? Send them to Tech_Medics@ziffdavis.com
WE KNOW IT'S BEEN JUST THREE MONTHS since we last played a turn-based historical war game, but as part of our continuing effort to woo the rest of Bill Trotter's former readers away from PC Gamer, we're playing another one this month, Crown of Glory. In the 1805 scenario, Bruce is playing as France, Tom is playing as Russia, and everyone else is the A.I. The first player to amass 1,000 glory wins.

1805

Tom: You might have thought that Napoleonic is the study of short people. So imagine your embarrassment when Bruce suggests a Napoleonic game and you call dibs on the hobbists, or the Omima Loompas if Electronic Arts has an exclusive deal with the hobbist franchise. Imagine, then, your disappointment upon discovering that Napoleonic is actually the study of men who wear bad hats and line up in neat formations to shoot at each other. I'm not necessarily saying this happened to me. But I do want to make it clear that a lesser magazine would take this opportunity to make all sorts of jokes about Bruce being a cheese-eating surrender monkey because he's playing as France. I like to think we're above that sort of thing.

Bruce: Crown of Glory is a war game about the Napoleonic era, with a complex strategic layer that makes Rome: Total War look like Riskus Romanus. The 1805 scenario doesn't involve a lot of economic management since the main countries are already developed and primed for war. However, Crown of Glory's two-player game has some serious issues that Tom and I will have to fight through. Pun totally intended.

There are two key stats in this game: national morale and glory. These come from fighting battles, surrendering, controlling designated "political goal" provinces, and having avant-garde plays and poetry readings, which are represented by your culture score. A game that glorifies intellectual foppery—that has to be a first.

Tom: The best parts of Crown of Glory play a bit like Frog City's Imperialism games.

IF YOU WANT TO FIND OUT HOW SMART PRUSSIA IS, GO LOOK FOR IT ON A MAP. GO AHEAD, I'LL WAIT.
Unfortunately, these same parts also play a bit like Quicksilver’s *Master of Orion III*. Welcome to the sometimes cool/usually stupid strategic layer! While we’re doing some nifty 19th-century wheeled and dealing to lay a taffic of diplomatic interactions over Europe, we also have to futz with inscrutable slider bars and wonder why we have so many textiles sitting around in our warehouses. No joke. This game has textiles like you wouldn’t believe. Need a bolt of cloth? Come on down to *Crown of Glory*.

Bruce: Remember how I said the two-player game has some issues? One of them is the totally goofy A.I. To wit: Since the A.I. controls Prussia, offering the Prussians “free passage” through my territories is enough to get them to declare war on Russia—a completely idiotic move, especially considering that free passage through my territories is totally useless to them. But in exchange for nonexclusive vacation rights in Languedoc (which is also a kind of cheese), the Prussians are totally willing to freeze their asses off in Russia. Sounds good to me!

While my diplomats are engaged in these machinations, I need to get my war machine in motion. At the beginning of the game, France is the only nation that can move corps independently, which is a serious historical simulation of Napoleon being, like, a total genius. I need to redeploy my troops to the south and whip the Austrians before they can link up with the reinforcements that Tom will eventually send from Mother Russia.

Tom: You know how someone in *Battlefield 2* will rush ahead in a dune buggy instead of waiting for his teammates to get in with him? From now on, I’m going to call this move “pulling an Austria,” because that’s exactly what Austria has done. Those lone-wolfing idiots decided to have their own battle in Bavaria instead of waiting for me to link up with them, which was totally on my way to do.

Bruce: The first big battle happens in Bavaria, with 100,000 Austrians taking on 90,000 French. We’re resolving battles by quick combat rather than in the tactical war game mode so that the game doesn’t last two years to finish. This means that, given French leadership advantages, it’s going to take a lot of Austrians to slow down my steamroller. Eight wonderful glory to the French.

Tom: I’m being attacked by some place called Prussia. If you want to find out how smart Prussia is, go look for it on a map. Go ahead, I’ll wait. Are you back yet? You couldn’t find it, could you? You know why? Because it’s gone. That’s what happens to countries clueless enough to take orders from France and attack another country that’s not even bothering them. Not that the Prussians pose any great threat to me. By promiscuously building a string of depots to its destination, the A.I. does a great job of telling me exactly what it’s going to do long before it does it. So the genious running Prussia kindly draw the 19th-century equivalent of a neon arrow to Moscow using a line of expensive and unnecessary depots. To which I respond by easily knocking out the first one, in Grodno, rendering the rest of them useless.

1806

Bruce: Fouché is my spy in the east, and right now he shows a Prussian army sitting in Smolensk in the middle of a snowstorm. That can’t be good for Prussian supply. More importantly, the Austrians concentrated forward and tried moving into Switzerland. My advance guard lost a couple small battles, but the larger ones were never in doubt. I won a particularly big battle against both Austria and Russia, which gained me 32 glory.

Tom: As sure as you’ll get the message “dumbass666 [LAW] anygivenplayer” after dumbass666 runs off in his dune buggy in *Battlefield 2*, I got the following message about Austria: “Your ally Austria has surrendered to France.”

Bruce: Peace terms are crucial here. I take the provinces of Tyrolia and Carniola, which are French political objectives and will gain me two extra glory per turn. Over a 40-turn game, that’s 60 glory. I also got the Austrians to give me 20 percent of their income for a whole year and to agree not to attack me for a few months. I actually went to them to attack again at some point, because that means I will be able to make them surrender, netting me another 120 glory. Maybe I can farm the Austrians for glory.

Tom: Now to get the Prussians to surrender. I force them into a few sizable battles and grind their armies down. Based on my decisive victories, I’ve determined that the Prussians are probably lazy, stupid, shiftless, bad at math, and unable to drive worth a damn. Since there’s no longer any such thing as a Prussian, I can safely say this without offending anyone.

Bruce: While I was taking down Austria, Britain landed an expeditionary force in Brittany and actually captured Breit! That did wonders for my national morale (-150 for a captured city). Plus, they reinforced with more troops, and with Austria out of the way, Napoleon came back and forced pretty much the whole force to surrender...
render. It was like a rehearsal for Dunkirk, but without the part where they're valiantly ferried across the Channel. It's going to take Britain a long time to get those troops back because it'll have to build divisions from scratch.

Tom: Like Richard Simmons, the Prussians are easy enough to hold back but hard to beat into submission. I just found out that they have a whole other army. Apparently, the Prussians researched "reserves." So I make peace with them by paying them off. Too bad they won't accept textiles, because I'm sitting on a ton of the stuff. I promise not to attack them for a year, which lets me convince them that they should try their luck beating up on Bruce.

Bruce: After a year as my ally, Prussia has cancelled our alliance and declared war on me, apparently at Russia's behest (according to the treaty report). That's actually great, because now I can invade Prussia.

1807

Bruce: When you're playing as France, invading Prussia is trivially easy because Batavia (the Netherlands) is your protectorate. Drop a small depot chain in there and you can operate in full supply as long as you can afford it. I cranked my military readiness down a bit after defeating Austria and shutting down the British invasion, so I've built up a nice pile of cash. Two huge battles in Brandenburg net me almost 50 glory. A few turns besieging Berlin drops the Prussian morale enough to force a surrender. My glory is over 600.

Tom: Apparently, I managed to weaken the Prussians enough so that Bruce could quickly convince them to surrender. It's like those times you try to open a jar of jelly that's been sitting in the fridge. You grunt and struggle to no avail, only to have your girlfriend easily pop the lid off because you forgotten it first.

Bruce: The Prussian surrender puts me in an interesting position. There are no provinces that gain me any political objectives, so I need to decide if I'm going to invade Russia. If I re-create the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, I get a protectorate where I can start my depot supply chain. That costs me a lot of points (to get Prussia to cede five provinces), so I can't get other things out of this, such as money or enforced peace.

Tom: Time to get some glory. Bruce created a protectorate out of Poland, and I'm about to unprotected. I cue the montage of battle scenes with me in the background looking noble and determined!

Bruce: Tom got the jump on me and laid siege to Warsaw. But my whole army is close by, and when the French are operating in supply, they're very tough. I taught two Russian armies the dangers of exporting Pan-Slavism west of the Dvina. Fourteen glory to me, and I'm on the road to Moscow.

Tom: I set up the montage of retreat scenes with me in the background looking impressed and baffled!

Bruce: Here is where Crown of Glory isn't such a good Napoleonic war game: if you can just sit in an enemy's capital, you can pretty much force him to surrender. Not to get all preachy, but the story of Napoleon's assault in Russia is one of the most famous in history. In this game, as long as you occupy the enemy capital, morale will plummet and the czar will eventually agree to pay TO whatever he wants.

Tom: My national morale is at -300, but I'm not terribly concerned with approval ratings. Let them eat borsch. I'm busy beating up on the French.

Bruce: I spend three months in Moscow watching my army melt away as Tom's Cossacks very effectively break down my supply chain. However, he can't manage to win a decisive battle, and his morale ends up just giving out.

1808

Tom: Bruce has forced me to surrender by basically camping his troops in Moscow while I run around and actually win battles. Who knew bivouacking was more important than actually fighting? It seems that Spain and Turkey are also really good at bivouacking, because they both have more glory than me. I hereby dub this game Nightcap of Glory.

The problem here is that you really have to cooperate to defeat France, which is something Europe doesn't do well when it's run by half-baked A.I.s, much less actual European leaders. So Bruce got to play the A.I. like the war-gaming puppet master that he is while I lurked harmlessly on the eastern edge of the map and tutored with Prussians.

Bruce: Actually, supply is (or was) probably the single most important consideration in Napoleonic combat. The problem is that this game doesn't penalize you enough for being way, way out of supply like my troops were in Russia. Napoleon's army disintegrated in less than a month after he left Moscow, but I've happily sat here for several turns with no depots, defeating every Russian army that tries to dislodge me.

Tom: Bruce is within spitting distance of the win and there are Austrians amassed for an attack, which will be followed by their surrender, which will handily tip Bruce over 1,000 glory. How can I get the A.I. to not attack? I need to quickly research the United Nations and pass a resolution for the Austrians to chill the 1st out. Unfortunately, Crown of Glory's economics are mainly about stockpiling textiles.

Bruce: Austria hates me. Austria wants war. In fact, Austria wants war so much that it gave me a casus belli by loading all of its army into adjacent territories. This gives me an excuse to declare war with no glory loss. Here we go again! I swing my two main armies south from Flanders and force three big battles this turn. I win all three. Tom is in the unfortunate position of watching the A.I. give the game away to me.

Tom: One of the recurring problems in Tom vs. Bruce articles is that anytime we want some sort of multilateral gaming experience, either Erik Wolpaw comes in and writes stuff much funnier than ours or the A.I. serves as a spoiler. And when you consider how horrible Crown of Glory's strategic A.I. is, I don't consider this a loss for me so much as a win for bad A.I.

Bruce: The second Austrian surrenders the army to me for over 900 glory, and a few more turns of doing nothing but collecting points for stuff that doesn't require me to do anything will put me over the top.

Tom: The piece de resistance here—note that I'm having to use little Frenchisms now that Napoleon Gorky has pretty much conquered the world—is that the denouement of this mise-en-scène wasn't due to Bruce's superior esprit de corps. Mais non! Instead, the coup de grâce was simply the bonne chance of the pomme de terre A.I., trampling the monde in a veritable cirque du soleil of je ne c'est pas. Que est ce que c'est? At any rate, the cheese-eating surrender monkey wins. C'est la guerre!
Put On Your Game Face

Competition's cutthroat out there — serious gamers can't afford to sleep on the latest technology trends.

**Interact with 35,000 gamers** and get an edge at New York's only consumer gaming and technology event, DigitalLife, the final word in electronic entertainment.

We're dishing up the world's hottest games and gadgets.

Test drive the latest unreleased games and get a sneak peek at the stunning power of the Xbox 360™ weeks before its official launch!

**Get Tickets Now!**

50% off with promotional code: at www.digitallife.com

October 14-16, New York City, Javits Convention Center • 1-866-761-7282

Presenting Tournament Sponsors: XBOX, Intel, GGL Global Gaming League

Produced By: Produced By:

Sponsors: 2K Sports, HOT 97, New York Post, Shure, UP 1 UP.com, Star Wars Battlefront II

ON THE DISC

HUXLEY
Check out this trailer and documentary on this much-hyped MMORPG. You’re just one step away from it. But you probably already know that.

STAR WARS BF2 TRAILER
All-new space combat, player-agnostic, and locations straight out of the last movie—on mail. Read our preview on page TK, then save it for action on the CD.

F.E.A.R. TRAILER
Check out the trailer of this survival horror-inspired real-person shooter and watch for our review in an upcoming issue.

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE TRAILER
See Stubbs fight humans and convert them into zombies as he exacts his revenge in this ‘50s-inspired action game.

TOTAL OVERDOSE TRAILER
Mix From Dusk Till Dawn with Kill Bill, then go waay over the top from there. Seriously. Check it out in this trailer.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3 TRAILER
The Prince is back—and the Prince is bad. Take a peek at the game promising to blend the best elements of the last two Prince of Persia games.

FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS TRAILER
Fable arrives on the PC with expanded content, greater customization, new quests, and enhanced graphics. You’ll find our review on page TK.

BATTLEFIELD 2 MOD EDITOR (BETA)
Get creative with the Battlefield 2 engine with this mod editor from the good folks at EA Games.

THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE TRAILER
The Sims get their groove on in this trailer for The Sims 2: Nightlife!

THE SIMS 2 DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT
Check out this exclusive song for The Sims 2. Just load this CGW remix and watch your Sims dance the night away.

BLACK & WHITE 2 TRAILER
Will Black & White 2 "revolutionize both real-time strategy and God games," as Molyneux and gang claim? See it in this trailer, and read our preview on page TK.

LUXOR SHAREWARE
The good folks at Reflexive Arcade offer up some ancient Egyptian puzzle action.

BLACK & WHITE 2 SPELL VIDEOS
Get a look at some of the spells you can cast in Molyneux’s latest game.

VARIOUS TOOLS
Enjoy some nifty tools we found on the Web. Aren’t we thoughtful?

AD INDEX

2K GAMES CIVILIZATION IV ................................ 102-103
2K GAMES CIVILIZATION IV ................................ 105
2K GAMES ELDER SCROLLS OBSESSION ................. 3-3
2K GAMES SERIOUS SAM ........................................... 22-22
2K GAMES SHATTERED UNION .......................... 68
ACTIVEVISION CALL OF DUTY ............................ 214-215
ACTIVEVISION QUAKE III ........................................ 43-43
ACTIVEVISION X-MEN ........................................... 125-127
CHIP'S & BIT'S CHIPS & Bits ............................ 80-80
CHIP'S & BIT'S GAMEWADZWEB.COM ................ 86
CREATIVE LABS AUDIGY ................................. 18-19
CYBERPOWER SYSTEMS ........................................ 101
CYBERPOWER SYSTEMS ........................................ 101
DELL COMPUTER CORP .................................... 60-81
DELL HOME SYSTEMS ...................................... 16-17
ELECTRONIC ARTS ........................................... 24-26
FULL SAIL REAL WORLD EDUCATION ............... 67
HUFFPOWER BESTPOWER PC ......................... 16-17
LUCASARTS ENTERTAINMENT BATTLEFRONT ...... 210-211
MICROSOFT AGE OF EMPIRES ......................... 328-338
MICROSOFT DUNGEON SIEGE II ....................... 121
MICROSOFT FABLE PC ........................................ 59
MICROSOFT WINDOWS XP .................................. 37
MICROSOF microsoft games, incs....................... 37
MICROSOF microsoft games, incs ....................... 37
SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND ........................... 30-31
NO SOFT CORP BACK COVER ........................... 124
NEWCOM.COM ........................................... 46-47
NINTENDO OF AMERICA ...................................... 58
BATTALION WARS ........................................... 58
D-PUMPS COOLING .......................................... 75
TURBO COOL PSU ........................................... 75
"SAITEK INDUSTRIES LTD, INC." ................. 124
SAITEK FPS GAME ACCESSORIES .................... 71
SEGAS OF AMERICA .......................................... 41
BARBARIAN INVAISON ....................................... 41
HOCKEY MANAGER ........................................... 25
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EQ DESERT OF FLAMES .......................... 66
NO SOFT CORP BACK COVER ........................... 124
TURBINE GAMES ........................................... 58
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE ................. 11-12
TURNER BROADCASTING CORP ......................... 87
GAME TAP .................................................. 123
UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT ............................... 27
UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT .................................. 27
MYST V ....................................................... 8-9
WIDEWORLD UNIVERSAL GAMES ..................... 8-9
F.E.A.R. SHAREWARE ........................................ 50A-D
WIDOWPC WIDOWPC ..................................... 111

WANT THE DISC?
DON'T MISS OUT UPGRADE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TODAY
BY CALLING 800-827-4450
Are You Game?

Now's your chance to find out.
DigitalLife, October 14-16 in New York City, will feature one of the largest gaming tournaments EVER!

Qualifiers will be coming to a city near you, or you can compete online for a shot at playing in the finals!

- Halo 2 DigitalLife Championships with a purse of $20,000
- Star Wars Battlefront™ II (Official Launch and Tournament) with a cash prize of $10,000
- Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament 2004, Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne

Dance Dance Revolution’s East Coast Championships – get your groove on!

Even if you don’t compete, you can still test drive the latest unreleased games and get a sneak peek at the stunning power of the Xbox 360™ weeks before its official launch!

Get Tickets Now to DigitalLife!

To register for the Gaming Tournament go to www.digitallife.GGL.com

CGW
50% off with promotional code:

october 14-16 · new york city · javits convention center · 1-866-761-7282

Presenting Tournament Sponsors:
XBOX
intel.

Tournament Sponsors:

2K
HOT97
NEW YORK POST
SHURE

Official Media Partner:

Sponsors:

BEST BUY
CREATIVE
Windows XP
Nokia
Connecting People
SEGA
T-Mobile
TOSHIBA

Official Launch Event Of:
BAD FOR BUSINESS

Anyone up for some CornHole? Hello? Is this on?

I RECENTLY INSTALLED AND PLAYED MOJO MASTER because, apparently, I am filled with self-loathing. Mojo Master successfully blends Magic: The Gathering, Singles, and a desperate cry for help into a gaming experience that isn't so much bad as it is horrible. But you can't exactly blame the game for its overwhelming crudity—after all, it was created as a promotional gimmick for Axe Body Spray. In the alternate hellscape universe of this dating game, Axe Body Spray is a potent power-up instead of a substance that will make you smell like a strip club bathroom attendant's worn and spattered Hush Puppies. If you're capable of making that cognitive leap, then OK, maybe you can eke a little enjoyment out of conning digital viens into dating you with the sub-middle-school double entendres that pass for wit in Mojo Master.

Then again, Mojo Master just might be the Noel Coward of corporate gaming. After playing—I'm sorry, enduring—Mojo Master, I took a quick spin around the Internet to see what other corporations had to offer in the way of games. Most corporate websites indeed feature some sort of gaming, most of it incredibly bad Shockwave mouse clickers that effectively whistle away a few of the minutes between now and your inevitable death with the added benefit of a special sneak preview of what purgatory might be like.

Take, for instance, the entertainment Coca-Cola provides at my coke.com—it's all New Coke-caliber bad. For example, MyCoke Recycler cunningly captures the special chum of fetching tools for an irrational factory foreman. "Bring me the Poofs!" it commands. "Bring me the planket!" it orders. First off, what the hell are Poofs? And why are planks going in my soda? Uh-oh! Be careful—one wrong step and you might get incinerated by molten steel! Or electrocuted! Sweet Moby Dick, is this the same company that wanted to teach the world to sing? Another game, MyCoke Coaster, seems a more natural fit until you play it and discover that instead of promoting responsible beverage-cozy usage, Coaster is a sequence-memorizing game that charges you with getting a roller-coaster car to the top of the rails. Coke—the beverage of one-armed, ball-skipping carnies.

Unlike Coke, the Pepsi.com entertainment isn't designed by monkeys fed a steady diet of peyote and psilocybin. (I'll pause here to note that while I don't know how to spell "psilocybin," Microsoft Word does. Make of that what you will.) Instead, Pepsi.com pimps its products not through bed games but personality tests, albeit tests packed with wild, wacky, eXtreme 'tude. Through this no doubt rigorous scientific process, I am matched as an ideal Pepsi Twist drinker because when confronted with naming a hypothetical band, I opt for The Plastic Tart over choices such as Seventeen Sprain because The Plastic Tart was merely stupid as opposed to incredibly stupid, and because my real dream band name, Crawlspace Cowboy, wasn't an option.

You'd think that such a large corporation would have the wherewithal to create better-quality content. Sadly, they don't. These games don't do anything to enhance their parent brands, and some aggressively degrade them. Like McDonald's games. The company created those playgrounds at its obesity-dispensation centers in order to hook younger consumers, so surely its website is chock-full of fun for the youngsters, right? Wrong. The only real game I could find consisted of trying to click on a flitting Big Mac that shed lettuce and taunted me by declaring "MY BUNS DEMAND BOTH HANDS!" While this very phrase is doubtlessly useful in negotiating salary increases (yes, I'm looking at you, Ryan "Mr. Moneybags" Scott), its efficacy as a slogan related to a greasy food product is, at best, questionable. Your buns demand both hands? Of course they do, fat ass.

MY BUNS DEMAND BOTH HANDS!

Some companies seem to worry if their Web visitors are even up to the task of gaming. Take Preparation H—its website proffers a leisurely '90s-style quiz show in lieu of anything too taxing or lively because, you know, occids are if you're visiting the Preparation H website you've already got enough aggravation. As you'd expect, Preparation H is all about the end result, and after you've wrestled with whimsical hemorrhoid humor in the form of multiple choice answers that postulate "Hemorrhoids often occur with birthday parties," you've laughed a little, you've loved a little, and you've learned a lot—about swollen rectal veins.

Yet the most unsettling diversion and definitive proof that businesses have no business in the game business comes courtesy of Nabisco. Journey to nabisco.com/games and you'll discover the unfortunately named CornHole, an innocuous enough little recreation yet the most badly named recreation since, um, Scab Nibbling. Short of finding a rat bottled in your soda, Cornhole, with its subtle visual of a big, dark, round hole cut into a board, is the most inept brand enhancer ever, successfully linking snack chips with (at best) oughtouses and (at worst) a little spot on the body which should avoid birthday parties at all costs. Bon appétit! / Robert Coffey
A new world of video games has arrived.

Welcome to GameTap™ where you can play hundreds of the greatest video games from the greatest systems, right from your broadband-connected PC. It’s gaming freedom like never before. All for just $14.95 a month. GET YOUR FREE 2-WEEK TRIAL AT GAMETAP.COM
BUILD YOUR OWN FORTRESS OF EVIL

Use strategy and style to build a bastion of villainy from the ground up. Construct bases room by room with teleporters, hospitals and elaborate defenses in addition to an extensive set of furnishings. Base building is just one of the many villainous activities in which players can partake in City of Villains®. Do you have what it takes to become infamous? Lord Recluse™ is watching.