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COMPUTER GAMING

The PC Gaming Authority

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS, BABY!
P. 343

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

TEAM FORTRESS 2

THE KING OF ONLINE SHOOTERS RETURNS—AT LONG LAST!

PLUS: HANDS-ON WITH PORTAL • HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO SHOCKER

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Stronghold Legends is a dramatic new RTS adventure set in the medieval world of Stronghold. Play as King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, Count Vlad Dracul, or the mighty Siegfried of Germany. Seize control of 3 vast kingdoms and become a legend.

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- 100% more siege equipment and castle traps - trebuchets, ballistas, statal towers, cannon, cannons, orcs & amazons.
- 4-player multiplayer features, including a challenging skirmish mode.
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To all you elitist bastards who insist on playing
 games in hard mode: Shaddup. To everyone
 who plays in easy mode: You're not alone.

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THIS MONTH ON 1UP.COM

CGWRADIO.1UP.COM
Hello and welcome...to the weekly CGW Radio podcast! Crank the volume and hear
what the intrepid editorial staff has to say about all things PC gaming-related.

BOARDS.1UP.COM
Had enough of our nonsense? Come to our
official message boards and let us know! CGW's official forum is a great way to get
in touch with the editorial staff and scores of hardcore PC gamers.

CGW-RYAN.1UP.COM
Take a peek at one mild-mannered CGW editor's rants on weird dreams, Pop Tarts,
and all things Sam & Max.
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Might and Magic
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T.G. PHONE HOME

Missive from a wandering editor

Where am I again? Can someone remind me? It's not that I'm suffering from old-man memory loss...it's just that during the entire production of this month's issue, I've been on the road. Even as I type this now, I am sitting on a plane bound for good ol' Austin, Texas, far away from the good ship Computer Gaming World in San Francisco, California.

Why you should care about this—other than the fact that we've already been close, you and I—is that my travels are directly related to the future of this magazine, which (as many of you already know) is about to change dramatically. And though we're still a couple months away from The Big Day, I figured it's too late to start talking about it all official-like, just to make sure we're on the same page. If you know what I'm talking about and are already tired of hearing about it, then bear with me. It's not because I'm forgetful or stupid. I just care, dammit!

So the deal is this: in the December issue, CGW will transform, as if by magic, into Games for Windows: The Official Magazine. Rolls right off the tongue, doesn't it? Yeah. Well, you'll get used to it. And maybe we will, too. This is a huge deal—obviously, after 25 glorious years of CGW—but however traumatic or shocking the change may seem now, this is going to be a great thing both for us here and for all PC gamers. It's a play for the big leagues, a swing for the fences. It's an acknowledgment that PC gaming is here to stay, that it matters, and that it deserves its own official magazine. And that magazine, my friends, is this one right here.

Or at least it will be. You're about to read the next-to-last CGW. Enjoy it—I know I will, since I wasn't around to participate. If it sucks, blame the other guys. And if it's great, as I suspect it is, thank my awesome staff—who always has my back, whether I'm in or out of town. Turn the page, and let's see what's up.

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Since Team Fortress 2 Was Announced in 1999...

SEAN MOLLOY MANAGING EDITOR

I've moved across the country; lived in seven apartments; held jobs as an engineer and a movie critic; lost a cat; gained a dog; read 67 science fiction novels with embarrassing covers. Now Playing: Civilization 6. World of Warcraft, Dead Rising (Box 90). 1UP.com Blog: cgw_g1ass.1UP.com

RYAN SCOTT EDITOR (VIEWPOINT)

I landed my first job out of high school; paid off a car; moved out of my parents' house; witnessed two presidential elections; acted as editor for four different sections of CGW; attended five consecutive E3s. Now Playing: EVE Online. 1UP.com Blog: cgw_ryen.1UP.com

SHAWN ELLIOTT EDITOR (MARKET)

I've earned a master's degree in creative writing; expanded from console to PC gaming; worked on Electronic Gaming Monthly; freelanced for everyone else. Now Playing: Company of Heroes. Dark Messiah of Might and Magic. 1UP.com Blog: cgw_g1ass.1UP.com

LOGAN PARR FILEFOOT LISBON

I bought my first PC; moved on from LucasArts; been back to New Zealand; and, oh yeah, played something like 20 million games. Now Playing: The Elder Scrolls. NI. Overworld. Prey. 1UP.com Blog: loganl.1UP.com

MICHAEL JENNINGS ART DIRECTOR

I've entered the exciting world of magazine publishing; found that world is messy and unpredictable; wrote a story in Baja for a while; mentored the world of magazines; saw all three LOTR movies and was Arts Director at CGW. Now Playing:有任何。 1UP.com Blog: cgw_jennings.1UP.com

SEAN DALLASKIDD ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

Kevin Bacon has been in more than 14 movies—a stimulus, considering he's been in more than 40 since 1979. Now Playing: Tron: Legacy. Dark Secret. 1UP.com Blog: the_dallaskidd.1UP.com

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THE F.E.A.R. CONTINUES
OCTOBER 2006
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Let's cut the cow manure: August 2006 issue. Sam & Max cover story, Page 70. Photo of CGW staffers Ryan Scott, Michael Jennings, Darren Gladstone, and Sam & Max creator Steve Purcell. Well... I was just thinking maybe you could be friendly guys and send me one of those good “prototype” CGW covers that Mr. Purcell drew for this issue? I promise it will be the Ancient of Ancients! The Artifact of Artifacts! You have my word.

Alfred Chou

You mean those prototype covers up on top of the page there?

CONSOLE CONVERGENCE

In the article “A Separate Peace” from CGW #265, Matthew Guzanda of Crystal Dynamics states, “I can’t really think of anything long-term that a PC will be able to do that a console won’t.” Does this mean I can look forward to my kids downloading porn on their Xbox?

Don Voge

Yes, but only after they’ve applied for variable-rate mortgages and punched that damn monkey a few times to win an iPod.

I was thinking on your August issue’s Radar topic of PC-console convergence. As I see it, the console’s only real advantage is that it is a fixed environment: Once a game works, it works on everyone’s box. The PC, however, is a dynamic environment, in terms of both hardware and software. It seems to me that if you know that a PC is going to be gaming-only (and many families have multiple PCs, so that’s viable), you could trim the OS to a subset of the bloated thing Windows is now, increasing reliability and decreasing resource-hogging. Without all the “features” that support actual productivity apps, Windows could be tight and sleek.

So, how about using your bully pulpit to lobby Microsoft for a gaming-only version of its OS? Taking a proportion of PCs out of the available pool for spreadsheets and whatnot would probably raise PC sales (and siphoning PlayStation purchases away from Sony, since they’re claiming they’re building computers these days... and charging for one). That translates to more copies of Windows going out the door, too. Heck, maybe Dell would fund the development!

Kaffen

Think about what you’re asking for: Do you really want to have to fork over the cash for yet another version of Windows? While there’s an off chance that a games-only edition might speed things up and prevent a few crashes here and there, it certainly wouldn’t be the “once a game works, it works on everyone’s box” answer. Hardware’s the real sticking point: With so many processors, motherboard architectures, video cards, soundcards, and drivers, it’s impossible for game devs to design for every possible combination. PC gaming’s strength and its weakness.

F***ING DAMMIT!

While paging through the August 2006 issue, I became acutely aware of the gratuitous amount of cursing that filled your copy. In my opinion, you have strayed over the line of what is—or what should be—acceptable conduct for a magazine of your caliber. What I’m referring to was most apparent in your Gladstoned column. Honestly, does anyone care how trying it is for this “modern woman” to be engaged to a gamer, anyway? How many females read this magazine?, as well as your “Overrated/Underrated” feature.

However, before we go any further, I should point out I’m guiltless in this manner, either. I admit I’m often prone to firing off many of the profanities you list. With that said, I try to refrain, as much as possible, from spouting profanities in the public agora—especially if younger audiences are likely to overhear. Now, I know you do refrain for the most part from stating the profanities explicitly (with the exceptions of “goddamn” and “bitch,” both of which I consider unsuitable). But honestly, is there anyone capable of reading a sentence who doesn’t know what “f***” or “s***” means? Would any on-staff parents feel comfortable allowing their kids to read a column like Gladstoned?

Not only is the excessive level of profanity purely and unprofessional, it also makes taking you seriously when you actually adopt a serious tone that much more difficult. After all, why should I even consider your moral stance on an issue like game piracy when you yourselves fail to exhibit a fraction of the restraint you’re advocating? Once upon a time, CGW epitomized journalistic excellence, when it elevated itself above—rather than pandered to—the lowest common denominator.

Trevor Tuninga

Sorry, Trevor. We f***ed this one up big time.

ASK, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE

Will you guys run a story in the next issue about Team Fortress 2 (which Valve says is coming with Half-Life 2: Episode Two)? A cover story, even?

Dan

Get out of our heads, Dan. GET OUT OF OUR HEADS! Oh, and check out our cover story on all things Valve (including Team Fortress 2) starting on page 70.

SPEAK UP!

You hate us. You love us. You will send us $1 million in small, unmarked bills if you ever want to see your puppy again...

Prove your blind devotion by spewing some of your bile and e-mailing cgwletters@ziffdavis.com today. You’ll be a better person for it.
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FORTUNE AND GLORY
Just want to say thanks for publishing one of my e-mails. It’s gotten me some fame where I work!
    Adam Ruhoff

You’re welcome, Adam. Hey, look! Now you’re even more famous!

CH-CH-CHANGES
You should ignore all those losers who complain about the changes to the Viewpoint section. Hey, people! If you’re so mad, then stop buying the magazine! And do you really think that sending hate mail is going to help? That never works. I can see it now: “Hey guys, someone just threatened us with his unsubscript! Quick, we’d better change it back!”
Readers like you are the reasons people who are original and like to think outside the box—like, say, the writers and editors of CGW—are such a dying breed.
    Lucas

FURRY CORNER
Our off-the-cuff commentary about the furry community on the CGW Radio podcast (cgwradio.1UP.com) a while back has kicked off quite the debate. Here’s the latest batch of furry-mail. Keep ‘em coming!

In response to Schwimmwagen21’s letter about furries from CGW #265: The furry fandom’s big on foxes, wolves, and—yes—rabbits. Sheep? Not so much. Furry fans are mostly individualists (or like to think so), and so most tend not to take on the persona of a herd animal unless it has something distinctive about it. Furries have a reputation for being dumb, too—and the whole point of furry characters is that they’re what animals would be like if they were sentient. Think “humans in funny suits” (which is what the fur suits are all about).

I wouldn’t say that a “very small percentage” of the fandom support “adult themes.” A big market exists for anthropomorphic erotica, though it turns out an even bigger one exists for nonadult anthropomorphic artwork...just like the market for other forms of art! Wow, who’d a thunk?

In case you’re not bored stiff by the topic, drop by WikiFur.com—its 4,406 articles on furry fandom should be more than enough to make fur grow on the palms of your paws. Nothing on Jessica Rabbit, but look up Shanda the Panda, Omaha the Cat Dancer, and Zig Zag if you want to know about the real furry equivalents.
    Laurence “GreenReaper” Parry

Furries are known to be irrational, quick to anger, easily offended, self-righteous, and very, very, very dim. Here are some tips and facts for dealing with and arguing with furries that you may find useful. By knowing how someone will react, you have already won half the battle:

1. Speak calmly and clearly, because acting angrily toward a furry will cause it to go into defensive mode and start ignoring everything you say. It’s much better to stay calm and carefully inform them that they are wrong.

2. Furries often wave their freedom of expression around as an “anything goes” pass to let them do whatever they want while avoiding criticism, but they constantly forget that it also applies to others. They often seek to silence anyone that opposes them or mocks them, completely missing the irony of doing so.

3. Furries will take special care to tell you how they have “won” an argument at every turn. They will also twist words and logic to appear superior. Remember: Furries can never truly win an argument, since at the end of the day, when everyone goes home, they are still furries, and you are not. In this sense, a furry can never put forward a winning argument. A simple rebuff of any argument with “but you are a furry” is invincible.

4. There is no such thing as racism against furries, because “furry” is neither a race nor an ethnicity. Furries make a choice to join the furry community and condone its massive output of disgusting gunk.

Marshall Banana

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
Oops! In our Half-Life 2: Episode One Viewpoint article from CGW #265 (page 80), we provided an inaccurate Reality Check score synopsis. Here's the correct rundown—we apologize for any confusion.

REALITY CHECK
IUP NETWORK 8/10
GAMESPOT 8.7/10
GAMESPY 4.5/5
IGN 8.5/10
Forgotten Realms

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Everything you do has a meaning

Available Fall 2006

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Congratulations, you've righted your plane.

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With a 16X overall improvement in terrain graphics, suddenly, calling it a simulator just doesn't seem right anymore. And over 50 real-world missions, it's the most realistic version yet. Whole cities and airports have been faithfully recreated. All that lets you. You're an uninvited climber on Mt. Kilimanjaro. Or take on the world's best pilots in the Red Bull Air Race. With 22
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD
How to raise an underground army
THERE'S STRENGTH IN NUMBERS, SO they say—unless those numbers shoot friends, won't follow orders, or perform otherwise egregious miscalculations of common sense. As shooting games grow beyond one guy and his guns, intelligent artificial intelligence becomes increasingly imperative—not for your foes, but for the allies you trust to act as assets rather than liabilities.

So pray for IO Interactive's Kane & Lynch: Dead Men, a buddy-criminal flick cum squad-based third-person shooter that's betting the bank on allied brains. The premise: You play Kane, a "misunderstood" electric chair-bound mercenary who escapes his fate and finds redemption in the underbelly; at your side is Lynch, a doped-up murdero who might've done in his own family, and an A.I. flash mob to help out with firefighting.

Rewind to 2005's Freedom Fighters, IO's "what if the Russians invaded America?" PC/Xbox/PS2 squad shooter. Three basic commands (attack, fall back, defend your position) directed allies with minimal fuss. "Freedom Fighters was a good training ground for us," says K&L game director Jens Peter Kurup, who describes K&L's squad-control system as a "simpler" and, at the same time, more tactically complex version of the already-effortless Freedom Fighters scheme.

When asked why more developers haven't copied Fighters' system, Kurup answers, "We aren't sure...perhaps people stick to the 'must add more features' approach and end up with something cumbersome."

"Squad members and opposing forces react to a range of stimuli," continues Kurup. "The most powerful inputs are perceived threat, fear, and firepower. It's crucial that A.I. reacts realistically, and team tactics vary according to evolving situations—for instance, if the team is outnumbered, I'll attempt to leverage suppressing fire in order to advance." Immense effort, in other words, to make players feel like they're fighting the foes designers intend them to fight, rather than the desire to uninstall suspect software.

And that's why Kane & Lynch's next design decision is so surprising: When loose-cannon Lynch has one of his "episodes," he slops obeying your commands. While IO's aim is to add tension to firefighting, we question the wisdom of suddenly killing players with a "bait"** insane sidestick. What if he's, you know, really, really annoying? Isn't this the same as sanctioning everything IO's poor A.I. programmers devote themselves to preventing?

"We're working hard to avoid that," Kurup says. "The secret lies in your understanding of Lynch's state of mind so that you can sense the onset of an episode. Combine that with a large amount of testing and tweaking, and we aren't worried."

THE C-WORD

While loony Lynch shares top billing with straight-laced Kane, the balance (at least in single-player mode) is obviously in Kane's favor. The reason is that Kane is given slightly more focus is that he is definitely the more professional and skillfully trained of the two," says Kurup. "We felt it would weaken storytelling and immersion to be able to jump between Kane and Lynch in single-player. Storywise, we're focusing more on Kane, but only marginally."

"We're trying to deliver an intense cinematic story and experience," says Kurup, invoking the c-word like so many other starry-eyed..."
gamemakers. However, when he lists IO’s influences, we understand: “Man on Fire, Clear and Present Danger, Miami Vice, Black Hawk Down, Heat,” the last of which evokes some particularly memorable firefight scenes and firefight scenes, when all is said and done, are at Kane & Lynch’s heart. “Great tension, real danger, excellent detail, and an epic struggle” define first-rate shootouts, according to Kurup. “A bad firefight is one without risk.”

The tension lies in Lynch’s unpredictability, the epic scale in your league of squadmates, the detail in destructible environments, and the threat—aside from baddies and their bullets—in ammo pickups, of all places. “We’re avoiding illogical pickup placement,” Kurup says. Squadmates play pack mule, and extra supplies are precious. Need a new rifle? Swap one with Skippy over there—but don’t leave him defenseless. “Weapons, items, and ammo are only available in appropriate locations such as an armory or security office. We’re making the resupply problem slightly more interesting,” he teases, “but aren’t ready to reveal how just yet.”

Also adding to the big-screen vibe: no inventory-management menus to break up the action. “Menu screens and clutter can kill immersion,” says Kurup.

FRIEND OF A FRIEND
Kurup extends the movie metaphor to Kane & Lynch’s co-op play. “In a sense, it’s like watching a film,” he says. “You can watch a film by yourself and enjoy it, but it’s better to share the experience with someone else so that you can discuss it and laugh about it later. That’s what we’re after.”

Cooperative mode not only offers the only opportunity to take control of Lynch, it’s also your only means of avoiding his off-the-meds fits. Rather than craft a completely separate two-player mode, Splinter Cell-style, IO is designing K&L’s single-player content to support co-op play—a tough balancing act for the level designers. “The most important thing is to ensure that you can’t just steamroll through levels in co-op mode,” says Kurup. “We also have to make sure that levels offer alternative paths for players to try more elaborate flanking and pincer movements.”

As for competitive multiplayer modes, IO isn’t talking, although Kurup hints at something more than dime-a-dozen deathmatching. According to him, “Competitive multiplayer is important to today’s always-connected game communities, and we want to offer highly innovative solutions. Why make an average multiplayer game? People will play it for an hour and then go back to Counter-Strike or Halo.” Know your enemy, the saying goes. And if you’re Kane or Lynch, you’d be wise to know your friends, too. —Sean Molloy
RAISE AN ARMY.
RULE THE WORLD.

FOR THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE ARCHLORD!

THOSE WHO WOULD RULE THE WORLD OF CHANTRA ARE LEGION. THOSE WHO WILL RULE CHANTRA NUMBER ONLY ONE. WILL IT BE A HUMAN? OR AN ORC? OR A MOON ELF PERHAPS? YOU DECIDE.

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The rich fantasy world of Chandra is the setting for ArchLord, the new MMORPG that will redefine online gaming. Three races, Orcs, Humans, and the mysterious Moon Elves, with eight different classes, live in this fully imagined environment.

The Humans
Throwing off the shackles of their Orc overlords, Humans are forging a brave new destiny on Chandra. Relentless and loyal, the Knight is the master of the melee. The Archer fields a potent ranged attack and offers fantastic combat support from afar. Small in size but stout of heart, the Mage wields mighty magic to make even the strongest ice cower.

The Orcs
One considered the elder races on Chandra, the Orcs have occupied the world for a very, very long time. The ferocious Berserker possesses great strength and surprising ranged skills. No wonder they are relatively rare. Sharp-eyed and strong, the Hunter lives “on point” as the premier mission scout. The Sargeant is charismatic and can devastate with a mere case, but is foremost in danger of losing his edge to the dark arts.

The Moon Elves
The Moon Elves have inhabited Chandra for eons and only recently have chosen to reveal themselves. Only two classes are known: the Ranger and the Elementalist. The Ranger is the most well-rounded of all the ranged attack roles.

Though weak physically, the Elementalist employs powerful summons to defeat his foes.
BATTLEFIELD SPONTANEOUS

Combat freedom in Frontlines: Fuel of War

PREVIEW

GHOST RECON SENT YOU SCRABBLING for cover. Battlefield 2 flung you whoopping from it. Frontlines: Fuel of War wants to pitch you somewhere in between. "Our aim is to balance fast-paced cinematic intensity with strategy," says Kaos Studios lead designer Frank DeLise, conjuring visions of chess meeting Black Hawk Down. "Players choose how to take on objectives—go stealthy and find new ways to sneak using different roles and recon equipment, or choose a heavy loadout and run a full-guns offensive.”

West versus East in a near-future squeal over oil, role-based combat specialties, working in foot squads or slinging vehicle fire—sound kinda like the same-old thing? Frontlines' hook: "Each theater is roughly an hour of gameplay streamed in with no loadings," DeLise explains. "The theaters themselves have front lines with a series of spread-out, nonlinear objectives that you must achieve to move that front forward." Whisking you between war theaters from Afghanistan to Moscow, Frontlines lets you pick missions and objectives your way. Sniper the enemy team holed up on the far hill, fling grenades at the nearby command HQ, or just recon the whole shindig—you tap your squad bots (in single-player), you mark the targets.

"Capture objectives and you get new abilities, like equipment, weapons, and vehicles, which you'll then use to grab the next objective," says DeLise, explaining how you'll refine your soldier class by choosing loadouts and roles. "The loadout is your weapon choice plus secondary elements like smoke grenades and proximity mines. Your role, on the other hand, adds equipment such as remote-controlled drones—"recon—or base defenses." DeLise says roles improve according to use and yield access to new abilities. A drone specialist might start with a passive recon drone and upgrade to one capable of assaults later in the game. And while role-playing combat ops aren't exactly new, the team hopes a few of Frontlines' 60 next-gen weapons and vehicles will knock the socks off conventional shooter tactics.

In the end, DeLise wants Frontlines to convey a broad range of emotions and playing styles. "It'll always feel like you're in a much bigger battle with lots of allies around you, fighting and changing their strategy based on the objectives you've achieved," he says. "Your squadmates will react like real soldiers, yelling for help and pointing out threats using a contextual battle-chat system that brings the war to life." And, with a little luck, it'll bring a well-worn genre to life, too. / Matt Peckham

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Schoolmarmish marketer calls retailer GameCrazy "the hizzouse; you know, the heezy" in this train wreck of an employee training vid.

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RAINFOY SIX VEGAS
Reversal of fortune?

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal GENRE: Tactical First-Person Shooter RELEASE DATE: November

“ARE GAMES GETTING STUPIDER?” WE sometimes ask ourselves, reminiscing over graph-paper dungeon maps and notepads filled with security codes and mission coordinates. Those seem to be fond memories, anyway.

The crotchety old gamer in us takes Ubisoft Montreal’s Rainbow Six Vegas as a hopeful sign that kids today aren’t as badly off as they seem. What was once the preeminent thinkin’-man’s shootin’ series took a nosedive with 2005’s Rainbow Six Lockdown, a game that confused “smart tactical operations” with

THE SERIES SEEMS TO BE PULLING AN ABOUT-FACE.

REAL-WORLD TACTICS

Shortly after Rainbow Six Vegas’s unveiling (and a demo that climaxd with a generic Las Vegas Strip hotel exploding, presumably from a terrorist attack), Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman publicly proclaimed the game to be a potential economic liability to his fair city—a proclamation that begs the question: How is a fictional terrorist attack in a videogame any different from a movie that depicts the same thing? A Vegas-based crime show like CSI? A Tom Clancy novel that culminates in the nuclear annihilation of the Super Bowl?

“We cannot speculate as to what the mayor would be referring to,” says Roy, “but we’re not making changes to the game as a result of his statement. The story line...is a work of fiction and should be held to the same standards as other forms of entertainment, such as books and films.”

This isn’t the first time a Clancy-branded game has come under fire. North Korea called Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 a propaganda piece, but Ubisoft calls that balderdash. “Ubisoft is in the entertainment business,” according to Roy, “and does not make political statements through its videogames.” An especially strange situation, then, given that books and films frequently do.
GET TOGETHER. ROLL SOME DICE. HAVE FUN.

Dungeons & Dragons

PLAYOND.COM
"carnival shooting gallery." Now, with Ubisoft Montreal back in the driver's seat, the series seems to be pulling an about-face. The first signal? "There will be a tactical map," says Ubisoft Montreal producer Stephane Roy, referring to the planning tool that was the Rainbow Six series' hardcore hallmark before all-developer Red Storm's Lockdown chucked it out the door, "to orient the player in the environment, help him locate alternate entry points, evaluate direction and distance from the objective's location, and control the locations to send the team by using preset waypoints."

To describe the flow of your missions, the folks at Ubisoft Montreal have turned tactical common sense into a might-as-well-be-trademarked mantra. Observe, Plan, Assault. Observe: Invert-rappel down the side of a building with your night-vision goggles to peek inside a penthouse suite, or just slip your snake cam beneath a door. Plan: Choose your weapons and use the aforementioned tactical map—but keep in mind what they say about the best-laid plans. Heat-of-the-moment combat tools include an updated order system that lets you give fellow Rainbow teammates commands based on their location rather than the location of your crosshairs, and a new ability to "tag" two foes for teammates to concentrate on while you take care of the rest. As for Assault: If all goes according to Plan, blink and you'll miss it. / Sean Molloy

YOU CAN PLAY THROUGH THE ENTIRE STORY CO-OP WITH UP TO FOUR PLAYERS.

MULTIPLAYER, VEGAS-STYLE

We interrogate producer Stephane Roy about Rainbow Six Vegas' multiplayer modes.

CGW: What multiplayer modes can we expect? Do any of the old modes like Free-for-All, Team Adversarial, or the objective-based Rivalry return?

Stephane Roy: Expect new online co-op and Adversarial game modes as well as some of the modes from previous Rainbow Six titles. Attack and Defend is a new team-based adversarial game mode in which one team assaults while the other team defends an objective. Your mission objectives vary from one map to another and include hostage rescue, defusing bombs, and recovering Intel.

CGW: What's in it for the co-op crowd?

SR: You can play through the entire story with up to four players, and once you're done, you can play missions in Terrorist Hunt with your friends. You can either play through co-op as [single-player protagonist] Logan or your online multiplayer character.

CGW: The console versions of Lockdown introduced a multiplayer "achievement" system that many felt only succeeded at making the good players better. The PC version of Vegas is using a multiplayer customization system, too, to earn new equipment and achievements—how will this work?

SR: While I can't share a lot of details about this aspect of the game, I can assure you that we are working to create a great package in terms of customization with the PC version.

CGW: Will multiplayer lean on large outdoor or intimate indoor maps?

SR: The Rainbow Six franchise is well known for its close-quarters battle elements, so we're focusing on giving the same kind of experience in the multiplayer maps, outdoor and indoor.
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Under the name Epic MegaGames, Rein's company makes shareware like Jill of the Jungle and Jazz Jackrabbit. Unreal? Not so much. Surreal? Possibly.

1998
After years of screenshot teases, Unreal ships. The 3D-engine wars begin as Epic licenses out its engine.

1999
Unreal Tournament revolutionizes multiplayer games. Spot-on bots, multiple modes, and alt-fire modes on weird weapons make us declare that UT topples the house of Quake.

2004
At the Game Developers Conference, Epic kicks off the next-gen wars by unveiling its new Unreal Engine 3—and then licensing it to just about everyone on Earth.

2006
Gears of War is the first Unreal 3-based game to market. If only it weren't just on the Xbox 360.

THE CGW INTERVIEW:
MARK REIN
Epic Games' epically opinionated VP gets real
BY DARREN GLADSTONE
CGW: You're developing games for just about every platform. Where do you see PC gaming now?
Mark Rein: It's at a crossroads. We're in a multiphase world these days, and you'd think that the X-Box 360 and PS3 would be good things for PC gaming. Next-generation games are expensive to make, and few publishers will give developers the money to make a blockbuster game for just one platform, so the PC seems like an obvious place to recoup some of the costs. The problem, however, is this: The percentage of PCs sold that are completely inadequate to play those cross-platform games is rising rapidly due to the massive success of Intel's strategy to sell complete platforms to system manufacturers. This is causing the proliferation of Intel integrated graphics and is exacerbated by the trend of people moving to laptop systems as their primary computing platforms. It's the same problem—most laptops come with integrated graphics chips, which can't run the games targeted toward next-gen consoles. This leaves only the high-end PC gamer, and that's not enough of a market to support PC gaming as a thriving industry. In my opinion, Intel is to blame. For some reason, they've decided an $800 PC shouldn't be as capable as a $300 game console, even though the cost to them to fix the problem is probably only a few dollars per PC.

The bottom line is that the majority of consumers unknowingly buy computers that suck for playing decent games. Intel could easily fix this, but they're not a graphics company, so it's not a priority for them—even though, in my opinion, it could be one of the best things they could do for their business.

CGW: Wasn't this always a problem, though? People always need to upgrade to play the "latest and greatest" games.
Mark Rein: No. You didn't need a graphics card to run Doom II. Every PC in its day could play it. If someone tried to run Doom 3 on a computer with integrated graphics today, they're likely to be so turned off by the performance—if the game runs at all—that they're pretty much lost to us. If the industry can't sell graphically compelling games to a large part of the PC audience, then eventually publishers might decide it isn't worth producing them at all. The decision to abandon the PC gamer will be a lot easier for publishers when X-Box 360 and PlayStation 3 installed bases go up, the prices of the consoles drop, and developers start making second- and third-generation games that take greater advantage of the hardware. It usually takes 18 months or more to make a game, so that time is coming sooner than you think.

CGW: How would you fix it?
Mark Rein: Well, Intel is doing a great job with the Core 2 CPU. They're back at the top of the performance pile, and we're happy to support them. However, they need to provide a better graphics experience so that $800 PCs can run games designed for next-gen consoles well enough so that people might get hooked and consider upgrading to higher-end machines. We're talking about Intel, though, so don't hold your breath. One possible glimmer of hope is the recent merger of AMD and ATI. The combined company will be able to sell the holy trinity of PC parts: CPU, GPU, and motherboard chipset. Unfortunately, Intel's Core 2 processor appears to outperform anything AMD currently makes. Maybe AMD will realize that they can offset this by selling manufacturers on overall system performance, not just CPU performance. Perhaps they can make one of the decent midrange ATI graphics chips with a decent-performing GPU. They could kick Intel's butt in benchmarks that test combined graphics and CPU performance, forcing Intel to either develop a better graphics chip or buy one from Nvidia. Maybe this will finally wake up Intel. I can dream, can't I?

CGW: It's a good dream, but let's talk games. Gears of War, specifically. It's coming on November 12 to the 360. What's the deal with a PC version?
Mark Rein: There is no PC version. This is a 360 game. The 360 blunders are firmly on our heads to make the best Xbox 360 game that we could possibly make and to push the 360 as hard as we can possibly push it. If we were trying to make the game on two platforms, it wouldn't be possible to achieve that. Could Gears come to Windows? Perhaps someday, but not now.

CGW: Unreal Tournament 2007, by comparison, is coming to the PC and the PS3. That doesn't push the tech as hard.
Mark Rein: One of the important design goals of UT is to be the ultimate multiplayer game, even though the majority of players might not ever play it online. One of the performance challenges with multiplayer games is that we have to provide good performance whether there are six guys on the screen at one time or 16. So we have to leave room in the design to ensure that, when the game fills up with players and the action gets intense, the performance is still great.

Conversely, in a single-player-focused game like Gears, we can really push to the edge of the platform because we know how many monsters are going to be onscreen in each scene, how complex each scene is going to be, where you're able to go. We don't know that with UT. People can be all over the map. And, with the transporter, they hop from one side of the map to the other in no time at all.

CGW: So how has this affected UT2007's development?
Mark Rein: With UT2007, we've scaled back the number of game types so that we can make sure each one gets enough attention. We're concentrating a lot of effort on taking Onslaught, which was hugely popular in UT2004, and moving that forward to an even better, deeper game type. With the upgraded Onslaught game, which we're currently calling "Warfare," we're definitely giving people a deeper experience with some cool objectives, more teamplay, and smarter bots. The bots are better teammates this time. They naturally communicate with you. You can actually talk to them and tell them what you want them to do.

CGW: That's great to hear. One of UT's strengths is its highly customizable bots. Are there many players who say, "Screw real people—I'll just play against the computer?"
Mark Rein: To be honest, the majority of people just play against the bots—and that's the dirty little secret of UT. That's why we work so hard to make sure that the bots are really, really good. Not only do we want to have bots able to fill up servers so you can go online and have the whole experience, but we also want you to be able to have a good game experience completely offline. And I can tell you right now, we're going to do a better job with the single-player. If it kills me, I will keep pushing for a real, traditional story-based single-player component to UT2007.

CGW: Single-player used to be a laddered-content context. How would you do it differently for UT2007?
Mark Rein: In my opinion, we have the tools now in Unreal Engine 3 to make UT both a single- and multiplayer game. UT already delivers several styles of gameplay that, bound together with story, could produce a very fun single-player game. There are so many cool places in a game like UT—the variety is amazingly compelling. The objective-based nature of the new Warfare mode is also suitable for a story. I think we can find a way to satisfy the UT player who enjoys multiplayer yet still have a good story-driven single-player element for people who are new to the franchise.

Then there's online. If you do go online, there's so much more you can see, because the community takes our tools and builds all kinds of amazing things that we never even thought of doing. Now that we have Unreal/Realm, our visual-scripting system, it's much easier to do things that were previously programmer-intensive. I think you'll see a lot more depth in the mods produced for UT2007—and that's saying a lot, because many of the existing mods for UT2004 are just amazing.

CGW: Will the single-player game be on the level of a Gears of War?
Mark Rein: No. I don't see that as our goal. I think we can provide far more depth to the single-player than previous UT games, but we're not looking to do anything as deep and intense as Gears. But I still think we can provide a single-player game that makes you think, "Wow, now that was a ride!" when you've completed it. There's still a long way to go to make that happen, so only...
time will tell if we pull this off. But let’s not forget that most of the people who played UT in the past already think it’s a pretty good single-player game, even though what they’re playing could be considered a simulation of online play.

CGW: Yeah, the Instant Action matches were always good for a quick fix.
MR: I played through the ladder, but since then, I’m like you. I pull up UT a couple times a month for kicks; I just go into Instant Action. I choose a couple of levels I feel like playing that day, and I go off and play. That’s my singleplayer. I don’t really play it online at all that much. You know, if you get a non-UT player down at the game and turned off voice chat, he probably couldn’t tell if he’s playing against bots offline or people online. With bots, you just start the game up, and they’re there. The game puts the right number of bots in each level, depending upon what the designers intended for that level, and you can see their difficulty to your liking. I think most people are perfectly happy playing the game that way.

We want to provide a better experience with each new UT. We want to make the game more immersive, make it more fun, have cooler gameplay modes, add depth where people want it, reduce complexity where it makes sense, and continue to make the weapons fun. As long as we do that, it’s a game that people want to come back and play.

CGW: It was widely reported that you called episodic gaming a "broken business" because of, in part, the need to recycle content and the poor pricing scheme. Do you feel the same way about expansion packs that you feel about episodic games?
MR: You know the old children’s game “broken telephone”? That’s what I think happened with those comments. People wrote about it completely out of context. Here’s more or less what I said: We see a lot of developers coming to us and saying, “My business model is that I’m going to make a little bit of my game, and I’m going to sell it online through digital distribution, and then I’m going to make the money to make a little bit more and a little bit more.” And I’m thinking, “Are you insane?” There’s a lot of talk about this right now, but very little success in this area. What I was talking about is this idea that you can make a little bit of a game, and then make the money to build the next chunk of the game, and repeat that until you’re rich. That’s just crazy. And that’s not what Half-Life 2 is doing. I mentioned in my speech that we have a perfectly good model for episodic content in place right now. I said that the gaming industry’s already doing episodic content, and we’ve had it for years with franchises like Mario, Unreal, Grand Theft Auto, Final Fantasy, WarCraft, and Half-Life—all these games sell episodically and do very well. The more successful ones have expansion packs, which is also a good episodic business model. These models make huge amounts of money because the publishers can justify putting the marketing behind them.

CGW: You think that trying to end-run around publishers is a mistake?
MR: Yeah! Developers think, “Oh, I’m going to make a lot of money doing this.” I’m sorry—you need marketing to sell games. Marketing is what sells games. What works for super-established brands like Half-Life will not work for you. You need to get a publisher, you need to build a brand, and you need to be marketed.

Making your game, putting it out there, and hoping that distribution alone is going to do the job for you is just ridiculous. The scary thing is, even after I gave this speech, somebody came up to me with exactly that kind of proposal. I billed the speech as an audience-participation event, and I had mics in the audience so that people could offer their options. One person supposedly said something along the lines of, “Well, you’re just saying that because your engine’s not suitable for that.” And that’s just not true. First of all, there are people with publisher backing doing episodic stuff using our engine already. They’re developing the whole game and putting out pieces—which is a different philosophy from what I was talking about—and, hopefully, they’ll do fine. They’ll deliver the pieces in small enough timescales that you won’t get fatigued, you won’t get bored of it and say, “Well, I’m just going to go play something else now.” But in the meantime, they’ll get proper advertising budgets and marketing support.

Epic has a perfectly good engine-licensing model for people who want to attack casual games, episodic games, online-only games, or things like Xbox Live Arcade. We charge very little up front, and then we get some participation in the revenue. So this is not an Epic interest thing. This is me, worried about the state of developers who think that they can survive by doing something crazy. I sell technology to developers and publishers, so my job is to ensure that the developers and the publishers are as successful as they can possibly be. So if developers die because they go into broken business models, that doesn’t help me, and it certainly doesn’t help them.

I’m trying to advise developers to be careful to not get sucked into the idea that digital distribution is going to be your savior and make you rich. You need marketing. And when digital distribution has the opportunity to be a savior and make you rich, guess what? The big, 800-pound-gorilla publishers will swoop in and suck up all the oxygen in the space. Nobody will find your game—it’ll be relegated to 10 levels deep on some distributor’s portal because the big companies bought up all the spaces on the front page. That’s just distribution acting like distribution—just like it does currently in retail.
SHALL WE PLAY

Introversion's DEFCON wagers on no-win entertainment


PREVIEW

THERE'S THAT SCENE IN THE 1983 movie WarGames where Joshua, the belligerent, creepy computer program that speaks in halting, mechanized Donald Duckese, is instructed to play by itself. The screen explodes in dazzling achronemic arcs as Joshua runs all the possible (actually, 156) nuclear war scenarios, from predictable "US/USSR first strikes" to oddsballs like "Thai subversion" and "Gabon takeover." The world's destroyed a hundred times over in an orgy of blossoming light, and all you could think was: Where can I play that?

It's shameful, then, that it has taken 23 years for someone to capitalize on a concept so glaringly obvious it seems virtually foolproof. "Often the best, most addictive games are the simplest, least gimmicky titles," says Introversion lead designer Chris Delay, the brains behind hacker-sim Uplink and namesake-mutant Darwinia. "In reality, we often overlook or dismiss the most elementary ideas and pure concepts for seeming, well, too simple." In Delay's view, you don't want to spend hours playing demos and tutorials and reading manuals before you actually understand what you're playing. "However, simplicity can be deceptive," he adds stily. DEFCON may be easy to learn, but it's insanity hard to win. If you've seen WarGames, a quick glance at DEFCON's (Defensive Condition) lovingly austeres screens instantly betrays what you'll be up to. Jousting with five other missile-slinging maniacs, you play as the military honcho of a country (North or South America, Europe, Russia, Asia, or Africa) moving quickly from brinkmanship to the total annihilation of your opponents' units and populations. On a flat Glow-lined map of the globe, you jockey units like silos and fighters within your territories, tweaking radar coverage and sneaking subs as the DEFCON level escalates. The end of the world starts at DEFCON 6 and drops every five game minutes until you reach DEFCON 1...when the long knives—and nukes—come out.

"We realized fairly quickly that if you have six players all fighting each other, it can end as a bit of a shambles," Delay says. To modulate "fastest-nuke-in-the-West," Introversion added an Alliances system that allows players to team up. The catch: each individual's still playing to win and scores stay singular.

"We take our cues straight from the Cold War and that atmosphere of paranoia and suspense," explains Delay, describing DEFCON's in-game IRC server for public—or private—chatter. He says what conflicts are born out of simple misunderstandings, like alliance members shooting down friendly planes suspected of scouting the area for strike targets. "This leads to arguments in the chat channels," he adds. "Followed by skirmishes at sea, followed by retaliation, before finally the whole alliance collapses and everyone starts nuking each other."

Backstabbers rejoice, in other words... DEFCON sounds primed to cater to your basest urges. "For me, the really satisfying moments occur when an ally manages to catch me completely off guard and pulls off the perfect betrayal," muses Delay. "It gives me confidence in the game design that such things are possible." He describes a staff test where the game had essentially ended (as far as he knew), but, in the space of a few seconds, his ally (codeveloper Gary Chambers) surfaced a load of subs right off his coastline and started, as Delay puts it, "nuking the hell out of my cities." It was perfectly timed, he says, and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it save sit back and laugh. "Betrayals like that can cost you millions of lives and take you from first to last place on the scoreboard," he adds bitterly. Those subs had been traveling to that strike point for the entire game—he'd planned it from the very beginning. -Matt Peckham

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**GROUND UNITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SILO</td>
<td>Missile silo have two modes: launching nuclear warheads and shooting down incoming ordnance and units. Switching between modes takes time, and sailo is inoperative during a switch. Firing a silo reveals its position to all players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIRBASE</td>
<td>Launches fighters and long-range bombers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADAR DISH</td>
<td>All units extend radar coverage but dishes have the most, providing excellent coverage although they are defenseless.</td>
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**SEA UNITS**

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<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUB</td>
<td>Invisible to conventional radar, but with no radar themselves. Subs launch nukes or torpedoes from any ocean location. They are strong against battleships. Can use sonar to destroy enemy subs, but that gives away the sub's location to other naval units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BATTLESHIP</td>
<td>Anti-ship unit used to detect enemy units and to destroy opposing units without use of warheads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARRIER</td>
<td>Mobile unit used to launch fighters and bombers. Can carry depth charges to use against subs.</td>
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**AIR UNITS**

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<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
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<tr>
<td>FIGHTER</td>
<td>Good against enemy aircraft and to scout out enemy territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOMBER</td>
<td>Can carry one nuclear warhead each but are slow and vulnerable to attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUKE</td>
<td>Boom!</td>
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A GAME?

WARGAMES UPLINK?

How Shall I Nuke Thee...Let Me Count the Ways

"We have some interesting alternative game modes," says Delay, calling them "DEFCON with a twist." Take Speed DEFCON, for instance. "It's the same game but it runs at 20 times real time fixed, so it's pretty hectic. And we also have a truly crazy mode called Diplomacy, where everybody starts on the same team. It becomes an exercise in making sure you aren't the first group target."

Then there's Office Mode, Introversion's bid to keep you entertained at work without getting you fired. "Yeah we're pretty excited about the Office Mode," says Delay. "We just thought it would be cool if a group of work colleagues could fire up a game in the morning, playing over the LAN to see them through the tedium of the working day." Say your boss turns up unexpectedly: just press ESC twice and shazam—instant minimize to system tray. The team's even planning a leaderboard and tournament at release as a free patch. "We have loads of ideas," adds Delay. "This could be just the beginning for DEFCON."

Orange and green naval ships trade incendiary blips, but that doesn't mean they can't still kiss. "There might be a good time to call it off and join the greens in an alliance," says introversion cofounder Tom Arundel. "Here we're waiting for them to vote in or out."

Timing is paramount. For example, silos that are placed in attack mode (triangles) can fire missiles, but they lose their ability to defend against incoming attacks.

Africa wigs out. The yellow triangles indicate launch detections off the current view. Africa would be wise to stop its attack and change all its silos back to defense mode," says Arundel.
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Dude, my head! I'm not feeling so hot right now. I know that I have Nyquil capsular sitting at the back of my medicine cabinet somewhere. Ah, there they are. What's wrong with this stuff? It's not working. Let's see what the box says... expires... in... 1998?? Yes, that can't be right. Suddenly—hey, why is Abraham Lincoln in my room wearing a hat made out of meat? Whoa. This is messed up. I think I'm gonna lie down for a minute. Maybe you should come back in a bit. Go on, get out! I'm serious. What's that? You're not leaving without some freebies? All right, you asked for it. /The Freeloader

Nintendo may have Super Smash Bros., but that game doesn't address the existential questions that plague me: What happens when Street Fighter's Ryu drops shoryuken on a Battletoad? Who handles shrooms better, Mario or the Prince of Persia? Can anyone from Dragon Ball Z out punch Spider-Man? Most importantly, though: What were the designers smoking when they decided to crossbreed 8- and 16-bit games? Whatever it is, I want some!

THE GAME: Multihack
FILE UNDER: We don't need no steelin' copyrights!

OK, it's confession-time: I love pirating off people on message boards. Especially the CGW message boards (boards.upcom), where I have many personas and names. I just can't help it. I type the dumbest, most obnoxious comments that come to mind—usually without any facts to back up my idiocy—and take great pleasure in watching people freak out. Imagine my joy now that someone's made a first-person shooter game based on that.

THE GAME: Flamewar
FILE UNDER: Forums are leh suck!

How the hell does one describe Kingdom of Loathing? The best way is by telling thee of my quests as a level 2 pastamancer (yes, as in magical pasta); I've traveled the land slaying bunnies, quoted Sith from The Goonies, and paid for new armor with stacks of meat. If I were to make some sort of "WTF?" of the Month" trophy, this game would earn it. Go to kingdomofloathing.com and see for yourself. It's a stick-figure art connoisseur's dream.

THE GAME: Kingdom of Loathing
FILE UNDER: Site of idiocy +5

So many jokes ask the question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Aside from a couple perverted verlafon, nobody ever tackles the bigger mystery: "How'd it pull it off?" Finally, someone has. The game may be a bit on the short side—and really, it'd be nice to see more than just one stretch of road—but Chicken vs. Road is a fun little graphic adventure. Until you get that damn "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" song stuck in your brain.

THE GAME: Chicken vs. Road
FILE UNDER: Poultry puzzler

DEVELOPER'S DESKTOP What games do they want to play?

BRIAN REYNOLDS, the big brain behind Big Huge Games, has challenged gamers for years with RTSes like Rise of Nations and, most recently, Rise of Legends. He isn't ready to spill the beans on the next thing to Rise, but Reynolds did reveal what he'd love to play again now that he has a chance to breathe.

ULTIMA VI
"This game made me want to develop computer games for a living. It had such a huge world, the inhabitants all felt at least a little alive (they would go through a bit of a daily schedule, and they'd be somewhat aware of your reputation), and the transitions between environments were darn seamless for the day."

ARCHON
"The game that got me through the early and mid-'80s. It captured the magic of the famous Star Wars ODS chess scene and combined strategy with shoot-em-up action in a way we seldom see these days. Of course, you had to play on the original Commodore 64; I carried around a special joystick to challenge all comers."

EMPIRE: WARGAME OF THE CENTURY
"Converted from an old PDP-11 game, this was the first strategy game to deploy the 'cities and units' paradigm. It got a little hard to manage toward the end (the number of units grew geometrically), but it definitely had that 'just one more turn' addictiveness."

CIVILIZATION II
"OK, look, I'm a game designer and programmer, so if I'm going to get trapped on some kind of a desert island, I'm sure going to take one of my own games and tinker with it! And I'd better take one from back in the days when one programmer could mostly manage the code. These days, booting up CIV II reminds me of that golden era when Windows 95 first came out. DOS was dead and buried, and the graphics and soundcard people hadn't yet led us down the garden path to driver incompatibility hell, the modern equivalent of autoexec.bat hell."

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
"I haven't seen my real life 60 priest in a year now. But when I typed /played and saw how many months I've been playing this game (and these are 720-hour months, not the wimpy 160-hour 'man-month'), I realized that this one game may conceivably have accounted for more than 50 percent of the time I've spent playing computer games in my whole life."

FILE FRONT COG
Want to find these baby bits of treasure? Lots more this month. They're online! Find out at cog.filefront.com
PHANTASY
Another MMO game crosses the great console divide

PREVIEW
PHANTASY STAR IS MASSIVE IN another world—the one where the console crowd chases anime-eyed catwoman. But many PC people don't know that long before ArenaNet crunched its first line of Guild Wars code, Sega's sci-fi RPG series pioneered the whole notion of patrolling town hubs to make new buddies and run instanced raids. (That game was 2000's Phantasy Star Online for Sega's defunct Dreamcast system.)

Today, Sega's Sonic Team is close to completing its multiplatform MMO-isch RPG Phantasy Star Universe. The big draw for migrants from console land is that they can get their high-res fix on a PC—and, as with Final Fantasy XI, Windows players can pounce up with PS2 pals online. The big draw for overextended PC RPG-heads is a richly stylized world with highly customizable characters in an action-heavy sci-fi MMO.

Unfortunately, being an "action-heavy sci-fi MMO" doesn't exactly equal instant success here in the States. The most relevant burnout in this category, Auto Assault, quickly turned into a postapocalyptic, playerless wasteland despite garnering good reviews. So what's Sega doing to combat the potential problem? PSU is broken up into two parts: The first is a story-driven single-player game in which you take the role of Ethan Weber, tasked with combating an all-consuming dark force known as SEED. Instead of clinging to turn-based dogma like most RPGs, Phantasy Star Universe feels feels and plays like an action game. You dodge, strafe, run—even button-mash and use combos while switching between futuristic melee and missile weapons.

But brace yourself for some annoyance when you get to the second portion of PSU: Sega spokespeople say that even if you complete the 40-hour single-player game, you

SEGA'S SCI-FI RPG SERIES PIONEERED THE NOTION OF PATROLLING TOWN HUBS TO MAKE PALS AND RUN INSTANCED RAIDS.

GIMME SOMEONE TO FIGHT
PSU plays surprisingly well whether you use an Xbox 360 gamepad or the keyboard and mouse. Combos are easy to execute, and combat is more involving than mere button mashing. Just watch out for these Graboid mofos—they're a major pain.
STAR UNIVERSE

get no boost for your multiplayer character before going online. No extra gold, no sweet superweapon for your newly victorious avatar. Nothing. Nada. Zip. Just a finished story and a cinematic pat on the back. Sega’s spin doctors call it getting two games for the price of one, but c’mon—that kind of talk may fly in consoleville, but PC games as recent as Titan Quest allow you to take your single-player character online.

Another hitch: Buy the game and you get access to the full single-player game—but the second you go online, it’ll cost you extra. Sega has no official word on how much, but bank on it being in line with monthly fees for Final Fantasy XI ($14.95 per month). Considering the game’s resemblance to Guild Wars (which costs a one-time-only fee), this could be a sticking point.

We’re also sure that some will miss player-versus-player combat (really, though, can’t we all just get along?), but huge boss battles, relentless waves of monsters in PVE combat, and lots of loot could keep players coming back. How do we know? Team Ziff hiked to Sega’s offices and spent a day transfixed by monitors, and we got an exclusive first taste of the multiplayer game. /Darren Gladstone

IN CHARACTER

The unique races are highly customizable with anime flair. Choose from being human (bo-ring), Newman (elvish-looking magic users), CAST (robots), or Beast (meat monsters). Will you be able to resist the temptation to whip up a fembot hottie like this?

THE GANG’S ALL HERE

As in games like Guild Wars, this space station is one of the central hubs where you meet other players—or just stroll through the spacey megamall and resupply. And—big surprise—everything looks a whole hell of a lot sharper on the PC than on consoles.

PURPLE RAGE!

Every race has a special secondary super-power-up move. The CAST’s SUV move summons heavy weaponry, while beasts (above) mutate into monsters.

PSU CRIBS

Whether you're finding interesting objects midmission or want to order stuff from the space-age IKEA, PSU lets you furnish your pad—or just stock your closet with some sharp new threads.

GAME OVER, MAN

The 20-plus dungeons in the game are loaded with larger-than-life boss battles. Like with Sparky here. Don't forget to switch to a first-person perspective when trying to snipe enemy weak spots.
GLADSTONED
Shooting the messenger... and the message

WORK WITH ME HERE!

SELLOUT. WORSE. CORPORATE
shill. Disgruntled readers have
called me all these names (and a
couple of other creative ones that I can't
list here). That doesn't bother me, however, a
new trend is brewing that makes me violently
vomit blood: Some game companies have this
screwed-up notion that editors really are sellouts,
whores, and shills. It's time for me to squash this
rumor before it gets too out of control.

Screenshot held hostage, info doled out in
precious droplets—magazines deal with this kind
of stuff every month. To be perfectly honest,
most public-relations managers do a kick-ass job
and "get it" (seriously, guys, much love!), but when
somebody thinks he can buy coverage—boy, you
just ticked off the wrong nerd.

Before I signed on with CGW, I was a "real"
reporter. Writing about videogames for a living
didn't make me suddenly forget every lesson I
learned in journalism school, and that's why I've
decided to present, here, a few paragraphs from my
PR Journalist Relationship Operating Manual. Fol-
low these simple rules, and I promise I won't toss
you out the window when you come to my office.

RULE NO. 1:

Never use the phrase "stay on message," or I will
slowly choke the life out of you. Or cancel the story.
You have an agenda—I get that—but I have my
own angles as well, and delivering the message
of your marketing department isn't one of them.
I am not on your payroll. God help me, I have ques-
tions—both good and stupid—and I will ask them.
If I wanted a blind recitation of facts, I would've
just asked you for a FAQ to cut and paste.

RULE NO. 2:

Developers are people, not products. If I ask for an
interview with a developer, I may actually want his
opinion on topics besides his game. That's right:
Sometimes I might want to hear what an industry
luminary has to say about a big-picture topic. If
our interview doesn't fit an agenda or deliver a
specific "product message," please don't shut
down the conversation before it even
begins. Readers: Thumb through
this issue, and I'm sure you'll find some
mysterious hole where we would've loved
to get the thoughts of a particular developer,
but couldn't—thanks to those shadowy people
in the background who silently squash good
interviews without seeing the big picture.

RULE NO. 3:

Be honest. This is kind of a no-brainer for life in
general. If you're talking to another magazine,
website, or radio operator, whatever—just let
me know up front, because it affects my story. It
won't hurt my feelings, really. And I swear that I
won't bite your head off. Much.

"WHAT CAN I DO?"

Just because you're reading this column, don't
think I'm gonna let you off the hook. I need your
help. In our never-ending quest to deliver a top-
quality magazine every month, we're slaves to
getting the latest testy screenshots and info.
That means we're at the publishers' whims. Do
something about it. Call them on it. Call us on
it. Demand more out of all your news sources.
Send some e-mails. Make some calls. Stick your
head out the window and scream so the whole
world can hear that you're mad as hell, AND
YOU'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT ANYMORE!

BE HONEST. THIS IS KIND OF A
NO-BRAINER FOR LIFE IN GENERAL.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY
OCTOBER 2006

THE GOOD
GOOD RIDDANCE,
E3 EXPO!
Several major publishers
recently pulled out of Los
Angeles' annual E3 Expo
(the gaming industry's biggest trade event), citing
astronomical costs with little benefit. This
prompted E3 showrunner Doug Lowenstein to pull
the plug on E3 in its current form... which itself
prompted a collective sigh of relief from industry
insiders, newly free from the media circus that E3 had slowly degenerated into.

THE BAD
GOODBYE,
E3 EXPO!
True, E3 was a wretched hive of scum and villainy... but
if you managed to wade
through the piles of freebie-seeking fanboys,
skantly clad booth babes, and loud, obnox-
ious displays, some genuinely cool stuff
awaited. E3's dismantlement particularly hurts
smaller developers, as it means one fewer
opportunity to get their products in front of
a few thousand eyeballs.

THE UGLY
HELLO,
E3 MEDIA FESTIVAL?
From the official E3 website
(e3expo.com): "The new E3
Expo will take shape over the
next several months. As currently envisioned,
it will still take place in Los Angeles, described
by [the] ESA as a 'great and supportive partner
helping to build E3.' It will focus on press events
and small meetings with media, retail, develop-
ment, and other key sectors." Sounds like PR
damage control—we'll believe it when we see it.
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MATCHSTICK

Six industry insiders disabuse our A.I. illusions

BY MATT PECKHAM

ROUNDTABLE

YOU KNOW THE DRILL: YOUR OPPONENT HAS X-RAY vision and always peeps your hidden network of bases. Or: You've discovered the other team never punts on fourth and 10. Or: Monsters pop out from behind sliding doors and go “booo!” Or: You can smack Trader Bob around on Monday, but you return Tuesday to find him healthy, beaming, and huggable. On the other hand, we call it “artificial” intelligence for a reason: It’s not the real deal, caveat emptor, pay no attention to the algorithm behind the curtain. In hopes of shining a bit of light on these commonly ignored issues, we’ve assembled six industry bigwigs to hash out the how, what, and why of videogame A.I.
A.I. that covers its own, giving pale a breather to snarf meds or swap clips

A.I. that can carry friendlies out of harm's way or slyly shift mission objectives around

A.I. that abandons a skirmish to find a healing station before returning to battle

** ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN ALGORITHMS: EIGHT EXAMPLES OF BUDDING A.I. BEHAVIOR

---

**MEN**

**THE BRAIN TRUST**

- **Peter Molyneux**
  Managing Director, Lionhead Studios
  The Movies, Black & White, Fable

- **Warren Spector**
  President and CEO, Junction Point Studios
  Ultima Underworld, System Shock, Thief, Deus Ex

- **Brad Wardell**
  President and CEO, Stardock
  The Political Machine, Galactic Civilizations

- **Todd Howard**
  Executive Producer, Bethesda Softworks
  The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, Morrowind, Oblivion, Fallout 3

- **Mikko Mononen**
  Senior Technical Designer, Crytek
  Crysis

- **John Abercrombie**
  A.I. Programmer, Irrational Games
  BioShock

---

CGW.COM 57
“In games like chess, where you’re on a small playing field with a very limited number of moves, you can create a pretty neutral algorithm that doesn’t really know how to play the game, but instead just values certain pieces at different weights and essentially creates its own strategy,” explains Brad Wardell. “But in a PC strategy game where the playing field is huge, the number of decisions is massive, and with humans not being willing to wait more than 10 seconds between turns, you have to hard-code a lot of the basic strategies.”

**CGW:** First off, is game A.I. really “artificial intelligence”? Or is it just a gameplay convention?

**Peter Molynux:** There’s a misconception that A.I. in games is real. Ninety percent of the time, it’s not, as real A.I. would be far too expensive in terms of processing power.

**Warren Spector:** I hate to be a phillistine, but I’m in the camp that doesn’t even think about it. I’m sure this is partly because I’m not a programmer responsible for coding this stuff or an academic getting paid to think about it—I’m only concerned with the player experience. As long as the A.I. accomplishes the goals of the game and offers a compelling experience for the player, you can call it whatever you want.

**Todd Howard:** It depends on the audience. At Bethesda, we define A.I. as intelligent behavior that the actors—NPCs, creatures, et cetera—engage in. So we’re looking for real intelligence, on-the-fly decision making, strategies, and so on. From the consumer’s perspective, A.I. is anything a character does. So scripted events, animation, and so forth all form the A.I. to the player, and that’s the most important part—conveying the illusion of good behavior.

**Brad Wardell:** For the kinds of games we make, I take the heuristic point of view. My job is to get the computer players to play that particular game very well. This means developing strategies much like a human player, then incorporating those various strategies into the game.

**CGW:** What are some of the challenges and/or advances occurring in game A.I. development at the moment?

**WS:** Every game I’ve been involved with in the last decade or so has had to incorporate A.I. that does more than figure out how to attack the player more efficiently. "This time the A.I. takes cover" just doesn’t cut it in a game where the NPCs may or may not be your enemy, based on your in-game choices. And "Look at our amazing group-tactics A.I." is irrelevant when we don’t know how the NPCs in a given scene feel about you—whether they love you, hate you, fear you, want to talk to you, don’t care about you... And let’s not even talk about what happens when players can change their environment dynamically. The A.I. challenges of a game where you can fight, sneak, or talk your way past problems, in a world where there are many ways to get everywhere you—or the NPCs—might want to go... well, there are some interesting challenges.

**Mikko Mononen:** Creating the illusion of life. Imagine a watch. The watch may function even without its case and hands, but it’s rather useless as a timepiece. A simplistic version adds the minute and hour hands and 12 dots to mark the hours. A more detailed and interesting implementation could add more markers, another hand to show the seconds, another for hundreds, maybe even the days of the month. These things don’t reinvent the watch, but they do increase the level of the detail and feedback to the user. A.I. actions without feedback are perceived as chaos by the player, just springs unwinding and gears rotating. A simple behavior with proper feedback can look believable, intelligent, and complex, but complex behavior without enough feedback looks chaotic and random.
free to drop me an e-mail. And a résumé. Oh, and a demo!

MM: When the environment is highly detailed, the description of the world is always going to be different for the A.I. and the player. Creating an artificial perception system that's loosely based on how humans sense the environment can make the A.I. act more like real humans, but there's always a constraint on how complex this model can be. In games, the greatest limitations are production time, and processing power. Allowing the A.I. to partially "sense" the player through an obstruction, for instance, creates the impression of an A.I. behaving like a savvy human would in the same situation.

BW: Up until the "intelligent"—tough—difficulty level in Galactic Civilizations II, the A.I. gets no advantages over the human at all—and, in fact, is penalized in most of the difficulty levels. As for how we go about implementing our A.I., the way we are able to do this revolves around two development techniques. The first one is having a multithreaded computer A.I. That means that while the player is taking his turn, the computer players are generating their turns. It's not that our A.I. is better written than other games; it's certainly not. It is that our A.I. has a lot more time to calculate. Human players are a lot slower than the computer. By the time the human player has finished his turn, the A.I. may have had half a minute or more in the background to calculate. The second technique revolves around being reasonably good at strategy games and incorporating those strategies into the computer A.I. Techniques like hurrying, strong rushing, harassment and other strategies that are well known to hardcore strategy gamers are integrated into the computer A.I. as best we can.

John Abercrombie: There are certainly situations where a human can recognize something that an A.I. never will—or at least not as well—so you have to provide hints for the A.I. The hints aren't cheating, and they might also allow the A.I. to make mistakes as a human would, like searching in the wrong direction. But giving the A.I. the exact location of a player they can't see seems wrong to me—that's too much information. There's a balance between what the A.I. should and shouldn't know, and the player has to believe that the A.I. should know it.

CGW: Some have suggested building a world-class A.I. that doesn't need to cheat to beat the best human players is possible right now, but that development time and costs don't justify it. Your thoughts?

PM: It's possible, but is it desirable? A.I. must be balanced with game experience and that means that even the simplest academic A.I. has to be refined and tweaked in the name of the game being good. It should be possible for a game to focus on learning aspects of A.I. at its core.

BW: I actually don't care if it cheats—it's not a big goal of mine. I want the perception that it's not cheating—that is, the perception that it's making logical choices.

TH: We've often said the same thing online when some top strategy gamer buys Galactic Civilizations II, [defeats] the "intelligent"—best noncheating level—A.I. after a few weeks, and then posts that the A.I. isn't challenging enough. The cost of good A.I. increases exponentially, but the quality only goes up linearly. Creating an unbeatable A.I. can theoretically be done, but to what end? Of the 10 percent who can beat the best noncheating A.I. we make, how many of that 10 percent actually mind having to turn difficulty to the point where the computer players get another 5 percent to 20 percent in resources per turn? And is it really worth doubling your A.I. budget to satisfy that small percentage of unhappy users?

CGW: How can games better implement nonconfrontational or nonviolent A.I.? Is this limitation responsible for the need to have monsters of some sort in most every game?

WS: Man, I wish I knew how to answer this question. My "thinking" is that our ability to create compelling noncombat A.I. is pretty puny. The issue is creating characters that behave in ways that, given the context of a game or scene, elicit an appropriate emotional response in players. Take the guns away, and we lose the most easily elicited emotion—fear—and we're left with...not a lot. How do we make progress in the nonconfrontational space? Beats me—maybe someone in a garage somewhere is solving the problem even as we speak. If I knew how to solve this problem—and it's a huge problem for gaming, one that is really holding us back as a medium of expression and communication—I'd be making a very different kind of game.

TH: In terms of nonviolent interaction, I certainly think Oblivion has a bunch, though we haven't gotten away from time-stopping dialogue trees yet.

CGW: Soren Johnson of Civilization fame estimated in 2002 that A.I. was something like 2 to 3 percent of the total development cycle, and that it was usually integrated only at the very end due to lack of money and time. Has this changed in 2006?

PM: We have two projects currently under development—Fable 2 and another unannounced—and we've had an A.I. team working on these projects from day one. I've seen the A.I. team swallowed by our product—coders and game designers—the A.I. team is, in fact, alerting the designers to some unexpected but cool situations which are a result of A.I., as opposed to the designers asking the A.I. team to construct specific situations.

WS: Wow, 2 to 3 percent? That doesn't reflect my experience at all. It didn't reflect my experience even back in 2002. We've always had multiple, dedicated resources working on A.I., basically, from the start of the project to the end. I think all the high-level tech stuff is the difficulty a bit, in that we can create more dynamic, more deeply simulated worlds. But, really, until people start making different kinds of games, the difficulty only goes up incrementally.

TH: We spent an enormous amount of our dev time on the Radiant A.I. system in Oblivion. It ended up not only being the character A.I., but the basis for how a lot of our quests worked.
also takes a lot of CPU time, so the more power we can get through the hardware, the better we can make it.

BW: There are really two issues here. First, it really depends on the developer and what priority they put on computer A.I. and how complex the A.I. needs to be. Secondly, what dual cores and AMP do is allow computer players to be more effective with less work because they can brute-force calculate better strategies.

CGW: How do you convince gamers to stop and pay attention to your "cool new A.I. feature" as games become increasingly free-form?

PM: A.I. is a bit like game physics—both are coming of age. A few years ago, we all got very excited when we had the technology to throw boxes around in a realistic way, and of course, game designers were sort of "what?". Same thing with A.I. Our first attempts were pretty primitive, and it's only now that we're seeing more sophisticated A.I. appear in games. Still, consumers don't care if some technical advance is hard to pull off or ground breaking—they're only concerned whether new techniques make a game seem more realistic.

WS: There's an assumption in your question that players should care about A.I. They shouldn't. They should care about the experience you're providing—whatever it is. The overall experience of a game has to be a lot more than "acceptable" or you're doomed to failure in the marketplace. A.I. is just one component toward reaching the level of quality necessary to succeed, and how important a component it is will vary from game to game.

MM: There are several design principles in Crysis where we tackle that problem. They all allow the player to observe the A.I. reactions without engaging in combat. The first we call "veni-vidi-vici." The idea is that you're able to slowly deduce the A.I. into combat and observe their actions. The result is that you have the possibility to outsmart rather than outgun A.I. opponents. The second principle involves giving the player a chance to try each situation multiple times, thus prolonging the A.I.'s "lifetimes" and allowing us to better "show off" its sophisticated behaviors.

CGW: With the whole "virtual pet" craze, isn't there a sort of sideways argument that games already react favorably to more life-like A.I. for its own sake? Say, more mundane behavioral "coloring," like NPCs that take pee breaks?

WS: This is a huge question! First, we almost always tell our audience too short in gaming—don't even get me started on that rant. Second, we need to move past the idea that "if it's a computer A.I., I can aspire to. Finally, if your game benefits from NPCs taking pee breaks, the 'I'm pee—don't worry about the audience.

BW: You're definitely touching on a larger issue in the game industry, and that is, as it has grown, the [people] who make the big decisions are increasingly nongamers. Look at the copy-protection debacles we have now. People practically have to give skin samples to the game before they can play it. Similarly, I think many studio heads these days don't see how much people care about having a good, single-player experience, which means competent computer opponents. They don't see that it does drive sales. Our average gamer is around 30 years old. They're smart, sophisticated people who want to be treated with respect and intelligence. The problem is that computer A.I. is rarely budgeted enough to make the difference it could make. Computer A.I., after all, doesn't make a good screenshot.

TH: Actually, I find the audience picks up on the small stuff and reacts positively. All of the little touches we put in Oblivion was to have the shopkeepers "keep an eye on you," while in their stores, and it's subtle, but lots of people eventually noticed. If we made the guards pee, I assume you would care—pick their pockets when they're distracted.

CGW: Can we expect to see more user-controlled A.I. customization in future games? Or does this jeopardize developer controls?

WS: I don't think this is an either/or thing. I think you'll see a little of both. Some developers, in some games, will allow players to tweak the A.I. explicitly. Other developers, in other games, will create adaptive systems that allow characters to learn from the player and adjust their behavior accordingly. It all depends on a game's goals.

BW: There's a general recognition that writing "smart" computer A.I. is very hard and expensive, and in many games, is not a good investment. In those games, it makes sense for the developer to provide tools and extensions that allow the fan base to enhance the A.I. behavior to increase the lifetime of the game for the hardcore fans.

JA: There are games where tweaking the A.I. behaviors from an options menu might be appropriate, especially in sports or other games where the player is working with other A.I.s to accomplish a task. From a designer's perspective, though, those variables should be under the hood, and the A.I. would adapt correctly to each situation to fit the player's style.

CGW: With all the research into academic A.I., can game A.I. benefit from academic game A.I. convergence?

PM: We're inspired by what the academic approach is, but because of the restrictions of the gaming world, we have to reinvent what academic circles pioneered decades ago. One of the biggest differences between academic A.I. and games A.I. is that we have a perfect rule-based world in which our A.I. can fit.

TH: Like many things in academia, it often has very little application in a real world or real game environment. Fuzzy logic is pretty basic, as are some of the others, so you see these things sprinkled in game A.I., where it needs it. I don't see games ever going the full "A.I." route as defined by academics.

JA: We have this great behavioral system here. It's a project that was developed as an academic project for modeling simulations of groups of characters. Nearly everything we do in the game A.I. involves using this system, and the ability to layer behaviors and rapidly prototype simplistic behaviors has made it an invaluable tool for designing and developing the A.I.

CGW: Thinking about game A.I. and the next decade or so, the Magic 8-Ball says...

PM: Some of the likely events are emergent A.I., which is becoming a significant force because it's so central to a game's premise. A.I. gives us the ability to support custom characters in games not only visually but psychologically.

TH: It's pure development time, so the bigger budget games are going to push A.I. forward more than others. Procedural animation is one technique that you will really perceive in games soon that will make you believe the characters are behaving better. I know that's pure visual, but don't discount that aspect when it comes to "lifelike" behavior.

BW: I think in the next five years we'll start to see macrountification in computer players. I think we'll also see options in games that allow more CPU to be dedicated to computer players, just as we have options for video displays. Let the guy who wants a more challenging game with a powerful system get full use out of it. I also think you'll start to see A.I. players learn between games. This happens organically in online games, but computer players presently start from scratch each session. After that, I think we'll see A.I. become increasingly conversational. The drive for immersion will mean having RPGs and MMORPGs that act like real characters. And from there, those technologies will find themselves back in strategy games where you're playing Diplomacy 2016 and you're truly negotiating with the A.I. Germans in an online game, and [CGW editor-in-chief] Jeff Green—from his resting home—will be curbing profanities via chat for ganging up on him... again.

CGW: Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." You say?

PM: I play with him, therefore he thinks!

TH: I prefer Socrates: "I drank what?"

BW: I think beyond a set scope, therefore I am.

WS: Wow, Descartes in an interview about games? I'm too blown away even to answer!
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MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

Flying the friendlier skies

PREVIEW

"WE'RE ADDING GAMING ELEMENTS TO Microsoft Flight Simulator X," says ACES Studio lead designer Paul Lange, signaling what may be the most significant change in the Flight Simulator series' 24-year history, "in order to give players something to do beyond just flying over the countryside."

In the past, Microsoft designed its Flight Simulator games as pure civilian-flight sims made for hardcore virtual pilots who revel in spending carefree hours simply flying from one airport to another. Previous Flight Simulator dev teams have been so focused on "as real as it gets" that they've never tasked someone with enforcing traditional gaming features such as objectives and missions. That's why the presence of Lange (whose résumé ranges from 1996 first-person shooter Powerslave to 2003's Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator 3) is such a departure. His expertise is gaming, not aerospace engineering, and his goal is to make Flight Simulator X attractive to people who would normally fall asleep trying to figure out how to work a Cessna's Garmin GPS system.

FSX's new hook is a powerful, simple-to-use mission-creation module used to craft the 90 missions that will ship with the game. The built-in missions range from the relatively simple (search for a missing camper in snowy mountains) to more challenging, frantic tasks such as rescuing workers from an exploding offshore oil rig. ACES has already provided the mission creator to a number of third-party developers, so a large number of community-developed mission packs should be available the day FSX is released.

This attitude of cooperation toward third-party developers is another radical departure for Microsoft, which has, by its own admission, historically treated this group with indifference at best. While dedicated community developers were once forced to craft hacks and find holes in the code in order to make their creations work, Microsoft now actively provides software development kits (SDKs) to third-party developers. The company has even created a new community development team lead position (currently held by Brett Scheppe), charged with making FSX as third-party accessible as possible.

But none of these changes fly in the face of what's come before. Flight Simulator X continues the series' tradition of absolute realism and the trend of increasingly exact virtual landscapes and city skylines, accurate aircraft models, and details that make the world feel more alive: Wildlife roams the countryside, cars drive on the streets below, and fuel and luggage carts scramble around the airport as you taxi in. Despite Microsoft's friendlier attitude toward third-party developers and newfound focus on "the game," Flight Simulator X is still hardcore at heart.

Jeff Lackey
IF YOU LITTLE BASTARDS MAKE ME MISS ONE MORE MINUTE OF LAW AND ORDER WITH YOUR FIGHTING, I SWEAR I'M GOING TO COME DOWN THERE AND SMITE YOU ALL.

-GOD

“I wanted to make my own engine, if only to prove I could do it,” says maker Garry Newman.

Newman is “talking to Valve software about selling Facewound over Steam.”

FACEWOUND

Garry’s Mod maker goes 2D

PUBLISHER: TBD DEVELOPER: Facepunch Studios GENRE: Side-scrolling shooter RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREVIEW

IS HE OR ISN’T HE? GARRY NEWMAN is at a kind of career crossroads where modmaking merges with professional programming. “When people ask what I do, I usually dodge the question and say ‘self-employed.’ The problem with telling people you’re a developer,” he says, “is that the next question is, ‘Oh, yeah? What games have you made?’” Surely all-in-wonder Garry’s Mod, which is about to go from for-free noodleware to polished e-tail product on Steam’s digital-delivery pipeline, counts for something. So, too, does Newman’s commitment to the craft: “I love Black & White-style software, where you build stuff to do stuff. I suppose programming itself is a supernerdy game that only a few people dig playing.” Still, Newman’s an emerging gamemaker of another stripe, indifferent to market pressure and next big things. Though willing to hear out admirers and hash it out with detractors, he makes what he wants, when he wants, the way he wants (although we suspect he’d say he’s more doofus than iconoclast).

On his monitor at the moment: side-scrolling shooter Facewound. “The idea,” he says, “is ‘Counter-Strike meets Mario’—2D gaming with modern graphical effects—and the control scheme is the standard WASD-and-mouse combo. In the tradition of Mario, we don’t have much of a story... actually, we don’t even attempt to tell a story. It’s all zombies and guns and guns. Except I’m English, and we have a somewhat limited familiarity with weapons, so it’s mostly Counter-Strike stuff with a few exceptions—chainsaws, Molotov cocktails, miniguns. I’m trying to stay away from power-ups, but when you blast something, a bunch of green s** flies out. You can collect it and use it to purchase new weapons.” You read it here.

As its moniker implies, Facewound is a stupid/funny affair through and through—perhaps the product of too much time spent patrolling somethingawful.com’s untamed and often sidesplitting spoofos. “We try to make ourselves laugh along the way,” Newman says. “Why aren’t games funny anymore? We’re always adding funny things as we go along—probably pretty hardcore humor, though... pedophiles and whatnot. We’re not censoring ourselves. If it gets a laugh, it’s in.” / Shawn Elliott

OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO THE OVERHYPED AND OVERLOOKED

SIDEKICK

OVERRATED: CANNON FODDER

Sorry—hordes of nameless, faceless grunts that catch bullets with your name on them don’t make you feel like you’re part of some bigger battle.

UNDERRATED: CLIPSY

Whether you’re battling dangling participants in the grammar dungeon or having trouble double-jumping over sentence fragments, Clippy’s always been ready to assist—heck, he even helped us write this here magazine!

“I looks like you’re writing a computer gaming magazine. Would you like help?”

Illustration by Sean Dallashood

Turn off safe search and visit Newman’s Facewound development blog at www.garrytv.
ASK IRRATIONAL GAMES PRESIDENT Ken Levine about BioShock's Electronic Entertainment Expo accolades and he'll throw out everything from "awesome" to "mind-blowing." Scrapping with bruisers like Crytek's Crysis and Maxis' Spore, BioShock went on to win 17 awards (including several "Best of Show" honors). "It was like being prom queen," says a giddy Levine. "We're not used to being prom queen. I'm still wearing my tiara."

Still teasing an amorphous 2007 release date, Irrational's multiplatform hybrid sci-fi FPS remains shrouded in mystery. We know it's set at the bottom of the ocean in a mythic 1960s utopian art-deco megalopolis called Rapture, has loose ties to writer/philosopher Ayn Rand's controversial meganovel Atlas Shrugged, and that it takes place after a horrible mutagenic war involving Rapture's fanatical idealists. "The creepy thing about the city of Rapture is that the world doesn't know this society's fallen apart," says Levine. "Music still plays, vending machines still audibly hawk their wares, and so on." He references a contraction with an image of a "scary" clown—when you walk by, it shouts, "WELCOME TO THE CIRCUS OF VALUES!" (I should know, for I am indeed the clown voice actor," says Levine.)

Like a deep-sea refuge for Dr. Moreau's, think of BioShock as a Wild Kingdom of the weird. It posits an ecology of hulking Big Daddies in corroded diving suits protecting warlike Little Sisters, the latter in bow-tie skirts and scrambling on stick-thin legs to harvest and process a gene-molding substance called ADAM from dead bodies, as their foes—drug-jacked Splicers—sneak or stalk in the shadows. Enter you, playing the anomaly as usual—but in a spontaneous ecosystem swarming with hostiles. "It's very much like GTA in the sense that once you open up parts of the world, you can always return to them," says Levine, commenting on Rapture's free-form framework. "And remember, none of this is scripted. You kill a Splicer, and the Little Sisters come out of their hiding places to harvest ADAM from the body. And the Big Daddy comes out to protect that Little Sister." The world of BioShock is always humming, in other words. Rapture's denizens go about their business with or without you, trying to scrape by in a world gone nuts. "How you want to interact with them is up to you," adds Levine.

When it comes to interacting with your character, of course, the mechanics may get a bit ghastly. Though the team wants a clean break from BioShock's spiritual predecessor (the System Shock series), the echoes of self-modification are undeniable. The difference: BioShock involves a slow survival-driven descent into drug-jacked madness. Much of the game apparently hinges on your ability to pinch harvested ADAM from the Little Sisters without bating Big...

Irrational's Ken Levine talks proms, clowns, and a post-E3 BioShock
Daddies or tangling with Splicers. Once acquired, the material (called plasmids) can be used to mod your ability to relate to the environment—say, thermal- or air-pressure change—but only a few at a time (the development team likes it to a deck of cards with limited slots). Other plasmids can be sprayed like pheromones to lure Splicers into direct confrontation with Big Daddies, leaving, say, a Little Sister open for easy pickings—do you kill or just steal from her? “BioShock adds moral choice to the equation of gameplay choice,” Levine says. “The game adapts to support your intentions.” Indeed, if a single word defines BioShock, Levine says it is “choice.” “Our goal is to sentence play-by-numbers to death,” he continues. “We don’t want to tell the gamer how to play; we want them to tell us how they’re going to survive. Let’s face it—this is where games are going. RPGs get it—Oblivion—action games get it—GTA—and now it’s time for shooters to evolve.” Levine and team, in fact, view BioShock as “the deepest shooter ever made.” “We think it’s going to bring about a real change in the shooter genre,” he says. “Let’s face it...the FPS has gotten kind of stale since Half-Life 2.” Those might be fighting words, considering the positive reaction to Valve’s recent Episode One—then again, Levine’s the brains behind trailblazers like Thief and System Shock 2. “We intend to be the stake in the heart of ‘run down the corridor, shoot the monster who pops out of the closet, rinse, and repeat’ school of FPS games,” he says. “If you want to go deeper—if you want to hack, if you want to craft, if you want to explore the depths of our genetic powers—think X-Men mutations—then BioShock will be there for you as well. But even if you’re just into shooters, the story line, the A.I., and the world are really something you’ve never experienced before.”

Will that story line be dynamic enough for multiple endings? “There’s a fair amount of choice in the game’s story, primarily around how you relate to the Big Daddies and Little Sisters,” Levine teases Levine. “And as Forrest Gump might put it, that’s all I have to say about that now.”

Matt Peckham

UNREAL VS. UNREALITY

“Unreal is at 100 percent Unreal 2.0,” says president Ken Levine. “They’re at the very edge of their technology and that’s why they are good. We’re at the edge of the technology and that’s why we can be good.”

The real challenge is balancing the two. “We want to make the game as fun as possible,” Levine says. “And that means making sure that players can progress through the story without getting stuck.”

The A.I. in BioShock really is something new,” says Levine, offering the following list of behaviors he claims you’ll witness in BioShock (and that you’ve never seen before):

- Weaker A.I.s hiding behind stronger ones.
- A.I.s running to health stations to heal themselves.
- A.I.s looting corpses and machines.
- A.I.s pulling weaker A.I.s out of the line of fire (e.g., Big Daddy will actually grab a Little Sister by the scruff and pull her to safety).
THE HOT SHEET

TEN THINGS THAT ROCK CGW'S WORLD

1. THE NEXT BEST THING
Enter Aesop Rock, he of solid rhymes and heavy beats. Combine with Jeremy Fish, street artist extraordinaire. Together, the two crafted this limited-edition short-story art book and 7-inch record about the creative process. Our advice: Grab one for $25 on upperplayground.com before they're gone.

2. A GOOD PSP GAME?
Finally, we've found a reason to brush the dust off our PSPs—no joke! Tekken: Dark Resurrection is best portable fighting game around. And, well, we like the bowling minigame. Karate strike!

3. ALL STRUNG OUT
Want to seem upper-crust and still get that modern music fix? Try The String Quartet's Tribute's classy covers.

4. IBIZA LED WATCH
Here at CGW, we embrace the inner nerd, but sometimes, you need to let it shine. Thinkgeek.com sells this Trek-tastic LED-laden timepiece for $140. Go on—you're worth it.

5. INTEL CORE 2 DUO
Well, the results are in (see Hard News, pp. 108) and it's official: AMD is no longer the gaming speed king. Intel reclaims the crown—big time.

6. GET LOST
When a DVD set of Lost's second season showed up in the CGW office, the big mystery became: "Who the hell has it now?" Everyone wants to see all the behind-the-scenes special features.

7. DISC OF THE DEAD
Endless waves of the shambling undead, trapping you in the mall—could a game possibly be more perfect? Some gameplay quirks aside, Capcom's Romero tribute Dead Rising is reason enough for any zombie connoisseur to buy an Xbox 360.

8. PHILLY CHEESE
What? You haven't seen the messed up FX sitcom It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia? This season alone, the show's dealt with steroid abuse, crack, welfare, underage drinking, and the physically challenged. Politically correct, it ain't. Funny, it is.

9. NINTENDO
We finally laid our hands upon the DS Lite and were ashamed we missed out on so many good original games for so long (try Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney and Trauma Center: Under the Knife if you doubt us). That's to say nothing of Nintendo's upcoming Wii console. If you haven't done so already, preorder, stat!

10. BLUETOOTH LASER VIRTUAL KEYBOARD
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PIPE DREA

Valve Software turns vaporware tangible and student project into showstealer

BY SHAWN ELLIOTT AND DARREN GLADSTONE

EXCLUSIVE

VALVE’S TRIPLE THREAT—TEAM FORTRESS 2, PORTAL, AND HALF-LIFE 2: Episode Two packaged together and piping from Steam to your PC sometime this season—encapsulates the company’s past, present, and future. If TF2 is the outfit’s tardiness (or perfectionism) incarnate, it also represents Valve’s ability to find big leaguers in the bush leagues, to take mod makers, as was the case with TF creators Robin Walker and John Cook, and position them to produce blockbusters. Portal, itself an offshoot of student-developed software, promotes the tradition. Imagine seven programmers from Redmond, Washington’s DigiPen Institute of Technology showing their senior project to Valve reps and signing on that same day. Meanwhile, HL2: Episode Two, breadwinner and main event, at once holds the line and heralds things to come, epitomizing why a visit to Valve today offers a glimpse of its tomorrow.
TEAM FORTRESS 2
PORTAL
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

Left to right: writer Marc Laidlaw, Half-Life 2: Episode Two project lead David Speyrer, Team Fortress creator Robin Walker, and Valve co-founder and managing director Gabe Newell.
CLASS ACTS
Cocreator Robin Walker on TF2’s characters

PYRO
“A great skirmisher, the Pyro often serves as a first line of defense. His flamethrower and incendiary rockets are difficult to avoid, making it easy for the Pyro to weaken enemies before an Engineer’s sentry gun mops them up. On offense, the Pyro is terrific at harassing the enemy’s defense, since it’s hard to maintain a solid defensive line when you’re on fire.”

ENGINEER
“The defensive backbone of any team, the Engineer builds useful devices such as sentry guns and health and ammo dispensers. Tactical placement of these devices and the ability to maintain them under fire are the keys to being a successful Engineer. If you’re better at planning and thinking than fighting, you’re a natural-born Engineer.”

SNIPER
“Nobody beats the Sniper at long-range combat. With a little time to find a perch and dig in, he can significantly slow an enemy advance. If knocking the helmet off of a Soldier at 400 paces sounds fun, then the Sniper is the class for you.”

TEAM FORTRESS 2 Seven-year switch

CHARLIE BROWN, PROJECT LEAD
When we started Team Fortress 2, we set out to make the best-looking, best-playing class-based multiplayer shooter. We studied Team Fortress Classic, since we’re founding TF2 on it, and wanted to settle on a complementary look. “Realistic” wasn’t the way to go. So we started studying several styles, and given the exaggerated nature of the game—the nonrealistic weapons and stuff—it seemed natural to lean toward a nonrealistic look.

Once we decided that, the first question was: “What will characters look like in this world?” Obviously, we wanted what you could call aspiration characters: characters players want to play as. Plus, when another player shows up on your screen, you want to know right away whether he’s friend or foe. So we have something we call a “read hierarchy.” When someone shows up onscreen, we want you to be able to identify what team he’s on and what class he is—so, say, if he’s friendly, you can figure out how you want to team up, work together, et cetera. Silhouettes are essential, especially when identifying someone at a distance, so we went superdistinct.

Robin Walker, cocreator: [Pointing at a projection of TF2’s Pyro] To give this character a sophisticated, less cel-shaded look, we’ve built this gradient of color up the body where it gradually gets brighter, drawing the eye to where the character gestures and holds his weapons.

CB: Since we wanted something stylistically sophisticated, we worked out a way to implement Phong shading in real time. This creates nice highlights on the characters—It brings out some of the folds in their clothing and makes them a bit more interesting than comparatively flat cel-shaded characters. In addition, it actually makes figures stand out from their surroundings, so it’s easier to identify danger.

[Again pointing at a projection] Here’s 2Fort [see glossary, pg. 74]. We apply the same principles to maps, too. With two opposing teams in such close proximity to each other, it’s tough to settle on a plausible environmental excuse—why would one faction build a base 100 yards from another? But when the setting is more iconic, that sort of sense-making isn’t necessary. Space would’ve worked, but we’re tired of the “space marines” thing, so we tested other themes that said “wacky weapons” and found the vibe in ’60s spy-meets-sci-fi movies. You have that nice retro feel, along with the high-tech equipment that does all the stuff that you’d want it to do without having to explain it. Instead, it’s like, “This looks like a thing that shoots lasers.” No need to ask how or why; it does what it does.

CGW: Like Got Smart.
CB: All of those spy shows! So on top of this theme, we have façades and high-tech areas. Think 007 and the evil lair inside the volcanic
"A versatile combat class packing an absurd amount of high explosives, the Demo Man is great at holding a map’s choke points. Whether he’s shutting down an enemy route by laying pipebombs along it, blowing up anything that blocks the team’s way, or entire packs of enemies with his highly explosive MIRV grenades, the Demo Man is the class of choice for anyone interested in making a lot of noise."

"The fastest and lightest of all the classes, the Scout uses his speed to punch through enemy lines before opposing defenders can react. What he lacks in health and weaponry, he makes up for with his incredible speed and maneuverability. If you’d like to sprint gracefully through enemy fire, look into the Scout."

"The core support class, the Medic is invaluable on both offense and defense. When attached to an offensive squad, he’s critical to keeping it alive inside the enemy base (while also boosting its offensive capability). On defense, his ability to keep defenders healthy means they won’t have to leave their posts. If you want to be loved by your entire team, or to indirectly kill a horde of enemies without firing a shot, then the Medic is just what the doctor ordered."

"The core of any offensive push, the Soldier comes armed with a devastating rocket launcher. Faster and slightly more fragile than the Heavy, the Soldier’s true all-rounder. From taking out Engineer sentry guns to using his rocket launcher to launch himself like a rocket, the Soldier is useful in a wide variety of situations. If you’re an old-school deathmatcher, or just quick on your feet in the middle of combat, the Soldier’s your man."

"The slowest, most powerful class, the Heavy carries a massive minigun capable of clearing rooms of enemies. He’s critical on defense to deal with Scouts, who can easily avoid Soldiers and Demo Men. If you’re a player who wants to be in the thick of the action, but your aim is a little rusty, the Heavy is the perfect class for you."

It works well with gameplay, too. In a typical capture-the-flag map, a no man’s land around a neutral area separates the two teams. Our art emphasizes this by saying to you: "This is neutral territory. It’s less intimidating." Then, "Ah, I’m moving into the opposing team’s property. It’s more threatening, and I feel like I’m trespassing."

We want these neutral areas and facades to say low-tech, so we’re stickin’ to a rural look. Well, blue bases tend to be a bit more industrial, but neither team’s facades are necessarily high-tech as what’s underneath. So we play with transition spaces and prepare people to think that things are a little off.

Here we have a barn, mostly low-tech, but we start to see some hints of high-tech—this video camera looks a little out of place. Look closely at that cow...it’s actually a billboard. Then we start seeing sharper cutoffs. The front of this door has a ho-hum vibe, but its back is a bank vault. Each map has a theme—2Fort’s is a command center or NODAR-style space."

"The point he’s making here is that a huge amount of TF2’s art flows from gameplay. We’re emphasizing the level of experience we have with our technology and what makes TF tick."

"Cosmetically, this applies to Team Fortress Classic’s oranges; structurally, it seems the same...."

"Although Team Fortress Classic is a version of Team Fortress, it’s pretty old at this point. Off the bat, Source has a bunch of technology that wasn’t available when we built earlier versions of Team Fortress. We’re taking advantage of that tech, but even simple things such as physics have a huge impact."

For instance, Demo Men and classes who throw physically simulated objects immediately become more interesting when we imagine them in Source. And, well, this isn’t the first version of Team Fortress that we’ve built by any stretch."

CGW: So tell us about those other versions.

RW: How many, and what happened? There were a few and, in each case, we learned a lot. Our process involves lots of playtesting, internally and with outside testers, so each and every version of Team Fortress 2 included a set of developed technologies and developed design—some of which we liked, and some we didn’t. In each case, we trimmed off the cream and took it with us to the subsequent step. So the TF2 you see here includes several improvements—wide-ranging alterations, additions, and so on. It’s certainly not the same as TFC, by any means. Some classes, for instance, are completely reimagined.*
TF Glossary

2Fort: Symmetrically constructed for capture-the-flag matches, 2Fort is Team Fortress Classic's most played map. Its massive popularity often reduces map options on public servers.

Concussion Jumping: Using concussion grenades—issued to lightly armed and armored Scouts and Medics for the ostensible purpose of throwing off pursuers—to propel oneself over long distances. Concussion jumping (also called concing) became standard practice for entering and disabling enemy bases in Team Fortress and Team Fortress Classic.


Source SDK: The Source software development kit is a collection of tools used to create maps and mods, among other things. In it, tinkerers found code connected to another incarnation of Team Fortress—one with Striders, vehicles, construction crews, a commander mode, and more. We're willing to entertain the idea that this is a kind of Enemy Territory: Half-Life Wars.

CGW: An abbreviated version of these various fits and false starts?
RW: We're not talking about that today.

CGW: You're kidding, yeah?
RW: I'm guessing that the in-game commentary in Team Fortress 2 is probably the place where we're going to talk about that stuff. We're talking years of work, and we haven't massaged that into an understandable statement.

In terms of technology, a bunch of the stuff we showed off in Brotherhood of Arms ended up appearing in other products. The parametric animation system became the fully fledged blended-animation system of HL2. Voice chat lip-synched to characters is in Counter-Strike, and so on.

CGW: How would commentary work in multiplayer?
RW: We want to do Day of Defeat commentary as well, and we're not sure whether it's where you can listen to commentary while everyone else plays or you're in some other mode where you can't see people. We are planning to incorporate commentary into our multiplayer content, though, and, with its long history, TF2 is a prime candidate.

CGW: Was the Half-Life 2-flavored stuff stripped from the Source SDK [see glossary, above] a red herring or the remnant of another false start?
RW: [Laughs] Well, it wasn't a red herring. We don't do reams of work to throw hackers off. It was from one of the iterations, and some of the best bits are absolutely sticking around for Team Fortress 2.

CGW: What, specifically, will you say about this "skimmed cream"?
RW: Well, we're still playtesting, and we wouldn't want to make promises....

CGW: Can you comment on essentials—classic elements such as concussion jumping [see glossary]?
CB: They're intact. And, in fact, we're even seeing new ones. "Sharking," or so I'm told, involves moving so swiftly as a Scout that you can actually skip across water without sinking.

RW: Team Fortress is all about that, I think. Its core—players making a choice about how they want to play, whether that's, "I want to be about mobility, dodging, and mincing through defenses" or something else. We're going to keep that. Multiplayer games are, in some cases, inherently humorous. Put 20 people together and give them all guns and try telling them to stay serious; it doesn't work that way. No matter how serious a shooter wants to be, it'll have moments that make you laugh a lot. Instead of trying to fight it, Team Fortress 2 takes hold of it.
CGW: Were TFC's tricks jumps intentional, too?
RW: Absolutely. Remember, Team Fortress came out of the Quake era; all rocket jumping, all the time. Giving medics a concussion grenade that made them move faster and farther was definitely deliberate.

CGW: You're reluctant to say what you're adding. Will you reveal what you're removing?
CB: I guess the nice answer is: The game is 10 years old, and we've learned a lot. Again, we're still testing and tweaking and can't give concrete answers.

CGW: Let's say we list ideas under consideration with the caveat that they're ideas under consideration...
RW: Instead of specific ideas, I'll offer a blanket statement. One thing we want is to make the things much more understandable. You've probably tried to introduce new players to TF—tried to explain exactly what's what, except explosions are going off, scouts are sprinting by, someone who looks like an ally suddenly turns into a Spy and starts stabbing.
CB: Chaos.
RW: Yes. Team Fortress is certainly chaotic, and we're not necessarily trying to lose that. But we are making it accessible. It's almost all in user interface elements rather than about removing features.
CB: Class interactions are interesting—we're changing things there, too, mostly in the way one class complements another. We're incorporating new ways to work together tactically—it's all about decisions, overcoming different problems in different ways.
RW: Team Fortress 2 tries to make sure that no matter what your skill set is, you're incredibly valuable to your team. In the past, TF faltered in places where a couple of classes could function in the same roles.

CGW: Perhaps some serious shockers for the purists?
RW: They'll be shocked 'cause it shipped! [laughs] The old TF community has come out of the woodwork, suddenly sending us a ton of e-mails saying, "We've got the clan back together! We're ready, man! Let's go!" They're the people who have to pay for our product, and we want to make sure it's something that they want to pay money for. So we invite them in, let them play....

CGW: Is it difficult? The hardcore have ideas that don't always agree. Where do you draw the line?
CB: Obviously, sample size is one way. One person on our forums says this class is underpowered; someone else insists it's overpowered. In some ways, it's subjective, so it becomes about bringing in as many people as we can—sussing out what the actual problems are.
and addressing those as opposed to people's personal reactions.

CGW: Sure. So while watching a sufficiently wide cross section of people play the game, you start to see so much of something—for instance, nobody playing a Pyro—that you get past the point where it's subjective.

CB: That's it exactly.

CGW: Steam's friends function is working well. Will TF2 take it further and, say, separate players by skill?

RW: I think the short answer is "yes."

CGW: Any possibility of cross-platform competition between Xbox 360 and PC players in TF2?

CB: Technically it's possible, although interoperability is up to platform holders. If they open it, we can write the code to support it. Once upon a time, we had the PC and the Dreamcast versions of Half-Life: Deathmatch working together, so we know we can do it.

CGW: So we've seen 2Fort. What about other maps and modes—push/pull, attack and defend?

RW: Again, we're not talking yet, although I can say that Team Fortress 2 will have classic maps, new maps, and more modes than CTF. One of the things that was fun and worked out well in the original Team Fortress was the variety of modes and the way that they changed the importance of various classes. Old engines constrained the ways that the Demo Man could modify the world with dexpacks. We can do much more now, so I definitely think we'll be pushing that as well as taking advantage of the Engineer's ability to work on stuff, and so on. And certainly some of the classic maps are undergoing change.

As with all of our multiplayer products—actually, all of our products—TF2's an ongoing process. We're never "done" with it on the day we ship, and we definitely have ideas for other classes with original styles. We define our classes in terms of play style—"I want to play this way. Which class do I choose?"—and through testing we've discovered other styles that people haven't had the opportunity to explore elsewhere.

So much class-based stuff sticks to what we'd consider the core—a guy who's good at combat, a support guy such as the Medic, a technician, and that's it. They stop right where you start to see the really interesting stuff, like the Spy or the Engineer. It's possible to play as an Engineer without any ability to aim whatsoever. The Spy takes out opponents purely through sneakiness—watching how other people play, and using their own behavior to best them. That's what we find the most fascinating, not more combat classes.
THE MODDERS MAKING FORTRESS FOREVER HAD REASON TO HANG THEIR HEADS ON WHAT, FOR THE REST OF US, WAS A RED-LIGHTER D. DAY. HOWEVER, WHEN VALVE UNVEILED TEAM FORTRESS 2—RADICALLY RJUGGERED AND CLOSER IN CONCEPT TO TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC THAN THE COMPANY'S PREVIOUS PLANS SIGNALIZED—FF FOLK WERE AS EXCITED AS EVERYONE ELSE, INSISTS DESIGNER KELLY DICKINSON. "COME ON, WHO WASN'T EXCITED?" HE SAYS. "SOME OF US DISCUSSED THE 'TF2 RELEASE CONTINGENT' AGES AGO AND DECIDED THAT IT WOULDN'T GREATLY AFFECT OUR OWN GOALS EVEN IF IT DID OCCUR DURING FF'S DEVELOPMENT. OBVIOUSLY, THERE'S A CAUSE FOR CONCERN."

NAMELY, WHETHER OR NOT THE OFFICIAL FORTRESS 2 WILL TAKE THE SOURCE MODS FOLLOWING BEFORE IT'S OWN FORMED. "WE'RE PUSHING TO RELEASE FF PRIOR TO TF2," DICKINSON SAYS. "SHARING SOMETHING TO THE COMMUNITY SOONER IMPROVES OUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS, AND NEW PLAYERS SHOULD BE MORE APD TO TRY US. WE WORKED TOO LONG AND TOO HARD."

For Dickinson, Team Fortress 2's class-to-class imbalances and exploitable bugs are, if they're not serious cracks, the chief trouble in the same complexity that makes the FPS, well, classic. "With so many different experiences—each depending upon the class a player picks—the game is daunting," he says. "Plus, public server play doesn't display the depth on tap in more organized matches. With Fortress Forever, we want to provide better direction for players. We have a hint system similar to Battlefield 2's. We're offering narrated tours with overviews and point-of-interest flythroughs that show objectives for each and every map. We also have an 'Intro,' or interactive training session, led by bot instructors, in which players can test the same advanced techniques that veterans perform." TFC-native tricks (read: cone jumping) aren't just possible; they're positively reinforced: Fortress Forever's stat system (a mash-up of the BC2, WarCraft III, and Gunbound) rewards players for team- and objective-based accomplishments.

Melding the preservationists' "they don't make 'em like they used to" devotion to the past with a willingness to tweak parameters, FF, Dickinson holds, is firmly rooted in TFC but isn't an outright remake. "We decided to stick with the Soldier-Medic dynamic that's so strong in TFC and push the other classes up to that ideal," he says. "We've tuned mobility, making the Pyro a cooler class with an incendiary cannon that's more mortar than RPG and allows for trick jumps. Similarly, we've modified the Heavy's chain gun so that it's more satisfying to use and we've given the Sniper teamwork-oriented options such as radio-tag ammo that allows allies to see marked opponents through walls. In addition, Spies can crouch in midair to mute the thud of impact. They also stay disguised while firing tranquillizers—although [the] rate of fire is slower—and auto-disguise as opponents they stab in the back."

Valve's Robin Walker says, "It's great. They have different goals, so we're not threatened by them, and they don't feel threatened by us. People will play what they want to play. And the Fortress Forever lot has some nice-looking stuff." Reason for FF's makers to hold their heads high then, provided they meet projected release dates and continue to iterate according to player input.

CGW: Are physics posing any impediments? For instance, dealing with rag dolls when Spies feign death?

CB: Absolutely. Definitely.

RW: Yeah. Our philosophy there is to run with it, not to fight it. Instead of saying, "We need to make sure that you can do everything now that you did then," it's "What would we do if we were inventing this game today?" And what we usually find is that we get a bunch of new, much more exciting behaviors.

CGW: For example?

CB: OK, maybe I'll talk about the Medic, who's much, much different in Team Fortress 2. We don't feel that anyone's produced a perfect medic in a multiplayer game, and certainly Team Fortress Classic's mechanism is a chore. The way that you heal people is annoying and hard. You can't do it in the middle of combat, the other person has to be aware that you're trying to help them, and so on. So Team Fortress 2's Medic is completely changed in the way he interacts with other characters and the way he fulfills his purpose as the core support class. Now he's supportive on offense and defense. If you're near one, you'll appreciate his presence whether you're hurt or not.

CGW: We hope he can still spread infection.

CB: [Laughs] Earlier you asked what about Team Fortress Classic we didn't want in Team Fortress 2.

RW: There's one.

CB: Excellent example. That feature fundamentally says, "Stay away from your teammates; they might hurt you." That's not exactly a good signal to send.

CGW: Shipping Team Fortress 2 will send a good signal. How does it feel to finally, finally get within range of an actual release?

CB: It's awesome. I keep seeing things here and there where I want to shake the artists' hands; their work fits the gameplay so well. Watching a Heavy open up, with HDR on his tracers and that massive muzzle flash—the whole thing just looks better than I ever thought Team Fortress would look. It's exciting.

"I WANT TO SHAKE THE ARTISTS' HANDS: THEIR WORK FITS THE GAMEPLAY SO WELL."

—ROBIN WALKER
BLUGS BUNNY—WASCALLY wabbit, videogame pioneer. Stupping a hole on a rock and stepping inside, he’d instanta- neously emerge from some distant burrow. And yet, thanks to modern scientific advancements at Valve Software, what once seemed phony now works. The proof is in Portal.

Those little environmental logic puzzles scattered throughout Half-Life 2: Episode One? Pfft! Nothing compared to what we’ve played in Valve’s first-person puzzler. In Portal, Newtonian law is meant to be bent if not broken: The game’s portal gun tears holes in space-time, creating paths to and from physically unconnected points; its gameplay challenges players’ spatio-logic prowess with perplexing labyrinths. The only fatalities in this fright-free bonus (bundled with Team Fortress 2 and Half Life 2: Episode Two) result from bungled jumps.

DROPPING SCIENCE
Portal’s simple design draws on stark white backdrops straight from THX 1138. riffing on Metal Gear Solid’s similarly spartan VR training missions, each room presents a new puzzle that, in turn, teaches another knotty navigation trick. Open a portal under a crate and place the exit point over a turret emplacement; gravity does the rest, as the crate drops on the gun and destroys it. Plummet into one low-lying portal and use the momentum to catapult yourself out yet another portal and over a yawning chasm. Sound familiar? Prey noodled with similar notions, but making and manipulating portals—as opposed to simply stepping through them—is another matter. Perhaps you’ve heard of the little freeware that could called Narbacular Drop? A student project from the DigiPen Institute of Technology, ND (download it at nucleo@monkeysoftware.com) plays like a lean version of Portal. “It’s an environment-traversal game, too,” says level designer Kim Swift, part of Narbacular’s seven-person crew. Excitable engineer Jeep Barnett finishes her thoughts: “Originally, we wanted these overly complex ideas—weapons and entire cities full of things to chase down.” However, that was too intricate, “so
we cut it all out, just stick to the portals, and see what we had."

What they had caught the attention of Valve employees visiting DigiPen’s annual student expo.

We showed ND to [Valve founder] Gabe Newell. Apparently he must have liked it, because he hired the whole team on the spot,” says Swift, summarizing one hell of a senior-project success story. Now, celebrating its one-year anniversary with the company, the team’s first pro title nears completion.

Right now, though, Portal is in the throes of rigorous playtesting—an important lesson learned from their bug-ridden senior project. “The entire game is built on player feedback,” says Barnett. “The Valve school of thought—test, iterate, test—has helped improve Portal in every way.”

More satisfying is seeing testers work out new ways to solve challenges—and inspire completely different design. One interesting observation: Women assess the situation before acting, whereas men hop about as if bracing for a fight. Finger testosterone if you must, but c’mon. The game, played entirely in the first-person perspective, has you staring down a gun barrel while solving IQ-busting brainteasers. The first urge is to fire a few rounds and bunny-hop. We did.

A LINK TO HALFLIFE

Swift confirms that this unique single-player puzzle also somehow ties into the larger Half-Life world: “Think of Portal as a sort of side path that will connect with later episodes. It’s fun figuring out how we’re going to fit ourselves in.” Stranger still is that Valve scribe Marc Laidlaw places Portal’s events between Half-Life’s Black Mesa incident and the beginning of Half-Life 2. “Portal is one of those parallel-evolution games that’s converged on where we’re at in some ways. I just loved what they were doing,” confides Laidlaw. As per the Valve norm, how it all connects remains a mystery. “Portal,” Swift says, “offers some answers while raising other questions.”

For starters, what’s next? That, according to Swift, is up to the masses and what they want—Portal’s features integrated into the Half-Life franchise proper or a full-blown sequel. We say why not both?"
CGW: HOW IS THE EPISODIC experiment going?
Marc Laidlaw, writer/game designer: We’re still in unknown territory in terms of storytelling. In Episode Two, we’re out of the familiar confines of Half-Life 2, out of the Citadel and City 17. It opens up possibilities—a new setting, new characters, and new events that we couldn’t pull off in the past.

David Speyrer, engineer/project lead: Marc has to keep several stories in his head, since we can’t predict where gameplay prototyping and playtesting will take the product. The player is another random element in that equation, and only through experimentation are we able to figure out what works. So Marc stays superflexible in such an unpredictable framework.

CGW: So you say, “We want a temperate forest,” and Marc matches his story to fit?
ML: Well, it works both ways. We’ll take a list of levels and areas that we’d like to explore, let the artists stretch their wings, [and] let the level designers do the same. Then we’ll work that into the story. Other times, we’ll settle on a story idea that dictates the environment.

DS: [To Marc Laidlaw] I remember you really wanted to develop the Vertigoants in Half-Life 2. They’re unique in our fiction in that in Half-Life 1 they were your enemies, whereas in Half-Life 2 they became your allies.

ML: We want to get into who they are, their motivation and special role. In Half-Life 2 we couldn’t get them into areas where we wanted them, so we sort of went, “OK, we won’t deal with them here, and that changes their story.” Now we say why they weren’t infesting City 17, why you frequently encounter them out in the countryside. The exigencies of game development tweaked things, but I’m totally happy with the way it ends up.

DS: When we playtested Nova Prospekt—the prison in Half-Life 2—one Vertigoant got loose and went around shooting Antilons. I wanted to fight alongside him, but it was way too late to introduce new companion A.I. to Half-Life 2, so we bookmarked it for the future. We knew
that adventuring with Vortigaunts would be fun, and that dovetailed nicely with Marc's desire to flesh them out.

**CGW:** And what role will Vortigaunts play in *Episode Two*?

**Josh Weier, engineer:** Obviously, we didn't want Vortigaunts to work the same way as Alyx, so they do things differently. They shoot lightning bolts and can charge your suit, bringing your health back up. They're also great against Antlions, and will flip them onto their backs to buy you time.

**DS:** And for consistency's sake, we can't have Alyx die at any time. As allies, Vorts fix that since they're hive-minded and all the same. Also, it's much easier to make an alien endearing. Because we're programmed to recognize whether a person is behaving appropriately, it's tough to make someone such as Alyx effective and evocative. With an alien, you have a little more leeway, and you can take its personality in more interesting directions.

**CGW:** Just avoid Jar Jar Binks. Have you considered revisiting other *Half-Life 1* characters from time to time?

**ML:** So much from *Half-Life 1* is still unresolved, and we're having fun bringing elements of the Black Mesa backstory forward. For instance, Dr. Breen was an unnamed administrator—you never saw him in *Half-Life*—but in *Half-Life 2* he becomes a character. One of the old *Half-Life* scientists will emerge in *Episode Two*.

**CGW:** Shining the spotlight on a new Barney or Dr. Kleiner?

**ML:** I won't say too much more about him until we roll out the red carpet, but he's a fun personality to inject into scenes. I kind of know how Dr. Breen is going to talk, I kind of know how the Vortigaunts are going to respond to things, so it's good to work with these characters when putting scenes together.

**CGW:** Ah, so Dr. Breen is still alive?

**DS:** [Laughs] Hmm. What? Let's look at this vehicle.>
JW: We wanted a vehicle that looks, feels, and functions unlike what the Resistance used in City 17. A car created to kill zombies. It's cobbled together: The muffler is crimped on, it has fenders from different cars, a cowcatcher on the front...NPCs interact with it in interesting ways. The little zombie actually knows to jump onto it to attack. If you swerve, he swerves while still hanging on—the way he would in an action flick. To clear him off the car, you'll want to smash into a wall.

DS: Allies can catch rides, too.

CGW: Are these vehicle segments as straightforward as those in Half-Life 2?

JW: Some maps are massively nonlinear. The jeep's a great way to get around, and so we wanted to make big maps.

DS: [Points at a monitor] Gordon's crossing through the countryside, racing Combine forces to a missile silo in the White Forest. The goal is to rendezvous with Resistance scientists working on a superimportant project there. The big environments between City 17 and the missile silo required us to change the way we build maps. We render a few dozen trees and then replicate those in slightly different orientations and positions until it feels like a full forest. Look at this: See how the Strider demolishes this house? [Reloads and replays scene] It collapsed differently that time. That's cinematic physics.

CGW: How different is it from what Havok or AGEIA is doing?

DS: Gray Horsfield [who worked on destruction sequences in The Lord of the Rings and King Kong for director Peter Jackson] translated his techniques to game development. The initial destruction event is canned animation, then we hand off some of it to Havok simulation. We use it to do much more spectacular stuff without slowing the computer down.

[Attempting to take on a Strider] Bear with us on this Strider Buster demonstration; we're using a pumpkin to represent it at this point. The goal with this weapon is to get Gordon down underneath the Strider. It's a combo weapon; it works as gravity gun ammo—similar to C4—and then conventional weapons detonate it.
And that's the Hunter....
ML: Every time you encounter a new creature, you want to know how it fits in with the Combine. How does the Combine use them? Where did they originate? We're fleshing out the whole tapestry of Combine creatures and the ways in which they fit together.

DS: Hunters, for example, accompany Striders. They're peak creatures designed to pursue players into all the spaces that Striders can't. And they emote....

Ted Backman, senior artist: Think about the way we read faces: raised eyebrows, squinting eyelids, flaring nostrils. Now imagine that for Hunters. The eyes retract inside of the head. The pupils dilate, much like Dog's does.

It seems strange to talk about this sort of alien and acting, but I think it'll read really well and people will intuitively understand the different emotional states.

CGW: After seeing Dog in action, it doesn't seem strange at all.
TB: Dog's performance in Half-Life 2 and Episode One made me want to push dramatic acting among monsters. It's one of our goals going forward.

DS: We also want to breathe more life into Antlions—let you look at their life cycle, social structure, and that sort of thing. We think you'll get a kick out of walking through Antlion tunnels, and, yeah, you'll definitely deal with Antlions in new ways, and see Antlion variants that you've never seen before in Half-Life 2.

CGW: Speaking of NPCs, what can you tell us about the big tease from the beginning of Episode One—the Combine Advisors escaping the Citadel?
DS: It's one of the interesting things about episodic storytelling. While working on Half-Life 2, we'd revise the whole story as necessary. Here, however, we create an episode and ship it. Episode Two can't revise Episode One. That said, we always had plans for the Advisors—we foreshadowed them at the end of Half-Life 2, and we showed them in HL2: Episode One. We'll flesh them out in future episodes.
**ML:** These teasers aren’t accidental. The fact that the Advisor scene is there in *Episode One* is a strong sign that it’s significant. In a longer game, we could put something in simply because it’s cool. Here, we often end up cutting it. Things have to do double duty. They have to be good for gameplay, they have to add to the story, and they have to look great. There’s less and less extraneous stuff in each episode.

**CGW:** As you trim away accidental and/or nonessential experiences, are you afraid you might paint yourself into a corner?

**ML:** We try to avoid inconsistencies and contradictions, but even if we think that we’ve painted ourselves into a corner, we’ll find some way out. That’s the fun of it. Every now and then, though, you’ll find footprints in the paint! [Laughs]

With *Half-Life 2* we were thinking, “We want to make sure this is expansive.” In *Half-Life 1*, we didn’t think about anything beyond Black Mesa. But I’m often amazed by it, because, as I said, we’re still pulling stuff out of Black Mesa, and its backstory figures significantly into the episodes as we move forward.

**CGW:** On moving forward: Previously you referred to episodes one through three as “Half-Life 3.” Is it only a trilogy?

**ML:** What we’re working on now is a three-episode trilogy. And what lies beyond that...?

**DS:** Is unspeakable! [Laughs] Any conclusion we provide to any story arc will leave unanswered questions. To me, that just seems right. Our players are participating in our fiction and it would spoil a lot of the fun to tie a little bow around every question for them.
“Work as if you were to live a hundred years. Play as if you were to die tomorrow.”

-Ben Franklin

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These articles are meant to give you the bigger picture: a summary of our original online review, community and media reaction to the game, and a look at patches and updates since a game's original release. In short: It's everything you need to know.

INSIDE

Civilization IV: Warlords
More civs, more scenarios—more ways to get obsessed all over again.

The Ship
They're coming to get you!

Tom vs. Bruce: PoxNora
Wanna trade cards with us? Eh? Eh?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VIEWPOINT

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CIVILIZATION IV: Too much is never enough

Publisher: 2K Games Developer: Firaxis Games Availability: Retail Box, Download (direct2drive.com) Genre: Turn-based 4X strategy ESPRI Rating: Everyone 10+

GREAT EXPANSION PACKS CAN'T MAKE UP FOR A TERRIBLE GAME. In the case of Civilization IV, that's not such a problem. But even with a great game like that—and don't kid yourself that this wasn't the best game of 2006—an expansion pack needs to get you excited enough to pull out the original again. If you'd uninstalled it, the expansion should really make you willing to tear through your stacks of games, looking for the CDs so you can do the reinstall shuffle—and like it. Spend an evening tracking down a game that wound up in some paper sleeves at the back of your desk? A good expansion pack makes it all worthwhile.

WHO DECREED THE PLEASURE DOME, ANYWAY?
It's not tough to get excited about Civilization IV again. The problem: Does the expansion pack really have anything to do with it? Do you really care that you get to play as the Carthaginians?

Or that you can build a trebuchet? Or that Civ IV developer Firaxis Games had the questionable taste to include Josef Stalin as a Russian leader while showing the obvious sense to exclude Hitler from the German side? Longtime Civ fanatics (those who've stuck with the series since 1991 and still have Civ II installed somewhere on a laptop or old Windows machine) won't find any surprises here. In that sense, the minor changes in Warlords are instant failures. Ooooh! A Great General! Is that because you forgot to put him in the original game in the first place? "Hmmm...we have Great Engineers, Great Artists, and Great Prophets...what are those guys in the army called? No, I can't remember, either. Let's just leave that out this time."

Short of adding tin soldiers and Richard Nixon, it's hard to effect any substantial change to the Civ formula, which continues working quite well even a decade and a half later. Sort of counterintuitively, the only way to really make players think differently about these types of games is to limit their options in some way—because expanding a player's options has long since reached the point of diminishing returns. Hence the only substantive difference about the Warlords expansion pack is the inclusion of fixed scenarios.

I know—everyone hates fixed scenarios. All 4X strategy games should have the largest maps possible, with the most units, because that's what these games are all about...right? Trust me, though—the scenarios work. In fact, they're the best part of Warlords.

TREBUCHETS-R-US
Here's the weirdest thing about Warlords: The scenarios feel like total last-minute add-ons cobbled together to offer some more material for when players get sick of building trebuchets. To load a particular scenario, you have to restart the game in order to queue up the particular mod that the scenario uses (trying this in multiplayer without the appropriate restart causes crazy sync errors). Once you get past this undocumented problem, you realize you have the choice of some excellent multiplayer situations...and some totally broken messes. But the real challenge lies in the limited range of action available in these scenarios, because when a game
WARLORDS

The player's actions, it must do so very carefully to avoid undue frustration—and Warlords generally gets this equation right. Paradoxically, despite the expansiveness and scope of the well-established Civilization system, the part of Warlords that works best is the one that limits the game the most.

It's also interesting to see how well Warlords works as a straight war game, which is what you're essentially playing in the Peloponnesian War scenario (one of the best scenarios, incidentally). The Chinese Unification scenario puts players in a diplomatic straitjacket and forces them to forge alliances in order to accomplish anything, and works very well in multiplayer. Some of the other scenarios, like Omens, don't work well at all...so, just like every other part of this package, the quality varies.

Reimagining and restricting the game's scope also makes an intriguing solo scenario possible, in which the player controls the Vikings in their invasions of the British Isles. The goals: Loot, loot, loot. You can even ransom cities back to their owners, with the proviso that once-ransomed cities that fall under subsequent attacks won't accept further ransom demands. So, of course, your ultimate goal is to ransom every city once—and then build up a massive armada to come back and take them all again, plundering them properly. That's what Vikings do.

Did I mention the fact that Warlords also features buildings specific to each civilization? It's a nice touch, but ultimately not that important. New Wonders include the excellent Great Wall, which looks superb even if its usefulness remains questionable. One scenario lets you play as the barbarians, and it feels like the final act in a series from which we've now seen everything. Ultimately, perhaps the reason Warlords is so good is simply that enough time has passed since the release of the original game, giving you plenty of leeway to appreciate it all over again. /Bruce Geryk

VERDICT
Worth your money? Yes. Worth your time? That depends on your valuation system.

REALITY CHECK
IUP NETWORK 8/10
GAMESPOT 8.6/10
GAMESPY 3.5/8
IGN 8.4/10
DUNGEON SIEGE II: BROKEN WORLD

Meh

PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Gas Powered Games
GENRE: Action-RPG
AVAILABILITY: Retail Box
ESRB RATING: Mature
RECOMMENDED: 1.6GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 1.4GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard

MOST EXPANSIONS SKIRT A FINE LINE between "making the most of a quality engine" and "wringing the last dime from a tired property." The thing is, which side of the line a given expansion falls on is less a matter of objective analysis and more a matter of how much you liked the base game. It's telling, then, how little commentary (professional or fan-based) exists for developer Gas Powered Games' new Dungeon Siege II expansion, Broken World. In fact, apart from Gamespot reviewer Greg Mueller, the Internet critics remain positively mum. Bad sign? Well, in the words of Oscar Wilde: "There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."

Despite the ho-hum-ness, a few honest-to-goodness, objectively identifiable strengths and weaknesses shine through. The two new classes (with names that scream "marketing department"—see sidebar for details) and one new race (dwarves) aptly complement the gameplay, and the added content provides a few more solid hours of hack-n-slash. On the other hand, Broken World's graphics are as dated as a milk carton and its story thinner than Lindsay Lohan...before her intervention.

SAME AS EVER

Good or bad, though, the new stuff doesn't add up to much. As GameSpot's Mueller points out, "Broken World" doesn't bring anything to Dungeon Siege II in terms of the story, and it's too short to stand on its own as a separate campaign. The game throws some uninspired new dungeons at us (the final one is little more than a really long corridor), with most of the repetitive "new" enemies simply rehashed from the base game. While the expansion's boss monsters provide good challenges, requiring some tactics and clever timing to defeat them, you wind up fighting the same ones repeatedly throughout. Other aspects (the click-n-us gameplay, the multiplayer mode, and the spells and weapons) remain completely unchanged.

Then again, the lack of change doesn't necessarily equal failure, as long as you maintain an "it ain't broke" attitude about the original Dungeon Siege II. The gaming industry is rife with sequels and expansions that radically alter a series, only to upset fans. Instead, for better or for worse, Gas Powered chose to play it very safe here—so if you just want more of that old feeling, Broken World should keep you happy. —Eric Neigher

A LITTLE BIT OF CLASS

One of the biggest complaints about Dungeon Siege II centered on its nigh useless multiclassing options. Pursuing different skill sets inevitably led to worse results than grinding it out as a basic fighter, mage, or healer. While Broken World doesn't change that mechanic, it offers two new hybrid classes (the Fist of Stone and the Blood Assassin) that combine two primary skills. Fists of Stone cater to solo players, in that they pair hand-to-hand specialties with healing and defensive magic, Blood Assassins do the exact opposite. Their archery-based attacks and long-range combat magic mean they need to team up with some tough mofos to soak up frontal assaults. Both classes work well in their own ways, but their existence begs the question: Why not just retool the engine so as to cut multiclassers some slack and allow us to choose our own path through the character tree? Lord knows I could've cleaned up as a dual-classed nature/combat mage.

REALITY CHECK

ONLY DIEHARDS WILL WARM TO THIS BY-THE-NUMBERS EXPANSION.

IUP NETWORK: 6.10
GAMESPOT: 6.3/10
GAMESPY: 6.3/10
IGN: 6.3/10

VERDICT

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
VIVA LA REVOLUCION!

IF YOU LOATH THE SPENDING MONEY ON war games of questionable quality that keep covering all the same old crap, you can’t do much better than 1848, downloadable (free of charge) from Battlefront.com. As its name implies, 1848 covers the Hungarian Revolution of 1848—tell me if you’ve ever seen that in computer form before.

The Hungarian Ministry of Education sponsored 1848’s development, and Battlefront.com used the bit of government largesse to promote its latest war game, For Liberty!, which covers the American Revolution and comes from HungarGames, the same developer responsible for 1848. Furthermore, the two games share a common system...so, chances are, if you’re into 1848, you’ll also enjoy For Liberty! The latter game costs money (you can try a brief demo before you buy), but frankly, I like this “get one free, then buy one” system of game marketing; in this case, it gives players access to a game about a period of history with which they might be unfamiliar, and then gives them a reason to try it out.

Obviously, this kind of thing isn’t going to work for many other war games, because not all of them can receive funding from big government institutions like the Hungarian Ministry of Education. However, Battlefront.com gets props for recognizing the opportunity here and using the game as a marketing tool rather than trying to charge even a modest price for it.

And if you’re still hungry for American Revolution material after For Liberty!, try Birth of America from www.ageod.com, a PC game from the designer of the original Europa Universalis board game. Bruce Geryk

Longtime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk can probably kick your ass at any board game, any day of the week.

EVERY WANTED TO PLAY OUT THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1848? NOW YOU CAN.

For Liberty! uses the same game system as 1848, so if you dig one, you’ll likely dig both.

AVIATOR. MODERN TECHNOLOGY. CLASSIC DESIGN

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Dual independent throttle controls with interlock
Realistic design trigger
2-way PDV hat
11 buttons
Rudder twist
Constant force spring gimbal design
Fully programmable with over 24 commands
Ambidextrous
Compatible with Windows 2000, XP, XP64
CIVICITY: ROME
Maybe this is why Rome fell

WERE YOU TO KNOW NOTHING ABOUT history except what you learned from PC games, I'd forgive you for believing that Rome was the world's only great empire worthy of a game simulation—or, in the case of this release season, two of 'em. CDV's Glory of the Roman Empire led the charge...and the second of these sims, CivCity: Rome, is an intriguing collaboration between Civilization's Firaxis Games and Stronghold's Firefly Studios, that, despite its positive qualities, excels only at dull mediocrity.

SIZE MATTERS
At first, Rome feels like a strong medium-intensity city game, well suited to casual players or veterans with little appetite for hardcore micromanagement. The math is easy to grasp (one in-game person equals 100 citizens), with simple resource-production chains varied enough to make each a unique challenge. The game's best innovation: a realistic representation of citizen life that allows you to diagnose problems by watching citizens' comings and goings (rather than by combing through info boxes and tables). It all works quite nicely—until your city gets too big. As cities grow, the game unravels...and Rome's apparent accessibility begins to smueh, instead, like a cop-out. The production chains that made the early game so engaging either become harder to troubleshoot or simply break down (it's hard to tell which). The low zoom-out and unchanged viewing angle prove unworkably claustrophobic. And, without any useful hot-keys, playing at the game's brisk pace becomes physically tiring; would it have killed someone to program "H" for roads and "R" for houses?

The campaign mode tries to minimize this problem by moving you to a new (and usually empty) map with every scenario. Far from helping, this structure forces you to, as GameSpot reviewer Brett Todd puts it, "build the same town over and over again." Worse still, you quickly realize that the best way to achieve mission goals is to forge strategy in favor of plopping stuff down willy-nilly. It's like finishing a puzzle by pounding in the last few pieces with a mallet. Your cities end up sloppy and disorganized...but that's the next governor's problem, right?

RENDER UNTO CAESAR
Even before they reach this state, however, the cities aren't much to look at. Most critics (except for IGN's very forgiving reviewer) pointed to the game's "ugly" aesthetics, but that's a bit misleading. Yes, the building selection screams "monotonous" and everything's blocky up close—but that's not "ugly," that's "dated." They would've been quite acceptable four years ago. It's curious, then, that the game runs so sluggishly even on machines that exceed its recommended specs; at highest settings, even mid-sized cities stutter annoyingly.

TIME MACHINE OR A DUSTY SHELF?
Everything about the game, in fact, seems so 2002. I'm unable to escape the feeling that Rome was an uninspired and rightly shelved game that got a second chance with the infusion of Firaxis brainpower. Still, not even the Civilization team's most substantive changes penetrate more than skin deep, as the game was just too finished for any fundamental alterations. Ignoring the purely cosmetic changes (like calling the collection of Roman trivia a "Civlopedia"), the attempts to put the Civ in CivCity: Rome to improve the game a little, but they fall far short of their promise to— as lead designer Simon Bradbury said in an interview—put "the Cities of Civilization under a magnifying glass...[carrying] on where the furthest zoom level of Civilization left off..." One could imagine the great game we'd have now had Bradbury kept that promise. Perhaps no worthwhile city-builder can sprout from Civilization IV's city concept, but it would've been nice to know that someone gave it an honest try. Better that kind of failure than the post hoc patchwork of CivCity: Rome. —Greg Kramer


VERDICT

At this shotgun wedding of the Civilization and Caesar franchises, no one catches the bouquet.

REALITY CHECK

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EETS ALIVE!

THOSE OF US OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER CGW Hall of Famer Lemmings back when it debuted have waited a good long time for something to come along and fill the void that only a lack of adorable, suicidal, leaping critters can create. Enter Eets to fill said void.

In this nifty little puzzle platformer, you guide a cutey little white blob (the eponymous Eets) across a cartoony landscape. Your goal: Get the little guy to the jigsaw-piece piece serving as the finish line for the level. You do it by messing with Eets’ emotional/food issues; feeding him certain types of marshmallows changes his emotions, thus changing how far (if at all) he leaps at a platform’s edge. Or you could shoot him with chocolate chips from the choco clouds... or have him get gobbled up Jordan-like and shot across the level by a cannonball. Yeah, it’s all more than a little surreal—picture Willy Wonka on even more LSD—but it’s an addictive good time. You can pick it up for just $20 at www.eetsgame.com.

POPCAP’S MIDAS TOUCH

While PopCap’s Whac-A-Mole wannabe Hammer Heads Deluxe didn’t grab me the way most of the publisher’s mouthwatering-in-honey-games do, Talsimania makes up for it, consuming my free time faster than Eets down a happy marshmallow. What makes Talsimania so addictive is the way it mixes different gameplay types and rewards.

The core of the game consists of spinning coins around to create paths between different talismans. Longer paths equal bigger rewards... simple, right? But with three tiers of talismans offering three different levels of reward, a mix of bonus coins and blockers to snare for bonuses, and a Duck Hunt-like minigame between missions, the action never stops... and neither do you. Don’t mess with the free trial—give in to the inevitable and purchase at www.popcap.com /Robert Coffey

CGW alum Robert Coffey blames his inability to get anything done on “column research.” He’s really just playing word games online.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Fight in the air or on the ground. Fight on the beaches or at sea. Fight during the day or through the dark of night. Fight with valor. Fight with might. Defend your armies, whatever the cost may be. Patrol the skies. Hunt down your enemies. Attack your foes. Never retreat. Never surrender.

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X62

- Pro Flight Rudder Pedals
- Precision rudder axis control
- Adjustable pedals with integrated toe brakes
- Adjustable resistance for realistic feel
- Strong, stable base

www.saitekusa.com
THE SHIP

Fantastic voyage

- The less immediately lethal the murder weapon (knitting needles and pen knives, for example), the more money you make.
- Bait fools: The Ship fines and/or jails players for offing the wrong passenger.

I SHOULD SH*** AND SHOWER. I NEED a nap. I'm hungry, thirsty, hunted...all of this in The Ship, I should say (what with all the out-of-proportion MMO players out there who'd sooner crap in a sock than step away from the PC). The man in the top hat and coattails is scheming; I've seen him pace the same corridor one, two, three times. Same goes for the old crook with the graying bob, meandering in and out of third-class cabins, beepspectacled one moment and naked-eyed the next. She waits to catch me washing, snoring—or worse, crapping. She waits to off me on the can with the pool cue, poison, stiletto, skilet, cleaver, screwdriver, tire iron, or any other object—improvised or for the purpose—she so happens to have hidden underneath that dead-giveaway gown. But we all want blood on our hands. Maybe she knows I know is more "she thinks I'm out to murder her."

Sixteen passengers per online server, we walk the ship, visiting boiler room and rec room, infirmary and brig, looking for our very own Professor Plum and the lead pipe to whack him with. Meanwhile, Colonel Mustard (or whoever; among the 14 other players) follows us. Each voyager is both target and triggerman, whereas Silma-ish needs—bladders, stomachs, and stimulation-starved brains—create vulnerability. If I stop for a bite, I risk a knife in the back. Ignore those needs and fatigue sets in, making me an easier mark. The rule set is simple; the psychology is something else.

MIND GAMES

A poker face is paramount: Only an assassin is sure of himself, positive he's approaching his hit and not the other way around. Everyone else stays tentative, on edge...or in the shrewd executioner's case, trying on sheep's clothing. What you have is first-person dinner theater—based more on artful deception than hand-eye coordination—that even the nonmousing, WASD-verse will take to.

In fact, The Ship favors Parker Brothers' "that's the breaks" attitude toward setback. Housing and routine, electrifying and exhausting—like Monopoly, it soars when some other lout grabs the "Go to Jail" card. Alternately, TV, chitchat, or the takeout menu on the table looks twice as interesting when that lout is you (here, it's one player starting within spitting distance of an ordnance dump...while the next needs to scour the deck just for a knitting needle) in bad luck, hold out; in good luck, hold in.

Fortune aside, satisfying executions float this Ship...assuring a half-wit you're a noob looking for a tutor and not his life, only to off him as he types; poisoning a schlep and butchering him as he heads to sick bay. Similarly, in my mind, The Ship is mostly immune to the bugs and imbalances other critics carp on. Psyche yourself out. Play it in short, on-again, off-again stretches—not to shirk time. / Shawn Elliott

UNSMOOTH SAILING

Garage-born and buggy, The Ship shows its mod ancestry when passengers strut aft to stern, obsessively compulsively stuck in hand-washing and other animations. We say: So what? The game also owes its distinctly genre-free design to those same DIY origins.

VERDICT

Too spirited, sinister, and inexpensive (it's $19.99) not to try.

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CRISIS ON INFINITE SERVERS
CGW'S MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF THE ENDLESS MMORPG LANDSCAPE

PACIFIC BY NIGHT

This is a tale of two Ultima Online characters—Carnelam (my thief) and Shaal (my buddy’s insane ax-murdering beggar dude)—who, one dark night at around 1 a.m., after a long combat training session on UO's Pacific shard, declared, “Let’s go look for trouble!” In the waning days of the game’s unforgiving kill-or-be-killed atmosphere, we rarely needed to look any further for our entertainment.

So we took off across the docks of Skara Brae, and into the thick of Britannia’s urban blight—with two unarmed (unless you count Shaal’s picks), mostly naked, and severely unfinished characters. We often ran into some fairly odd and random encounters at these hours, so we did on this night: a small, player-owned house stood in a clearing, and near it sat a shirtless, deer-antler-adorned tamer atop a pet nightmare.

According to the house’s sign, it would fail at any minute (as was once the fate of any ill-maintained house in UO). A quick inspection of the tamer’s pockets revealed a fresh house deed—obviously intended for the soon-to-be-empty spot—along with some spellcasting materials and quite a bit of gold. Since this amateur land tycoon remained motionless and wholly unresponsive to our antics, we did what any good hell-raising troublemakers would do at a time like this: We PK’d him.

You are dead.

For the uninstructed, that’s short for “Player Killed.” Shaal tore through the hapless house-camper while I carefully trapped the nightmare inside another nearby house, thoughtfully left unlocked by its undoubtedly soon-to-be-dead owner. After looting the tamer’s corpse (and letting our criminal timers expire), we wandered into an even more absurd situation farther south: Two trash-talking mages duelled outside their guild house, clearly focused on honing their mad PvP skills. Shaal wasted no time in telling off these two veteran characters, insisting that he could take them both by himself—driving the point home with a sudden pickax attack.

How exactly the ensuing melee unfolded I do not clearly remember. I helped out by stealing random items from the mages’ backpacks while Shaal ran around trying not to get killed. He managed to elude them long enough to pick up a poisoned butcher knife (aka the weakest weapon in the game) from a nearby player-owned weapons vendor, which I’m pretty sure he used to kill one of the mages. One way or another, I know that this particular comedy of errors did end with at least one of the mages dead, right before Shaal and I disappeared into the woods yet again—where we wandered into a moongate (fancy UO talk for a teleportation gateway) that sprang into being right next to us.

Phat Lewtz!!! 1111111111 One 1!!!

On the other side of the moongate, we found the decayed house from earlier in the night. Or, more accurately, we found a shiny new house where the old house sat not an hour prior. We immediately hid near the moongate, lightly expecting the new tenants to drop in, hauling furniture and other possessions. Moments later, a large, 400-pound chest fell to the ground right next to the moongate. You see, players oftensend transport heavy cargo by “dragging”—that is, alternating the goods between their inventory and empty patches of floor nearby (necessary to offset the stamina loss that comes with carrying heavy loads)—and for a split second, the treasure chest rested unclaimed, on the ground... right next to me.

The proud new homeowners never had a clue. After discovering the valuables missing, they took off in search of the thieves—oblivious to the fact that we stood right next to them, hiding the entire time. We got the loot back to our own house without further incident, and found that we’d hit the jackpot with all the gold and rare items we’d scored.

Man... those were the days.

---

CGW editor and MMORPG addict Ryan Scott misses the good old days of vicious PKs and endless urban sprawl.

We did what any good hell-raising troublemakers would do at a time like this. We PK'd his.

We were vicious PKs can we kill you?

We told these two unsavory-looking characters that we were vicious PKs, which they somehow believed. Later, we wound up killing them.

Off we go!

One AFK house-camping tamer, good as dead!
TOM: Several people recommended PoxNora, a new online CCG, to Bruce and I. They said we'd like it, because it's turn-based, and you can build decks and use lots of different strategies, yada yada yada.

It sounded right up our alley. Plus, the game we were going to do, Sword of the Stars, was really awful... and we wanted an excuse—any excuse—to not play it. PoxNora gave us just such an excuse.

BRUCE: I thought I was going to be playing a collectible card game (or "CCG," as hip guys like Tom call them), but I had to play a web browser first. Instead of actual cards, I got a list of my cards, which I had to page through to "activate" the ones I wanted in my deck.

TOM: Nothing like a clumsy card-sorting interface to make a bad first impression in a CCG. However, maybe this doesn't apply to PoxNora, since they're not called "cards." They're called "runes," which is apparently another word for "cramped 2D graphics that don't convey very much information at all." But we wouldn't find that out until we got into the actual game: the deck-building process—although I'm not sure you can actually call a collection of "runes" a "deck"—was indeed a big hassle. So I just randomly picked a faction... it's go with, umm, dwarves... and threw in my rarest cards. There. I had a deck.

BRUCE: Every CCG deck has to have a theme, or it doesn't work. Tom's theme, for instance, was dwarves. My theme was beating Tom by rooting all of his monsters and then making the ground under them turn to water and drown them. Actually, I only have one Drowned card, but it seemed like a pretty good way of taking out a big Chickien monster. Plus, it's realistic, because drowning is what happens when you go in the water.

Another part of my plan was to have all kinds of ranged units, like centaurs and faerie maidens, to attack across the newly installed water obstacles. Unfortunately, a lot of the ranged units seemed crummy, so I filled the deck with a bunch of rare, expensive dudes.

TOM: As everyone knows, dwarves excel at making money. Duh—we're talking Fantasy 101 stuff. So I made sure to include a few money-making runes: a pair of Deep Miners and a Nora Mine. I figured it was a sound strategy, since most strategy games come down to some form of economic management, whether you're trafficking in mana, gold, pax, lik, or tibulum. Besides, using my real-world knowledge of dwarves and the economic principles of strategy gaming beats the hell out of trying to figure out what's going on with the runes in PoxNora (i.e., clicking through my web browser to page through a few dozen runes, each split into two separate displays, to deduce which rune gets which special attacks and has which special abilities and counters which other runes and other such information that the rune browser takes forever to just freakin' tell me already).

Before we've even begun, I've got a bad feeling about PoxNora.

BRUCE: I start by bringing out my Drakesar Lord, which I put in the deck because he's big and scary and costs a lot of mana. He also takes up four squares on the map, which gives him the disadvantage of covering up units that end up directly behind him. If he were smaller, he'd have the disadvantage of being covered up by big units directly in front of him. That's a real dilemma. I suspect the solution lies in overhuling the interface, instead of remodeling the monsters.

TOM: One of the first things we hate about PoxNora is the time limit it imposes on our turns.
We can’t turn it off, even though we’re playing a non-ranked game for kicks instead of one of the supercompetitive tournament-ranked games that go on your permanent record. So I have two minutes to figure out whether I should use my Dwarven Axe Guard’s Sunder ability on Bruce’s Krikkinwing, how worried I should be about his Fiend Sensorate, and whether I should instead try to use the Interrogator’s Sapping Blow—Wait, wait, what does Sunder do again, and how much damage does this guy take? Oh, he didn’t take any damage...but one of my guys took damage...oops, time’s up and the turn’s over.

This is also a problem because Bruce and I are pretty interactive when we’re playing games. Here’s an example:

**BRUCE:** I’m summoning a Draksar Lord. He’s big and scary and costs a lot of mana.

**TOM:** It’s not “mana.” It’s called “nora.” That’s why the game is called *PoxNora*.

**BRUCE:** I can’t be bothered to remember a new word every time some developer decides to make up his own term for an elf or a magic sword or a wizard or some damn thing that already has a name.

**TOM:** Nevertheless, it’s called “nora.”

**BRUCE:** OK, I’ll call it “manora.”

**TOM:** That’s anti-Semitic.

**BRUCE:** No, it isn’t. And you’re not even Jewish. You don’t even know what a menorah is.

**TOM:** You don’t know whether I’m Jewish. We’ve never even talked about religion.

**BRUCE:** You’re not Jewish. And we’ve never talked about religion because we can’t get past politics, because talking politics with you is like talking to a brick wall that only listens to NPR.

**TOM:** At least I don’t sound like some Bill O’Reilly wannabe.

**BRUCE:** Hey, your time just ran out. I guess it’s my turn again.

**TOM:** So that’s how *PoxNora* goes with a time limit. You have to remember not to interact with the other player so that you can spend your valuable time playing the game. It’s like an unholy combination of turn-based gaming and real-time gaming.

**BRUCE:** Bringing out my non-flying, non-ranged Draksar Lord first kind of subverts the whole deck theme...but since my fantasy knowledge comes third-hand, my understanding is that big, scary-looking monsters usually win monster fights. Right now I want to point out to *PoxNora* developer Octopi that, much as *Laser Squad Nemesis*, Julian Gollop shouldn’t have named a unit a “missile tank” if it didn’t have any missiles, you shouldn’t put wings on a monster if it can’t fly.

**TOM:** Not a lot of interesting stuff happens in the early turns of *PoxNora*. Basically, we both summon champions and then spend action points slowly walking our champions toward each other.

**BRUCE:** One of the second things we hate about *PoxNora* is that it’s confused about whether it’s a CCG or a PC game with a bad interface. When you’re playing a CCG, you have to keep track of different types of effects, damage, and all the things that happen in fantasy worlds that you need to simulate. With all the cards assembled in front of you, it’s usually easy to see that—for example—some guy is down to three hit points, because you have to have it marked with something. You can scan card effects by just looking at the cards in front of you. I’m told information wants to be free, which is why the CCG was invented in America.

But in *PoxNora*, everything is cutestides into these tiny runes, which you have to mouseover to see...and you can’t rotate or zoom in on the monsters on the map. So part of the game is just hunting for information that should be way easier to get. How many hit points does Tom’s dwarf guy have left? Not only do I not know, but I have to pick him out from behind two much larger monsters, thanks to the fixed perspective and cramped unit placement. Guys, when you design a map,
don’t make the pieces as big as the spaces. That’s like Elementary Rule 1 in board-game design, and since this plays out like a board game, you might want to go pick that book up at the library.

**TOM:** While our units trudge toward each other, I summon a BattleRager. That’s right, a BattleRager. He must be called this because of how he totally rages during battle. Having clicked on a few different displays and scribbled some rough calculations on a piece of scratch paper I’m using to keep track of all my units, I’ve deduced that the BattleRager is my best unit. His special abilities include Berserk and Whirlwind, which is what you’d expect from someone who totally rages during battle.

Also, I believe in health care for veterans; that’s why I put Desperate Heal and Priest of Valdack into my deck. While I’m reading the flavor text to figure out who the heck Valdack is, the timer runs out and my turn ends. Remember, kids: When you have a time limit, study the cards before you play the game.

**BRUCE:** One of the fatal flaws in **PoxNora** is that your deck’s success heavily depends on which map you use. For example, a map with a lot of water on it heavily favors amphibious and flying units, like the one I summon before ending my turn. **TOM:** “Champions.” They’re all champions. That’s the word you’re supposed to use.

**BRUCE:** This beetle thing called a Krinkokinning is a champion?

**TOM:** **PoxNora** is about special heroes called champions. They’re not all human. Some of them are Krinkokinning. That’s how it is.

**BRUCE:** I’m not going to take a **PoxNora** history class just to be able to refer to all the pieces properly.

**TOM:** PC games can have backstories, you know. Not everything has to be a board game. **PoxNora** is no board game.

**BRUCE:** You can say that again. Anyway, as I was saying, if you build a deck with a lot of amphibious units and you’re on a waterfront map, you’re like a fish out of water.

**TOM:** Fish aren’t amphibious.

**BRUCE:** Maybe they are in **PoxNora**-land. By the way, your time ran out again. It’s my turn. I guess I didn’t think this whole thing through well. My centaur archers aren’t doing much damage to Tom, who seems to have become invulnerable through some drainless sorcery or something.

**TOM:** As everyone knows, dwarves and barbarians get along. They probably hang out and talk about stuff like the best kind of grip for a battle-axe and whether you should put points into Constitution or Strength when you level up. So, naturally, I’ve got a few barbarians in my deck.

My favorite: the Renegade, who seems inspired by the Lorenzo Lamas series and maybe even the *Styx* song. He has a woman randomly lodged behind his right knee, as if she got stuck there while he was striding through a village. For a barbarian, he’s sporting an odd haircut, halfway between a Prince Valiant and a Fabio. My theory is that’s the haircut that makes him a Renegade.

**BRUCE:** Uh-oh. I have a Drakkar Lord, but Tom has a big load with huge teeth. I have no idea what it is, so I have to go click on it and try to figure out what it does. Wait—**it has how many hit points?** I need to click on it again.

---

**BRUCE:** **PoxNora** is a popular board game that combines elements of strategy and role-playing. The game involves collecting and battling champions, with each champion having unique abilities and strengths. The player’s success depends on the map they are playing on, as certain maps favor specific types of units. The game also features a deep backstory, with each champion having a unique history and origin.

---

**TOM:** We can play a game of **PoxNora** and see who wins. It’s a great way to spend an afternoon. I’m looking forward to our next game!
REALITY CHECK

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO WHAT WE SAY—AND WHAT THEY SAY—ABOUT THE LATEST IN PC GAMING

**BONE: THE GREAT COW RACE**

We say: "By the time you start having some real fun, it's over. It's fine for gamers who don't mind waiting months between episodes, but if you want to get the real charm of the story and art, it's best to just read the comic book."

—Sarah Jaissier Green, 1UP.com (4/10)

They say: "Bone: The Great Cow Race is what it is. It's a very well-designed, well-drawn point-and-click adventure that harkens back to the days of old."

—IGN (8.8/10)

**CITY LIFE**

We say: "City Life is the freshest take on the city-sim genre in memory, managing to be both as challengingly complex as its more gearhead forebears and more accessible to casual or more philosophical players. Nice trick."

—Greg Kramer, 1UP.com (8/10)

They say: "If the player is willing to dig through the messy presentation, there's some fun to be had here. With a little more effort and polish, City Life could have been...well...a riot."

—GameSpy (3.5/5)

**DARKSTAR ONE**

We say: "DarkStar One proves that the term 'tried-and-true' doesn't just mean 'been done.' While it does nothing innovative, DarkStar One does a lot of things expertly within a genre that's, sadly, fallen by the wayside in recent years."

—Eric Neigher, 1UP.com (7/10)

They say: "Although the flaws can lead to some frustration, they never get in the way of that 'just one more mission' mojo that can keep you playing the game into the wee hours."

—GameSpot (8.1/10)

**ROME: TOTAL WAR—ALEXANDER**

We say: "Not too bad for the $14.95 price tag, but still disappointing compared to the [previous expansion]. With the abundance of free mods out on the Net, Alexander just isn't great enough to be a 'must-buy."

—Di Luo, 1UP.com (7/10)

They say: "I'm always glad for an excuse to revisit [developer] Creative Assembly's Total War series and the Alexander expansion is definitely a welcome addition."

—IGN (8/10)

**TITAN QUEST**

We say: "While it may not break, or even dent, any new ground, Titan Quest features a beautifully realized game world based on a tried-and-true core mechanic, with tons of replayability. What's not to like?"

—Eric Neigher, 1UP.com (7/10)

They say: "The only thing that keeps Titan Quest from being the consummate Diablo clone is that it's missing the robust multiplayer implementation that Blizzard realized with Battle.net."

—GameSpy (3.5/5)

**WORLD WAR II COMBAT: IWO JIMA**

We say: "Iwo Jima looks and plays like a tech demonstration from a couple of gifted grade schoolers, with deplorable graphics, clunky controls, and completely unimaginative level design."

—Di Luo, 1UP.com (3/10)

They say: "If you're looking for a cheap shooter, go to the store and grab any game off the shelf and you're practically guaranteed to have a better game than this one."

—GameSpot (2/10)

**SCORECARD**

Available now

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**BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE 1UP NETWORK**

For more thorough reviews on the latest PC games, point your web browser to cgw.1UP.com today!
SIXTY-FIVE MILLION YEARS AGO, WHEN dinosaurs and internal-speaker-only PCs still walked the planet, game audio—where it existed at all—bleated in monophonic "blips," "tweets," and "boops." If you were so bold as to crack open your computer case (a time-honored geek rite in the PC gaming’s Paleolithic era), that PC speaker resembled a teensy silo, hole in the top, beneath which a silver sliver oscillated at variable frequencies, producing sounds only an extremely forgiving gamer—or droid—could love.

Thankfully, by the late 1990s, dedicated soundcards arrived to tickle tympanic membranes with kitschy MIDI music and, with the advent of PCI, juggle multichannel digital effects that made stuff like car engines sound, well, like actual car engines (as opposed to FX-pumped flushing toilets). But let’s cut to the chase: When was the last time you took a serious stroll through the audio section at your local gadget boutique or got hot and bothered over some new acoustics-modeling standard?

These days, you’re practically gorged into springing for new CPUs and 3D videocards biannually—but chances are, you’ve been running that old PCI soundcard (or integrated audio that came free with the computer) for years. We’re all up on the latest 3D video stuff, like SLI versus CrossFire technology, but do you know the difference between EAX 4.0 and 5.0? Dolby 5.1 and 7.1? AC’97 and 3D Sound?

Yeah, maybe your ears are bigger than your ears, but as anyone who’s gone to the trouble of rigging Doom 3 in surround sound will tell you, if you’re still running that “out-of-the-box” two-speaker setup, you ain’t heard nothing yet. Read on, and we’ll tell you how to breathe new life into your games without dropping a gold brick, help you gauge whether to upgrade your audio gear, and maybe even throw in a few home-decorating hints while we’re at it.

SONIC PHONICS

You’ve been chewing the marketing hype about the “digital age” for decades, so it never gets old pointing out that what your ears actually hear when sound pours out of your new Dolby Digital speaker set (or headphones) isn’t digital at all. Your eardrums are actually analog-only vibrating receivers that pick up continuous sound waves in the air.

ALL ABOUT AUDIO

Forget 3D graphics for two seconds—sound matters, too.
Hi-fi audio for notebooks is a relatively new trend. Unfortunately, you need to buy an external card to get top-notch sound.

Not playing off the neighbors for one? Good for you! Headphones rawk!

Whether you're going with 5.1, 6.1, or 7.1 surround sound setups, make sure you've got enough room. Oh, and try to cover those wires to avoid unexpected trips.

- Digital Signal Processor (DSP): The microprocessor on a soundcard designed specifically for processing the digital signal in real time. Many integrated audio solutions off-load this task to the CPU through software.

**Audio Formats and Codecs**

**AC'97**: Intel's audio codec (enCODer/ DECoder) standard, introduced in 1997, and consisting of a two-channel ADC and DAC, a mixer, and an I/O controller. A hardware DSP (digital signal processor) is absent and instead off-loaded to the CPU, which meets Intel's goal of delivering decent audio at reduced costs. Some soundcards list themselves as AC'97-compliant (Creative's older Sound Blaster Live! series, for example) but include a dedicated DSP for performance benefits, while most motherboards with integrated audio implement the AC'97 standard without hardware DSP. In 2004, AC'97 was superseded by Intel HD Audio (ICH).

**ASIO**: Stands for "Audio Stream Input/Output" and represents a protocol for low-latency digital audio established by German music technology company Steinberg. If Microsoft DirectSound facilitates communication between the soundcard and applications, think of ASIO as the equivalent for musicians and sound engineers who may want to access multiple audio inputs and outputs independently. ASIO 2.0 simply enhances the Steinberg ASIO standard. (Note: This has no impact on game audio.)

**DirectSound 3D (DS3D)**: Often functionally confused with Creative's EAX specification, DirectSound 3D is rather an extension...
DID YOU KNOW
HAVING A DEDICATED SOUND CARD ACTUALLY IMPROVES GAME PERFORMANCE?

of Microsoft's DirectX series of application programming interfaces (APIs) that works with (rather than in lieu of) EAX. Where EAX simulates real-world environmental effects, DSSD is responsible for rendering positional audio (in the case of only two speakers, it uses special algorithms to “trick” both ears into perceiving more discretely directional audio).

Dolby Digital: Don't think that we forgot about this little company and its audio formats. In fact, it gets its own sidebar on pg. 105. Aw, isn't it special?

Environmental Audio Extensions (EAX): Introduced in 1998, EAX is Creative Labs' solution for simulating real-world audio environments using two or more speakers. EAX 1.0 allowed eight simultaneous "voices" (sound) and a series of environmental presets that simulated acoustics like "bathroom," "hall," and "cave." EAX 2.0 bumped voices to 32 and threw in sound occlusion (i.e., the effect of sound passing through a solid object); EAX 3.0 tweaked reverb and environment transitions and bumped simultaneous voices to 64. EAX 4.0 introduced the ability to model different environments simultaneously. EAX has continued to improve over the years (the current revision is called Advanced HD 5.0), adding features like 128 simultaneous voice support (with up to four effects applied to each voice) and improved environment occlusion. Nearly all games support EAX, and the standard has remained public (allowing competitors to support it) since 2004.

Intel High Definition Audio (HD): Not to be confused with HDA, which pertains to HD-DVD. Intel released this follow-up specification to AC'97 in 2004 to support more audio channels at significantly higher quality (32-bit at 192kHz output) and enhanced features like improved voice capture and automatic device sensing when plugged into an audio jack. (If plugged into the wrong jack, the computer can actually route audio-jack functionality to correspond to the device.) Microsoft's Windows Vista will include a Universal Audio Architecture (UAA) driver to automatically support audio devices built to the HDA spec. Note that host processing is still prevalent for cost/ design reasons, resulting in a sizable CPU performance hit in audio-intensive games.

Open Audio Library (OpenAL): A multiplatform audio API with stylistic similarities to the 3D-graphics OpenGL API, OpenAL is an open-source API designed to render multichannel 3D positional audio, with special ease-of-implementaion benefits for OpenGL engine games. Games as recent as Quake 4 and Prey both support the OpenAL standard.

FOR THE AUDIOPHILES...

Dynamic Range: And you thought this was just something to do with lighting in Half-Life 2 and Oblivion? The two are intimately related, and where video engineers express dynamic range in terms of contrast ratio, audio engineers use it to represent the range of input and output that an audio device can process without distortion—that is, the "lowest" and "highest" levels, usually expressed in decibels.

Frequency Response: Basically a measure of which frequencies (how "high" or "low") the soundcard can reproduce. You’ll typically see this represented as a spread, usually the low number in herz and the high number in kilohertz. Broader ranges are better, but note that the range of human hearing is generally regarded as between 20Hz (extremely low bass tones) up to 20kHz (the highest treble tones).

Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR): Signal strength relative to background noise. SNR measures the clarity of the audio signal in decibels (e.g., 109dB). Higher numbers are better (notably, anything over 100dB).

S/PDIF: Stands for “Sony/Phillips Digital Interface Format” and constitutes a serial interface for transferring digital audio from CD and DVD to amplifiers and TVs. This jack is on some high-end dedicated soundcards.

Total Harmonic Distortion (THD): The ratio of the fundamental frequency to its harmonic. Harmonics are undesirable effects introduced by power amplifiers or other components through which the audio signal passes. Lower numbers are better (e.g., 0.001 percent).

INTEGRATED VS. DEDICATED

If you’ve been building PCs all your life, you’d probably sooner be subjected to thumbscrews than snap on an add/dedicated PCI audio card—or worse, use an integrated solution. If, on the other hand, you’re a relative newcomer with a standard retail rig, chances are you’re using an integrated sound solution to power your PC games (whether or not you intended to).

Q: What’s at stake?
A: Only everything from audio quality, feature support, and bottom-line framerate. Plug-in audio cards pack dedicated processing chips and boatloads of features, whereas integrated solutions—especially anything more than a year or two old—can put a notable load on your CPU.

Q: What’s the thrilling history of integrated audio?
A: With the stratospheric increase in CPU power over the last decade, Intel came up with the idea of off-loading audio processing to those “extra” CPU cycles. The result (in 1997) was a specification for integrating cheap-to-manufacture audio components on
You can have the latest hardware imaginable in your gaming rig, but it won’t matter if you run it with a cheap power supply. That’s why the Neo HE power supply from Antec is the power supply of choice for gamers everywhere. They come with three individual +12 volt rails, are SLI ready, and can handle just about any hardware you could throw at it. Neo HE power supplies also feature modular cabling so you only need to connect the power cables you actually use. The Neo HE, combined with your high-end hardware, makes for a stable and highly efficient noob-owning machine. Find out more about Antec Neo HE power supplies at www.antec.com.
WEAPONS OF CHOICE: SPEAKERS

PRODUCT: Creative Labs GigaWorks ProGamer G550W 5.1 System
URL: creative.com PRICE: $400

Bowel-shaking earthquakes of audio aren’t reserved for the superluxe 7.1-channel surround systems. And really, what’s the point if you keep falling over all the damn speaker wires in your room? This 5.1 system does a tremendous job of shooting solid sound, and the wireless 2.4GHz rear receiver frees you from trip wires around your PC.

motherboards—perfectly acceptable for day-to-day productivity software, but lacking in quality features for serious audio recording and 3D gaming. Today, most PCs (desktops and notebooks) ship with some kind of integrated audio.

Q: Wait—so that audio port on my mother- board is “teh suck”?
A: Your motherboard is a rat maze of wires crammed tighter than uncooked ramen noodles and pulsing with current. Interference can thus be a serious issue if you have a motherboard with an SNR below 90dB. Sure, you’re not as likely to hear those tiny pops in a noisy frag-fest, but in more subtle gaming situations, or if you’re simply messing about with audio (ripping music, for example), those crackles will make you mental.

Q: C’mon, you expect me to believe that integrated audio hasn’t improved at all since 1997?
A: Oh, it absolutely has gotten better. Integrated audio—especially Intel’s follow-up to AC’97, Intel HD audio (see above), along with the rollout of ever-faster CPUs, has moved integrated audio squarely into the mainstream, with some manufacturers going so far as to include dedicated DSPs, 3D positional sound, and surround support. After setting an integrated-solution SNR, the key questions you need to ask are: Is the integrated audio hardware- or software-based? And does it support the existing positional modeling or surround standards you’re after?

Q: As a PC gamer, what does all of this mean to me?
A: It means you’ve got to take a stand and decide exactly what kind of PC gamer you are. First, you need to choose whether you want to run high-quality or 3D positional audio in your games at all, because if you don’t care, dedicated audio processing loses at least half its allure. But say you want it all (and, frankly, who doesn’t?)—depending on which audio settings you’re using (e.g., high-quality versus low-quality), the performance boost to your framerate with dedicated audio hardware in games like Half-Life 2 or Battlefield 2 can be upward of five to 10 percent. No kidding. Dual-core or no, your CPU takes a beating when it’s forced to handle audio off-load. If your integrated audio solution’s dumping on the CPU, you’ll want to think seriously about picking up a dedicated soundcard.

EXTERNAL SOUNDCARDS

The first 3D accelerators in notebooks began showing up in the late 1990s, but it’s only been in the last few years that mobile manufacturers have poured their all into making boutique (read: spoiled-rich expensive) notebooks as competitive as serious desktop 3D gaming rigs. At the same time, most of these same notebooks use integrated audio for obvious form-factor constraints, hobbling otherwise gameworthy mobile machines.

The solution? Consider a PCMCIA soundcard. Creative Labs manufactures the Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS, which is essentially what it sounds like—a PCMCIA version of its respectable Audigy chipset.

Q: I’m h4rdc0r3! Does Creative Labs’ X-Fi card make any difference?
A: If you’re a total audio snob, you bet your ass it does. This is the digital equivalent of a tube amp. It not only makes music sound richer, its positional audio technology knocks around 7.1 without breaking a sweat. Gamers can get 64MB RAM on higher-end cards, as it supposedly improves performance on audio-dependent games such as Battlefield 2. X-Fi cards cost a little extra money, but if you’ve got a discerning ear, you probably already have high-end speakers, headphones, and home theater gear. So suck it up. But an up-and-comer thinks that it can topple Creative: Razor, previously known mainly as a mouse and peripheral maker. Can its Barracuda Integrated Audio System compete to X-Fi? Well, it sounds good on paper, and the board looks nice (we have one in the office) but for the second month in a row, the box sits on our desk, taunting us. We still don’t have drivers! Maybe one day, we’ll be able to test it out.

The Bottom Line: If you plan to use your rig for basic stuff—office suites, audio playback, and basic gaming (or games played on low to medium settings)—most recent integrated-audio solutions will do you fine. If you intend to use your PC for high-end audio editing and audio-intensive gaming, a dedicated soundcard still pays dividends. (You can grab a powerful Audigy 2 Value for less than $50 if price is an issue.)
HEADPHONES VS. SPEAKERS

First of all, when we say headphones, we’re talking the nice over-the-ear sort, so don’t go thinking that cheap pair that came with your childhood Sony Walkman is even on the menu. The answer to the headphones/speakers debate is actually pretty straightforward. Do you have roommates, family members, and so on who don’t exactly thrive to the sound of you thrashing that ridiculously voluptuous succubus with a lead pipe? Are you cash-strapped and looking for high-quality positional audio without dropping upward of a grand on a really nice surround set? Or do you just hate the idea of playing “hide the wires” with rear and sideline speakers?

Whatever the case, it’s worth bearing in mind that even a midgrade pair of headphones (around 50 bones) will generally trump most open-air speaker setups if you’re into quality over quality. There’s a reason, after all, that professional studio engineers produce their mixes using studio-quality headphones. Goodbye expensive speaker sets, messy wires, annoyed family members...hello all-night, loud-as-you-want-'em gaming sessions. Feeling chatty? Remember to look at headsets that have a decent boom mic. For good sound without that breaking the bank, we suggest Logitech's Premium Notebook Headset ($90 at logitech.com).

On the other hand, if you hate clapping plastic on your head during a frag-a-thon and you don’t have touchy neighbors or relatives to quibble with, it’s hard to argue with the raw, untangled power of a decent surround setup. A well-placed Dolby 7.1 speaker configuration (that’s seven surround speakers plus a subwoofer) is virtually untouchable if you’re into soiling yourself when Doom 3’s “monsters-in-a-closet” elect to say boo.

Speaker Tip: When setting up, pay attention to speaker distance. Generally, as distance doubles, the intensity of a sound source drops by six decibels. How does that relate to your perception of loudness? Every 10 dB drop will be perceived as a 50 percent drop in loudness.

Headphones Tip: Cast your gaze around the local coffee shop or bookstore and note the number of people wearing earbuds (Pod headphones, for example), competing with espresso machines, conversations, the music on the overhead speakers, outside traffic, and so on. Recent studies suggest earbuds are dramatically less efficient at blocking external sounds, meaning people are cranking the volume higher than they probably should to drown out ambient noise. Long story short, if you’re wearing earbuds in a noisy environment, consider switching to an over-the-ear flavor, ear-isolating earbuds, or one of those battery-powered noise-canceling cans.

The Bottom Line: If you want high-quality audio that won’t shake the rooftops and surround sound without speakers and wires—get headphones. If you want to feel the sound of Satan and his minions reaching down your gullet at the maximum speed of evil—speakers and 5.1 are minimum.

DOUHY FOR DUMMIES

Dolby, named after Dolby Laboratories founder Ray Dolby, is a marketing term for a series of audio compression techniques generally referred to as “Dolby Digital” and is available in two essential gaming flavors.

Dolby Digital: Standard for up to 5.1 discrete audio channels (left front, center, right front, left surround, right surround, plus a subwoofer...that’s the “5.1”). A Dolby 5.1 game runs through five appropriately positioned speakers will realistically model the effect of moving objects with 360-degree realism, which can be absolutely alert-crucial in first-person games that render the sound of, say, an assailant stepping on gravel or broken glass behind you. Audiophiles with deep pockets might favor hand-selecting each speaker, even mixing and matching vendors to taste, but the rest of us can find some pretty handy 5.1 speaker combo deals from no-slouch companies like Logitech or Creative Labs.

Dolby Digital EX: Takes the 5.1 standard and adds a single “back surround” channel (6.1) or dual “back surround” speakers (7.1). The “EX” is an extension to the Dolby Digital (5.1) codec for even more detailed surround effects. Note that it’s technically only 6.1 discrete audio channels—the two “back surround” speakers in 7.1 are actually matrix (the same single channel flows to each one). Few games support the EX format, and with limited EX-encoded DVDs and the need for additional speakers, it’s safe to bet against EX and stick with straight Dolby Digital for now.
DUAL-CORE DEATHMATCH: CORE 2 DUO VS. ATHLON 64 X2

We put two affordable dual-core processors to the test

If you've been paying attention to recent events in the processor world, you've probably heard about Core 2—Intel's lower-power and lower-frequency but higher-speed line of dual-core desktop CPUs. You've probably also heard that Core 2 is faster. But just how fast is it?

Since most people don't have $2,500 to drop on a new PC every time a new CPU comes out, we concocted a test to represent "your next dual-core computer"—something you might put together for $1,500 or so. We pit two modern, reasonably priced ($300 to $350) dual-core CPUs against each other—AMD's Athlon 64 X2 5000+ and Intel's Core 2 Duo E6600—in six gaming tests.

THE TESTS

Most game benchmarks use "Quake TimeDemo"—style preencoded gameplay, which is great for testing graphics cards, but not so ideal when you're trying to paint an accurate picture of what actually happens when you sit down to play a game. AI, physics, and other CPU-intensive parts of the game can essentially "turn off" during such preencoded benchmarking demos.

So in order to more accurately gauge what happens in a real game, we used a popular program called Fraps (fraps.com) to measure live gameplay performance. We patched each of our test games with its most recent patch, ran each at a resolution of 1280x1024, and turned the details up to high. We played each game for five minutes and used Fraps to get a frames-per-second measurement for every second of play. To compensate for the sorts of AI and physics variables that crop up in unscripted playthroughs, we then repeated each test two more times to acquire an average.

We also took a look at how consistently each CPU was able to maintain the minimum frame rate required for what we decided was smooth and enjoyable gameplay—a number that varies from one genre to the next. While 45fps is a good low threshold for many games, RTS games can often be perfectly enjoyed down to 30fps, while first-person shooters are best at 60fps or above. To that point, we also measured what percentage of time played was spent above each game's (admittedly arbitrary) "framerate enjoyment threshold."

THE RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>Core 2 Duo E6600 Average fps</th>
<th>Athlon 64 X2 5000+ Average fps</th>
<th>Ideal fps Threshold Core 2 Duo Time Beneath Threshold</th>
<th>Athlon 64 X2 Time Beneath Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half-Life 2: Episode One</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield 2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titan Quest</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World of Warcraft</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE WINNER

As you can see, the Core 2 Duo swept 'em all—and in fact, three of the games we tested never even dropped below our "ideal frames-per-second" threshold. If you'd asked us to run a similar test a year ago, we would have told you to go with an AMD processor. The Core 2 Duo clearly puts Intel back on top of the game.

THE TEST SYSTEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>INTEL PROCESSOR TEST SYSTEM</th>
<th>AMD PROCESSOR TEST SYSTEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>2.4 GHz Core 2 Duo E6600</td>
<td>2.6 GHz Athlon 64 X2 5000+ (Socket AM2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherboard (chipset)</td>
<td>ASUS P5B Deluxe (Intel P965 chipset)</td>
<td>ASUS M2N32-SLI Deluxe (nForce 590 SLI chipset)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>2 x 1GB Corsair XMS2 6400 (CAS 4-4-4-12)</td>
<td>2 x 1GB Corsair XMS2 6400 (CAS 4-4-4-12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphics card</td>
<td>XFX GeForce 7900 GT</td>
<td>XFX GeForce 7900 GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard drive</td>
<td>Seagate Barracuda 7200.8 160GB SATA Drive</td>
<td>Seagate Barracuda 7200.8 160GB SATA Drive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

World of Warcraft has some yet-unresolved issues (as of v1.11) with dual-core systems that kept the frame rate from exceeding 64fps.

Even with all the graphics set to high and the detail and distance sliders maxed, the Core 2 Duo still kept Oblivion running at over 30fps. Most of the time.
Q: I've been hearing a lot of talk about DirectX 10 and needing a new video card for it, but what exactly does DirectX 10 give us over DirectX 9? What differences might I notice between the same game running on a DX10 card and a DX9 card? Are there new effects that games can only pull off with DX10? What's all the big fuss?

Ryan Jacob

A: This is actually a tough one to answer. See, game developers don't have DirectX 10 hardware in their hands yet (that we know of), so they're not showing off real DX10 screen shots just yet. DX10 does add quite a bit to the picture, though. First, it's only available in Windows Vista, and it takes advantage of Vista's new driver model along with changes to the structure of the API (application program interface) itself to reduce the overhead when changing "states" in the graphics pipeline. That's a long-winded way of saying you can have more "stuff" in a scene: more rocks and grass, more random objects on an office desk, more accessories on the soldiers' belts, more critters in a real-time strategy game—whatever.

DX10 also has new, more flexible standards for shaders. A geometry shader works on entire geometry primitives (lines or triangles) instead of single vertices. Developers can stream data from almost any part of the pipeline (vertex, geometry, or pixel shaders) and read it back in to other parts. If that sounded like gibberish, the bottom line is that DirectX 10 is actually a pretty big evolution over DX9, but there's no one feature you could point to in a screenshot that screams "DX10"—it's not like it adds normal mapping or something. It's basically a bigger, more flexible toolbox with better consistency and less overhead for developers. Most of the guys we've spoken to about it are pretty excited.

Q: I've been trying to discover why I'm supposed to care about dual-core processors. After all, nearly nothing supports them. Can you run two virtual machines on the same PC and toggle between them? That would be nice if you have to keep business stuff up and running but want to switch to Call of Duty multiplayer for a bit. Will Windows Vista support them with Hyper-Threading and what all? And a year from now, will most new apps and games have built-in support of dual-processor PCs? If this is the case, getting the dual-core CPUs out in the world is the egg that hatches the chicken down the road a bit. If not, then it appears we should be spending our bucks on faster single-core CPUs rather than dual-core parts.

Mark & Brenda Smith

A: Actually, there are already a few games that benefit from dual-core processors, though they're definitely rare. Virtualization (switching between two virtual machines) is possible, but you wouldn't want an entire other virtual PC taking up your valuable RAM and adding overhead while you're gaming. But dual-core CPUs have value outside just running games optimized for them. Windows XP already runs separate applications in separate threads, so if you have in the background while you play a game which is optimized on that second CPU core, keeping your game from slowing down as much. Vista, in theory, should be even better at this. There are some other applications, such as video transcoders and decoders (DivX, Nero, and so on) that take advantage of dual-core CPUs, too.

Our advice: Every new CPU buyer should probably go dual-core. Future games will heavily support the processors, and in today's heavy multitasking environments, a dual-core CPU really helps keep things running smoothly. Besides, Intel's new Core 2 Duo chips are the fastest gaming CPUs we've ever tested, regardless of what games we've thrown at them (see Hard News, pg. 106).

Q: I currently own a 128MB GeForce FX 5900 XT and I'm looking to upgrade, but I'm on a budget. I've found some reasonably priced GeForce 7600s, but I'm not sure if I should pay the extra 30 or 40 dollars to get the GT over the GS. What's the difference, and is it worth 40 bucks?

Ryan Kok

A: The GeForce 7600 GT and GS are pretty good buys for a gamer on a budget. At the prices you mentioned, I would go with the more expensive, but faster, GT model. Specs vary a little bit from one manufacturer to the next, but generally it breaks down like this: The 7600 GS has a core clock speed of 400MHz, while the GT's is 560MHz—that's a 40 percent faster core clock speed. The 7600 GS has a 400MHz memory clock, while the GT's is 700MHz—that's 76 percent more memory bandwidth. So the GT model is going to be roughly 40 to 60 percent faster, depending on the game and the settings. That's worth the extra green.
ON FILEFRONT
THE LATEST AND GREATEST PC DEMOS

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LEGENDARY STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY
Take the classic Star Wars trilogy for a new spin in this blocky, tongue-in-cheek game based on the Star Wars movies. The good ones.

DARK MESSIAH OF Might and Magic
Become a warrior, mage, or assassin and sample some mighty, magical adventures in the world of Ashan in this single-player demo.

CALL OF JUAREZ
Saddle up, strap on your six-shooter, and sample missions for each of the main characters in this Wild West first-person shooter.

GTR 2
Climb behind the wheel of one of two FIA GT class cars and race against computer-controlled opponents at the Barcelona GP circuit.

FACES OF WAR
Here's your chance to command German, American, Russian, and British troops in some of World War II's most famous battles.

TITAN QUEST V1.11 (PATCH)
This patch improves inventory placement and multiplayer performance, fixes a memory leak, and addresses other bugs.

BATTLEFIELD 2: SURREAL II (MOD)
As the team behind this Battlefield 2 mod puts it, Surreal II “will definitely battle your imagination.”

QUAKE 4 V1.3 (PATCH)
Grab the latest update for a host of community-requested features along with a new game mode, eight new maps, and a killer new weapon.

STARCRAFT: BROOD WAR V1.14 (PATCH)
This patch for the StarCraft expansion Brood War offers an extensive list of changes to enhance your RTSing.

NEOFORTS 1.75: REALIZATION (MOD)
This latest version fixes several bugs and greatly improves server performance. It also adds one new map and updates several others.

Dave The Worm (SHAREWARE)
From friendly tutorials to fiendishly difficult brain teasers, this game caters to all levels of puzzle fans.

Bliss Island (SHAREWARE)
Roll your way through a circuit of challenges in Bliss Island as you blow through more than 90 levels of wacky, weird fun.

AGE OF EMPIRES III V1.08 (PATCH)
This update fixes a number of bugs and adds game improvements and features such as quick search and power ratings.

BLAZETRIS (SHAREWARE)
Sometimes imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. This Tetris clone comes complete with 3D graphics and custom music.

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GAMING FOR DUMMIES

Who says games are too easy? One moron speaks out

As a noted gaming-industry pundit, and one who can justly lay claim to the title "dean of the gaming press," it's my job to read a lot. Because when you read, you learn. And when you learn, you get smarter. And when you're smarter, you can serve your readers better by, like, knowing more stuff.

Just this morning, for example, before coming to work at CGW, I was reading my box of Frosted Flakes and learned that the cereal, according to noted mascot Tony the Tiger, can actually help your body grow stronger. Before I read that, I'd always believed my mom when she said it would rot my teeth out and make me get fat. Now I know she was just a big liar.

Another thing I've learned by reading is that many gamers now think games are too easy. I read this on a number of different threads on some of the online message boards I frequent such as quartertothree.com, where civil and intelligent conversations among gamers occur, with nary an insult thrown amongst the participants, except for the occasional use of words like "douchebag" and "asswipe." And those are usually only directed at morons who don't know what they're talking about, so they therefore deserve whatever name I call them.

So, yeah. I think those asswipes are wrong—games are not getting too easy. If they were, then I might actually beat one for a change. What I think may be going on is not that games are getting easier, but rather, friendlier. Case in point: Prey (see CGW #266, pg. 84). Here's a game that, unlike nearly every other shooter before it, goes out of its way to ensure that you don't have to spend half your gaming time dying and reloading to your last save point. In this game, when you lose your last health point, you go to a netherworld for a few seconds—kind of like a dunce corner—where you momentarily get to ponder your lissomness before warping back into the game right where you left off. Any monsters that had been injured before you died are still just as injured as you left them.

Here's where the controversy is: According to certain online nitwits, this is not enough of a "penalty" for having died. In their world, I sucked, so now I should suffer. Maybe the monsters should get their health back. Maybe I should have to restart the level. Maybe I should be forced to uninstall the game, parade through town naked with a bright red "I Suck at Games" tattoo branded on my rear and then jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. Anything but continue the game without paying a price.

Yeah, well, you know what? I did pay a price. $49.99. And that means I'd like to play my game without anyone telling me it's not hard enough for me. The refreshing thing about Prey is that it lets me keep playing without artificially forcing me back to a loading screen—a gaming convention that I'd be happy to never see again.

Frankly, forcing gamers back to an earlier state is just a somewhat bogus way of inflating a game's playtime. If I have to die first and reload the game to figure out how to beat a monster or get down a corridor, then I humbly submit that it's not me who sucks as a gamer, but you who sucks as a designer. By all means, I want a challenge. I want to have to use my brain and my reflexes to propel myself forward in your game. But I should be able to do this without your ending the game on me completely. Why not just give me a small penalty, as in Prey, and let me continue?

Yes, I know. Mr. Übergamer. You're a tough guy. You think the "normal" mode on most games is for wimps and n00bs. You can beat the hardest mode in every game in 30 minutes while standing on your head, blindfolded, and with both hands tied behind your back. Great. Call the circus. Perhaps the bearded lady will find you hot.

But if you think you represent the gamer norm, I have important news for you: You're a moron. Most gamers I know play in "easy" mode most of the time. And if they get stuck? They cheat. Because most people who play games just want a little fun and diversion. They're not staking their entire claims to manhood and self-worth on whether or not they took down the giant lizard the first time around. And, hey, if you're so great, you won't be dying anyway, right? So why should you care what the death mechanism is? Death only happens to people that suck.

And those of us who do suck? We're tired of dying. We want to live. We want to play on. So, I write this on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of long-suffering, constantly dead gamers who've spent far too many hours staring at their own bloodied, lifeless bodies, and offer one humble "thank you" to the designers of Prey and other games who make death a relatively painless experience. Our reanimated corpses salute you.
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