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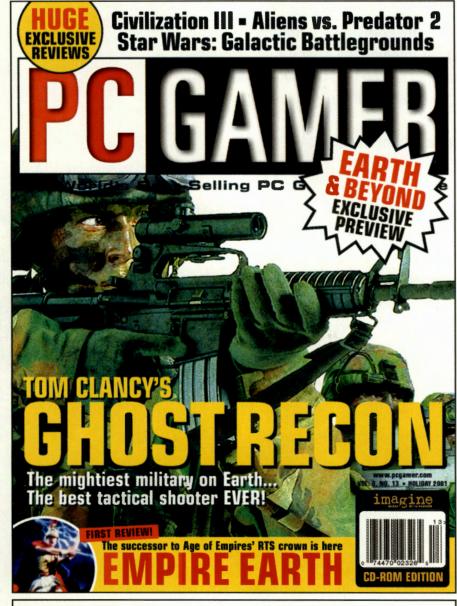**RAINBOW SIX**

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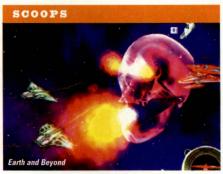
If you meet them in combat...

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SPECIAL SECTION

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THE HARD STUFF

104 You can improve your computer. You can make it better, faster, cooler. The Vede can help you. He has the technology. From the Xtasy GeForce3 card to the RADEON 8500, he gives you the reviews you need.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"I haven't felt that good since Archie Gemmill scored against Holland in 1978!"

Welcome to the first-ever Holiday issue of *PC Gamer*. This year our staffers gave up the few extra weeks of hang-time that a 12-issue schedule would've given us to put together a *13th* issue slap-bang in the middle of the big buying season.

And, as you'll see, it means a perfectly timed review-packed issue. Within these pages are the first reviews of some dizzyingly great titles. We got the gold code hot off the burner and put in mammoth hours of gaming to give you the full skinny. *Ghost Recon* turned out to be everything we hoped it would be. *Civilization III* is as engaging as you'd expect. *Empire Earth* has been clogging our LAN play since it arrived. And I'm still a bit nervous about dipping my marine's toe in the brooding tension of *Aliens vs. Predator 2*.

With *Arcanum*, *Pool of Radiance* (patched), and *Red Faction* all underway on my hard drive, and Cate Archer coyly beckoning me back to *NOLF*'s Game of the Year Edition, there's some amazing PC gaming to be had right now.

So if you're psyched to play *Halo*, wait for it to arrive at its rightful home (which *is* happening, according to Ed Fries, the head of Microsoft's game division, and the guy who really should know). I'm certainly not going to get into the "mine's bigger than yours" console bitching war, but having seen the Xbox's launch offerings, I'm prepared to guarantee that your money's better spent on a good GeForce video card and any number of the PC games reviewed this issue. The PS2 should certainly stay on store shelves since it offers nothing that doesn't look, sound, and play better on your PC. And anyone capable of reading this is too old to own a Gamecube!

But anyway, happy holidays. Thanks for your support during this year, and we all look forward to bringing you the greatest in PC gaming entertainment and information in 2002. Maybe you can start the year by winning the quote contest, just like Dustin Greenleaf, who spotted last month's rousing speech from *Deep Impact*. Send entries and comments to *ednote@pcgamer.com*.

Happy Holidays!
Rob

Rob Smith
Editor-in-Chief

Go to Hell

Stand and Deliver

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Write to us at PC Gamer Letters, Imagine Media, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005, or email us at *letters@pcgamer.com*.

We must agree, *SOF2* looks pretty damn promising. Keep the winners coming, Raven!

US SOCOM 12 1125 AUTO

M1911A1 12 1125 AUTO

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2: BLOODY IS AS BLOODY DOES

I recently bought *Soldier of Fortune: Platinum Edition*, and I think that it's one helluva sweet game. I noticed that it comes with a little preview film for *SOF2: Double Helix*. I don't know if you guys have seen the video yet, but that was the coolest 60 seconds of my life! Holy cow, the graphics look gorgeous! When is this game coming out?
— Ryan Davidson

Games' ship dates are always subject to change, but Activision tells us Soldier of Fortune 2 *will be released "after the holidays" — which likely means sometime in February 2002.*

EAT LEAD, FRITZ!

I've been a subscriber since you put demos on floppy disks. Lately, I've been reading up on *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, and while I'm not here to tell you guys how to do your jobs, I think denying *RTCW* a score of 100% would be a travesty! It's the sequel to one of the most important games of all time, and should be given the highest score possible.
— Sean "Insaniac" Brogan

Wow! Talk about a fan! The id and Gray Matter guys should call you up and have you do PR for them! Unfortunately, no matter what, we've got to review the game based on its own merits — not its heritage. The good news is that we've played our fair share of Wolf *already, and it's looking to*

be one heck of a good time — even if it doesn't ultimately get the highest…score…ever. Look for our review soon in PC Gamer.

OPERATION LOW SCORE

I just read your review of *Operation Flashpoint* and was shocked by your score of 70%. I've been playing the game for about a week, and though I can only play for a few hours a night (I'm married), I've found it to be highly immersive and refreshing. The expansive terrain you must cover while playing is amazing, and the interaction with computer teammates and enemy AI is superb. When I consider how easy some games are these days, the fact that *Flashpoint* is so challenging is a pleasant change from the norm. As a fond reader of your magazine, I have to tell you, this game should have gotten at least an 80%, if not higher.
— Joe Garcia

PCG *Associate Editor Li C. Kuo, who wrote the review, responds: Yes,* Operation Flashpoint *is a very immersive game, and it is innovative. But its flaws are significant enough to keep it from being "excellent." Take a look at the rating-system box on our reviews intro page. 80% is an excellent game that is among the best in its genre, while 70% is a good game that has flaws.* Op Flash *falls into this latter category. I still play it at home and enjoy it a great deal, but having only*

With style and looks like this, we're excited to see how the world of *Motor City* pans out.

one save-point is just unforgivable. Factor in the clunky interface, iffy controls, and inconsistent AI (I've walked right up to soldiers and had them stare right at me with no reaction), and the game falls shy of the "excellent" mark.

PEEVED AT *SPEED*

Why did EA have to go and further ruin the *Need for Speed* series with *Motor City*?

Now, don't get me wrong: I've played the beta and it's fun (unlike *Porsche Unleashed*). But why does the game have to be *entirely* online? It irks me that I'm going to have to shell out $40 for the game and then an extra $10 every month just to play it. Maybe I'm just cheap.

— Jeff Olson

Are you mad? Porsche Unleashed was BRILLIANT! As for your other statement, $10 a month to play a driving game — even a really, really great one — seems a bit much, but then again, racing fans are a crazy bunch! We're all very interested to see how Motor City does given its long development cycle, and how much it ultimately costs.

POOL OF (BUGGY, SLIGHTLY LACKLUSTER) *RADIANCE*

I just bought *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor*, and the game is so bug-ridden it isn't even funny. I tried to uninstall it after realizing that it stank, and it wrecked my install of Windows! Yes, I couldn't get back into Windows after uninstalling it — I had to reinstall Win 98 again from DOS. How

Pool's monsters aren't half as scary as its bugs — yeesh!

do games like this make it to store shelves in the first place? People complain about *World War II Online*, but *Pool* takes things to a whole new level. Someone over at Ubi Soft or Stormfront Studios deserves an ass punch.

— Scott Fraser

We don't condone violence here at PC Gamer, Scott — least of all the dreaded "ass punch." Still, with all the email we've received about these bugs, and since the game has supposedly been all but finished since May 2001, it's hard to know how the ball got dropped so hard. Read our review on page 92 to learn about our own experiences with the game.

ONE GAME TO LAST A LIFETIME

Hola, *PCG* peeps! In your November 2001 issue you asked us "little people" what game we would want with us if we were stranded on a desert island. Here are my thoughts:

If I could have only one game to play, it would have to be the final release of *Gravy Trader*. I would then build a giant coconut sculpture of Coconut Monkey and pay homage to it every day. If, however, *Gravy Trader* had not seen the light of day by the time of my unfortunate entrapment, I would wish for my trusty copy of *Deus Ex* and all its development tools, and would pay homage every day to a giant coconut sculpture of Warren Spector.

— Max "Astral" Rubenacker

True. True.

What game would I want with me if I was trapped on a desert island? That's easy! Assuming I could connect to the Internet, I'd choose *Worms Armageddon*. I never get tired of playing it by myself, and, of course, it's always a blast to play with others. Hey, that sort of reminds me of…oh, never mind.

— Luc Gagnon

Hey, you weren't trying to make a reference to…oh, never mind.

SUMMONING SALES FIGURES

A friend and I recently got into an argument about *Summoner*. He claims that the game completely flopped on both the PlayStation 2 and the PC. From what I've heard, though, it sold just fine. Can you guys clear up this question for us?

— Gary

Sure thing, Gary. According to research firm NPD Intelect, the PC version of Summoner sold roughly 29,500 copies in the six months following its March 2001 release, while the PS2 version sold around 134,000 copies in the 11 months following its October 2000 release. Those are pretty poor sales numbers for each system, so it seems your friend's right here. Though the game was a good play (we gave the PC edition an 81%), it didn't nab gamers' interest, unfortunately.

THE BLAME GAME

Well, well, well. One interesting development in regard to the recent terrorist attacks is that the media's talking heads aren't blaming computer games. How 'bout them apples?

— Lewis

It's a nice change of pace, isn't it? A few crass reporters have mentioned MS Flight Simulator, but that nonsense talk seems to have come and gone rather quickly. That said, make sure you play as much Quake as possible so that you'll know how to fire a rocket launcher should you end up being drafted. Oh wait, that's right: games like Quake are controlled with a keyboard and mouse and couldn't possibly teach you to fire a real gun. Forget it.

A TIMELY QUESTION

Hey, what holidays do the *PC Gamer* guys and gals celebrate this time of year?

— Joe Momma

Magazine lead times being what they are, we usually celebrate Halloween right about now. Come the real holiday season, the PCG crew is an eclectic bunch: we celebrate everything from tribal sacrifice to Christmas and Chanukah.

BCG: BETTY CROCKER GAMER

Can you people give me a good recipe for holiday cookies?
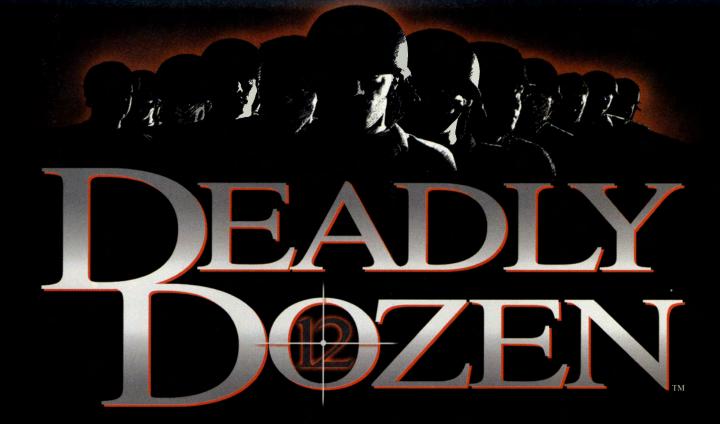
— Jason Hitch

Sure, but keep in mind that we're gamers first, cooks second.

PCG Love Cookies

Mix one egg, two pounds of flour, one cup of orange juice, three sticks of butter, one pound of sugar, two tablespoons of green food coloring, and four large tomatoes in a large cookie jar. Let the mixture sit on the counter until it hardens into a thick sludge, and then enjoy it with a bit of whipped cream and eggnog!

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Wolfenstein™

Earth and Beyond

IN A NUTSHELL

Space is big…really big. And it's yours to be commanded, and conquered.

Brett Sperry asks serious questions, with a serious purpose, about the vagaries of game design. "How do we make it balanced, fun, and with continuity?" he ponders. "How do we shift the emphasis away from conflict and combat?" These questions barely scratch the surface of building a massively multiplayer game, but they're among hundreds already addressed throughout *Earth and Beyond*'s five years of development time.

The setting for this unique enterprise is the vastness of space, the future, the home to three distinct factions. Senior Game Designer Janus Anderson explained the makeup of the three races: the Progen are genetic manipulators and warriors who fly slow, powerful ships; the Terran are capitalistic tradesmen whose ships sport large cargo bays and meaty missile racks; and the Jenquai's beat is technology, but with fragile ships that rely on cloaking, scanners, and even psionics. While each race

lends itself to one of the three classes — warrior, tradesman, explorer — it's possible to start a Terran (tradesman) as an explorer (usually a Jenquai). The races will be able to adventure together, and a collection of their particular skills will be vital to achieving certain objectives.

In the game, the discovery of star gates has allowed space exploration to flourish. These gates have always been around, but only in recent history have they been visible. So who built them? Where are they? When did this happen? What was their plan? These questions form the core backstory to *E&B*'s ongoing theme, and are the canvas on which the three factions will paint their story of trade, exploration, and combat.

At the heart of Westwood's design is the desire to achieve the holy grail for developers of persistent-state–world games: a compelling blend of easy accessibility for the newbie with tremendous depth and opportunity for the hardcore. Starting

Sperry hopes that the game's strong cultures will get you interested in the mysteries of the universe.

with the character-creation process, the three factions and three class types mean just nine character combos. A simple menu of sizes, hair styles, colors, and equipment lets you customize your avatar quite specifically, or those wanting to dive right in can simply choose a random option.

The start of the game, which I got to play, has a voiceover tutorial that blends

Voiceovers help you navigate the character-creation process, making all the options very clear.

Down the road, downloads or expansions will introduce new star gates that lead to new areas.

It's possible to make new objects by dismantling and rebuilding the component parts of other items.

light-hearted banter and important in-game fact to show you around the interface. Your in-game HUD uses a series of icons to let you access maps, inventory, and weapons in a very manageable format. It also includes critical information such as your power level. Progressing down the tech tree, high-end items will drain more power, and so energy conservation becomes a critical strategic resource: should you blast an enemy with everything you've got in one shot, thereby draining your power, or pace your attack and ensure a getaway option?

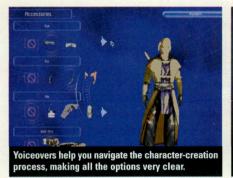Right now the control is slightly clunky in combat because your eye is pulled to a small reticule over your selected weapon slot in the interface bar, and away from the main action screen. But E&B has just gone into beta testing with 500 players trying out the current functionality, so hopefully this point will be addressed. Combat itself is as you'd imagine: it's somewhat turn-based, with skill levels, weapon type, and armor selections all going into the number cruncher to decide hits, misses, and the resulting spectacular explosions. By carefully balancing weapon ranges and the option of temporarily closing space gates, Westwood hopes to prevent grief tactics such as flooding certain areas with buddies and surrounding enemies using all the 3D space available.

To make space an interesting place to adventure, the backdrops mix dazzling nebulas, beautifully textured space stations, and detailed planets. You can orbit these worlds, view buildings on the surface, and enter floating stations for new supplies or missions. The artists have brought whatever real-life facts they can into the E&B world, modeling certain areas based on NASA documents. "[Jupiter's moon] Io looks like Io," notes Director of Product Development Eric Wang.

Docking at space stations and then visiting stores, bars, and a handful of other locations is streamlined through a simple menu. Once at a station, you can converse with NPCs, buy and sell equipment, mend or upgrade your ship, or just hang with the homies. Whatever your mission, it's all recorded in a log that details what you need to do, and where. With the ability to break down some items into their component parts, traders get to learn what it takes to make the more powerful ship upgrades, creating a dynamic economy that's driven by players' ability to crank out cool gear.

Whatever you decide to do, Sperry hopes that grouping with others will be a key element. "You can play to the end of a career solo," says Sperry, "but we hope you don't." Some installations, planets, or other features of space will be invisible to certain races due to technology limitations, so these groups will need to team with someone who can see the location before you can share the information.

Of course, death plays a part, too. While the E&B team is still debating the penalty of in-game death — possibly not even experience loss — they want to ensure that it's not a big deal. Should your ship be pounded to the point of being "derelict," it'll be considered worthless by attacking foes, and thus left alone. At this point, rather than start a salvage operation, you'll have to recover — either through your own repair kit, or by paying another player to bail you out of your jam.

Westwood is certainly in a position to learn from the mistakes of others, and EA, as the publishing parent, should be able to build the technical infrastructure necessary to support the flood of players. Newbies should be encouraged by the limited starting options and other efforts made to attract them, while E&B's complex, deep missions and rich story should offer the hardcore sci-fi crowd the persistent-world game they've been waiting for.

— Rob Smith

You could use the Menace skill to frighten off opponents, but if you're damaged, you might want to flee the fight instead.

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero

IN A NUTSHELL Now you can play *Counter-Strike* even if you don't have any friends.

The amateur mod–turned-phenomenon that is *Counter-Strike* is undoubtedly one of the game industry's biggest success stories. Some 50,000 people are playing this downloadable addition to *Half-Life* at any given time, and its success has generated professional jobs for many members of the design team. The only thing hindering *Counter-Strike's* further success is its requirement to be played online or over a LAN.

Well, that's about to change. Gearbox has been handed the continuing development of *Condition Zero*, an enhanced, standalone, single-player version of the squad-based shooter. With *Zero*, you'll not only be able to take *CS* off-line, you'll also be treated to a satchel full of new features and weapons. Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox and the game's lead designer, says, "*Condition Zero* is an opportunity to deliver a new type of single-player game that appeals to fans of on- and off-line action games." It'll also offer visual upgrades via higher-resolution textures and more complex character models, Pitchford tells us.

These improvements should help give extra life to *Zero's* five episodes, each consisting of four or five missions with a number of varied objectives. Some of the missions are indoors, such as one operation set inside a military bunker in the desert, similar to the facility in the movie *Three Kings*. Other missions take place entirely outdoors, as in the one where you're dropped on the walkways of a canal city similar to Venice. Further locations include jungles, arctic bases, and two urban areas based on American cities.

Within those missions are three scenarios, each with multiple objectives. One of the new game modes involves getting your team to a specific area in a map to accomplish a set objective. For example, in one mission, a team must make it to a computer room to download some files and then make it out to the extraction point. It's like a mix between the "diffusion" and

You'll be able to tackle the missions in any order, so you can save harder ones for later.

"escape" modes in *CS*. *Zero* will ship with at least one additional new gameplay mode that Gearbox wants to keep secret. In all modes, you'll earn more money for your squad depending on how well you complete each mission. As you earn more funding by beating missions, you'll unlock more missions to play.

One of the staples of *Counter-Strike* is buying new weapons and supplies. In *Zero*, you'll have access to tweaked versions of classic *CS* weapons, plus plenty of new hardware. The list includes LAW Rockets, an Israeli assault rifle called the Galil, the FAMAS assault rifle, Molotov cocktails, gas grenades, the M-60 E3, machetes, a ballistic shield that you can use in conjunction with a pistol (see image, above left), and a few surprise mystery weapons.

Another feature new to *Zero* is Training. Since the game is squad-based, you'll have a team of AI buddies on your side. "Training the recruits will be arbitrary between each mission," Pitchford explains. "You select the type of training, confirm the order, the money is spent, and the recruit is upgraded." Training will become crucial later in the game, when the effectiveness of your AI buddies will be paramount. Thankfully, Pitchford assures us that Gearbox will make these artificial buddies top-notch. "In testing, we've been able to consistently fool experienced *Counter-Strike* players into thinking they're playing human players rather than bots," he says.

Dying to know more? So are we. As *Zero* nears release, we'll be sure to share our hands-on experience with it.

— Li C. Kuo
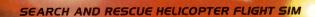
The FAMAS assault rifle is used by the French Foreign Legion, and is nicknamed "The Bugle."

The *Condition Zero* team includes both Gearbox veterans and original *CS* community developers.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action
DEVELOPER: Gearbox
PUBLISHER: Valve
WWW: valvesoftware.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 65%
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2002

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: The most popular online shooter ever is finally coming in a single-player package. Now you don't need broadband to play what many consider to be the best tactical shooter yet.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Gearbox made the terrific *Half-Life* add-on *Opposing* Force and its weaker (but action-packed) follow-up, *Blue Shift*. These guys know the *HL* engine and can do great games.

The U.S. Coast Guard has once again put out the call for brave individuals to step forward and risk their very lives in the line of duty. In this latest installment of the critically acclaimed SAR series, you begin your career as an ensign and it is your job to command any of 3 authentic rescue choppers through over 100 new missions in an attempt to save lives. Whether you're repairing a volatile oil rig, or plucking victims from frigid ocean swells, every mission will immerse you into authentic rescue situations, and will require a steady hand, nerves of steel and sometimes even a little luck.

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--Washington Post

"...spectacular, tense, and exciting..."
--GameSpot (8/10, Great)
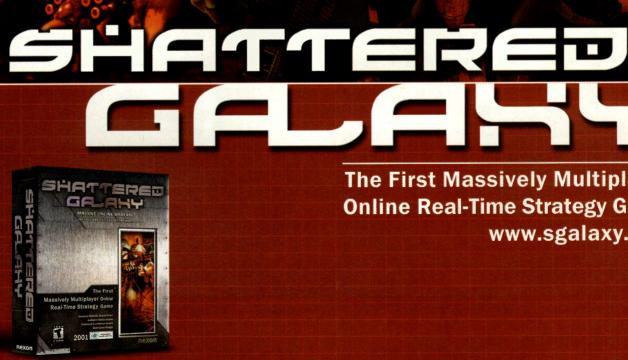
"...immensely enjoyable...the alliance of EverQuest-style
role-playing with Total Annihilation-style combat."
--PC Zone (10/10)

"...the type of large-scale conflict that I've always hoped for...
its foot firmly planted in the ass of stability."
--IGN (8/10)

Divine Divinity

IN A NUTSHELL — Is it a *Diablo* clone or a *Baldur's Gate* rip-off? Actually, it may be better than either.

Purple bolts of lightning from heaven are all the rage on the catwalk this season.

From the department of redundancy department comes *Divine Divinity*, a game with a name so weird it could only have spawned from those strange people across the ocean. No, not Orcs — Belgians. Larian Studios is based in Flanders, and the developer is busy putting the final gobs of spit and polish on an ambitious new RPG.

At first glance, the 2D sprite-based isometric gameplay recalls just about every *Diablo* knock-off we've seen in the last few years. But looks can be deceiving. *Divine Divinity* has far more flexibility than most RPGs because it emphasizes characters over classes. The three basic classes — Way of the Survivor, Way of the Warrior, and Way of the Wizard — are only basic "callings" rather than individual sets of abilities.

Divine offers 96 skills, and your character can train in all of them regardless of his class. So why have classes at all? Each of the three offers small benefits, including a unique "special move." A fighter, for

example, can doing a spinning slash that will gut just about anything in arm's reach.

The goal, then, is to let you create your own distinct RPG experience. If *Diablo*-style hack-and-slash is your bread-and-butter, then go for it. But if you prefer the measured pace of, say, *Baldur's Gate*, then you can play that way as well, including the option of pausing the game to issue orders. And don't worry about wearing out your mouse button: simply click on an

enemy once, and you'll attack him until he (or you) dies.

Other examples of this cool flexibility include the ability to physically manipulate just about anything in the game world. In one instance I went into a barn full of hay bales and started to throw them around for fun. Underneath the pile was a trap door that led to a treasure-rich dungeon.

This sort of connect-the-dots gameplay also applies to your weapons and tools. For example, you can collect ingredients to make a potion, and then splash it on your sword to make a poisoned blade. Then you can charm that blade to make a truly wicked weapon. The result is an almost unlimited number of uniquely specialized weapons and items.

Divine's basic story involves familiar elements such as disloyal magicians, overthrown councils, and a magical land (in this case Rovellon) in mortal peril. You play the role of the savior in a setting brought to life with some very respectable graphics. The animation is smooth, the level of detail in the art is as good as anything we've seen recently, and the landscape is varied and seamless. *Divine* also supports up to 1024 x 768 resolution in 16-bit color.

Only some of the game's 100-plus NPCs have spoken dialogue, but that's understandable considering the size of such an undertaking and the fact that *Divine Divinity* could occupy up to four CDs. Right now the game is on track to show up next spring. We hope Larian will soon start working on sequels such as *Bloody Blood* and *Devilishly Diabolical*.
— *Jim Preston*

Characters run or walk based on how close they are to your cursor as you click on the screen.

With more than 100 monsters to fight, your mouse finger will be pretty busy.

The might of the Empire is at his command.

She's the last hope of the Rebellion.

His menacing power guides the Trade Federation.

Official *Star Wars* Web Site www.starwars.com

hands on

As some big-name games finally near release, playable late-beta builds land on our desks. Here's where we give hot-off-the-burner first impressions of how these titles are coming along.

Those crazy knife fights from *Counter-Strike* are back; (inset) defusing bombs is tense work.

You'll find lots of blocks to magically move.

Quidditch is like soccer, but without the hooliganism.

Global Operations

DEVELOPER Barking Dog **PUBLISHER** Electronic Arts **CURRENT RELEASE DATE** February 2002

IT MAY BE EASY to dismiss *Global Operations* as just a *Counter-Strike* clone, but you should remember that even if the game's roots are familiar, Barking Dog plans on making it a bigger, badder, better version of the popular online mod. The premise is identical — you play as either a terrorist or a counter-terrorist, each with a distinct set of goals. You start with limited cash and earn more with successive victories, using the money to upgrade your weapons, armor, and accessories.

The controls and game mechanics are nearly identical to *Counter-Strike*'s, with a few tweaks such as a useful drag-and-drop HUD. Quick, controlled bursts are required if you want to hit anything, crouching improves accuracy, and the characters have location-based damage, so you don't want to get double-tapped in the head. I did find it difficult to tell where my shots were going: there

just wasn't enough user feedback in the early version I played.

One especially impressive part of the game is its new approach to defusing bombs. Rather than just walking up to a bomb and hitting the Use key, you actually have to pick it up and bust out a defusing kit that consists of a pair of wirecutters and a tool to check wires for current. Each bomb has a red, blue, and yellow wire, and you have to check each wire to figure out which needs to be cut. But it takes time to find the current, and if time's running out, you just have to guess. Frankly, this nerve-jangling idea is brilliant, and it worked perfectly in the mission settings.

Barking Dog is bang on the right track with *Global Ops*' core action gameplay — even if its real-world settings may jangle a few sensibilities.

— *Li C. Kuo*

Serious Sam: The Second Encounter

DEVELOPER CroTeam **PUBLISHER** Take-Two **RELEASE DATE** Holiday 2001

JUST AS YOU'RE recovering from *Serious Sam*, it's *The Second Encounter*, with more of the same manic carnage. Some of the new weapons (chainsaw, sniper rifle) aren't exactly original, but that's *Sam* for you. The focus is on crazy fun, and the alpha build we played had plenty of that.

— *Jim Preston*

Harry Potter

DEVELOPER Electronic Arts
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
CURRENT RELEASE DATE November 2001

HARRY POTTER IS THAT magical little wizard-in-training who can take a publisher's ordinary Q4 profit projections and make them shine with gold! As you've noticed, the *Harry Potter* movie is in theaters, and the PC game, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, is on shelves.

It was clear from the beginning of our late-build playtest that this is a kid's title. Product Manager David Lee told us that the game was aimed at 8- to 14-year-olds, and that it will closely follow the events in the film.

Graphically, *Harry Potter* is beautiful, with a colorful, vibrant world provided by the *Unreal* engine. Gameplay is basically *Tomb Raider Lite*, offering a third-person perspective on the core gem-gathering. The controls are standard mouse/keyboard setup, and you can save at any time.

Along with the standard jumping puzzles, mazes, and timing patterns, *Harry Potter* shakes things up with a game of Quidditch, a form of soccer played on broomsticks. You just follow around the golden snitch until you grab it, and then move on to the next adventure.

To be honest, *HP*'s younger demographic will get a bigger thrill than we did from our playtime. It's an easy $30 purchase for parents who want to get their kids something safe and fun on the PC. On that level, the game should entertain fans of the books and the film. Add more fragging and a railgun or two, and we'd be right there with them.

— *Jim Preston*

THERE'S NOTHING CONVENTIONAL ABOUT IT.

Plunge back into intense World War II combat with the most realistic tactical and strategic action game ever created. Maneuver Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite squad of soldiers deep behind enemy lines utilizing their combined expertise to set up ambushes, control troops and conduct night missions.

Interact like never before with detailed environments based on actual WWII locations. Go covert into the heart of the Third Reich, defend a Northern European submarine installation, and infiltrate the headquarters of the Japanese Army.

New 3D engine offers a 360° rotatable environment and seamless movement in/out of buildings, submarines, planes and under water.

Complete simultaneous control of multiple gameplay windows in real time.

New commandos include a thief, a seductress, and a dog – adding stealth, distraction and distribution strategies.

Go into battles with others in a cooperative multiplayer mode.

Dungeon Siege will be one of the first games to come with gmax.

NEWS

EASY MOD-MAKING

Discreet's gmax puts powerful tools for level design, modeling, and texturing in your hands with a free 20MB download

One of the best parts of being a PC gamer is enhancing your shelf-bought game experience with all the free mod downloads available online. Here at *PCG* we've clocked in countless hours with mods such as *Tactical Ops*, *Day of Defeat*, *Counter-Strike*, *Team Fortress Classic*, and *Nato 3.0* (for *Rogue Spear*). User-created mods have truly enhanced gaming for all of us. Now, gmax promises to make mod creation easier than ever, and amateur mod-makers and experienced professionals are all talking about it.

So what is gmax? Think of it as a chip off the 3D Studio Max block, one of the more popular programs used by the pros and by modders across the Internet (including the *Day of Defeat* mod team). The idea behind gmax, created by Discreet, is to make a program that is more approachable than 3D Studio Max yet just as powerful in almost every way. With this program, you'll be able to edit and create your own

maps and character models, and even make animations. And with a special add-on pack called Tempest (also a free download), you'll be able take all your creations and drop them straight into *Quake III: Arena*.

Everyone knows that no matter how powerful a program is, it's worthless if you can't figure out how to use it. Modeling and level design aren't simple tasks. Jakob Jungels, the modeler for the *Day of Defeat* team, is more than familiar with the difficulties involved in creating new characters and levels for a game. "There are dozens of minute steps you need to make, and it's frustrating when you get unexplainable errors," he says. "Even when you do manage to get the model in the game, sometimes it looks completely different than it did in the modeling program. Frustration is definitely part of the process."

According to Discreet's Dave Campbell, anyone from the hardest of the hardcore game

players to their little sister will be able to use gmax to make their own game modifications. "The whole point of gmax is to enable people who have never made anything before, even children, to make things like 3D models for *Quake III*," he says. [*Though those children can't* buy Quake III, *of course! — Ed.*] Campbell isn't alone in his sentiments. A few developers, including Microids and Gas Powered Games, have already integrated gmax into their games. One of the more prominent upcoming games that will feature the gmax system is GPG's *Dungeon Siege*. Chris Taylor, president and founder of GPG, says: "This [gmax] is what people have wanted for a long time. No more hacking and reverse-engineering file formats: people can go straight to work making cool stuff without all the headaches and hassles."

This easy compatibility is possible because every time gmax ships with a game, you're getting a special version of the software designed specifically for that game. As a result, anything you make will be instantly compatible with the game gmax came with. That means you won't have to know any coding or have to get your hands into any of the actual programming. Before gmax, if an aspiring mod maker wanted to tweak a weapon or character, he would have to hack into the game's core code and change it. Doing this complex process incorrectly could result in breaking the game itself. Even then, after figuring out how to make mod files in a format that's compatible with the game, the modder would have to use a 3D program such as 3D Studio Max or Inspire 3D to create his 3D models. And these programs aren't cheap. The latest version of 3D Studio Max costs a whopping $3,495.

But wait: isn't *Dungeon Siege* already supposed to ship with an editor called The Siege Editor? Yes, it is, but both programs will work hand-in-hand to give you the power of creation. Think of gmax as a creator for the smaller, or micro, elements and The Siege Editor as the creator for the larger, macro elements. Says Taylor: "First using gmax, someone might create a new weapon, character, tree, or whatever. Then, they can use The Siege Editor to put [all these elements] together by building a terrain, placing monsters on [it], plopping down the trees they made."

With gmax and the tempest add-on, you'll be able to create your own *Quake III* levels.

Will there be special versions of gmax for games already released, such as *Max Payne*? If developers like what they see, they could easily build a special version of gmax (using gmax dev, a variation of the program specifically for professional developers) designed specifically to make mods for their game. However, there are currently no plans to make gmax versions for older titles.

So is gmax really as easy to use as Campbell says it is? I decided to find out for myself. Both gmax and the Tempest add-on are available for a completely free download at *www.discreet.com*. After downloading the 20MB program and the 500K Tempest add-on, I got to tinkering. For the record, I've never touched a rendering program of any sort in my life. I decided to try to make a simple stickman without working through any tutorials. After a little over 20 minutes, I had my stickman, sort of. He looks pretty bad, but it's not shabby for

someone who has no idea what he's doing. Fortunately, you won't have to click around blindly like I did. Discreet has a very thorough gmax tutorial available for download that will lead you through creating 3D models, 3D levels, texturing, and even animating. Trust me, you'll need them if you want to create anything worthwhile. gmax is a powerful program, and the number of options available in its menus is overwhelming if you're new to 3D rendering.

If gmax is really as good as its creators say it is, you can expect many more mods popping up in the near future — though it's a time-intensive program, and few user-created options were available at press time. But for now, all we can do is wait and see how the gaming community responds. We'll be sure to keep you keyed in as gmax takes its first steps into putting powerful tools in gamers' hands.

— *Li C. Kuo*

FAR LEFT: A 3D model of an ogre made with gmax. LEFT: Li's first try at building a 3D model. It's aptly named "Sucky Stickman."

LAN-PARTY REPORT

WHAT: LANExtreme
WHERE: Bloomington, Illinois
WHEN: December 7–8, 2001

At LANExtreme, you'll be able to play everything from *Duke Nukem 3D* to *Unreal Tournament* and the original *Team Fortress*. The entry fee is $20 and all proceeds will go to the Red Cross. Get more info at *www.lanparty.com/lanextreme*. Remember to send any and all LAN-party news to *Li@pcgamer.com* at least two months before the event.

Dimension Films has obtained the rights from Infogrames to make a film based on the *Alone in the Dark* games. Two supernatural investigators...a creature-infested island...cool!

Heavy Cat Multimedia has released a new adventure game called *Lady Star*. The game is based on a 14-year-old high-school girl and uses anime-style graphics.

Black Thorn

<<< *Rogue Spear: Black Thorn* is back on track. Red Storm delayed the release after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The standalone add-on should be in stores now.

A *Real War Enhancement Kit* is coming. The kit will be available for free download, and will have new missions, tweaked gameplay, and more. Its release is "soon."

THE PATH TO BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL GAMER

Have you got what it takes?

Counter-Strike is currently the official game of the Cyberathlete Professional League.

"Not everyone can be a pro gamer. It takes dedication and commitment. Gaming on the pro side of things isn't always 'fun,' and you have to have the skills and talent to make it." These are the words of *Counter-Strike* champ Jay Chern, one of the growing number of professional gamers in the U.S. Chern isn't a full-time gamer, but he spends a good five hours a day practicing. His biggest cash prize is $1,200 in a previous CPL tournament.

How do you become a pro gamer? Everyone we asked had one response in common: you have to be *really good*. "Right now, the only way to truly make a living off of pro gaming is to be the best all the time," Chern tells us. That's easier said than done. Only champions win enough money to make a living. And to become one, you have to beat hundreds, even thousands, of gamers.

In Korea, pro gaming is massive. This year's CPL World Championship Tournament in America should attract 2,000 gamers. The Jeju International Games Festival being held by Knight Bridging Korea (KBK), a company that organizes pro matches, has 32,000 gamers signed up to compete, and the event is even supported by the Ministry of Government. KBK vice president Seung-eok Paik tells us: "Ten pro gamers have reached a celebrity level of fame in Korea, but [our country has] more than 100 full-time professional gamers. A Gallop Poll held in elementary schools shows that Pro Gamer is one of the occupations most students want to be when they grow up."

In Korea, pro gamers can become more famous than actors and singers. Champions are often asked to appear in commercials and do product endorsements. The country even has three cable channels devoted to games. One time, a televised *Starcraft* tournament drew an audience share of 30 percent. "Many parents try hard to support their children to become pro gamers," says Paik. "Once, a gamer's father offered us $100,000 to fix a tournament."

Does pro gaming change the way you look at games in general? "It's definitely very serious," Chern says. "When you're in a gaming championship, this isn't just a game. It's a sport, and you're there to win." If you think you have what it takes, try entering a competition. Take part in everything from local LAN parties (find them at *www.lanparty.com*, or in our monthly LAN-Party report) to official CPL events. After that, it's an oh-so-simple matter of beating everyone you play and registering with the CPL (at *www.thecpl.com*).

DESIGN LAB

HONG KONG THEATRE

■ By Joshua Knode

IN MY GAME YOU PLAY as a Hong Kong movie director. You start out with a small budget, and with that you have to hire talent, rent studios, or shoot on location. You also have to purchase props, and rent or buy equipment like cameras and lights (and eventually, special effects like wire rigs and pyrotechnics). Action is the heart and soul of your movies, so you have to choreograph everything carefully, whether you're doing a John Woo–style shootout or a Jet-Li–type fistfight.

You control the action by telling the performers where to go, and what to do in a 3D engine with full camera control. Risky stunts attract more attention to your film, but be careful: if you injure one of your star players, you have to go on without him for the rest of production! Since you're working with a strained budget most of the time, you have to conserve resources by cutting back on safety or reissuing props from film to film. The more action-packed, suspenseful, and exciting your movie is, the more money you'll get to make your next film. Got a great film you want to show the world? Post it on the web, and let everyone see your masterpiece.

Got a great idea for a game? Submit it to the newly revived *PCG* Design Lab! Each month we'll be printing a monthly winning entry, the author of which will receive a random selection of goodies from the *PCG* Game Pile™. Those entries will then have the chance of appearing in a Design Lab roundup sometime in 2002, in which we'll award a *very* special grand prize — so good we can't announce it yet — to our favorite reader-submitted game idea.

So send your concepts for a new, wonderfully playable game design to *design@pcgamer.com*. (Or mail your entry to PC Gamer, 150 N. Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005.) Your game design should have a title and a description that's 350 words or less; see more rules on page 127.

THE PCG RELEASE METER

Now that all the big holiday releases have shipped, game releases are slowing down. But some gems are still coming out. Thanks to Rich LaPorte for the list. Send release-date news to *laporte@gonegold.com*, and visit *www.gonegold.com* for the latest release-date information.

EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin

Beam Breakers

	Title	Publisher	Date	Prognosis
DECEMBER	Rayman Arena	Ubi Soft	12/04/01	This month
	Arx Fatalis	Fishtank	12/04/01	About here
	Beam Breakers	Fishtank	12/04/01	Racing in
	EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin	Sony	12/04/01	Later
	Grandia 2	Ubi Soft	12/05/01	Much later
	Dune	DreamCatcher	12/11/01	Around now
	Destroyer Command	Ubi Soft	12/12/01	Next year
	Capitalism 2	Ubi Soft	12/12/01	Promising
JANUARY	Majesty Gold	Infogrames	01/10/02	Should make it
	Disciples II	Strategy First	01/16/02	One month late
	Industry Giant 2	JoWooD	01/17/02	Most likely
	Mafia	Take-Two	01/18/02	A little later
	1503 AD	Electronic Arts	01/31/02	About now
	Sid Meier's SimGolf	Maxis	01/31/02	On the green

>>> THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Discovery Science Channel is now airing *Electric Playground*, a TV show for PC and console gamers. Check your local cable listings for dates and times.

Enterprise

<<< **Though Activision tells us a game based on *Enterprise* isn't yet in development,** the company does have the *Trek*-game license for the next 10 years. Give us some 3D T'Pol!

Fuel

<<< **Firetoad Software is working on a new hovercraft racer called *Fuel*.** The game will take full advantage of the GeForce3's features, and will be published by JoWooD.

WOMEN LOVE BAD BOYS. BAD BOYS HAVE DSL.

Typically referred to as "bad ass," the online gamer who has DSL is a belligerent yet irresistible sort. He is legendary for his high-speed Internet access. He is feared for his ability to download up to fifty times faster. He has really big hands. The DSL man never puts up with busy signals and can even use his phone while he's online.

When you see a DSL man, kiss your girlfriend goodbye and kick rocks, soldier. Or else you'll have a grappling contest on your hands.

But don't just take our word for it. Studies show nine out of ten supermodels prefer a man with DSL. Some seek out the speed. Others seek out the reliability. They are obsessed with this. In fact, when women go to the restroom together, they are secretly discussing DSL.

Hey, tough guy. Get ∅ EarthLink DSL.

Upgrade to EarthLink™ DSL. The fastest way to get to the Real Internet and the smartest way to play online video games. DSL provides you with an "always-on" Internet connection. No more busy signals, delays or dropped connections during play. DSL is up to fifty times faster than regular dial-ups. It's just $49.95 a month.* Sign up before January 31, 2002, and receive a free DSL modem and free self-install kit. It's that easy. We'll even waive the $99 activation fee. You save a total of $450.** Get DSL and start kicking sand in the face of lesser gamers. Call 1-800-EARTHLINK or visit earthlink.net. Ask about getting your own static IP address so you can host your own game server.

Not quite ready for DSL? Try our award-winning Internet dial-up service for only $21.95 a month. Pop in the enclosed CD to get started with 700 free hours.†

Save $450. Call 1.800.EARTHLINK today and mention DSL Promo Code 10959 or go to earthlink.net

PC GAMER PLAYLIST

It's been awhile since we've received this many incredibly anticipated games in one month. *Ghost Recon, Empire Earth, Galactic Battlegrounds, Aliens vs. Predator 2, C&C: Yuri's Revenge* — now *that's* a list to make any gamer giddy with glee. Most of these games came in too late for all of us to give them a try, but you can bet the next month will be full of frantic gaming.

ROB >>> I've gone back to the original *Baldur's Gate* — a great game playable on my laptop. Of course, shooting Nazis in multiplayer *Wolf* never gets old, and I'm still searching for a repeat championship win in the never-ending pursuit of *Championship Manager* greatness. And I'm also enjoying working through *Red Faction*.

COREY >>> For all the talk of "tactical, squad-based combat," I've always loved shooters where you get in, blow stuff up, and get out. So I'm loving *Red Faction*. Wading through legions of Ultor's finest, dropping the boomsmack wherever necessary — now this is the way to play. And the rail driver — one of the coolest weapons ever. Yes.

DAN >>> *Ghost Recon*. Buy *Ghost Recon*. After you have bought *Ghost Recon*, install and play *Ghost Recon*. Enjoy *Ghost Recon*. Its goodness has taken over my PC. (Though I must say, my *Baseball Mogul 2002* Giants are finally getting it done — NL champs 2009! It took seven long years, but my boys are finally for real.)

CHUCK >>> Coming off a jaunt to the Disneyland Resort, I imagine that the office is one big flume ride. Rob's an audio-animatronic puppet demanding copy at every turn. "Deadline! Deadline!" he bellows. TheVede points and laughs. Too bad there's no big drop at the end. But now I'm prepared to review Disney's *Ultimate Ride*.

LI >>> *Ghost Recon*. That's what it's all about. I haven't been able to get it out of my mind. I'm thinking about squad-based tactics in my sleep. I see enemy snipers out of the corners of my eyes everywhere I look. My trigger finger twitches. Also, I've been wiping out hordes of zombies at 45wpm in *The Typing of the Dead*.

JIM >>> This month I've finished playing *Red Faction* (very cool), *Zax the Alien Hunter* (simple and fun), and best of all, *Ghost Recon* (awesome). I even found *Grim Fandango* online for $9, so I picked that up to check out the brilliance I missed the first time. And don't tell Rob, but I've been reviewing some kickass Xbox games for *NextGen*.

JOE >>> *NHL 2002* is better than last year's — don't listen to what Jim "My Blues are better than your Rangers" Preston had to say in his review. Email your AI settings to *joe@pcgamer.com* and I'll give prizes to the settings that create the most realistic gameplay. And check out *http://nhldepot.nhlgaming.net* for some cool downloads and add-ons.

CHIAKI >>> *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*...mmmmmmm, must...kill...enemy! Damn, I'm really getting into the FPS action. Okay, get ready, I'm about to let you guys peek into my geeky world: I wear an army helmet whenever I play FPSs. It helps, I swear! *Diablo II: LOD, Sheep,* and *Black & White* have also received some of my attention lately.

GREG >>> I'm all about *Ghost Recon*. I haven't had time to get beyond the first mission yet, but holy jeebus, I'm having fun! I just about jumped out of my chair when a bird chirped while I was bringing a sniper through a sleepy grove of trees. Too cool! Also, I've been spending *way* too much time with *Dark Age of Camelot* — I'm almost level 7! Woo-hoo!

NEWS

CHEAP THRILLS

Activision's value line brings quality Sega games to the PC

Shovelware. You all know what that means: cheap, second-rate games that are sold for anywhere between $15 and $25. They cluster around bargain bins like a fungus. So admittedly, our initial reaction to Activision Value's announcement of a new batch of upcoming budget games was less than ecstatic.

But while sifting through the list of horrors of hunting games and other drivel, we came across something that caught our eye. *Crazy Taxi*? That's not the same *Crazy Taxi* from the Dreamcast, is it? It's not the spectacular driving game that puts you behind the wheel of a cab racing to take customers to their destinations through a living, breathing city, is it? Yes, it is. Excellent.

Racer extraordinaire *Crazy Taxi* is finally coming to the PC.

And it doesn't end there. Other Sega games that will be part of Activision Value's new lineup include *Marine Fishing*, a surprisingly addictive fishing game; *Sports Jam*, a collection of sports games such as basketball, baseball, and bowling; and a real-time strategy game called *100 Swords*. Now *these* are the kind of budget titles we like to see. These Sega games are being ported to the PC by their original development teams at Sega and should be available early next year. Keep those Dreamcast ports coming, boys!

PVP

by Scott Kurtz

Dear Santa,

This year, please make sure that all the games I'm dying to play are released in time for Christmas.

TAK. TAK.

HMMM...

And make sure they work right out of the box. I don't want to have to wait for any patches to be released.

TAK. TAK...

FOR THE LOVE OF... WHY DIDN'T HE JUST ASK FOR WORLD PEACE?

READ PVP DAILY ONLINE @ WWW.PVPONLINE.COM
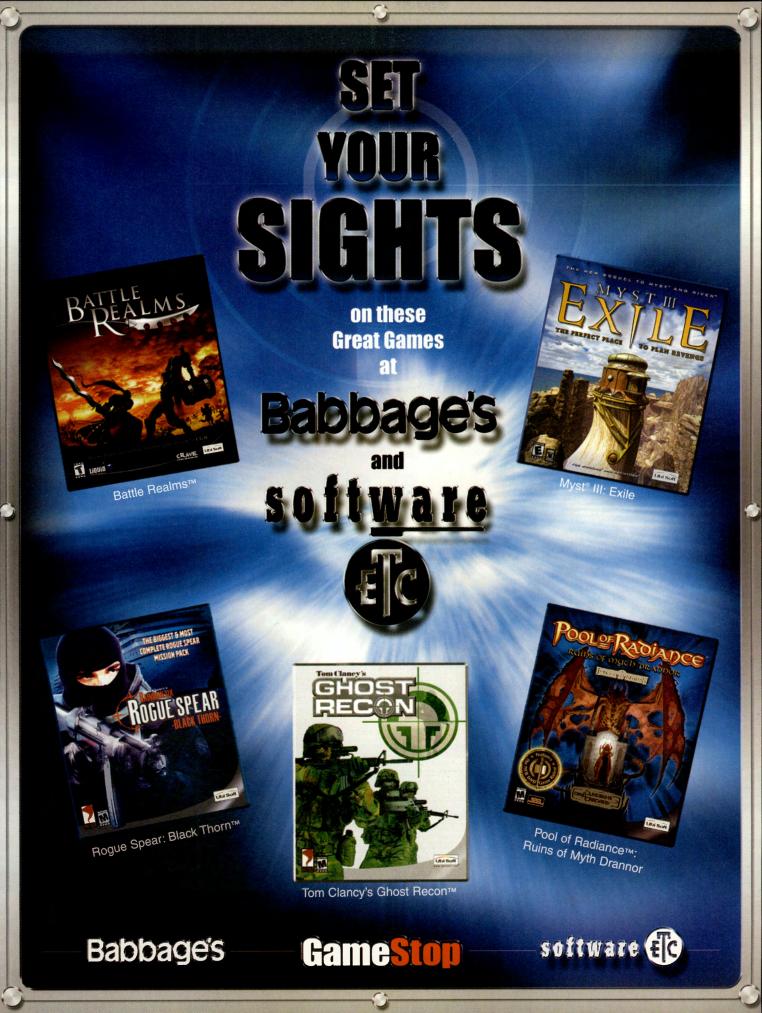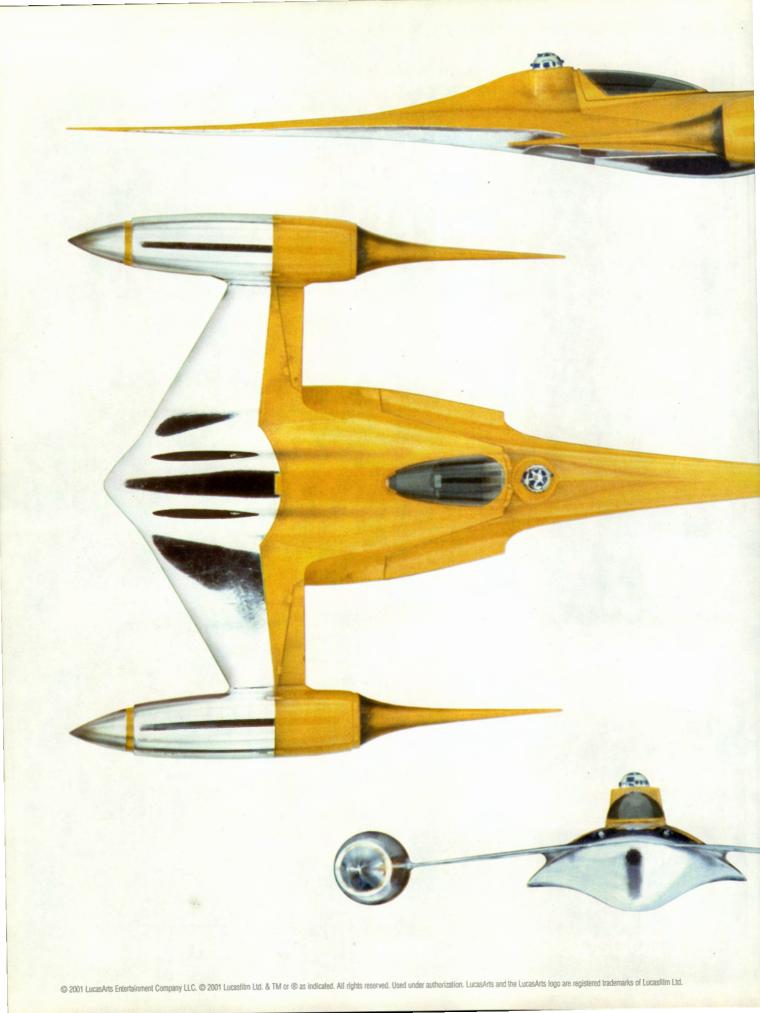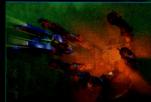
THE LAST WAR
WILL BE FOUGHT
BENEATH THE WAVES.

aquanox

It's deep. It's immersive. It's the end of the world – and it looks
like nothing you've ever seen. Life came from the oceans.
AQUANOX takes you back home in a fleet of screaming
underwater killing machines. You're armed to the gills and
you're looking at graphics straight out of the future. As
mercenary, Dead-Eye Flint, you're in over your head. 30
single-player missions. Intense multiplayer modes. Warring
governments. Masses of freebooting pirates. Hordes of
godless monsters. And 360° of complete aquatic freedom.
The future's history. Go down in style.

GO DEEP

PC GAMER'S
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE

YOU WANT COOL STUFF, and we want to help you out. So we've scoured the planet to put together this year's ultimate buyer's guide for gamers. Not just PC games — though we've included plenty — but everything and anything that a tech-savvy guy or gal could possibly want. From MP3 players to board games to DVDs, consider us your one-stop shopping express. Just check the items you like and slip the list to someone who loves you (and is very, very wealthy).

NOMAD JUKEBOX 20GB

AN ENTIRE MUSIC COLLECTION in 14 ounces? Sweet! We featured Creative's first NOMAD Jukebox MP3 player in last year's holiday gift guide and loved it so much that nearly half the *PC Gamer* staff ran out to buy one. Now Creative has more than tripled the original's 6GB of music storage space to a whopping 20GB, while keeping the product the same convenient size. 20GB of hard-drive space means this new Jukebox can store over three times as many MP3s, WMAs, or WAVs as the original Jukebox. (That's over 333 hours of CD-quality music, or 8,500 hours of speech, to you and me.) Want more? The PlayDock PD200 ($229.99) speaker system from Cambridge SoundWorks can turn your Jukebox into an easy-to-carry boombox. Or, if you're worried about getting it wet, the NOMAD Jukebox AquaPac ($39.99) will keep it clean and dry at the beach or around the pool. (www.nomadworld.com; $399.99)

FRAG

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE to lure the board gamer in your life to the dark side of PC first-person shooters. Eviscerating friends and enemies is only a dice-roll away in this card-based arena-battle board game from Steve Jackson Games. Billed as a "first-person shooter without the computer," Frag isn't your usual namby-pamby D&D fantasy lovefest. It comes with a rulebook, a gameboard, three decks of cards, and game pieces. No elves, no fairies — just plenty of killing, and cards. (www.sjgames.com/frag; $34.95)

DM2 DIGITAL MUSIC MIXER

BECOME A FLY TECH-SAVVY DJ and turn your PC into a personal mixing studio. Create a 16-track mix in real time using beats, vocals, and effects out of the 30 songs and many sounds included with the DM2, or use your own to create a personalized remix. Or just freak out your cat. (www.mixman.com; $119.95)

ARCANUM

IT'S TOLKIEN-MEETS-CYBERPUNK in this incredibly deep RPG from developer Troika Studios. Lead a party of adventurers through a gigantic gameworld filled with high fantasy and gritty technology. If you love the BioWare/Black Isle style of roleplaying and adventure, you'll definitely get all the fun you can handle from *Arcanum*. (http://sierrastudios.com/games/arcanum/; $49.95)

PC GAMER 90% EDITORS' CHOICE

APC BACK-UPS CS 500VA

PICTURE IT — you've invested an hour reaching the next game level, and suddenly, a blackout erases your progress forever. (If you live in California, you probably already know what that's like.) No time to save your game, no time to shut down, major distress. The CS 500VA supplies up to 22 minutes of power to take care of business before nature takes care of it for you. (www.apcc.com; $129.99)

You just pushed my button again, you sorry sack of %$&#@!!!

AVERTV BOX

IT'S A COMMON PROBLEM: you've played *Ghost Recon* for so long that you don't have enough energy to get up off your sorry butt and walk over to the TV to turn on *The Simpsons*. No problem — the AverTV external TV tuner lets you watch TV or video right on your PC monitor. It incorporates 3D Stereo Surround Sound and Picture-in-Picture technology (so you can watch *Roswell* and *Smallville* at the same time), and you can even play console games through it. (But we don't recommend that.) (www.aver.com; $159.99)

SAITEK X36 AND LOGITECH WINGMAN EXTREME DIGITAL 3D FLIGHTSTICK

IF YOU'RE A HARDCORE flight-sim nut, Saitek's X36 was made for you. The stick (shown at right) comes with hat switches and buttons galore, and the included rudder system gives you all the added control you could ever hope for in a precision gaming peripheral. If you're just on the hunt for a "vanilla" stick suitable for piloting through the latest space-sim nebula, Logitech's WingMan Extreme Digital is the king of the hill. (www.saitek.com, $79.99; www.logitech.com, $39.95)

SGT. R. LEE ERMEY ACTION FIGURE

HOLY %$&*@!!! The R. Lee Ermey "Motivational Figure" is the greatest god-damn action figure of all time, and you pukes had better not forget it! (Ermey's the guy who played Gunnery Sgt. Hartman in the movie *Full Metal Jacket*, numbnuts.) He's intricately detailed, and barks out eight R-rated sayings that'll motivate you to finally do something with your worthless, pathetic life. (www.rleeermey.com; $40)

BLACK & WHITE

TAKE CONTROL OF IMPOSSIBLE creatures in this "God game" from legendary designer Peter Molyneux. As a deity watching over a primitive island, you raise a giant critter to behave any way you want, using the game's astounding AI to positively and negatively reinforce your pet monster. Will he be mousy or malevolent? It's your call. Endless fun for just about anyone. (www.bwgame.com; $44.99)

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 95%

BLACK & WHITE

NVIDIA PERSONAL CINEMA

TIVO IN YOUR PC, BABY! This kit from Compro Technology gives you a GeForce2 MX 400 card as well as NVIDIA's external AV box that allows you to watch *and* record TV shows just like TiVo. Plus, it offers fantastic DVD playback, powerful video-editing capabilities, and a very nice wireless remote. It's like an ATI All-in-Wonder card on steroids! (www.nvidia. com, www.comprousa.com; $199)

WORDS OF WARCRAFT

SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR game franchises have had their stories expanded into novellas, and they're not all terrible! *Pool of Radiance* (www.wizards.com; $6.99) and *Baldur's Gate* (www.wizards.com; $5.99) follow each game's story in great detail, and even give away a few clues to parts of the games you might have missed. The rich backstory to *Starcraft* has birthed a couple of novellas, including *Shadow of the Xel'naga* (www.simonsays. com; $6.50), that are written in digestible chapters for the younger audience. And if you're interested in *Warcraft* lore, check out *Lord of the Clans* (www.simonsays.com; 6.99) for the history of *Warcraft III*'s Orc warchief, Thrall. Also spawning books is *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri*, with a trilogy written by the game's story writer, Michael Ely. The second in the series, *Dragon Sun* (www.simonsays.com; $6.99), the follow-up to *Centauri Dawn*, is out now.

GHOST RECON

OPERATION FLASHPOINT, *Rogue Spear*, and *Delta Force* have nothing on this game. For realistic indoor or outdoor tactical action that's so intense you'll get shellshock, play Red Storm's *Ghost Recon*. With killer graphics, insane missions, authentic environmental sound effects, and furious multiplay, its tactical warfare is second to none. A must-play. (www.ubisoft.com; $49.99)

PC GAMER 93%
EDITORS' CHOICE

AFTERBURNER BY AVERY

SO, YOU'VE MIXED UP a rockin' disc with your new DM2 and saved your vacation pics to CD-ROM. Label them with the AfterBurner CD-labeling system and never lose track of an important disc ever again. Cleanly apply labels without wrinkles or bubbling. Perfect for anybody who owns a CD burner. (www.avery.com; $29.99)

COMICBASE 6.0

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING like our features editor, Chuck, you've got boxes upon boxes of comics piled up in your closet. Catalog your collection with this professional inventory system that tracks prices, condition, autographed copies, special editions — you name it! Also contains an industrial-strength search feature helpful for finding the first appearance of Bat-Mite. (www.human-computing.com/ComicBase. html; $129 Standard, $149 Deluxe)

SONICARE PLUS TOOTHBRUSH

YOU'RE HIGH-TECH AND PROUD of it. So why are you still using that same old grungy, manual toothbrush? Clean your teeth the *Star Trek* way, with an electric toothbrush from Philips that combines 31,000 strokes a minute with gentle sonic waves to help remove nearly twice as much plaque as a plain-Jane brush and 80 percent of coffee, tea, and tobacco stains. You weren't expecting that, were you? (www.sonicare.com; $119.95)

HOLIDAY GIFT PACKS GALORE

THE HOLIDAY SEASON ALWAYS MEANS one thing around the *PC Gamer* offices — an avalanche of great games from years past repackaged and reissued with extra goodies and gameplay. Keep your eyes peeled for *Collector's Edition Doom* ($19.99), which includes *The Ultimate Doom*, *Doom II*, and *Final Doom* all in one package, and is Windows-compatible. *Ultimate Quake* ($29.99) packs the entire *Quake* trilogy into one tiny box, and *Soldier of Fortune Platinum Edition* ($29.99) includes all-new multiplayer maps, a strategy guide, and a preview of *SOF2*. Cate Archer racks up the kills in the *No One Lives Forever Game of the Year Edition* ($29.95), which includes four new multiplayer maps, a music CD, and a full strategy guide. Visit the massive *Command & Conquer Theater of War*, a compilation with the original *C&C*, *Tiberian Sun*, *Red Alert*, and *Red Alert 2* in one heavy box. Or discover the world of Norrath with the *EverQuest Trilogy* ($39.99), a collection of the original game and its two expansion packs. If sports are your thing, then *Links Championship Edition* ($54.95) gives you *Links 2001*, the *Links Expansion Pack Vol. 1*, new courses, and a course converter.

NIKE PSA(PLAY 120

UP UNTIL NOW, trying to jog or exercise at the gym while listening to an MP3 player meant plenty of skips and possibly a damaged player. Well, this baby can handle the stress of all your romping and stomping. Designed specifically for the athletically (and musically) inclined, the psa[play 120 is packed with 64MB of onboard memory — roughly two hours of music. Small and light enough to clip onto your shorts or T-shirt — it's only 2.7 ounces! — it'll help you jam through any workout. (www.riohome.com; $199.95)

MAXTOR PERSONAL STORAGE 3000LE, 3000DV

FILLED UP BOTH your 20GB hard drives and your 6GB spare? No room to expand? Not so fast there, bub — with the Maxtor 3000LE ($199.95) and a USB port, you'll have 40GB of 5,400rpm external hard-drive space to store all those MP3s and digital pictures clogging up your system. (Hey, we won't ask where they came from...) Or, if you're looking for something on the fast side, with even more room to play, plug the 3000DV ($379.95, shown at right) into a 1394 data port and get a roomy 60GB of 7,200rpm hard-drive space! (No 1394 data port? No problem! The Maxtor 1394 PCI Adapter Card is only $49.95) Both units are whisper-quiet and pleasing to the eyes. Better still, installing a hard drive has never been easier. (www.maxtordirect.com)

HP JORNADA 560 SERIES

WANT THE BEST POCKET PC for your scratch right now? Then you need the HP Jornada 568. It's got a lightning-fast (by Pocket PC standards, anyway) 206MHz 32-bit Strong ARM processor, a flexible, easy-to-use D-pad, 64MB RAM, a 16-bit color screen, an upgrade-ready CompactFlash Type I expansion slot, and the new Microsoft PocketPC OS 2002. It's just what you need for making the seamless transition from the humdrum world of word-processing and email to demon-blasting in a game of *PocketDoom*. And at 6.1 ounces and a width of 0.68 inches, you really can take it with you, wherever you go. Comes with a built-in microphone, voice recorder, audio speaker, and a bundle of Microsoft utilities such as Word, Outlook, Excel, and Explorer. In short, it kicks boo-tay. (www.hp.com; $649)

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY SOUND CARD

FORGET ABOUT THE Sound Blaster Live! — Audigy is here, and it rocks! Just like the Live! line, Audigy comes in many different flavors: Gamer (includes full versions of *Deus Ex GOTY Edition* and *Giants*), MP3+ (bundled with a plethora of MP3 software), and Platinum (includes tons of software as well as a breakout box with extra inputs). (www.soundblaster.com; $99 for Gamer and MP3+, $199 for Platinum)

MAX PAYNE

CINEMATIC IN THE EXTREME, *Max Payne* is like a John Woo movie you can play through yourself. With his family murdered and his career in tatters, DEA agent Max Payne takes on the New York mob — *by himself*. Slo-mo gunfights and a bitterly dark, graphic novel–style storyline make Max an innovative and thoroughly cool action game. (http://maxpayne.godgames.com; $49.99)

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 90%

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE FIGURES

THE FIRST BATCH of these figures sold out faster than the proverbial March Hare. Now the second run is available for rabid fans of *American McGee's Alice*. Tweedle Dee, Tweedle Dum, Alice, and the White Rabbit are all on store shelves just waiting for the grubby, loving hands of gamers. (www.diamondcomics.com; $19.99–$24.99)

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

DVD DELIRIUM!

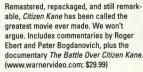### STAR WARS EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE

Yeah, Jar-Jar's still in it, but this two-DVD set is packed with a surprising number of extra features, including commentaries by George Lucas and crew, deleted scenes, interviews, and a documentary. (www.starwars.com; $30)

AKIRA: THE SPECIAL EDITION

Welcome to Neo-Tokyo. Motorcycle gangs rule the streets, and the Army's struggling to rein in a psychic power that threatens the city. This landmark anime classic comes to DVD with new English voiceovers, interviews, trailers, and tons of production materials. (www.akira2001.com; $39.98)

CITIZEN KANE

Remastered, repackaged, and still remarkable, *Citizen Kane* has been called the greatest movie ever made. We won't argue. Includes commentaries by Roger Ebert and Peter Bogdanovich, plus the documentary *The Battle Over Citizen Kane*. (www.warnervideo.com; $29.99)

BATMAN

The '60s cheesefest races home — same Bat-time, same Bat-channel. POW! Adam West and Burt Ward provide commentary. BAM! Tour the Batmobile. WHAMMO! Watch the featurette and trailers. BIFF! Robin tells us how his tights were like a sausage. Eww. (www.foxhome.com; $19.98)

THE SIMPSONS: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

Not their best season, but classics nonetheless. See Homer's first "D'oh!" and relive the days when Bart said "Eat my shorts." Has outtakes, an unseen episode, and commentary from Matt Groening and crew. (www.thesimpsonsdvd.com; $39.98)

HEATHERS

Mix fear, loathing, and dark satire and you have this tale of a high-school clique gone suicidal-ly wrong. Includes audio commentary, a documentary, and the screenplay's original ending. Christian Slater *is* Jack Nicholson! (www.anchorbayentertainment.com; $19.98)

THE MATRIX REVISITED

This DVD has everything you ever wanted to know about the making of *The Matrix* and still more after that. Go behind the scenes of the special effects, and learn about the coming sequels and even the Anime Matrix project. Whoa. (www.warnervideo.com; $19.98)

GO-VIDEO DVR-4000 DVD/VCR

VIDEOPHILES SIMPLY MUST HAVE both the crystal-clear clarity of a new-fangled DVD player *and* the recording capabilities of an old-time VCR in their home-entertainment center. Now you can have both in one convenient unit! Play DVDs and audio CDs with Dolby Digital/DTS output, and use the Hi-Fi Four-Head VCR to play or record any VHS tape. Finally, a product that lets us watch *Friends* DVDs and tape the newest episode at the same time. Sorry, pirate wanna-bes: only non–copy-protected DVD-to-VCR taping allowed. Arrr! (www.sensoryscience.com; $349)

KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 5.1 SPEAKERS

THESE 400-WATT (RMS) PC speakers offer balls-to-the-wall performance at a terrific price. Some high-end home-stereo systems we've heard don't sound nearly this good. Even if you own an older sound card that doesn't support a center-channel speaker, the 4.1 audio quality you'll get out of these puppies will rock you like a hurricane. (That's a good thing, folks — we promise). (www.klipsch.com; $399)

RED FACTION

A FUTURISTIC BATTLE against an evil corporation on Mars might sound like a tired game cliché (or *Total Recall*), but if you haven't tried it, you don't know what you're missing. Great level design, sweet multiplay, and the all-new Geo-Mod engine — which lets you *blast through* walls — help make this first-person shooter one of the most entertaining action games of the year. (www.thq.com; $39.99)

PC GAMER EXCELLENT **85%**

Made friends, made enemies, and almost died
—can't wait to go back!

Death Trip 2001

Me battling vile olthoi insects in Marae Lassel

My millionth pyreal coin—ah... the joy of being a monarch

~ claw from nearly lost arm

Note to Self: Olthoi breed deadlier than last month

Gauze from wound on nearly lost arm

Dusk lily from my 2nd trip to Marae Lassel

My house, Southern Osteth

My precious focusing stone allows me to, well, focus.

purchased in March

Weapons stored here: Quiddity Sword ~Pyreal Axe

Derethian Identity: warrior, allegiance monarch, trained in axe and sword

level 5 warrior

Hans Wrathman
Baishi, Southern Osteth, Dereth
blue brown Caucasian
220 lbs 6' 2"

friends in my allegiance, each chosen for a purpose, a specific skill

Blade Master

Enchantress

Life Mage

Archer

"hair of the beast"
— lock of hair
from my first
tumerock killing

Volcanic ash from
Obsidian Plain
— possibly the most
dangerous land
I've ever
visited

Another slain beast
(see claw, see hair)

~ Arrowhead from
vassal's first kill

ASHERON'S CALL
DARK MAJESTY

PC GAMER'S
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE

GAMER WEAR

ARE YOU ON A LIMITED budget? Game-related T-shirts and caps are can't-miss gifts. At *www.game-skins.com* you'll find a collection of stylish T-shirts (like the one shown here) for the discerning gamer — everything from W-A-S-D keyboard logos to slogans like "Campers Suck" will tell the world "Hey, I'm a savvy gamer. Love me." (www.game-skins.com; $18 each) Blizzard and RPG lovers will go nuts over the offerings at *www.blizzard.com*, including the *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction* shirt ($14.95) and the Blizzard beanie ($9.95) shown here. FPS devotees can't resist the *Quake III* merchandise at *www.activision.com* ($14.99 per item), or the old-school *Doom* and *Hexen* shirts at *www.idsoftware.com* ($16 each). *EverQuest* fans will don an *EQ* polo shirt and cap (www.store.station.com; $24.99, $19.99) with pride, while the *C&C* wear at *www.westwood.com* ($9.95–$29.95) will make aficionados NOD with delight [groan].

VISIONTEK XTASY 6964

NEED A NEW VIDEO CARD? Look no further than NVIDIA and VisionTek: they've joined forces to serve all your graphics-cards needs. If Santa has been extra generous and you've got the loot to spend, the Xtasy 6964, powered by NVIDIA's new GeForce3 Ti 500 chip, is top-of-the-line — it's as much as 15 percent faster than the original GeForce3! (www.visiontek.com; $349)

NHL 2002

The greatest PC sports series of all time fields a fast, frenetic game for a brand-new season. *NHL 2002* features gorgeous new breakaway-cam and goalie-cam views, as well as a much-improved face-mapping feature that lets you get your own fresh-faced mug "in the game." Sports fans can't ask for a better computer game, and we can't recommend it enough. (www.easports.ea.com; $39.95)

PC GAMER 83%
EXCELLENT

LOGITECH WINGMAN RUMBLE PAD

DO PC GAMERS USE gamepads anymore? Sure they do! If you need a new one, there's nothin' better than this sweet eight-button controller. It's comfortable to hold, fully configurable, and as its name implies, it rumbles like a mother in any game that supports force feedback. (www.logitech.com; $29.99
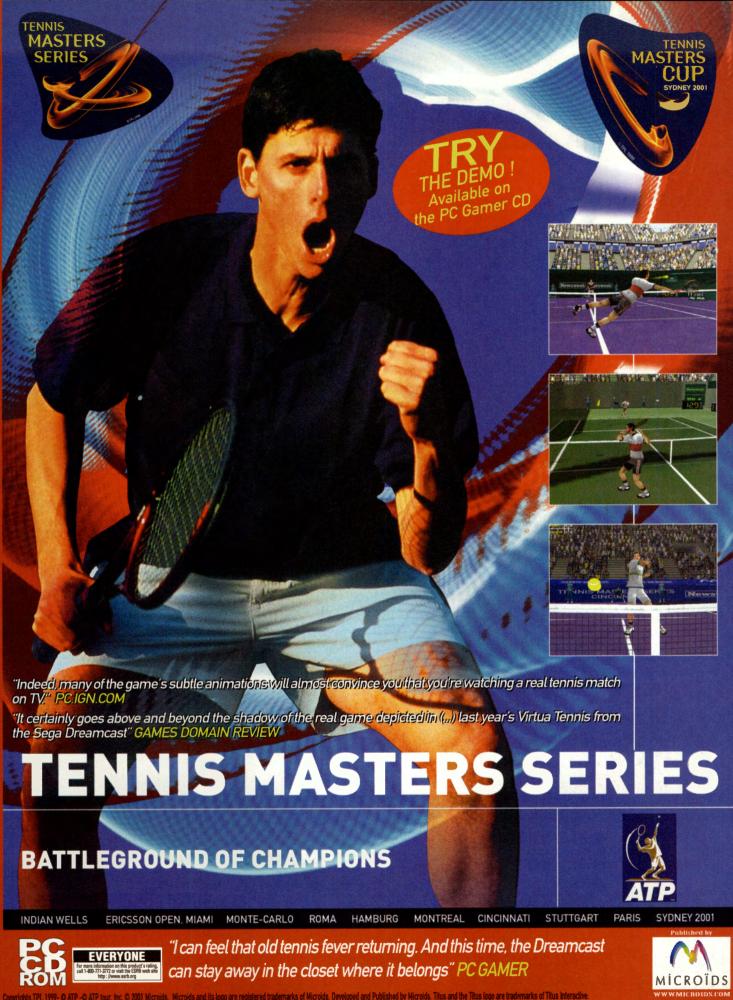
FUJIFILM FINEPIX 4800 ZOOM

DON'T PAY BIG BUCKS to develop snapshots: join the 21st century and get yourself this stylish digital camera capable of generating a 4.3 million–pixel image and 3x optical zoom. The FinePix 4800 fits comfortably in your hand, looks very cool doing so, and takes great, high-resolution pictures (such as the one used in this month's Killing Box column). It even records up to 80 seconds of AVI video or up to 30 minutes of audio. Waah, we want one… (www.fujifilm.com; $499)

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES

TENNIS MASTERS CUP SYDNEY 2001

TRY THE DEMO !
Available on the PC Gamer CD

"Indeed, many of the game's subtle animations will almost convince you that you're watching a real tennis match on TV." PC.IGN.COM

"It certainly goes above and beyond the shadow of the real game depicted in (...) last year's Virtua Tennis from the Sega Dreamcast" GAMES DOMAIN REVIEW

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES

BATTLEGROUND OF CHAMPIONS

ATP

INDIAN WELLS   ERICSSON OPEN. MIAMI   MONTE-CARLO   ROMA   HAMBURG   MONTREAL   CINCINNATI   STUTTGART   PARIS   SYDNEY 2001

PC CD ROM

EVERYONE
For more information on this product's rating, call 1-800-771-3772 or visit the ESRB web site http://www.esrb.org

"I can feel that old tennis fever returning. And this time, the Dreamcast can stay away in the closet where it belongs" PC GAMER

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WWW.MICROIDS.COM

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Step into the Future of EverQuest...

☾ Experience a massive 3D overhaul with high resolution player character models and completely re-textured zones, including the original world of Norrath and all previous expansions.

☾ See the world through a cat's-eye. Play as the new Vah Shir cat man race or BeastLord class.

☾ Mount up! Horses have now been tamed in the lands of Norrath. These noble steeds will carry you across the world at incredible speeds.

☾ The moonscape of Luclin adds over 24 new perilous zones to explore.

www.everquest.com

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ENTERTAINMENT

EverQuest
THE
SHADOWS OF LUCLIN

PC
CD
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TEEN
T
ESRB INTERACTIVE

The World's #1 Massively Multiplayer Online Game

RATING SYSTEM

Only the greatest games should receive our coveted Editors' Choice award, and our rating system reflects that. With a quick glance at the score box in each review, you can see where the game fits into the great gaming scheme of quality.

90% — **100%–90% EDITORS' CHOICE**
It's not easy to get here, and it's darn near impossible to get a score near 100%. A game in this range comes with our unqualified recommendation, and is an absolute must-buy.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

80% — **89%–80% EXCELLENT**
These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your purchase, and is likely a great example of its genre. This scoring range is also where we might reward specialist/niche games that are real breakthroughs in their own way.

70% — **79%–70% GOOD**
These are pretty good games that we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre, though it's a safe bet you can find better options.

60% — **69%–60% ABOVE AVERAGE**
Reasonable, above-average games. They might be worth buying, but they probably have a few significant flaws that limit their appeal.

50% — **59%–50% MERELY OKAY**
Very ordinary games. They're not completely worthless, but there are likely numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

40% — **49%–40% TOLERABLE**
Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep these games from falling into the abyss of the next category.

30% — **39%–0% DON'T BOTHER**
Just terrible. And the lower you go, the more worthless you get. Avoid these titles like the plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of the horsepower you'll *really* need.

Pro Gamers Are Becoming Jaded

Professional PC gaming used to be an innocent, delightful American pastime. Before gamers started signing huge multi-year contracts and soft-drink deals, they were just happy to be playing for a living.

But things have changed. Justin Wills, the reigning MVP of first-person shooters, recently signed a six-year endorsement deal with Snickers worth almost $12 million. Drafted out of high school, Wills brought a swagger and arrogance to the sport, which had previously resisted the negative aspects of other big sports. There was a time when Wills was happy to sign autographs for his young fans — but now, he charges kids $40 for every signature.

"Hey, man — that memorabilia gets sold on eBay," says Wills. "I gotta look out for No. 1."
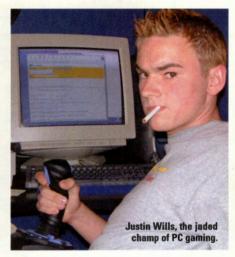
His fans say he's not paid to be Mr. Congeniality, but it's still a bit of a shame that PC gaming has gone the way of the other major sports. In a new era of big-money gamers playing for the paycheck, it's hard not to look back at sepia-toned memories of fanboys who played for the love of it, and who were amazed they had any fans at all.

As for Wills, he is unapologetic about his press coverage. "People think it's easy being me," he says, "but this isn't a dream life. There's constant pressure: the

Justin Wills, the jaded champ of PC gaming.

groupies, the contracts, the constant travel around the world to play computer games. I mean, it gets to you after a while." *[Note of disclosure: We paid Mr. Wills $500 for his time to do this interview, and he retains all rights to his likeness, shown here. It may not be reprinted in any other medium without his prior approval, and is available for $1,000 per use.]*

Here's hoping for a return to a more innocent time for PC gaming. Otherwise, our sport's "arrival in the big time" may mean the worse for the hobby we love.
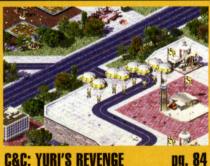
DON'T MISS...

CIVILIZATION III — pg. 64

It's been a very long wait for the legions of fans devoted to Sid Meier's classic *Civilization* series. Once again, it's up to you to build a civilization to stand the test of time. With new diplomacy rules and greatly enhanced global trade, this third game in the series is a tremendous arrival.

C&C: YURI'S REVENGE — pg. 84

Just when you thought you were safe from Yuri and his diabolical mind-control schemes, the villain of the *Red Alert* series has reappeared with an all-new, all-evil plot. Featuring tons of new units and clever new mind-control tactics, this huge add-on earns very high marks.

ESRB RATINGS In each issue, we'll be supplying the ESRB rating of each of the games we review on the Category line in the "Useful Info" box. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an industry association that provides parents with useful guides to the maturity level of the games available on store shelves. A rating of "E" (for "Everyone") indicates that a game is suitable for all ages. A game rated "T" (for Teen) may contain some objectionable material, and you should examine the box for specific content guidelines before purchasing it. An "M" rating (for "Mature") indicates that a game is not suitable for minors. "RP" indicates "Rating Pending."

Ghost Recon

I don't know but I've been told, *Ghost Recon*'s worth its weight in gold. Sound off. One, two...
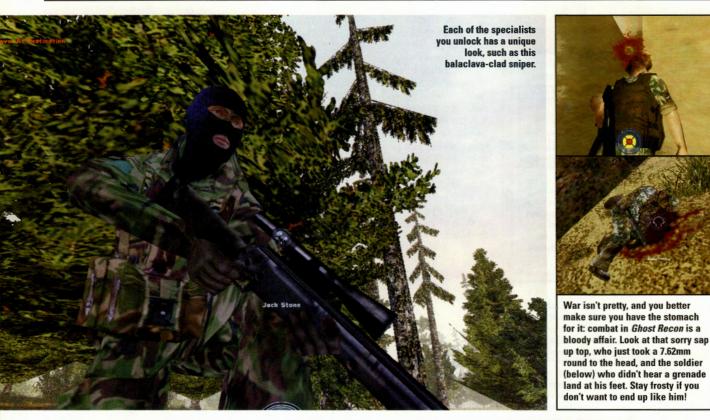
REAL-WORLD RECON

Mark Bowden's riveting book *Black Hawk Down* chronicles a Special Forces mission in Mogadishu, Somalia, that turned into one of the biggest firefights U.S. troops have been in since Vietnam. During the battle, a little over a hundred U.S. Army Rangers and Delta Force commandos fought off literally thousands of Somali militia.

Each of the specialists you unlock has a unique look, such as this balaclava-clad sniper.

War isn't pretty, and you better make sure you have the stomach for it: combat in *Ghost Recon* is a bloody affair. Look at that sorry sap up top, who just took a 7.62mm round to the head, and the soldier (below) who didn't hear a grenade land at his feet. Stay frosty if you don't want to end up like him!

L isten up, you miserable sacks of puke! I'm here to give you my expert evaluation of Red Storm's new realistic action game *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*. But before we get started, let's make sure we get one thing clear: you will respect my authority. I've been in the shit. I've cut my teeth in the trenches of *Rainbow Six, Rogue Spear, Operation Flashpoint*, and everything in-between. And I will go on record right now and say that *Ghost Recon* is hands down the best tactical shooter this veteran gamer has seen in his entire ass-kicking, name-taking, tango-stalking life. Get it?

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY	Action (M)
DEVELOPER	Red Storm
PUBLISHER	Ubi Soft
REQUIRED	PII 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB HD, 16MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 750, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	36

"WE DON'T NEED SISSY RAINBOWS"

It could be easy to dismiss *Ghost Recon* as just another *Rainbow Six* game. Do not make that mistake, maggot! This is a whole new battlefield. While some of the play mechanics and controls have carried over from Red Storm's previous games, every other aspect of *Ghost Recon* has been enhanced and better streamlined to kick the gameplay to unparalleled heights.
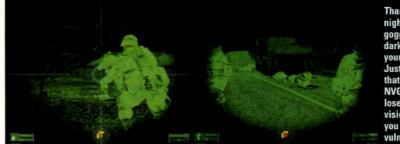
You're now part of the United States military, the greatest fighting force on Earth. You're the tip of the spear of America's might; you are the best of the best. And the best of the best are called "Ghosts" — elite commandos who make no sound before springing their lethal trap.

The story takes place seven years in the future. The Reds are at it again and are starting a Communist revolution in Russia. All hell is breaking loose and it's up to you and your team to fix the situation by assisting the embattled democratic government in subduing the Red insurrection in any way possible. Might is right.

"TOYS FOR BIG BOYS"

Because you're in the Army this time around, you won't have to worry about law-enforcement concerns like "rules of engagement" or "civilian hostages." The gear at your disposal reflects this new mentality, putting in your hands some of the most powerful handheld weapons ever devised. M203 grenade launchers, M249 SAW machine guns, claymore mines, and M136 anti-tank rockets are just some of the new toys available.

One of the highlights is the OICW (Objective Individual Combat Weapon). This high-tech piece of death-dealing badness is a marriage of a 5.56mm assault rifle and a 20mm semi-automatic grenade

Thanks to your night-vision goggles, the darkness is your friend. Just remember that with your NVGs on, you'll lose peripheral vision, making you more vulnerable.

Your threat indicator (the circle at the bottom center) is crucial for locating and eliminating enemy soldiers. Keep an eye on it at all times.

is to neutralize a rebel camp in a dense forest and capture their leader. From the drop zone, what you do next is completely up to you. Here's where you find out if you can lead worth a damn. Do you take out the rebel encampment first and then capture the leader hiding in the caves? Do you organize search-and-destroy teams to wipe out all resistance and then grab the leader? Don't screw up, soldier! This freedom sets the trend for the other levels. In one mission you're tasked with rescuing a downed F/A-18 pilot and his co-pilot from a rebel camp in the dead of night. The very next mission commands you to stop a Russkie armored advance through a mountainous pass.

Other missions include breaking into a POW camp to rescue captured comrades, sneaking into an enemy shipyard to blow up submarines, and clearing a mountain of all hostile elements. My favorite involved ambushing a tank column moving through a narrow valley. Few games have captured the tension and ferocity of war, but this mission comes about as close as you'll ever want to get. You'll quickly find yourself outnumbered by at least four-to-one, and if you're not smart the enemy will out-flank you and cut you to ribbons. Ammo will run low, your squadmates will die horrible deaths, tracers and machinegun fire will rake your positions, and that's *before* you encounter the tanks. And crying to mama won't help. A smart team leader will take to the high ground and catch the tanks in a withering blaze of crossfire, and then bring out the anti-tank missiles for the coup-de-grace.

Many missions will be pitched firefights in which you'll have to throw every round of ammo and every ounce of sweat into tactical thinking just to make it out alive. Lucky for you, Red Storm had the foresight to include a save-game option. You can save and load at any time, giving you and your boys a distinct tactical advantage. Use this often, you ape!

You can shoot through those tents.

Death animations are hard to watch.

With NVGs, fire can look like people.

launcher. Anyone facing the business end of an OICW knows he'll be dog food in an instant. Also in the mix are three different sniper rifles, including the Barret M82A1 .50 caliber, for when you really need to reach out and cap someone. (In real life, the M82A1 can hit a target up to a mile away. *Ghost Recon* maps get as big as 400 square meters.)

All the weapons are so effective, they're scary. The actual rate of fire for each rifle and machinegun is faithful to the real deal, and it shows when you rip off 200 rounds with the SAW. I've seen this puppy annihilate entire platoons. The blooming reticule from the past *Rainbow Six* games is back, but this time it allows

for even more realistic targeting. Now you'll be able to walk your fire onto enemy targets, and full-auto fire won't be a completely futile action. You'll actually be able to hit targets while laying on the trigger. It's time to rock 'n' roll!

"THE CALL OF DUTY"

Before I go on, let me hear your war cry! That's not a war cry! Arrrghhh! Now *that's* a war cry!

While in the service of our great country, you and your six-man team will be asked to achieve goals that would be near-impossible for the average soldier. The 15 missions are challenging and varied, and you'll never be bored. Your first assignment

"ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?"

Now listen up, soldier — this is important! As you progress through the campaign, each member of your squad who survives a mission will be awarded one Combat Point. Think of these as the equivalent of experience points you'd find with all the pixies, fairies, and fat little dwarves from those wussy roleplaying games. These are points for hard-as-nails military men.

Each of your troops has four attributes: Weapon, Stealth, Endurance, and

Without an M136 anti-tank rocket, you won't be able to do squat to enemy armor.

When the enemy downs you, they'll sometimes fire a few extra rounds to make sure you're dead.

Your boys will try to find cover wherever they are. Just don't leave them exposed in an open field.

Medals and combat points are awarded to your team after each successful mission.

Mounted machineguns are deadly, but they'll overheat when used for sustained fire.

Leadership. Weapon and Stealth are both self-explanatory. Endurance makes troops tougher and less likely to drop when hit, and also enables them to carry more gear without being encumbered.

The Leadership attribute requires more brainpower than you can muster, but I'll try to explain it to you sorry sods anyway. For every three points in leadership that a soldier has, he'll boost the skills of every soldier in his squad by one point. For instance, if Pvt. Doe has six Combat Points in leadership, the other five soldiers in his six-man squad will each gain two additional points to their Weapon, Stealth, and Endurance. However, if Pvt. Doe is killed in action, that boost in skills is lost.

The introduction of these Combat Points gives a renewed incentive to keep your men alive. It also adds a strategic element, since you have to decide which soldiers need boosts in which areas. Since the Combat Points are given only to surviving members of your team at the end of your mission, it's important to use these points wisely. Fresh recruits will fill in the gaps on your roster, but they'll be green, and you'll have to start building up their skills from scratch.

"THE SPECIALISTS"

Green recruits aren't the only soldiers added to your roster. As you accomplish missions and any of the optional objectives, highly trained specialists are assigned to your team. These guys are tough and come with plenty more Combat Points than most of the soldiers in your platoon. They each have distinct outfits and skills, and even unique weapons and tools.

Alas, there are some unrealistic requirements. Weapons such as the OICW and .50-caliber sniper rifle are available for use only by certain specialists, as are certain inventory items such as motion sensors. That's a gameplay decision I don't agree with. You're telling me these crack troops can't pick up a SAW and rock 'n' roll if necessary? Drop and give me twenty, Red Storm!

"I JUST LOVE IT WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER"

A good commander must know *how* to give orders and make sure that those are the *right* orders. Instead of planning missions ahead of time as in *Rainbow Six* and *Rogue Spear*, you'll be giving commands on the fly through a Command Map. This screen shows a top-down map of the

entire situation. From here you'll be able to issue waypoints to your squad and tell them when to shoot and where. And that's all you can do — nothing too complex. It's kept simple so even you pathetic grunts can figure it out.

Your Command Map also tells you the status of your troops, such as their current orders and whether they're alive or dead. Just like in *Rogue Spear,* if you happen to step into the path of an enemy round and eat it (it only takes one good shot to the head or the heart to end your miserable excuse for a life), you instantly take control of the next guy in your squad. You can also take direct control of any member of your squad anytime at the touch of a button. This option is very useful for precise positioning of your troops when setting up an ambush.

"KNOW YOURSELF, KNOW YOUR ENEMY EVEN BETTER"

If the Command Map control seems a little too simple, you're an outright moron. Your troops know when to take cover, and can handle themselves just fine in a firefight. Try not to issue orders that'll get them slaughtered and they'll make you proud.

Red Storm's attention to detail is phenomenal. In this enemy camp, you'll find Russian newspapers on the ground and toilet paper next to the outhouse.

THEM SQUIRRELS ARE GOOD EATIN'!

Listen up soldier! If the rigors of combat are getting to you and you feel like you're near the breaking point, try out this easter egg for some comic relief. It's about as funny as a USO comedy night, which isn't saying much, but it's better than nothing. To enter this code, bring up the console (the default key is the Enter button on the numberpad), type squirrelkite, and then hit the main Enter key. With this easter egg activated, you'll now launch squirrels from your grenade launcher. Also, whenever you open fire on a tree, dead squirrels will fall from the branches. It's good wholesome fun for the whole family. Now get back to the war, soldier!

In urban levels, expect high casualties. Check those windows for sneaky-bastard snipers!

Sadly, they're not all perfect. They do get stuck indoors and on stairs, forcing you to take direct control to get them moving again.

The enemy AI is just as smart, if not smarter. These guys are the hardest, brightest enemies you've ever faced. They understand the principles of cover and evasion. If they're under fire from your team, they'll take cover. If a sniper pins them down, they'll send units to flank you and kill your sniper from behind. Do not make the mistake of underestimating your opponents, or your journey home will be in a pine box!

"YOU'RE NOT ALONE"

Ghost Recon has support for up to 36 players in multiplay. The game comes with six multiplayer-only maps that are more fun than a night alone with your mother. Trust me, I know. These maps include a valley with a river running through the middle, a night map with a lone house on a hill, and other creative sneak and combat scenarios. Multiplayer modes include cooperative play, in which you and your buddies can play all the single-player missions together, and adversarial teamplay.

Hamburger Hill mode is basically King of the Hill, where one team tries to hold a certain area for as long as possible. Search and Rescue mode has up to four teams looking for three hostages scattered across the map; the objective is to be the first team to rescue all three hostages. *Ghost* also includes the standard deathmatch and team-deathmatch scenarios. One brilliant touch is that you can play team deathmatch and have each human player control an AI squad. All the single-player maps are available for multiplay as well, and the six multiplayer-only maps look and play beautifully.

Setting up a game is every bit as easy as it was in *Rogue Spear*. Few moments have topped going into a decimated battlefield with five of your best buddies on your team. Actual tactics come into use, flanking maneuvers are paramount, and covering fire is a necessity. My only gripe is that in cooperative play, you can have only six men on a team. For all other modes, you can have up to the full 36-player festival of destruction.

HEALTHY

Enemy soldiers won't just sit in the open when they're out of ammo. They'll actually fall back to a covered location to reload, and then engage you from this protected spot.

"KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN AT ALL TIMES"

Environmental awareness is the key to surviving combat: if you know where your enemy is, you'll be able to kill him. Red Storm has really outdone itself in this regard with *Ghost Recon*. Trees and bushes rustle and sway in the wind, rain splatters off rooftops, and explosions look and sound as deadly as they should. If I could, I'd recommend the sound-effects team at Red Storm for a special commendation. Likewise, all the units are superbly detailed, especially the snipers in their ghillie suits. Get one into a bush and the enemy will never know what hit them.

The graphics are so detailed, you'll feel like you're in the middle of a war movie. One second you're admiring the beauty and serenity of a forest, and the next moment the sky's ablaze with explosions and gunfire, and you're in the middle of the biggest firefight of your life.

"BEST OF THE BEST"

Consider that Editors' Choice a badge of honor. *Ghost Recon* has officially become my favorite tactical action game of all time. It's easily the best-looking and best-sounding game ever to come from those boys in North Carolina. Once again, Red Storm has impressed me with its game design, and that makes me happy. So happy, in fact, that Red Storm can come over to my house and date my sister any day as far as I'm concerned. You, on the other hand, will be too busy trying to unlock all the specialists. But you owe it to your strategic, military-minded self to pick this one up. It's a doozy.
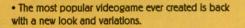
— *Sgt. Li C. Kuo*

Foliage makes excellent visual cover, but it won't stop enemy bullets.

Having a SAW machinegun equipped is vital for cover-and-advance tactics.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Spectacular sound; great mission variety; intense gameplay. Overall, a brilliant piece of work.

LOWS: Steep system requirements; weapon-use restrictions; team AI still gets stuck.

BOTTOM LINE: It's Red Storm's best game yet, and easily beats *Operation Flashpoint*.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE **93%**

Tetris® is back.

If you loved it then, you'll love it even more now.

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- The most popular videogame ever created is back with a new look and variations.

- Exciting challenges await you with 6 variations of Tetris in Story Mode and Arcade Mode, including the all new Hot-Line Tetris, Cascade Tetris and Fusion Tetris.

TETRIS WORLDS

- Lush 3D worlds evolve and animate as a reward for clearing lines and reaching goals. See what each world is meant to look like.

- Enjoy Tetris Worlds together when up to four people play to see who is the best.
(Two players only on GameBoy®Advance)

Deceptively simple, completely addictive.

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX

Already a pro at skateboarding? Try out the two-wheeled version of this street spectacle.

B ack when I was 12 or so, I would gather up the kiddies from around the neighborhood and make them lay down on the sidewalk. Then, after setting up a rudimentary and rickety ramp, I'd get a good start on my bike and jump over them. Someday, someone will make a game that re-creates the thrill of sailing over a pack of screaming 8-year-olds as they empty their bladders. But until that glorious day arrives, I'll have to make do with *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX.*

Settling for this pretty entertaining game isn't a bad thing. Powered by a modified version of Neversoft's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* game engine, *Mat Hoffman* lets you ride as one of eight BMX pros across eight courses. Each course has specific objectives you must complete in the allotted time, and if you're successful, you'll unlock additional tracks and better equipment for your bike.

The tracks are well-designed, and afford a lot of opportunities to pull off crazy stunts. The real meat lies in trying to beat a course's high score, and this is

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Extreme sports (E)
DEVELOPER Gray Matter
PUBLISHER Activision
REQUIRED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 550MB HD, 8MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PII 400, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 2

The more spins you successfully complete, the more points you'll get.

Billy just realized that he forgot to put on his "protective" cup. Youch!

where the game really shines. Catching huge air and pulling off a Superman One-Hander is an absolute blast, as is trying to land a flurry of stunts as time expires. (The Superman One-Hander is truly insane. In the air, you hold onto the handle with one hand while your body extends out away from the bike.)

Other tricks include the Rocket Queen (which may be the only bike stunt named after a Guns N' Roses song) and the Bar Hop, a truly death-defying maneuver in which you catch air, jump up on the handlebar, and pose in mid-air before (hopefully) returning to your seat.

The bike tracks include a London Underground scene, a construction yard, and a treatment plant. The Blue Torch

Competition is a great track — one continuous course with a ton of ramps. It's the one that feels most like a challenge race. It was definitely my favorite — you keep moving forward and have plenty of opportunities for stunts. Be sure to bring along a gamepad for optimal control.

Sadly, there are too many instances where the game's flaws reach out and smack you upside the head. The collision detection is seriously messed up, and it's common to get trapped in or on structures. Adding to the frustration is that too often you'll crash when landing, even though you're lined up perfectly with the ramp. If you're willing to tolerate those quibbles and some below-average console graphics, *Mat Hoffman* is good fun.

With a great soundtrack of underground ska and rock, you'll never be at a loss for good tunes. There's also a track editor so the really committed can design their own stunt courses, and dual-player LAN multiplay lets you challenge a friend to a high-score battle.

Obviously, Activision's *Mat Hoffman* invites comparison to the company's earlier blockbuster *Tony Hawk.* Does it measure up to the high standard of its forefather? Well, not entirely, but then again, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* is one of the best console-to-PC ports in history. Nevertheless, *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* is definitely a game that will satisfy fans of the genre *Tony* created.

— *William Harms*

SCORE 0
SPECIAL
1:55
SKATELITE

360 SUPERMAN + BIG AIR!!
1354 X3

This big air looks like it'll finish with a big ouch!

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Tons of cool stunts and tricks; some really fun tracks; good soundtrack.

LOWS: Graphics are console-port blocky; the collision detection could use lots of work.

BOTTOM LINE: A pretty good serving of BMX goodness for fans of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater.*

PC GAMER 71%
GOOD

Sid Meier's Civilization III

One of the PC's greatest franchises serves up more classic strategizing.

When Sid Meier and his merry band of gaming geniuses left MicroProse in 1996 and formed Firaxis Games, any chance of a proper sequel to *Civilization II* seemed to be nothing more than a glorious pipe dream. After all, the license was caught up in a mess of lawsuits, and Firaxis was hard at work on *Alpha Centauri*, a game that many folks thought would be the closest we'd ever get to a true extension of the *Civilization* series.

But if there's one thing you can be sure that lawyers understand, it's greenbacks, so an agreement was cobbled together that would let everyone involved in this classic franchise make bucket loads of 'em. And though the wait has been extremely long, the end result makes it worthwhile: *Civilization III* is a fantastic game that takes the core gameplay of *Civ II* and pushes it in new, exciting directions.

The basic premise behind *Civ III* remains unchanged from the previous games — pick one of 16 civilizations and build from the stone age to the modern age without being destroyed by the other civilizations. Each of the civs has different strengths and starting advantages, which lets you pick one that complements your playing style. Your ultimate goal is one of five victory conditions, including Diplomatic Victory, Space Victory, and the new Cultural Victory. If your goal is militaristic global domination, for example, then playing as the hated Germans makes good sense. *[Haw-haw — take that, krauts! — Ed.]*

That said, the game's received numerous and substantial changes (see sidebar

for info on some of them) that directly impact how it's played. One of the largest tweaks is the introduction of a culture rating determined by such factors as how many wonders you've built and how many city improvements you've constructed.

For example, as your cultural influence increases, nearby towns from a civilization with a weaker culture will rebel and join your civilization. (On the flip side, if your culture is weak, your cities will rebel and leave your empire.) The strength of your culture also impacts relationships with foreign leaders.

Though culture is a cool new feature, I did find myself mildly annoyed with it occa-

Most people don't play turn-based games for the graphics, but in this case they're easy on the eyes.

You can define the parameters of each randomly created world. Still, there should've been an editor.

You can get a good look at your achievements by bringing up this awesome City View.

WHAT'S NEW?

Firaxis has added or changed several key gameplay elements, including the following:

UNITS Each unit now has a health bar: the shields of *Civ II* are gone. In addition, units are now supported with the gold in your treasury, not by shields or food.

WAR WEARINESS This new feature impacts representative governments. If you wage war for an extended period of time, your people will get ticked off and trash your cities. If the war keeps dragging on, you can fall into anarchy.

TRADING Caravans are no longer required. All trade is handled automatically if you have roads, a harbor, or an airport. All trade agreements are created in the diplomacy screen.

WONDERS There are now two types of wonders: Great and Small. Only one civilization can build Great Wonders, so if you construct the Great Wall first, everyone else is out of luck. But anyone can build Small Wonders, regardless of whether or not another civilization has already built them.

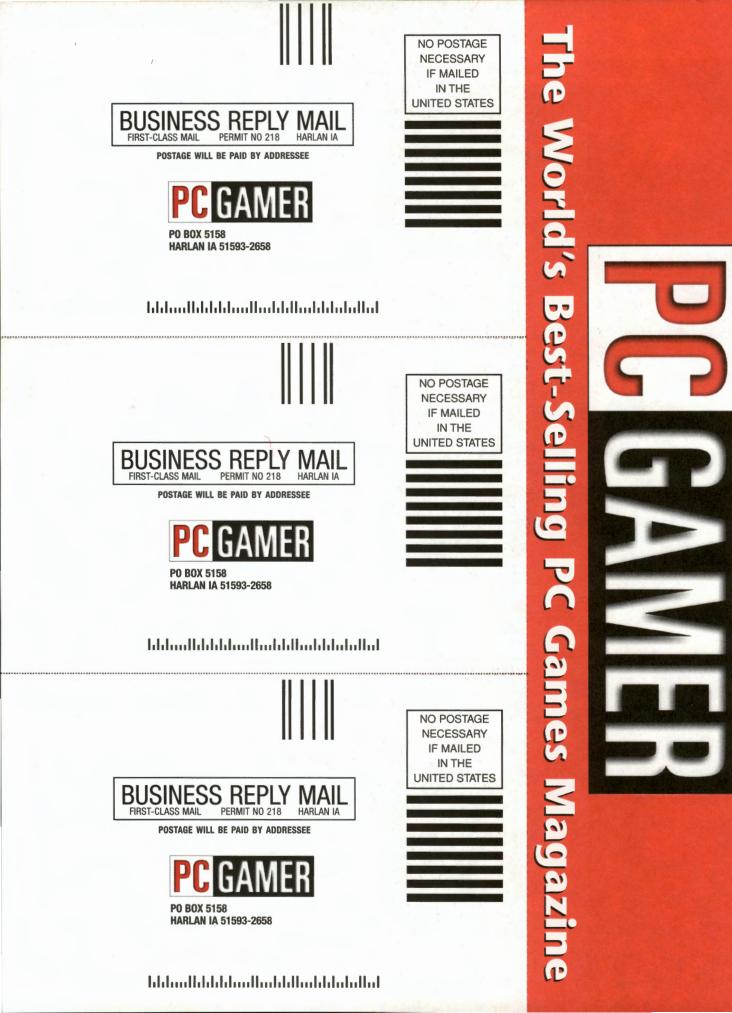You'd think that my tanks would just roll over those Chinese horsemen. Sadly, that isn't the case.

sionally, especially when occupying conquered enemy cities. Too often, especially on maps made up of islands, I would lose conquered cities — and any military units stationed there — simply because I had no cultural influence in the area. The result was wars that dragged out longer than I would've liked. *[That's called reality, Billy. Look it up under the history chapter titled "Vietnam." — Ed.]*

Another substantial change that *Civ III* introduces involves securing raw materials. Forever gone are the days when you could simply research "motorized transportation" and start pumping out tanks. Now, in order to build certain units, you'll need a supply of raw materials such as oil, rubber, or uranium. And since raw materials don't appear on the map until the corresponding technology is researched, it's possible to find yourself with lots of researched technologies but no way to build advanced units.

This gameplay change is a touch of genius because it means you're forced to negotiate with other civilizations for raw materials that aren't readily available in your own backyard. International trade *matters* now. And if you anger the wrong civilization, they'll try to negotiate trade embargoes against you and cut your supply of raw materials. During a war, you can destroy any enemy roads or railroad tracks that connect a civilization to vital raw materials and slowly take them out by attrition, which adds more strategic depth to the conflicts.

As for the actual gameplay, it's flat-out brilliant. The AI-powered civilizations do a great job of fending you off, especially on the diplomatic front. In one instance, after waging war with China for several turns, I negotiated a peace treaty so I could reinforce my positions. When I re-declared war on China a short time later, I was shocked — and amazed, to be honest — to find that China had used the lull to negotiate mutual protection agreements with several other civilizations. When I re-declared war on China, the other groups

all declared war on me. Suddenly I was fighting a war against six civilizations and being invaded on all fronts. Needless to say, I didn't last too long, but I was damn impressed with the computer's savvy.

Unfortunately, *Civ III* is tripped up by a few omissions. For one, it lacks a multiplayer mode (*Civ II* didn't have one, but *Alpha Centauri* did). It also doesn't include much documentation to help you use the scenario editor — though this time the editor includes tweakable government forms, something that's fun to play around with.

My only other substantial complaint has to do with unit balancing — specifically, swordsmen and pikemen destroying my tanks. Attacking tanks with swords

didn't work for the Polish during World War II, and it shouldn't work here. I really hope this issue is addressed in a patch, because if I'm able to get ahead of the other civilizations, I want to experience the joy of my tanks thoroughly thrashing their puny pikemen. In fact, I should be able to hear my tank treads grinding their bones to dust!

Those minor complaints aside, what makes *Civ III* such a great game is that, just like *Civ II*, it blends a simple start with a vast array of options and pulls them together into a detailed, compelling, and seamless gaming experience. This is one game that you can't afford to miss.

— William Harms

If your people tire of your antics, they'll get pissed and start rioting. Those fools.

SCIENCE ADVISOR

With the overhauled interface, you can now access all your advisors through this one screen.

Military Advisor

Domestic Advisor

FAR LEFT: If your culture rating runs low, an enemy can capture one of your cities without using military force. **LEFT:** Your advisors update you on all aspects of your empire.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fabulous strategy elements; savvy AI; great new features.

LOWS: No multiplayer options; some units aren't properly balanced (e.g., swords can destroy tanks).
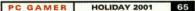
BOTTOM LINE: It's not a revolutionary leap forward, but it's still an absolute joy to play.

PC GAMER
EDITORS' CHOICE

92%

ENTER AN EPIC 500,000 YEARS IN THE MAKING.

CREATE, BUILD AND LEAD A CIVILIZATION

TO TRANSCEND THE AGES AND DOMINATE THE WORLD.

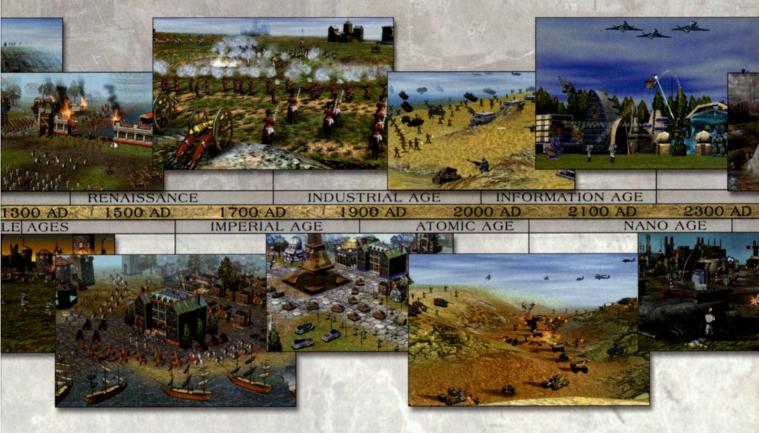HISTORY IS YOUR CANVAS. EARTH IS YOUR EMPIRE.

PREHISTORIC AGE
500,000 BC   25,000

AGE
900 AD

The Weakest Link

Anne Robinson's pre–*Weakest Link* claim to fame was fronting the consumer advocacy TV show *Watchdog* in the UK. She pissed people off back then by getting in Corporate Britain's face when cowboy plumbers screwed grandma out of her life savings. So her turn as the *Weakest Link*'s hard-faced, dismissive host evidently wasn't a stretch, and in the inevitable game conversion, she's firing on all those cheesy cylinders with voiceovers and the occasional video clip of lame put-downs.

Thing is, *The Weakest Link* is actually a good quiz show in spite of its crass style. It has more questions than *Millionaire*, a
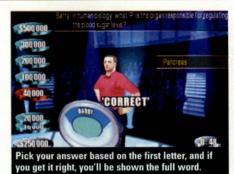
You are…the weakest collection of square-headed, blocky polygons. Goodbye.

faster pace, and an entertaining blend of team sentiment and selfish strategy. And this PC game is a great re-creation of those features, complete with an accurate rendering of the set and the music. If offers an impressive library of 6,000 questions — though it's obvious that the same game will be distributed in the U.S. and the UK, as a few of the questions are purely UK-focused ("What English county is Chelmsford in?" …England has counties?) while others are U.S.-specific. This regionalism throws virtually unanswerable wild cards into what's generally a sharp, challenging collection.

Impressively, unlike *Millionaire*'s multiple-guess format, *Weakest Link* uses a four-answer system to each question, but gives you only the first letter of the answer. So you have a bit of a clue, but not the full answer. If that's still too tough, you can use sliders to adjust the frequency of questions in your weaker categories.

Of course, there's all the spectacle of voting off the other six contestants, which can be played by AI characters of three smartness levels, or by other players at the same PC. Less welcome is the crappiness of awful polygonal people shaking their heads in despair.

Pick your answer based on the first letter, and if you get it right, you'll be shown the full word.

Though it would have been nice to drop my own face into the game, the depth in playing championship mode with tougher opponents and greater prize money is pretty surprising. Big fans of the show will love it, and it's a good quiz game by any standards. Just lower the volume and skip past as many video interludes as possible, and enjoy the surprisingly well-balanced mental gymnastics.
— *Rob Smith*

PC GAMER **73%** GOOD

The Typing of the Dead

I have a tool of death and destruction on my desk: It's a 104-key Microsoft Natural keyboard with an off-white polymer frame and a USB connection. In the hands of a skilled operator such as myself, it can dish out 45 zombie-destroying words a minute. Those advocates at the NRA have nothing on this bad boy.

This fine piece of precision-made firepower is the weapon of choice for *The Typing of the Dead*, a Dreamcast port for the PC. The premise is simple: Type or die.

Get ready for a big challenge if you don't already know how to type.

And if you want to learn how to type, you won't find an educational product out there that's anywhere near as fun.

Typing of the Dead is simply a port of the lightgun arcade game *House of the Dead 2*, only the lightgun has been replaced by your keyboard. Rather than shooting zombies, you type in words that appear on the screen. Each correct letter equals a hit, and each typo equals a miss.

Besides the new "control scheme," *Typing* is a carbon copy of the *House 2* coin-op, bad voice-acting and all. You're part of a group of do-gooders who must fight off a zombie infestation in a small city.

Sega's added in plenty of typing drills and extra modes, such as one where you fight all the bosses in the game, one after another. Some of the words you'll have to type are a bit odd: I've seen "unisex codpiece," "brain douche," and "male corset."

You gotta know your ABCs to make these zombies go away.

The game's genuinely fun — for the first 10 minutes or so, before it gets repetitive. Still, I'd rather play this than *Mavis Beacon Typing* any day.
— *Li C. Kuo*

PC GAMER **69%** ABOVE AVERAGE

NAME: MARINE   FILE # 79/3147
ORIGIN: Earth
CAUSE OF DEATH: Thoracic
vertebrae severed at T5 & T6 by
massive projectile. Also
sustained intense trauma to
major organs.

Vegas Fever: Winner Takes All

CATEGORY Gambling (E)   **DEVELOPER** Interactive Solutions   **PUBLISHER** Encore Software   **REQUIRED** P200, 32MB RAM, 120MB HD   **WE RECOMMEND** PII 350   **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

Never before has such a comprehensive compilation of Vegas favorites been available in one package. *Vegas Fever*, like Sierra's *Hoyle Casino*, bundles together a load of Vegas games — though it lacks the casino presentation.

It's all here, from slots to poker, blackjack to roulette, and even video keno among the 22 options (though many games are just slots variations). Even the lesser-known games make an appearance, so if you're a fan of — or have even heard of — Omaha or Sic Bo, you won't be disappointed.

Unfortunately, *Fever* doesn't provide any tutorials for any of the games, so if

Video slots are but one of the many slots variations.

you don't know how to play, you'll have to make do with simple instructions on an included PDF file.

The casino is presented in a single rendered image, so all the action can be accessed from one place. No fancy Vegas theme here: all the rendered graphics are presented in a generic red-and-green scheme. It would've been nice to have some sounds or animations in the background to provide a real Vegas feel. As it stands, it's not much different from Yahoo online games. *[Yahoo games…shudder… — Ed.]*

Speaking of online play, *Vegas Fever* lets you challenge other players in most of the games, and contains a lounge area where you can chat and relax — skimpily clothed waitresses not included. Furthermore, an online Sports Book lets you make bets on real-world sports games (for fun, of course). You can track college and professional competitions, and follow up-to-date information about team lineups and injuries.

Come on, red…Come on, red…Please…Please…NOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!

Vegas Fever ultimately doesn't offer much over what you can find online. And without tutorials, it probably won't make you a better gambler. At least with this game, the money you lose won't be real.
— *Norman Chan*

PC GAMER **MERELY OKAY** **58%**

Hoyle Casino 2002

CATEGORY Gambling (E)   **DEVELOPER** Sierra   **PUBLISHER** Sierra   **REQUIRED** P133, 16MB RAM, 135MB HD   **WE RECOMMEND** P200   **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

Finally, you can quell your crippling gambling disorder in the comfort of your own home. Sierra's latest version of *Hoyle Casino* attempts to deliver an entire "casino experience," rather than just the games by themselves. Short of having a large bouncer kick your ass out after you go broke, *Hoyle Casino* has got it all.

Hit me! Various versions of blackjack will entertain even veteran players.

As your path to riches commences, you're given the option of choosing your appearance, right down to creating your own custom face. Upon entering the casino, you get a bird's-eye view of the playing floor.
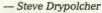
With 14 different games to play, you have a bigger selection than many *real* casinos. From keno to horse racing, you have numerous ways to make your virtual bank foreclose on your virtual house. While I've never found slots exciting, the poker and blackjack leave little to be desired. Depending on the difficulty of your opponents, poker can be a real blast to play — *Hoyle* is probably the best PC game for dedicated "rounders."

At nearly every game table, you'll be playing alongside a variety of competitors with a dis-

tinct look, attitude, and style of playing. While this diversity can add an interesting element to gameplay, it also means you're forced to listen to their annoying, nonsensical banter every 30 seconds. Luckily, there's an option to turn that off.

For novices who have absolutely no idea how to play some of these games, *Hoyle Casino* includes an extremely helpful tutorial system. While you play, it can give you hints as to what you should do to maximize your winnings and minimize your losses. This feature is extremely helpful, since surely only people with a gambling problem will know how to play *all* the games.

While very few major changes have been made from last year's version, *Hoyle Casino* is still *the* game to buy for the complete casino experience.
— *Steve Drypolcher*

PC GAMER **GOOD** **73%**

NAME: PREDATOR   FILE# 925741
ORIGIN: Unknown
CAUSE OF DEATH: Massive blood
loss due to decapitation. Acid
burns noted on torso.

Real War

Real bad, real frustrating, and...well, you get the picture.

I'm getting tired of real-time strategy games stuck in the never-never land of mind control and ore gathering. Imagine my excitement, then, when I got my hands on *Real War*. Here, at last, was a realistic RTS where supply lines need defending and the units are matched to real-life counterparts. And for that extra slice of officialdom, the whole affair is based on a training game developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Alas, that anticipation quickly vanished in a haze of spent gunpowder as *Real War* revealed itself to be just another tiresome and unimaginative RTS. It's a real shame.

Set in all-too-prescient near future, *Real War* chronicles the conflict between the United States and a fictional terrorist group known as the Independent Liberation Army (ILA). The units in the game are all based on real-world vehicles and weapons, and as such both sides in the conflict have access to pretty much the same implements of destruction.

One would imagine that any game based on something developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would feature a wide variety of combat scenarios. Well, keep imagining. Most of the missions found here are strictly "build base, survive initial attack, and launch offensive against the enemy." You get a few deviations here and there, but none of them are particularly intriguing or creative, and some of the 12 missions for each of the two sides last only two or three minutes. For instance, in one ILA mission, your objective is to construct a scud missile launcher. So I did. And the mission ended successfully. Huh?

Compounding this shallow gameplay is some of the most laughable AI and pathfinding ever to soil an RTS game. Mine-laying trucks will drive into the mines they just set, even when you tell them to go to an open area. Newly constructed units will wander away from their

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Real-time strategy (T)
DEVELOPER Rival Interactive
PUBLISHER Simon & Schuster
REQUIRED PII 333, 64MB RAM, 150MB HD, 8MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 600MB HD, 16MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 4

The game's graphics are pretty blah, with the exception of the fiery, powerful explosions. Die, terrorist scum!

Some missions are played from both sides. As the U.S., you'll wreck a missile launcher you built as the ILA.

No matter how often I tell these helicopters to land, they keep doing flips in the air.

Revealed! The Navy's top-secret weapon: the amphibious destroyer.

pre-defined waypoint. Your boys will let an enemy roll right past them without firing a shot, and your fighter jets will do evasive maneuvers that lead them right back into the jaws of the enemy's air defenses.

Another major problem is that if you load a saved game from an earlier point in the game, your progress in the campaign is permanently reset to show your progress at the point of the saved game. Brilliant.

The multiplayer mode is decent enough, but lacks any substantial depth. The included maps are rather standard fare, and there's no option to introduce computer-controlled opponents into the mix. And if you play the game at higher resolutions, large conflicts will slow to a crawl, even when you're playing over a LAN. This slowdown is even more astonishing given the bland and simple graphics.

Real War does offer a few glimmers of hope here and there. Resources are handled realistically — choppers carry in supplies,

for example — and simply playing with the real-life hardware and weapons is very cool. Watching an American B-2 level an ILA base is a thing of beauty, and managing a combined air-sea-ground attack force is a lot of fun when it results in total victory.

Unfortunately, the drab mission design and horrific AI mark *Real War* for a quick trip to the ash-heap of military history.

— *William Harms*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Real-life units are cool; realistic supply and resources; it's fun nuking terrorists.

LOWS: Insufferable AI; dull graphics; missions are repetitive and very poorly designed.

BOTTOM LINE: Three years of development for this? What a waste.

PC GAMER 41%
TOLERABLE

Recognize your mortality.

NAME: ALIEN   FILE# 54/2/3/6
ORIGIN: LV-1201
CAUSE OF DEATH: Multiple high
caliber gun shot wounds
delivered at close range to
upper chest and facial area.

Kill or be killed as three different species: Alien. Predator. Human. Each with new weapons and capabilities in a single storyline told from three perspectives. Intense action. With graphically stunning environments. Blinking just became a liability.

ALIENS VERSUS 2 PREDATOR

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avp2.sierra.com

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take out radar

0800   Command squad in beachhead assault

1000   Fly Cobra attack helicopter to

soften up enemy positions

1300   Drive civilian vehicle through checkpoint

1500   Pilot and command a platoon of

M1A1 tanks to take enemy stronghold

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Go to war in the most realistic combat experience ever, engaging in single-player and squad-based, non-linear campaigns.
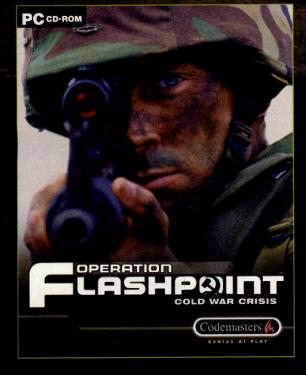
Operate over 30 authentic military and civilian vehicles, plus aircraft in immense 3-D environments totaling 100 square km.

Create and share missions with the built-in Mission Editor and wage war online in multiplayer action via LAN or Internet.

THIS IS WAR.

PC CD-ROM

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"Operation Flashpoint is a perfect blend between fun and realism."
PC GAMER

Conflict Zone

CATEGORY Real-time strategy (T) **DEVELOPER** MASA **PUBLISHER** Ubi Soft **REQUIRED** PII 400, 128MB RAM, 600MB HD, 8MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 32MB 3D card **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

By now, you have a very routine image in mind when someone rattles off the letters "RTS:" That image looks a lot like *Conflict Zone*.

The setting: a "good guy" International Corps for Peace squares off against GHOST, an organization controlled by multinational corporations. They fight with the standard futuristic units and tech trees. (And interestingly, the good guys' acronym, ICP, happens to be the abbreviation for the non-PC thrash band Insane Clown Posse.)

Conflict Zone tries to set itself apart by focusing on two concepts largely

Many of the maps are built around "meatgrinder passages" such as this one.

untouched in previous games: the effects of conflict on the civilian population, and the role the media plays in how a conflict is perceived and eventually plays out.

As an ICP commander, your ability to build units depends on how many civvies you can ferry from their war-torn villages back to refugee camps at your base. GHOST commanders can build "media centers" and dispense propaganda to help drive up production. It's a cool idea, but it's handled so abstractly that the net effect is the same as harvesting any other resource. It's almost like the *Soylent Green* of RTS gaming: instead of playing up the plight of civilians, they become essentially nothing more than grist for the production mill.

As you progress in the campaign, you're assigned commanders who help administer some of the logistical headaches. But the vehicles they build are AI-controlled unless otherwise specified, and these commanders are worthless on offense. It's another cool idea not well-realized.

But the biggest problem in *Conflict Zone* is map design. Time after time after time, you'll find that your forces *must* scoot through a tiny passage (or one of several

The 3D view can be rotated, tilted, and panned, but the overhead view allows optimal unit control.

tiny passages) to attack the enemy. Imagine the toll-booth-in-the-desert scene in *Blazing Saddles*, and you'll have a good idea what's going on here. It results in tiresome strategies and predictable battles.

Conflict Zone earns points for fresh thinking, but loses them again amid a catalog of weak implementation.

— *Stephen Poole*

PC GAMER **ABOVE AVERAGE** **60%**

Ultimate Ride

CATEGORY Simulation (E) **DEVELOPER** Imagineering **PUBLISHER** Disney Interactive **REQUIRED** PII 333, 32MB RAM, 64MB HD, 8MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 128MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

Designing roller coasters has been one of my passions since *Disney's Coaster* (1993). While Disney's follow-up isn't quite the ultimate ride, it's no dud.

You can make three types of coasters — steel, wooden, or hanging — in mission mode or free-form mode. Only traditional out-and-back coasters are available; no shuttle loops, boomerangs, or reverse freefalls here.

Construction is where *Ultimate Ride* shines. Designing a coaster has never been easier, and the circuit-closing auto-finish feature is a stroke of genius. Plus, any

Ride in first- or third-person mode, enjoying the game's crisp 3D graphics.
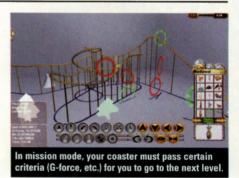
coaster you build can be uploaded to the *Ultimate Ride* website for others to enjoy.

But while the cornerstone of the game — building coasters — is solid, numerous limitations kept me from enjoying it more. For one, the developers have spent too much time in Fantasyland. *Ride* ships with four environments — a mountainous region, an asteroid, an underground cavern, and a holodeck-style grid. Creative settings, but where are the forest, lake, and theme-park surroundings normally associated with roller coasters?

I'd have liked the option to alter the terrain, allowing for tunneling underground or through hills. (No man-made tunnels are included, either.) Instead, you're given a collection of enormous animated props with medieval, space, or futuristic themes to place around your ride. Natural props are limited to two types of trees — small and large.

My biggest issue is the ride physics. Track types all behave exactly the same, except for a jittery camera view on woodies. Trains glide up lift hills and slowly descend drops, even when the speedometer reads 50mph.

The sound effects are unnaturally subdued, too. The lift hill's muted *clickety-clack*

In mission mode, your coaster must pass certain criteria (G-force, etc.) for you to go to the next level.

and lack of crowd noise are a constant reminder that this is a virtual world after all.

Want realism and terrain deformability? Then I recommend Pantera Entertainment's *3D Roller Coaster Designer*. But if you want to make coasters easily and like fantastic settings, *Ultimate Ride* won't steer you wrong.

— *Chuck Osborn*

PC GAMER **GOOD** **73%**

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microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege

Aliens vs. Predator 2

Turn off the lights, crank up the sound, and get ready to piss your pants.

The original *Aliens vs. Predator* was so scary that even our fearless editor-in-chief couldn't summon the tenacity to complete it. Of course, the game also lacked an in-mission save option, which caused *lots* of people to abandon it, and that issue's addressed here — you can save your progress anywhere. Indeed, developer Monolith (creator of the excellent *No One Lives Forever*) has taken over the sequel and produced a game that is better than the original in just about every respect.

The gameplay in *Aliens vs. Predator 2* is nearly identical to that in its predecessor. There are three different species (the titular characters plus the space marines from the *Aliens* film), each with a unique storyline and campaign orbiting around a central plot. It doesn't matter which order you play them in, as each one provides a different take on the same core story.

The setting is a research facility on planet LV1201. One of the corporation's brilliant scientists has been cross-breeding Aliens with Predators, and the results are…well, let's just say they're not cuddly. As a marine, you've got to clean up the mess, and as a Predator or Alien, you've just got to clean house.

There's good variety to motivate playing as the different races. The marines have loads of cool weapons and the ominous bleep of their motion sensor. The Predator has all the weapons from the movies, and can leap 20 feet in the air. And the Aliens are fast and vicious — as a facehugger, you even get to experience eating your way out of a human chest.

AvP2 uses the LithTech 2.5 engine, a slightly more advanced version of the engine that powered *NOLF*. While 32-bit textures and nicer bump-mapping are welcome additions, the simple fact is that LithTech cannot compete with the *Quake III* or *Unreal* engines. Everything has a sort of boxy look.

But it still does a fantastic job of creating a tense atmosphere. There's nothing

AvP2 may not have cutting-edge graphics, but it's got more style and atmosphere than most games.
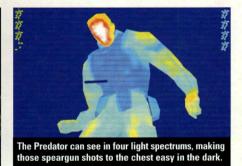
As a marine, you'll have to go it alone into the heart of an alien hive to save your brothers in arms.

The Predator can see in four light spectrums, making those speargun shots to the chest easy in the dark.

quite like having the lights go out in a maintenance tunnel, tossing down a couple of flares, and seeing a horde of Aliens flowing toward you like black water.

Unfortunately, Monolith didn't include EAX or DirectSound 3D support, which is a real letdown for a game that relies so much on positional awareness. Equally disappointing is the wooden nature of some of the AI. But these are really the only weak points in an incredibly gripping single-player story.

Likewise, the multiplay extends the unique feeling of each of the three species. In deathmatch, most players are naturally going to gravitate to the Predator, thanks to his ability to cloak and see in different light spectrums. But a smart marine and a fast Alien both stand a chance against him.

In addition to deathmatch and team deathmatch, you get an excellent multiplayer mode called Evac, in which teams of marines have the simple goal of getting the hell out of a bug-infested hive to a safe zone.
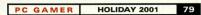
The emphasis here is on teamplay. Some may not enjoy playing as the Aliens because of the constant rush tactics, but seeing those marines scream in terror as you pounce on them is pretty damn satisfying.

AvP2 proves that gameplay is king over eye-candy. The different types of action and the overall stylishness more than make up for the game's few weaknesses.

— *Jim Preston*

The Predator is far more powerful than his prey, and as in the movies, he collects the heads of his luckless victims as trophies.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Three different and very fun scenarios are tied together nicely; great atmosphere; fun multiplay.

LOWS: The graphics are only ordinary; average AI; lacks 3D-sound support.

BOTTOM LINE: *Aliens vs. Predator 2* is fun, absorbing, and pretty damn scary.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT **86%**

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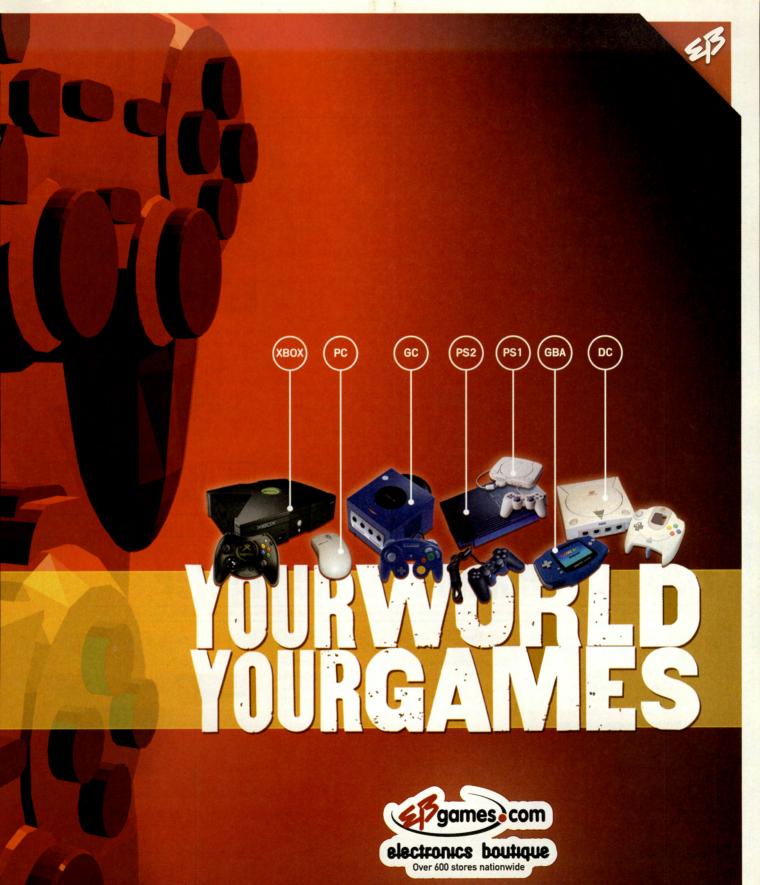
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Shattered Galaxy

CATEGORY MMORTS (T) **DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER** Nexon **REQUIRED** P233, 64MB RAM, 2MB 3D card, Net connection **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 8MB 3D card, broadband **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** Thousands

Game designers must have a pretty low opinion of our ability to co-exist with one another, because *Shattered Galaxy* is the latest in a long line of games predicated on the notion of humans on a distant world splitting into factions and battling for supremacy.

On the massively populated (and thus massively multiplayer) planet of Relic, everyone's pledged allegiance to one of four factions. You control between six and 12 units in a never-ending series of clashes that temporarily change boundary lines, but which never result in ultimate victory for anyone.

Developer and provider Nexon claims that *Shattered Galaxy* is the "first massively multiplayer online real-time strategy game," but that long-winded description is somewhat misleading. Yes, thousands of folks can be logged on simultaneously, but individual battles are limited to "over 30 players" (one of several instances of such limiting ambiguities in the documentation). What this *means* is that 30 players fight each battle, which then momentarily shifts the boundaries of the persistent world.

That's not to say *Shattered Galaxy* doesn't offer the chance for some nice tactical maneuvers: there are artillery bombardments, sneak attacks, minefields, aerial fighters, and nukes. In the end, though, battles are almost always won by veteran troops — which means it all comes down to who's willing to log in epic amounts of playtime.

The game places great emphasis on trying to involve you in your faction. You can also join a regiment — the equivalent of a clan — which offers your best option for winning consistently, since communications are a major key to victory.

SG came from an independent developer, and seems a bit thin throughout — the whole thing is restricted to one planet,

Things can become a bit confusing visually when a bunch of units get scrunched together.

so we have to assume the galaxy will *eventually* be shattered. And it's not without its share of bugs: I had at least a dozen desktop crashes over the course of a week. But if you don't mind taking a chance on the $19.95 retail price for the first month of play (after that you'll pay $9.95/month or $59.95/year), it's definitely a step forward in RTS ambition.

— *Stephen Poole*

PC GAMER **ABOVE AVERAGE** **64%**

Most battles are decided by each side's heroes descending on a key point of contention.

F/A-18 Precision Strike Fighter

CATEGORY Combat flight sim (E) **DEVELOPER** Graphic Simulations **PUBLISHER** Xicat **REQUIRED** PII 233, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PII 400, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card, joystick **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 4

Wanna make a quick buck in the PC combat flight-sim market? Simply do what Xicat Interactive did — locate a well-respected, four-year-old F/A-18 sim, tack on some minor enhancements, repackage it under a new name, and then charge full retail price for it. For better or worse, that's exactly how *F/A-18 Precision Strike Fighter* came about.

The 1997 Graphic Simulations title *F/A-18 Korea* was scheduled for a "Gold Edition" when it was acquired by Xicat.

The "gold" enhancements were minimal, but owners at Xicat felt that these minor improvements were significant enough to justify a shiny new box with a $40 price tag.

Precision Strike Fighter showcases the U.S. Navy's F/A-18C fighter in a series of scripted missions against North Korea (the favorite whipping boys of many sim developers). This campaign is supplemented with a handful of Instant Action missions, six Hawaiian training scenarios, and a comprehensive Mission Editor utility.

While the campaign itself is notably lacking in depth and substance — most enemy targets are only minutes away from your home base and none of the missions are connected — the Mission Editor does deliver a fairly decent set of tools from which you can build custom sorties.

The graphics are dated, as you might expect, with particularly bad terrain. The multiplayer component is quite underwhelming by today's standards. The maximum number of players (human or AI) remains limited to four. And the absence of any proper co-op missions makes the expe-

The attractive light-sourcing and aircraft texturing stand out next to the simplified polygonal terrain.

rience grow very old very quickly.

F/A-18 Korea was an above-average combat flight sim when it was released four years ago. I'd recommend it as a bargain-bin purchase. But $40 is just way too much money for what's being offered here.

— *Andy Mahood*

PC GAMER **MERELY OKAY** **56%**

PSF's virtual-cockpit view is clean and ergonomic, with functioning HUD and pop-up MFDs.

PREDATOR OR PREY?

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A L I E N S VERSUS 2 PREDATOR

C&C: Yuri's Revenge

Tired of add-ons that play it safe? Here's one that dares to reinvent its parent game.

A t long last, here's an expansion pack that throws caution to the wind by giving *Red Alert 2* not just a tweak or two, but an *entire new dimension* — without changing what makes it fun in the first place.

Whether you played the Allied or Soviet campaign in *RA2*, it soon became clear that Yuri was the real villain of the piece. In *Yuri's Revenge*, Soviet and Allied forces each get one new seven-mission campaign in which to defeat him for good after his re-emergence supported by a range of psychic tinker toys.

These single-player campaigns are really the only part of this whole pack that came close to disappointing me. They're a little short, and while awesome new cut-scenes once again feature the terrific Udo Kier and Kari Wuhrer (altogether now: "Mmmmm... Kari Wuhrer"), the missions themselves weren't quite as challenging as I expected.

You get some original scenarios (the more interesting ones taking the fight outside the U.S., to places like Egypt, Transylvania, and even the moon), but none really raise the stakes of difficulty or invention. That said, they're fun, and Westwood's included 10 campaign missions exclusively set up for cooperative multiplay. Nice touch.

New "mind-control" facilities enable Yuri to convert enemy soldiers to his cause.

Airstrikes remain a solid way to hurt enemy bases. Be sure to suppress air defenses on the ground.

What you really want to hear about, though, are the new units, and here *Yuri's Revenge* delivers over 30 new toys. Allied players get, among others, the new Guardian G.I., a soldier that can erect a mobile bunker to protect him from tanks, and the new Robot Tank, immune from enemy mind-control attacks. New Soviet highlights include a super-unit called Boris, who can call in airstrikes on structures from long range, and an Industrial Center that radically speeds up the production of units and buildings.

But all the coolest new gadgets belong to Yuri himself. And this is the most significant addition of all — an entire new side of 20-plus units and structures created from scratch and blended seamlessly into the existing design.

Yuri doesn't have any powerful conventional units, nor are traditional attacks such as tank rushes part of this faction's gameplan. Yuri's units rely on psychic warfare, with new Mastermind tanks that can seize control of multiple enemy units; Psychic Towers that do the same to vehicles as they close in on a Yuri base; and Slave Miners, mobile ore facilities that employ armies of zombified slaves to manually dig Tiberium out of the earth with shovels. Also, Yuri's mob now incorporates a little genetic trickery, with gene-altered Brute infantry units able to smash tanks with their Hulk-like fists, and a sniper who infects enemy soldiers with contagious darts.

My personal favorite is the Genetic Mutator superweapon, which transforms enemy soldiers within a given radius into Brutes for you to control. If an enemy has infantry massed inside his base, a quick shot of this can reduce him to rubble in moments.
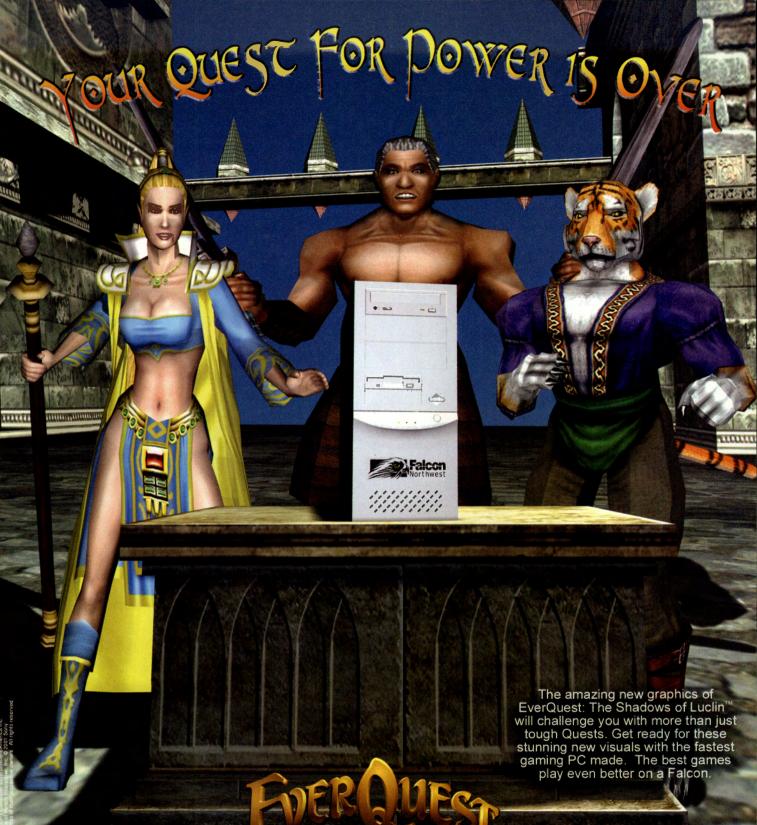
The multiplayer Yuri side is definitely aimed at the more advanced player — a small battery of carefully placed psychic units can easily annihilate a huge tank force by turning them against one another.

Yuri's Revenge also adds improved veterancy rules, slicker multiplayer functionality, and new tech buildings to capture. (You'll want to defend the machine shop — which auto-repairs all your vehicles — with everything you've got.) All in all, it's a pretty impressive achievement for an expansion pack. The Yuri units will shake to its foundations the way *Red Alert 2* is played online, so I advise you to start familiarizing yourself with them before the opposition does. That's an order, soldier!
— *Gary Whitta*

Massed ground fire turns the lights out on an enemy stronghold. Ah, the good ol' tank rush...

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great blend of new units; great new Yuri side; mmmm, Kari Wuhrer.

LOWS: Missions in the single-player campaigns are too short and too easy for *Red Alert 2* vets.

BOTTOM LINE: A tremendous add-on that will totally re-energize the game for *Red Alert 2* addicts.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 90%

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Brand yourself a warrior with the incredibly fast 64MB DDR, high-resolution 3D graphics of RADEON™ 8500. Get the most out of today's hottest 3D games and experience the most immersive 3D gaming imaginable. RADEON™ 8500 changes everything.

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Sub Command

CATEGORY Simulation (E)   **DEVELOPER** Sonalysts   **PUBLISHER** EA   **REQUIRED** PII 233/AMD K6, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D card   **WE RECOMMEND** PII 350, 96MB RAM, 16MB 3D card   **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

Make turns for one-zero knots!" I yelled, eliciting a confused "What the hell are you doing?" from my wife, as she stuck her head through my office door.

"I'm controlling a nuclear submarine on a *very* sensitive mission," I replied tersely, while cupping the headset microphone with my hand. "Go back to bed." (Wife, not submarine crew!)

Such is the immersive world of *Sub Command*, a modern-era submarine sim that puts you at the controls of three complex nuclear submarines — the American Seawolf, 688(I), and Russian Akula — with mission objectives that are often as murky and surreptitious as a Tom Clancy novel.

No quarter has been spared in delivering one of the most detailed and complex representations of modern sub warfare ever for the PC. You're effectively locked away in a silent metal tube surrounded by myriad stations, including sonar, Target Motion Analysis, fire control, and navigation. (An optional 3D-view window has also been tossed in to reduce the claustrophobia somewhat, as well as to show off the game's attractive animated water and pyrotechnic effects.)

Experienced sub-mariners will have a field day with all of the hands-on buttons and scopes, but newbies are toast. You can hand most of the sub's stations over to AI control, but unlike the game's remarkably savvy enemy AI, these auto-crews leave quite a bit to be desired. The 208-page manual (which is of the dreaded PDF-on-the-CD variety) does a surprisingly poor job of explaining the details.

The game ships with three training exercises, 23 stand-alone missions, and a pair of 14-mission campaigns. Missions are affected by your earlier results, and random dynamic elements keep the replay value as fresh as possible. You also get a seamless online multiplayer matchmaking service and a full-featured Mission Editor. Perhaps the niftiest component of all, though, is the optional voice-command interface, which lets you confidently bark orders into a microphone just like *Red October*'s Captain Ramius.

To see the game's impressive D3D-fueled graphics up close, toggle the small 3D inset window.

In a genre that's seen few recent releases, *Sub Command* steams to the front of the pack at flank speed. It's a must-buy for any naval-simulation buff.

— *Andy Mahood*

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 88%

Planet of the Apes

CATEGORY Adventure (T)   **DEVELOPER** Ubi Soft   **PUBLISHER** Visiware   **REQUIRED** PII 300, 64MB RAM, 650MB HD, 8MB 3D card   **WE RECOMMEND** PII 450, 132MB RAM   **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 4

The best thing that can be said about Ubi Soft's adaptation of *Planet of the Apes* is that it's based on the classic 1968 movie and *not* this year's ridiculous Tim Burton remake. (The next person who *dares* use the word "re-imagining" in my presence gets a slap.) Aside from that one reprieve, it's exactly the kind of cookie-cutter movie spin-off we could easily survive without.

Planet of the Apes kicks off with an opening sequence almost identical to the

Take that! Slugging it out with the ape guards will take up a lot of your time.

movie's, before handing control over to you — a human who is definitely not Charlton Heston, or anyone remotely resembling him, but is stuck inside a prison cell. The problems begin here. The puzzle itself is simple — the key to the cell is hidden inside the bowl of food an ape minion brings you — and I'd guessed the solution almost immediately, but then I gave up on that theory after several failed attempts to interact with the bowl. Eventually, after several more minutes of banging my head against the cell wall, I realized that the key *was* inside the bowl after all — I just wasn't standing in the exact pixel-perfect position for the program to realize what I was trying to do.

Once outside the cell, the game progresses as a purely standard mix of 3D exploration, puzzle-solving, and rudimentary combat. There's a slap-dash feel to the whole experience — the graphics are thoroughly mediocre throughout — though there are enough puzzles to please genre purists who feel the urge to persevere nonetheless.

As in the original film, the simians experiment on humans. Take your paws off him, you damn dirty ape!

As I wandered from cave to cave, occasionally trading loosely controlled blows with an ape guard or trying to interact with objects only to be told "This is of no interest," I realized that I couldn't have put it better myself.

— *Gary Whitta*

PC GAMER DON'T BOTHER 36%

Patrician ·II·

Quest For Power

As a trader in medieval Europe during the 1300's, your aim is to rise to the status of a Patrician. To achieve your goal, you must gain recognition and prestige among the people and try to make profit by means of maritime trade, the production of goods and the completion of missions. You can raise your standing through city improvement and diplomacy or fill your treasury through piracy and smuggling in this real-time trading simulation.

- A genre-mix including trade, economics, sea battles and diplomacy.
- A complex world comprising production, transport, trade and consumption.
- A number of various game modes and objectives, ranging from small single missions to 'life-long' campaigns.
- Game objectives and difficulty levels can be adjusted in various ways.
- Detailed and historical graphics (buildings, ships, city walls, citizens, etc.)
- Multiplayer allows up to 8 players over LAN, Internet or using a single computer in turn-based mode.

ASCARON
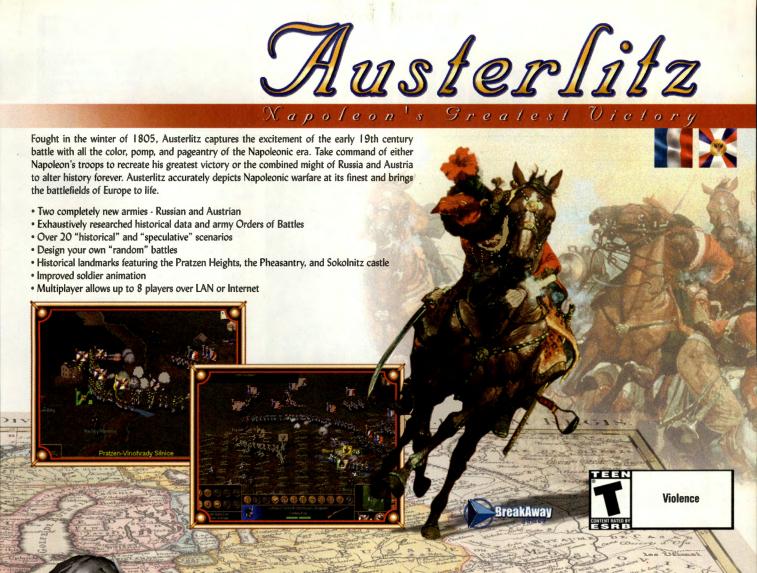
HISTORY'S GREATEST CIVILIZATIONS
PROFIT · POLITICS · POWER

Strategy First

Pool of Radiance

We waited for years for a buggy rehash of the cherished original. You'd better *really* love AD&D.

The Fireball spell is just one of 90 in the game. It's useful, but stay out of the blast radius!

Not since the infamous debut of *Daikatana* has the release of a single game generated so much incensed indignation from early buyers. *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor* had the potential to be one of the greatest "dungeon-hack" epics of recent memory, but it's looking like it might go down in the anals (sic) of RPG history as one of the greatest disappointments.

There certainly are plenty of reasons to be frustrated with the game. A multitude of outrageous bugs infested the initial retail release (see boxout), and many RPG fans are miffed with the game's handling of AD&D's 3rd Edition rules. I personally experienced very few technical problems after spending nearly 50 hours with the game, though my PC (an Athlon 1.1GHz with 256MB RAM and a 32MB GeForce2 card) greatly exceeds *Pool*'s required specs.

I *do* have many gripes with the gameplay itself, however. The turn-based combat (the only option) is extremely tedious at times. The drop-down, window-based interface is kludgy at best in combat. The monsters aren't varied enough within each level. You can scroll your view only to a tiny degree. And, most annoyingly, the story is a tired rehash of the first *Pool*'s plot.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY	Roleplaying (M)
DEVELOPER	SSI
PUBLISHER	Ubi Soft
REQUIRED	PII 400, 64MB RAM, 3D card (12MB Voodoo2/16MB other card)
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 600, 128MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	6

Nonetheless, I've sat at my PC 'til the wee hours of the morning several nights in a row making my way through the game. Despite all of its frustrations, it's hooked me. I'm cursing a lot, but I'm still playing.

Pool is a 3D sequel to a game published in 1987. The pesky Pool of Radiance has percolated from its slumber and is once again churning out the evil-doing undead. Your job (*again*) is to save New Phlan by assembling a team of adventurers and putting an end to the dreaded Pool once and for all. You can have up to four player-characters and two NPCs for a total of six in your party.

It soon becomes readily apparent why *Pool* is billed as a 100-plus-hour game. Progress through the dungeons is laboriously slow as you wait for tiresome monster animations to finish. Be prepared to watch hours of repetitive combat animation.

One of the coolest features is a tangible Dungeon Master presence, mostly in text

The undead aren't your only foes. These Arraccat aren't in any D&D Handbook, but you'll find 'em here.

form but often via audio messages as well. The "virtual DM" describes rooms when you enter them, offers occasional hints and directions, and gives you detailed feedback on rolls during combat. The DM really gives an atmospheric pen-and-paper feel to the game.

As far as multiplay goes, I can only say that *Pool* is, at press time, a trove of unrealized potential. I was able to get into a few games online, only to be dropped after a few minutes. LAN play is apparently much more stable. Hopefully, online performance will be improved with patches, and more of us struggling valiantly past the problems can cooperatively explore the randomized dungeons.

If nothing else, *Pool* offers a welcome change of pace from the 2D worlds of *Baldur's Gate* and *Arcanum*, and the frenetic click-fest of *Diablo II*. Unfortunately, with so many pure gameplay problems, it's impossible to recommend the game very highly.

— *Steve Klett*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Attractive 3D graphics; "virtual DM" lends atmosphere; uses 3rd Edition rules.

LOWS: Bugs galore; combat gets tedious; plot is a rehash of the original game's.

BOTTOM LINE: Hardcore players with patience may enjoy it; all others should wait for the patches.

PC GAMER **59%**

MERELY OKAY
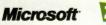
He looks like Sergio Garcia.
He talks like Sergio Garcia.
He swings like you.

actual game footage

Links Championship Edition is so realistic, it's like being Sergio Garcia, only with your talent. Factor in course and wind conditions as you play with a host of pros. Choose from 13 exact renditions of top-flight courses, including Oakmont and Royal Melbourne, or design your own course with the Arnold Palmer Course Designer.

Realistic? Absolutely. Frustrating? Oh yeah:

Microsoft   Zone.com

microsoft.com/games/linkschamp

Empire Earth

The epic story of human civilization throughout the ages comes to your PC.

Sea battles can get ugly if your opponent pumps out bigger and better ships faster than you.

E nsemble Studios' *Age of Empires* conjures images of a kick-ass medieval RTS franchise brimming with blades of steel and mighty castles. Nothin' wrong with that, right? Apparently, it depends on who you ask!

After the first game in that million-selling series was completed, lead designer Rick Goodman thought it was time to broaden the game's horizons. Unfortunately for him (and maybe for us), many of the people at Ensemble were content simply to refine the core game that had proved so successful. So Rick left to build his own game company, Stainless Steel Studios, where he

would be free to design the title he thought *Age of Empires II* should have been.

The fruit of his labor is *Empire Earth*, and while it isn't perfect, it does offer up one hell of a good time.

The game's hook is its 14 epochs (time periods), which chronicle the progression of human civilization from its early days in 500,000 B.C. all the way through the not-so-distant future of 2200 A.D. Cavemen, archers, swordsmen, riflemen, airplanes, ships, subs, tanks, cyborgs, mechs, and many more are all contained in this one massive game.

The *Age of Empires* games have only four relatively small age-leaps, and your ultimate goal in most multiplayer battles is to build up to the final age as quickly as possible so that you're able to gain access to the powerful units. *Empire Earth's*

varied epochs provide *way* more depth than that in its gameplay options.

Multiplayer battles and single-player skirmishes are the best parts of this game, and are scream-out-loud-like-a-little-girl-when-stuff-blows-up fun. Each epoch is a self-contained, fully playable RTS game unto itself. Furthermore, you can create games that start and end in any sequential epochs you choose. World War I through the Modern Age is a span of time I enjoy playing a great deal.

Standard and Tournament are the two rule sets to choose from in multiplayer and single-player skirmishes. In Standard mode, it's tough to progress through the ages because of high costs and slow build times. In Tournament mode, build times are reduced and epoch upgrade costs are lowered to facilitate a faster gameplay experience — amen to that, brother!

Empire Earth allows you to customize your civ to a never-before-seen degree to suit your style of play. At the start of each game (Standard or Tournament rules) you're given five minutes to pick your civilization's bonuses. There are well over 100 to choose from, and they range from unit-type-specific attack bonuses to an increase in the efficiency of your farms. Upgrades increase in cost depending on numerous factors, and you're given only 100 points to spend at the start of each game, so choose wisely.

In the Middle Ages, nothing instilled more fear in the enemy than seeing the British army on the move.

EMPIRE EARTH'S 14 PLAYABLE EPOCHS (AGES)

PREHISTORIC	STONE	COPPER	BRONZE	DARK	MIDDLE	RENAISSANCE
500,000 B.C. – 50,000 B.C.	50,000 B.C. – 5000 B.C.	5000 B.C. – 2000 B.C.	2000 B.C. – 0 A.D.	0 A.D. – 900 A.D.	900 A.D. – 1300 A.D.	1300 A.D. – 1500 A.D.
Humans learn how to control (but not make) fire	First signs of religion; humans learn how to make fire and complex tools	Agriculture explodes; animal domestication begins	First appearance of the sword; medicine gains prominence; Greeks standardize schooling	The fall of Rome; Constantinople is established	Castles become ultimate defensive structures; governmental authority returns	Mass-produced books become available; gunpowder use grows rapidly

If you reach the Nano Age before your enemy does, he's toast: these mechs will make mincemeat of units from earlier epochs.

sion objectives are too often muddled or misleading. Time and time again, I ended up with far too small an army to accomplish my goals if I relied only on in-game mission tips and recommendations as my guide.

Make no mistake, this game is tough, and while you can adjust difficulty settings in single-player skirmishes and multiplayer games, you cannot do so in any of the campaigns. The compelling stories do make them worth fighting through, however, so my tip is to always build more units than you think you're going to need based on what the game is telling you.

Graphically, *Empire* is rich and detailed — especially compared to other 3D RTS games. The animations are smooth and varied, and if you zoom in close enough, I think you may even be able to see Rick Goodman's face on one of the characters in the game! Despite *Empire*'s 3D engine, you can't rotate the camera — the only time you'll see it spin is during the nifty in-game movies that pop up every so often in the single-player campaign missions.

Overall, the game's music is pretty good, though it gets a bit repetitive. The sound effects, on the other hand, are first-rate, and really bring you into the action in each age.

Empire Earth certainly has a massive scale, but it still *feels* like it belongs in the *Age of Empires* series. I think that point speaks very highly of it. I've clocked innumerable hours with it so far, and I think I've barely scratched the surface of what all the many units and time periods have to offer. Believe me, this is one we're going to be playing around the office for a while to come.
— *Greg Vederman*

Here I am in the Modern Age, minding my own business and planting some crops, when suddenly I look up and see... Oh no! It's the big one — duck and cover!

Players who like to just jump in and go can also choose from one of the game's 21 pre-made civilizations. Make sure you pick one that's appropriate for the epoch you're playing: gaining bonuses to the armor strength of tanks and fighter jets won't help much if you're playing in the Middle Ages!

As impressive and gripping as the stories are in the game's four single-player cam-

paigns (each one brings you a bit closer to modern times and the future than the last), I didn't have nearly as good a time with them as I thought I might. The individual scenarios that make up the campaigns are long and hard — not just because *Empire* is a hardcore RTS in which you're always having to pay close attention to the "rock, paper, scissors" rules of combat, but because the mis-

When spending your 100 civ-upgrade points, pick bonuses that apply to the epochs you'll be playing in.

If your base is too far from your enemy, your planes will need to refuel before reaching their destination.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Customizable civs; big-time replayability; engaging historical story; 14 ages.

LOWS: Difficult campaigns; desktop crashes on PCs without latest (2183) NVIDIA drivers; AI a bit weak.

BOTTOM LINE: *Empire Earth* has replaced *Red Alert 2* as my RTS of choice. It's great fun.

PC GAMER **85%**
EXCELLENT

IMPERIAL	INDUSTRIAL	WORLD WAR I	WORLD WAR II	MODERN	DIGITAL	NANO
1500 A.D. – 1700 A.D.	1700 A.D. – 1900 A.D.	1914 A.D. – 1918 A.D.	1939 A.D. – 1945 A.D.	2000 A.D.	2000 A.D. – 2100 A.D.	2100 A.D. – 2200 A.D.
Ships capable of circumnavigating the Earth; Galileo shows that Earth is not the center of the universe	Industrial revolution powered by steam engines; Darwin publishes his theory of evolution	Steel warships gain prominence; U-boats and airplanes make their debut	Steel planes, ships, and tanks all improve dramatically; atomic bomb dropped on Japan	Computer technology rules the day	High-energy laser and particle-beam weapons gain prominence; first AI-controlled robots appear	Time travel and teleportation become available thanks to studies in "negative matter"

SW: Galactic Battlegrounds

Age of Empires II is repainted with Star Wars colors — and that's just fine.

INT. LUCASARTS BOARDROOM — MORNING
Two well-dressed LucasArts executives sit across a large table from a game designer.

EXECUTIVE 1: As you can see, the performance of our *Star Wars* lineup has been less than satisfactory.

EXECUTIVE 2: George wants to see things pick up.

GAME DESIGNER: Don't worry: I have an idea that will literally fly off the shelves. Guaranteed.

EXECUTIVE 1: Really? Tell us more.

GAME DESIGNER: Check out this game from Ensemble called *Age of Empires II*. *PC Gamer* gave it a 94% in their January 2000 issue.

EXECUTIVE 2: 94%? That's not bad at all.

GAME DESIGNER: Exactly. I say we just take *Age of Empires II* and make it a *Star Wars* game. It'll be a piece of cake. We'll replace Romans with the Empire, Japanese with the Naboo, Celtics with the Rebel Alliance, and so on. Then it's a simple matter of adding new art, our trademark sound effects, and voilà! Instant bestseller.

EXECUTIVE 2: What about multiplay?

GAME DESIGNER: Already taken care of. We'll make the multiplayer modes exactly like the ones in *Age of Empires II*: deathmatch, defend the wonder, and so on. Oh, we'll have to change "wonders" to "monuments," to keep things in harmony with the whole *Star Wars* theme.

EXECUTIVE 2: I like that idea. Let's go with it.

EXECUTIVE 1: Wait a minute. Won't the gaming public just see this as a quick rush-job? Don't they want something new?

GAME DESIGNER: Don't worry. It's a good game, paired with a good license. It can't fail. They'll have AT-ATs, Dark Jedi, X-Wings, Battle Droids, and countless other units to keep them happy. We'll also include all the *Star Wars* characters from the movies. Everyone from Chewbacca and Han Solo to Darth

You also get plenty of never-before-seen units for each race, including these Rebel hovertanks and armored troop transports.

Rather than moving up ages as in *Age of Empires II*, you'll move up tech levels.

Yes, the Gungans are one of the six playable races. And you can fight them in skirmishes and multiplay.

Many of the units are just re-creations of *Age II* units, only with a *Star Wars* look.

Vader and Obi-Wan. We'll get our development boys to think up of a bunch of missions: escorting Princess Leia, smashing rebel bases…hell, we'll even get a mission with Gungans that takes place hundreds of years before *Episode I*. It'll give that species some history. I'm telling you, the fans will go nuts.

EXECUTIVE 1: Right. I'm sold. Green-light it.

INT. PC GAMER OFFICES — AFTERNOON
A year later. Dan walks up to Li's desk.

DAN: Hey Li, you done with the *Battlegrounds* review?

LI: Yeah. It's just *Age of Empires II*, only with *Star Wars* stuff. It doesn't look like they tried that hard.

DAN: So it sucks?

LI: Actually, it's pretty fun. Look, I just built AT-ATs. And look here, that's Luke Skywalker. There's tons of units. Pretty cool, huh? I think it deserves a score in the high seventies. It's fun, though it looks a little dated.

But the *Star Wars* license is just too cool to pass up. And really, this is what all RTS fans wanted back when that *Force Commander* fiasco happened. So we had to wait a couple of extra years, but we finally got the gameplay we wanted. That's got to be good, right?

DAN: If you say so.

Dan walks away.

— *Li C. Kuo*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Tons of units; plays just like *Age of Empires II*; great *Star Wars* feel.

LOWS: Graphically dated; not very original; feels more like a mod than a brand-new game.

BOTTOM LINE: Basically a *Star Wars* mod for *Age of Empires II*. That's pretty cool, though.

PC GAMER GOOD **78%**

NO REST FOR THE WICKED, INDEED

I'VE GOT A REAL PROBLEM. I don't live with my girlfriend, but I stay over at her place a lot. That's not the problem exactly. The problem is that I'm the type of person who's always warm — especially at night. She, on the other hand, is the type of person who's always cold — again, especially at night. She's a small girl, but the fact that I'm 6'4" and she's only got a queen-sized bed doesn't help matters much because I don't have enough room for myself, gosh ding it!

It's the same thing every night. I open the window in her room as wide as possible and I sleep closest to it. She cuddles up close to me because she's cold. I immediately start sweating. She takes the blankets off me and puts them on herself because she thinks I'm too hot — which I am, but I'd be fine if she'd just go to her side of the bed. Then, I start to freeze because the window is wide open and I don't have any blankets. About three or four hours later, after I've fallen asleep despite my discomfort, I awake with icicles hanging from my ears. Then I get up and close the window, take the blankets back from the doofus sleeping next to me, and finally get some rest. That is, until Ms. Sleep All Over the Bed Like a Monkey digs her knee, foot, or elbow into my head, spine, or hind parts.

Anybody out there have a solution to my problem? If you do, dear Superman up in heaven so high, email *greg@pcgamer.com* and let me know about it!

Greg Vederman,
Senior Associate Editor

PRODUCT TYPE

☐ ENTRY	Every hardware review now includes a chart that lets you know if a product is meant to be used with an Entry-level, Mid-range, or Dream-class computer, or if the product itself falls into one of those same three categories.
☐ MID	
☑ DREAM	

hstrinity

So you want to build a new PC, huh? As you may know, it can be a tricky affair. Luckily, Hard Stuff editor Greg Vederman is here to help you select the best parts for the job. The prices listed below (obtained almost entirely from *www.pricewatch.com*) reflect the lowest prices we could find as we went to press. (Note: Prices do not include shipping costs.)

ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $999

Component	
CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
AMD Duron 1GHz	$67
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V-133	$76
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	$13
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Creative Labs PC-DVD Ovation 12x with software DVD decoding	$99
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
40.0GB IBM Deskstar	$88
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs Audigy (white box)	$59
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$49
MONITOR	
17-inch Optiquest Q71	$140
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce2 Pro 64MB DDR	$100
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Joystick	$30
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Game Pad USB	$30
SPEAKERS	
Labtech Pulse-424 — 2.1	$39
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	$39
TOTAL	**$952**

MID-RANGE SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $1,800

Component	
CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
AMD Thunderbird 1.4GHz	$100
MOTHERBOARD	
Gigabyte GA-7DX	$93
MEMORY	
256MB PC-2100 DDR SDRAM	$25
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Creative Labs PC-DVD Encore 12x with Dxr3 Technology	$149
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
75GB IBM Deskstar 75GXP	$196
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy MP3+	$85
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$49
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE950+	$323
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce3 Ti 200	$186
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision 2	$45
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech SoundMan Xtrusio DSR-100 — 4.1	$122
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics Keyboard	$15
MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft USB mouse	$39
TOTAL	**$1,558**

DREAM SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $3,000 AND ABOVE

Component		Component	
CASE		**SOUND CARD**	
P4-ready 300-watt ATX form factor	$100	Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy Platinum 5.1	$200
PROCESSOR		**MODEM**	
Intel P4 2GHz	$530	3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$49
MOTHERBOARD		**MONITOR**	
Intel 850-based chipset	$150	22-inch Viewsonic P220f	$648
MEMORY		**VIDEO CARD**	
Two sticks of 256MB PC800 RDRAM	$138	NVIDIA GeForce3 Ti 500	$350
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE		**JOYSTICK**	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$48	Saitek X36 Flight Control System (USB)	$96
DVD DECODER		**GAMEPAD**	
RealMagic Hollywood Plus PCI card	$50	Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
BURNER		**SPEAKERS**	
Plextor 24x10x40 CD-RW	$179	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	$399
FLOPPY DRIVE		**KEYBOARD**	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$40
HARD DRIVE(S)		**USB MOUSE**	
Two 100GB ATA-100 Maxtor DiamondMax	$448	Original IntelliMouse with IntelliEye technology	$55
IDE RAID CONTROLLER		**TOTAL**	**$3,586**
Promise FastTrak100 (ATA-100)	$75		

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Red Faction™ image courtesy of THQ.

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■ **COMPANY** VISIONTEK, WWW.VISIONTEK.COM, 800-360-7163 ■ **PRICE** $349 (M.S.R.P.)

ENTRY	
MID	
✓ DREAM	

Xtasy 6964

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

GEFORCE3 ULTRA BY ANY OTHER NAME WOULD SMELL AS SWEET

Another six months brings another new 3D graphics chip from NVIDIA. In keeping with the company's long history of releasing one new core a year, with a higher-clocked version (usually called "Ultra") shipping midway through the cycle, this new chip, GeForce3 Ti 500, doesn't deviate much from the existing core. Instead, it offers a substantial boost to the clock speeds of the existing technology. VisionTek is the first company to release a Ti 500–based product, and needless to say, we're in Xtasy. Ho-ho-ho!

GeForce3 weighs in at 200/233MHz (core speed and memory speed, respectively) and GeForce3 Ti 500 ups the stakes by delivering a beefier 240/250MHz.

Unfortunately, the faster 275MHz DDR memory that ATI fit on its new RADEON 8500 wasn't available in time for this card. We say "unfortunately" not just because faster is always better, but because as fast as Xtasy is, it's not *that* much faster than the GeForce3s we've already got.

Using the Xtasy's bundled v. 2185 Detonator XP drivers, the card is about 15 percent faster than a regular GeForce3 using v. 2181 Detonator XP drivers. (Neither card functions with the other's drivers, or we'd have tested them with the same one.) And that's best-case scenario at resolutions of 1280x1024 and above. At 1024x768 and below, the difference is usually less than 10 percent.

Clearly, if you've got a system that's lower than Mid- or Dream-class, or if you already have a GeForce3, you'll want to sit out this round of the battle. If you're building a new system, however, or you simply have an aging 3D accelerator, there's absolutely no better card on the market for today's games than VisionTek's Xtasy 6964. It ships with NVIDIA's latest reference drivers as well as PowerDVD 3.0, and has VGA, S-Video, and DVI connectors for all your output needs — just like the new RADEON 8500 reviewed below!

■ **BENCHMARKS**

Tests performed on a 2GHz Pentium 4 running Windows XP.

3DMARK2001
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 32-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)
3DMarks: 7,547
Game 1: Car Chase
High Detail: 39.5 fps
Game 2: Dragothic
High Detail: 63.9 fps
Game 3: Lobby
High Detail: 55.6 fps
Game 4: Nature:

43.6 fps
Fill Rate: 1,565 mtps
Vertex Shader: 54.1 fps
Pixel Shader: 95.0 fps

QUAKE III
(Tests run in full, 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, compressed textures, and V-sync disabled)
640x480
206.1 fps
800x600
202.3 fps
1024x768
181.5 fps
1280x1024
136.3 fps

1600x1200
99.0 fps

MDK 2
(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled)
640x480
164.3 fps
800x600
158.9 fps
1024x768
157.4 fps
1280x1024
142.2 fps
1600x1200
105.2 fps

PC GAMER **EDITORS' CHOICE** **90%**

■ **COMPANY** ATI, WWW.ATI.COM, 877-757-1001 ■ **PRICE** $299 (M.S.R.P.)

ENTRY	
✓ MID	
✓ DREAM	

RADEON 8500

ATI'S NEXT-GEN CARD IS FASTER *AND* SLOWER THAN WE EXPECTED

Technologically, RADEON 8500 is similar to the GeForce3 in that it's a full-fledged GPU, with high-end vertex and pixel shaders capable of making the games of tomorrow look nearly as good as film-quality CG. In fact, on paper, the 8500 is even more powerful than GeForce3 Ti 500 since it's clocked faster (275/275MHz DDR — core speed and memory speed, respectively), implements all of DirectX 8.1's features in hardware, and renders six textures per clock cycle instead of four. Because there aren't any DirectX 8.1 games available yet, however, it's impossible to test many of the card's newer features.

With the shipping drivers, RADEON 8500 proved faster than a standard GeForce3 in most of our tests, but a bit slower, on average, than

the Ti 500. With the optimized drivers we were also sent (downloadable soon), DirectX performance was improved to faster-than–Ti 500 levels in many of the tests in 3DMark2001 — including the overall score. OpenGL performance remained the same regardless of which driver we used, and was only a few frames per second behind the Ti 500 in *Quake III* at all resolutions. It was as much as 15 percent slower in *MDK 2.*

Both drivers were a bit rough around the edges. We tested over a dozen games, including biggies like *Unreal Tournament, Diablo II, Max Payne, and Half-Life*, and they ran without a hitch — except for one. In *Quake III*, even if the Texture Resolution slider was set to maximum, the game would render only the mid-level textures. As a result, *Quake III* perform-

ance is likely to drop from our listed scores as soon as the problem gets sorted and all high-res textures are rendered. Also, in 3DMark2001, textures would sometimes drop away, leaving only flickering wire-frame meshes. These problems were few and far between, but clearly, the drivers need more work.

Still, the card is fast and stable overall, and given that it's $50 less than the Ti 500, it would have received an Editors' Choice award had the drivers worked with greater efficiency.

■ **BENCHMARKS**

Tests performed on a 2GHz Pentium 4 running Windows XP. First number represents shipping driver; second number represents optimized driver.

3DMARK2001
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 32-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)
3DMarks: 7,188, 7,768
Game 1: Car Chase
High Detail: 37.3 fps, 38.5 fps
Game 2: Dragothic
High Detail: 73.8 fps, 79.7 fps

Game 3: Lobby
High Detail: 49.1 fps, 51.6 fps
Game 4: Nature
22.4 fps, 27.1 fps
Fill Rate: 1,815 mtps, 1,815 mtps
Vertex Shader: 81.5 fps, 88.7 fps
Pixel Shader: 78.2 fps, 101.3 fps

QUAKE III
(Tests run in full, 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, compressed textures, and V-sync disabled)
640x480
194.8 fps, 195.3 fps
800x600
192.2 fps, 191.6 fps
1024x768

178.0 fps, 178.3 fps
1280x1024
137.1 fps, 137.1 fps
1600x1200
95.6 fps, 95.6 fps

MDK 2
(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled)
640x480
140.9 fps, 140.9 fps
800x600
142.3 fps, 142.6 fps
1024x768
136.8 fps, 137.8 fps
1280x1024
110.7 fps, 110.8 fps
1600x1200
80.6 fps, 80.6 fps

PC GAMER **EXCELLENT** **84%**

■ **COMPANY** BELKIN, WWW.BELKIN.COM, 800-223-5546 ■ **PRICE** $45.99

✓ ENTRY
✓ MID
✓ DREAM

Nostromo n30 Game Mouse

MICE. RUMBLING. BALLS.

Optical mice have the great advantage of using lasers instead of balls. Now, I don't want to get too Freudian on you here, but it's better to have lasers than balls because (1) balls get gunk on them and have to be cleaned delicately, and (2) lasers are — all things considered — cooler than balls. *[While that's true, it's too bad optical mice use red light, not lasers, dork. — Ed.]*

It would take a lot to make us go back from lasers [*oy vey* — Ed.] to balls, but if we did, we probably wouldn't be heading to the Belkin Nostromo n30 Game Mouse. We're not exactly sure what a "game mouse" is other than a rodent you hunt for sport, but the Nostromo n30 is nothing more than a clunky, black, three-button mouse with a scroll wheel.

This puck-sized mouse certainly feels smooth when you first lay your hands on it, and ergonomically, it's okay. The two large left and right buttons are loud and "clicky," and some people like the tactile feedback. The mouse wheel is smooth, but sadly, it can't be depressed as a third button the way every other wheel mouse on the planet can.

Instead, the third button is actually located on the unit's left side, on what the company laughably calls the "battle wing," which is a little bit like calling a Yorkshire terrier "Lothar the WorldEater." The battle wing is nothing more than a piece of vertical plastic with the third mouse button located above, not underneath, your thumb. Belkin put the button out of your way so you wouldn't accidentally press it in the heat of battle. Of course, we tend to prefer our mouse buttons right where we would expect them to be.

To its credit, the Game Mouse does boast the best rumble feedback yet in a corded mouse. Our Logitech iFeel mice seem rather wimpy compared to this bad boy, with most of the effects feeling fuller and more "rumbly" than the competition's. It's easy enough to tone down the feedback if you desire, but we dug the default setting.

We would have appreciated this mouse a lot more if it wasn't so compact and heavy, and if it had a mouse-wheel button where it should be — on the wheel. It's not a terrible mouse at all; it simply didn't compel us to stop using the Microsoft and Logitech mice we already have. Any chance you might add these terrific rumble effects to a more traditionally designed mouse, Belkin?

PC GAMER 69%
ABOVE AVERAGE

"The Area 51 runs crop circles around the competition!"

-PC Gamer 2001

AWARD-WINNING SYSTEMS

■ FALCON NORTHWEST, WWW.FALCON-NW.COM, 888-325-2661 ■ **PRICE** $2,995
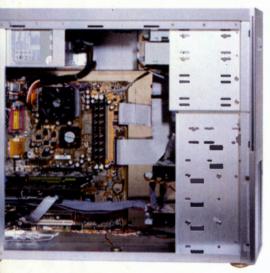
✓ ENTRY
✓ MID
✓ DREAM

MACH V

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

FALCON SETS A NEW HIGH-WATER MARK WITH ITS BEST-EVER PC

Before Alienware, before Voodoo, Hypersonic and all the rest, there was Falcon. And it was good. But since the beginning, a lot has changed. These days, Falcon Northwest faces stiff competition from companies whose staff is every bit as passionate and knowledgeable, and whose aim is to build the best gaming rigs $3,000-plus can buy. With its latest MACH V, Falcon is clearly rising to the unspoken challenge issued by its peers.

Hand-picked by AMD to show off its next line of processors, this MACH V gives us our first glimpse at the new Athlon XP CPU. The model number itself (1800+) represents how fast in MHz the new chip runs relative to existing Athlon processors (so sayeth AMD). Clocked at 1.53GHz, the 1800+ is a real scorcher in the benchmark department. The extra boost in performance comes not just from the 153MHz boost over the "older" 1.4GHz Athlon, but from new core optimizations AMD calls QuantiSpeed Architecture, as well as the inclusion of SSE instructions — Intel's original Pentium III optimizers. As new as this technology is, it ran as fast and as stable as any computer we've ever tested.

Picking up the "rear," Falcon has thrown in everything but the proverbial kitchen sink. Inside the great-looking and bay-filled CoolerMaster ATC-110 case are nifty items like NVIDIA's new GeForce3 Ti 500, as well as Creative Labs' best-ever sound card, Audigy. Say hello to Win XP, too.

Falcon overclocks the Titanium 500 a bit (+7MHz core and +33MHz memory), and the result is that — when combined with the powerful Athlon XP — the MACH V is faster than our own hand-built, identically equipped 2GHz P4 in virtually every benchmark. Worth pointing out is the fact that our system isn't overclocked at all. Still, given how much more expensive the P4 currently is than Athlon XP, AMD has a real hit on its hands with this new platform.
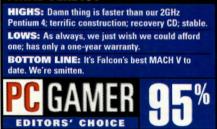
The Falcon team have always been excellent system builders, but this new computer is the cleanest, best-cabled model we've ever seen from them. The craftsmanship on display is every bit as good as the work done by Voodoo Computers in this area — and that's saying a lot.

We'd still like to see a warranty that's longer than one year, but then again, in all the years that Falcon has been selling computers, we can count the number of complaint emails we've received about the company on one hand. If you've ever dreamed of playing games on a computer that meets the *maximum* system requirements, MACH V is where it's at.

■ BENCHMARKS

3DMARK2001	texels per second	1600x1200
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 32-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)	Vertex Shader: 50.0 fps	102.8 fps
	Pixel Shader: 96.6 fps	**■ MDK 2**
	■ QUAKE III	(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled)
	(Tests run in full, 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, compressed textures, and V-sync disabled)	
3DMarks: 7,843		**640x480**
Game 1: Car Chase		183.9 fps
High Detail: 48.2 fps	**640x480**	**800x600**
Game 2: Dragothic	191.3 fps	183.5 fps
High Detail: 64.2 fps	**800x600**	**1024x768**
Game 3: Lobby	189.2 fps	182.1 fps
High Detail: 59.0 fps	**1024x768**	**1280x1024**
Game 4: Nature:	175.7 fps	154.3 fps
39.6 fps	**1280x1024**	**1600x1200**
Fill Rate: 1,626 mega-	138.5 fps	111.5 fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Damn thing is faster than our 2GHz Pentium 4; terrific construction; recovery CD; stable.

LOWS: As always, we just wish we could afford one; has only a one-year warranty.

BOTTOM LINE: It's Falcon's best MACH V to date. We're smitten.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 95%

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hsq&a

Q I've got an NVIDIA card running on Windows XP. Ever since I made the jump from Windows Me, I've noticed that when I set up the refresh rate of my monitor in Windows, the change doesn't seem to have any effect in games like it used to. Instead of running at 85Hz at 1024x768 like my desktop, my games run at 60Hz, or sometimes (in D3D, I think) 75Hz. I'm starting to get headaches from all the flicker. Is there anything I can do?
— *Alex Spoot*

A I ran into this same issue myself. Representatives from NVIDIA tell me that it's a bug in Windows XP and that they've been able to reproduce the problem on card makes and models aside from their own. Preliminary feedback from Microsoft leads me to believe they agree. Here's a fix that'll get you sorted while you wait for a patch: Point your browser to *http://www.entechtaiwan.com* and grab the latest shareware version of PowerStrip. It's a program that allows you to tweak your video card in a number of different ways. It also lets you set and lock your refresh rates for your desktop as well as your applications (be they 2D, 3D, or otherwise), at all resolutions.

Q I'm putting together a new computer with an IDE RAID controller. Are there any hard drives that aren't compatible with something like a Promise FastTrak 100?
— *Jim Poon*

A We've heard that some newer ATA-133 drives don't work even on ATA-133 controllers, but other than that, getting any two of the same ATA-66 or ATA-100 drives to work on that specific controller shouldn't be a problem.

If you have a hardware question or comment, write to Greg Vederman, Hard Stuff, PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005, or email gvederman@pcgamer.com.
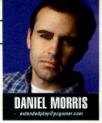
Star Trek vs. Star Wars Is Here

DANIEL MORRIS
extendedplay@pcgamer.com

Stop dreaming and start fighting, with the *ST: Armada* mod that answers the eternal question.

Star Destroyers and Federation cruisers go head to head in vicious battles.

Imagine: a starfield ablaze with dogfighting. One of the combatant forces is the United Federation of Planets, fighting with Galaxy- and Intrepid-class starships. Their opponent? The Galactic Empire of Darth Vader, which strikes back with a complement of TIE Fighters, TIE Bombers, and Imperial Star Destroyers.

This battle (and others — say, a Klingon Bird of Prey against a Rebel Y-Wing) can now be fought on your very own PC, thanks to *Star Trek vs. Star Wars*, Apoc Entertainment's dynamite new mod for Activision's *Star Trek: Armada*.

The idea may have been a no-brainer, but the mod itself is an impressive achievement. Its sheer comprehensiveness will leave you temporarily stunned. Practically every combatant ship from the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* universes, including a

Straight into the mouth of the beast, a Rebel frigate takes on a Borg cube. Can these brave underdogs avoid assimilation?

plethora of ships I'd never heard of, have been modeled into this mod.

For *Star Trek*, the mod offers dozens of ships just between the Federation and Klingons. In addition, there's a Romulan Warbird, Jem'Hadar vessels, Cardassian destroyers, and, of course, Borg cubes and spheres. The free-floating structures include sensor stations, heavy-weapons platforms, and even Deep Space Nine.

For *Star Wars*, you get an awesome range of ships from both the Rebel Alliance and the Galactic Empire. The Rebels can deploy X-Wings, B-Wings, Corellian cruisers, Calamari frigates, and more. The Empire has the full range of TIE craft and dreadnoughts, as well as various levels of Star Destroyers, including the dreaded SSD Executioner. (The only oversight is the lack of a Death Star.)

The resulting battles are sublime pieces of modmaking. If you want an infernal alliance, set up the Empire and the Borg to join forces against your Federation-Rebellion fleet. Or perhaps Vader will ink a deal with the Romulans, pitting them both against your brave squadrons of Klingons. It's up to you.

What's truly inspiring is to fight the dizzying conflicts themselves. There's nothing quite like watching a squadron of TIE Bombers make an attack run against the starship *Enterprise*. Conversely, it's a heap of fun to re-create Luke Skywalker's *Star Wars*–finale X-Wing raid against a menacing Borg cube.

Star Trek: Armada sold decently, and hooked a large number of players who still enjoy its space-based tactical combat. Kudos to Apoc Entertainment for giving these gamers a superb new way to extend the fun — and for giving newbies a brilliant reason to pick up the game for the first time.
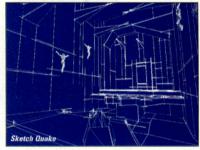
Download *Star Trek vs. Star Wars* at Apoc's website, *www.apocent.com*, or nab it from this month's *PCG* CD. It's first-rate work, and kicks *Armada* to a new level. **PCG**
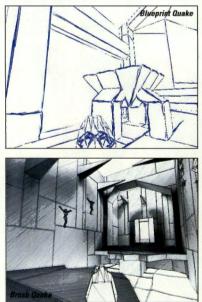
SKETCHY *QUAKE*

This has to be seen to be appreciated. A nifty little application now allows you to play *Quake* in a surreal world of sketch illustrations, blueprints, and brushstrokes. What the hell am I talking about? Well, check out these screens and you'll see what I mean.

NPR Quake (Non-Photorealistic Rendering) is just Win32 GLQuake re-imagined with a bold new set of graphics. The application takes the 3D-rendered world of *Quake* and transforms it into a landscape that looks hand-drawn. You're basically charging around playing *Quake* as if you were inside a cartoon or a blueprint.

Alex Mohr, Erik Bakke, and their team have conjured up an ingenious and mind-altering re-invention of *Quake*. Take a few minutes to download their renderer (from *www.cs.wisc.edu/graphics/Gallery/NPRQuake/*), and enjoy a hallucinatory new vision of first-person gaming. Talk about a new way to see shooters!

Sketch Quake

Blueprint Quake

Brush Quake

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. BASEBALL MOGUL 2002, 2. DIVIDED GROUND, 3. DAY OF DEFEAT, 4. MAX PAYNE, 5. NHL 2002
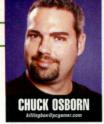
The Killing Box Unplugged

CHUCK OSBORN
killingbox@pcgamer.com

A board game trades your PC for dice in the arena of first-person combat.

Vede's Light Armor couldn't match Chuck's Portable Nuke — or Dan's complete indifference.

So there I was, surrounded. To my left, a stack of hardback D&D rulebooks, glaring menacingly. To my right, a rack overflowing with unpainted pewter miniature dwarves. And behind me, three stubbly-faced guys flipping cards at one another. If you've guessed that your intrepid Killing Box columnist was trapped inside an old-school pen-and-paper gaming store, you're right. Oh, the humanity.

Now this may be a case of the geek calling the kettle nerd, but I've never *gotten* pen-and-paper gaming. Sure, I've given it a try once or ten times, but the mix of cumbersome rules, dice-slinging, and stat-tracking makes it seem only slightly more interesting to me than doing my own taxes...by hand...with an abacus.

Anyway, there I stood, sucked in to "Ye Olde Luddite Gamer" — or whatever the

"No way," I thought to myself. "It's *Quake: The Gathering.*" Too bad the physical world isn't littered with AI opponents.

store's named — by a close friend who takes his roleplaying PC-free. (And before you set quill to parchment to jot off hate mail, these are strictly my own obnoxious opinions: some of my *PC Gamer* cohorts were born with eight-sided dice in their fists.)

That's when I saw it — *Frag* from Steve Jackson Games, a "first-person

shooter without the computer" (or so it says on the box).

"No way," I thought to myself. "It's *Quake: The Gathering.*"

That assessment isn't far off the mark. *Frag* is inspired by PC shooters like *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament,* but it's played with dice, cards, and a gameboard (the arena "map," if you will). Its tagline is "If it moves, shoot it."

Seeing as this is *PC Gamer* and not, say, *Bored Gamer* — oops, I meant *Board Gamer* — this column should not be construed as an official review of *Frag.* But in my ongoing quest to shed light on the FPS genre in all its forms, *Frag* is definitely the oddest shape I've yet seen it in.

For $34.95, what you get is a bit sparse. The *Frag* box includes a rules sheet, one double-sided gameboard (or two maps), three decks of cards (for a total of 112), a sheet of cardboard characters, and little cardboard blood splotches that you have to cut out yourself. Six-sided dice, which the instructions claim you'll need a "huge quantity of," *aren't* included. SJG couldn't even pop for character-record sheets: you have to make copies of the one on the back of the instruction booklet or download more from the *Frag* website (*www.sjgames.com/frag*).

Right off the blunt weapon, I had a big problem with *Frag* — nobody wanted to play it with me. It seems that PC gamers like to play their PC games on a PC, and board gamers don't play PC games dressed up like board games. Since up to six people

can play, and the instructions recommend between four to six players, no players meant no game.

Finally, I scrounged together a somewhat willing group. This is a rough simplification of how the game works: you grab a character and make a dice roll to see where you "spawn." Each player takes cards from three decks: Weapons, Gadgets, and Specials. (Weapons consist of Lightning Blasters, Shotguns, and such; Gadgets are Power Leaps, Armor, and the like; and Specials give you fun powers like Bonus Damage or Teleportation.)

And from there, the game plays like a PC shooter smothered in molasses. Starting with no armor or weapons except a trusty pistol, you roll dice to assess speed and movement across the board, calculate your attack ability versus another player's armor stats, use card power-ups and declare a weapon before making an attack, pick up abandoned weapons and armor, and even "telefrag" other players by respawning into an occupied square.

But, it must be asked, why play *Frag* if you have a PC and an Internet connection? I haven't a clue. It's like substituting soy patty for sirloin steak. For the PC-less, however, *Frag* has already launched an add-on pack, Death Match, and the upcoming western-set sequel *Frag Deadlands.* And I bet development time is a lot shorter than four years. **PG**
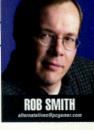
MOD OF THE MONTH

This month introduces a new staple, the Mod of the Month. I'd like to give a tip of the hat to Godfugitive, who told us about the *Max Payne* mod *Kung Fu Edition,* by Kenneth Yeung. (See, we really do read our website forums.) KFE replaces the lead pipe with some crazy hand-to-hand martial arts moves like kicks, judo chops, and jumping flips, and also lets you snipe right through a line of enemies. Get it off this month's *PC Gamer* CD or from *www. themelee.com/KungFu09.zip.*

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. GHOST RECON, 2. RED FACTION, 3. MAX PAYNE, 4. UNREAL TOURNAMENT, 5. QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA

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http://www.pcgamer.com

Build Your Own 3D RPGs

With The Elder Scrolls Construction Set, you can make your own Dungeon o' Damnation.

It's a little shameful, but it's true: I haven't created my own roleplaying realm (read: crazy hack-and-slash "monty haul" dungeon delve) since my first year of college some…harrumph…years ago. What stifled the creative juices then is my most prominent excuse today: I simply don't have the time to build a setting as compelling as I think I'm capable of building. (Not that I expect anyone to believe that.)

Each Morrowind mod becomes a plug-in that you can choose to load or not load every time you start a game.

Back then, armed with mapping paper, a hand-me-down typewriter, and a crate of sodas, the road to creative greatness was long, filled with pencil shavings, eraser dust, and illegible notes. Yep, running a D&D game required reading as much fantasy literature as possible (without vomiting), a stout personality to deal with peer grief, and patience.

Well, PC RPGs have advanced significantly over the last couple of years, embracing 3D space and using complex scripting patterns in a bold attempt to re-create the fluidity of having a live GM ready to respond to your every action. I figured that getting my hands on The Elder Scrolls Construction Set would open boundless new creative opportunities to return to the adventure-building roots of RPG design. But times have changed, the tools have changed, and the skills required to build games have evolved to levels above the casual.

TES Construction Set is the core game creation tool used by Bethesda to build its upcoming *Morrowind*. And while I've touted its ease-of-use — having witnessed it being wielded by experts like *Morrowind*'s lead designer, Todd Howard — getting to grips with the vagaries of 3D space when staring at a blank rendering window is a frightening prospect for a newbie like me.

What drew me to the *Morrowind* editor was the concept that all the tools used to build the game (which ships next year) would be in my hands. Conceivably, I could build a dungeon at the game's starting point, fill it with all the best armor and weapons while conveniently forgetting to place monsters, traps, or other obstacles,

and then load up the main game with the "Rob's a cheatin' git" plug-in (as it would be called) and stock up on the goodies. But it's not quite that easy. To create dungeons — or more ambitiously, towns — you need to be able to get your head around 3D design.

Placing a cavern from among 50-plus choices in the "Static" objects menu in the rendering window is literally as simple as dragging-and-dropping. So it's easy to throw rooms, corridors, doors, monsters, loot, and objects into your sandbox. But it's a whole other time-consuming matter to then manipulate them to "snap" together, look natural, and be populated with the right level of villains.

I discovered early in the creation of Rob's Dungeon o' Damnation that you need to go into this kind of project with a solid plan. Ask yourself upfront what kind of location you want to create. Is it a one-encounter dungeon? How about a new trading store or an entire town? Or a vast underground sewer? All these options are possible, since the shipping version of *Morrowind* includes the art and resources to build pretty much any fantasy-styled location imaginable.

Amazingly, once your basic structure is in place, you can even customize NPCs — change their appearance, attitude, and even write your own scripts and responses that allow quests to be set or completed, and vital information to be disseminated.

In my time with the editor I could *see* the possibilities, and I also understood my own limitations. While I wanted to create a dungeon that was spookily lit, looked like it had been built with a purpose, and housed a few script-driven NPCs among the sword fodder, I realized I'm not going to see the culmination of that plan any time soon.

But the options are there, and they're close. And with a vibrant community, *Morrowind*'s flexible design, interface, and user-created plug-ins will be the start of mod creation that could mimic the vitality that *Counter-Strike, Day of Defeat,* and others have brought to *Half-Life*'s existence.

Rob's Dungeon o' Damnation will likely never be satisfactorily finished. But I hope that once *Morrowind* ships, some of the committed RPGers out there who have perhaps abandoned their own pen-and-paper projects can resurrect their ideas with this powerful tool, and get them online for other gamers to try.

3D modeling, texturing, and animating are still beyond most of us, but dragging-and-dropping shapes, lights, items, weapons, and monsters into a 3D RPG world shouldn't be that difficult, right? I'll be tracking the *Morrowind* mod community closely after the game ships, so be sure to let me know when your plug-ins are ready for prime time. Remember, most of the original *Counter-Strike* boys are working in game design professionally right now… **PCG**

What every good dungeon needs: a skeleton, a rat, a table piled with loot…and a ninja monkey.

ADVENTURE AND ROLEPLAYING GAMES · ONLINE RPGS · NEWS · ETC.

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. BALDUR'S GATE, 2. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER, 3. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2002, 4. RED FACTION, 5. POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

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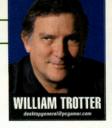
Blame Canada (for Fine Games)

WILLIAM TROTTER
desktopgeneral@pcgamer.com

Matrix Games scores a coup by resurrecting some classics from wargaming's Golden Age.

WARGAMES · HISTORIC & MILITARY SIMULATIONS · TACTICAL COMBAT

Mention the name "Simulations Canada" to a roomful of wargamers, and you can instantly see the demographic fault-line. Those who came to the genre after the mid-'90s will show a blank stare, while the faces of those who began playing in the '70s or '80s will show a jolt of nostalgic recognition.

Sims Canada began publishing boardgames back in 1977 — maps, die-cut

Some of wargaming's best boardgames will soon be playable on your PC, thanks to the Sims Canada/Matrix deal.

unit counters, and made-in-the-kitchen manuals, all crammed into a zip-lock bag — and soon became a major trademark. Before the company faded from sight, it had amassed an impressive catalog of respected games, covering a huge range of historical periods. Besides the basic repertoire of major 19th- and 20th-century wars, Sims Canada also produced some wonderfully exotic titles, such as Campaigns of the Mongolians (1982); Schnellboote (1984), a game of tactical PT boat combat; The Scourge of God (1982), which depicted the rampages of Attila the Hun; and "I Will Fight No More Forever" (1979), the only game ever to simulate the fascinating Nez Perce campaign of 1877.

But Sims Canada never quite got a foothold in the emerging computer-games

WE KNEW IT ALL ALONG!

Columnist Dave Kopel, writing in the Oct. 1 issue of the *National Review*, said: "…we have repeatedly been told that Americans…know nothing of war. [The TV pundits tell us that] the public will not understand the considerations involved, the risks, or the nature of the current conflict."

Not true, Kopel argued. He then advanced the theory that *because of the widespread popularity of sophisticated wargames*, many thousands of American civilians "know more about the nuts and bolts of warfare than most journalists who cover the subject, and most politicians who vote on military matters."

Kopel's essay also includes an excellent, succinct history of wargaming. It is, hands down, the best article of its kind I've ever read. The entire text is displayed at *www.national review.com/kopel/kopel100101.shtml*.

market. It published many distinguished titles during the mid-to-late '80s that *did* require the use of either an Atari ST or an IBM clone, but these were spartan, hybrid designs: neither fish nor fowl, they offered *no* graphics as such. The computer simply did all the number-crunching, die-rolling, and tedious boardgame-era paperwork, with actual gameplay still centered around maps and cardboard counters. Such designs were simply not competitive, and the company fell off the radar, publishing its last game in 1994.

Now it's coming back, and it's a big, bright blip, thanks to a deal between founder Stephen Newberg and David Heath, director of operations for Matrix Games. When Heath took a fresh look at Sims Canada's catalog (now totaling 65 titles!), he found a lot of buried treasure.

"These game designs are first-rate," Heath says. "Some of them are amazing. Matrix gets letters all the time from newbies who say, 'Y'know, I really like wargaming, but so many of these games are just too complicated.' Well, I think our Sims Canada games will be a perfect next step for these gamers — they're moderately complex but very accessible. And they're a hell of a lot of fun."

Newberg and Heath had been hatching this deal for more than a year before the official announcement, and the partnership has been mutually rewarding. Says Newberg: "Matrix has shown that it really cares about its customer base, that it's willing to go the extra mile for its customers, just as Sims Canada always tried to do. David has put the project together with a lot of enthusiasm and a firm directorial hand. I'm very pleased to have him at the helm."

Matrix doesn't intend to overload these updated classics with flash and chrome. "We'll add good graphics, a modern interface, and a play-by-email option," explains Heath. "The gameplay is so great, these products don't really need more than that to be fully competitive."

The first batch of titles will resurrect a series of lavishly detailed naval games that were widely regarded as Sims Canada's masterpieces. Kriegsmarine and Fleet Med will be blended into one super-game called *Europa Fleet Actions*, while Long Lance and In Harm's Way will be mated to form

LONG LANCE

A Computer Game of Tactical Naval Combat in the Pacific, 1942

Simulations Canada

Long Lance will be incorporated into Matrix's upcoming *Pacifica Fleet Actions*.

Pacifica Fleet Actions. Mid-'80s land warfare (NATO vs. Warsaw Pact) will be covered in a similar manner in *Main Battle Tank: Germany*. Two of the "A List" titles will revamp Sims Canada's epic treatment of Stalingrad and Kursk. *Main Battle Tank: Middle East* will also blend several older stand-alone games to form a panoramic treatment of all the Arab-Israeli conflicts.

A bit farther down the road is a game that makes the ol' Colonel's mouth water: *Red Sky at Morning*, a simply colossal simulation (operational/strategic) of a global Third World War.

If the initial batch of releases generates the kind of enthusiasm (and sales) Matrix anticipates, Heath has another *two dozen* Sims Canada games waiting in the wings.

And when can we expect to see the first titles in this hugely ambitious undertaking? Matrix is savvy enough not to promise anything prematurely, but Heath will say that work on the first releases is "well advanced" — barring unforeseen problems, we might see a game or two (or three) before Christmas.

Old wine in new bottles? Yes indeed! And what a vintage it is. **PCG**

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH… 1. WORLD WAR II ONLINE, 2. OPERATION FLASHPOINT, 3. SQUAD BATTLES: VIETNAM, 4. GHOST RECON, 5. ACROPOLIS

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The Sim Community Responds

Sensationalistic reporters showed no shame in implicating flight sims in the terrorist attacks.

In the aftermath of the horrific terrorist attack against America on Sept. 11, it's clear that we all just need to take a deep breath and let the healing process run its course. Unfortunately, there are some who feel compelled to jump on bandwagons and beat illogical drums at times like these in pursuit of facile answers. It's an unfortunate tendency in the American media to begin searching for easy scapegoats to "explain" incomprehensible evil to their audiences.

Less than two days after the disaster, MSNBC.com posted an article by Dr. Bob Arnot titled "Flight simulators could be a problem." In this terse and sensationalistic piece, Arnot (who is NBC News' chief medical correspondent, as well as a private pilot) pointed a direct finger at PC flight simulations and even went so far as to suggest their complicity in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians.

MSNBC.com's story "Flight simulators could be a problem" suggested that terrorists may have practiced using *FS2000*.

Avoiding the use of any specific brand names, he proceeded to describe Wilco Publishing's *767 Pilot in Command* add-on for *MS Flight Simulator 2000* in some detail, alluding to its ultra-realistic Boeing 767 cockpit layout and equally authentic FMC (Flight Management Computer) representation. Plenty accurate enough for any terrorist to train on, according to the article.

Extending his argument to the *FS2000* program itself, Arnot went on to describe the "accurate 3D map of Manhattan" and how the terrorists could have used the sim to target the World Trade Center "again and again." He saved his most disturbing accusation for the end of the piece, by posing the following question: Did the terrorists pick the World Trade Center *because* it was on a flight simulator?

The implications of this last question are profoundly disturbing and, frankly, insulting. Not to mention wildly speculative. (Arnot concedes that his article is entirely speculation, though it's an admission buried deep in the piece.)

Microsoft has been an exemplary corporate citizen in this crisis, demonstrating extraordinary sensitivity to the plight of the victims of these attacks and their families.

MS Flight Sim 2000 has become an unfortunate victim in the search for scapegoats following September's terrorist attacks. Sensationalism may get "pundits" airtime, but it won't help the situation.

In addition to an immediate donation of $10 million to the September 11th Fund, the software giant indefinitely postponed the release of its highly anticipated *Flight Simulator 2002*, and also made good on a promise to remove any images of the WTC buildings from future game builds (as well as earlier versions via a freely downloadable patch). Microsoft didn't have to do any of these things, but it did so out of simple human compassion for those directly affected by the tragedy. (There's certainly no small irony in the fact that Microsoft just happens to be a major corporate partner of the site that ran the Arnot piece: they're the MS in MSNBC.)

As a direct result of the unsupported speculation found in articles like Arnot's, some retailers in the U.S. and Britain made a hasty decision to remove all copies of *MS Flight Simulator* from their shelves. Knee-jerk reporting fuels knee-jerk hysteria, and the cycle is complete.

I'm a gaming journalist. More to the point, I'm a writer who covers PC sims. As such, I feel singularly unqualified to editorialize about the events of Sept. 11, the monsters that perpetrated those acts, or the tools they used to accomplish their obscene goals. You don't subscribe to *PCG* or buy a copy at the newsstand to get the skinny on world events. If anything, you read it to get away from the real world for a little while and indulge in some harmless escapist fantasy through the avenue of PC gaming.

Railing against PC aviation sims and then going so far as to implicate them as accessories in the deaths of almost 7,000 people is absurdly sensationalistic, and flight-sim enthusiasts would be correct in disregarding such tripe with a groan and a shake of the head. However, I would be shirking my responsibilities to everyone in the sim community if I didn't respond. The tragic events of Sept. 11 would have happened whether or not *Flight Sim 2000, Fly! II*, and add-ons like *767: PIC* were freely available. It's well-known that the terrorists shelled out sizeable amounts of money for professional flight training, some of them seeking this training years before committing their heinous acts, and they even sought to purchase a retired Boeing 727. To suggest that there is *any* relationship to the *Flight Sim* series is a pathetic effort to get on TV and rally up some scare-mongering, with no point, no focus, and no worthwhile conclusion.

So give it a rest, Dr. Arnot. Though the world could certainly benefit from the wisdom of your medical expertise right now, your unsubstantiated theories on flight sims and terrorism are completely off-base. Even in a new, more vigilant America. **PCG**

Flight sims were grounded by alarmist headlines in the wake of Sept. 11.

PIC's authentic Boeing 767 controls aren't very useful for those who just want to crash planes.

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. IL-2 STURMOVIK (DEMO), 2. FALCON 4.0 (WITH EFALCON 1.10 AND RPG 5.0 PATCHES), 3. BATTLECRUISER MILLENNIUM, 4. MS FLIGHT SIM 2000, 5. NASCAR 4

Real War

Use our patriotic strategy to play the game the way it should be played: with America handing those damn enemies doom and destruction. Go Joe!

The carpet bomber is a weapon of mass destruction. Its payload can devastate an enemy base.

If you've read our review of *Real War*, you know that the game didn't impress us all that much. However, since it does represent a fictional conflict between the U.S. and the terrorist group ILA, *Real War* presents a perfect vehicle for people who want to bomb the hell out of virtual terrorists. The strategies and tips you'll read here are intended only for use while playing as the Americans. The ILA, along with anyone who might be tempted to play as them, can piss off!

RECON AND INTELLIGENCE

As in most other real-time strategy games, the battlefields in *Real War* are covered with a fog of war. You'll want to know what the enemy's up to as soon as possible, so quickly build a recon unit and send it out to uncover the map. Promptly locate any and all chokepoints that you can use to your advantage and uncover a large area around them so you can see any incoming enemy units. Once all of these areas are revealed, send your recon unit out in an effort to find the flight path of the ILA's supply helicopters. We'll discuss this again later.

On the flipside, some missions begin with the ILA sending out their own recon units; once they find you, the ILA will attack. One good strategy in this situation is to quickly recon a large area around your base and find the ILA's recon as it's moving toward you. Let the ILA recon truck spot you, and then move your vehicle away from your base. Often this strategy will result in the initial ILA force going after that single unit, which will buy you more time to fortify your base defenses.

And finally, the ILA almost always launches an attack with aerial units early in each mission; pay attention to their flight path. The helicopters and jets always follow a straight path from their base, and knowing where the ILA scum are hiding will make launching a counterattack that much easier.

EASY BASE CONSTRUCTION

The vast majority of the American missions begin with you controlling a very small base at a pre-determined insertion point. The ILA will almost always attack you a few minutes after the mission starts, so you don't have long to prepare. You normally have enough money to build two supply depots and one electrical generator right off the bat, so build those immediately. Also, be sure to watch the bar in the upper-righthand corner of the screen: when it's blue your base has enough power, while red means you need more generators. If it turns red, immediately build more generators: if you don't have enough power, you'll be penalized with slower build times.

Your money will slowly regenerate on its own, but the big influxes of cash come with the supply helicopters that arrive every minute or so. Once the first supply helicopters arrive, build another supply depot (you can build only three land-based depots), followed by a Land Command Center, barracks, and another electrical generator. You won't be able to build all these at once, but get them up as fast as your funds allow. Once the barracks are complete, create a soldier and look for any supply stashes that might be near your base; these supplies look like a little stack of crates. Move your soldier near those supplies and leave him there; this will speed up the automatic regeneration of your money.

Next, build a vehicle yard, followed by two light anti-air vehicles, which you should position near key buildings. Next,

Once your base is up and running, your defenses should include bunkers, artillery, and anti-air units.

Have your attack helicopters find and then attack the ILA's supply choppers.

The Combat Engineering Center lets you repair buildings and vehicles.

build at least two light armor vehicles to fend off any land-based attacks.

By this time a few air and land units have probably attacked you. Make a couple more anti-air vehicles and a few more light armor vehicles. Now build a Combat Engineering Center, which lets you build defense bunkers. These defensive structures are very important: build two or three of them at strategic locations around your base and fill them with soldiers. Once properly employed, these structures will fire rockets at any approaching enemy vehicles and are particularly effective at holding the line. Remember, bunkers fire only at land units, not aerial units.

By this point, your base is well underway and you should be fairly secure. Continue to create more anti-air and light armor vehicles along with a few artillery units before focusing on your offensive capabilities.

IT'S TIME FOR AN UPGRADE

Once your base is up and running, it's time to focus on upgrading key buildings. After you've constructed a barracks and vehicle yard, you'll be able to build a Land Strategy Center. (The option to build the LSC is in your Land Command Center.) Once the LSC is done, you'll be able to upgrade the barracks, the vehicle yard, and the supply depots. Immediately upgrade all your supply depots; once they're upgraded, you'll get resources at an accelerated rate. Once the depot upgrades are completed, upgrade your barracks and vehicle yard.

In addition, if you're on a map that has water, construct a Sea Command Center, even if you don't need one to complete your objectives. The SCC opens up another opportunity to collect supplies and also lets you build destroyers and cruisers, which can fire long-range cruise missiles.

PAYBACK'S A BITCH

Once your base is suitably secure and you've performed the first round of upgrades, prepare your attack. Build an Air Command Center and create five or six attack helicopters. Bind the helicopters together (by selecting them all and pressing Ctrl + number) and send them off in search of the ILA's supply line. Once you find the point on the map where the ILA's supply helicopters come in, order your helicopters to patrol that area. They'll automatically attack and destroy any enemy units entering the patrolled airspace, including supply helicopters, which will seriously hinder the ILA's ability to wage war.

Once your helicopters are in place, build an airfield and add all the available add-ons and upgrades. Then build a carpet bomber and as many fighter bombers

Knocking out bridges that lead to your base will seriously hinder the ILA's ability to attack you with ground troops.

When starting a base, place your supply depots toward the rear to protect them from attack.

Aircraft carriers can launch extra fighter jets, which are handy during extended campaigns.

as you can. Recon the ILA base and find out the location of their air defenses, supply depots, and electrical generators. Send in your air units and have the carpet bomber target the ILA supply depots; use your fighter bombers to attack any air defenses. After the depots are down, target any nearby generators before heading back to base to re-arm. Continue attacking in this manner until all the enemy generators are down and then attack the ILA's airfield if they have one. If not, take out their vehicle yard.

While you're conducting these raids, you should also be building a sizeable

land-based force that's supported with mobile anti-air units. Once this force is ready, send it across the map and place it on the edge of the ILA's base. Coordinate your final attack so that your air and land units hit the base simultaneously, targeting different areas of the base. Use your land-based units to target any remaining air defenses.

Depending on the mission, it may take a couple of major attacks before you finally topple the ILA base in that area, but as long as you're using the full might of your forces, you'll emerge victorious. Time to raise the stars and stripes.

DIE, TERRORIST SCUM!

As much as we would love to see all of the terrorists of the world gathered under a glorious mushroom cloud of fiery nuclear retribution, we'll never be blessed with such a sight. (And our plan of watching a pay-per-view broadcast of those responsible for the World Trade Center atrocity being brought to justice probably isn't going to happen either.) So we'll have to settle for the next best thing: nuking the terrorist scum in *Real War* to oblivion.

Real War's nuclear missile packs a serious punch, and a direct hit will take out any building. To build the nuke, you'll need to construct a Land Strategy Center, then a Special Forces Center, and finally a tactical-nuke structure. Each nuke costs 1600, so they're quite pricey; if you have the money, though, you can keep building them. Before launching them, just make sure you've knocked out the ILA's air defenses, as those structures can and will shoot down nukes before they hit their target.

Once you have a nuke prepped, fire it at the most attractive target — which, unless you've

This is what it looks like when a nuke hits an ILA base. Such a glorious sight. USA! USA! USA!

already destroyed it, is the airfield, especially if the ILA's planes are parked there. If the airfield is already gone, target the ILA's headquarters instead. Or hold off on launching any other attacks and just keep firing nukes at the ILA until their base vanishes under the power of your nuclear-fueled rage.

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backspace

Things You Should Know About...

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

When John Carmack's fledgling Id Software (they used a capital "I" back then) unleashed *Wolfenstein 3D* in 1992, they unwittingly created a huge new genre: the first-person shooter. Everyone who's seen *RTCW*'s multiplayer demo agrees that the graphics are flat-out sensational. So we pumped Maxx Kaufman, who art-directed the project for Gray Matter Studios, for info about his work...

■ The *Quake III* engine is very powerful, but it was originally designed primarily as a multiplayer engine. *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, however, is mainly a single-player experience, so we made quite a number of enhancements to meet the needs of our game.

■ It's a matter of historical fact that Hitler was obsessed with the occult.

■ We did a great deal of research in Europe: our guys went over with digital cameras and took hundreds of shots, which we used as the basis for our textures. These photos were also used for planning out the village and castle environments.

■ The game's visual language was created using a combination of concepts, photos, books, and World War II movies.

■ We added weapons code to allow for distinct first-person weapons. This move allowed us to make a weapon look different in the first-person view than in the third-person view.

■ We created environmental entities to allow for much more complex props and special effects. For example, we can have knights that fall over when you pass too close to them. Also, we added a scripting language into the levels, which gives us complex control over the characters and environments.

■ I've read previews that took us to task for having "too many zombies." But this belief is not at all representative of the overall balance between zombies and Nazis that will appear throughout the final game.

■ We've been able to add a dimension of depth that you won't find in other WWII games by bringing to life some of the more bizarre things that were going on during that period.

■ There's another frightening and mysterious layer to the game, wherein you're not quite sure what you might find around the next corner.

■ SS agents really *did* search for the Holy Grail, and collected relics of the old Teutonic Knights.

■ We've taken things a step further, imagining that some of the more bizarre Nazi experiments were successful, and that they created super-soldiers and apocalyptic weapons.

■ We try to keep things believable in an *X-Files* sort of way.

■ You're always surrounded by authentic WWII characters, weapons, and environments. But as you pursue Himmler, you begin to encounter the monstrous manifestations and side-effects of his twisted experiments.

■ Nevertheless, most of the enemies are Nazi soldiers, leaders, commandos, and so on.

■ I used to think, "I can't wait until games look like movies!" And now we're right on that threshold. *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* is the best-looking game I've ever worked on.

"There was a high private pleasure in plugging a Nazi..." Norman Mailer, *An American Dream*

NEXT MONTH JANUARY 2002

The Ultimate Strategy and Tips Guide... Oh yes, it's time for our annual extravaganza where we dig deep into the biggest games and give you the skinny on how to solve them all. We've got cheats, we've got walkthroughs, we've got tips and easter eggs. We've got everything you need to get more out of some of the best new games, including *Ghost Recon* (left), *Civilization III*, *Empire Earth*, *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, and many more. Plus: We'll do it again — the exclusive first review of one of the most hotly anticipated games in PC gaming history. Can you guess what it is?

Soon, the *PCG* staff must prepare to go unto the breach. On Oct. 20, 2001, the 2nd Battalion, 69th Imagine Media Infantry, PCG Division, Creamy Company, will take to the paintball fields of Northern California in service of their great country. Leading this expedition will be EIC Robert Smith, with Executive Sergeant Daniel Morris by his side. Team sniper will be Joe "The Sniping Mitch." He's capable of popping a paintball on a moving target at 50 yards. Backing Joe up will be Jim Preston, aka "Yojimbo," a man who worked for *Daily Radar* and lived to tell the tale. Greg "TheVede" Vederman will take point. "We need someone who will be an irresistible target to distract the enemy so we can flank them," says Sgt. Morris. "Obviously, that man's chances of survival will be very slim to none, but it's a sacrifice we're willing to make." Vederman will be missed.

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Uncompromising Performance in a Thin and Light System
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- Modular 8X Max DVD-ROM Drive
- 16MB DDR ATI Mobility Radeon™ M6 4X AGP 3D Video
- Sound Blaster Compatible
- 8-Cell Li-Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology
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- Turtle Beach® Santa Cruz™ DSP Sound Card
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