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SPECIAL ISSUE

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DECEMBER 2002
VOLUME 9 · NUMBER 12

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Untold Treasures Await Those with the Strength to Find Them!

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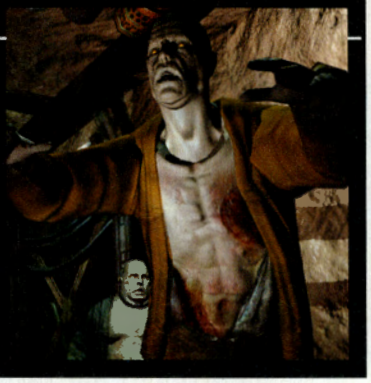
It's a story so huge that only *PC Gamer* could bring it to you: the exclusive first detailed look inside *Doom III*. We were given top-secret access to the geniuses at id Software, along with an extended viewing (and even some playing) of what could end up being the most terrifying game ever made. We'll tell you everything you want to know, including all the story info, and show you tons of new screenshots and art!



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and more!

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ON THIS MONTH'S PCG CD We've got colossally cool demos for swingin' shooter *No One Lives Forever 2*, the *Diablo*-ish *Divine Divinity*, and sky-high action/RTS *Project Nomads*! Plus, you'll find an *Unreal Tournament* bonus pack, patches, and more!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"Sell crazy somewhere else. We're all stocked up here."

Strategy gaming has never really been my thing. I've enjoyed the high-profile games in the genre — the *Warcrafts*, the *Ages*, the *C&Cs*, and others — but exclusively in their single-player modes. My ventures into multiplayer strategizing have, for the most part, always ended in appalling embarrassment.

But one strategy game has currently got me hooked, and at the same time loving and loathing its rock/paper/scissors balance. *Magic Online* represents a very interesting turn in PC gaming. On one hand, it's a fantasy turn-based strategy game that can be played to a limited extent for free. On the other, it's a deep and involving exercise demanding lateral strategic thinking involving numerous dukes and dekes. It's also the very top of what could be a downward spiral for gaming on the cheap.

Imagine that you eagerly tear open your brand-new copy of *Age of Empires IV*, plow through the single-player training, jump online to test your skills, and then face units you've never seen before. No worries…you can buy some extra units online to add to your arsenal. Now you can compete.

With Decipher Games' *Star Wars* card game following *Magic*'s lead online, we've not seen the last of this business model. And given publishers investing millions in MMORPGs to find a product that can generate hundreds of thousands of $12.95 monthly fees, the search will continue for the next great online cash cow.

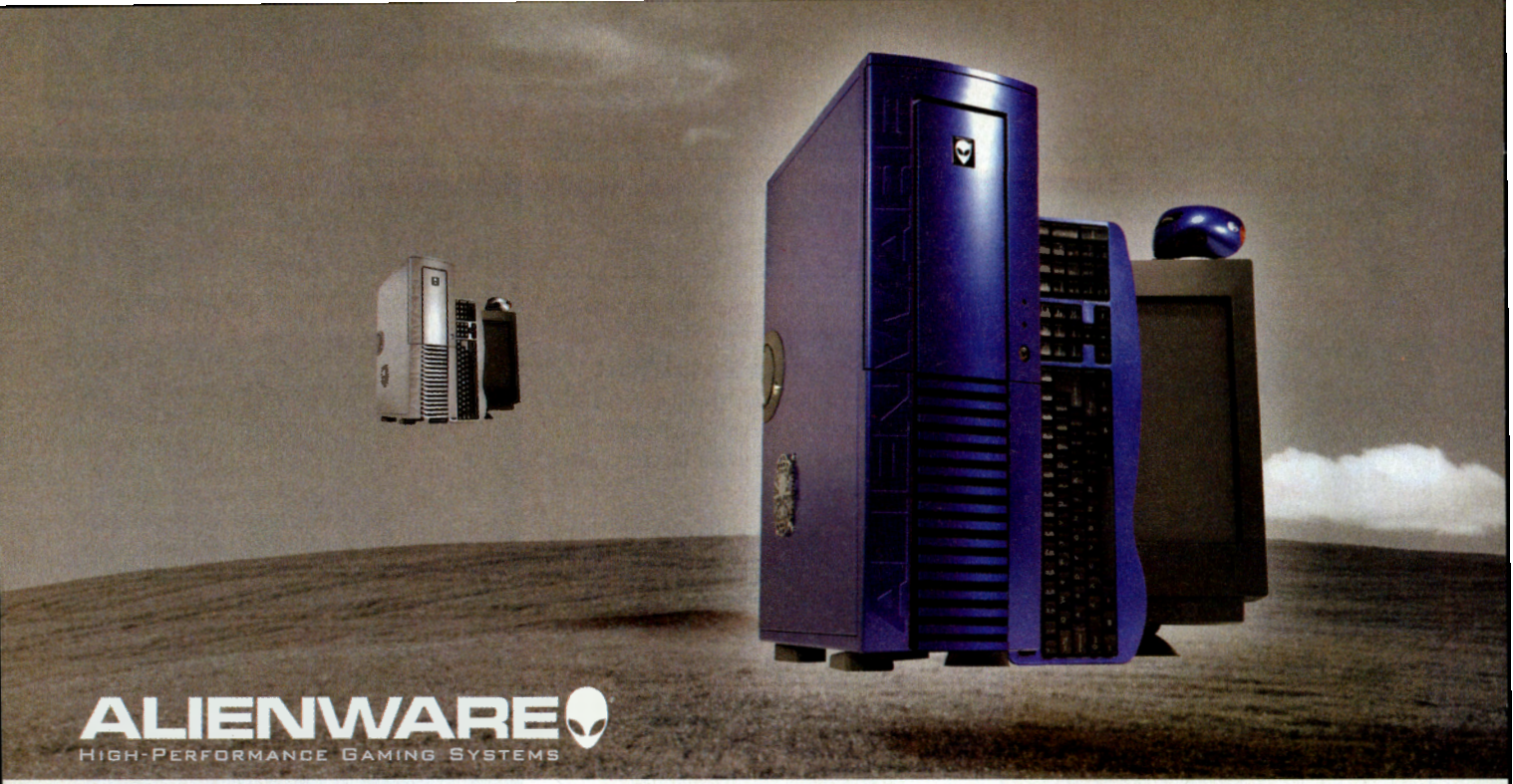
It could be easy. Last night I blew $5 in an intriguing way that was as easy to do as it was ominous: I bought five *Magic* tickets from the online store, used them to enter a sanctioned tournament, and then played a five-round tournament in which I got my humble deck's ass handed to me. This $5 lesson in bravado was sobering, but the lesson was to pay more to get the cards with which I could fight on a level playing field with the power players.

The question is, How far would you go in the pursuit of glory? Would you spend, say, $200 on the extra units to make you a *Warcraft V* champion? My guess is that so many people would that there's a really profitable business opportunity for the right property or franchise. Scary.

Such business ponderances aside, raise your glasses to Adam Davis for spotting last month's quote from *Field of Dreams*. Identify the film quote above and send your entry to *ednote@pcgamer.com*. I'll send a random game to a randomly chosen respondent who names the correct movie.

Rob

Rob Smith
Editor-in-Chief



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Diss-Information

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.***

You don't need Russians to make a great *C&C* game. The series started without 'em, and *Generals'* non-Soviet action looks *astounding.*

IT'S CALLED THE NEWSPAPER... LOOK INTO IT

SO I'M READING UP on *Command & Conquer: Generals,* and I'm in shock at how stupid it's going to be. Sure, the gameplay and graphics will be great, but what's up with the story? It's the dumbest thing ever. China? Terrorists? What the heck does China have to do with anything, especially with terrorists? And what does the U.S. have to do with China? What dumbass came up with this? How on earth will the campaigns be tied to each other? Whatever happened to good ol' USSR, and pure, simple balance between the sides? Bah. I'm not buying this game.

— Anonymous

Well, the USSR dissolved in the early Nineties, leaving China as the sole remaining Communist superpower. And it goes without saying that terrorism has emerged as the most clear and present danger to the free world. So to answer your question about "What dumbass came up with this?" we'd have to say, well, history did.

GAMER STORMS PARIS!

SORRY IF THIS IS A LITTLE bit late, but I just wanted to send in a picture of my 100th issue of *PC Gamer* in front of "L'Arc de Triomphe" in Paris. I read through the issue several times during the trip and can't tell you how much I love your magazine.

Oh yeah — I really was in Paris: this isn't a photo-editing job, as you can see upon inspection. I'm even wearing my new French soccer jersey.

— Brian Marcks

Upon seeing Brian march on the city with his PC Gamer *in hand, the French unconditionally surrendered, first to him and then to us. We are proud to announce that Brian has been appointed head of regime over there, and that the Arc de Vederman stands proud and true.*

WRONG, OLD BOY

HEY, NOT TO SOUND like a geek or anything, but there's an error in your *James Bond 007: NightFire* scoop (October 2002 issue): there *is* no Q anymore. Anyone who paid attention to the last Bond movie saw that Q retired and R took his place. Even in the console game *Agent Under Fire,* R is the main man with the gadget plan. But keep up the good work, and I can't wait for issue 200 to reach my door.

— Steve

Wrong! And that's the very reason you pay your hard-earned dollars for PC Gamer *— because we have all the latest facts. In the upcoming Bond film, as well as the game* NightFire, *R is officially promoted to the position (and codename) of Q. Consider yourself shaken, though not necessarily stirred.*

EA OUT OF BOUNDS

IT LOOKS LIKE EA SPORTS did it to us computer gamers again. The hype leading up to *Madden 2003* didn't reflect the game I bought, and I feel like I was robbed.

Problems with getting it to work on Windows XP aside, *Madden 2003* is not all it could be. The eye candy is sweet, but the gameplay is sour. I know I'm not alone in my disappointment: Just having a look at the EA forum, the amount of unhappy posts from PC players is a pretty good indication that *Madden 2003* is a seriously flawed game that was shipped 75 percent finished.

Furthermore, EA's technical team clearly thinks that time spent developing player-specific "end-zone dances" is far more important than providing solid AI or a well-rounded game.

Many of us PC gamers are getting fed up with being ignored by companies like EA Sports, and would hate to see your magazine be an accomplice to their blatant disregard of their customers.

— Adam Fallenbuchl

You're preaching to the choir, Adam. Our review of Madden 2003 *(October 2002, 74%) was highly critical on many of the same points you make here. (Our preview of* NHL 2003 *in the same issue — as well as our review of it in this issue — has similar comments.) We're starting to lose the love for the EA Sports franchises. Here's hoping the folks over there care about what we think: They know they can sell a million units on PlayStation 2, so the PC is pretty much an afterthought ancillary market for their sports division.*

TOP: It's useless to deny that *Madden* has some of the best graphics ever seen in a PC sports sim. But is it realistic? Hardly. BOTTOM: We love how three opposing skaters are near our goalie, but none of our guys can be bothered to defend our goal. It's time to accept that — on the PC, at least — EA Sports' glory days are in the past.

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With *City*'s awesome pantheon of heroes, who needs a girlfriend?

MORE HEROIC?

I WAS LOOKING THROUGH your October 2002 issue when I saw that *City of Heroes* was to be one of the Top Ten Games of 2003. As I flipped through some more, I noticed that we will *still* be playing *Freedom Force* all the way through 2006. Well, now, we couldn't be playing both. Which will we really be playing? *Freedom Force* seems to be as good as it gets in superhero gaming. Are you expecting *City of Heroes* to be better?

— Kim Pond

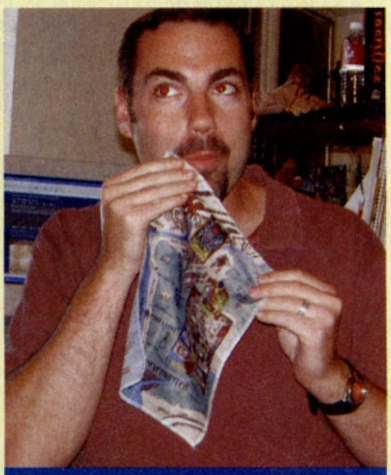
Well, Kim, not only is it possible to play both, but we also think you'll be unable to keep from doing just that. Freedom Force *will continue to offer great replay value and tons of user-created mods, while* City *will offer a full persistent online world to complement it. Heck, we've been following both the Marvel and DC continuities for decades now — what's a couple of games?*

MAP OR NAPKIN?

WHAT THE HELL IS THE LITTLE cloth map that comes packaged inside the *Neverwinter Nights* box? Does it have any importance? It would be very kind of you if you could enlighten me on the subject.

— JediKnight1058

When we found the nearly transparent cloth map included with Neverwinter Nights, *we thought it was an illustrated napkin. It's definitely the flimsiest game map we've ever laid eyes on. Next time, they should save themselves yet more money and just have a crayon map on some college-ruled paper.*



We finally found a use for the *Neverwinter Nights* map (or "mapkin," as we say).

ANY SECOND OPINIONS?

I'VE BEEN READING PC GAMER steadily for about three years now, and am quite pleased with the stories you run and find the reviews have been pretty bang-on most of the time.

Recently, your review of *Operation Flashpoint* (November 2001; score: 70%) seemed a bit off the mark to me. That's okay — I understand I don't have to share the reviewer's opinion of the game, and I actually bought *OF* before reading the review anyway. I absolutely love it, by the way.

This whole thing got me thinking, though. Do other staff members have a crack at a title under review before the piece is finished being written? Seeing as how your reviewer's issues with the game seem to be mainly control and visual aesthetics, wouldn't the review have benefited from a second or third opinion on these points? I don't mean to say you should have multiple reviewers spending the full amount of time with the game, but you must have disagreements about these things. It'd be great to read some dissent from other staff.

Okay, thank you, I'll go back to reading your kickass mag now.

— Miles Littman

The bottom line is that our reviewers are paid to render an expert opinion, and it's our job to make sure they're experts. That's why we stand by Andy Mahood's race-sim reviews, since he was a race-car driver for many years, or Li C. Kuo's military-game reviews, since we've personally watched him put an M-16 round through a target at 300 yards. The boy knows his military hardware.

In the specific case of Operation Flashpoint, *several editors here were slavering in anticipation of that game. Billy played through most of it, and Dan played many hours of it. The consensus of the staff matched that of our reviewer (Li) — it was a bit of a disappointment. (Though, with a 70% rating, it did earn an overall recommendation.)*

WE READ YOUR MINDS

THERE I WAS READING your October 2002 issue, and thinking it's been so long since you've put a poster in your magazine. I turn the page and, voilà, a poster of *No One Lives Forever 2*! Coincidence? I think not.

— Evan Osheroff

It's all a part of what we like to call "excellent customer service," Evan.

LUCKY GHOSTS

REMEMBER THOSE PEOPLE in *Ghost Recon*? The year was 2008...WHICH MEANS THEY GOT DUKE NUKEM FOREVER. Man, that sucks.

— xxUltraMetaxx

Actually, we double-checked with the boys of D Company, 2/3rd Special Forces Group, and they report from the future that Duke Nukem Forever *has yet to ship.*

NOT-SO-SPECIAL EDITIONS

I'VE MADE A STARTLING discovery in the PC game world: After eliminating all of the Game of the Year editions, online readers' choice editions, collector's editions, gold editions, platinum editions, elite editions, second editions, deluxe editions, limited editions, mucho macho editions, and all of the mission packs, expansion packs, and gold packs, it appears that only 37 original PC games have ever been made!

Does the industry need some fresh ideas, or is the gaming public satisfied with the regurgitation that is going on here?

— Steve Morgan

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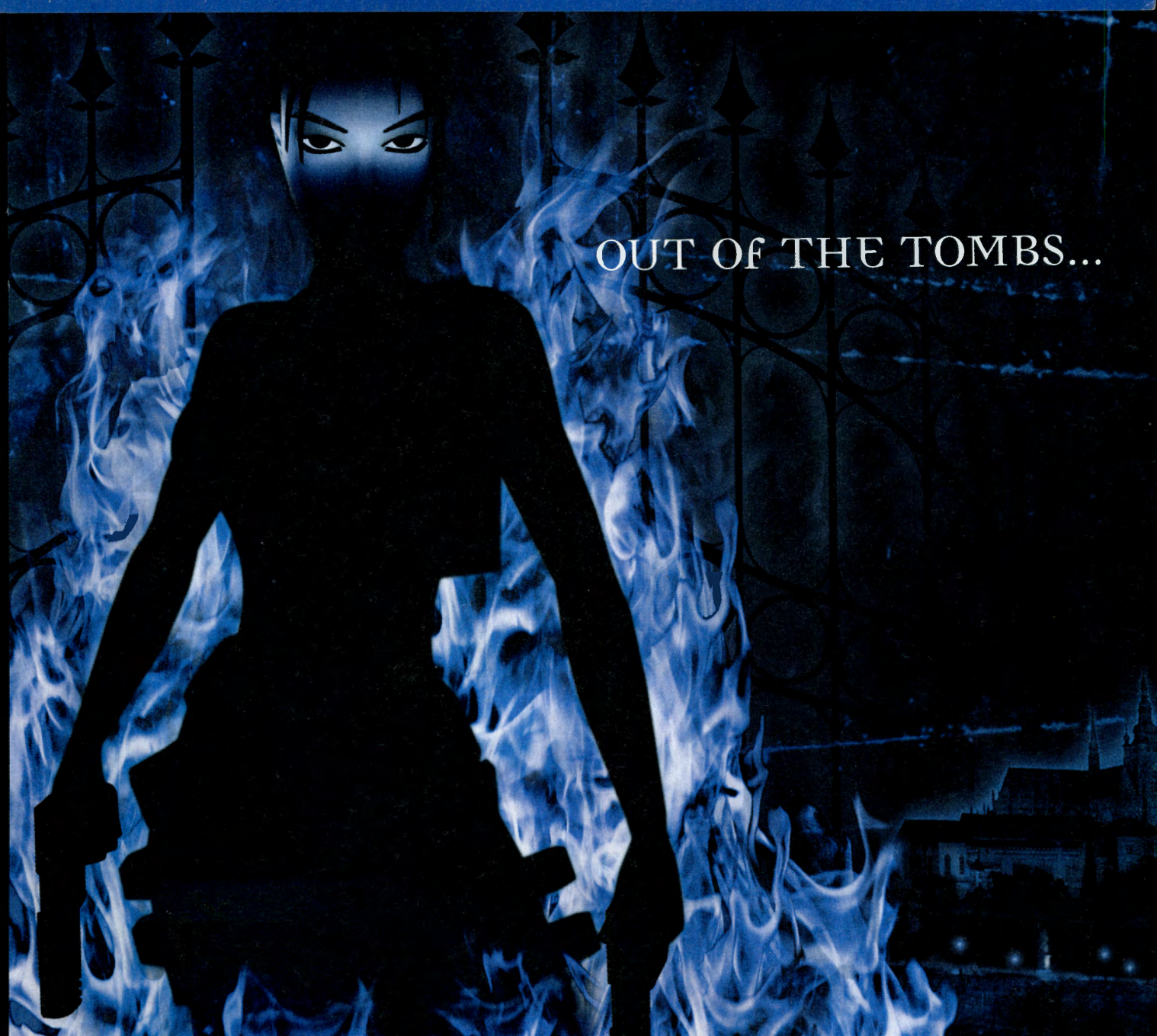


GAMING UNDER FIRE

GUYS, IF WE REALLY CARE about the work that the IDSA is doing on behalf of the industry and gamers, we owe it to each other to use more intelligent arguments than likening *Grand Theft Auto III* to *Hamlet* or the Bible as a form of expression, as you did in your October 2002 issue.

Let's face it: for a lot of people (including some gamers), the content of *GTA III* crosses the line. The fact that someone coded a game that not just simulates but also rewards sex with prostitutes, wanton murder, and violence, and then sells the game in the same place you can get *Super Mario Sunshine*, is an issue we have to at least try to find a way to deal with, whether we as gamers like it or not.

Now before people get all up in arms, let me just say that I'm a long-time gamer and an ardent defender of free speech and freedom of expression. I'm not advocating the banning of *any* games (including *GTA III*) or stupid (and likely unconstitutional) legislation that would regulate game content on any level, but this issue has made me curious about our appetites as gamers and how seriously software publishers take their responsibilities as caretakers of the medium.

Can *GTA III* and games of its ilk be fun? Sure, and I admit to owning a few of them and having a blast. But has anyone asked if we really need to play a game where we can violently carjack for no other reason than because we're allowed to? Does a game simulating a crime spree in a realistic city have value? Do "mature" gamers need to "get it on" with a pixelated prostitute for entertainment? I don't know, but I can see how some people would have problems with it and would want some help preventing into a Shambler and shooting a prostitute so you can get your money back. Drawing satisfaction on any level from the latter speaks to a need that I'm not qualified to analyze.

If we really want mainstream acceptance of gaming, it wouldn't kill us all to grow up a little. I think we can and should strive to do better. I can't help but feel that while games are amazingly more sophisticated and complex than they've ever been, they're not moving forward. If the message that we (publishers and gamers) send is that gameplay is all that counts, no matter the context, then we're hurting the medium and its potential for the future.

— Joe Kvam

This was the most cogent of several letters taking issue with our IDSA story.

We didn't compare GTA III *with* Hamlet *or the Bible; we just pointed out that by using Congressman Baca's definition of unacceptable material, both* Hamlet *and the Bible are rife with the same content. (Prostitution and violent felonies, that is;* GTA III *doesn't have any patricide or infanticide.) No one is holding* GTA III *up as a great work of art. But by promoting unfair and discriminatory legislation singling out games and not music or movies, Lieberman and Baca cause a chilling effect on a medium that is just beginning to find its legs as a source of mature, compelling content.*

The ESRB is a powerful tool for parents to use, with specific content warnings and parental guidelines. Politicians should refrain from the indignant speeches, and use the stump time instead to inform constituents about the benefits of adhering to and enforcing ESRB ratings in

> **I can't help but feel that while games are more sophisticated than they've ever been, they're not moving forward.**

Point well taken, Steve. But here's a little something in defense of the "many editions": Often, a great game will sell poorly on its first release. So after the product wins a couple of editorial awards or gathers buzz in user forums, it makes a lot of sense for a publisher to relaunch it when it might receive a bigger commercial boost the second time around. (And, in fact, this scenario is often what happens. Very few of you would have discovered No One Lives Forever if not for its award editions, for example.)

SHAMELESS GRANNY?

WHEN I FIRST STARTED playing *Grand Theft Auto III*, I thought I'd seen everything. Wow, was I wrong! Today while playing the game, I watched an old grandma pick up a hooker in her Jeep! This is a bit much, don't you think?

— Vlad B.

We take back everything we've said in defense of this game. It's abhorrent.

TEAM FORTRESS BLUES

I'M HERE TO "DISCUSS" *Team Fortress 2*. I won't whine about how long it's taking for the game to come out — I think the longer Valve develops it, the better it'll be. Let me just ask PC fans around the world, When's the last screenshot anybody has seen? The only ones Valve's shown are the ones using that enhanced *Half-Life* engine, and now Valve's using a proprietary engine that we haven't even seen yet. I suspect that *TF2* has been in development so long that some of the cool things about it have been done already. For instance, there's a beach-landing level — that concept would have been a first in 1999, but now it's been done in both *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and *Castle Wolfenstein*. Other concepts have also become a standard in recent games. Good luck, Valve.

— Sam Kjellesvig

We feel your pain, Sam. Our suspicion is that Battlefield 1942 *is essentially everything* Team Fortress 2 *was intended to be. (Even* Day of Defeat *seemed to fit that bill, and it was a free mod designed by amateurs.) This situation can end in only one of two ways: either Valve calls the whole thing off, acknowledging that feet were dragged for too long, or else (hope, sweet hope) it unveils a multiplayer action game so advanced and brilliant that it makes our heads blow up. Time will tell.*

VEDE-A-GRAMS

DID YOU KNOW you can rearrange the letters in Gregory Vederman to spell "Dog revenger army" and rearrange Mister Vederman to spell "Drivers meet man"? Just wanted to let you know.

— Ryan Noon

MONKEY MADNESS

I SAW THIS MYSTIC STATUE from the anime movie *Spirited Away*, and wonder if it was a shrine to the famous monkey with no hands.

— Godwin Leung

The Lord of the Rings

IN A NUTSHELL The fate of Middle Earth rests in your gamepad-calloused hands...

You can't directly control them, but the rest of the Fellowship is there to help you on your quest.

It's been almost 12 years since we had a game based on Tolkien's legendary trilogy, when Interplay released *Fellowship of the Ring* in 1990 and *Two Towers* in 1991. Now, amid convoluted licensing arrangements, Surreal Software is developing what should be the most visceral re-creation of the novel (not the movie) yet seen: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Free to pull inspiration from the entire novel, the developers plan to include every location, character, and encounter along a chronology that will match the book's. "The game is broken down into regions, and each region may have several levels," says lead designer Todd Clineschmidt. "There are seven regions — The Shire, The Old Forest, Bree, Weathertop, Rivendell, Moria, and the River Anduin — made up of 22 levels total."

The levels should be fairly expansive, as well as non-linear. "We're fortunate that the technology we developed for our *Drakan* games allowed us to build quite large, open regions for *Fellowship*," explains Clineschmidt. "You definitely won't feel confined, and you'll have the freedom to explore. The game should take the average player roughly 20 hours to complete."

You'll have the option of controlling Frodo, Aragorn, or Gandalf, though certain levels will be designed with a particular character in mind. "Each character has his own unique abilities," Clineschmidt reveals. "Frodo is very agile and, of course, can use the One Ring (and his sword, Sting). Aragorn is all about combat and can use various swords (including Anduril), as well as a bow. Gandalf has the sword Glamdring and powerful spells. Each character has different moves, too: Aragorn and Gandalf have special combat moves, while Frodo can do things like climb and shimmy."

As in the books, using the One Ring has serious consequences, and you'll have to weigh each situation carefully. As Frodo wears the One Ring, his purity will decrease, which limits how often he can wield it. And naturally, he'll also be corrupted by its evil influence.

Though you'll be able to direct only three of the protagonists, the other members of the Fellowship are present and accounted for, battling right alongside you. (One of the major unknowns is how well the computer will manage the characters that you're not controlling.) You'll need intelligence and teamwork, especially in situations where, as Gandalf, you must figure out how to gain entry to Balin's Tomb while the other Fellowship members fend off the two large Cave Trolls.

Combat will obviously play a major role. "The game features a variety of enemies: Spiders, Orcs, Uruk-Hai, Barrow Wights, Wolves, Wargs, Hill Trolls, Cave Trolls, the Southern Men of Bree, the Balrog, Old Man Willow, and more," says Clineschmidt.

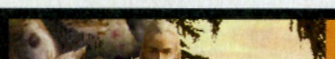
The most memorable encounters, if the novel is anything to go by, are sure to be with the dreaded Ring-Wraiths. "You'll face the Ring-Wraiths multiple times in different ways throughout the game," Clineschmidt notes. "At one point, you — as Aragorn — must fend them off with a torch as they attack the wounded Frodo at Weathertop."

From what we've seen, development is headed in the right direction. As Clineschmidt tells us: "This is a fast-paced, visceral action title that faithfully follows the book. What more could a Tolkien fan ask for?" We're hoping the answer will be a resounding "Nothing." — *Bert Salkmoor*

As Frodo, you'll constantly need to ask yourself whether now is the time to use the One Ring.

Gandalf has the advantage of being able to call on the power of magic to aid him.

Billy Harms' Hobbit name is Sancho Grubb of Little Delving. (Find *your* Hobbit name at *www.chriswetherell.com/hobbit/*.)



CATEGORY: Action/adventure
DEVELOPER: Surreal Software

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: Because the game is based strictly on the novel

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Surreal developed *Drakan* (*LOTR*

Computer Games Magazine (Editors' Choice)

Computer Gaming World (Editors' Choice)

PC Gamer (Editors Choice)

"...a PC gaming classic for the Ages."

95 out of 100

PC Gamer

"The DM Client and tools elevate Neverwinter Nights into a creative medium of expression"

4.5 out of 5

Computer Gaming World

www.neverwinternights.com

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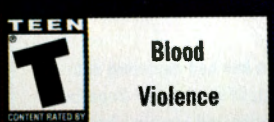

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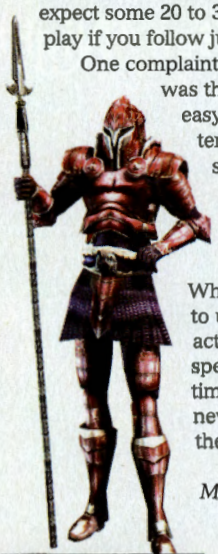
The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal

IN A NUTSHELL As if you need *another* reason to play *Morrowind* for hours and hours...

While user-created content has given us *Morrowind* addicts even more locations to explore after finishing the vast campaign, it's rarely matched the quality imbued by the game's original designers. Fortunately, those same capable coders at Bethesda have been hard at work on the official expansion, *Tribunal*.

Adding *Tribunal* into your existing game will open up a new area called Mournhold, a huge city that's actually the capital of Morrowind. Unlike the relaxed, freeform style of play in the main game, *Tribunal* will introduce a more focused plotline. That's not to say that you won't have the freedom to do things your own way — there'll still be side-quests aplenty — but the events you witness will need to be addressed with some urgency.

And during the course of your journeys, you'll have to deal with assassins nipping at your heels, a ruthless new leader, god-kings Almalexia and Sotha Sil, plus several enormous dungeon treks. In all, you should expect some 20 to 30 additional hours of play if you follow just the critical path.



"If anyone messes with me, I'll jab 'em good with my +2 Spear of Ass-Kicking."

One complaint about *Morrowind* was that it became too easy once your character was buffed. That should no longer be an issue, as *Tribunal* has been designed to challenge your high-level hero. While it's not necessary to use an existing character, you will need to spend some additional time building up your new avatar to deal with the hard road ahead.

Another gripe with *Morrowind* was the way the journal tracked your progress. Project Leader Todd Howard believes this problem has been abolished: "In the journal you can now sort by quests you have active or have done, and see all the journal entries for a particular quest," he tells us. "And [the journal] retrofits the quests in *Morrowind* to work with that system." In addition to the improved journal, you'll now be able to make notes directly on the map.

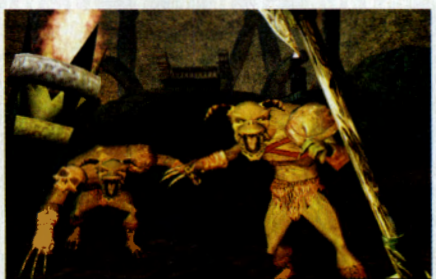
Tribunal will also be fully mod-able — good news for the thriving community. "*Tribunal* is another 'master' file," says Howard. "We designed the Elder Scrolls Construction Set from the beginning with this option in mind, so you can make plug-ins that are based on multiple master files."

The graphical look of *Tribunal* will be consistent with the rest of the game world — not that any visual improvement was needed to this remarkably attractive game. Of course, you'll find plenty of new weapons, armor, and magic, and face a host of new foes. One of the main adversaries will be the goblins that live below the city.

The developers are certainly excited about the new adventuring opportunities *Tribunal* represents. Says Howard: "It should offer some of the best *Elder Scrolls* questing people have done — a good story, good dungeons, and some cool new quest twists. My personal favorite is one where you have to take an actor's place in a stage-show in Mournhold." Fantastic! — *Bert Salkmoor*

The world of Morrowind still looks awesome, especially the huge outdoor spaces.

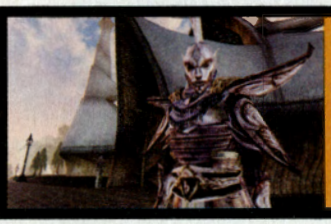
Tribunal's new areas should challenge even the most battle-ready hero. Make sure you're well-armed.



These goblins can't wait to suck the marrow from your bones. Best lay the smack down on them.

Back in 1996, *Morrowind* was called *Tribunal*. It was set in Summerset Isle, and dealt with High Elves, not the Dark Elves.

F.Y.I.



CATEGORY: Roleplaying
DEVELOPER: Bethesda
PUBLISHER: Bethesda
WWW: elderscrolls.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 85%
RELEASE DATE: November 2002

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: The new area, Mournhold (Morrowind's capital), looks fabulous, and the new beasties will challenge even the mightiest adventurer. And the tweaked journal has additional functionality.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Bethesda has had moderate success with titles like *Sea Dogs*, but its best-received products have always been the *Elder Scrolls* games: *Daggerfall*, *Arena*, and *Redguard*.

By The Developers of the Award-Winning Imperium Galactica™ and Imperium Galactica II™

HEGEMONIA™
LEGIONS OF IRON

IN 2104, MANKIND IS ENGAGED IN A FRATRICIDAL WAR BETWEEN EARTH AND MARS POPULATIONS. AFTER WEEKS OF FIERCE SPACE BATTLES AND HEAVY LOSSES, BOTH SIDES HAVE TO JOIN TOGETHER AND FORM THE LEGIONS OF IRON TO FIGHT A NEW ALIEN ENEMY FORCE.

"...promises to breath new life into the deathly quiet genre of sci-fi 3D RTS gaming...one of the best looking games on the E3 showroom floor." - *GAMESPY*

"...the game simply looks gorgeous and also plays very well to boot." - *HOMELAN*

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — VIOLENCE

POWERED BY gamespy

PC CD ROM

DIGITAL REALITY

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DREAMCATCHER

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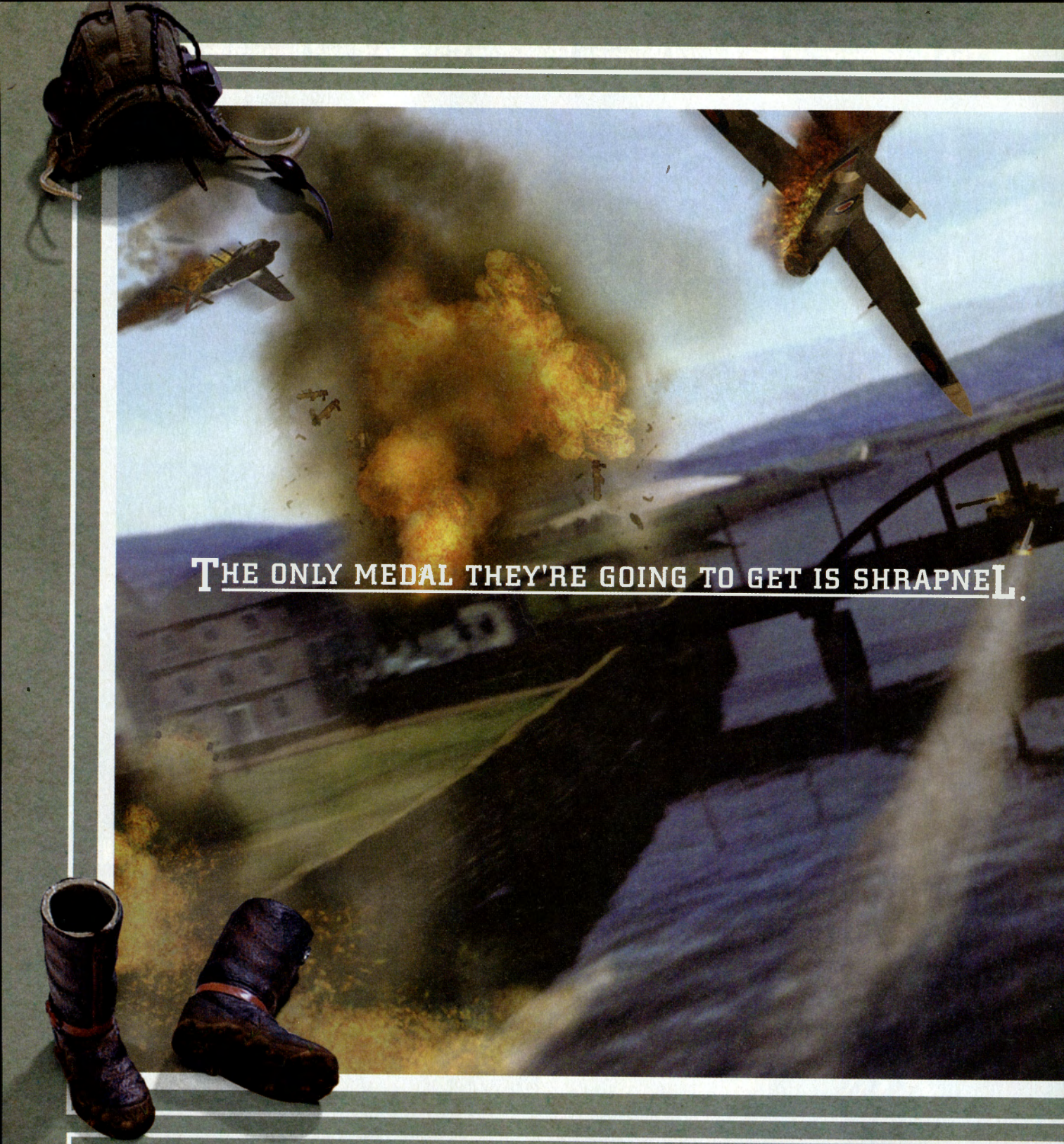

Microsoft game studios

EVERYONE E Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

If you want a victory medal, you'll have to go through them. So pick an allegiance, choose one of our 34 authentic planes and prepare yourself for extreme, low-flying WWII combat missions over Europe.
Combat Flight Simulator 3. As real as it gets.

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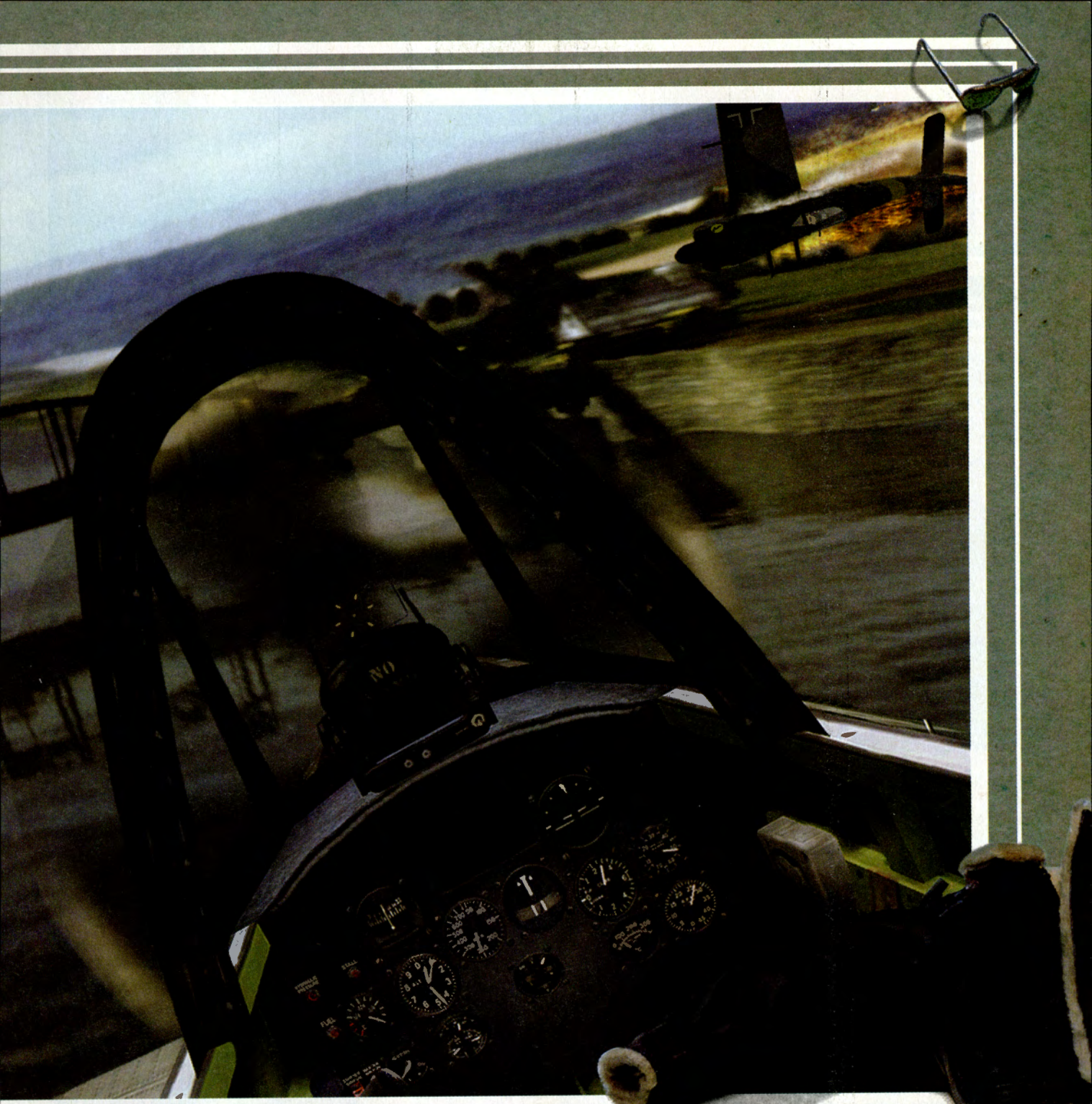

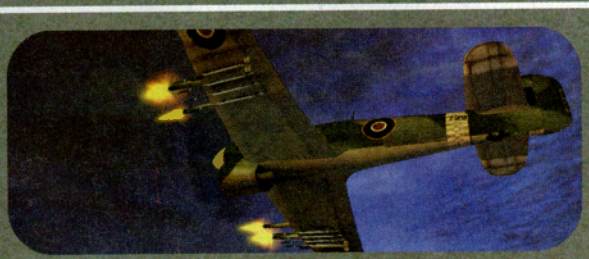

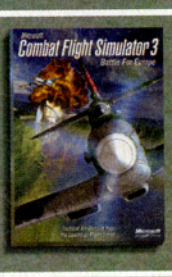

Microsoft
Combat Flight Simulator 3
Battle For Europe

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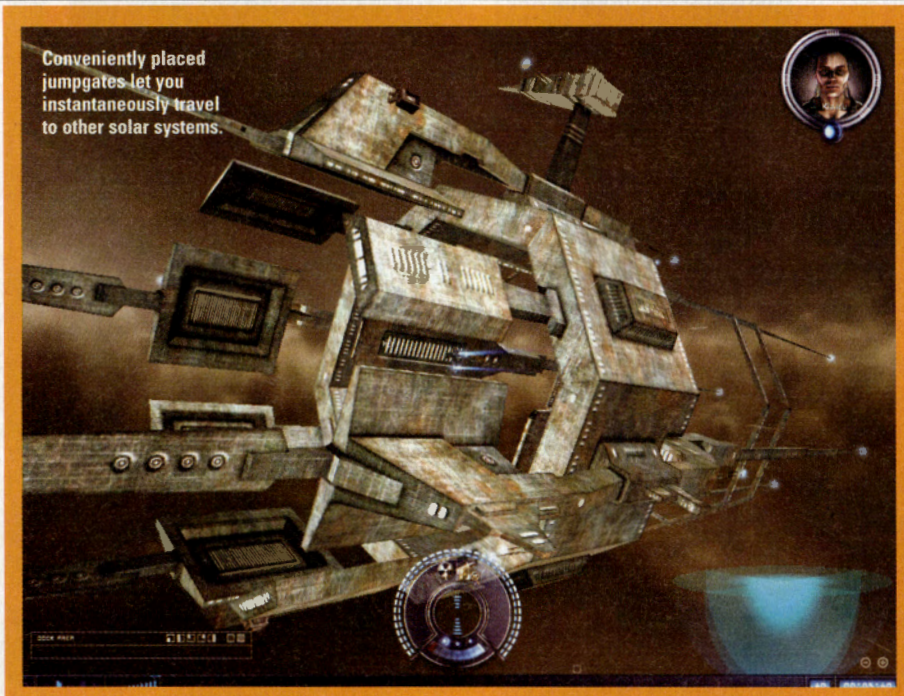
Hands On

As 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.



EVE ONLINE

With its stunning graphics and deep gameplay, it's an MMORPG to watch

Once upon a time, *EVE Online: The Second Genesis* was more likely known as the space MMORPG that *wasn't Earth & Beyond*. But positive buzz from beta testers has prompted a course reversal, and now that both games are set to go head-to-head for sci-fi fans' online dollars, we figured it was time to take a jaunt around *EVE*'s side of the late-beta universe.

As in any other MMORPG, the first task is to choose your character. You're presented with a choice of five races: Amarr, Gallente, Minmatar, Caldari, and Jove. Because all are descended from Earth, each race is vaguely humanoid, though in a cyber-gutterpunk way. Think Keith Richards pumped full of nanites with a transistor jammed in his forehead.

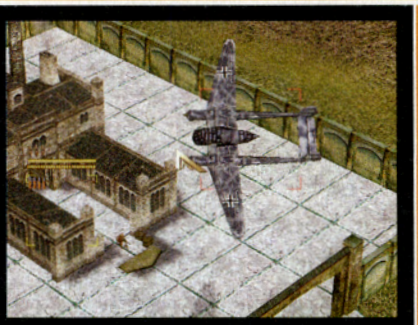
DEVELOPER CCP
PUBLISHER Simon & Schuster Int.
RELEASE DATE December 2002

Though you see yourself only as a spaceship during gameplay (even while docked in spaceport, unlike in *E&B*), your portrait will be visible to anyone who selects your ship. You could spend ridiculous amounts of time tweaking your appearance: not only do you pick your face, sex, hair color, and clothing, but you'll have a multitude of lighting and background options as well.

Apparently, capitalism will be the second genesis for mankind. Commerce is the core of *EVE*: you can join or start corporations; go into business for yourself as a miner, enforcer, or trader; or even become a rogue space pirate. Social interaction actually has a purpose beyond mere chatting. If you're a scientist in need of minerals, advertise mining missions for other players. In need of a new laser turret? Bid for one against other players in the marketplace and sell your old one to the highest bidder.

Graphicswise, *EVE Online* is a powerhouse. Sunlight glints off the beautifully textured hull of your spacecraft, and I especially like the way your ship jitters and surfs the solar winds as it warps from system to system. And though I was playing over CCP's servers based in Iceland, my ride was a smooth one. In fact, CCP even claims *EVE* is thoroughly playable over a 56K modem. We'll find out if that's the case in a month or so. — *Chuck Osborn*

Bjork is Iceland's best-known export, but we're hoping that *EVE* won't feature a swan-suit spaceship.



■ All units are rendered in 3D, and you can play the game from an overhead or zoomed-in view.

■ Landscape and lighting play key roles in combat, and day and night contrast beautifully.

WORLD WAR II: PANZER CLAWS

THE ONGOING WWII vogue isn't limited to the FPS genre, even though the complexity of most war sims and strategy games has pushed casual gamers toward that venue. *Panzer Claws* is a welcome alternative to *Wolfenstein* and *Medal of Honor*, presenting straightforward tank-blasting action in a real-time-strategy shell.

As either the Allied Forces, Russian Red Army, or German Wehrmacht, you command an army of tanks, infantry, and planes fighting on vast 3D landscapes. As the game name suggests, the focus is on tank confrontation, and there's plenty of it. Though battles play out slowly (units move at an almost mind-numbing pace), strategic positioning of your ground units is integral; pure numbers don't always cut it.

DEVELOPER In-Images
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive
RELEASE DATE Fall 2002

Keeping the focus on the action, buildings are resources and are acquired through quick captures, though a simple construction and upgrade scheme lets you crank out more advanced units. Aerial support such as bombers and paratroopers can be called in, but you won't actually control the air units.

Besides the three campaigns, a thorough skirmish mode will offer five game modes and 18 maps; my favorites so far are "Stalingrad" and "Islands." *Panzer* promises heaps of action without a steep learning curve. — *Norman Chan*

■ From top to bottom: (1) Your glasses offer three viewing modes, including X-ray (which, for obvious reasons, isn't shown here). (2) Gadgets play a large role in the game and are required to get past certain areas. (3) Stealth is often the key to survival. (4) *NightFire*'s environments are rich and varied. (5) Enemy AI looks to be challenging, as baddies will work together and hide behind cover. Of course, that just makes snuffing them out all the more satisfying.

007: NIGHTFIRE

The first Bond game for PC looks to be worth the wait

Facing down squads of terrorist goons is no big thing for Mr. James Bond.

James Bond is a man's man: he kicks the tar out of every bad guy he faces; he's given cool gadgets and drives exotic, rocket-firing sports cars; and every woman he meets falls in love with him (at least for one night). Yep, it sure would be great to be James Bond.

Well, PC gamers will finally get a little taste of what it's like to be the world's savviest super-agent when Gearbox's *James Bond 007: NightFire* is released later this year. I recently played through several of the game's nine locations and came away extremely excited about this first-person action game.

Without ruining the story, the new, non–movie-tie-in plot is classic Bond — bad guy wants to mess up the world, 007 has to stop him, martinis are consumed. The action jumps from Austria to Tokyo to a remote tropical island, and beyond. Pulling me through even these beta-stage missions were objectives with great variety and depth.

The opening mission has Bond parachuting into the compound of an Austrian castle, where he needs to crash a party and meet with a contact. The cool thing is that while you can sneak in (of course), you can also go in guns-a-blazing. This kind of pseudo-stealth gameplay seems to pervade many of the game's missions.

Another highlight from my play-testing included a segment where you're in a tower, armed with a sniper rifle, and you have to cover an AI-controlled partner. And I loved a scenario in which you're in an elevator on the side of a building, trying to reach the ground, and every bad guy in the country is lighting you up. It's exhilarating, sweat-inducing stuff.

You'll get all of Q's gadgets, including a laser wristwatch that can be used to burn off locks, a pen that doubles as a tranquilizer gun, and sunglasses that offer multiple view modes, such as night vision and X-ray. Visually, the world of *NightFire* is rich and vibrant, and makes great use of color. The Austrian castle, for example, is warm and inviting (except for the huge bodyguards, that is), and looks like the kind of place where the uber-rich would gather for soirées and super-secret villain meetings.

DEVELOPER
Gearbox Software

PUBLISHER
EA

RELEASE DATE
Late 2002

All of the character models are highly detailed, too, and they show off a wide range of animation. In one instance, I gunned down a guard and — in a true "living a movie" moment — he flipped over a rail and fell to the ground below. Another sweet spot was when I sniped an unsuspecting guard and he fell back into a fountain filled with frozen water: his body broke through the ice and he ended up laying in the fountain, his legs sticking up in the air. It's inspiring to see that level of detail.

And with that, here's a nugget of wisdom from Mr. Bond himself: "Anything can be penetrated with the proper tool." Indeed. — *William Harms*

In the novel *You Only Live Twice*, Bond "becomes" Japanese by dyeing his skin and cutting his hair.

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

We get down and dirty with the third installment of this acclaimed tactical-action series

The enhanced AI will properly deploy and cover all possible firing angles.

I've been excited about *Raven Shield* (hereafter referred to as *Rainbow Six 3*) since it was announced, but now that I've actually *played* the game, my excitement and my expectations have sky-rocketed. *Rainbow Six 3* is poised to kick major ass, due in part to its being packed with tons of juicy refinements, including the ability to use your mouse wheel to slowly open doors; the new "mouse" look option that lets you peek around corners and over walls; a new graphics engine; and the same sweet, sweet tactical gameplay that we've loved for years.

DEVELOPER
Ubi Soft Montreal

PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

RELEASE DATE
Early 2003

I played through six of the game's 15 single-player levels, and the enhancements made in the transition from the previous technology to the modified *Unreal* powerhouse are palpable. From the highly detailed character models to the real-world environments, the visual style is spectacular, and you'll see subtle but immersive touches everywhere, like your boys slinging their rifles over their shoulders to pick a lock.

The death animations are extremely satisfying, too: When you double-tap a terrorist, he'll collapse in a heap, his limbs bending in all the appropriate places. Best of all, enemies no longer fall through walls or stairs: if you shoot a bad guy while he's standing on stairs, he'll slide down them or simply fall down, his body conforming to their shape.

The planning section of the game is essentially the same: you get a top-down view of the map and you lay down your teams' path and waypoints. Improvements to this system include letting you right-click on a waypoint and assign a specific action, like recon, to that waypoint. You can also select a waypoint and then get a fully moveable 3D view of the surrounding area, which is particularly helpful when you need to see any nearby windows or doorways.

This time around the terrorists throw grenades and use cover, and in one particularly diabolical maneuver, they'll occasionally surrender and drop to their knees, only to suddenly reach for a hidden weapon. In other words, you'll need to be on your toes.

The elite members of Rainbow also exhibit a good degree of intelligence. They'll make sure the rear is covered, they'll efficiently bang-and-clear rooms, and when fired upon, they'll lay down a lethal barrage of counter-fire. Controlling them is straightforward — a white-colored icon (which depicts the available action) will appear on your screen and you simply hit the action button to get your squadmates moving. You can also delay a particular order for those times when you want to launch a tightly orchestrated assault.

The only bad news from my play-testing was learning that *Rainbow Six 3* has been delayed until the beginning of next year. Ubi Soft says it'll be using the time to further polish the game. — *William Harms*

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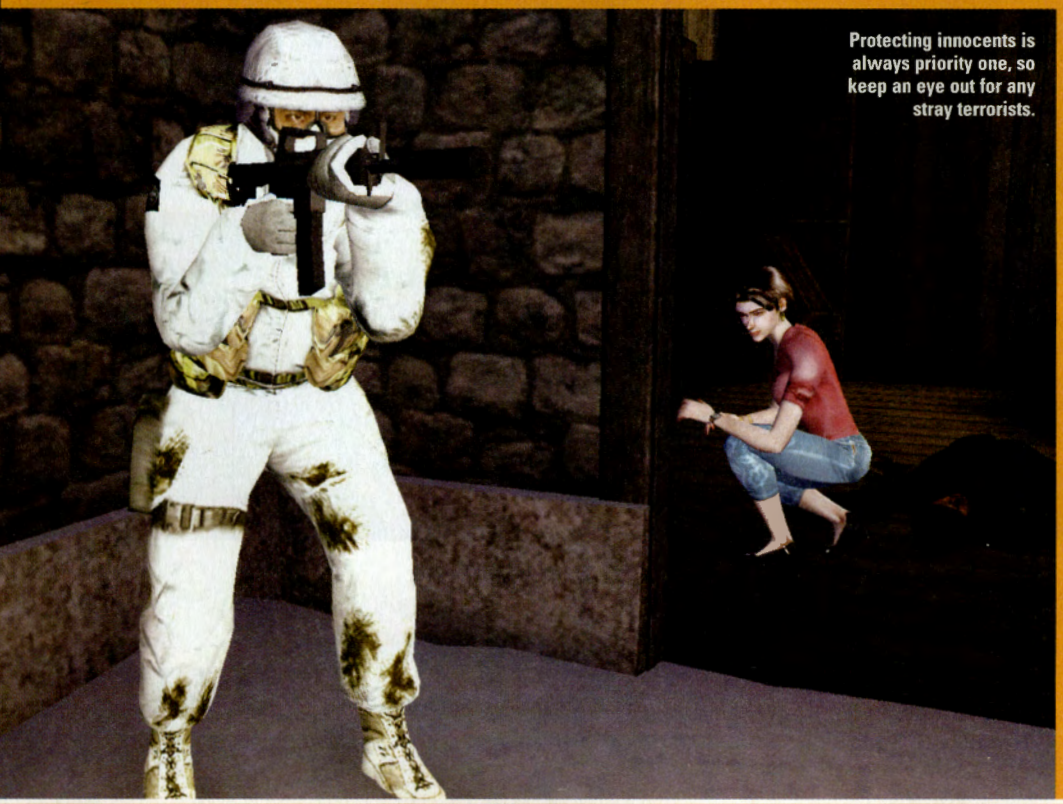
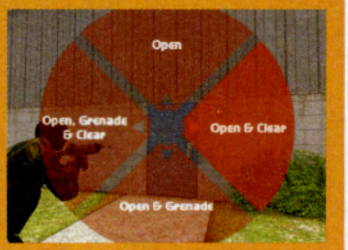
■ From top to bottom: (1) One of the missions takes place in a refinery, and the action is immediate and brutal. Be sure to check your corners. (2) Enemy AI promises to be especially smart and will use cover, go prone when fired upon, and deliver a lethal volley of gunfire. (3) Team Rainbow is ready to deploy to any part of the world, no matter the environment. (4) This is the last thing a cold-hearted terrorist bastard will ever see. Hope you enjoy your time in hell!

Delta Force is America's primary counter-terrorism group. Its principal task is hostage rescue.

All of your weapons are fully customizable, so you can add scopes, silencers, and extra clips.



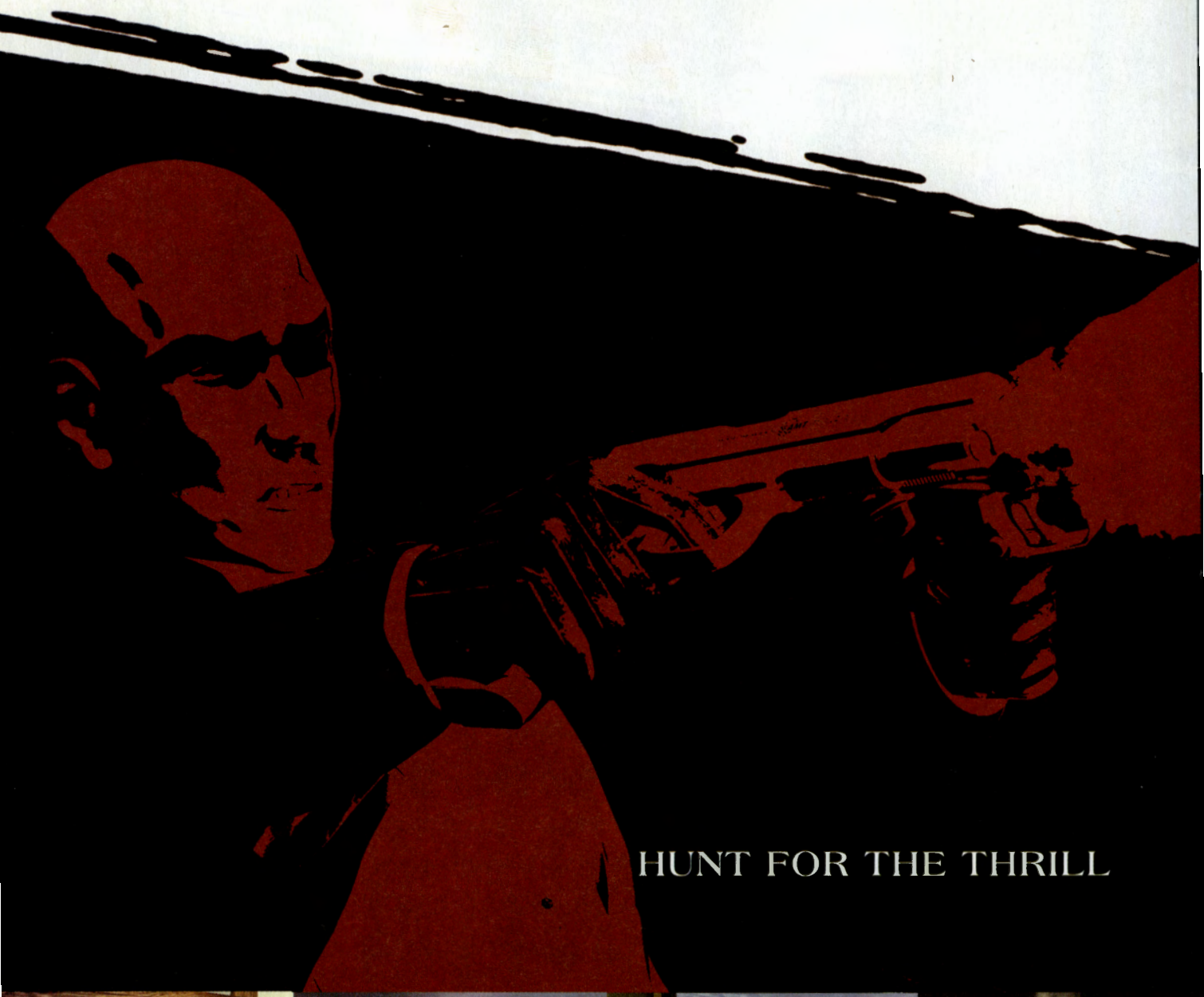
Protecting innocents is always priority one, so keep an eye out for any stray terrorists.



This simple interface lets you issue orders to the rest of your team. You can also "stack" orders, which will let you storm — guns blazing — a room from multiple entry points.

The *Unreal* engine is looking extremely impressive, particularly the character models. Of course, no matter how detailed a bad guy looks, he still has to pay the price for his transgressions. So long, scumbag.

Delta Force was created on Nov. 19, 1977, and was modeled after the British SAS.



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Violence

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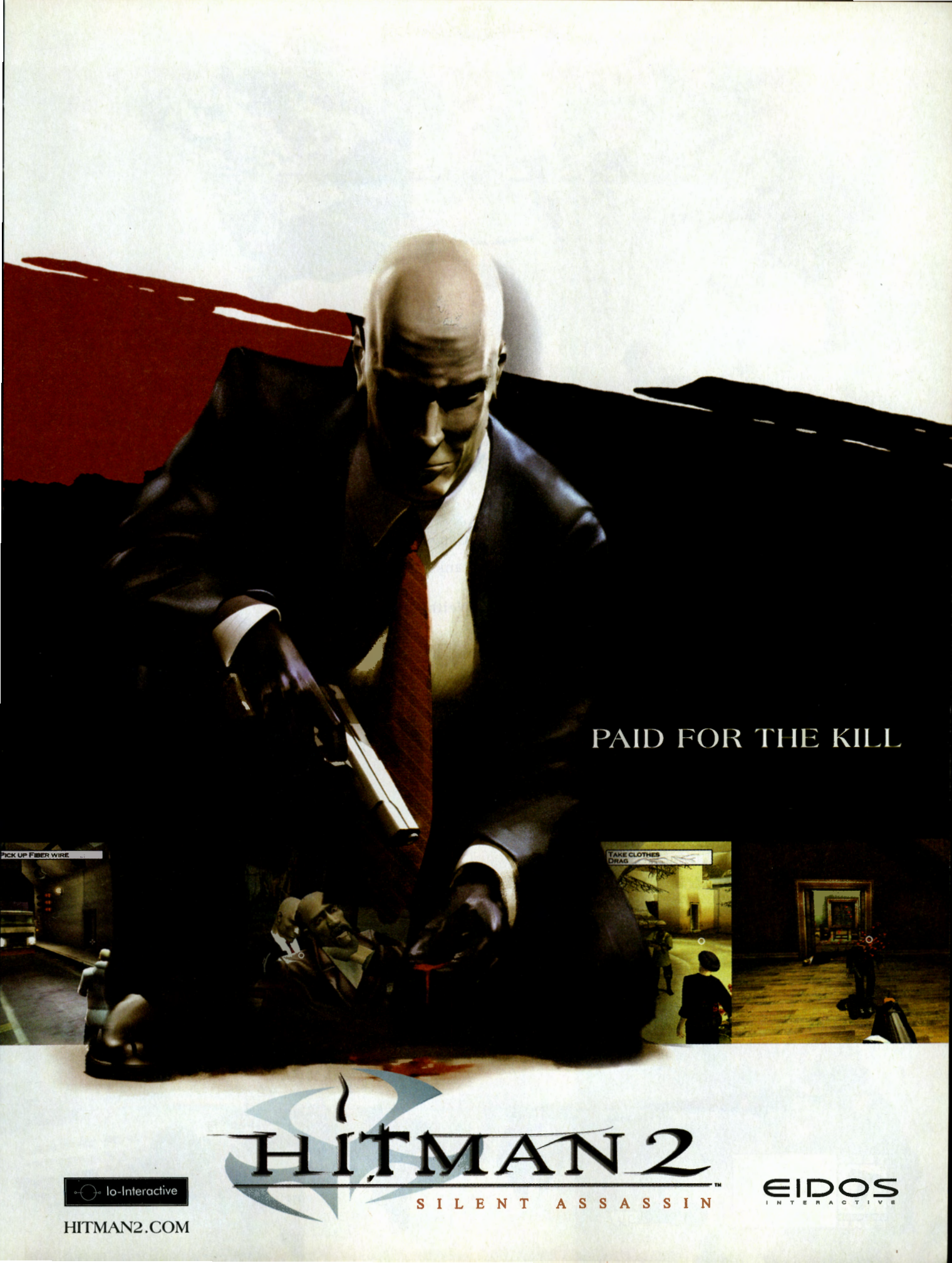
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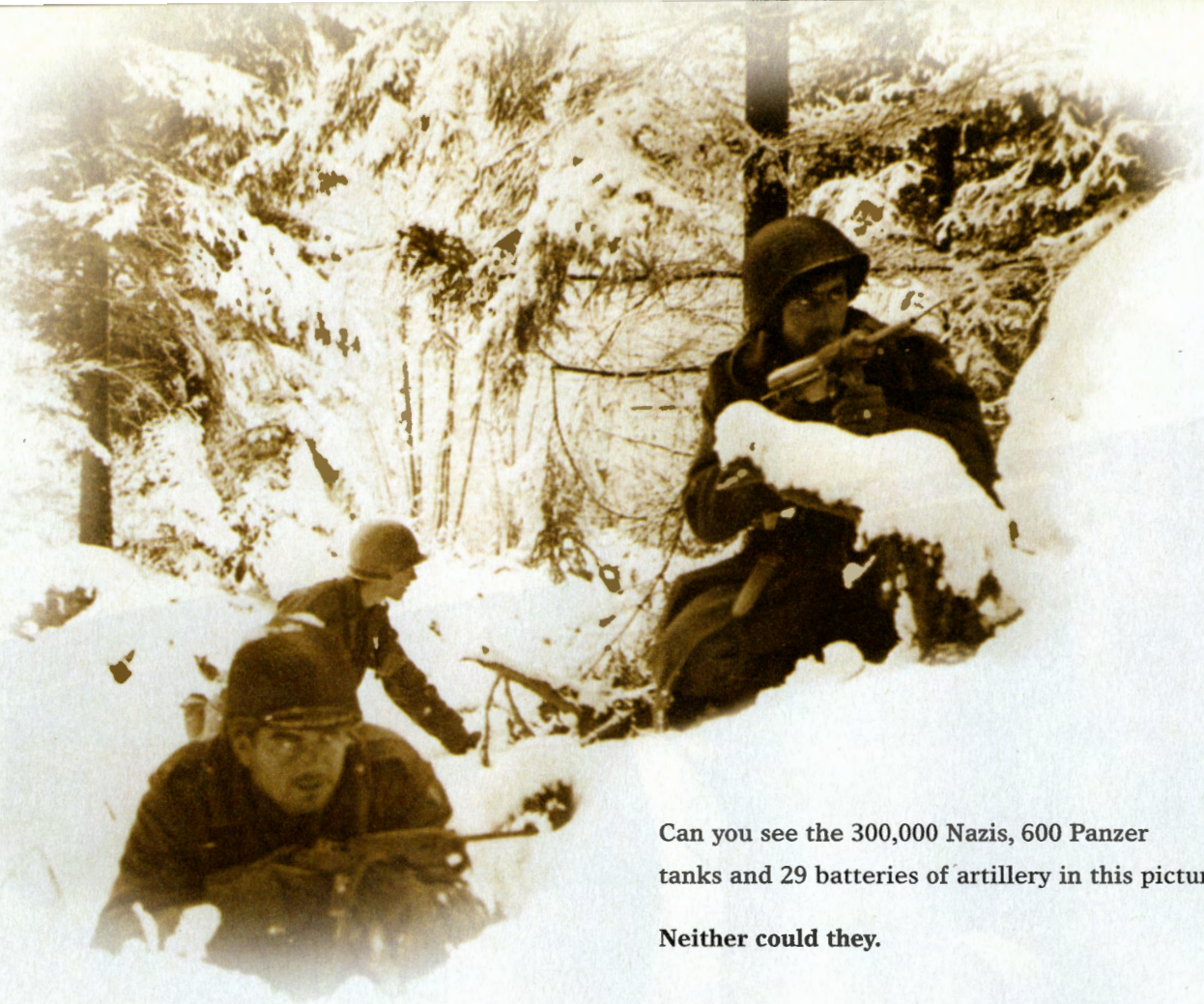
TAKE CLOTHES
DRAG
HITMAN 2
SILENT ASSASSIN
Io-Interactive
HITMAN2.COM
EIDOS
INTERACTIVE



Can you see the 300,000 Nazis, 600 Panzer tanks and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture?

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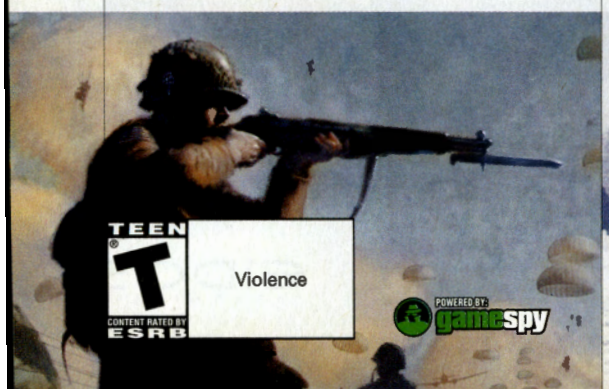
Dec. 24: The Ardennes Forest
Hold the Allied line until a break in the weather allows American and British forces to begin bombing again.



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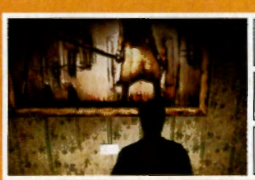
"Come here, Billy — we wish to 'examine' your sweet, sweet innards. Mmm...innards."

SILENT HILL 2

Keep the lights on: a terrifying survival-horror series is coming to the PC

A man named James Sunderland receives a letter from his wife, Mary, asking him to meet her in the town of Silent Hill. This message comes as a bit of an unpleasant surprise to James since (1) Mary has been dead for three years, and (2) Silent Hill is a fog-enshrouded hellhole full of beasts so horrific they'd make even Clive Barker drop a load in his pants.

And thus begins the terrifying journey known as *Silent Hill 2*. Originally released on the PS2, *SH2*'s PC skew is more a port of the Xbox version that



DEVELOPER
Konami

PUBLISHER
Konami

RELEASE DATE
November 2002

included the "Xbox Exclusive" bonus "Born From the Wish" scenario. But don't let this game's console origins scare you — special effort is being made to ensure that *SH2* plays like a true PC game. And after spending several hours with a preview build, I can say that the hard work is paying off.

Unlike other games of its ilk, *SH2* lets you save anywhere (there's even a quick save/load key); it has hotkeys for all of your weapons and health; and you can crank the resolution up to 1600x1200. Better still, there's no hokey *Resident Evil*–style inventory box: instead, you carry everything with you, including the greatest weapon of all, a chainsaw.

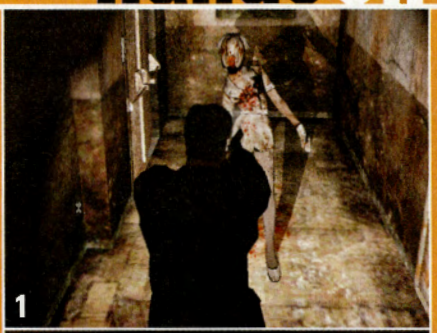
The thing that's impressed me the most about *SH2* is its brilliant use of sound. Early on, you find a transistor radio that issues a shrill screeching sound whenever a foul beast lurks nearby. This device really adds to the taut atmosphere because you usually hear the radio before anything is even in sight. As a result, you're constantly looking around, spying through the gloom for potential danger.

That said, the best moments are when the radio fails because the ghoulish hellspawn is behind (or under) an object that blocks the instrument's signal. Naturally, this setup is all scripted for the big-scare payoff, and *SH2*'s scares more than live up to the hype.

Unlike the gnawed-up zombies that populated the *Resident Evil* games, the creatures in *SH2* are freakishly imaginative. They run the gamut from membrane-like nasties that breath a noxious gas (and slither along the ground) to evil-looking doors (which are much more frightening than they sound) to nurses that were seemingly pulled from the bedside of Hell's own hospital. And since it takes multiple blows or shots to fell even the lowest ghoul, every battle drips with tension.

All this action leads to finding out what's going on with James and his dead wife. The standard survival-horror elements of puzzle-solving are all here. But if puzzles annoy you and you'd rather sever the limbs of the undead, you can set the puzzle difficulty level independent of the action difficulty setting.

At this point, my only concerns are with the game's story (will the payoff be worth it?) and the quality and type of the puzzles throughout the game. We'll find out if *SH2* will join the elite ranks of horror games when it's released next month. — *William Harms*



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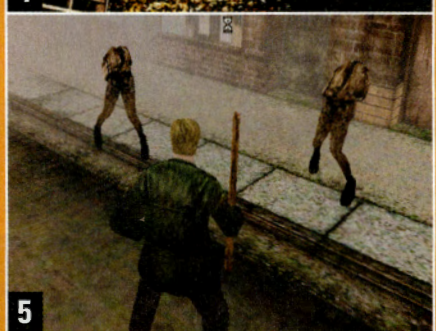

5

■ From top to bottom: (1) The real-time shadows are used brilliantly, creating the perfect atmosphere for a horror game. (2) During some sections of the game you'll be joined by the mysterious Maria. (3) Hmm, do I really want to jump down into this dark, dank hole? (4) Thus far, the camera looks like it'll do a good job of showing the best viewing angle, even in tight quarters. (5) Come visit beautiful Silent Hill, and match wits against weird headless monsters.

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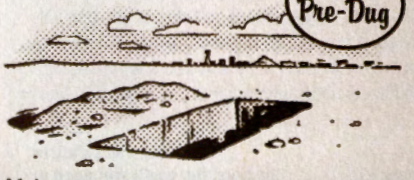

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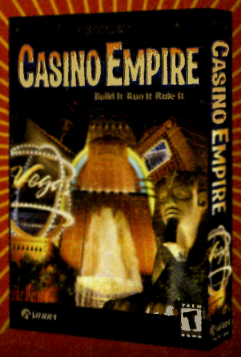

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Gambling
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

PC CD-ROM

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ASHERON'S CALL 2

Who thought that a massively multiplayer game could look so good?

After spending several hours playing the beta of *Asheron's Call 2*, one thing's for sure: the gameplay is a substantial departure from that of the original.

A cataclysmic event wrecks the world (which is stunningly gorgeous and offers all kinds of 3D eye candy), and 300 years later everyone's popping out of their bomb shelters to see what's up. Getting started is simple: Pick one of three races — Human, Lugian, or Tumerok — and then grab a bow, sword, or staff and get out there and slay stuff.

DEVELOPER
Turbine Entertainment

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

RELEASE DATE
Late 2002

Taking a cue from games like *Dungeon Siege* and *Diablo II*, character creation is streamlined and bone simple, with nary a single stat to be found. *Asheron's Call 2* is completely skills-based, and since you can buy back skills later in life, you're going to have to try *hard* to screw up your character.

Newbies should appreciate this streamlining, though some veterans of the first game will likely balk at its simplicity. From birth to level 10 takes about four hours (*AC2*'s got a level-50 cap), and the "training" part quickly gets you out and about. Above-ground exploration is zone-free as in *AC*, with the added bonus of caves and dungeons that don't require loading.

Even at this early stage, the gameplay dynamics are nicely tuned, with enemies acting pretty much like they should and giving appropriate rewards. Though the world could use some faster beastie respawning, that problem should be addressed before *AC2* ships.

Skills go up pleasantly fast (though the "level up" graphic needs work), and it's easy to recognize which skills should be improved. *AC2* also has a healthy set of crafting skills for making weapons and armor (these skills should really appeal to the game's power players), among other things, and this time around you don't need to gimp your fighting abilities to use them.

Player vs. Player is both consensual and forced-mandatory, with the three major factions competing for scant resources, some of which are available only in clearly marked "conflict areas." It'll be interesting to see how "forced" PvP works out in the final game.

In terms of race balance, each race is better at one type of fighting than the other two, but all can learn to fight any way they like, and though some skills weren't functioning yet in our beta build, all races will have access to useful, common skills such as Lifestone and Bind Recall. As a plus, each race has unique skills for each method, so you'll always have a reason to try something new.

AC's fellowships and allegiances are back, but this time allegiance bonuses work a bit differently (you can no longer level off a vassal) thanks to some *AC* players' abuse of the dynamic. In another nod to *AC*'s sordid past, the Code of Conduct for *AC2* will address a number of "hot spot" issues, such as bots, and Microsoft looks to be much harsher on exploiters and cheaters this time around. — *Bill McClendon*

You may find safety in numbers, but you'll still need to watch your back lest some beast attack from behind.

In *Asheron's Call*, you can run along the entire coastline of Dereth without loading screens or zone lines, but it can take up to 12 hours.

■ From top to bottom: (1) The world of *Asheron's Call 2* is simply massive, complete with soaring mountains. (2) We hate to say it, but we're mesmerized by the grass in this game...so pretty. (3) This sequel will have plenty of locations, including this jungle. (4) Bring it to me, fool! I'll smite you good! (5) Now *that's* what we call stunning architecture! And best of all, *AC2* is filled to the brim with cool structures, monuments, and other doodads.

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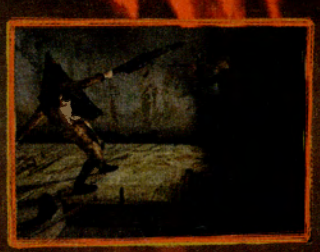

PC CD ROM

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

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Vehicle upgrades are handled differently than in previous *C&Cs*. Veteran pilots will automatically raise the veterancy levels of vehicles you place them inside. Some units, like Technicals, can receive upgrades in the field through successful kills, while others, like China's Overlord Tank, can be outfitted with extra armaments such as a gatling gun or a propaganda bunker.

C&C: GENERALS

We came. We saw. We played. And we think the next *Command & Conquer* game will rule the world.

As the first person outside of EA's QA department to play any of *Command & Conquer: Generals*' single-player missions unsupervised, I have some very simple advice for you — clear your social calendar immediately, because once this beauty arrives, there's an extremely good chance that it'll suck up every drop of your free time and completely destroy what remains of your social life. Don't say we didn't warn you.

DEVELOPER EA-Pacific

PUBLISHER EA

RELEASE DATE January 2003

The build I played was still officially pre-alpha, but under EA-Pacific's "thread" development process — wherein individual levels, or "threads," are perfected until there's a finished game — the levels I saw were looking very complete. Here's what you can expect, along with my impressions, come January.

BOOT CAMP

Rather than put you through yet another ho-hum tutorial, EA-Pacific starts off *Generals* with a bang — a full mission masquerading as training. The whole affair kicks off with an opening cinematic (rendered entirely in the game's 3D engine) that sees the Global Liberation Army capturing a U.S. military base. Your mission, playing as the U.S., is to take back that base. This easy level serves as an introduction to *Generals*' mechanics, units, and structures. Pop-up windows give you details on each new unit and building you come across, as well as your next objective. Once the entire camp has been liberated, you'll invade the nearby GLA camp and crush its defending Technicals (pickup trucks outfitted with manned machine guns) and pummel its Stinger sites (the GLA's crude anti-air defense). A scripted U.S. air strike will automatically destroy the GLA's Weapons Factory in a dazzling pyrotechnic display. Mission over.

■ **OBSERVATIONS** *Generals* has a slightly slower pace than the lightning-fast *Red Alert 2*, but it's not as geriatric as *Tiberian Sun*. Even in 3D, the *C&C* feel is spot-on. Resource management is the biggest change: as long as you have a Supply Center, wealth pours in, automatically delivered by Chinook helicopter (U.S.), supply truck (China), or manpower (the GLA). There are no fields to defend with mines, and no resources to dry up. The only confusing aspect is that, in campaign mode, you start out playing as China, then you control the GLA, and you finish up as the U.S. The training mission, however, acquaints you with U.S. units, not China's.

OPERATION: FINAL JUSTICE

In the United States' first real mission, an in-game cut-scene starts the action with a tank confrontation on the edge of Baghdad — U.S. Crusaders

The last *C&C* game to be developed by Westwood was *Tiberian Sun*. EA-Pacific also developed *Red Alert 2*.

■ Can China protect the Hong Kong Convention Center from Scud attack? You'll be able to try this scenario yourself early next year.

■ As in previous *C&C*s, shoot strategically placed oil barrels for major damage. Don't forget to destroy the GLA's tunnel network while you're at it.

■ Since the game features three playable sides, expect a lot of variety in terms of units and structures. Here, a Chinese base takes a serious pounding.

■ Even when it seems like you have things well in hand, stay alert — the enemy will often launch a ferocious counter-attack.

versus GLA Scorpions. After the GLA scatters into the city following a jet strike, the gameplay begins. Once your forces reach the city center, a scripted sequence shows the GLA unleashing its Scud Storm super-weapon on downtown Baghdad. New mission: Destroy the Scud Storm. GLA troops garrison buildings along your route, which you can capture by rope-dropping rangers onto the roofs from Chinook helicopters. Blow up the Scud Storm and a voice cries out, "There'll be ice cream for everyone!" End of mission.

■ **OBSERVATIONS** For an RTS, *Generals*' 3D graphics, art design, and animations are mind-blowingly awesome. Burka-clad civilians realistically flee in terror from combat and writhe in pain when engulfed in flame. My only complaint is that the special effects are so over-the-top that they sometimes obscure the action: for example, exploding Technicals flip over in a burst of flame and send the onboard gunner flying forward, legs kicking and arms twitching. Thankfully, EA-Pacific is way ahead of me — they tell me they're still tweaking the visual fireworks.

OPERATION: STORMBRINGER

The fourth mission for the U.S. side begins with a Normandy-style beach invasion as the red, white, and blue raids the coast of Kazakhstan in a cut-scene. After the dust settles, you'll lead a platoon of troops and three Tomahawk missile launchers in an effort to eliminate bunkers and Stingers protecting the GLA base. Destroying all the Stingers prompts a scripted carpet-bombing run on the GLA base.

■ **OBSERVATIONS** The GLA can't match the U.S. in firepower, but its tactics are more slippery. Unless you also take out the GLA's tunnel network, it'll start rebuilding Stingers immediately. The U.S. Rangers have replaced the engineer unit in that Rangers can capture buildings and oil derricks, but now the process isn't instantaneous, giving your opponent a chance to react. So long, engineer rushes!

LAST WORDS

Though I wasn't able to play them, I did get a sneak peek at a few other missions. Ridley Scott fans will appreciate the second U.S. level, which sends you on a *Black Hawk Down*–style rescue mission amid the streets of Yemen. In the GLA's second mission, they'll attempt to kidnap a U.N. aide, and China will have missions set in Hong Kong and on the Great Wall of China.

It's still too early to call *Generals* a classic-in-the-making, but I'm anxiously fingering the "uninstall" tab on my current installation of *Red Alert 2*. And best of all, when *Generals* is released, there'll be ice cream for everyone!* — *Chuck Osborn*

■ Tomahawk missiles will take out your base in seconds without a strong anti-air defense.

■ One great way to get the drop on the enemy is to launch an amphibious attack. Booyah!

*Promise of ice cream will not be honored by either *PC Gamer* or EA-Pacific. Go buy your own!

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RATING PENDING
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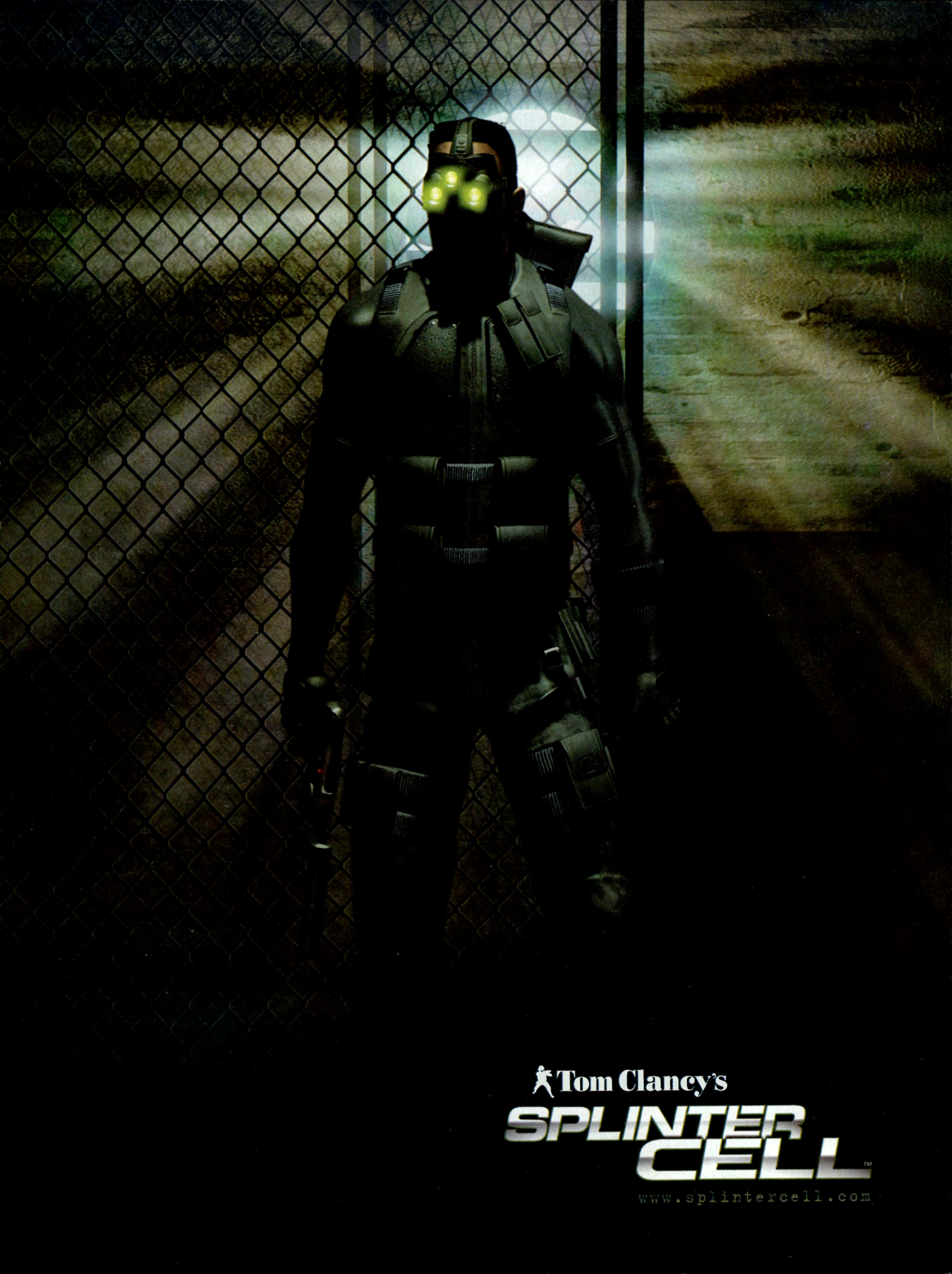
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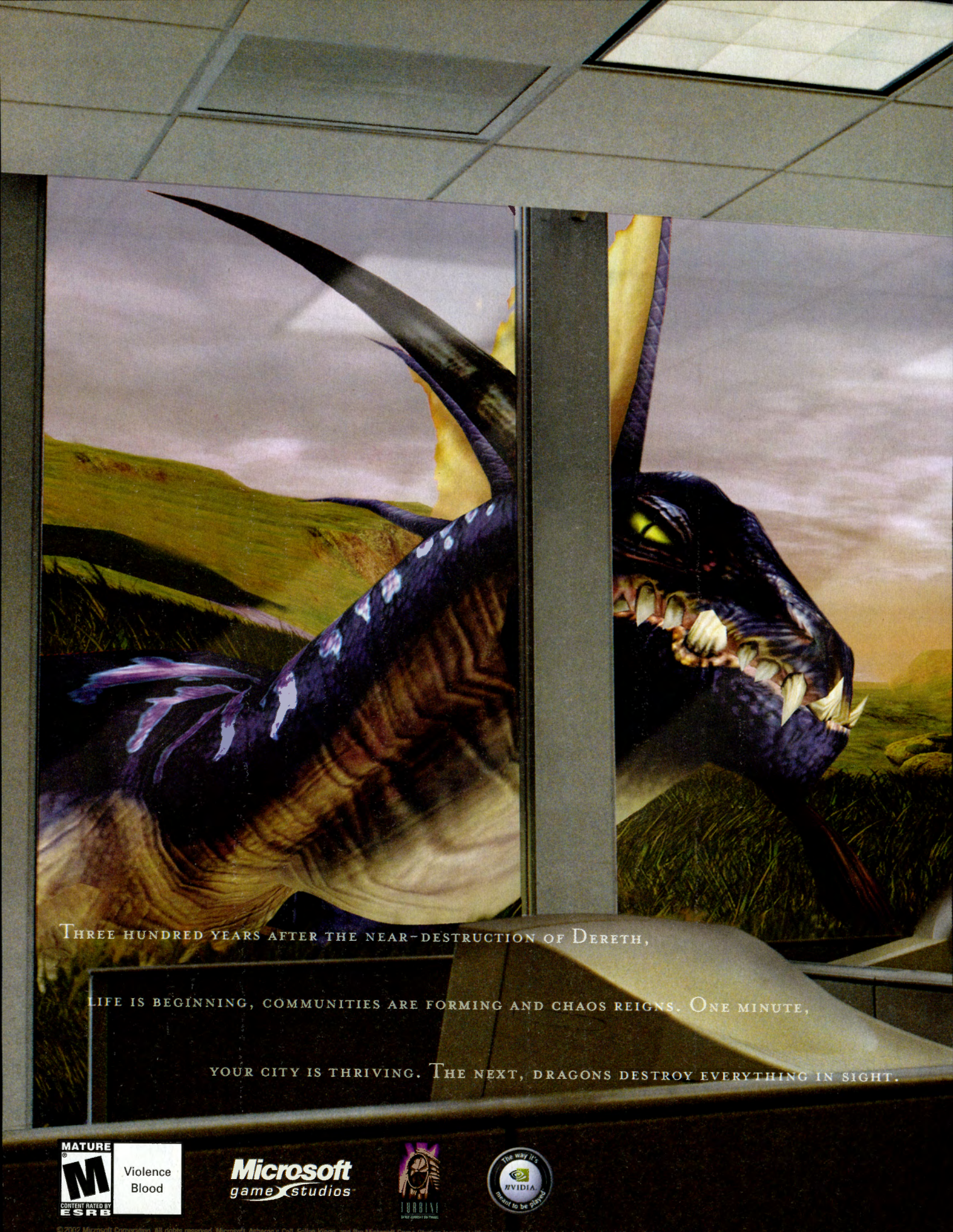
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LIFE IS BEGINNING, COMMUNITIES ARE FORMING AND CHAOS REIGNS. ONE MINUTE,
YOUR CITY IS THRIVING. THE NEXT, DRAGONS DESTROY EVERYTHING IN SIGHT.
MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Blood
Microsoft
game studios
TURBINE
The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA
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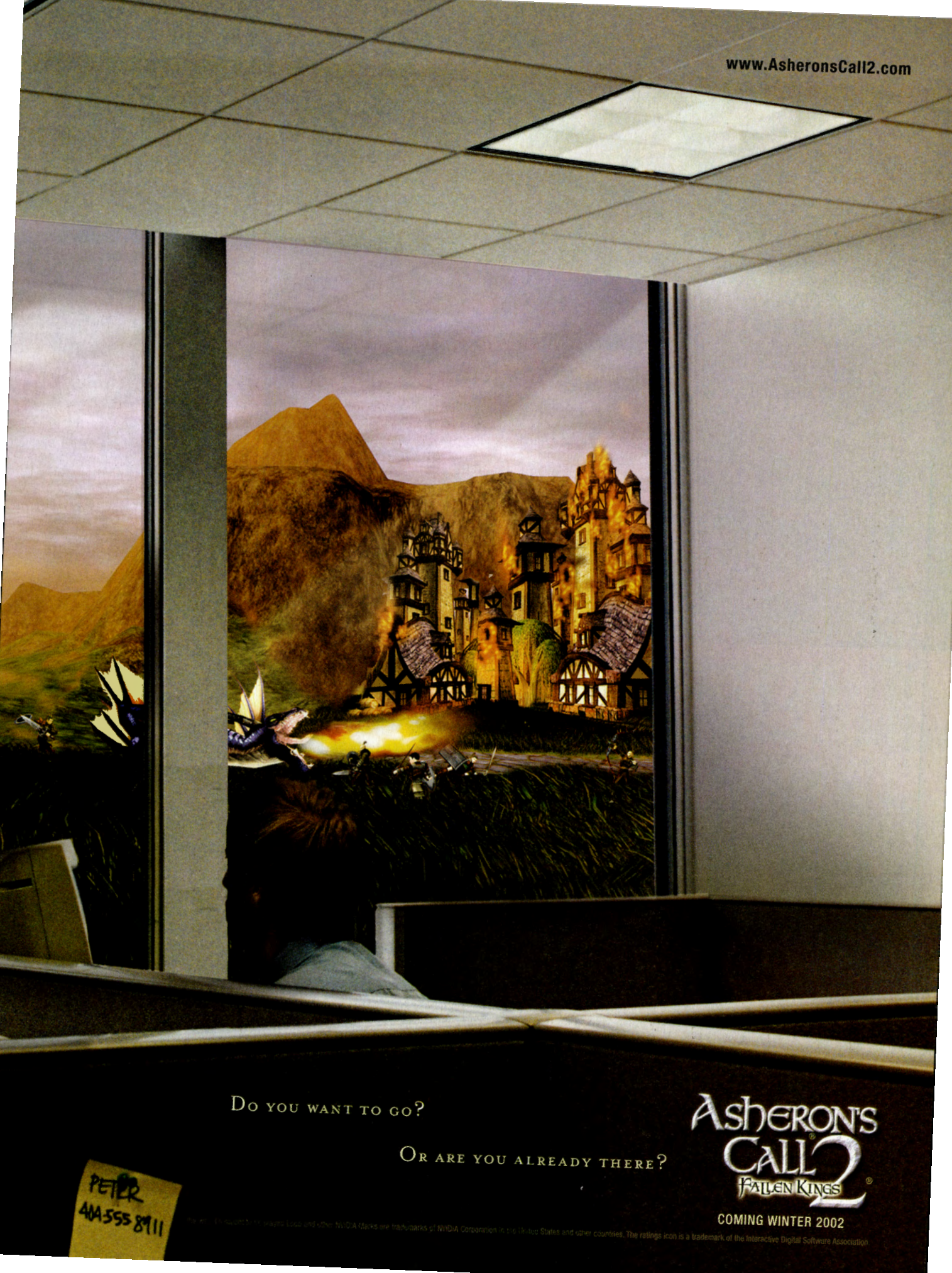
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As you plow through Germany's cratered capital, you'll jump into familiar tanks for some extra firepower.

The new missions take place amid a variety of locations, and you kill Nazis come rain, snow, or shine.

"Men, this stuff that some sources sling around about America...not wanting to fight, is a crock of bullshit." — General George S. Patton, Jr.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT SPEARHEAD

In this thrilling expansion, you'll drop behind enemy lines, fight in the Battle of the Bulge, and devastate Berlin

Right from its opening moments, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault — Spearhead* promises an abundance of gut-checking action. This much-anticipated add-on begins with you, as a member of the 101st Airborne, parachuting behind enemy lines the night before Operation Overlord. As you drift all-too-slowly to the ground, anti-air fire rips all around; planes are cut in half and plunge downward, and men plummet to their deaths. It's sensational, eerily thrilling stuff.

Spearhead introduces nine new single-player maps and 12 new multiplayer maps, with the pan-European action taking you from Normandy to the Ardennes Forest and finally to brutal street fighting in a bombed-out Berlin. You play as Sgt. Jack Barnes, and as in *Allied Assault*, you're occasionally accompanied by AI-controlled squadmates.

The "playing on a rail" feeling that permeated bits of *MOHAA* is gone for the most part. This time, the scripted sequences feel fresh and immediate — especially during the add-on's early missions, where you must take out artillery shelling the beach. The fighting occurs both outdoors and indoors, and the jump between locations is seamless and maintains a perfect sense of intensity.

The highlight of *Spearhead* will likely be the levels set during the Battle of the Bulge. In a scene stolen from *Band of Brothers*, you and your boys come under intense shelling, with trees, bodies, dirt, and snow flying everywhere. A later mission in the same theater has you participating in an offensive, under the cover of smoke, while artillery and heavy machine-gun fire tear your boys to pieces. Even at this early stage, I can say that this level easily rivals, and possibly surpasses, the defining D-Day level from the original game. It really is that good.

Besides showing a different arena in late WWII, *Spearhead* offers some new weapons, including the British Enfield Mark 1, the Soviet PPSh-41 and Sten submachine guns, and red smoke grenades.

Graphicswise, the *Quake III* engine still looks sharp. I saw some problems with washed-out textures, and the wallpaper in some of the houses in Normandy made me want to gouge out my eyes (French taste, perhaps), but those are minor issues that'll surely be addressed before the game ships. The player models have received an upgrade, and each one (German, English, and American) looks slick.

DEVELOPER
EALA

PUBLISHER
EA Games

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2002

I didn't get to try out any of the new multiplayer maps, but *Spearhead*'s exquisite single-player action left me more than entertained. I can't wait for the finished product. — *William Harms*

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A dead king. A mad god. A city under siege. A hero marked for death. The fate of Morrowind is in your hands...again.

- Travel to majestic Mournhold, the ancient capitol city of Morrowind.
- Unravel the mysteries of The Clockwork City of Sotha Sil.
- Delve into new epic-sized dungeons.
- Battle goblins, liches, and other new creatures.

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The expansion to Morrowind, winner of more than 40 awards.

"All hail the new king of RPGs." **PC Zone**

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Computer Games EDITOR'S CHOICE

IGN, Editors' Choice award
Games Domain, Top Game award
GameZone, Editors' Choice award
Gone Gold, Platinum award
ActionTrip, Editors' Choice award
WorthPlaying.com, Editors' Choice award

The Entertainment Depot, Editors' Choice
RPG Dot, Platinum award
GamePen, Numb Thumb award
PC Zone, Classic award
Voodoo Extreme, Can 'o Whoopass award
Zen Gamer, Gold Zen award

GameSpot, Game-of-the-month Gold award
AllOutGames, AOG Seal of Approval
Xistenze, Choice award
VN Roundup, Stamp of Approval
General Protection Fault, Must Have award
Loadedinc, Hot Property award

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What if there was only

What would the world be like if you created it? Peaceful? Filled with war? Welcome to Civilization III, created by Sid Meier, the Steven Spielberg of PC games. Named the Computer Games Magazine "2001 Game of the Year", this special edition features new scenarios and a strategy guide sampler.

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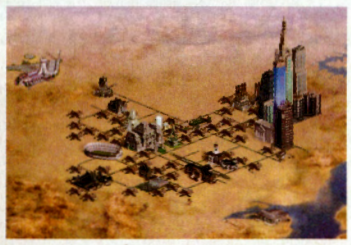
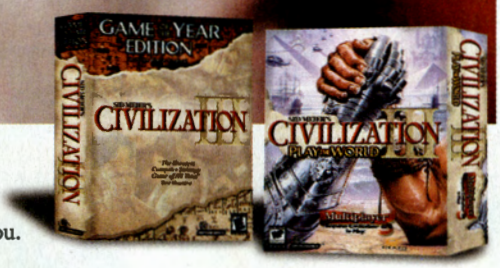
one god? And it was you?





Also visit civ3.com to find out about Play The World, a multiplayer expansion pack that lets you go head to head, and play a game in about an hour. It's an all new way to play Civ. But no matter how you play, when you play Civ the ultimate creator is you.

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MAINSTREAM-MEDIA WATCH

I WANT MY GTV

Are gamers ready to sit down and watch shows about gaming?

It depends where you live in the country. It depends on your cable operator. It depends on your viewing habits. But believe it or not, when you turn on the tube, there's a good chance you'll find a show about gaming. Switch on G4 and you'll find an entire network with 13 original shows devoted to games. From where did this surge of interest arise, and more importantly, is any of it worth watching?

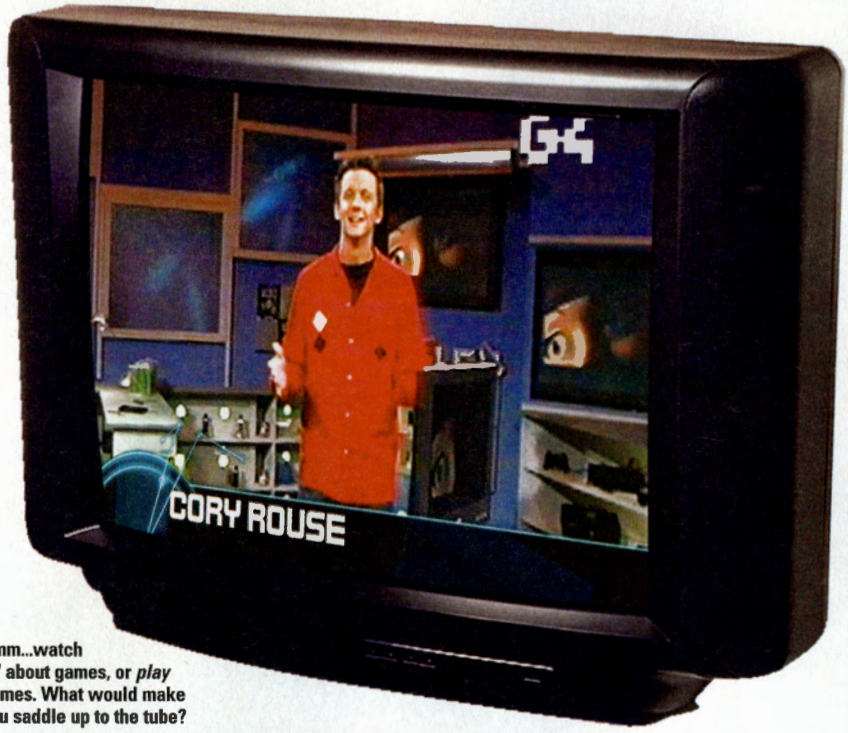
There may be more game programming on TV now than ever before, but this emergence isn't a new development. Sure, *GamePro TV* and ZDTV both crashed and burned amid viewer apathy, but *Electric Playground* has been plugging away from Canada for seven years. Currently available Stateside on the Science Channel, *Electric Playground* has a "something for everyone" format that works pretty effectively in half-hour chunks, with bite-sized profiles of specific games or companies, and Game Jobs highlighting employment options within the industry.

"When I hear that a 14-year-old girl likes *EP* because we interviewed an artist at a game company and she's interested in pursuing digital art and design in school, that's a big thrill for me," says Victor Lucas, the show's co-host and executive producer.

After seven years of pushing for regular syndication in the U.S., Lucas believes that it's getting easier for *EP* to be taken seriously as a viable programming topic. With 100,000 *EP* viewers a week from off-prime spots across Canada's cable, digital cable, and syndication network, Lucas is hoping to hit 1 million per week from the right deal south of the border.

Further indication of gaming's growing stature as a potential for mainstream TV coverage is TechTV's gaming show, *Extended Play*, which is getting bumped up from a once-a-week format to three unique shows a week plus a daily timeslot on the network. Ebullient host Adam Sessler is understandably excited about the possibilities that this expansion presents. "With so many AAA titles coming out, [we weren't] covering them in a timely fashion…and we just missed some big games," he told us. The two additional shows will focus mainly on reviews and previews, leaving one show for the more in-depth coverage of companies and the industry at large.

Sessler has also seen a big change in industry attitude toward TV coverage. "In the beginning, game company PR reps didn't think about TV coverage," he says. "So getting footage was hard, since from 15 minutes of footage, we probably get one minute of air time."



Hmm...watch TV about games, or *play* games. What would make you saddle up to the tube?

G4 has also announced a new 30-minute show, *G4: TV 4 Gamers*, which will air on the UPN network in the SF Bay Area, on Fox6 in San Diego, and on the Zylo network that serves college campuses nationwide. Much of the content will be culled from existing G4 shows, with new content being filmed at G4's L.A. studio (left).

SUBHEADS ARE QUOTATIONS FROM THE BRILLIANT MOVIE *NETWORK* (1976)

WIN A COPY OF THE THING SIGNED BY JOHN CARPENTER!

This month five lucky winners will receive a copy of both *The Thing* game and *The Thing* movie on DVD. And best of all, one movie or game will be signed by movie director John Carpenter! To be eligible for our random drawing, just send an email to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "Trust No One" in the subject heading, and include your name and address in the body of the message. Only one entry per person allowed. Contest ends Dec. 31, 2002. See additional rules on page 167.

A significant factor in this greater awareness is the launch of the G4 network. "It's a definite benefit," says Sessler of this emerging network. "More people now take the medium seriously given the money being invested in a whole network, and it makes people who didn't think that gaming was viable [change their mind]." Sessler also sees the potential competition as a good thing. "Nobody watches *Entertainment Tonight* at the exclusion of *Access Hollywood*," he says, "so we'll all do great content differently."

"ALL I WANT OUT OF LIFE IS A 30 SHARE AND A 20 RATING."

OVER AT G4 ITSELF, THE MOOD at the top is enthusiastic about the impact and progress made since the network's April launch. Backed by cable property Comcast, G4 debuted in 3 million homes, but with the Comcast purchase of AT&T Broadband, another 3 million homes were added in July.

With 6 million households, G4 flies below the radar of the TV industry's number-crunching Nielsen ratings, which require a network to be in 20 million homes before it's tracked. For G4 President Charles Hirschhorn, not having ratings means that the program planners at the network, some of whom helped launch MTV, have to rely on their own gut instincts. G4 also culls opinion from professionals in the gaming industry, as well as viewers on well-maintained forums and message boards at G4's web site (*www.g4tv.com*).

In working with the industry, G4 has a pretty open and inviting policy for a company wanting promotion for its latest game. "We support anyone trying to accomplish *anything* in games," says Hirschhorn, which is why at press time, G4 viewers are being bombarded with interstitials for Universal Interactive's *The Thing*. In a very cooperative relationship, UI produces footage and content that can be used in any of G4's shows where relevant, and UI gets huge exposure for its latest game.

For Hirschhorn, a few areas of the gaming market still need to be tapped. "I'd love to see us involved with competitive gaming," he says, confirming that G4 had approached the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) to cover its big-money tournaments, but that organization decided to pursue TV interests elsewhere.

G4 is also looking to offer game companies the opportunity for more innovative game-related content. Rather than a Lara Croft/*Tomb Raider* cartoon series, what about a longer piece, with TV-focused content? "It could be four minutes, 44 minutes, or 144 minutes: with game properties, we can take advantage of the linear, passive entertainment [of TV]," he says. "The beauty of MTV was that music videos were not something that was done before [the network aired]...it was a whole new format."

"BY TOMORROW, HE'LL HAVE A 50 SHARE, MAYBE EVEN A 60."

And the MTV inspiration hasn't been lost on MTV itself. Independent TV show producer David Berrent filmed a pilot gaming show for the music network last May.

"I wanted it to be fun and irreverent but give a lot of information," Berrent said of his pilot. To give weight to that information, Berrent approached various U.S. game-magazine editors to vie for host spots.

REVIEWED: G4'S PROGRAM LIST

WITH A TOTAL OF 14 SHOWS, G4 HAS PLENTY of game-TV options. But are any of them worth watching? We've given each one a rating from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

GAME ON Two doofus idiots travel the country, play games, and get cute girls to support Joe Blow off the street. "These guys are funny," says Peter Sylvia, a G4 viewer. Complete rubbish, we say. (3/10)

ARENA Wil ("Wesley Crusher") Wheaton and Travis ("Who?") Oates sound off while local L.A. "clans" play multiplayer games of *Unreal Tournament*, *MechWarrior 4*, and one-on-one *DOA* (Xbox). With little support from Oates (apparently a comedian by trade), the banter comes across as a flailing effort to jazz up what's really pretty dull competitive action. It's a task too great for even the most creative commentators. (5/10)

BLISTER Some-time actor and event host Bill Sindelar leads this action game show that's good because it deals with the biggest game genre and is impressively timely. (8/10)

CHEAT This show sadly proves that you want your strategies in hand, or easily referenced. Unless it's taped, or you've got a pen for a specific code, it's tough to sit through 20 minutes. (5/10)

CINEMATECH A compendium of those high-resolution rendered intros that make games so enticing. A showcase for design creativity, or a time-filler? Ends up being both. (5/10)

FILTER Hosted by Diane Mizota (who played Fook Mi in the recent Austin Powers movie *Goldmember*), it's a 10-minute top-10 countdown of random game topics (villains, soundtracks, babes, and so on) stretched into 30 minutes. Partly due to Mizota's apparent interest in the subject, and a general fascination with top-10 lists, this show can be fairly addictive viewing. (7/10)

G4TV.COM A live "talk show" with content provided by visitors to G4's web site, this program is entirely hit-and-miss, depending on the quality of questions submitted online. (6/10)

ICONS One of our favorite shows, and not just because Rob and Chuck are featured as "expert" commentators. Good production values and subjects generally broad enough to span 30 minutes make each one worth catching. (9/10)

JUDGEMENT DAY Victor Lucas and Tommy Tallarico (of *Electric Playground*) bring their game reviews to G4. They've got a well-honed schtick and the show has excellent production values. (8/10)

PLAYERS Third-rate bands playing PS2 in a tour bus while showing open aggravation at the host's incessant rambling does not make good TV. Occasional good one-liners and an improving guest list (Coolio, Incubus) could save it. (6/10)

PORTAL A goofy host backed by a female HAL-like computer voice reports on MMORPGs using characters from within the games. It's quite novel, and if you can get over the bizarreness, there's some good information and support of the genre. (7/10)

PULSE After changes to the hosts, this news-focused show is settling into a rhythm, and it's great to get relatively up-to-date game news on TV. (9/10)

STARCADE Initially aired in the early 1980s. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and kids from the street compete in some of the "latest" coin-ops...like *Galaga*, *Super Cobra*, and *Pole Position*. (5/10)

SWEAT Unless you eat and breathe sports games, it's almost impossible to view a full 30 minutes. (2/10)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

PC GAMER PLAYLIST

ROB I'm just six games away from completing a full season of *High Heat 2002* (now imported into *HH 2003*). I still have a shot at winning the NL West, but the wild card is sown up. And when I need a half-hour break in the office, *Magic Online* still provides a willing bunch of opponents. The functionality improves regularly, which is good to see.

COREY It's not nearly as good as *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, but the *Primal Hunt* add-on was giving me a few thrills...until I started playing *Battlefield 1942*. Now I've shot *PH* out the airlock and am blazing my way through Kharkov and other maps, dealing permanent punishment to Axis scum. And I thought WWII-era gaming had been played out!

DAN Having belatedly discovered the joys of *High Heat Baseball 2003*, I'm now steering the Giants through a mediocre season of .500 baseball on the "All-Star" difficulty setting. But more importantly, *Battlefield 1942* is finally here — and with it, a glorious new age of online done-getting. Fire up those tanks, honey, 'cause it's clobberin' time.

CHUCK I just fired up my Xbox for the first time in months. Not because there aren't any good games on the PC — I'm playing the Justice League mod for *Freedom Force* and just finished *Jedi Knight II* — but because I wasn't sure it still worked. It did, so I enjoyed the attitudalicious *Buffy*. Well, that was fun...now when's *Shenmue II* coming out?

BILLY Hot grits a-flying, *Medieval: Total War* is an absolute blast. Sure, it's got a few problems here and there, but the addictive turn-based mode keeps me begging for more. Most satisfying of all, though, is fighting the French and watching them flee from the countryside, their cowardly stench wafting across the battlefield.

JOE Dan is dead-on in his review of *NHL 2003* (page 114): it doesn't quite live up to its predecessors. I'm sure with some tweaking of the AI settings you can get some realistic play, but I might as well reinstall my copy of *NHL 2000* and download the updated rosters from the web. I'm sad — I want to cry... maybe *Icewind Dale II* will cheer me up.

CHIAKI I can't even watch a movie like a normal person: I *finally* saw *Lord of the Rings*. Halflings, elves, dwarves, wizards, and all manner of evil beasts...man, I was in RPG heaven. All I could think about was what a great game it'd make. Oh well: *Neverwinter Nights* is just gonna have to tide me over until the *LOTR* game ships.

GREG *Asheron's Call 2* is a beautiful game, but where are the stats? Why can I tweak only skills? I know that Microsoft wants this MMORPG to be accessible, but are stats like Strength, Dexterity, and Vitality really so hard for the "everyman" to grasp? Still, I've got to hand it to 'em, the game is fun. And for a beta, it's been pretty stable!

PC GAMER RELEASE METER

1914: The Great War

Release dates used with permission from Gone Gold (*www.gonegold.com*). Games farthest out are most likely to change dates. Send release info to *dates@gonegold.com*.

→ November

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	11/01/02
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	11/01/02
BloodRayne	Majesco	11/01/02
Ghost Master	Empire	11/01/02
Survivor Marquesas	Infogrames	11/01/02
Vietcong	G.O.D.	11/05/02
Silent Hill 2	Konami	11/06/02
Tiger Woods PGA 2003	EA Sports	11/06/02
Harbinger	DreamCatcher	11/06/02
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	11/06/02
DAoC: Shrouded Isles	Mythic	11/06/02
DarkSpace	Got Game Ent.	11/07/02
1914: The Great War	JoWooD	11/08/02
RalliSport Challenge	Microsoft	11/08/02
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	Microsoft	11/08/02
NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	11/13/02
Robin Hood	Strategy First	11/13/02
Hearts of Iron	Strategy First	11/13/02
Starfleet Command III	Activision	11/13/02
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	11/14/02
Hegemonia	DreamCatcher	11/15/02
Harry Potter Chamber of Secrets	EA	11/15/02
Project Nomads	Hip Interactive	11/15/02
Neocron	Hip Interactive	11/15/02
O.R.B.	Strategy First	11/19/02
Operation War in the Pacific	Infogrames	11/19/02
Battle Realms: Winter Wolf	Ubi Soft	11/19/02
Lionheart	Interplay	11/19/02
Medal of Honor: AA — Spearhead	EA	11/19/02
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA	11/20/02
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	11/20/02
SimCity 4	Maxis	11/20/02
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	11/20/02
Unreal II	Infogrames	11/21/02
Master of Orion 3	Infogrames	11/27/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	11/27/02
Praetorians	Eidos	11/27/02

→ December

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Monster Jam	Ubi Soft	12/03/02
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	12/06/02
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	12/06/02
Harpoon 4	SSI	12/11/02
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	12/11/02
Zanzarah	Xicat	12/13/02
Starsky and Hutch	Sierra	12/28/02

I WANT MY GTV

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

"When shows fail, they often have pretty-face hosts, but it's much better to have a knowledgeable host...It's important to have credibility," he explains.

MTV's slow dip into the gaming-show market is a surprise, but Berrent attributes the network's decision to make a pilot on the improvements in game technology, with musicians lending their talents to games and the products themselves looking more like movies.

While the show apparently focus-tested well, it had some elements that Berrent was happy to admit were unbalanced. A focus on PS2 games (albeit unintentional) as well as first-person shooter and sports games led to some focus-group criticisms, and a suggestion that audiences wanted variety in their gaming coverage.

Currently, the show is in limbo, awaiting a green (or red) light from MTV's programming decision-makers.

"THERE'S SOME REAL, ACTUAL LIFE GOING ON HERE."

AND THE PC EVIDENTLY STANDS proud and tall amid programming decisions that could legitimately focus heavily on console systems. "[This summer was] big for the PC," says *Extended Play*'s Sessler, citing the releases of *Neverwinter Nights* and *Warcraft III* as reasons to keep the camera on our platform of choice.

Electric Playground's Lucas (who also co-hosts G4's *Judgement Day* show) is a big proponent of PC gaming as well. "PC game developers are incredibly adventurous and intelligent," he asserts, and showcasing their talents makes for good TV.

REVIEWED: OTHER GUYS

ELECTRIC PLAYGROUND
Plenty of content in reviews, previews, and viewer-focused industry-insight pieces, but too much Tommy Tallarico–as-TV-"personality" detracts from the solid info. Pretty slick, and the relaxed writing makes for easy viewing. (8/10)

EXTENDED PLAY Snazzier production for the most part than *Playground*, but sloppier writing. Fast-paced content delivery keeps the game info coming thick and fast. There's little focus on the different platforms, with the editorial eye focused firmly on just the games. (8/10)

TV coverage represents numerous new challenges, and a bunch of opportunities for the gaming industry at large. "We'd be making stars out of the games, not the people who made them," notes Berrent. And Sessler doesn't expect the games industry to produce a made-for-TV Siskel and Ebert since "unlike a movie, reviewing a game requires more structure, and needs to be very [in-depth]."

That's one of the many reasons you'll continue to read *PC Gamer* while the shows take hold. Check your local listings for the details, then let us know what you think of games on TV.

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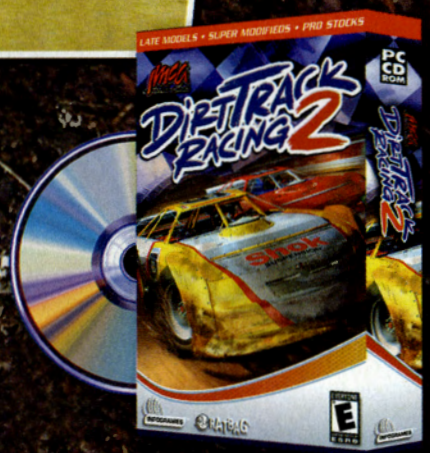

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Xbox screenshots shown

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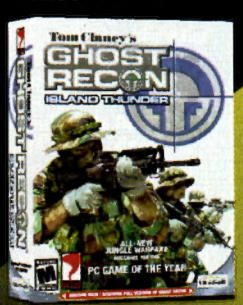

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PCG NEWS TICKER

Cartoon canine and rabbity thing duo Sam & Max are returning to the PC in 2004 courtesy of LucasArts. The "adventure comedy sequel" will reunite the screwy pair for the first time since their 1993 adventure classic *Sam & Max Hit the Road*. It's about damn time, we say.

Look out, *City of Heroes*! Marvel and Vivendi Universal have inked a deal that'll give Vivendi the right to develop and publish massively multiplayer games based on Marvel's huge stable of heroes and villains. We can't wait to see 500 Spider-Mans duking it out with 400 Dr. Dooms, with a couple of Stilt-Mans tossed in for good measure.

The big announcement at this year's Tokyo Game Show was that Blizzard is developing a tactical-action *console* game called *StarCraft: Ghost*. Details are sketchy, but *Ghost* appears to be in the same vein as the *Metal Gear Solid* games. Blizzard is currently saying the game will ship in late 2003 for "multiple console platforms," which means PC users are probably SOL.

In a recent effort to prevent illegal gambling, the Greek government managed to pass legislation banning the playing of electronic games in public, including Game Boys and games on mobile phones. Offenders risked a fine of roughly $5,000 to $75,000 and imprisonment of up to 12 months. The law is expected to be deemed unconstitutional and tossed out by the courts soon.

Clawhammer, AMD's new 64-bit processor that was originally slated for early 2002, and "Barton," the company's latest Athlon chip, have both been delayed until Q1 2003. AMD continues to boast that Clawhammer will outperform Intel's fastest chips. They just have to release it first.

Rival Interactive (*Real War*) has announced *Extinction* (shown above), a 3D RTS that lets you control primitive tribes of cavemen. In somewhat historically inaccurate fashion, man and dinosaur both walk the earth, with tribes competing to evolve. Rival is in talks with several possible publishers, but the software arm of the BBC reportedly may brand the game as part of its *Walking with...* series.

It's all about the Pentiums...and Happy Meals: EA has struck a multimillion-dollar product-placement deal with Intel and McDonald's for its next cash cow, *The Sims Online*. Reportedly, your Sims will be able to buy and sell McFood and use sim-PCs branded with the Pentium 4 logo. And in a complete blow to reality, eating a digital Big Mac will actually *raise* your standing in the online community. Inconceivable!

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

WHO'S SAYING WHAT AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

NEXT IN *EARTH AND BEYOND*: BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS IN SPACE!

"Screw that. I'd rather watch wood warp or paint dry than watch one-click combat. Where's the skill in that? People who like one-click combat probably also have birthdays for their cats."
— F0rge, posting on the www.voodooextreme.com *forums upon hearing that* Earth and Beyond *will feature "one-click" combat*

PREACH IT, BROTHER!

"*Unreal Tournament 2003* promises to be a sequel to *UT* with some new weapons and new styles of gameplay. But they never once said it wouldn't be a [deathmatch] game. That's what *UT 2003* is — DM. Now people are complaining that it's just a DM game. What the hell did you expect? A combination RTS-RPG-FPS-CTF game? Wake up, people."
— Tressym, responding to UT 2003*'s critics on the forums at* www.voodooextreme.com

IF YOU CAN'T SAY SOMETHING NICE...

"Yes, I'm egotistical, but the fact is, I love me more than I love the next jackass standing next to mé. When God said "Love thy neighbor," he didn't say I should blow him, too. As such, I really, truly don't care much for most people. At all. In fact, I have nothing at stake when it comes to lashing out at idiots who find it necessary to declare open season on me."
— Derek Smart, creator of the much-maligned Battlecruiser 3000AD*, responding to his critics on* www.quartertothree.com

LAND OF CONFUSION

"Wow, that's some sweet-looking stuff. What's the genre? I'm not familiar with the title."
"*PCG* did a preview of it a while back, but at the time it had a different name, I believe..."
"Yea, it was called *Dr. ___'s Island* or something..."
—Toaster8, nat, and Evulfson, highlighting the confusion over Sigma*'s evolution to* Impossible Creatures*, and subsequent delays, after seeing some cool new screenshots on our forums at* www.pcgamer.com

THE ULTIMATE INSULT?

"I now hate Blizzard. Thanks for blowing off five jillion hardcore *StarCraft* fans and giving *StarCraft* to a bunch of console &%$# *^ who have no idea what *StarCraft* even is."
— EvilJebus responding to news that Blizzard's next game, StarCraft: Ghost*, is going to be a console-only title, from* www.bluesnews.com

AND THE WINNER IS...

Every month we run a contest where we give away some *fantastic* prizes, like signed copies of games and hard-to-find game T-shirts. This month we thought we'd honor our recent winners by printing their names in our fine magazine. And to everyone who hasn't won yet — keep trying, because we have a great contest each and every month.

JUNE 2002 WINNERS
(Prize: A copy of the *TRON* 20th Anniversary DVD)

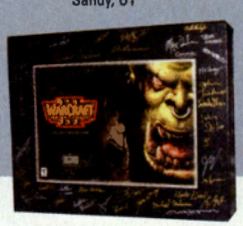
- Kenneth Seever, Atchison, KS
- Nick Chamberlain, Martinez, CA
- Evan Osheroff, Rolling Hills Estates, CA
- Jason A. Swick, Midland, MI
- John Vaughters, Burbank, CA
- Jim Campagna, Burlingame, CA
- Doug Rose, Kingsport, TN
- Remington Phillips, North Royalton, OH
- Brian Yochem, West Bend, WI

JULY 2002 WINNERS
(Prize: A copy of our own William R. Trotter's new novel, *The Sands of Time*)

- Steven Coad, Canton, SD
- Jay Owen, Montgomery, AL
- Brock Flint, St. Lancaster, OH
- Hio Lou, Wheaton, MD
- Robert Harris, Tacoma, WA
- Min Shi, Riverside, CA
- Larry Langstrom, Virden, IL
- Thomas Pagorek, Carlsbad, CA

AUGUST 2002 WINNERS
(Prize: A copy of *Warcraft III* signed by the game's development team)

- Henry Easterling, Logan, UT
- Ian Brown, Davis, CA
- Adam Enfroy, South Lyon, MI
- Tim Westbrook, Erin, NY
- Jon van der Zwet, Silver Spring, MD
- Ernest Billinger, Atlanta, GA
- Jeff Wheeler, Brandon, MS
- Brian Mains, Anderson, IN
- Doug McIntosh, Carlsbad, CA
- Brent Miller, Rocky River, OH
- Tara Johansson, San Diego, CA
- Sean Larsson, Modesto, CA
- Patrick McMichael, Spencerville, OH
- Joe Wick, Norman, OK
- Matthew V. Sueper, Boulder, CO
- Randall McEachern, Honolulu, HI
- Steven Ray, Sandy, UT



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Official Xbox Magazine

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PCG NEWS TICKER

More EA synergy: As part of his live broadcast analysis of Monday Night Football this season, fleshy commentator John Madden will employ *Madden NFL 2003* to analyze key football plays. EA Sports has also used the game to simulate the rest of the season and has predicted that the Rams will likely win Super Bowl XXXVII. Fortunately, as of this writing, its prophecy that John Madden's heart will explode on-air has *not* come to pass.

Presto, gone-o! *Myst III: Exile* (and *Journeyman Project*) creator Presto Studios has shut down, despite strong sales for the popular adventure title. Skyrocketing development costs, tough competition, and losing the rights to the next *Myst* game are said to be some of the reasons for the closure.

Guess they won't be selling *this* in Greece: German developer Westka Interactive (*The Y-Project*) is working on *Race Tracks Unlimited* (shown above), a god game that'll let you manage horse tracks in glorious 3D. The gambling and animal-cruelty simulator is set for a Q4 2003 release. When reached for comment about the PC's newest contribution to the downfall of humanity, Satan replied, "Excellent."

It's like Wheaties, only not: NASCAR racing superstar Dale Earnhardt Jr. has been named the official cover athlete for EA's *NASCAR Thunder 2003*. The 27-year-old Earnhardt claims that he prepared for circuit races by playing *NASCAR Thunder* because it "gives you the true experience and puts you 'in the game.'" Naturally, we believe him. Completely.

Gas Powered Games has at long last hooked up gamers with the official *Dungeon Siege* Tool Kit, available as a free download from the game's web site (*www.dungeonsiege.com*). The editor lets you hand-design your very own spells, monsters, weapons, and armor — a godsend to fantasy perverts everywhere. (Yes, a Crimson Rhinestone Spangled Thong of +5 Jiggley-ness is the ultimate protection.)

You're sad, you're lonely, you play the Lord of the Rings card game...now those three things aren't necessarily interrelated! Following Wizards of the Coast's lead with *Magic: The Gathering Online*, developer Worlds Apart, in partnership with Lord of the Rings card game company Decipher, has announced an online version of the card-flipper scheduled to go live in early 2003. Ah, J.R.R. Tolkien...impeding the natural course of human procreation since 1937.

PLEASE — MAKE US POOP OURSELVES!

Five horror properties that must be turned into games

In this issue we review *The Thing*, a game based on one of the greatest horror movies ever put to celluloid. And our experience playing *The Thing* got our little minds a-thinking: What other horror movies (or novels) would make great games? And so, after multiple viewings of *Lair of the White Worm*, *Dead Alive*, and *Phantasm*, we compiled the following pointers for would-be license signers.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

Genre: Real-Time Strategy

Story: A satellite returns from space, carrying with it a diabolical radiation that brings back the dead as slavering, flesh-chomping zombies.

Gameplay: Using a graphics engine similar to *Myth*'s, and featuring the same kind of small-squad tactics, *NotLD* would be set after the world has been overrun by the hungry dead. You'd lead a small unit of human survivors who must search for other survivors, all while fending off wave after wave of innard-licking zombies. In multiplay, you'd be able to play as the zombies or the humans, with both sides competing for the precious, precious humans.

SALEM'S LOT

Genre: Survival Horror

Story: Ben Mears, a mind-mannered author, has returned to Jerusalem's Lot to write a book about the old Marsten House. Unfortunately for Ben, the Marsten House is ground zero for a full-scale vampire invasion.

Gameplay: *Salem's Lot* would play much like *The Thing* — it'd be a third-person action game, and you'd be accompanied by AI companions who'd assist you in your vampire-killing ways. However, as in the novel, these companions would be picked off one by one, and then they'd return as the thirsty undead. In the end, you'd have to unleash an apocalyptic firestorm in an effort to destroy those foul bloodsuckers.

TREMORS

Genre: First-Person Shooter

Story: Giant worms terrorize a small town in the southwest.

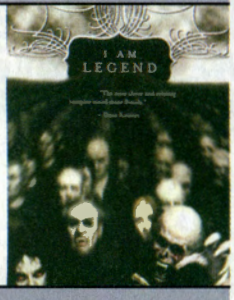
Gameplay: Fully tapping into the trilogy, *Tremors* would feature the creatures from all three movies, including the flying "ass blasters" from *Tremors 3*. Over the course of the game your job would be to locate any remaining survivors while laying waste to hundreds of beasties. You'd have the option of playing as either Fred Ward or Reba McEntire. *Tremors* would make full use of the *Serious Sam* engine and throw thousands of creatures at you. And once you finished the game, you'd practically be related to Kevin Bacon.

I AM LEGEND

Genre: First-Person Shooter

Story: Robert Neville is the sole surviving human in a world where hordes of ravenous vampires wander the streets in search of sweet, delicious blood.

Gameplay: Using the new *Doom III* engine, *I Am Legend* would be a technological marvel. Amid state-of-the-art graphics and AI, you'd struggle to hunt down vampires during the day and survive their all-out assaults by night. Some liberties would have to be taken with Richard Matheson's brilliant novel, however: In the game, the final mission would put you in the company of a small band of fellow humans as you faced off against the vampires in a horrifying finale.

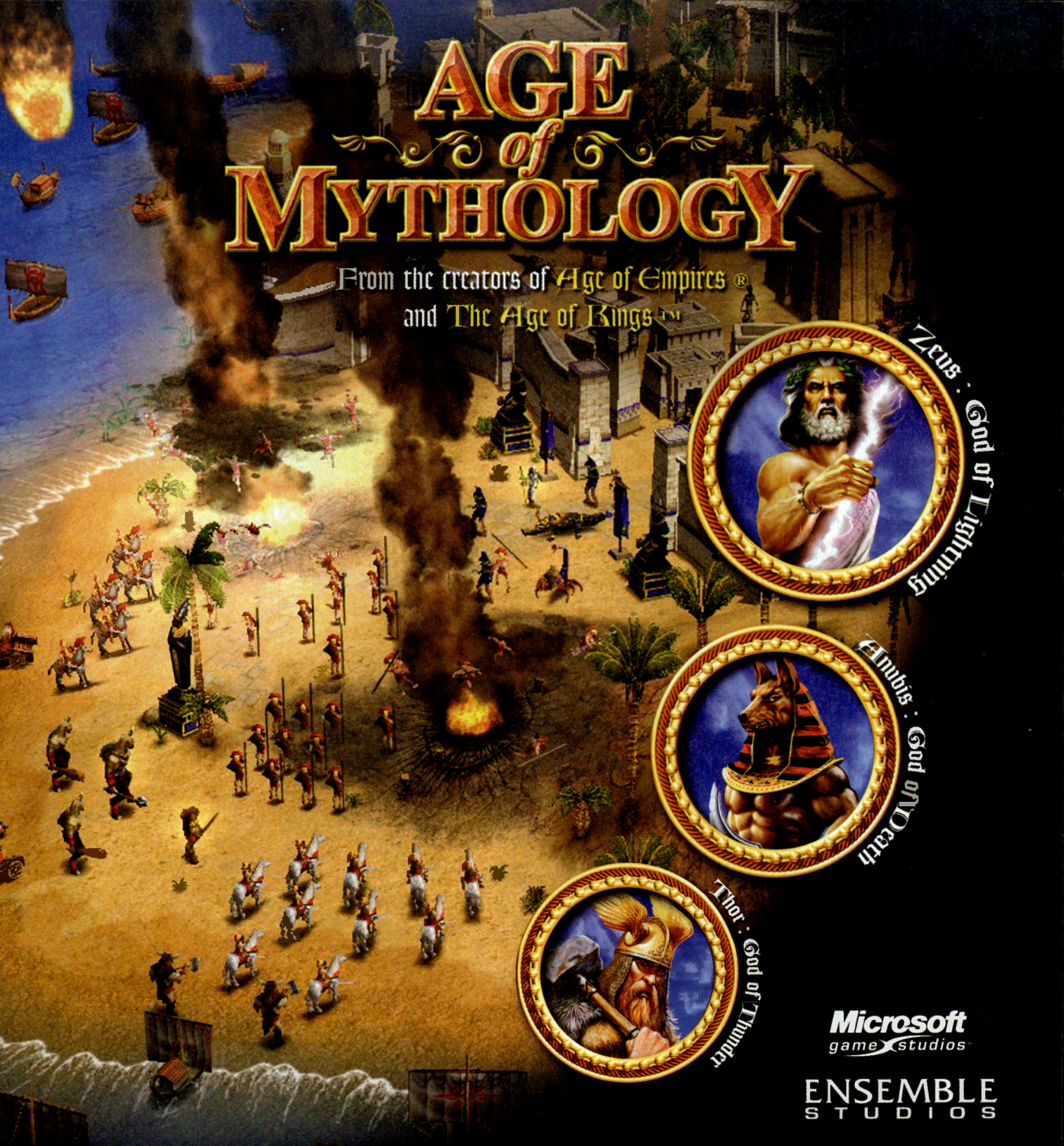


LEPRECHAUN IN THE HOOD

Genre: Dancing Game

Story: Greedy rapsters have stolen your mojo and you must get it back.

Gameplay: Shipping with Logitech's "Dance-on-Me Floor," *Leprechaun in the Hood* would have you dance to the ever-increasing beat of some of the worst rap ever produced, à la *Dance Dance Revolution*. If you survived all 49 torturous rounds, you'd have the pleasure of facing off against TheVede as he laid down a gut-churning rendition of Ice T's "New Jack Hustler." And that's not all! The special edition would ship with a lucky clover and a Blarney stone. And no matter what happened, you'd always know that evil is in the house!



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TEEN T Violence Blood
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

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YOU HAVE 60 SECONDS TO SAVE THE WORLD. GO.

You'll need gadgets, lots of gadgets, gadgets to master the art of becoming invisible, infrared goggles to start, maybe a grappling hook

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Suggestive Themes

PC
CD ROM

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tick or defend yourself from sniper fire high above the alps tock while dodging bullets from tick would be jungle assassins all in time to tock get the girl

but don't pat yourself on the back yet tick because that was only one minute tock and there are still 1,400 left in the day tick and 14 more classic Bond enemies to fight online.

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DOOM III

THE WORLD EXCL

ONLY PC GAMER COULD BRING YOU THE INSIDE TRACK ON THE HOTTEST GAME IN DEVELOPMENT RIGHT NOW. SIT BACK, PUT YOUR FEET UP, AND ENJOY — WE'VE GOT ALL THE DETAILS.

BY ROB SMITH

"Welcome to our game. We'll be your hosts for the next 10 pages."

Before we begin in earnest, let's make a few things crystal clear: *Doom III* is a *Doom* game. You'll hear a lot about what it's not, and you'll hear a lot about what it is. Having witnessed just a fraction of the actual gameplay in action, up close and very personal, let me assure you that you *will* be blown away.

The visual stylings are so palpably creepy, the lighting so subtly realistic, and the sound composition so bristling with pinpoint accuracy that you'll come for the name *Doom* and stay for the dread that the gameplay delivers. There's no redefining of gameplay rules here: quite the contrary, *Doom III* is a classic (traditional/established/expected) run-and-gun action game. Well, more a creep-and-fire-erratically-in-a-panic-fueled-frenzy action experience.

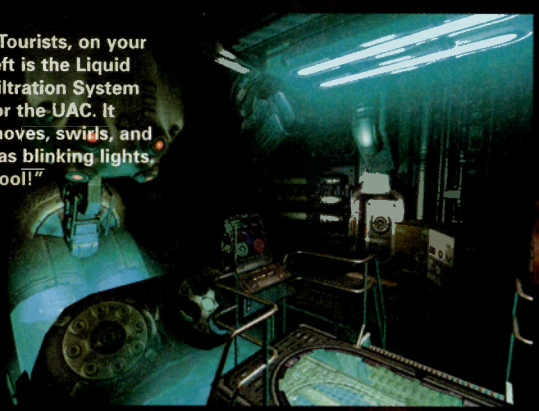
It's been done before...but not quite like this.

USIVE

DOOM — PURE GAMING BRILLIANCE. DOOM II — FEVER-PITCH ANTICIPATION AND MASSIVE SALES. DOOM III — THE MOST STUNNING GAME TECHNOLOGY YOU'VE EVER SEEN.

It's a retelling of the original *Doom*," explains Tim Willits, lead designer on *Doom III*. "It's like the first game never happened." So the "sequel" part of *Doom* is the technology itself, and that's the main progression point. The gameplay is strictly old-school: you hear monsters, you see monsters, you shoot monsters. Repeat. "I know id games are not that complicated," offers Willits, "but a lot of people bought and played them because they were simple."

"Simple" is a rule of thumb for *Doom III*. The only genuine revolution is in the cutting-edge technology. The only gameplay innovations will be derived from manipulating that technology in original ways to scare the bejeezus out of you. "Unapologetically, there are no secondary-fire modes," says Willits of potential features that were left out, "and no leap-jump strafing."



"Tourists, on your left is the Liquid Filtration System for the UAC. It moves, swirls, and has blinking lights. Cool!"

Despite the protestations of id newcomer Seneca Menard, a 3D artist on the project, you won't find a Use key, even though the original *Doom* had one. "You could open drawers," Menard suggested in one heated design discussion. "So what?" responded id programming guru John Carmack. "It's really just a gimmick, and doesn't add to the game in any way, so why do we need it?" Discussion over.

The weapons are visually updated, but functionally, they're familiar re-creations of the originals. A chainsaw was in the process of being illustrated and modeled during our visit. A pistol, shotgun, and assault rifle appeared in the fabled E3 demo. A plasma rifle is in early development, the BFG is confirmed but under wraps, and the rocket launcher's in the game but illustrated by placeholder art right now. A railgun is unlikely given its primary use as a long-range sniper weapon, which doesn't fit stylistically with the claustrophobic confines of the Martian research center, but a chaingun variant is pretty much a certainty. That's seven weapons we're pretty sure about, and two more are likely, which will round out an even selection of one gun per number key, with grenades as an added bonus for a little extra boom-power.

The bestiary of creatures also pulls from both *Doom* and *Doom II*. The Imp, Commando, "Pinky" Demon, Revenant, Arch-Vile, Mancubus, and Lost Souls are all present and accounted for, and you can be pretty sure that initial sketches for a reinvented Baron of Hell, Cyberdemon, and Anachratron were hidden away on a hard drive, or under a stack of papers, far away from my prying eyes.

Topping off the old-school flavor is a red keycard that needs finding. "An homage to the original," offers Willits.

"Is that really still in there?" asks id CEO Todd Hollenshead.

"It's an homage..."

DOOM III

Meet the Arch-Vile (and the remnants of a recent victim). Its flame-attack special effect should be spectacular — and we're guessing that that means a flamethrower will be included in the armory.)

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www.empireearth.com

Despite its size, the Hell Knight shown here is not a boss monster. Willits confirmed that the boss monsters had been discussed and designed (one of them is a Cyberdemon, surely) but wouldn't be showcased before launch.

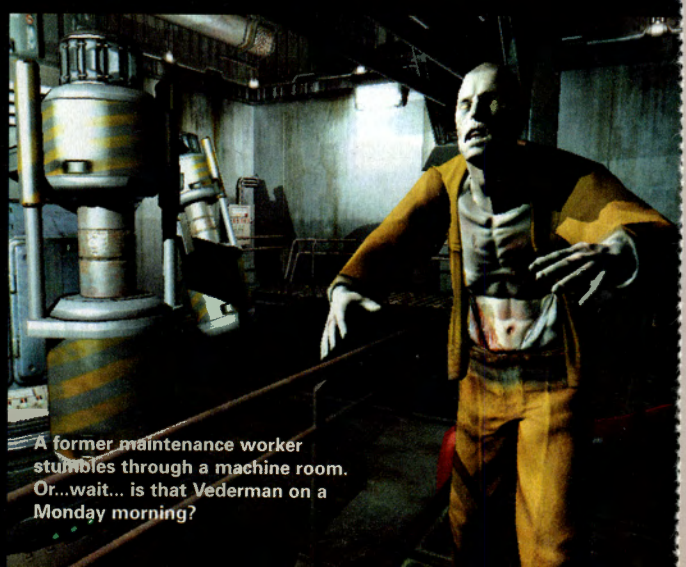
DOOM III

START SAVING

NO DOUBT YOU'LL NEED a powerhouse system to get the most out of *Doom III*. The game is currently running at just 800x600 on an ATI RADEON 9700 PRO. Optimizations should improve that performance somewhat, but the real upgrade should be with your speakers.

Doom III will be the first game that really cries out for you to have a 5.1 speaker system. Yep, they're expensive, but it'll really make a difference. If you're stuck with 2.1 speakers, Graeme Devine suggests using headphones so you can get the full experience.

With a Pentium 4 or Athlon XP and 512MB RAM, backed by top-range sound and video setups, you should enjoy the new technology to its fullest degree.



A former maintenance worker stumbles through a machine room. Or...wait... is that Vederman on a Monday morning?

With five texture passes, the lurid stomach tear on the fat zombie gains an eerie depth and precision when viewed up close. By the way, don't get this close.

PHOBOS — THE INNERMOST AND LARGEST OF MARS' TWO MOONS. PHOBOS — A POTENTIAL FUTURE COLONY LOCATION FOR STUDY OF THE RED PLANET. PHOBOS — THE GREEK WORD FOR FEAR.

In the year 2145, the Union Aerospace Corporation (*www.ua-corp.com*) operates a burgeoning research center located on the Martian moon of Phobos. As a marine, you're on routine guard duty, newly arrived on the rock. There's an uneasiness in the caustic air, a sense of foreboding even. Those scientists were always a quirky bunch, though — perhaps a bad batch of Space Spam was disseminated in the cafeteria, and they're all feeling the effects. Perhaps.

Still, the (male or female — it's still TBD) receptionist at the gleaming desk in the entrance lobby is personable enough. Chatty and coherent, s/he gives you the lowdown on the station, and offers you your very own, very handy PDA. This new gadget consists of an automap, inventory, and communication device. It's also able to receive both email and video messages, and will become a very good friend.

The automap fills in details of your surroundings as you meander through the corridors, even labeling the different areas so that if you're commanded, for whatever reason, to go to the armory, power plant, or wherever, you'll pull up the map and never get lost. As an "artist's representation" of the floor plan, the automap handily deals with rooms above rooms, linking them with clear staircases or elevators.

Should you, for example, find a security card that you figure may come in handy, it'll be stored here. And when you're buzzed for duty, the PDA is where you'll get your instructions, all neatly arranged into sections of orders you've completed, and those you've yet to accomplish.

As you wander the corridors and rooms of a high-tech research station, it's no surprise that the surfaces gleam with a cleanliness demanded in precision work environments. It's bright and sterile, and you begin to understand why some of these people are so touchy.

For starters, one senior scientist you meet, Dr. Malcolm Betruger, smells of trouble. Your bad feeling about this guy — a pseudo–Spidey-sense — tingles when you recall that semester of German you decided to take back at the academy. (You'd do anything to meet Cybil Schiffer, great-granddaughter of Claudia, or so I'm making up.) Betruger? Doesn't that mean [dum, dum, der…] *deceiver*?

Other scientists are likely to comment on Betruger's recent activities, and it's clear he's someone you need to watch.

So after you get acquainted with the locals, the friendly face of Sarge butts in to your PDA, telling you that you're needed for duty. Duly obliging, you head off to follow his instructions.

"With a large intro and no zombies, the game begins by building a context for what the scientists are doing," says Willits, "and it gives you an empathy for what they're — and you're — doing."

Then, while you're out of harm's way on marine duty, all hell breaks loose. Literally. It's a full-scale invasion.

AS YOU HEAD BACK INTO THE research facility, the terror begins. Virtually all the humans have been zombified, and those who haven't are being hunted down by the denizens of hell sent through a portal on a clean-up mission. Some of the characters you've met will still be alive and able to offer up health boosts or pertinent information ("basic gameplay stuff," says Willits), and then you're on your own.

With that military green helmet pulled close around your ears and any weapon you can find gripped tightly in your mitts, you're all that stands between hell and earth.

DOOM III

"DOOM" — THE WORD JOHN CARMACK WANTED TO UTTER, STEALING COOL FROM PAUL NEWMAN IN THE HUSTLER, WHEN ANYONE WOULD ASK HIM WHAT HE HAD IN HIS LAPTOP. PANIC — THE FEELING OF DREAD INSPIRED BY DENIZENS OF HELL BREATHING SLOWLY. TERROR — THE ACTION OF RUNNING BLINDLY INTO ALMOST CERTAIN EVISCERATION.

The research facility needs a sign, and you may spot one urging "Walk, Don't Run." Given the circumstances, running should be actively encouraged, but not for you. Your pace is slow: walking pace. No defaulting to run, since you'll burn out your stamina and then end up panting and wheezing while demons, zombies, and any passing snails take swipes at your gasping carcass. You'll have to watch that stamina every step of the way. Sure, it's a gameplay device, but it also ensures that you take your time to gaze at the stunning detail in every crevice and on every surface. "We always build certain things to show off how cool the engine is," admits Willits. "It's the nature of id."

As your boots smack on the metal floor grates, you'll feel the tell-tale weight that lets you know instantly that this is a John Carmack engine. It's that tangible feeling of mass that makes such a difference in immersing you in an environment. There's no flighty cartoon-like dynamics to the movement that you witness regularly in pretty much every other prominent game engine. You are a body standing in a game world. You have presence — you can feel it — and similarly, you can feel the presence of all those around you.

Ah yes, the terror.

Fat zombies and thin zombies — they all fall eventually when you've pumped enough lead into them. Hell, you can even stand on top of them when they're down to make sure they can't get up from the ground while you take care of other attackers. When the coast is clear, gaze down at the hideous hulk beneath your feet, straining to get back up…and cap the bastard between the eyes.

Sure, you'll see some slight variations in the skin tones of these early zombies, but since they were all once human workers wearing research facility–issue uniforms, of course they'll look similar.

IN THOSE EARLY MOMENTS, every step will be a new experience. With carefully placed and subtly hued lights giving surprising depth to the textures you walk by, and with details in the bump-mapping being picked out in the shadows, there'll be no such thing as a "normal" corridor. And just when you think you might have seen all the cool, you'll hear it, too.

A pipe, masked by shadows, hisses softly to your right as you pass by. It's enough to make you stop, turn, and look up — and boy, could that be a big mistake. Behind walls or lurking in the shadows, the creatures unleashed from hell are on a rampage to pick off any humans who've avoided zombification. Most prominently, that means you.

But even their rampage is calm and calculated, designed to bring you quivering to your knees, cause involuntary bowel movements, and inflict intense emotional torture…right until your head gets ripped off, you get disemboweled, you're blasted in the chest by homing rockets, or any one of thousands of fates that'll have you pressing the "reload" button.

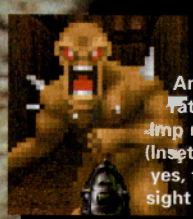
Frankly, firing the shotgun at a zombie from any kind of distance has to be heard up close to be fully appreciated. While some pellets give a dull thud as they penetrate the sickeningly grey flesh, others ping loudly off the floor, the walls, the railings, and the ceiling. Each resonates with its own depth. Sure, you just fired a shotgun shell at a zombie in a *Doom* game — and you might think you've done it before. But not like *this* you haven't.

"We used to have a binding box," says Willits, "but now we have per-poly hit detection." That means that exactly where you hit is where the hole goes in the creature.

This feature also means you can actually move certain objects with gunfire. Boxes will fly off shelves when you unload a clip on them. No doubt this technique could also be used to manipulate the environment — to activate a switch you can't reach, for example, or swing a crane arm around so you can use it. (These are our suggestions — not witnessed in the game, but all feasible with the tools available.) You won't be picking up boxes and stacking crates, but you could be pushing objects in some puzzle-solving circumstances.

FORTUNATELY, THE ARCHITECTS of the UAC's research facility were monstrously paranoid. They hid things, things that could be useful in case of an emergency, such as health kits, armor, and ammunition. You'll want to find these secrets (even though how many you found won't be tallied at the end of a level) to give yourself an edge, since ammunition will be quite scarce — i.e., blazing away in one firefight could get you killed in the next. And remember to use the environment: those glowing green barrels of toxic sludge can cause a huge explosion when hit by stray (or perfectly aimed) bullets.

As is befitting a research facility, it'll have dozens of control panels to open doors, manipulate security cameras, and so on. Be careful when you approach one, though: your weapon drops down and you take control of a cursor that lets you seamlessly highlight and click buttons on the panel (remember: no Use key). You'll have easy access to maps and information, which look like high-end animated Flash interfaces — but you need to be aware of your surroundings, or you'll be shredded



Animated at 24 fps (the same ratio used in movies) the new Imp moves with blinding speed. (Inset) How it was in *Doom*. And yes, there was a time when this sight scared the crap out of you.

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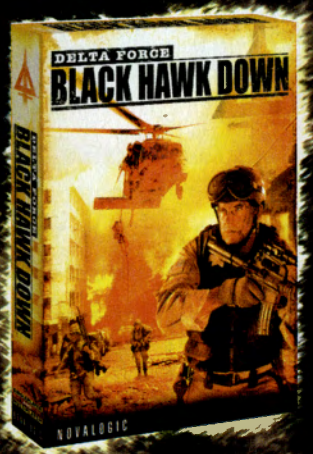

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The development stages of the Pinky Demon: (Top) The original high-polygon model. (Middle) The lower-polygon in-game model covered by a local map color that's used by the engine to figure out how light will properly interact with the surface. (Bottom) The finished article. Pinky has a butting attack that causes a special shaking, double-vision effect in the game.

by attacking zombies while you catch up on the in-game reading.

You'll be accessing that PDA often. It'll have detailed information on all the functions of the new weapons that you find, including warnings about what *not* to do. So if you had a flamethrower — and nobody's confirming that one way or another — the PDA would have a warning not to fire it in rooms filled with toxic green gas, or else the whole shebang would go, well, bang.

The PDA is also where you'll get your mission objectives from Sarge. Located in some yet-to-be-specified-but-evidently-quite-safe command center, Sarge will give you broad objectives that you'll break down into specific tasks, like "escape from the research facility." To accomplish that goal, you might find a way to access door A, get past monster B, and scale ladder C. Since your objective will be saved on the PDA with a screenshot of the location and annotated text on the automap, this marine should never get lost or be unsure what to do next.

Plug-and-play technology has also evolved by 2145, so that if you retrieve a PDA from the remnants of a former scientist, you can plug it into your own and download whatever information he had. It could be security keys, completely annotated maps of sections deeper within the facility, or grocery lists. But it should help.

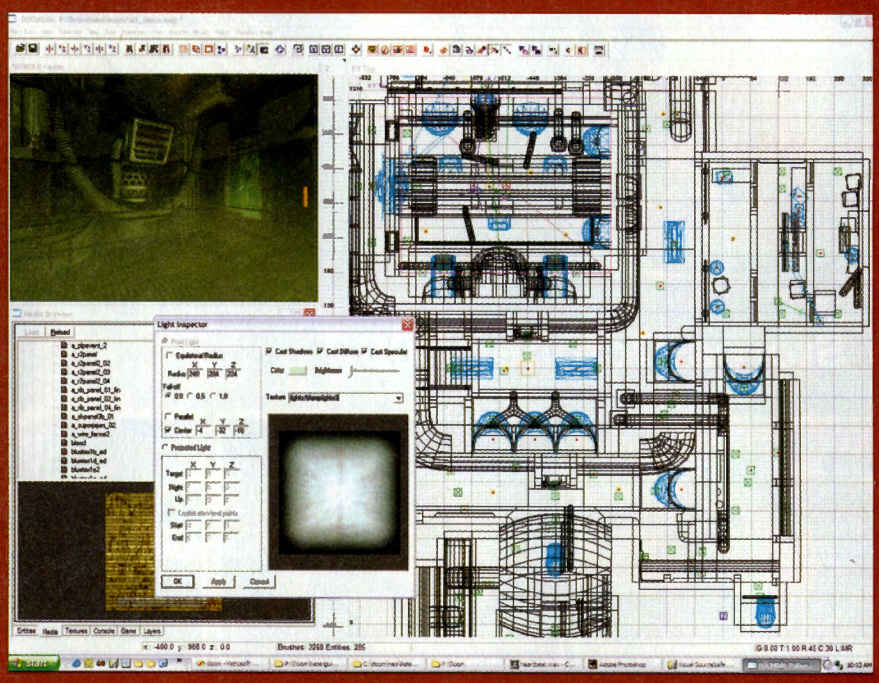
WHERE IT WON'T HELP IS where you're going next. When mad crazy scientists open portals to hell, it always seems to become the responsibility of one lone gunman to go through it. And so that's what you must do, to retrieve an object that'll help you take on the ravening hordes on Phobos. Arm yourself to the teeth, and head into hell itself.

Hell's not actually made yet, so this travelogue is vague on its look and style (dangling vines with reddish hues were all we could see in one early mock), but we're pretty sure those demons like pentagrams as a general décor statement, along with do-gooders impaled on stakes just for kicks.

With good aim, stout heart, and a supply of adult diapers, you'll emerge from hell on the trail of this Betruger character. Over the course of the story you'll chase him through a rusty, grimy underground complex, some kind of Mars city, a cavern complex of sorts, hell (of course), and even into the great outdoors.

Though initially thought to be a fuller part of the new game, your outdoor excursions will be short. The lack of air means you can spend only short periods outside before your head explodes, so while you *will* step foot on Phobos dirt, it won't be for long. (Limiting the outdoor time is also a significant factor in the decision to drop the railgun.)

Rather, the focus is on the tight, claustrophobic corridors and rooms of a futuristic facility. That's the perfect place for id to have monsters leap from dark corners, set swinging lights to cast jumping shadows across the walls, place mirrors to set up ominous encounters — basically, says Willits, "to be really, really scary."



The new editing toolset has extremely broad functionality, including rendering the level in the editor itself (top-left box). As a result, id's designers have been able to test and tweak a variety of lighting angles, intensities, and level shapes with the new technology. Tim Willits told us that the middle and end of the game are being completed first; the beginning, which id considers most important, will be finalized at the end of production, when the team is most comfortable with the new tools.

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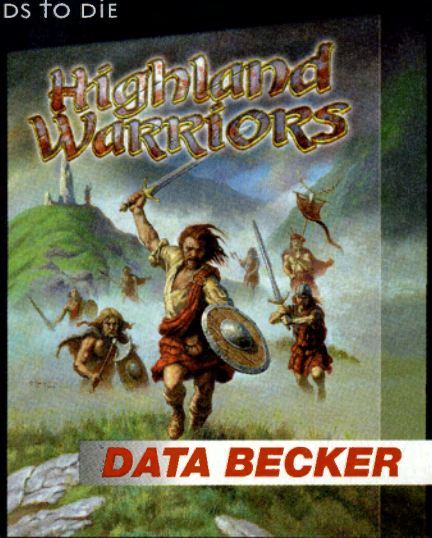

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DOOM III

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Starting as a penciled illustration, the Lost Soul evolves into this terrifying illustrated monstrosity.

Doom III will have spectacular rendering and art, and mediocre AI and multiplay," says John Carmack of the design focus. Already the art looks absolutely stunning. Modeler/artist Kenneth Scott is having a blast letting his (quite worrying) imagination run riot with the monster designs. "It's not for the faint of heart," he politely offers as he shows a female face slowly, painfully animating from ivory-skinned perfection to crispy, taut grey zombification. In-game, this effect is small, barely noticeable, but it's there.

Of other beasts being detailed, the masculine-sounding Mancubus seemed to be, well, female, and not just because of the monstrous boobies amid the rolls of brown fat…you'll have to see it for yourself. Armed with a rocket launcher of sorts on the end of each arm, it's "inspired" by the creature in the original game (shown at left), but the species has evidently "evolved."

What scariness inspired the soft-spoken Scott? "A directory of gross obese people," he explains. Okay then.

Some designs happen by accident. The Revenant was being modeled as a thin but solid-skinned creature when Scott made the outer skin a transparency just so he could go in and manipulate the creature's skeletal system. The subtle, swirling, translucent effect looked cool, so it stayed.

For the marine himself, Scott originally packed plenty of bulking armor, but our hero needed to be a bit more maneuverable and vulnerable.

Which of these creations is Scott's favorite? "Probably the naked woman," he says. This perfectly formed female may be found only on an autopsy table. But she's wearing panties! "It wasn't for modesty," says Scott. "Just the thought that the creatures left her panties on or *put* them on her is so creepy."

ANIMATING THESE CREATURES is Fred Nilsson, who worked on the movie *Shrek* before moving to id.

Building a large number of "bones" into the monster models allows Nilsson to animate almost every part of them. The fatty zombie has bones on his belly, allowing it to be swayed and tugged in different directions. "I have a smile control, too," says Nilsson. "I just don't think I've ever used it."

DOOM III WILL INCLUDE BRIEF scripted third-person in-engine cut-scenes to set up specific encounters. Working on the scripting and AI, programmer Jim Dose says, "It's about fear and tension — we want you to be terrified by what's going on around you."

At the core of building tension is the brand-new sound engine being constructed by programmer Graeme Devine and manipulated by Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor. Full six-channel (5.1) sound, 60 to 80 sound sources in a scene (where most games have 20 to 30), and 14,000 .wav files in the sound directory tell only part of the audio story.

"We want to make the scariest game possible, and what will finalize that goal is the sound," says Devine. The sound engine was up-and-running early in the development cycle, and various lessons have had to be learned. Programmers view sound as 1's and 0's — on and off. "Sound people," on the other hand, work in decibels — +3db on that channel, -2db on this one — and it was evidently a tough bridge to cross for both Devine and Reznor. "Trent's been a very exacting person to work with," notes Devine. "It's been...educational."

Sound effects are generated by the game physics: an object hits the floor, and the sound engine judges the location, the energy it absorbs, and what that means to the noise it makes. Sound occlusion tracks the environment — how sounds bounce off you, the shape of your ear (even your nose), and the shape of the location, shifting the reverb based on that space.

With all these technical details in place, how do you decide how monsters from hell actually sound? "Oh, that's all pure Hollywood," says Devine.

Such is the power in the sound effects — from blood trickling down walls to choosing one of 10 options for any single footfall, and subtle variances when a rocket is fired through smoke — that there'll be hardly any music, per se, according to designer Christian Anktow. "It may be used occasionally to build tension," he says, "much like Hitchcock."

IN A BREAK FROM ID TRADITION, an outside writer was hired to flesh out the dialogue and story details. Getting the call was Matt Castello, a friend of Devine's from his Trilobyte days, where he wrote the stories for both *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour*. The design has stuck to Willits' original vision pretty closely. "People [at id] wouldn't read a 90-page design doc," suggests Willits, "but they'd read the comic-book version."

The whole game has been mapped out in storyboards to track the flow and pace of your progress. Given that *Doom III*'s a remake of the original game, hardcore fans will also recognize some of the level designs being recrafted.

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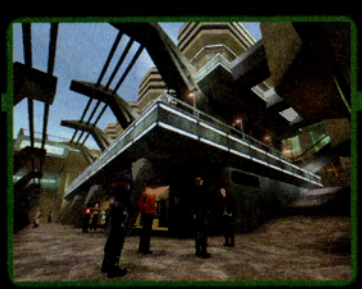

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DOOM III

JOHN CARMACK — TECHNICAL DIRECTOR AND RENDERING-ENGINE GURU EXTRAORDINAIRE. ADRIAN CARMACK — NO RELATION; CO-OWNER AND ARTIST ON ALL OF ID'S PROJECTS. KONA CARMACK — NO RELATION (WE ASSUME); PLAYBOY'S MISS FEBRUARY 1996.

Given the amount of damage you'll be taking, the interface will give you feedback on where attacks are coming from, and a heartbeat sensor will alert you to danger.

"I've mostly been done with the rendering engine for a while," says John Carmack, "and now I'm working with the hardware vendors on some issues, and on details like ambient lighting and soft shaders." That's a good position to be in, and one that now allows him to ask everyone else on the team where they're at.

The day after our visit was review day for Tim Willits and his team. Carmack had insisted on seeing an outline of the entire game, blocked out with sections in place, placeholders where necessary, to see the entire progression. "[The designers] say they're going to have it," he tells us. "*Doom III* will be looked at [in the community] as my game more than anyone else's, so the new content had better be good."

But John Carmack isn't micro-managing this project. Though he firmly believes that the best way to make games is to have just one programmer working on them, with one clear vision, he realizes that this situation isn't practical or possible. More importantly, he's now very comfortable with the quality of the programming talent currently employed by id. "[Programmer Robert Duffy] and I have fairly good-natured debates on how the process should work...but when you're creating content from scratch, you'll have slightly conflicting philosophies."

Those conflicts got down to the details of gameplay, such as what should be built for the game and what shouldn't. "I really believe in simple controls," Carmack explains, "whereas the other [team members] didn't mind binding 10 keys." And the fact that the original game had a Use key didn't matter at all. "I came down against at least half the company in that debate...but now [with the new GUI interface on control panels], we can display complex information with very little input."

Sometimes Carmack does relent, however. "I'm not a proponent of rag-doll physics, but [programmer] Jan Paul van Waveren went ahead and did it, and it's good, and it's a crowd pleaser. Clearly it's a gimmick, but it's popular...and that's an example of me making a bad call."

THE VERY ORIGIN OF THE DOOM III project was controversial inside id, and Carmack admits that it had a "troubled birthing process." After *Quake III*, it was understood that the company would do a single-player game next...but what game? "I was afraid that id was going to have its first disaster," he told us. "But after the beginning, *Doom III*'s had probably the smoothest development in our history."

While the company's artists have always been together in one large room inside id's offices, its designers were typically spread throughout their own offices. Now five of them are jammed into one eerily quiet space, where knuckling down appears to be the order of the day. "It's kinda like the rock band that gets back together in the basement," says Willits of the new setup.

LOOKING AHEAD, CARMACK HAS also stated his belief that the *Doom* technology is likely to be the basis of game engines for the next five years. So what will he be doing in that time? "Working on a couple of things for *Doom* as features to show off the technology, such as ambient lighting," he says.

What about other facets of game technology? What about AI programming? According to Willits, *Doom III* will use "the same basic navigational path system [created by van Waveren] as *Quake III*." Revolutionary AI is low on the priority list for Carmack "because monsters don't need it." Carmack does concede that "there's interesting research to be done on simulated societies...but it's not important for us." How about in, say, *Republic*? "Yes, I'm happy to see work like that done...emergent behavior is certainly more interesting."

And what about destructible terrain? Curiously, Carmack thinks the best time to have worked on that direction was two years ago, "before the realism interest kicked in." "You can render reality easier than you can simulate it," he explains. "You can render at *Doom*'s level of realism, but it's not so cool when you destroy it...you have conflicting issues of great games to be made or making physics toys."

OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS Carmack has openly admitted his waning interest in games. (Though since id derives its greatest revenue from its games — rather than licensing its engines — it's likely he'll be building games for years to come.) "While I enjoy my problem-solving, [game design] has arguments like strafe-jumping for which there's no logical answer," he explains. That's not the case in his pet project, Armadillo Aerospace, where he's working to send a manned ship into space. "With AA we're not trying to please the public tastes," he says. "A lot of people in the games industry are doing good work. If I disappeared, the industry wouldn't end."

Is his disappearing a possibility? "The aerospace industry is fundamentally broken," he believes. "[In the games business], I may do something two years ahead, but someone else could do it eventually. With aerospace, it may not happen for 20 years."

With each engine iteration taking six months to develop, Carmack suspects he may do a chunk of the next version based on NVIDIA's NV30 and ATI's R300 technology before *Doom III* ships. After that, he says, "I can imagine myself stepping back to be technical director rather than lead programmer."

As a problem solver, Carmack's future challenges may lay outside the games industry. "Some of the problems for me [in game design] are no real challenge...I've done them 15 times before."

And so he goes back to work. But until the aerospace industry funds a Ferrari or two, you can be sure that John Carmack will be in the id offices at least four days a week, crafting the next best thing in games technology. PCG

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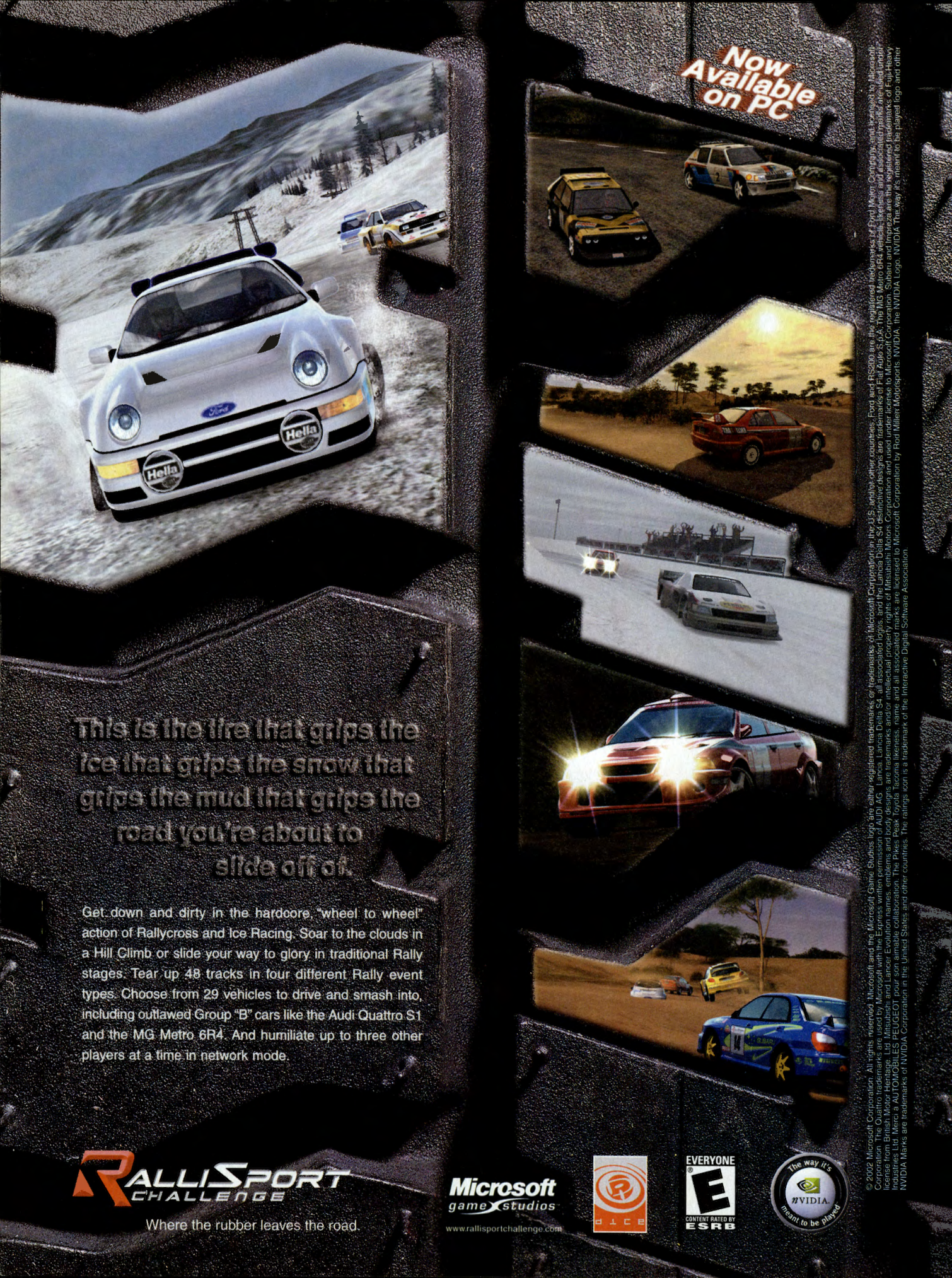
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RIGHTEOUS RIG

Simple steps for modding your rig, as told by the folks who were crazy enough to do it themselves

Waaaay back in our May 2002 issue, we launched *PC Gamer*'s first-ever Righteous Rig Contest, in which we challenged our readers to build a functioning computer with the weirdest, wackiest, baddest-assiest customized tower in all the land. Up for grabs: a smokin'-hot GeForce4 Ti 4600 card and two games of our choosing (i.e., whatever crap was lying on TheVede's desk).

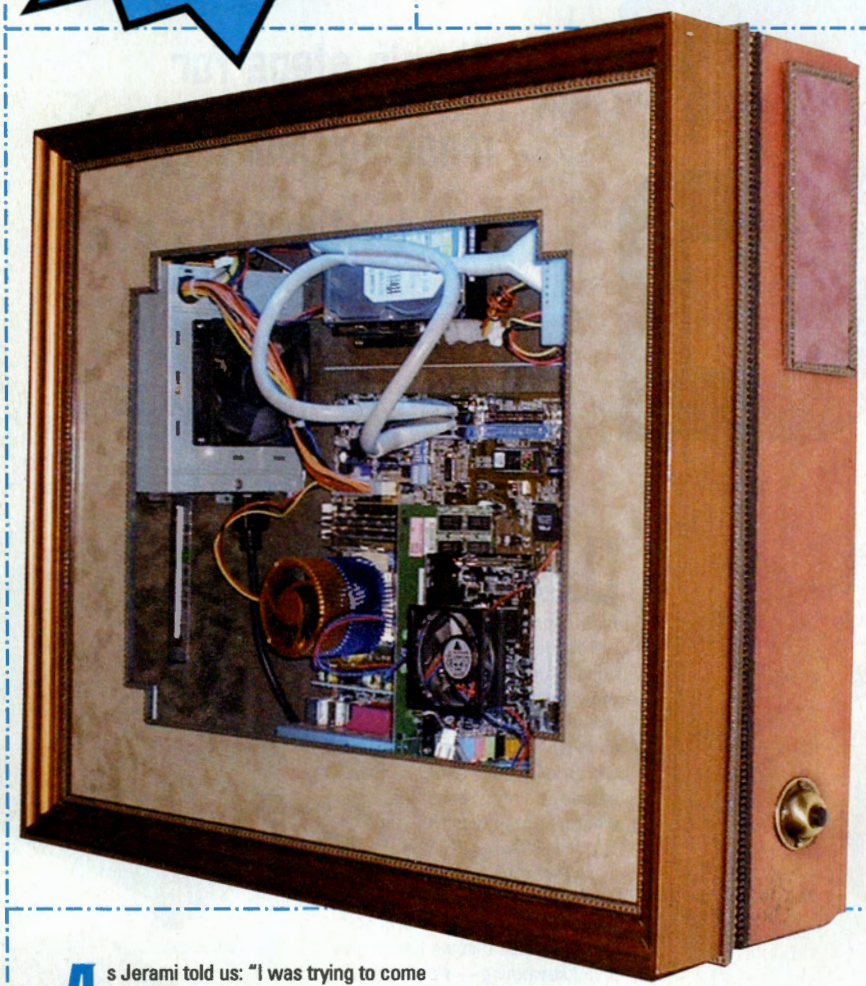
A few suckers actually believed us. So, after much foot-dragging — and a memo from our lawyer stating in legalese that we had to give away *something* — *PC Gamer* is finally proud to present the winner of the contest, plus the first and second runners-up. (The goodies are in the mail. Really.)

Want to build one of these fine mama-jamas for yourself, but don't know how? We've consulted the best case modders around and gotten them to reveal how to duplicate their unique creations, including a step-by-step guide to emblazoning a kickass skull on the front of your existing case. Hey, that's more than worth this issue's pittance of a cover price, right?

PC GAMER'S RIGHTEOUS RIG CONTEST WINNER

THE FRAMED COMPUTER

Jerami Campbell



THE SETUP

Asus A7V motherboard • 1GHz Athlon overclocked to 1.3GHz • 512MB RAM • Overclocked Elsa GLADIAC GeForce2 card with a blue orb fan mounted on either side • Sound Blaster Live! sound card • Western Digital 30GB hard drive • Philips 8x CD burner • Two off-white rounded IDE cables • Two 12-inch blue cold cathodes • Logitech iTouch cordless mouse and keyboard combo • A monitor purchased used for $5 and spray-painted copper to match the frame. It sits on a desk below the computer.

As Jerami told us: "I was trying to come up with a cool case mod, and a friend suggested that I put one into a picture frame since I was a framer. I worked like mad on it after work and in-between classes for three weeks before it was completed.

The picture frame was purchased at a frame shop. It was damaged, and almost deep enough for the power supply (the deepest piece of this computer). The frame determined the overall size of the PC.

The first step was to mount the motherboard. I mounted the motherboard standoffs to a piece of plywood that was 23-1/2 inches by 19-1/2 inches by 3/4-inch.

Next, I built the sides of the box. I used 4 inches by 1/2-inch of poplar. This part was an extension to make the frame deeper for the power supply; it also gave me a way to attach the frame.

At this point I lined the inside of the box with green suede to match the green of the motherboard. I paid close attention to color throughout the entire project because I wanted the machine to be visually stunning, with or without cold cathodes.

Next, I mounted the components. I ripped apart an old PC case to get the bays and various mounting bits to install the CD-ROM drive, as well as the video and sound cards.

Once everything was secured, I fit the frame to the box. The frame slips snugly over an extension of foam-core board that lines the inside of the box so the frame can be removed if I need to work on the PC as it hangs on the wall. The system hangs using normal 50-pound picture hooks mounted in dry wall.

The last step was to touch up the frame and add the finishing touches: the doorbell power switch, the mat inside that hides the cold cathode lights, and the fillet that runs around the outside seam between the box and the frame.

This computer was in my frame shop for about a month. It did get a lot of attention, but surprisingly, the copper monitor grabbed most of it. The average person didn't understand what they were looking at. Many thought that the monitor was the computer, and others thought that the PC was a clock. Go figure."

Check out more of Jerami's sweet creations at *www.LucentRigs.com*.

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THE COCONUT MONKEY PC

RIGHTEOUS RIG 1ST RUNNER-UP

Evan Rimmel

THE SETUP AMD XP2100 • 512MB PC-2700 RAM • Elsa GeForce2 GST card • Sound Blaster Platinum Audigy sound card

As Evan told us: "I was thinking of what I had laying around, because I didn't want to go out and spend too much. It turned out I had about a half-sheet of yellow acrylic. I liked the way it looked, and wanted a windowed case, so I put it to use.

The tools I used to build my rig were an electric drill, a jigsaw, metal files, and a screwdriver.

First, I took an existing case and stripped all the removable parts. I used the jigsaw to cut out the top of the case and some of the side so that the components would be more visible.

Next, I spray-painted the frame black and added wheels to the bottom. I cut the acrylic panels with the jigsaw and mounted them to the frame using bolts. I added two 120mm fans to the top of the case by cutting holes in the top plate and bolting them in place.

At that point, I crafted the fan covers out of a sheet of aluminum and some wire fencing. I traced Coconut Monkey and rough-cut the pattern with the jigsaw, then smoothed the design with the metal files.

I unclipped the fronts of my CD-ROM, floppy, and Audigy drives and spray-painted them black. Then I installed all the components and added rounded cables and a Volcano cooling fan to the CPU.

Finally, I installed rope lighting around the case's inside edge.

THE COMPU-WAVE

RIGHTEOUS RIG 2ND RUNNER-UP

Don Pullano

THE SETUP ABIT BE6-II motherboard • 850MHz Celeron overclocked to 1.13GHz • 256MB SDRAM • 32MB Asus GeForce2 GTS card • AOpen soundcard (for now) • 40GB Western Digital hard drive

As Don told us: "The 'Compu-wave,' as I so aptly named it, was conceived back in March of this year. It took about a month to build in my spare time. The idea came to me one day when I was trying to think of something different to use as a case, and a microwave seemed like a good way of concealing the PC's true identity.

I took apart a donated microwave and threw away all the parts inside. First, I used a Dremel rotary tool and a cut-off wheel to make a hole in the back. Then I took an old PC case and cut it up for parts. I used the motherboard tray and the cages to hold the drives.

I bought the clock/thermometer/hygrometer at Target because the original one wouldn't work. I used the Dremel to cut out the hole so I could mount it where the old clock was. The thermometer I bought had a temperature probe attached to it, so I mounted that inside on the motherboard tray. Now it reads the temperature inside the case.

The power and reset switches are from car alarms. Most of the other stuff I just had laying around from computers people have given me. Finally, I wired in the blue flex lights to work with the power supply."

THE CAFFEINE MACHINE

The following two cases come to us courtesy of our buddies over at sister publication *Maximum PC*. They looked so cool, we just had to ask their creators, "How'd you do that?"

Nick Pelis

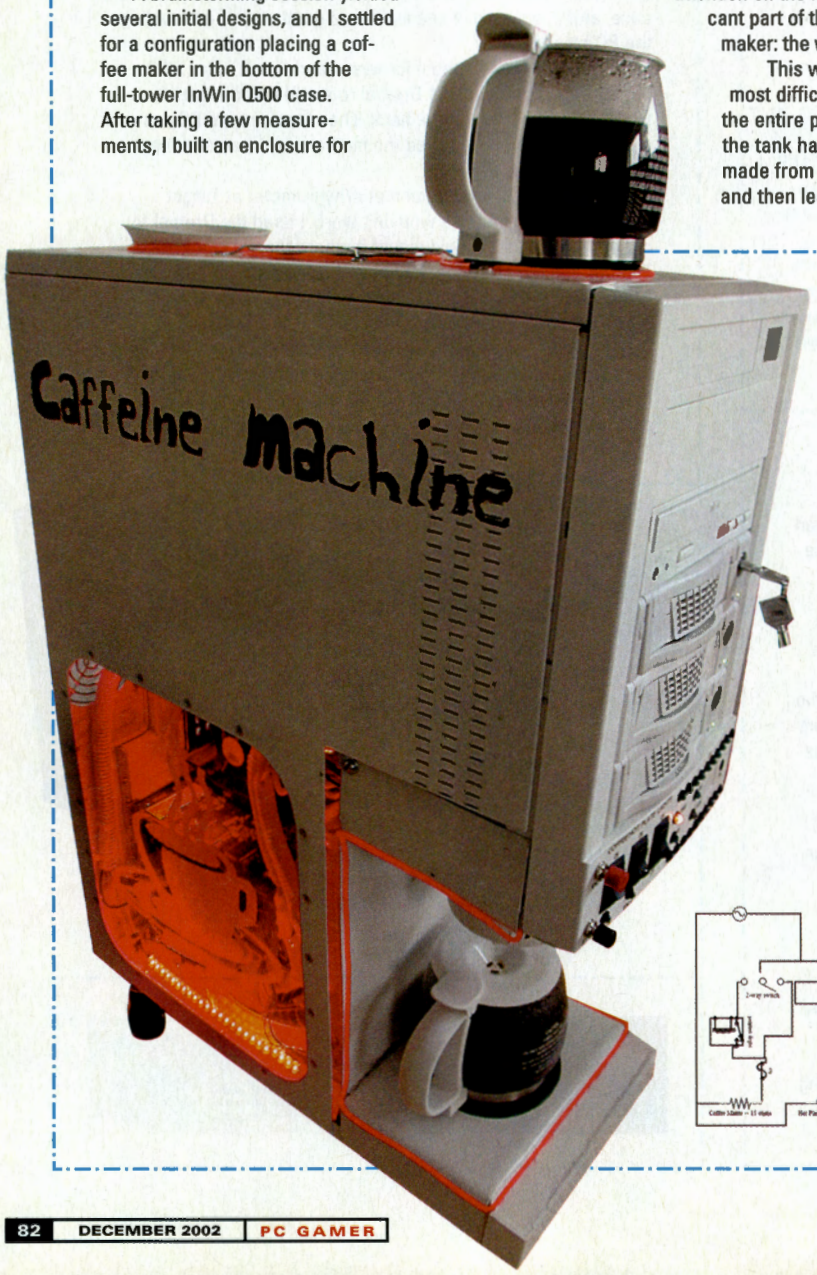
As Nick told us: "Being a hopeless caffeine addict, it occurred to me one day that since I drink a lot of coffee and spend a lot of time on the computer, why not simply combine the two and get the best of both worlds?

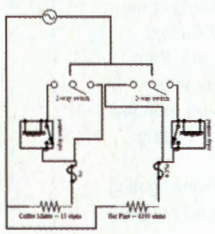
A brainstorming session yielded several initial designs, and I settled for a configuration placing a coffee maker in the bottom of the full-tower InWin Q500 case. After taking a few measurements, I built an enclosure for the coffee maker out of sheet metal, which is robust and easy to work with. The enclosure pieces were cut using a Dremel and formed together with vice grips and a rubber mallet. Pop rivets held everything together and provided a strong structure, so I focused my attention on the next significant part of the coffee maker: the water tank.

This was the most difficult part of the entire project, as the tank had to be made from scratch and then leakproofed. Originally, I planned to build a cube-shaped tank in the top of the case, where there was plenty of room. I built a test tank and immediately discovered a problem: by placing the bottom of the water tank above the hot-water spout, a siphon emptied the tank as soon as it was filled! This issue necessitated a redesign, so I settled for a book-shaped tank placed directly behind the back plate for the coffee-maker enclosure. Next, I had to waterproof the tank, and after trying several different epoxies and cements with disappointing results, I ended up making my own cement from scrap acrylic and acetone. Once the silicone hose connections were drilled in, I began work on the electrical system.

To keep the construction simple, I left the electrical systems for both the coffee maker and the hot plate at 120VAC. I cannibalized a dead ATX power supply for parts, and decided to use the same power connector for the coffee maker as for the computer's power supply. Keeping safety in mind, I installed fuses for the high-current circuits. At the same time, I wanted to have a little fun with the project, so I bought a remote-controlled relay kit and hooked that in with the coffee-maker electronics to make the device remote-controlled.

Finally, after about three months of planning, design, and construction, I assembled the components together to create…The Caffeine Machine!"





To get a complete description of how Nick built his java-powered PC, visit *www.pimprig.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=72*.

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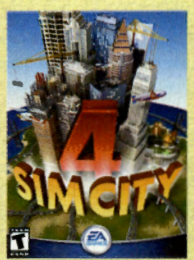

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THE SKULL

Salar Madadi

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Case
- Plastic skull
- Automotive primer
- Automotive paint
- Automotive clear coat
- Auto body plastic filler
- Crazy Glue
- Rotary tool (Dremel, RTX)
- Sandpaper (200–400 dry, 600–2,000 wet)
- Rubbing compound
- Putty knife
- Goggles
- Face mask

SAFETY TIP: When using a rotary tool or sanding, make sure to wear goggles and a face mask. When painting, wear a face mask and work in a well-ventilated area.

Salar's step-by-step instructions for building a skull case:

(1) First, figure out where you want the skull positioned on the bezel (faceplate), and mark the center of the area.

(2) Turn the skull sideways and draw a line where you want it to intersect the bezel.

(3) Using a saw or rotary tool, remove the extra plastic from the skull behind the line so that you have the front part of the skull with a flat surface on the back.

(4) Place the now-flat-backed skull on the bezel using the mark you made earlier, and, using a pencil, trace around the skull. Now draw another outline inside the original, about 1/4 of an inch inside. This is the line that we will use to cut the bezel.

(5) Using a rotary tool, cut a hole in the bezel using the inside line.

(6) Now fasten the skull to the bezel. I used Crazy Glue. Apply the glue to the back of the skull, and carefully attach it so that it sits over the hole made in the last step.

(7) Now you need to apply plastic filler to create a smooth blend between the skull and the case. Most plastic fillers consist of a can of paste and a small tube of hardening compound. The amount of hardener added to the paste determines how fast it will harden. Follow the directions!

(8) Using a putty knife, take a little bit of filler and apply it to the area between the skull and the case, working your way around. Apply thin layers of filler to make sure no air bubbles are trapped inside.

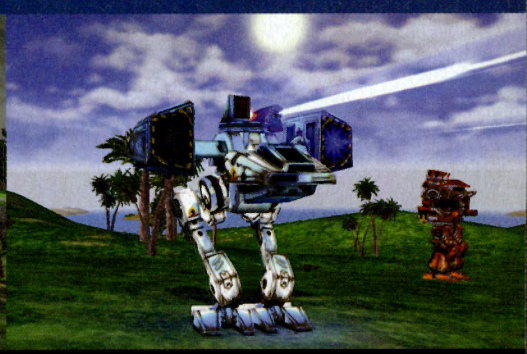
(9) Keep adding layers until you've created a good blend between the bezel and the skull. Remember that you'll be removing excess filler with a rotary tool, so make sure you've applied some extra layers. (To create the grooves between the skull and the bezel on my case, I used a rotary tool with a sanding drum bit to carve away excess filler, using short, controlled strokes.)

(10) You should now have a rough blend of filler between the bezel and the skull. Starting with 200-grit sandpaper, begin sanding the filler, working your way up to 600-grit sandpaper. Keep sanding until you have a seamless blend between bezel and skull.

(11) Now you're ready to paint. To create a smooth, glossy paint finish, begin with two layers of primer. Then put on three layers of color, and finish with three layers of clear coat. It's important to let each layer dry for at least six hours. Afterward, lightly wet-sand, starting with 600-grit and working your way up to 2,000-grit before applying the final clear-coat layer. PCG

MISSIONS +490% VIOLENCE +430.5% DEATHS +150% FAME +95.2% EGO +

+20% GREED +150% ENEMIES -95% DESTRUCTION +320% WEAPONS +200%



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Violence
Blood

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reviews

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO NEW GAME RELEASES

Dan and Billy drew a crowd of EA onlookers as they smashed all opposition at the *Battlefield 1942* launch event held aboard the USS *Hornet* (shown above, except it was in color when we saw it). The talented *PC Gamer* representatives decimated a field of top gaming luminaries — and they were eating while doing it!

Battlefield Conquerors

As the dust cleared and the victories were counted, Dan and Billy came out on top. Other gaming mags may claim skills, but our editors demonstrate!

In early September, EA gathered the cream of the gaming press together for a 64-player session of *Battlefield 1942*. Along with the journalists, the competition included a large selection of players from developer Digital Illusions, plus a few gaming luminaries like Dennis "Thresh" Fong. Gathered in the flight hangar of the historic aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* (moored in nearby Alameda, Calif.), the competition pitted the industry's best gamers against one another in mortal combat.

Now, you may ask: Who emerged the champions of the virtual battlefield? Need you even wonder? *PC Gamer*, baby.

Out of 64 players, your favorite gaming mag had two editors representing. Billy Harms and Dan Morris finished — you knew this was coming — first and second in the overall scoring.

No force — be it Thresh, or Digital Illusions, or *Computer Gaming World* (certainly not!) — stood a chance against the allied dominance of Billy and Dan. Whether sniping from high ridges, slapping planes out of the sky with anti-aircraft guns, putting bazooka shells up tanks' tailpipes, or just slashing throats with a measly knife, the *PC Gamer* soldiers stalked the battleground like a pair of hopped-up assassins. Even the game's own developers could do little to blunt the onslaught.

After 60 minutes of play, the two heroic *PC Gamer* editors made things even more challenging for themselves when they got dinner trays from the catering table and began to eat sandwiches while simultaneously laying waste to their opponents. But the results were unchanged — the rest of the gaming industry could only cower in horror as it was massacred by the iron fist of the *PC Gamer* juggernaut.

Interviewed after the event, Billy began to sing to the tune of "Shaft": "Who is the man/that can jam over any man?" Dan then chimed in, "Billy!" to which Billy nodded and growled, "Damn straight."

The boys made a hasty retreat after the event, for fear that the military may have been observing and might make a grab to press-gang our editors into service.

Other magazines may claim to be experts, but the numbers don't lie. *PC Gamer* got it done in stupendous style — proving yet again that we're the sharpest lance in the arsenal of democracy.

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

Bust out your wallet, free up some time: these recent games are still worth checking out.

MOONBASE COMMANDER

NOV. 2002

Okay, we understand that you might glance at the title of this game and write it off. But don't: it's great fun, and a very cool strategy entry.

80%

TONY HAWK 3

JUNE 2002

All you need is a plank of wood and some wheels attached, and glory can be yours. You won't find a better console port on the PC platform.

90%

ROBOFORGE

DEC. 2001

It's a gearhead's dream: program your own bot, then send it into battle! Thankfully, this unique sleeper has finally been released in boxed form.

87%

HOW WE RATE THE GAMES: THE BREAKDOWN

90%

100%–90%
EDITORS' CHOICE

It's not easy to get here, and games in this range come with our unqualified recommendation.

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.

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 you can definitely find numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

40%

49%–40%
TOLERABLE

Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep these games from descending into the utter 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 TheVede's smelly socks, and don't say we didn't warn you!

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STILL THINKING ABOUT SPRING BREAK?

Cabanas, clubs and casinos.
If you build it, they will come.

Feverish flings to sloshed scuffles.
Watch your guests indulge in an epic party.

Toss in wet t-shirt and dirty dancing contests.
The more fun they have, the more fun you have.

It's spring break year-round when you take control of a tropical playground packed with beaches, bars and bathing beauties. So grab the game, and give yourself something else to drool over.

Virtual Resort SPRING BREAK

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mature Sexual Themes
Mild Violence
Use of Alcohol

PC CD ROM

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

SpringBreakGame.net

Mafia

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

When this disc hits your drive like a big pizza pie, that's *amore*

In some missions, you'll have to rely on your fellow gangsters to help you out of tough spots.

THE BRUTAL UNDERWORLD

All part of the compelling story: On a routine protection-money pickup, Paulie, your partner, winds up on the wrong end of a bullet, proving you're not the only bad guys in town.

Organized crime has inspired some of the best films and television shows ever made — the *Godfather* trilogy, *GoodFellas*, and *The Sopranos*, to name just a few. We've been waiting patiently for eons to play a PC game that really took full advantage of this fascinating and action-packed atmosphere.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY	Action
ESRB RATING	M
DEVELOPER	Illusion Softworks
PUBLISHER	G.O.D.
REQUIRED	PIII 500, 96MB RAM, 1.8GB HD, 32MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 800, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Thanks to Illusion Softworks (the Czech Republic developer responsible for *Hidden & Dangerous*), that time has come. *Mafia: City of Lost Heaven* is a fantastic game, as well as a firsthand look at what it might have been like to be a "made man" back in the "glory" days of the 1930s.

You play the role of Tommy Angelo, who, after a life spent working for the Salieri family, decides to "flip" (mob-speak for becoming a traitor and working with the law to bring down your former associates) when he's ordered to kill some friends. Told as a series of flashbacks, the 20 missions of the campaign offer an amazing array of tasks to accomplish, ranging from stealthy assassinations to intense shootouts to competing in an auto race. *Grand Theft Auto III* is definitely a major influence on the game design, and always for the better.

The biggest complaint that most players will have with *Mafia* is that you must get yourself to wherever your mob-designated assignment is taking place. So you'll have to drive to and fro, making sure all the while that you obey traffic laws, as one slip-up means game over when you're pulled over by cops. This method may be realistic and can even be construed as a gameplay challenge, but an option to zip to the beginning of the action sequences would have been much appreciated.

Mafia's technical aspects are among the best in the business. It's rare in this day and age to be truly impressed by a game's graphics, but a lot of your early game time will be spent just marveling at the scenery. Those just scraping by with the minimum system requirements will still get a gorgeous, if somewhat sluggish, experience, but if you've been looking for an excuse to upgrade your video card, here's an excellent one. Most of the vehicles (more than 60 are eventually available) look like they were imported via time machine, and the texture-mapping of peoples' faces is outstanding. (There are no "faccia brutas" in this game.)

The soundtrack is filled with sounds of the era, and though some of the voice-acting can be charitably classified as "merely acceptable," the overall effect of music and speech pulls you further into the game's alternate reality. Cut-scenes between missions are movie-like in their presentation, the camera is almost always in a good position, and, for me, the game was refreshingly crash-free throughout. The one fly in the antipasto is that even on the burliest machines, the graphics at the far horizon tend to "pop in" a little too noticeably. It's not disastrous, but with other details so stunning, this hiccup can be somewhat distracting.

Backing up the sights and sounds is some of the best third-person action gaming since *Grand Theft Auto III*. Yes, the comparisons are valid, but only to a point: *Mafia* is much more focused on its story and, in turn, is more linear than *GTA III*.

Reloading your weapon plays a big role in gunfights. Running low on bullets is not recommended.

The Salieri family doesn't like what this politician has to say, and has sent you to shut him up.

I don't think the cops will be retrieving any fingerprints from *this* crime scene!

The cut scenes are so well done, it's like getting to star in your very own Hollywood gangster film.

That's not a bad thing, as the result is a more structured form of storytelling, but keep it in mind if you think *GTA III*'s open-ended style is the model for all future action gaming.

Mafia also has a separate Free Ride mode, which offers a chance to explore the city at your own pace. This mode lets you adjust the amount of traffic, the number of people walking the streets, and how long the arm of the law will be. Completing the campaign opens up more options, including Free Ride Extreme. Here you completely rid yourself of the pesky police force, and open the opportunity to gain further vehicles by completing odd-job tasks. While it's nowhere near as fun as the campaign (or *GTA III*, for that matter), this loosening of the belt is a good bonus, and just adds another checkmark to the positive side of the ledger.

Most of those negative checkmarks come from *Mafia*'s dedication to realism. In addition to the driving requirement, another vehicle-related issue is that the cars are incredibly true to their real-life 1930s counterparts, meaning that most of them pretty much suck. Forget about high-speed chases — you'll be lucky if you can even get these babies started the first few times you turn the key! A few of the missions also seem a little too scripted, in that they don't reward you for thinking outside the box because events need to proceed a specific way to set the stage for later actions. Finally, you get a fairly generous but still limited save-game system that may frustrate some players during the more difficult missions.

None of these complaints, though, takes away from the fact that *Mafia* is one of the more entertaining and impressively designed games to hit the PC in a while. Should you buy a copy right away? Fuhgeddaboutit! — *Bert Salkmoor*

Excellent physics modeling means everything behaves authentically — even your spent shells.

The lighting effects are outstanding, raising the graphics from merely great to out of this world.

The cars are incredibly realistic (and beautiful), right down to their pitifully underpowered engines.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Extremely high production values; interesting and varied missions; tells a great story.

LOWS: May be a bit *too* realistic; some irritating voice-acting; may be too linear for *GTA III* fans.

BOTTOM LINE: The combination of story, gameplay, and razzle-dazzle won't disappoint.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE **91%**

SPRING IS SHARK SEASON

Your guests want to have all kinds of fun in the sun, but watch out for sharks — your profits go down if people get chomped. Lifeguards can recall swimmers if you spot Jaws and friends.

Spring Break

Be the King of the Jumblies in this simulation of every 21-year-old's week of glory

Ah...sun, fun, and sex on the beach. Deep Red's latest twist on the tycoon sim has it all, from mixed drinks and midnight discos to muscle-heads in Speedos and wet T-shirt contests. While the game's content just to vamp on the genre, *Spring Break* is still good, reliable fun that favors atmosphere over innovation.

Though it has the feel of a *Sims* title, *Spring Break* is really a resort-management simulation at heart. Your mission is to get down and funk out on a veritable archipelago of 12 sun-drenched islands, keeping your inebriated guests, well, inebriated. Instead of plopping down structures and spawning well-disciplined workers, your selection of clubs, casinos, and beach shacks attracts MTV animal-house caricatures with lusty twinkles in their eyes. While they're busy surfing, sipping, and shagging, your job is to make the buildings grow and the bucks flow.

VITAL STATS

- **CATEGORY** Strategy
- **ESRB RATING** T
- **DEVELOPER** Deep Red
- **PUBLISHER** Eidos
- **REQUIRED** PII 450, 128MB RAM, 950MB HD
- **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz/ Athlon XP, 256MB RAM
- **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

Missions are simple but fun: Keep guests from swimming in shark-infested waters, or get X number of couples to do the bimbo limbo on the beach. Happiness is tracked for each individual, and nuisances like kleptomaniac monkeys, storms, and piles of litter will send it and your star-rating plummeting. To counter, you have an arsenal of builders, mechanics, cleaners, lifeguards, holiday reps, and security guards. Construct a general store so guests can buy suntan lotion, or build a humongous Jacuzzi for couples to dip in — all while keeping an eye on purchasing and payroll costs as you set the price of beer, hotel rooms, and access to public toilets.

Spring Break's a bit on the short side, meaning anyone with average skills will probably breeze through the 14 scenarios in a couple of days. A sandbox option lets you play on islands you've "unlocked" in freeform mode, but without the mission objectives, this mode wears thin quickly. Unfortunately, that's about all there is to the game. More scenarios — and perhaps a multiplayer option in which you'd compete for guests and business with another island tycoon — would have given this one longer legs.

Night and debauchery descend on the island. The lighting and graphics are quite pretty for a 2D title.

Track finances and building info. Guests will visit the Complaint Hut before giving you the kiss-off.

When the sun beats down, your guests will go for the Coppertone at the General Store (if you've built it).

To disco or not to disco? If you build it, they will come (and do a lot more after the lights go down). Ah, sweet spring romance...

The graphics are sharp for a 2D game, and have exactly the right kind of bawdy style. Animations are amusing and varied (drunken slugfests, dirty dancing, disco bumbling), and the MP3 music is actually a pretty addictive mix of light urban groove. (You can import your own tracks as well.)

Well-built and mostly idiot-proof, the interface offers friendly summaries that keep you focused on playing, not micro-managing. Pop-ups over buildings and guests describe current moods or building maintenance needs, and an informational marquee lets you know what guests want most, so you're never guessing. And unlike a proper business sim, you won't have to worry about excessive money menus and budget allocations — the bottom line is all that really matters here.

All in all, the game does a great job of holding your hand through the "gamey" aspects so you can enjoy the gags without frustration.

Spring Break is derivative, sure, but it's polished, and that's what counts. Pick it up if you want a management sim with sun, style, *and* potty humor. — *Matthew Peckham*

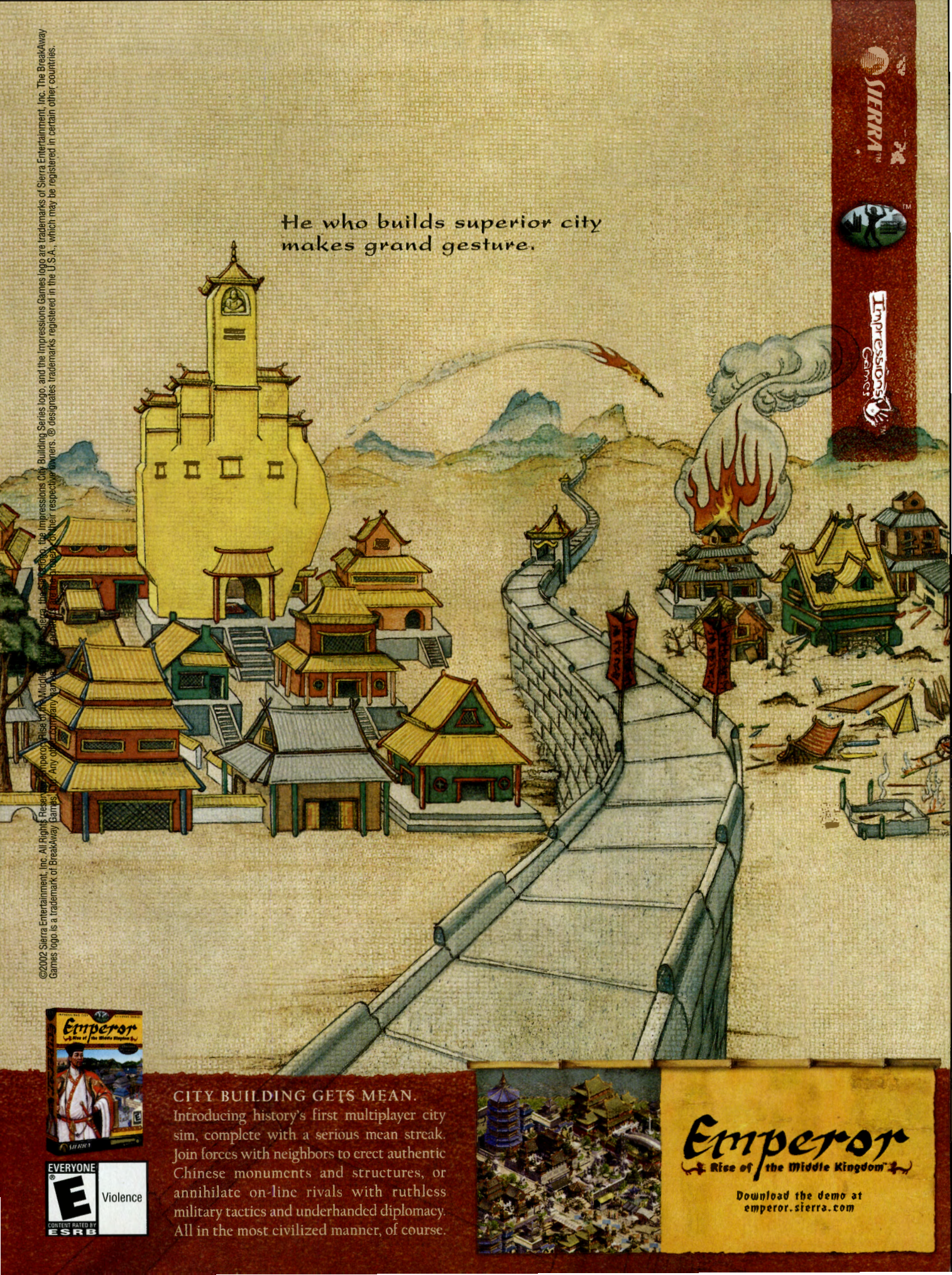
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Never too complicated; good humor; good graphics for a 2D-based business sim.

LOWS: Only 12 missions, so it's very short; the sandbox mode is a bore; no competition.

BOTTOM LINE: As engaging and simple a business sim as you'll ever find, and with lots of wit.

PC GAMER GOOD 79%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Medieval: Total War

Smash skulls and defeat inbred kings in this epic, enthralling game

With *Shogun: Total War*, developer Creative Assembly delivered a seamless blend of epic real-time combat and traditional turn-based gameplay. The result was a superlative strategy experience. The sequel, *Medieval: Total War*, continues *Shogun*'s success, adding even more strategic depth in the turn-based section of the game. The result is an extremely addictive game hampered by only a few minor problems.

VITAL STATS

- **CATEGORY** Strategy
- **ESRB RATING** T
- **DEVELOPER** Creative Assembly
- **PUBLISHER** Activision
- **REQUIRED** PII 350, 128MB RAM, 1.9GB HD, 16MB 3D card
- **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card
- **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

Like *Shogun*, *Medieval* takes a snapshot of a highly-volatile section of the world and drops you directly into the heart of the conflict. In this case, the setting is the Middle Ages and the battlefield stretches from the western edge of Europe to the Middle East. There are 12 playable factions, ranging from the Egyptians to the English to the Danes, and three possible starting dates: 1087, 1205, and 1321.

The starting date will determine which units are initially available to you (gunpowder won't be available right off the bat, for example); regardless of which starting date you choose, the game will automatically end once you reach the year 1453. The two possible victory conditions are Domination and Glorious Achievements.

Just because the French don't fight doesn't mean you can't lay waste to their country.

Medieval's six historical campaigns include the Golden Horde, shown here.

As in *Shogun*, you'll spend most of your time playing the game from the turn-based "grand strategy" screen. From here you move your pieces around the board, set the taxes for your individual territories, monitor conflicts, and build structures and military units. What makes this section of *Medieval* so engaging is that it's packed with strategic depth — so much so that it's entirely satisfying to play the game without once engaging in its real-time section.

Because *Medieval*'s setting roughly coincides with the historical Crusades, religion plays a huge part in determining the fate of your fledgling empire. As you spread your influence across the world, you must constantly monitor the religious affiliations of your citizens. For example, if you're playing as a Muslim nation and you conquer a territory that's predominately Christian, the people there might revolt simply because they don't like having a leader who doesn't share their beliefs.

On the other side of the coin is the Roman Catholic Church, which has the ability to launch Crusades. When this happens, a giant cross appears on the map and thousands of Christendom's finest soldiers begin to march toward the Holy Land. These battles can decimate your territories, especially if your military is weak. And you're not free of the Church's influence if you play as a Christian nation: an Inquisition can spring up and annihilate any "heathen" generals under your command.

Adding to the deliciousness are assassins and emissaries. Assassins can try to eliminate enemy generals or religious leaders, while emissaries are your primary diplomatic contact with rival nations. Emissaries can pro-

The cowardly Dan Morris flees from the battlefield while Lord Billy's forces celebrate their victory.

REVOLTING SCUM

REVOLTS IN YOUR TERRITORIES can happen for a variety of reasons: the taxes are too high, the populace has recently been conquered and they miss their old tyrant, or they're simply angry that you follow a different religion. Whatever the case, revolts must be quelled with extreme prejudice.

One way to keep the masses in line is to put a general in charge of the territory, preferably one with a high Dread rating. Also, when you first conquer a new territory, grant a title to the conquering general and leave him there. This show of faith goes a long way with the commoners.

Eventually, though, the peasants will try to free themselves from your tyranny and they'll field an army. When they do, execute all captured soldiers and, after winning the battle, enslave everyone who participated. It's not the most "PC" way to play, but it'll show the plebs who's boss.

The price of victory is thousands of rotting corpses. Good thing Smell-o-vision never made it to the PC!

pose cease-fires, alliances, marriages, and bribes; if a bribe is successful, the enemy general will join your side and hand over the territory he represents. Most impressive, though, is that *Medieval*'s AI can handle all of these elements, usually to great effect.

Unfortunately, this topic brings up one of my biggest complaints about *Medieval* — the lack of diplomatic depth. Instead of offering up a menu of choices, the game simply chooses what it deems the most applicable action, and that's your only option. I really wanted the ability to amass my forces on an enemy's border and demand that they fork over some cash or face the wrath of my merry band of ass-kickers.

Similarly, the alliance model seems rather pointless. Essentially, all it offers is the guarantee that an allied nation won't attack you. On countless occasions, I was boxed in by an ally and wanted to move my forces through his territory so I could attack another nation. If you try this, though, the game forces you to attack your ally. A system in which your emissary petitions for right of passage seems like a much more reasonable, and realistic, solution.

The other problem with alliances is that as far as I could tell, no one ever actually joined me in a battle. I'd be waging war with the Turks and my "allies," the Italians, would send a message telling me that they'd cancelled their treaty with the Turks. Did I ever see them actually attack Turkey? Nope. Thanks for the help, guys!

Ultimately, *Medieval* is about battle, and in this area you have two choices. The first is to let the computer resolve the conflict automatically (the victor is determined by a variety of factors, including the skill of the opposed generals), while the second is to head in and lead the troops yourself.

The latter real-time mode is nearly identical to *Shogun*'s. You position your troops in an initial deployment, call in reinforcements (if any are available), and control all of your forces on the battlefield.

The real-time battles can be a lot of fun, especially when thousands of units are slaughtering each other with reckless abandon on your monitor. But controlling all of your formations can be overly tough at times, and too often your men will stand and do nothing even though the enemy is a few feet away.

Morale and fatigue also factor into the mix, and with proper use of tactics a smaller force can decimate an army with superior numbers. More than once, the enemy had twice as many troops as me and I was still able to defeat them. Of course, it was usually against the French, so I don't know if that really counts.

Medieval also has a multiplayer component, but unfortunately, the only mode is a single real-time battle; I wish the developers had included a multiplayer campaign game. Hurling thousands of units at each other is fun, but I really wanted to see a cooperative multiplayer mode as well — if *Nobunaga's Ambition* on the NES could pull it off, the PC should be more than capable.

In the end, though, *Medieval* is a fantastic game. It's highly addictive (I've played at least 50 hours and still want more), and the variety of factions gives it *a lot* of replayability. I can't wait to see what Creative Assembly comes up with next. — *William Harms*

FINAL VERDICT

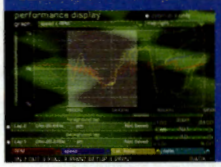
HIGHS: Tremendously addictive gameplay; solid enemy AI; vast level of replayability.

LOWS: No campaign mode in multiplay; some key options are missing; iffy control in RTS segment.

BOTTOM LINE: Even with its limitations, *Medieval* is a sensational strategy game.

PC GAMER 82% EXCELLENT

RACING — IT'S THE PITS



A comprehensive garage screen, complete with information-rich telemetry printouts, adds depth to the car-setup process. Tweak your racer for optimum speed and performance.

Grand Prix 4

Infogrames' latest F1 opus needs a new engine

Geoff Crammond needs to change gears. Long considered the godfather of modern Grand Prix racing simulations, the talented Brit developer has been turning out some of the PC's most revered F1 driving games since the early Nineties. Unfortunately, as evidenced by *Grand Prix 4*, he's clinging to the same graphics and physics engines that have defined his games for more than a decade.

VITAL STATS

- **CATEGORY** Racing
- **ESRB RATING** E
- **DEVELOPER** Simergy/MicroProse
- **PUBLISHER** Infogrames
- **REQUIRED** PII 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB HD, 16MB 3D card
- **WE RECOMMEND** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, joystick or steering wheel
- **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

Crammond's stubborn loyalty to a quirky and largely outmoded technology is just letting EA's competing *F1 2002* title pull further ahead in the race for both critical approval and consumer dollars.

This isn't to say that *GP4* is a bad game. Far from it — Crammond's latest sim is a stylish and lovingly crafted ode to the high-octane world of Formula One racing. It delivers some of the savviest AI and best wet-weather effects in the business, and features all 17 circuits and every single driver and team from the 2001 F1 season. Although not as current as those found in *F1 2002*, each of these tracks — including the most exquisite Monaco depiction that I've ever laid eyes on — has been rendered in full 3D with the assistance of accurate GPS satellite data. Although the asphalt and vehicle textures are somewhat bland, the trackside scenery elements are lavish and attractive.

The game's beefed-up replay screen lets you save entire races if you want.

GP4 is full to overflowing with wonderful scenery. Nowhere is this more evident than at Monaco.

But it's still weighed down by a difficult graphics engine. Instead of allowing you to set your own floating frame rate, *GP4* has a locked FPS setting that you must assign in the options menu; from there, the game determines its own "processor occupancy" value as you play. The result alternates between ultra-kinetic and super-slo-mo, depending on the complexity of the surrounding graphics and the raw horsepower of your computer (and only those with state-of-the-art PCs will be able to run this resource-hungry game to its full potential). Crammond has employed this same proprietary graphics routine since the original *F1 Grand Prix* (1992), and it's clearly time for an upgrade.

The physics are similarly skewed. Apparently not willing to trust his audience's ability to handle the authentic forces at play in a real F1 machine, Crammond has applied an unrealistic slot-car feel to the vehicles. It insulates you from such annoyances as turn-in understeer and correctable slides (even with all of the driving aids disabled). Each of the cars pivots smartly on a central axis, and all spins are canned and unrecoverable.

The driving experience certainly isn't unpleasant — there's plenty to keep you busy as you battle with the sim's remarkably well-tuned AI drivers — but it's not going to energize anyone who's experienced the lively vehicle dynamics of *F1 2002*. Arcade-style black-flag penalties, abysmal force-feedback implementation, and an absurdly uncooperative controller setup menu fuel the frustration.

The absence of any Internet multiplayer options is another significant omission, but it's offset a little by the exceptional AI quality in the single-player game. *GP4* also boasts new motion-captured pit-crew animations and a handy new "Gpaedia" reference database for struggling mechanics and F1 newbies. Factor in the game's comprehensive garage menu and beefed-up replay options, and you've got more than enough innovation to entice the Crammond faithful into trading up from *GP3*.

But veteran F1 racing enthusiasts — those who don't like to see their PC sims equipped with meddlesome graphics controls and training-wheel physics — are advised to stick to *F1 2002*. — *Andy Mahood*

All kinds of mechanical failures, from loose wheel nuts to full engine blowups, can affect human and AI foes.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Superb AI; convincing weather effects; lush track renderings; helpful Gpaedia database.

LOWS: Training-wheel physics; outmoded graphics; needlessly complex setup; poor force feedback.

BOTTOM LINE: Stylish and entertaining, but over-proprietary and not up to its competitor's mark.

PC GAMER GOOD **73%**

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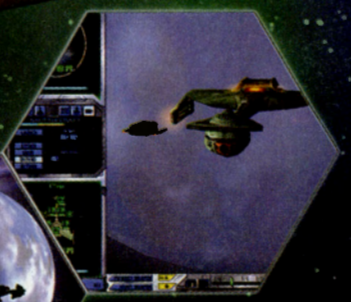

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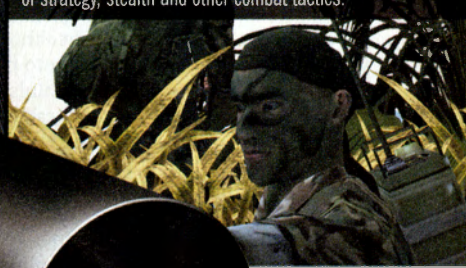

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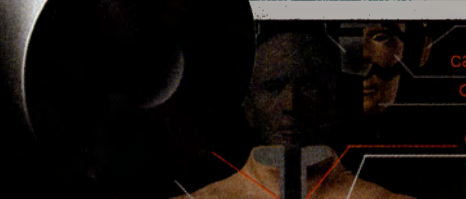

4 OUT OF 4 STARS.* — USA TODAY

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The Thing

An under-achieving attempt to resurrect a horror classic on your PC

THAT THING WE DID

To get by the first boss easily, take the coward's way out. Run over to the door switch on the beast's right side, repair the switch while chugging health, and run out the door when it opens. See ya!

There's an indefinable thing about *The Thing*. Something about a novella released in 1938 that can inspire two movies, another full novel, several comic books, and now a video game. Is it the secluded frozen wasteland setting? Or the simmering fears of a small cluster of paranoid researchers systematically destroyed by a shape-stealing alien?

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Survival horror
ESRB RATING M
DEVELOPER Computer Artworks
PUBLISHER Universal Interactive
REQUIRED PII 400, 64MB RAM, 600MB HD, DX8-compatible 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 600, 128MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

To me, it's the great unasked question: "What would *I* do in that situation?" Survive, freak out, or become lunch? It's a great premise, and one that should've made for a better game.

Universal Interactive's *The Thing* is a third-person action/adventure semi-sequel to John Carpenter's 1982 cult-classic movie of the same name. Picking up shortly after the film's fiery conclusion, a military squad has descended upon the demolished Antarctic outpost to look for survivors and investigate what happened. As Captain Blake, you find research notes, dead bodies, and destruction.

Oh, and Things. Lots and lots of Things.

What sets the game apart from other "survival horror" fare is that your squadmates (engineers, medics, and soldiers) will cooperate with you only if they trust you (i.e., don't think you're a Thing yourself). A squad-interaction screen gives you a read-out on each man's trust level, health, plus state of mind, ranging from calm to panicked. Divvying up weapons, administering blood tests, and fighting Things raises trust; inaction and hoarding lowers it.

The very best moments in *The Thing* take advantage of the game's unique trust/fear system. Wearing its M rating like a badge of honor, it boasts one early standout scene in which I saw one of my medics spontaneously begin quaking and Thing-ing out. After killing him with a combination of shotgun fire and a torch, I watched my hysterical (and vomiting) engineer take his gun, stick it in his mouth, and paint the wall with his brains.

There are too few of these moments, though, and part of the problem is the game's fundamental design. The small squad initially assigned to you leaves after the first mission. You meet new medics, engineers, and soldiers conveniently placed throughout the game's subsequent missions, but they mostly help you open doors and fight against Things, and you feel no real empathy for any of the characters (unlike in the movie).

Overall, I got the feeling that there could be a truly amazing game here if only the developers had more time to polish it. Too many rough edges ruin an otherwise smooth production: clipping problems, unexplained mission objectives (*Why* am I searching a warehouse? *Why* am I blowing up planes with C4?), save points strategically placed to artificially raise the difficulty of certain missions, and an emphasis on scripting over substance. (I broke the game once by finishing one objective before another; even though the mission itself was successful, I was forced to load a saved game to continue.)

Graphicswise, *The Thing* isn't for the squeamish. Blood and gore are thick as cake, and the ambience seeps dread. My only quibble here is with the unrelenting sameness in the monster design. I'd hoped that Things would reveal themselves in a variety of grotesque manifestations, but there are really only three — scuttlers, head-Things, and big Things — and their AI is straight out of The Big Book of Generic Game Monsters. NPCs might as well be turning into werewolves or zombies.

Being a fan of the movie, I can't help but be disappointed. *The Thing* tries to do the right thing; it just doesn't do that thing as often as it should. — *Chuck Osborn*

We had no idea this is what Bob meant when he said he needed to use "the head." Poor aim, though.

A self-induced hot-lead injection is the only out for some squad members. At least he'll shut up now.

To defeat the second boss, blast it down to red and then electrocute and torch it 'til it's dead.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Innovative trust system; appropriately bleak visuals and atmosphere; suicidal squadmates.

LOWS: Generic characters and monsters; no spontaneous saves; unclear missions.

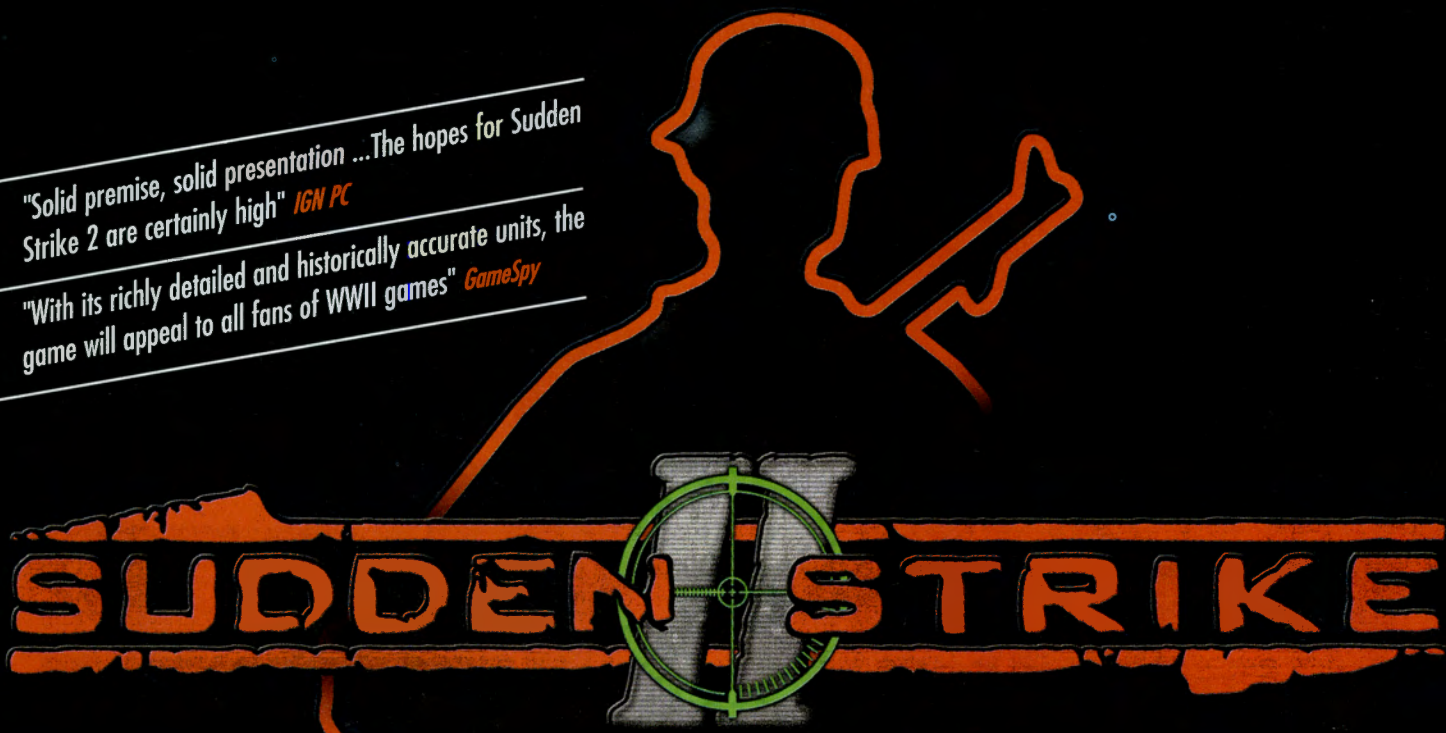
BOTTOM LINE: Fun but flawed — though it's a definite must-buy for *Fangoria* subscribers.

PC GAMER GOOD 70%

The war is far from over!

"Solid premise, solid presentation ...The hopes for Sudden Strike 2 are certainly high" *IGN PC*

"With its richly detailed and historically accurate units, the game will appeal to all fans of WWII games" *GameSpy*



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Observation mode is great for sightseeing. Among the other non-mission modes: multiplay via LAN or Internet.

Beam Breakers

Gridlock, begone! It's all about sharing the skyways in this airborne racer.

Flashy futuristic racing games like *Wipeout*, *Pod*, and even the older *Slipstream* have found more success on consoles than on the PC. Undeterred, JoWooD has shipped *Beam Breakers*, a racer-with-a-twist that makes no apologies for lifting its cityscapes from *The Fifth Element*.

VITAL STATS

- **CATEGORY** Racing
- **ESRB RATING** RP
- **DEVELOPER** Similis
- **PUBLISHER** JoWooD
- **REQUIRED** PII 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB HD
- **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM
- **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 6

The setup: It's 2374 A.D (as if we care) and New York is now called Neo York. Skyscrapers loom like mountains, and anti-gravity technology has rendered earthbound roads obsolete. Amid the concrete jungle, rival gangs compete in five territories for turf and prestige. You can race in championship mode through 30 unique tracks, play through a campaign of 57 missions, go toe-to-toe with the Metro police in survival mode, or just cruise around unhindered as an observer. For a racer, *Beam*'s bursting with variety.

Visually, there's nothing quite like it in the annals of racing games, whether on PC, console, or otherwise. You have 360 degrees of control. Obstacles come in the form of all sorts of varied connector beams, skyways, and hundreds upon hundreds of zipping and bobbing vehicles that form extensive arteries of motion in every conceivable direction. This is quite simply the most kinetic game I've ever seen.

Power-ups are strewn throughout each level, offering turbo refills and shield technology. Missions range from delivering pizzas to knocking down properties for Mafia bosses. Races are intense and thumb-wracking, requiring you to maneuver deftly through the neon-lit maze.

Problems creep in with control issues, mediocre sound effects, and pretty awful voice acting. The cars — even the better ones — sometimes don't respond the way you'd expect. Turns are often sluggish, and vehicles don't move up and down fast enough to complement distance-gauging. Consequently, you'll often clip things you thought you were under (or over).

While the critical control element isn't as slick as it could've been, it packs one hell of a visual bang, and it can cough up some pretty addictive gameplay. Don't throw out your consoles just yet, but *Beam Breakers* does end the curse of awful futuristic racing games on the PC. — *Matthew Peckham*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Gorgeous 3D vistas; furious rivers of traffic; oodles of sub-games.

LOWS: Occasionally sluggish controls; whiny, wimpy voice acting; underwhelming sound effects.

BOTTOM LINE: If you like futuristic driving, *BB*'s worth your money for the championship races alone.

PC GAMER 79% GOOD

Assorted windows give lots of info.

Chessmaster 9000

CATEGORY Classic **ESRB** E **DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER** Ubi Soft **REQUIRED** PII 450, 64MB RAM, 250MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HD **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 2

The *Chessmaster* series is a little like the kid you knew in grade school who never got enough attention, the one who was always sticking his hand in the air and crying "Me! Me! Pick *me* this time!" It is, and always has been, a perfectly respectable chess simulator, but at nine versions on the PC alone, its development is starting to resemble the EA Sports franchises: a little dash of this, a teensy sprinkle of that, and bam! — a brand-new full-priced product.

Chess freaks want this game because of the killer AI, which plays at an astounding rating of 2844 (for reference, Gary Kasparov is currently rated somewhere in the low 2800s). Hobbyists will want it for its bounteous features, including tutorials by International Master Josh Waitzkin, and for the excellent kid's room, which is perfect for budding young strategists. Toss in a "blunder alert" (which lets you know when you've made a truly awful move), 150 unique computer personalities, over 800 classic games annotated by the pros, plus Chessmaster Live multiplayer services through ubi.com, and you're looking at a snowball that has collected numerous fresh layers since it started rolling back in 1986.

I'm not convinced that *Chessmaster 9000* actually adds much new, but it's the first in the series to offer full support for true-3D sets and boards. You can rotate, zoom, tilt, apply dynamic lighting effects, and so on. It's novel, sort of, but doesn't look that much better than the slick, glossy 2D sets found in previous versions. Panning around in a flight simulation I get, but a chessboard?

It clearly remains the best chess game on the market, bar none. Packed with useful features, slick coaching, and the definitive chess AI engine, this one's an easy sell to those who just have to own the latest version of Brand X. With few new features to add, though, where's the series heading? Anyone for *Battle Chessmaster 10K*? — *Matthew Peckham*

PC GAMER 78% GOOD

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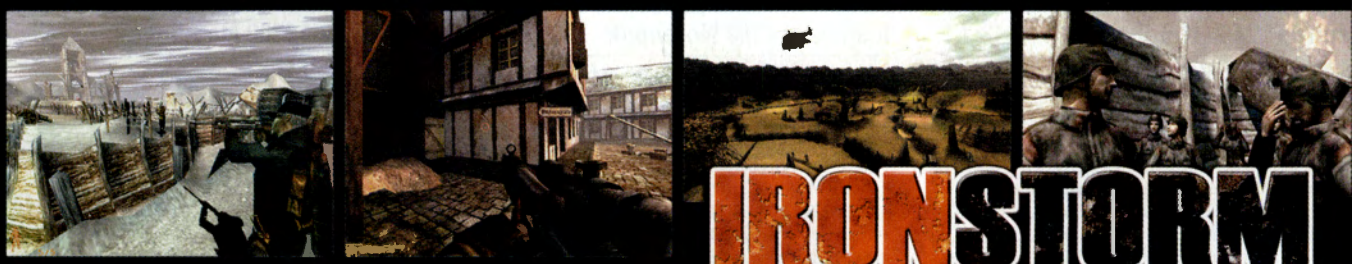

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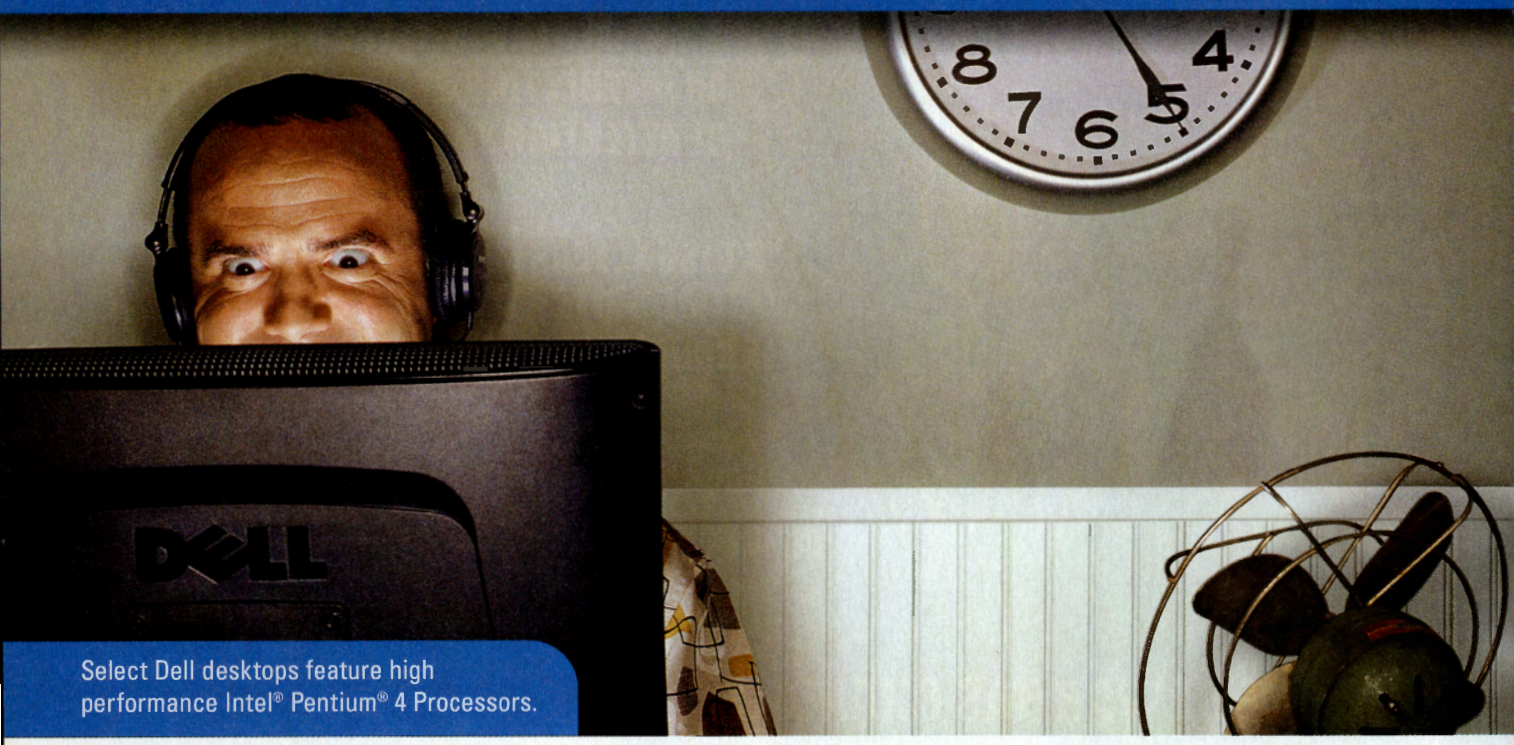

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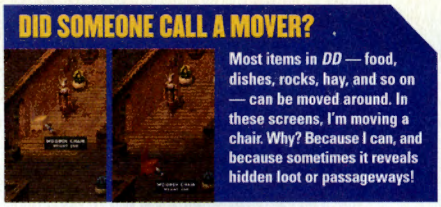
Divine Divinity

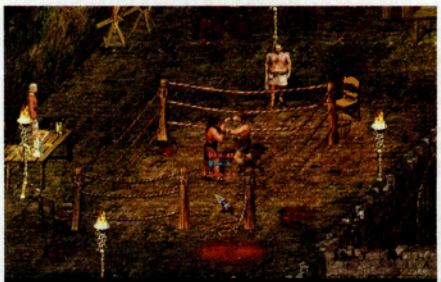
It may not have the catchiest title, but it's sure as heck a catchy roleplaying game



DID SOMEONE CALL A MOVER?

Most items in *DD* — food, dishes, rocks, hay, and so on — can be moved around. In these screens, I'm moving a chair. Why? Because I can, and because sometimes it reveals hidden loot or passageways!

With its top-notch art direction, *DD* serves as an example of a 2D game that looks better than many 3D titles.



Quests are diverse and interesting. Here I'm boxing a dude for cash and to improve my reputation.

Hit the Alt key at any time to reveal all items on the ground. Mmm...look at all that wine and beer!

I'm starting to notice that I get asked to review only games that are either like *Diablo*, or actually *are Diablo*. Apparently, I'm the *Diablo*iest.

It's probably not going to shock you, then, when I tell you that *Divine Divinity* owes an awful lot (in spirit) to the devilish geniuses at Blizzard. In many ways, *DD* is the *Diablo II* that a lot of us wanted but didn't get. In yet other ways, it's the *Diablo II* we'd have kicked to the curb. Like a meatloaf that's been in the oven for 41 minutes instead of the full 45, *Divine Divinity* tastes almost cooked, but not quite.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Roleplaying
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Larian Studios
PUBLISHER CDV
REQUIRED PII 450, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

The core of the game is simple but scintillating. Pick one of three character classes — Warrior, Survivor, or Wizard — and begin your quest to reunite the seven races of Rivellon, and basically just fux shist up along the way in true action/RPG fashion.

The character you pick at the start is important in terms of what primary special ability you get and how your initial stat points are distributed. Warriors begin with more Strength, Wizards start with more Intelligence, and so on. But in an exciting departure from D&D-esque traditions, each character can learn any of the game's 96 skills as he levels up.

If you wish it, Warriors can learn spells and get quite good with them, Survivors (think "thieves") can learn to kick ass and chew bubblegum wielding battle axes and long swords, and Wizards can become excellent pickpockets or even assassins. Many other cool "cats and dogs living together" scenarios are not only feasible, but also actively encouraged by nature of the game's open-ended design.

I played through *DD* as a Warrior, but as I leveled up, I also learned and improved Survivor skills like Magic Barrier, a path that helped me increase my protection from battle magic. I should also point out that I played the game in nothing but a wife-beater and my "date" boxer shorts because I figured that if I was going to be playing a game as a "Warrior" and increasing my protection from something called "battle magic," I'd better be prepared for any number of hot chicks to burst through my door and lay me.

As in *Morrowind* and *Ultima VII*, many of the items laying around in Rivellon can be used or combined, moved, and repositioned (occasionally revealing elements like secret passageways). Like any RPG worth its weight in magic armor — and very much unlike *Diablo II* — *DD* has a deep (albeit a bit contrived) story, and boatloads of side quests. You'll need to go on your fair share of them, too, because many of the game's straight-path quests are damn tough if you aren't a high enough level. Supposedly, you can run through this bad boy in about 25 to 30 hours if you just power your way through (and aren't beset by too many hotties wanting to come into your computer den to party), but there's probably closer to 100 hours of gameplay here if you check out every corner of the vast gameworld.

As an action/RPG, it's a full-on blast, and I'd have given *Divine Divinity* an Editors' Choice award if it wasn't for two major flaws: (1) No multiplay. A game this good needs multiplay. (2) Occasional crashes to the desktop — sometimes even in the middle of saving games, which is bad.

Larian Studios says it may add multiplay down the road, and company representatives assure me that not everyone experiences the crashes and that they're working hard to fix them. All said, *Divine Divinity* is still plenty worth an RPGer's cash investment. — *Greg Vederman*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fun, *Diablo*-style action; crisp 2D graphics at 1024x768; lots of options and replayability.

LOWS: Pesky crash bugs; no multiplayer mode; not all keys can be remapped.

BOTTOM LINE: I went straight from *Neverwinter Nights* to *Divine Divinity*, and I enjoyed them equally.

PC GAMER 84% EXCELLENT

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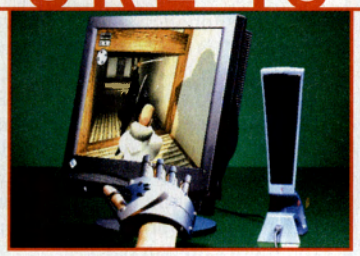

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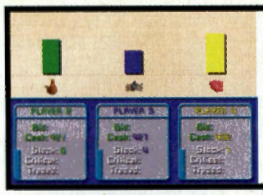

Market trading is always a race against the clock. Buy long, sell short, but whatever you do, *act fast*: Your competitors won't wait around while you dither.

Space HoRSE

CATEGORY Strategy **ESRB** Not rated **DEVELOPER** Gilligames **PUBLISHER** Shrapnel Games **REQUIRED** PII 233, 32MB RAM, 125MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PII 400, 64MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 4

Invest funds at the Warehouse, and watch what your opponents do here.

For many old-timers, our hobby rests on an ageless mantra: "Gameplay is everything!" In other words, a great game is a great game even with Stone Age graphics.

The avatar title most often cited as "proof" of this maxim is the 1983 Atari 800 classic *M.U.L.E.* ("Multiple Use Labor Element"), a simple-but-elegant, slyly humorous game of economic strategy that was the first successful multiplayer game in history — designed to maximize the Atari 800's ability to accommodate four players simultaneously.

Space HoRSE ("Holistic Robotic Slave Engineer") is *M.U.L.E.* reincarnated in all but name (due to copyright restrictions). Four players compete to build a prosperous space colony via exploration, land-grabs, resource development, and (here's the fun part) cutthroat trade deals on a series of fast-paced commodity markets.

HoRSE is both an honest homage to Dani Bunten's classic *and* a fascinating attempt to put that "Gameplay is everything!" adage to the test. It doesn't try to improve on the original — even the charmingly retro graphics faithfully capture the Atari look. So, shorn of nostalgia's patina, how's it hold up as a game?

Pretty damned well, I'd say, but only if you can find three other live opponents to play with. Most of the fun comes from the deal-making, back-stabbing, and unpredictable vagaries of the personalities involved. What we now think of as "AI" simply didn't exist in 1983: the "computer opponent" was just another set of basic "If...Then" code patterns, so the AI in *Space HoRSE* feels forced and anachronistic, and solo games quickly become tediously predictable.

But when played against three other human rivals, this game rocks! Nostalgia aside, it remains a paradigm of great game design: a robust, devilishly clever, frequently droll concept concocted from the simplest basic ingredients.

This reincarnation is self-recommending for older gamers who share fond memories of the Atari Age. I hope Shrapnel's modest retail price ($29.95) will motivate a new generation to discover why *M.U.L.E.*'s been a Hall of Fame classic for 20 years, and in so doing, gain valuable long-range perspective on the most volatile form of mass entertainment in history. — *William R. Trotter*

PC GAMER 75% GOOD

Ultimate Ride Disney Coaster

CATEGORY Simulation **ESRB** E **DEVELOPER** Gigawatt Studios **PUBLISHER** Disney Interactive **REQUIRED** PII 233, 32MB RAM, 8MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PII 400, 64MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

Blast off on Disneyland Paris' variation of world-famous Space Mountain.

Didn't we already review this game? Yes and no, but mostly yes. *Disney Coaster* is a stand-alone version of the *Ultimate Ride* coaster-building simulator that *finally* lets you build Disney-themed coasters. We say "finally" because the first two *URs* — though branded with Disney's Imagineering label — were completely devoid of Mouse-itude.

Long story short, if you're a fan of the first two games, then *Disney Coaster* is for you. It includes all five coaster types from *UR Coaster Deluxe* — flying, standing, wooden, steel, and hanging — while adding Disneyland-based flourishes.

But if you were disappointed by *UR*'s sluggish physics and too-forgiving missions, know that the Disney edition repeats 'em. Compared to the real thing, the pre-built rendition of Disneyland's Big Thunder Mountain Railroad is a lethargic substitute: the train moseys around curves instead of zooms, routinely clips through track obstructions, and lacks the real coaster's themed enclosed environments. (In fact, some outdoor rocks and props inexplicably float in mid-air.)

For Disney fanatics, its biggest flaw will be stingy access to real Disney props and settings. Sure, Frontierland is included, but why not Fantasyland or Tomorrowland? A rendition of Space Mountain–France is here, but not California Screamin' from California Adventure or MGM Studios' Rockin' Roller Coaster.

Imagineering mode includes 15 Disney-themed missions set in Toontown, Frontierland, and Main Street, in which you have to custom-build coasters to meet set requirements (like passing by pre-arranged squirting props or through floating Mickey circles). Creations are then graded by Donald Duck and pals. The most important requirement, though — passenger survival — is ignored, as some of my passing coasters reached G forces of up to +13...enough gravity force to snap Goofy's neck.

Then again, how much realism can you expect from a cartoon universe in which a mouse owns a pet dog? At $19.99, *Disney Coaster* is at least cheaper than a one-day admission to the real thing. — *Chuck Osborn*

PC GAMER 65% ABOVE AVERAGE

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Strategy First

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EVERYONE

E

CONTENT RATED BY

Violence

MONOLITH

PC CD ROM

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Enter

NHL 2003

NHL, MEET MTV

NHL 2003 is rife with pop-in appearances of songs from such generic pop-rock bands as Default, Jimmy Eat World, and Queens of the Stone Age. I join Owen Nolan in flipping off this grim development.

It's flashier and more high-flying than ever, but EA needs to take a Zamboni to this franchise's realism factor

Somewhere along the line, the EA Sports command authority decided that this series needed to take a turn toward the Dumb. Breakaway cams (with heavy-heartbeat overlay), fancy dekes, and close-up cinematic animations replaced investment in basics like, oh, say...AI. The result was high console sales, and deplorable realism.

VITAL STATS

- **CATEGORY** Sports
- **ESRB RATING** E
- **DEVELOPER** EA Sports
- **PUBLISHER** EA Sports
- **REQUIRED** PII 366, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
- **WE RECOMMEND** P4 1.6GHz, 128MB RAM, SideWinder gamepad
- **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

I hate it when game franchises find the perfect market equilibrium between profitability and mindlessness. It's an unstoppable economic logic that grinds purists into ice shavings.

The problem with *NHL 2003* is that it's fun, but it just ain't hockey. It's fun the way a game of slot hockey is fun. (And honestly, I think slot hockey is a more tactically demanding game than this PC entry.) I particularly enjoy head-to-head multiplay on daisy-chained gamepads. It's great to run up the score on a co-worker and taunt him to the point of tears, or curse the computer for your goalie's five-hole weakness.

But I want a hockey game.

No matter what difficulty setting, no matter what teams you play, there are never more than two things to keep in mind while playing this game. Here they are, in conveniently notated form:

(1) On offense, charge in a straight line toward the opposing net and attempt a one-timer pass when you reach the slot area.

(2) On defense, take control of a defenseman (since they'll go AWOL otherwise) and try to pre-emptively smash down one of the bad guys standing unmolested in front of your goalie.

That's it — that's the whole ballgame. Follow those two prescriptions, and you ought to win every single game. I'm 30 games into a season, and I have yet to lose one. I'm playing with the difficulty at Highest, with Goalie Rebounds maxed-out and with player boosts dropped way down low. I'm also playing without the asinine Game-Breaker boosts, which let you put the game into slo-mo while you work dramatic moves with *NHL 2003*'s new array of stick dekes.

The fastest we were able to score was 35 seconds into the game, though it was at accelerated speed (meaning we actually scored about eight seconds in).

Memo to defense: it's best not to let two opposing forwards advance unchallenged on your net.

It's always refreshing to see Darias Kasparaitis knocked on his ass in a brawl.

Yet another cross-ice one-timer goal. Admire your defense's sheer ineffectiveness in glorious slow-motion replay. Yeesh.

I understand and support capitalism. I'm not one to tell a company to make decisions that'll cost it money. But can't there be some satisfaction for us hockey fans? (As opposed to hockey-*highlight* fans, at whom this game is clearly aimed?) What's the loss in using the highlight footage and the breakaway cam and the Game-Breaker mode to *add* to a fundamentally solid hockey sim?

My shooting percentage is around 75 percent on one-timers, and I can almost literally score at will at even the toughest difficulty settings. This *NHL*'s just not going to keep me interested, nor is there anything in the online treatment (EA's added some mini-modes, like Shootout) to warrant your spending another $40 for this version if you've got either of the last two years' editions.

There may be some light at the end of the players' tunnel, though: EA recently bought developer Black Box, which features design talent from the *Hitz* series as well as the revered hockey hallmark *NHL Powerplay '96*. Will there be a strategic shift toward a more compelling hockey sim? Please, EA, make it happen. — *Dan Morris*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: First-rate graphics and animations; hosts hundreds of options; fun head-to-head play.

LOWS: *Highly* unrealistic on-ice play; defensive AI is a cruel joke; pop-in songs are sad marketing ploy.

BOTTOM LINE: Spend $10 on last year's edition in the bargain bin, and hope for changes next year.

PC GAMER 72%
GOOD

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Aaron Hall's Dungeon Odyssey

CATEGORY Roleplaying **ESRB** Not rated **DEVELOPER** Malfador Machinations **PUBLISHER** Shrapnel Games **REQUIRED** PII 400, 32MB RAM, 16MB video card **WE RECOMMEND** 128MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

"Little Vede" goes apeshit and kicks major ass on a grizzly bear.

Last month, while looking for bits to put on the *PCG* disc, I found the *Dungeon Odyssey* demo. My first thought? These graphics are *hurting*. The demo piqued my interest, though, so I downloaded it. Lo and behold, this game's a real RPG — a fun, fairly mindless hack-and-slash with cheesy, atmospheric tunes, surprisingly good sound effects, and colorful, sharp, 2D retro-style graphics (read: no frames of animation whatsoever).

Aaron Hall (of *Space Empires* fame) built *DO* to be a highly mod-able game. For $29, the full-version package includes one complete adventure for you to play through and all the tools and instructions you'll need to make your own maps, quests, and modules — done mostly by modifying easy-to-understand (and -tweak) text documents.

Hall's module involves searching for a crown, and you play as one of seven character types. These include all the usuals — Fighter, Thief, Mage, and Druid — each with unique abilities and/or spells that you choose and customize by adding points as you level up.

With the game's quick pace (click on baddies until dead) and all the stats, abilities, scrolls, and equipment I found myself managing, I soon felt like I was playing something of a *Diablo* clone. *DO* even randomizes its dungeons with each new game!

The character advancement is surprisingly deep!

Ultimately, *DO* breaks no new ground, but it still offers up a good time in brief spurts, not unlike a round of *Magic Online*. You probably won't play it for hours at a time, but you just might find yourself chipping away on the included quest against the evil magi a bit more each day, until the day arrives that you've retrieved the crown, accrued the experience, and looted all the dungeons, and realized you had fun in the process! — *Greg Vederman*

PC GAMER 65%
ABOVE AVERAGE

War Commander

CATEGORY Real-time strategy **ESRB** T **DEVELOPER** Hip Interactive **PUBLISHER** CDV **REQUIRED** PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 600MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

If you young whippersnappers want to learn why most wargamers loathed and shunned the first generation of real-time strategy games, I submit this piece of shit as "Exhibit A."

It purports to give you a wide range of command and tactical options as you try to lead a Ranger battalion from the D-Day beaches to ultimate victory. The German designers have packed it, like an overstuffed bratwurst, with features cribbed from *Close Combat* (soldier icons encrusted with symbols), Nintendo tropes ("power-ups"), and every *Warcraft* clone you care to name. But all these details do nothing but make for a cluttered, confusing interface that you'll never even have time to explore.

In trouble? Just grab yourself a nifty power-up.

That's right: *War Commander* is the kind of infuriating, hyperactive clickfest that most RTS makers have long since abandoned. Game speed is not — repeat: NOT — adjustable, and the default tempo is so fast that you simply can't react to events, much less plan strategies. You can pause the game, but you can't give orders or even scroll around in that mode.

As for historical accuracy, it's a pathetic joke. Early on, the American M-3 tank (the "General Grant") is identified as "The Grand" tank...and it gets worse from there.

War Commander is a pointless, hare-brained mess in every respect. On the default speed, it's literally unplayable, and that's the only speed available.

Breach concertina obstacles to get at enemy bases. Dangerous work!

Ugh. The hold-your-nose putridity exuded by this game made me want to chuck it straight out the window. Avoid even touching the box. — *William R. Trotter*

PC GAMER 15%
DON'T BOTHER

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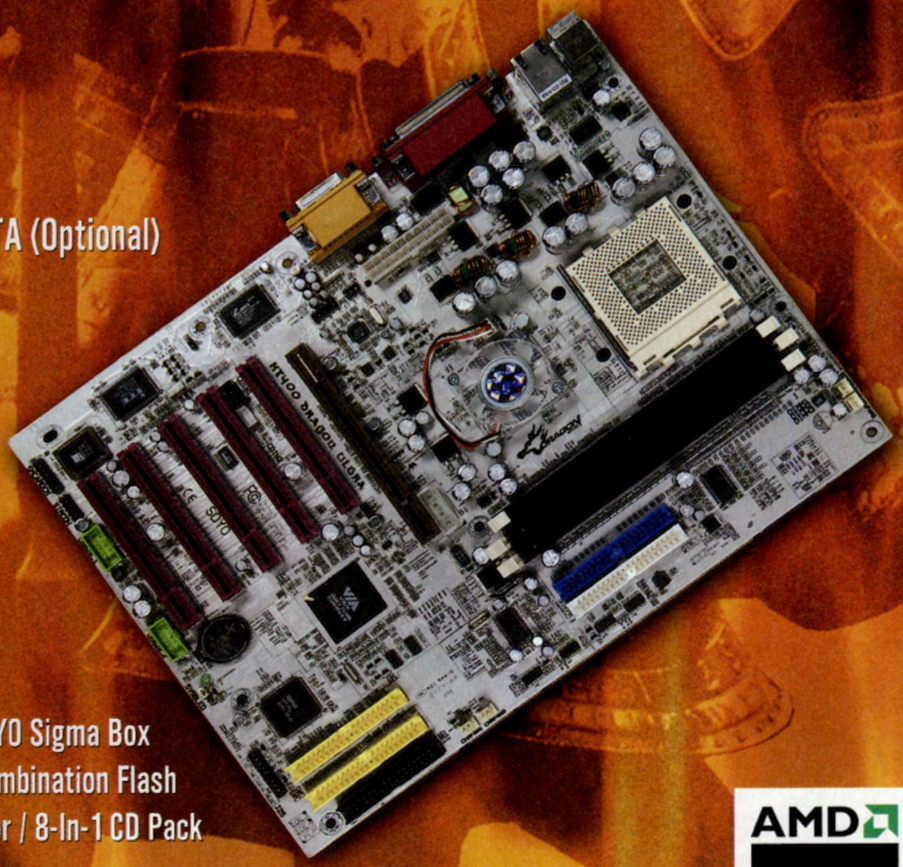

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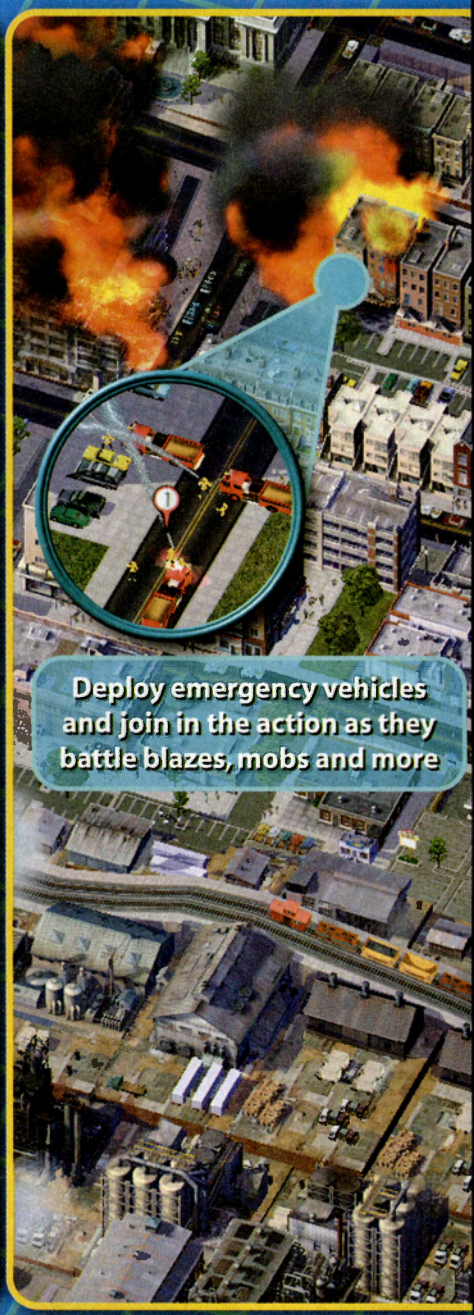

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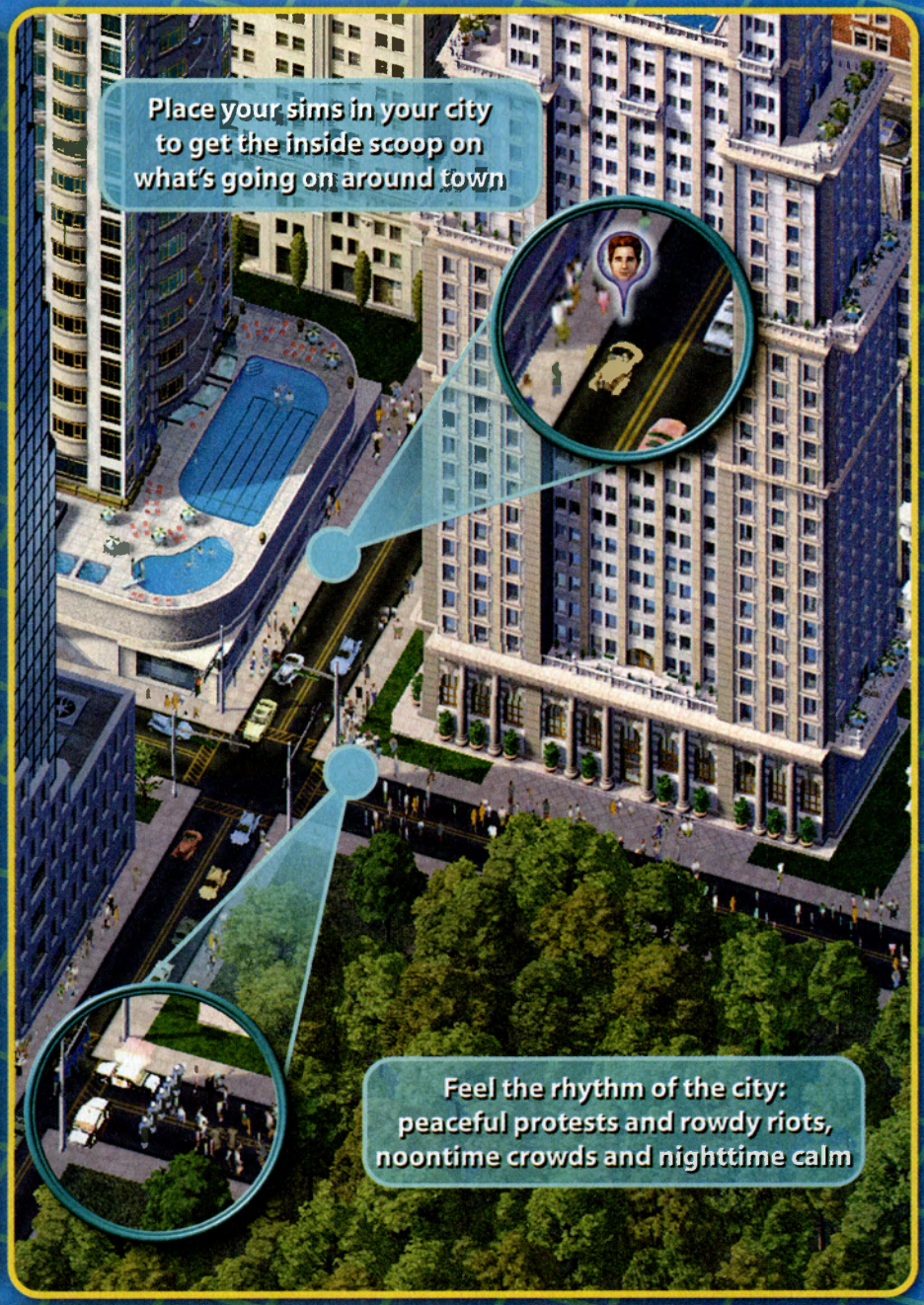

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Sudden Strike II

Just how many ways can you define retro RTS gaming in one title?

Blitzkrieg! Banzai! Tally-ho! Charge! Ataka! *Sudden Strike II*, the follow-up to the European cult hit that gained a modest foothold in the States, allows you to engage in World War II RTS action as one of five nations, each with a full-fledged campaign.

That level of ambition isn't quite paralleled in the rest of the game, but *SS II* does hold a fair amount of potential for fun, particularly if — like me — you're a WWII junkie and a fan of RTS games that fall on the lighter side of the "twitchy" scale.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY	Real-time strategy
ESRB RATING	T
DEVELOPER	Fireglow
PUBLISHER	CDV
REQUIRED	PII 333, 64MB RAM, 8MB video card, 350MB HD
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 16MB video card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	8

One of *SS II*'s most endearing features is that it doesn't employ any sort of resource-gathering or base-building. You're given ample resources, which are occasionally bolstered by reinforcements during the course of a mission. It's up to you to figure out how to use them.

As with the original game and its add-on, *SS II* appears very superficial — and the *C&C* retro-style graphics and 2D presentation do little to change that opinion. However, the longer you play, the more the subtle strategic elements become apparent, and the more addictive the mission objectives become. Units cover the range of WWII military personnel, from basic rifle-toting infantry, machine gunners, anti-tank units, paratroopers, and grenadiers to all manner of tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Each unit has different capabilities and weaknesses, and the sheer variety of units makes for a compelling tactical exercise.

Going toe to toe with trains as beefed-up as this one is never smart. Avoid it or pick it apart from cover.

They won't look as hot, but the units are much easier to see at 640x480 resolution. Use it as needed.

Sudden Strike featured U.S., German, and Russian campaigns; *SS II* adds Japan and Britain (and more than 50 new units) to the mix. Other than that, little else has changed, which makes *SS II* taste more like an add-on than a full-fledged sequel.

Some tweaks: The designers multiplied the potential number of buildings per map by a factor of four, so taking and holding buildings is now a much more integral part of your strategy than before. (What's cool is, you can even dictate how your forces occupy each floor of a multi-story building, resulting in better lines of sight and firing advantages.) The game also has more "usable vehicles" — you can capture and use enemy artillery, tanks, and so on — including trains, which was a big request from fans.

The art direction is pretty much the same, though the textures are a bit grittier. Most other changes are subtle tweaks to the AI, line-of-sight rules, weapon effects, and special abilities of particular units, which, when combined, give *SS II* a more lifelike feel. The multiplayer game, aside from the larger maps and new units, remains largely unchanged — and there's still no skirmish mode.

You *do* get a mission editor this time around, and it's easy to use. But too many glaring features are still AWOL, including the ability to set formations and plot waypoints, which would be *incredibly* useful. And the campaign mission briefings are still *ridiculously* brief and vague, making it very hard to figure out just what your objectives are and why you may fail a given mission...repeatedly. Annoying, too, is the scale of the art: the terrain and units have lots of detail, but once again it's just so damn hard to see at times that it's almost wasted. At the very least, a zoom feature (à la *Close Combat*) is an absolute must here.

If you're way into WWII games and looking for a colorfully uncomplicated RTS, *Sudden Strike II* has enough going for it to warrant a recommendation. But it's a guarded one. — *Steve Klett*

The limited-resources aspect makes employing tank or infantry rushes here just too costly.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: World War II setting; lots of units; five campaigns; challenging gameplay.

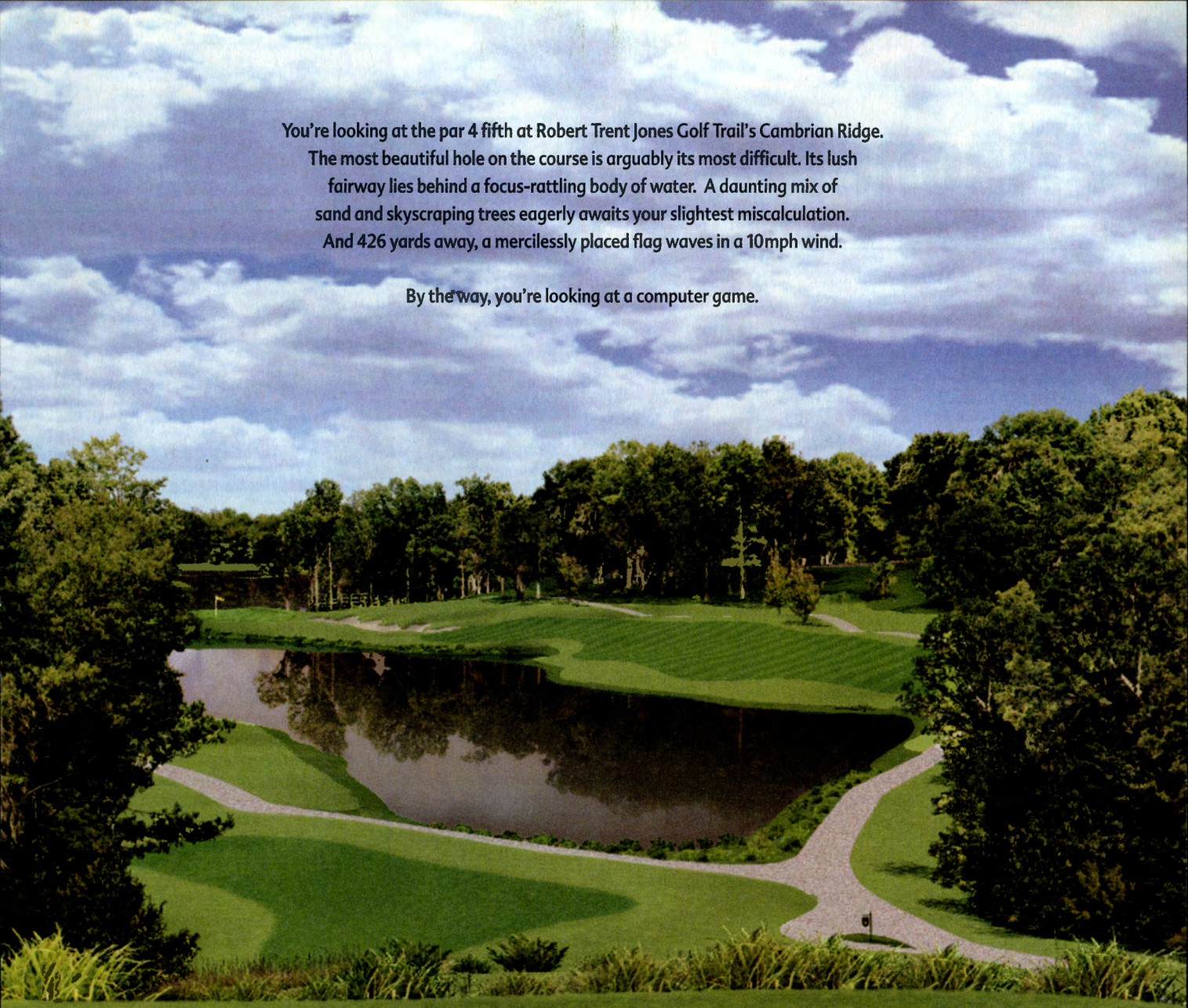
LOWS: No formation or waypoint settings; units can be hard to see; no skirmish mode; vague objectives.

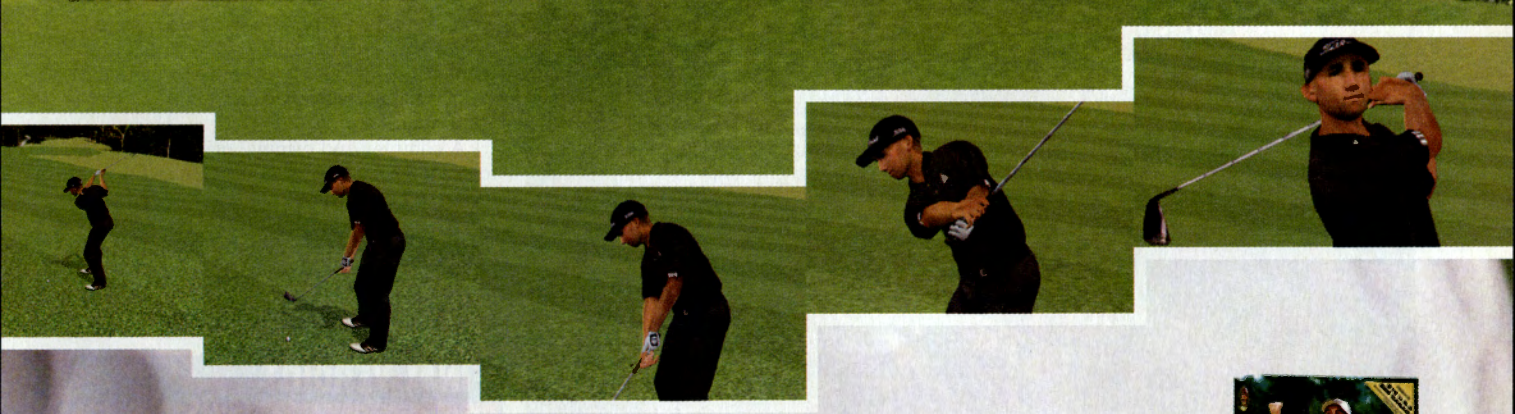
BOTTOM LINE: Fun, but without enough new elements to distinguish itself from its RTS brethren.

PC GAMER 70% GOOD

You're looking at the par 4 fifth at Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail's Cambrian Ridge. The most beautiful hole on the course is arguably its most difficult. Its lush fairway lies behind a focus-rattling body of water. A daunting mix of sand and skyscraping trees eagerly awaits your slightest miscalculation. And 426 yards away, a mercilessly placed flag waves in a 10mph wind.

By the way, you're looking at a computer game.





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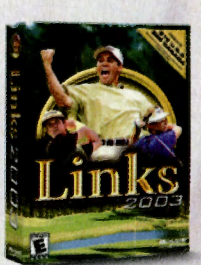
To be more specific, you're looking at Links 2003. Thanks to lifelike graphics, you can experience the beauty of actual world championship courses while playing with top pros like Sergio Garcia. If the state-of-the-art practice facility doesn't help you conquer one of the six new world-renowned courses, you can always build one using the Arnold Palmer Course Designer. There's also authentic ball physics and a hyper-realistic golf swing to help you hone your skills. Best of all, every day is a perfect day to play.



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Prisoner of War

Facing Nazis you're not allowed to shoot — have I missed something?

YOU *WILL* LISTEN TO ME!

The Kommandant lays down the Nazi law as you're welcomed to prison. Don't worry: this guy will get his eventually. In the meantime, keep making roll call and stay out of trouble.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Third-person adventure
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Wide Games
PUBLISHER Codemasters
REQUIRED PIII or Athlon 500, 128MB RAM, 420MB HD, 16MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz or XP 1600+, 256MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

While on a World War II aerial reconnaissance mission, your plane is shot down over enemy territory. Luckily, you're captured by a bunch of polite, soft-spoken Nazis and welcomed into their rather relaxed prison camp. Here you could sit out the war in relative comfort, but as a proud American warrior for democracy, it's your duty to embark on a Great Escape. The tale of that escape is *Prisoner of War*.

From a third-person perspective with a mouse-controlled camera, you explore the camp and plan your getaway. The gameplay mechanics are similar to those of *Metal Gear Solid*, with one major difference — a complete lack of violence. Instead, the game relies on the tension of sneaking around the camp, sizing up opportunities for escape, and above all else, *not* being seen. Its rewards come from evading guards and outwitting the camp's caretakers as you prepare one of multiple escape plots.

It may take a while to adjust to this mechanic. It's not that there's a lot to master; it's just that it's been a while since *Thief*, and the concept of a non-violent "sneaking game" takes time to get excited about. But once the cinematics-driven plot begins to gather momentum, the subtleties start to emerge and the tasks — such as a breaking-and-entering job at the Kommandant's quarters so you can steal his uniform —become more challenging. You learn to collect useful gear that's then used to influence guards or access areas so you can execute your plan.

Cinematics advance the overall story, as you endure one indignity after another from the Fritzes.

Organize the prisoners for the best chance at escape. Many inmates have a bit of helpful knowledge.

There are several ways to escape each camp (you're shuffled among three realistically modeled jails during your time as a prisoner), with sub-plots involving crooked guards, gambling, bribery, and team efforts.

Unfortunately, some basic problems persist. The camera sporadically finds fascination with the back of your jacket when you're crouching. Also, each task is played against the clock, with one real second representing one game-minute. If it gets too close to roll call — at which you *must* be present — you may have to abort a mission at the last moment. Keeping with this tiresome daily routine kills more tension than it builds.

Help is available from fellow prisoners, who can be quizzed by selecting threads of dialogue. *PoW* doesn't break any new ground in this regard — the dialogue rarely rises above functional. The tacky voice-acting of the Klink-esque krauts makes for a good time as they issue their threats, though.

Of the three camps, Colditz Castle is the most realistic and historically correct, and you can re-create some of history's most famous and extraordinary escape attempts. For example, Colditz prisoners once impersonated a German officer so well that they persuaded all the guards to leave their posts — all but one, who recognized the impersonator.

Prisoner of War would have benefited from a little more graphical polish, but the weather and lighting effects do create a strong atmosphere. This key quality of the game is powerfully supported by cinematic music that alters in style and tempo to suit your situation.

A complex and original game, it's easy to see why *Prisoner of War* spent two years trying to escape development. Brewed slowly, it requires some time to settle before the full flavor is released. Ultimately, though, it's a fresh challenge for adventure fans and a delight for those with a bit of historical knowledge. — *John Leaver*

The game's over if you're spotted off-limits, so duck and creep to move stealthily around the camp.

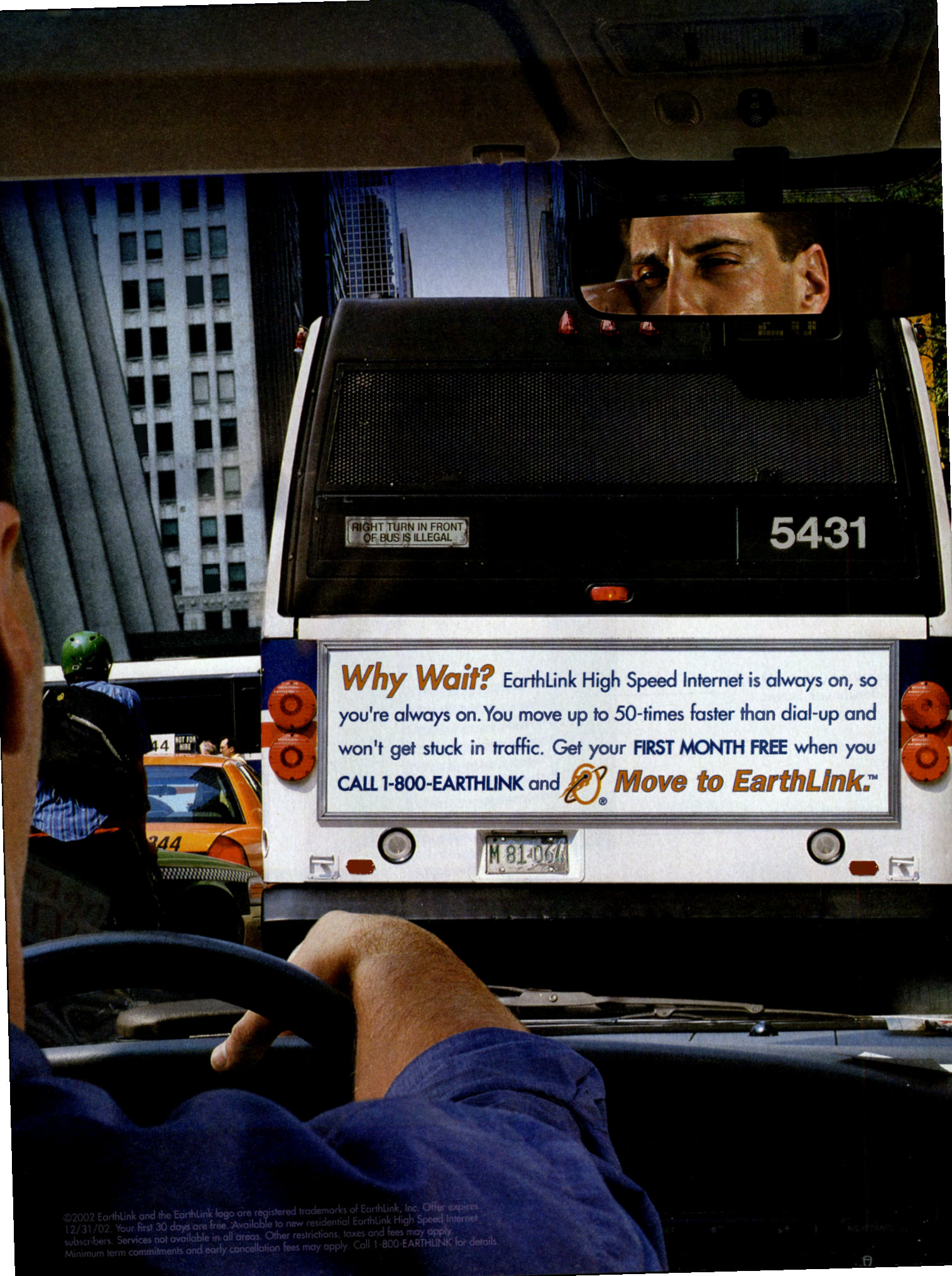
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Powerful atmosphere and sound design; historically accurate; chance to flex your brainpower.

LOWS: Some frustratingly repetitive elements; slightly dodgy camera; no Nazi-slaying.

BOTTOM LINE: Kudos to the developers of this original, intense World War II adventure.

PC GAMER 80%
EXCELLENT



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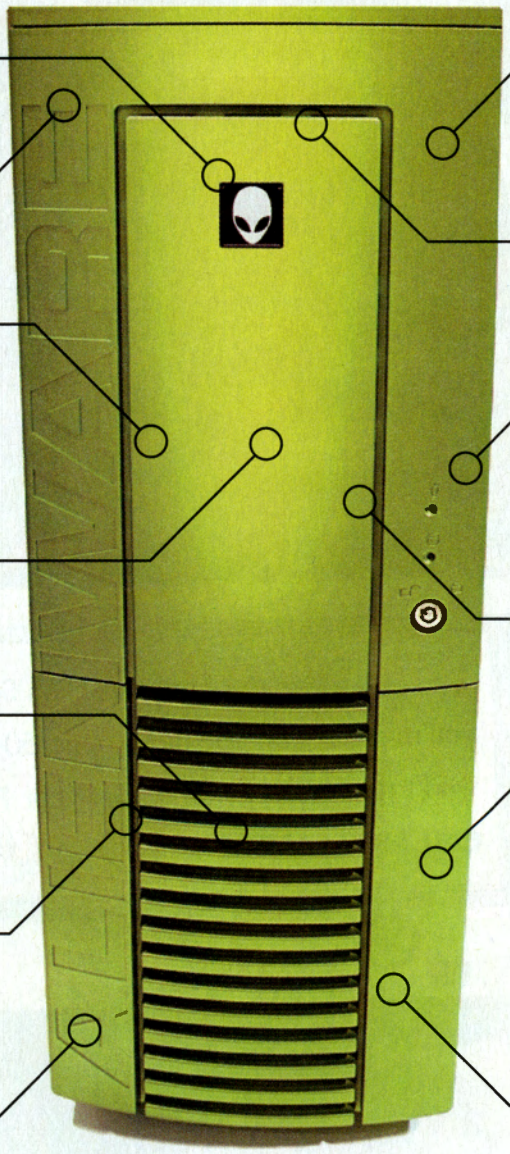

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Battlefield 1942

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

World War II on your computer, against 63 human players. The dream of ages has been realized.

You log on to a game and find yourself on the deck of a U.S. Navy carrier off the shore of Iwo Jima. The guns of a nearby battleship pummel Japanese positions on the island. You've got a choice between piling into a Higgins boat with several squadmates and setting off for a beach assault, or climbing into a Hellcat fighter and heading up for a dangerous strafing run against island bases guarded by anti-aircraft cannon.

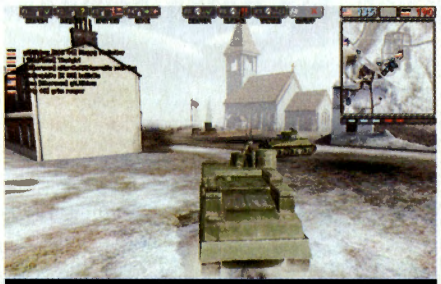
And all of the above manned by other live humans in a magnificent 64-player multiplayer environment.

That's just the tip of the heaven-sent iceberg that is *Battlefield 1942*. Its 16 maps cover an astonishing breadth and depth of WWII operations, including infantry pushes, tank charges, artillery bombarding, anti-aircraft guns, fighters, bombers, amphibious assault, naval warfare, and even submarines. There are 35 vehicles in all, plus 20 different weapons ranging from rifles to BARs to bazookas. All of these roles can be played in the game, most of them cooperatively in conjunction with teammates (i.e., a driver and a rooftop gunner for heavy tanks, or a pilot and a gunner for bombers). In a team-on-team multiplayer battle on the well-designed maps, you may well find yourself kissing your monitor out of sheer joy.

American, British, Russian, German, and Japanese forces are all modeled. Each map pits two forces against one another in a re-creation of a historic battle. The scenario designers took every conceivable opportunity to model elements of warfare that applied to the real setting — so, for example, tank maneuvers rule the El Alamein map, while beach assaults and aerial jousting feature heavily at Midway, and Stalingrad is nothing but a street-by-street urban meatgrinder of hand-to-hand killing. Each will teach you its own hard-won lessons in fighting, as you discover that tactics that work well on some maps will only get you massacred on others.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Action
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Digital Illusions
PUBLISHER EA
REQUIRED PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HD, 32MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, broadband Internet connection
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 64



The graphics aren't bleeding-edge, but they're still attractive, with nicely detailed vehicles and maps.

As always, the taking of objectives usually has to be accomplished hand-to-hand by infantrymen.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

BUT BEFORE I CONTINUE GUSHING ABOUT THE fulfilling achievement that is *Battlefield 1942*,

Bridges and mountain passes make natural tactical chokepoints. Expect vicious struggles for control of these spots, as in this nasty exchange.

TOP: A long-range bazooka kill. MIDDLE: A sniper sizes up some prey. BOTTOM: Manning an AK-AK gun, my trooper throws up flak at a plane.

The South Pacific battles mix naval, air, and land operations. Here, a Japanese defender waits for the arrival of seaborne U.S. forces.

KILLER ANGELS

NO OTHER ACTION GAME HAS so brilliantly mixed ground combat with aerial support in a multiplayer setting. In *Battlefield 1942*, airpower is a strong weapon, particularly in a ground-support role, but it comes with high dangers. Ground-based anti-aircraft guns can chop you to pieces with flak, and enemy fighters are a constant dogfighting threat. But when you land your payloads, it's a devastating blow to the enemy.

there are caveats to get out of the way. First: you'll *need* a broadband connection to derive any pleasure from the game whatsoever. (I suspect history will look back on this title as the one that finally drove every PC action gamer to broadband.) Even with a DSL connection, you'll still encounter a few servers fumbling to keep up the packet push. But the good news is that DSL *is* enough to get the job done on 90 percent of servers. Lag can crop up, but it hasn't been a consistent problem for me.

The other caveat is system specs: you'll want to play on at least a PIII 800, and preferably something over 1GHz. Even if you're only planning to play the included single-player campaign and bot modes, *Battlefield* has a lot of AI routines to run simultaneously, and they're a bear.

Provided you've got all that in order, you're in for a real treat — the realization of a virtual combat environment that ranks with any we've seen before. It's never difficult to get into the swing of the fight. The vehicles are simple to commandeer and employ arcade-style controls (there are *no* "sim" elements in this game).

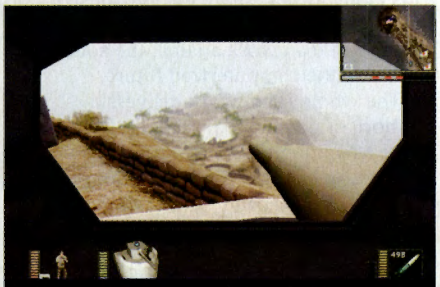
One last warning I have to make is about the sound. Noticeable and distracting audio bugs cropped up on every system on which I tried this game. There's rarely anything so bad that I had to quit out (though a few folks around the office experienced never-ending machinegun-noise loops that required a restart). But sound issues are a definite headache, and I fervently hope that patches resolve them.

The single-player option is a fairly rudimentary affair. The campaign mode lets you slug it out against bot AI, and is a good way to learn the maps and appropriate tactics for each battle — but it's battles without real purpose. More useful is a single-player mode that lets you play single battles against bots, with options to select the number of bots and to adjust the effectiveness of their AI.

Bot AI is a mixed bag. Some behave with extraordinary tactical soundness, particularly in vehicles — plenty of pleasure can be derived from the armor battles in single-play. The infantry leave more to be desired: it's not uncommon to find squads stuck running into sandbags, and even the occasional tank crew staying put at their base, seemingly refusing to roll out.

But honestly, you won't spend much time at all in single-play. The whole *raison d'etre* of this game is online multiplayer combat alongside and against human opponents.

As my scout watches, a fighter strafes an armored column in the featureless desert of El Alamein.


Artillery bunkers can demolish land *and* sea targets. These hardened strongpoints are tough to seize.

MULTIPLAYER HEAVEN

So on to the good stuff. Connecting to a multiplayer game is relatively painless through EA's GameSpy server menu. Every now and then you'll encounter a "cannot connect" issue, but it's never a great problem.

The 16 maps represent theaters of conflict spanning North Africa and the Pacific to Western Europe (D-Day and the Bulge) and the Eastern Front. Some of them are claustrophobic death struggles, like Berlin and Iwo Jima, in which forces claw for control of a relatively tiny, cluttered piece of territory. Others are vast, expansive, slow-developing wars of attrition, as with the tank battle at El Alamein, which unfolds over massive swathes of empty desert.

Desert battles in North Africa pit armor against its nemesis, the unchallenged bomber.

THE WAR AT SEA

IT'S ONE OF THE HARDEST things to get right, but if you can coordinate sea power with your land operations in the coastal maps, you can pull off some stunning victories. A tactic to consider: scouts use their field glasses to "call in" artillery targets for your battleship guns, softening defenses for an amphibious assault. Just be ready to defend against attack — your ships can be sunk by enemy aircraft, and also by subs (though luckily, you've got depth charges). Another tip: load up each Higgins boat with several troops for a coordinated landing.

American troops disembark from their Higgins boat for an amphibious landing on Iwo Jima.

The fiery climax of a desert tank duel, as a Panzer lands the killing blow on an unfortunate enemy.

Smart tactic: send infantry along the flanks of a tank column to root out any anti-tank troops.

Each is its own pleasure. Sometimes you're in the mood to jump right in the belly of the beast, in which case Stalingrad is your answer. Other times, you want to be part of a combined-arms "set piece" battle, in which case you might settle on a map of strategic and tactical complexity, like Market Garden. And *any time* is a good time for Omaha Beach, where shore bombardment, amphibious assault, and street fighting all come into play.

Five classes are available to pick from when you join in a battle. Scouts have sniper rifles, as well as field glasses with which they can "spot" targets for artillery further back. Assault troops get a very useful automatic rifle, and are the most effective in close combat. Anti-armor specialists hoist bazookas into battle, and make effective tank-killing infantry, though their reliance on a backup pistol makes them less than desirable for shootouts. Medics can patch up both themselves and wounded comrades, and engineers can repair vehicles and lay mines and detonation packs.

There are a few different multiplayer modes, but only one worth playing. While capture-the-flag, team deathmatch, and deathmatch (ugh!) are all available, Conquest is the only mode most people are playing. In these battles, the two opposing sides start off on opposite ends of the map, with unclaimed flags at the map's key strategic points. Control of a flag adds points to your team's running total, and you snip points from the enemy team with each tick of the clock that a flag is in your control. Control them all, right up to the enemy's base, and you win a Major Victory.

I guess I also need to throw a bone to the co-op mode, in which all the humans play on one side against an enemy AI force. This mode forces you to act in cohesive units, and makes for a very engaging exercise in teamwork against the soulless armies of the computerized future.

The whole framework delivers a plethora of gaming experiences. Dive for cover as a fighter-bomber strafes your position, only to see the plane chopped up and brought spiraling to the ground by an APC-mounted machinegun. Watch two guys slug it out in a tank duel, and then knock out the winner with a few well-tossed hand grenades. Charge from your Higgins boat onto Omaha Beach and snipe the Nazis in their hilltop machinegun bunker, only to get blown sky-high by inland artillery.

This review can really only offer a slight survey of the gameplay available — suffice it to say that the possibilities are almost limitless, and all of them impact strongly on the team-focused battle.

Battlefield 1942 is a special and wonderful game. It's not a sim in any way, shape, or form, and yet it *feels* like a murderously lifelike slice of WWII. If you've been waiting years, like I have, for the emergence of a truly multi-faceted shared-world action/wargame, it'll light up your eyes. — *Dan Morris*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Rich and absorbing multiplayer warfare; many vehicles; deep tactical possibilities.

LOWS: Requires a broadband connection; almost no single-player value; agonizing audio bugs.

BOTTOM LINE: For action gamers with a fast rig and a fast connection, it's the Game of the Year.

PC GAMER 91%
EDITORS' CHOICE

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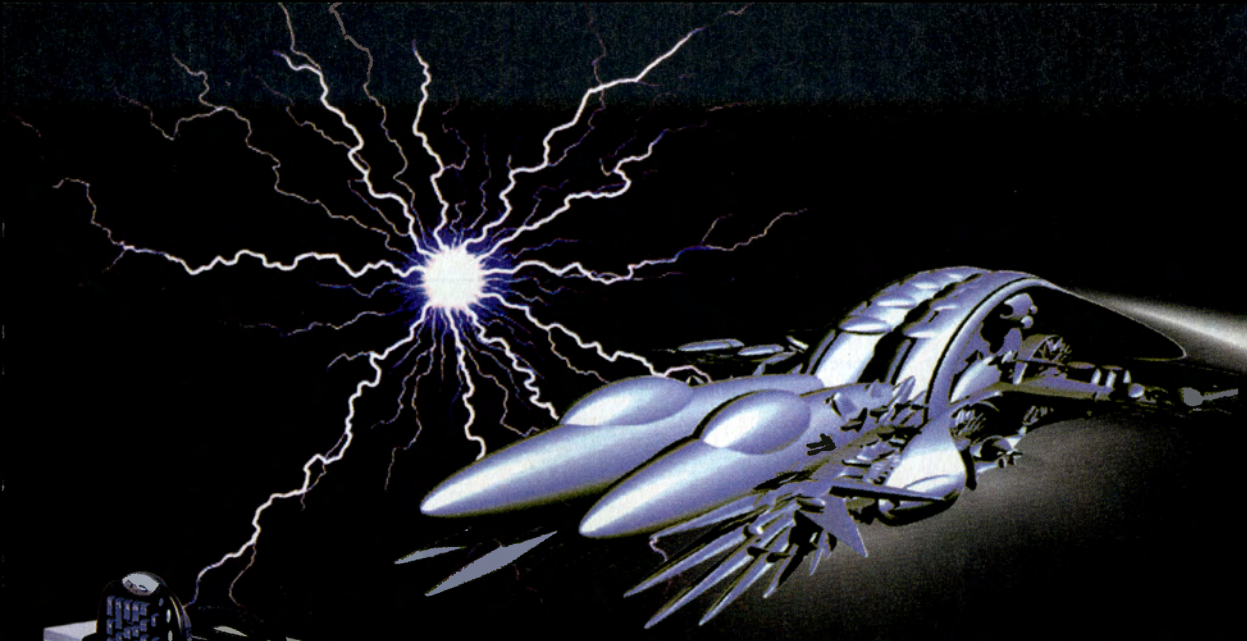

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Corsair 512MB PC2700 DDR RAM Memory
Two 80GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA133 Hard Drives
Lite-On 16X Black DVD Player & Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
Plextor 40X12X40 Black CD-ReWritable Drive
ATI RADEON™ 9700 PRO 128MB 8X AGP Video Card w/TV Out
Viewsonic 22" .25mm 2560x1920 Perfect Flat Color Monitor
Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy XGamer Sound Card w/IEEE 1394
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FATHER TIME PICKS AWAY AT THEVEDE

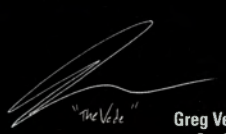
YOU KNOW WHY my life sucks worse than yours? Because I'm turning 29 this month and you're not. You're probably 15, and just starting off on the road of life. Hell, my life's just about over compared to yours. I've gone from "young man" to "sir" in what seems like a day. *[Nobody, but NOBODY, calls you "sir." — Ed.]* And, I swear, I just found three thick black hairs growing out of my right ear this morning. What the hell's up with *that*?!

What's worse, I've got two *completely* worthless knees that throb only a hair less than my aching loins at 4 a.m. every morning because I can't sleep through the night without having to pee anymore. Oh, and speaking of hair, of course, there's my *extreme* hair loss. Sure, I'm the only one who can see it, but it's there, I tell you! I'll be bald in mere weeks if this shedding continues!

What of my toenails, you ask? They're horrible! They're not even nails anymore. They're just thick, milky-gray slabs of goo that smell bad and taste worse. Have you ever tried biting into a fungussed toenail? It's terrible! (But at the same time, strangely enticing.) Last night, I *[this part is censored due to its monumentally disgusting content that plumbs depths lower than even TheVede has ever gone before. Believe me, I'm doing you a huge favor! —Ed.]*

I still have acne, too. Why? Bad karma. I had nary a zit in high school, so I made fun of all my crater-faced friends. Come college, their skin was clear and mine looked like a minefield. Still does.

Think your life is more craptacular than mine? Tell me about it, will ya, and make me feel a bit better! If I deem you more pathetic than me, one lucky winner will get a prize of my choosing. Good...er, bad luck!



Greg Vederman, Senior Editor

PRODUCT TYPE

ENTRY
MID
✔ DREAM

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 these three categories.

hstrinity

Building a new PC can be a thrilling experience, but picking the wrong parts by mistake can end the joyride in a hurry. Luckily, we're here to help you select the best parts for the job. The prices listed below (obtained almost entirely from *www.pricewatch.com*) are the lowest we could find as we went to press. (Note: Prices do not include shipping costs.)

ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $750

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$50
PROCESSOR	
AMD Duron 1.3GHz	$39
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V-133	$80
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	$24
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$60
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
40GB Maxtor 7,200rpm	$68
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs Audigy (white box)	$59
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$45
MONITOR	
17-inch Optiquest Q71	$130
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce4 MX440 64MB DDR	$60
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Joystick	$25
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech WingMan Z-340 (2.1)	$39
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	$15
MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft USB	$39
TOTAL	**$764**

MID-RANGE SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $1,250

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$50
PROCESSOR	
AMD Athlon XP 2000+	$90
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V333 (Award 1007)	$110
MEMORY	
256MB PC-2700 DDR SDRAM	$56
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$60
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
80GB Maxtor 7,200rpm ATA-133	$110
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy MP3+	$85
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$45
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE950+	$292
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti 4200	$120
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision 2	$45
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech Z-540 (4.1)	$60
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	$15
MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft USB	$39
TOTAL	**$1,208**

DREAM SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $3,000 AND ABOVE

CASE	
400-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel 2.8GHz P4	$497
MOTHERBOARD	
Intel D850EMV2	$150
MEMORY	
Twin sticks of 256MB PC-1066 RDRAM	$220
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$60
BURNER	
Plextor 48x24x48 CD-RW	$130
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
180GB Western Digital ATA-100	$337
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy Platinum 5.1	$160
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$45
MONITOR	
22-inch ViewSonic P220f	$647
VIDEO CARD	
ATI RADEON 9700 PRO	$325
JOYSTICK	
Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar	$269
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	$399
KEYBOARD	
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$40
MOUSE	
IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	$50
TOTAL	**$3,460**

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■ COMPANY LOGITECH, WWW.LOGITECH.COM, 800-231-7717 ■ PRICE $69 (M.S.R.P.)

ENTRY
MID ✓
DREAM ✓

Freedom 2.4 Cordless Joystick

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

LOGITECH GIVES YOU THE FREEDOM TO FLY FAR, FAR AWAY...FROM YOUR DESK

Since the beginning of time, what has man wanted? No, not food. Not sex, either. That's right, he's wanted wireless peripherals. Occasionally, he's even gotten them — usually in the form of mice and keyboards, and boy, have most of them been stinky for use in games. Generally, the Achilles heel of such products has been their sluggish sampling rates, which caused ever-so-slight but all-too-annoying onscreen delays. Well, kiss all that sloth-like slowitude goodbye, because Logitech has got a wireless solution that really works!

Just like a cordless phone, the Freedom 2.4 Cordless Joystick operates via radio waves at 2.4GHz. So, unlike devices that operate on, say, infrared, you get tons more freedom to move around. I stepped back at least 20 feet from my computer, with soda cans and bags of chips completely obscuring the small, pager-size receiver unit that I'd placed next to my monitor, and suffered no noticeable loss in accuracy in games like *Crimson Skies* (such a cool game, even today) and *Tachyon* (which I played primarily so I could hear Bruce Campbell's voiceovers again. Why isn't he a full-blown movie star already?).

If you're waiting for a catch, there really isn't one — except that the stick doesn't support force feedback. Aside from that, it also requires three standard AA batteries, but those little power logs should provide enough juice to get you through dozens of hours of actual game time, which is nothing to sneeze at. The stick sports 10 programmable buttons (programmable via Logitech's included software), an eight-way hat switch, a really slick aluminum throttle, and even a twist axis. Plus it looks like the sort of thing you'd see in a shuttlecraft from *Star Trek: Enterprise*. What more could you possibly ask for (besides Jolene Blalock)?!

Honestly, the Freedom 2.4 Cordless Joystick is pretty much the second-best joystick on the planet. True, it doesn't support force feedback, but that's understandable considering it runs on batteries — plus, it's every bit as responsive as any corded stick we've ever used. And comfort? You'll be able to play your favorite games for hours without complaint. Better still, it feels even more solid in your hands than Microsoft's (and even Logitech's own) line of corded sticks — including the high-end, force-feedback dealies.

Yep, for the money, there ain't much better in the world. I'd say the hierarchy goes like this: Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar, then Logitech's Freedom 2.4 Cordless Joystick, then everything else. In the immortal words of a girl who lives across the street from me, TheVede: "Break me off a piece of *that*!"

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 94%

■ COMPANY PLEXTOR, WWW.PLEXTOR.COM, 800-886-3935 ■ PRICE $159

ENTRY
MID
DREAM ✓

PlexWriter 48x/24x/48x

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

24x CD-RW IN AN EXPLOSIVE, AFFORDABLE DRIVE

It's hard to get excited about today's incremental steps in CD read speeds and CD burning times. Upgrade to a 48x burner from a 32x, for example, and you'll shave off a breathtaking 45 seconds or so. Woo-hoo. Leave it to Plextor to shake things up and make optical drives foxy again.

The most notable change in the Plextor 48x is that the write time to CD-RW has doubled to an ass-spanking 24x! We filled a 647MB CD-RW in 3:47 (min:sec), compared to an agonizing 7:14 to write at 12x. Burning 647MB to a CD-R came in at a record-breaking 2:43, and Plextor cut the seek time for the 48x to 62ms — less than half the seek time of the Plextor 40x.

Although Plextor can read discs at 48x, the drive actually defaults to reading at 40x. This setting is intentional — Plextor maintains that the read speed for the disc media we use today is topping out at 48x, and even *that* speed makes them nervous. High-speed drives can spin discs at up to 10,000rpm. At these speeds, tiny flaws in the surface of the media (or cracks from mishandling) are greatly stressed, and the result can be discs shattering in the drive. If this has ever happened to you, you know that it sounds like the *apocalypse*. After that, your drive may well be toast. The force from the shards can be so great that it can even blow the front bezel right off the drive! (Of course, on a positive note, having one of your CDs explode would make for just about the coolest story of all time!)

So, in order to achieve 48x, you have to press and hold the eject button for three seconds (when the drive is empty) as a way of acknowledging "Yessir, I'm willing to roll the dice." The front LED will then blink three times and the tray will open. The disc you insert will then be read at 48x. The speed difference may not be overwhelming — reading 647MB took 2:16 instead of 2:32 — but if you're installing *Mafia*'s three CD-ROMs, well, that's less time waiting and more time busting heads.

The only downside to the Plextor, and it's pretty minor to us, is the strange and redundant mishmash of bundled software, including the Basic version of Easy CD Creator, Oak Technology's SimpliCD, and the pointless Liquid Player.

Overall, folks, you can't miss with the Plextor 48x. It's the fastest, most advanced drive we've ever tested, and it's backed by the peerless build quality and reputation of what may be the finest optical-drive manufacturer on the planet.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 93%

■ BENCHMARKS

- Average data transfer 5.21MB/sec.
- Average drive rating 35.58x
- Random/full-stroke seek (ms) 62/110
- Audio extraction (min:sec) 2:28
- CPU utilization at 8x 6%

The audio-extraction test uses a commercially stamped 72-minute audio CD. The data CD burn test uses the bundled applications to create a 647MB CD-R.

■ COMPANY CREATIVE LABS, WWW.CREATIVELABS.COM, 800-998-1000 ■ PRICE 64MB, $129; 128MB, $169 (M.S.R.P.)

ENTRY
MID
DREAM

Nomad MuVo 64MB 128MB

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

"MUVING" MEMORY BETWEEN PCs WITH THE GREATEST OF EASE

If you're a *PCG* editor, MuVo is the greatest thing ever. If you're a student, MuVo is the greatest thing ever. If you're a gamer, MuVo is *still* the greatest thing ever. Well, okay, it isn't quite as great as ATI's new RADEON 9700 PRO, but it's a close second.

MuVo is one part miniature storage device and one part MP3 player. It comes in two sizes: 64MB and 128MB, and other than the difference in storage capacity, the units are identical. How do they work? Really, it couldn't be simpler. Let's say you've been playing a game down at the local Cyber Café, and at the end of the night you want to be able to take your save-games home with you. No problem. Simply unsheathe the white portion of the MuVo (it's about two inches long) and stick it into a free USB port. If you're running Windows XP, the system will recognize the miniature drive automatically, and guess what? Your computer will then register the new storage device and assign it a letter like "D" or "F." Next, simply drag and drop files into and out of it as you would with any normal hard drive, unplug the MuVo when you're done, and presto-chango — you've got a very portable, miniature hard drive!

Unlike other memory sticks of this sort, MuVo is also an MP3 player. Drag MP3s and or .WMA files into MuVo and you'll be able to listen to music via the included earbud-style headphones. The 64MB unit holds anywhere between 12 to 15 MP3s (depending on size), and the 128MB holds twice that. That's enough for a quick jog or bus ride, and *plenty* for even really big save-game files.

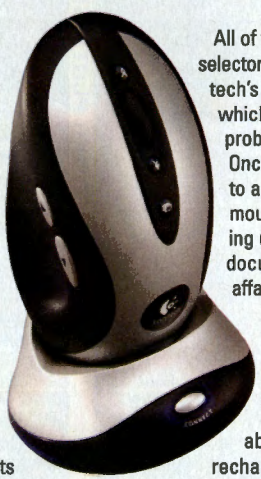
PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 90%

■ COMPANY LOGITECH, WWW.LOGITECH.COM, 800-231-7717 ■ PRICE $79

ENTRY
MID
DREAM

MX700

FINALLY — WORRY-FREE WIRELESS THAT WORKS FOR GAMERS



Mouse cords suck. Bigtime. But finally, our nightmare is over. Logitech's MX700 is not only a comfortable and full-featured cordless mouse, but to these hands and eyes, it also tracks as well as any corded optical mouse on the market — noticeably better than any other cordless we've ever tried before (including all of Logitech's own non–MX series cordless rodents). Why? The MX700 reports 125 times per second (the maximum supported by USB), offers up a resolution of 800dpi (twice as much as entry-level opticals), can track movement at a maximum speed of 40 inches per second, and works fairly reliably even at distances of up to 40 feet away from its base (depending on the room). It sounds too good to be true, but it's not. This mouse is this bomb.

The unit has seven regular buttons plus a clickable mouse wheel for a total of eight. By default, they're standard left and right, scroll up and down, page back and forward, and "quick switch program selector" — a button that lets you move quickly and easily between open pages and applications.

All of these buttons, except for program selector, work without having to install Logitech's included MouseWare software — which is good because, as usual, you'll probably want to stay away from it. Once it's installed, you're no longer able to assign in-game functionality to your mouse wheel, and when you're scrolling up and down in web pages and documents, it's anything but a smooth affair due to some really goofy settings.

Luckily, MouseWare isn't without its cool features. Once installed, the software lets you check on remaining battery life (the MX700 comes with rechargeable batteries and the means to recharge them) and lets you reprogram the mouse's buttons and wheel. Still, we value our mouse wheel in games, so we choose to go mouse commando.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 88%

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Q All of a sudden, Microsoft doesn't seem to be offering Java for automatic download anymore, but a lot of websites use it. Can you tell me where else I can find the software?
— Joey Shabadoo

A Java is owned by Sun Microsystems. You can download it straight from them at *http://java.sun.com/getjava/download.html*.

Q I recently installed some new 6118 drivers from *www.rage3d.com* for my RADEON 8500. Bad idea — my 3DMark2001 SE score dropped nearly 2,500 points! Thinking something must be wrong with my computer, I reinstalled Windows along with everything else, but still no change. I'm getting even crappier frame rates than normal in *Grand Theft Auto III*, and it was already hurting bad before! What should I do?!
—Spicer

A Stop downloading beta drivers! Actually, I'm not sure those were beta drivers. The "6118" designation refers to the 2D portion of ATI's driver package, whereas numbers like 7.70 — or, as we go to press, 7.76 — designate the 3D portion. Unfortunately, nobody seems to pay attention to 2D these days, so even my ATI contact wasn't 100 percent sure which driver package 6118 was tied to. No worries, though. If you haven't already, head to *www.ati.com* and grab the most up-to-date software they've got. My guess is that doing so will fix your problems. Also, in the future, keep a copy of your older drivers handy so that, should new drivers mess something up, you can always go back to a version that you know worked.

Q I'm looking for a TV tuner in the $100-or-less range with a remote and some decent PVR software. I thought I'd found a perfect match with Creative's Video Blaster Digital VCR, but they stopped making it. Now I'm leaning toward Leadtek's WinFast 2000. What do you recommend?
—Wolf

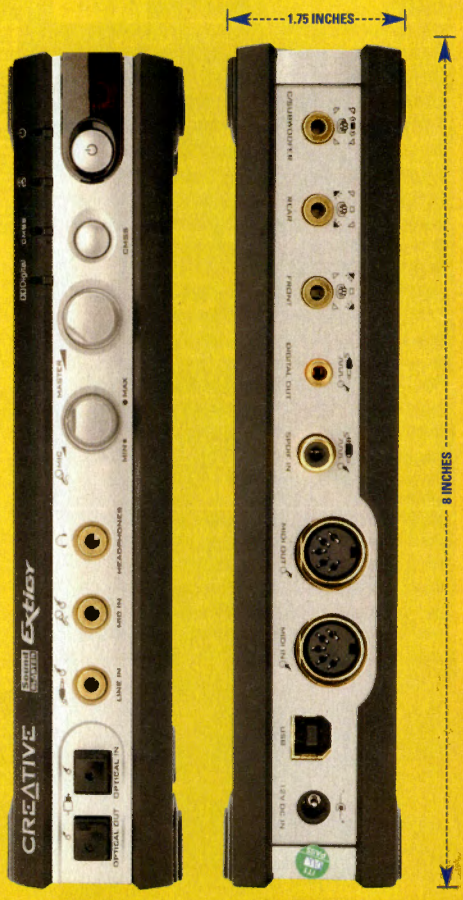
A Leadtek's TV tuner is pretty cool. It comes with dual cable inputs and a handy remote control, and has the ability to record your favorite shows — as long as you have a TV guide handy to tell you when they're on. You'll need to buy additional software like SnapStream's Personal Video Station ($49) to get streaming TV listings. ATI's TV Wonder, on the other hand, offers TiVo-like functionality right out of the box via a program called Gemstar GUIDE Plus+, but doesn't include a remote. Like PVS, GUIDE Plus+ provides TV listings and allows you to set record times for all your favorite programs. Head to *www.ati.com/products/pc/tvwonder* for more info on TV-Wonder; go to *www.snapstream.com/products/sspvs* for info on PVS.

Q Everyone says the GeForce4 Ti 4600 is a great choice for me, but ATI just dethroned GeForce4 with its RADEON 9700 PRO. Now I hear that NVIDIA's upcoming NV30/GeForce5 should be out in time for the holidays. Should I wait for the NV30 to arrive, buy ATI's 9700 PRO, or buy a GF4 Ti 4600?
—Mitcheal Thornhill

A Tough question; the answer really depends on when you read this response. The earliest you'll be reading it is around Nov. 9, and if what I've heard is correct, NV30 could be launched within a month of that date. I haven't seen one yet, though, so I can't tell you how good, bad, or great it's going to be. I can tell you this: When it ships, ATI's next video card will be that much closer to shipping, too. There's always something new on the horizon: it's the nature of the game. If you're buying today, I recommend the RADEON 9700 PRO. No matter how much faster NV30 may be when it comes out, you won't regret your purchase.

Q I've been having some weird problems when I set my AGP to 4x in my BIOS. At 4x, when Windows (98 or XP — I've tried them both) gets to the point where the login screen should appear, the screen goes blank and the monitor goes into power-saving mode. If I reboot and set AGP to 2x, Windows loads fine. I have a Leadtek GeForce4 Ti 4400 video card and a Gigabyte GA-7VRXP motherboard. Do you know why this is happening?
—Andy Kannenberg

A Recently, many GA-7VRXP users have been reporting conflicts between their motherboards and GeForce4 cards. Gigabyte appears to be aware of the problem and should be willing to upgrade your motherboard with newer capacitors if needed to fix your problem. Give Gigabyte a call at 626-854-9338 and speak to one of the techs there, who will be able to troubleshoot your system with you over the phone. If you'd like to try something on your own first, some users have reportedly met with success by increasing their VCore voltage by +7.5 in their BIOS. Proceed with caution if you go this route — should something go wrong, you might end up voiding your PC's warranty.



(front) *(back)*

Q I have a Sound Blaster AudioPCI 128d and a set of Klipsch ProMedia 2.1s. I was thinking about getting a Creative Labs Extigy, but I'm not sure if it will make a big difference in my sound. Will it?
—Shaun Myers

A Yeah, an Extigy is basically just an external Audigy that connects via USB 1.0. It'll sound much better than your existing Sound Blaster card. Why the Extigy over the Audigy, though? A lot of Audigy's advanced features require more bandwidth than can be transferred over USB 1.0. So, unless it's for a laptop, or if you just want to be able to bring the Extigy around to multiple PCs, I'd almost certainly recommend the Audigy over the Extigy.

If you have a hardware question or comment, or just want some...thing, write to **Greg Vederman, Hard Stuff, PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005**, or email *gvederman@pcgamer.com*.

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William R. Trotter

Short Rounds: Part Deux

More tidbits dug out of the Colonel's much-prized warchest

I'm writing this on August 23; if not for my deadline, I would *not* have left my air-conditioned bedroom (unless it was to write a letter of acceptance to the Pulitzer Prize Committee). The heat index outside is 102 degrees; every reservoir in central North Carolina has shrunk to 40 percent or less of normal (you can be fined for running a lawn sprinkler); the ozone has been pegged at Code Orange for two solid weeks; and the schools, which just reconvened three days ago, are already closing because asthmatic children are keeling over by the dozen.

The Doldrums, for sure. Lots of interesting games coming soon — but not here yet. Time for another "Short Rounds" column, to clean up some small stuff that no columnist (and I've tried, Vicar, God knows I've tried!) could inflate to column-length.

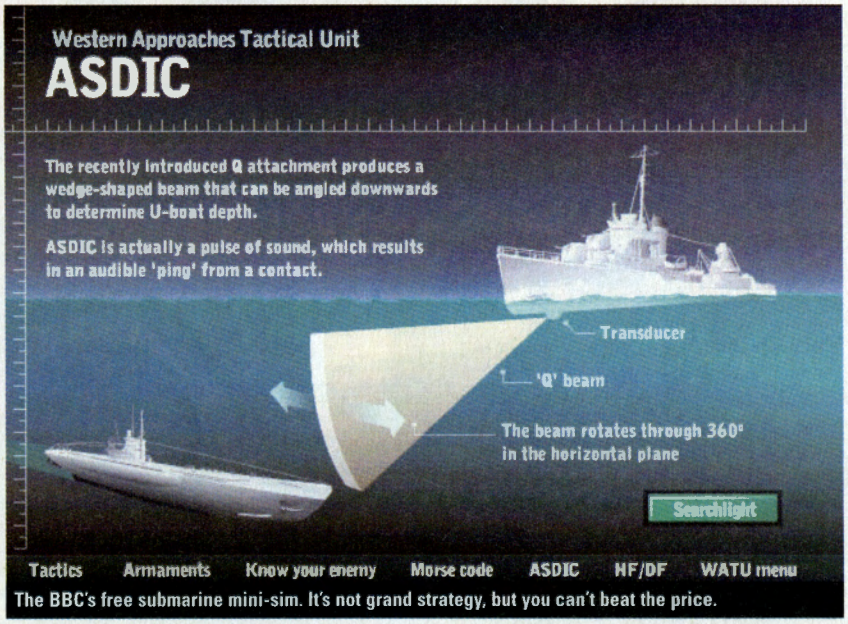
THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC AS A SET OF BUBBLE-GUM CARDS

I WAS INTRIGUED TO LEARN THAT THE BBC website was running a free "strategic" game based on the B. of A. Server problems kept most of us Colonials from playing for weeks, but yesterday I finally logged on just fine and spent all of maybe 45 minutes seeing *everything* there is to see. Can't complain: it's free, and the graphics are nice. Before playing the "game" (sorry, mates, there ain't no campaign), you're encouraged to go through "training" at WATU (the historical Western Approaches Tactical Unit, where countless corvette skippers learned the ropes from veteran sub-hunters like the legendary "Johnny" Walker). This segment consists of some nicely animated screens showing how the five basic escort tactics in use by mid-1942 could be applied under different situations. As a primer on the subjects, it's useful, but you get absolutely no hands-on training — none of the switches work.

Once you've graduated from WATU (which took me 20 minutes), you start the games. They're all brief, simple, and cut from the same pattern: You see a generic top-down view of a convoy, then you get a U-boat contact. Then you're given three possible tactical responses. Click on one and you see attractive animations of what happens. Alas, whether you clobber the U-boat or it sneaks past you and slaughters the convoy, you never get to see any *action*: all you get is a brief description.

The "gameplay" is, at most, one notch more involving than a game of tic-tac-toe. I kept playing long beyond the point of utter boredom, hoping that, sooner or later, the BBC would throw in a nice surface engagement, a dramatic ramming, or a tanker exploding. But it never happened.

There's a tiny germ here of what could, with lots of work and tremendous expansion, be a very engaging strategic simulation of the real campaign. But on the whole, this site was hugely disappointing. If you doubt me, check it out at *www.bbc.co.uk/history/games/battle_atlantic/battle_atlantic_pop.html*.



The BBC's free submarine mini-sim. It's not grand strategy, but you can't beat the price.

OH, THOSE PESKY IZ-BINS

Yes, yes, I *know*, you can all stop emailing me now: in the September 2002 issue, I transposed one number in the ISBN code for Evan Brook's delightful book *Military History's Most Wanted*. Evan called off the cruise-missile strike on my house when I promised to print the correct one, which is 1-57488-509-X. Buy it — you'll love every quirky page.

THE TANK AS CULTURAL ICON

QUITE THE *WEIRDEST* MILITARY HISTORY book of the year (yes, even stranger than Evan's) is *TANK* by Patrick Wright (Viking Press). His focus is less on the evolution of armor technology and tactics than it is on the cultural and psychosocial impact of the tank-as-icon throughout various times and milieus.

I was fascinated to learn that when the first photos of the new weapon were made public, they created a sensation among the Parisian avant-garde. Hailed as "The Triumph of Cubism," the tank inspired a wave of goofy paintings and crackpot "poetic manifestos." Tasty stuff!

Nor was I aware, until I read Wright's amazing chapter about it, that J.F.C. Fuller (generally regarded as a visionary strategist whose writings birthed the blitzkrieg theory) was *also* a ranking member of Aleister Crowley's notorious "Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn." Fuller composed wildly incomprehensible metaphysical tracts linking tanks to, among other things, Babylonian deities; he also participated vigorously in the Golden Order's monstrous, drug-fueled orgies — distancing himself from Crowley only after he realized that Crowley was genuinely insane.

If for nothing else, the book's worth buying just for the tank-inspired "poetry" Wright's managed to unearth: *"In a gargantuan mechanical contrivance/A masterpiece of metallurgique skill/Disgorging from inflammatory intestines/Unwelcome souvenirs for Kaiser Bill!"*

— desktopgeneral@pcgamer.com

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. EAGLE STRIKE, 2. SPACE HORSE, 3. FULDA GAP '85, 4. MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR, 5. BATTLEFIELD 1942

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

sim column

Andy Mahood

Taking the Private Road

What's better than free downloadable racing games? Not much.

The free *Racer* download includes all the tools you'll need to create your own cars and tracks.

So how do you plan on getting your high-speed kicks this winter? If you're a serious PC racer like me, then you're probably getting a little antsy waiting for that "next big sim" to come along and replace *NASCAR Racing 2002 Season* or *F1 2002*.

Oddly enough, you may not have to look any farther than the URL window of your personal web browser. A couple of significant "private" racing sims are currently capturing a helluva lot of buzz on the Usenet boards — and you'll never hear a peep about them down at your local software store. That's because these two sims are both *freely* downloadable, independent releases that are available only online. Here are the goods:

RACER (v. 0.4.9)
(www.racer.nl)

Developed by Dutch sim enthusiast Ruud van Gaal, *Racer* has built up an enormous cult following over the past two years. Not only does this sim boast some surprisingly sophisticated driving physics and a nifty built-in multiplayer component, but it's also been loaded up with all of the tools you need to build your own cars and tracks. (Dozens of user-created add-ons are already available.) The graphics aren't necessarily going to win any awards, and the vehicle dynamics can be a little rough around the edges, but for an independently developed freebie, *Racer* is a remarkable piece of work.

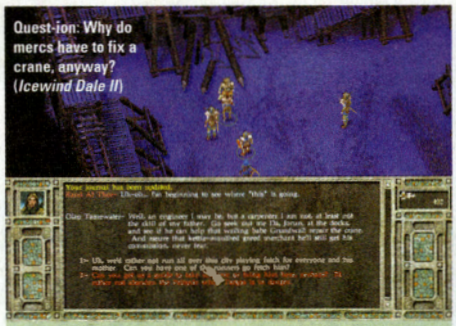
LIVE FOR SPEED
(www.scawen.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

Technically a demo rather than freeware (the sim's developer has every intention of making some money off it in the future), *Live for Speed* is nevertheless one of the most polished driving sims I've ever hooked a force-feedback steering wheel up to. Although still in its formative stages, this amazing new three-car Internet demo from ex-Lionhead programmer Scawen Roberts features some of the most realistic driving physics and promising graphics I've seen in years. Download it and play it online (or against seven highly aggressive AI drivers) until your throttle foot goes numb. You'll be impressed.

I've intentionally left out the most talked-about indie of the lot here — West Racing's highly anticipated *Racing Legends* (*www.west-racing.com*). Rising like a phoenix from the ashes of *World Sports Cars*, this new sim's development is under such tight wraps right now that I can't even show you a screenshot or give you a release date. Stay tuned, though: I'll have more on that story soon.

— simcolumn@pcgamer.com

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. GRAND PRIX 4, 2. STRIKE FIGHTERS (BETA), 3. NASCAR 2002, 4. LIVE FOR SPEED DEMO, 5. RALLISPORT CHALLENGE (BETA)



alternate lives

Best Gaming Engine: Build? Quake? Nope.

BALDUR'S GATE, TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, *Planescape Torment, Icewind Dale, Heart of Winter, Trials of the Luremaster, Baldur's Gate II, Throne of Bhaal,* and now *Icewind Dale II*. Yep, I think it's time we officially declared BioWare's Infinity engine to be the greatest game engine in the history of the PC.

When I think about the number of hours I've spent roleplaying courtesy of the Infinity engine, it boggles my mind. Expansions aside, the key games provide some 300-plus hours of gaming potential, of which I've probably imbibed only half. According to recent letters, many of you have sucked up every ounce of gaming goodness these titles hold — playing them through two, three, or even more times. (Commendable, yes, but lives anyone?)

While I'm sure I'd line up to buy another game in the series, it'll be a good thing if *Icewind Dale II* does indeed represent the end of the line for Infinity (save perhaps for an *ID II* expansion, of course). The engine is showing its age as never before, thanks to the likes of *Neverwinter Nights* and *Morrowind* raising our expectations. Niggling little gameplay issues that have plagued all Infinity games — AI pathfinding quirks, an over-reliance on "FedEx" quests — bother me more now than ever before.

Steve Klett

And the design seems virtually bereft of the invention that always made sub-quests compelling. *ID II* had far too many "FedEx"-variety quests, which I've personally come to loathe. The frivolous errands are one thing; it's quite another when *ID II* sets you up as the leader of a band of war-hardened mercenaries ready to smash skulls...and then treats you like a rookie gopher on a Hollywood set.

FedEx rant aside, this engine has given PC gamers more entertainment (and more entertainment value) than any other, and that includes any 3D first-person engine. In both quantity *and* quality of gameplay hours provided, I don't think any game engine can touch Infinity's contribution.

I'd be real curious to hear what first-person fans think of that assertion; my hunch is that a balanced gamer who enjoys both FPS and RPG genres will agree with me. After all, I'm as big a shooter nut as anyone. When you think of The Great Gaming Engine, you instinctively look toward id, or perhaps Epic, but I think the Mohammed Ali of game engines was, and still is, BioWare's.

And yet, all good things must come to an end. Thanks for the memories, Infinity. I'll be playing you for another 40 hours at least, and then that's enough...really.

— alternatelives@pcgamer.com

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A modest proposal: Voice chatter in gaming will destroy us all

Ask anyone embroiled in a message-board flame war: civil discourse over the Internet is an oxymoron. Anonymity breeds cocky arrogance in the best of us, somehow making it acceptable to badmouth people for the teeniest perceived infraction.

At first, gaming was a relative safe haven from online jackals. Even today, *Quake III* is a polite, if gory, gentleman's sport: ending a match by typing "gg" (good game) is common courtesy. It's the only game in which I've actually been *thanked* for not quitting a game even though I was hopelessly outmatched by a far better opponent.

Now, compare that to the smack talk permeating team games. Believe it or not, I'm secretly relieved that *Team Fortress 2* and its built-in voice communication have gone MIA. It's bad enough being bitched out in text chat — the last thing I need is a screeching 12-year-old in my ear, informing me that my sniping skills suck monkey balls.

As I contemplate my snazzy new USB headphone/mike combo, I can't help but eye it with the same trepidation Sarah Connor does muscle-bound Austrians. Voice chat in games *is* the future, but is it a future any of us really wants...or needs? Not a shiny, happy *Star Trek* utopian future, but a bleak, gloomy future of what I'd describe, without any exaggeration whatsoever, as never-ending badness.

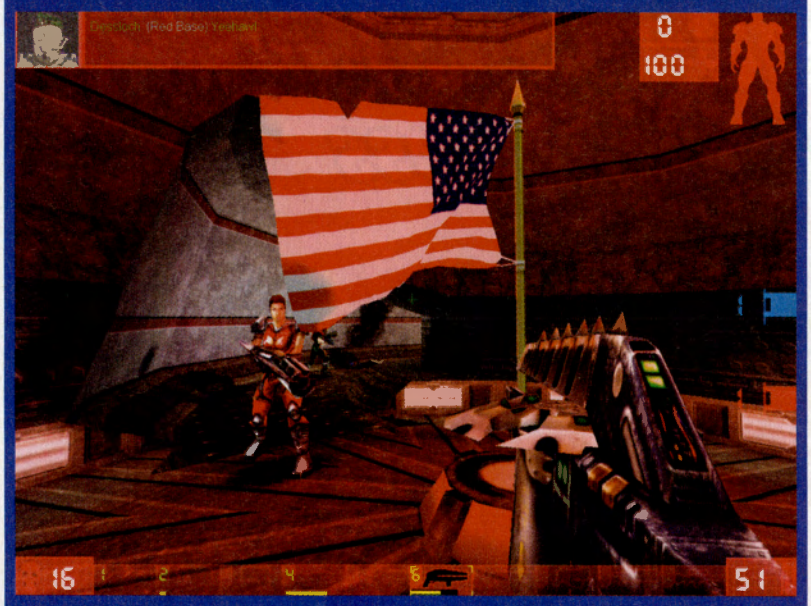
So now that we've established that verbalizing in games will be (1) a gateway to outrageously rude behavior, and (2) the ruination of civilization as we know it, who should we blame? The poor, naïve keyboard-less fools who own PS2s and Xboxes? Yep, they'll love broadband in the beginning: "Hey, look, I'm playing *Halo* against a guy in Wyoming." Then they'll start talking *and* shooting at the same time. The hardened grunt will be revealed as an obnoxious schmuck, and *bang!* — society goes into the crapper. The link is clear.

By then it'll be too late. The Pandora's Xbox will be open, and pretty soon it won't just be Roger Wilco owners gabbing on their PCs: a cacophony of voices will break the beautiful silence of my online world. Goodbye, suspension of disbelief; hello, Babylon.

Maybe I'm cranky. What do you think? Is voice communication good for games, or is it the devil in disguise? Shoot me an email — just do it *quietly*.

— killingbox@pcgamer.com

MOD OF THE MONTH



Celebrate *Unreal Tournament* 1999's last gasp by installing the *TechnoloG* unofficial bonus pack. It adds a host of new mutators (including CTF with U.S. flags), relics, and crosshairs. Get it on this month's *PC Gamer* CD or from *www.planetunreal.com/technoloG/*.

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. THE THING, 2. FREEDOM FORCE, 3. JEDI KNIGHT II, 4. RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN (MULTIPLAY), 5. BUFFY (ON XBOX)

Humping bar floor — all in a day's work for one of *JA2*'s mercs

extended play

An Old Alliance Returns; Cheeky Action Ensues

REVIEWERS ARE CONSTANTLY COMPLAINING about the lack of personality in games. For the most part, it's a fair comment. That's why the occasional cult favorite emerges based on an ensemble cast of characters that remain indelibly in the imagination.

Jagged Alliance 2, first released by Sirtech in '99, has been re-released in an enhanced *Gold Pack* edition from Strategy First. The pack features the full game plus its *Unfinished Business* add-on. If you like your strategy games spiced with a plethora of colorful characters, *JA2* is a cool example of what a little "human touch" can do for a PC game.

You play as the director of the Association of International Mercenaries, a private army that contracts its members to employers in the global underground. AIM is hired to help a band of rebels overthrow the military junta that has taken control of Arulco, a tropical-island nation. Through a series of isometric-view missions, played in the "pause-time" strategy style, you have to wage a guerrilla war against the dictators of Arulco.

Half the fun of *JA2* is in assembling the merc teams for each mission. Each merc has a distinct outlook on life, and quirks that range from allergies (meaning he's more suited to northern climes) to an unwillingness to share camouflage paint. Sometimes, mercs like Gumby and Shadow and Steroid simply can't find the interpersonal chemistry to be an effective fighting unit — and as you'll learn the hard way, there are few remedies for a team that can't gel in a firefight.

Dan Morris

Filled with amusing dialogue for 150 mercenaries, *JA2* feels like a particularly smart *A-Team* episode starring a vast ensemble cast. Like any good general, you'll start learning the advantages and drawbacks of individual mercs and combinations thereof, refining your prep process to best use your members for specific new challenges.

Not all the missions demand firepower, or even stealth: some are diplomatic expeditions, requiring affable negotiators, and a guy like Steroid isn't going to be a useful ambassador. Occasionally your job is just to train local militias, in which case you'll need the services of patient instructors. And, of course, you get some of the usual "mow 'em down like cattle" missions that demand heavier muscle.

With a custom-creation feature for your own new mercs, and day-night cycles in the open-ended missions, *JA2 Gold Pack* is an involving strategy game for the $20 price. Its tongue-in-cheek dialogue and clever team dynamics show that personality goes a long way in a PC game.

— extendedplay@pcgamer.com

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Medieval: Total War

You'll rule supreme with these sweet single- and multiplayer strategies from *Medieval*'s in-house testers and programmers. (Thanks to Azimoth, Lucsypher, B.O.F.H. and GilJaysmoth from Creative Assembly.)

Click-click-click your waypoints, and your units will follow your lead.

BATTLE-INTERFACE TIPS

PAUSE GAME: At any point in a battle, press P to pause the action. The action will stop but the camera will still be operable, and you can still give orders and waypoints to all units. Pressing the Spacebar at this time will show you where your new unit destinations are. Press P again to resume the action. In this way, you can play the 3D battles as a kind of pseudo–turn-based experience. It's also a handy way to recompose yourself when the action gets really hectic!

DRAG SELECTION BOX: Hold Ctrl and right-click and drag to create a box around several units at once. This method of selecting units will be familiar to mainstream RTS gamers, and is a handy way of selecting several units in close proximity to each other in the heat of battle.

WAYPOINTS: Waypoints are an extremely useful way of pulling off devastating flanking maneuvers. Simply hold down Shift and then left-click to form a path of flags on the battlefield for your unit to follow. This technique can also be used when multiple units are selected.

BATTLEFIELD TACTICS

The most important thing to remember when fighting battles is that, unlike in most other strategy games, *Medieval*'s battles are a realistic simulation of the way combat was at that time. All the factors that used to affect real troops and real armies are here. So if you charge your heavily armored units from one end of the battlefield to the other, they'll get tired and won't fight as effectively. If a unit is taking severe fire from enemy archers or gets charged in the flank by heavy cavalry, the morale of the men will suffer — and they could end up running for their lives.

This authenticity actually makes the game much more intuitive than other strategy games because it means you don't have to learn the tactics that fit best with that particular game — you just need to apply common sense. A few good tips for beginners:

ROCK/PAPER/SCISSORS: As a general rule, *Medieval*'s units adhere to the well-known rock/paper/scissors mechanism. In a nutshell, there are three primary types of units: archers, spearmen, and cavalry — and each of them is a perfect foil for another.

Archers will defeat spearmen because their light armor enables them to move faster, allowing them to fire their arrows, then retreat and fire again — with the slow-moving spearmen never being able to reach them to engage them in hand-to-hand combat.

With their long spears, spearmen are more effective against cavalry. A cavalry charge will often come to an abrupt (and bloody) end when confronted by a wall of spears!

At the same time, cavalry units are particularly effective at chasing down and massacring the lightly armored archers, who can usually unleash only a few rounds of arrows prior to being engaged.

It's a simple enough concept, but players who keep it in mind will find they spend more time tasting sweet victory than players who don't. You'll notice that we don't mention infantry here. Infantry fall outside of this set of rules, and are generally pretty effective against all kinds of units.

POSITIONING (TAKE THE HIGH GROUND!): The positioning of your troops is vital. Even if you are greatly outnumbered, finding and holding a good position on the battlefield will increase your chances of victory immeasurably. When deploying troops, look to position them on the highest piece of ground within your deployment zone. Armies attacking uphill suffer massive penalties, as they'll have less momentum and will be tired from the climb. Your archery units will

Don't carelessly throw your infantry against cavalry. Instead, keep 'em close to mop up surviving enemies.

We must commend this German army on its fine balance. Naturally, Rob will do his best to crush it.

Enemy starting to rout? Smack 'em around with your cavalry, snuffing lives and taking prisoners.

also have a better range and accuracy when firing from higher ground and your units will receive a bonus when attacking downhill. In other words, every possible advantage is with the army on higher ground. Armies that maintain a strong position on high ground and maintain their discipline can defeat much stronger armies.

CHOOSE A WELL-BALANCED ARMY: The basic rock/paper/scissors mechanism mentioned earlier means that a well-balanced army is strongly recommended. No matter how powerful and indestructible you may feel your veteran heavy-cavalry units are, they'll soon come a cropper if met by a well-balanced enemy army. Also bear in mind that an army is likely to come across all manner of different terrain, enemy, weather conditions, and so on, so try to maintain armies that are balanced enough to cope with most conditions.

A well-balanced army can have many different combinations of units. Here's an example for the English: four knights, three longbowmen/archers, six infantry, and three billmen. This combination provides good protection against enemy cavalry (with three units of billmen), a solid core (with six infantry), speed, a devastating charge, and the ability to chase routing units off the field (with the cavalry), as well as the ability to pepper enemy units from a safe distance (with the longbowmen).

CHASE ROUTERS OFF THE FIELD WITH CAVALRY: If, at any time during a battle, the enemy starts to rout, send cavalry units to attack the routing units. This maneuver will make it very hard for the routing units to rally and rejoin the battle — and you'll also inflict more casualties and take more prisoners (which can be sold for profit or massacred to gain "dread"). Continue chasing these units until they leave the battlefield. Routing units inflict a morale penalty on the whole army, so you'll often be able to cause a mass rout in this way.

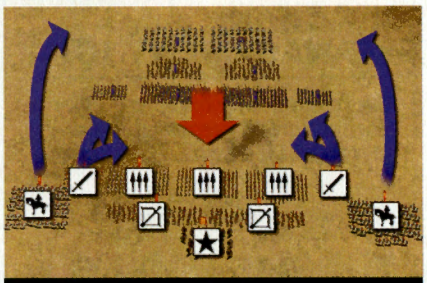
KINGDOM MANAGEMENT 101

Our resident *Medieval* buff, Billy Harms, couldn't resist giving a few tips of his own.

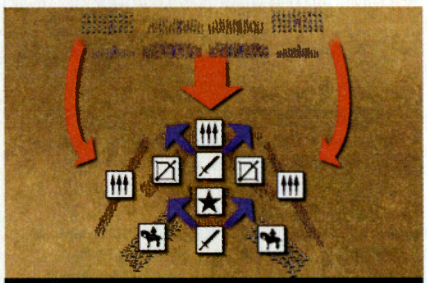
MAKIN' MONEY: At the start of a game, look over your territories and see which ones have exportable goods and/or exploitable natural resources. If you have resources, immediately build structures that'll let you access their riches (like gold mines), and if you have tradeable goods, get started on trading posts, merchants, and docks. If a territory doesn't offer any riches you can tap into, simply upgrade your farming capacity and move on to creating military units.

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES: When conquering new territories, remember that religion plays a huge role in *Medieval*. For example, if you're playing as a Muslim nation and you conquer a Christian territory, you'll need to evangelize your religion to the masses, lest they decide they don't like rule under a non-believer.

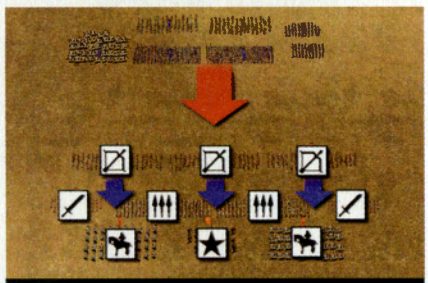
UP FROM THE ASHES: When you obliterate a foreign power, make sure that you keep a sizable military force in their former territories, especially in what used to be their capital territory. After a period of time passes, a leader may arise in that area and rally the people to their true lineage. These kinds of "rebellions" can be extremely devastating, especially if you're not prepared. Remember, the only thing rebels understand is the taste of cold, hard steel.



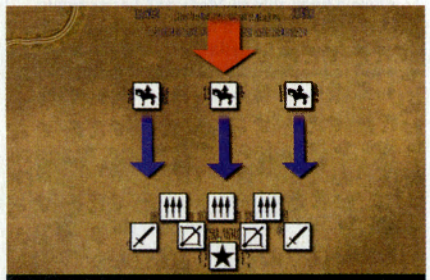
The Standard Line formation helps protect your archers, and keeps your flanks well-defended.



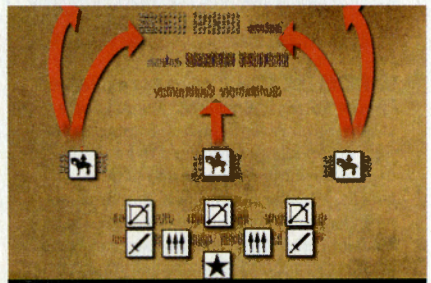
Enemies attacking from multiple fronts? Use a Circular formation, with your general in the center.



An Archer Skirmish formation lets your bow boys cut loose on the enemy, and then retreat when need be.



Wail on enemy cavalry with the Cavalry Skirmish, a formation that unfetters your horse archers.



A Cavalry Charge is exactly that: a fierce move that unleashes your cavalry in a quick attack.

Be wary of charging off a hilltop to chase routing units, however. The enemy will sometimes use this temptation as a ploy to draw you away from your advantageous position on top of a hill. Remember the folly of Harold at the Battle of Hastings!

MORE BATTLEFIELD TACTICS — FORMING FORMATIONS

The formation that your army lines up in is crucial. You'll often find your own preferred formations, but here are a few examples that our in-house testers have used in both single- and multiplayer games to great effect. (DF = defensive formation, OF = offensive formation)

■ STANDARD LINE (DF)

As the name suggests, this is a pretty standard defensive formation. The spearmen in the front-center provide good defense against a full-frontal assault (especially from cavalry), and also protect the archers while they loose arrows into the approaching army. Your flanks are protected by cavalry, which can (if the opportunity arises) charge into your opponent's flanks from this position. The infantry on the fringes of your front line can be used to bolster the line or charge into the flanks of attacking units once they've engaged your spearmen.

■ CIRCULAR (DF)

This formation provides a good defense from an attack on more than one front. Such an attack may come from two or more enemy armies — or from a single opponent that's divided its forces and is attempting to flank you. The spearmen at the front and sides form a formidable defensive line, and the central infantry units can be used to bolster any breaches. The archers that are protected by the spearmen have a wide angle of fire — and can even be used in melee to help bolster the line if necessary. In this formation, the cavalry are free to be used to flank the enemy, or to remain in reserve and run down routing enemy units. The general is in the center, giving a maximum morale boost to his entire army while remaining heavily protected.

■ ARCHER SKIRMISH (DF)

This formation gives your archers maximum opportunity to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy army while it marches toward you. Make sure that your archers have the "skirmish" icon selected so that they retreat of their own accord when the enemy gets close. It's also a good idea to set them to "loose" formation so that they can retreat through the defensive line more easily when the enemy closes in.

■ CAVALRY SKIRMISH (DF)

This formation is similar to the archer skirmish but with horse archers. The benefit of using horse archers is that, with their much greater speed, they can afford to engage the enemy with arrow fire while a good distance from the rest of your army. This scenario not only maximizes the amount of arrow fire the enemy must suffer prior to reaching your main army, but also tends to draw the enemy cavalry out to attack them. If you then retreat the horse archers back to your main army (with the impetuous enemy cavalry chasing them), you can sometimes entrap the enemy cavalry by charging your own cavalry into the gap between the distant enemy army and their cavalry, thereby snaring them between your front line. Of course, if the enemy cavalry aren't drawn out to attack, then your horse archers will be able to fire their entire constituent of arrows with nothing but enemy archers to concern them.

■ CAVALRY CHARGE (OF)

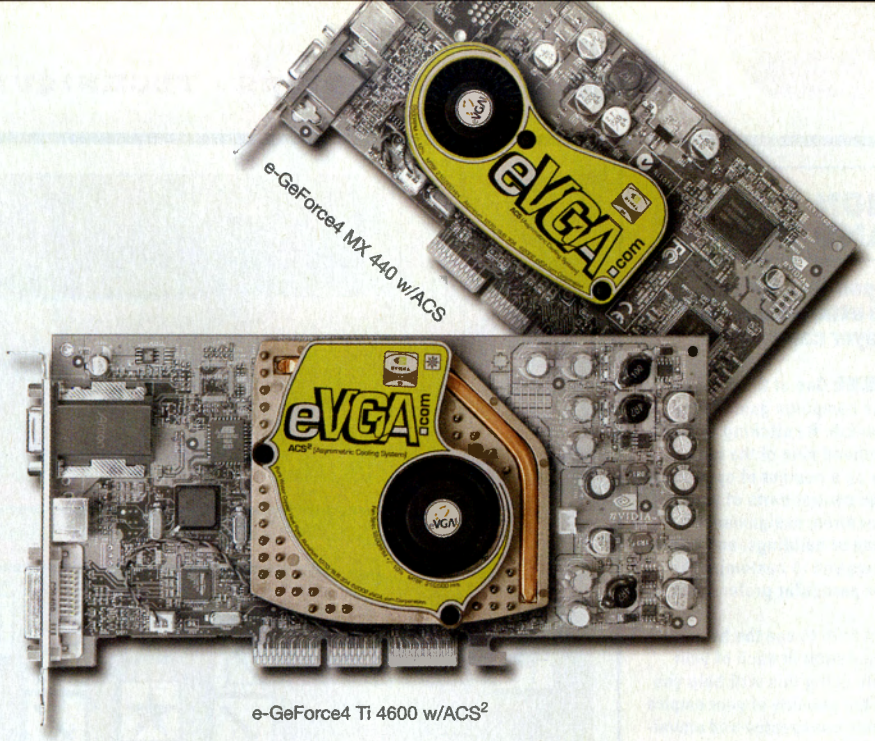
A very aggressive formation that should be used only if your enemy forms up with archers in the front line. It's designed to engage the defending enemy army quickly in order to avoid a prolonged archery assault. With your strongest cavalry units charging at the center of the enemy front line and the rest of your cavalry running flanking formations against the enemy position, the enemy archers will sometimes skirmish backward and cause minor disruption to the enemy line. Always make sure that your infantry is also in close support to make the most of this situation — and also to prevent your cavalry from becoming overwhelmed by superior enemy numbers.

■ CAVALRY SWEEP (OF)

When the enemy places its archers at the front of its battle lines, counter this setup with your cavalry. Send them up the flanks and then turn them in so that they charge across the enemy lines and attack the archers. As they do so, they'll draw out the stronger enemy units, exposing them to your arrow fire. Keep your cavalry away from any spearmen and return them to the flanks to try again.

■ FEIGN RETREAT (OF)

As with most other offensive strategies, the theory here is to draw the enemy army (or at least some of its key units) off a hill and onto a more even-sided fighting ground. Place your infantry and peasant units at the bottom of the hill away from the main body of your army. Charge them up the hill as if to attack



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CAMPAIGN HINTS AND TIPS

Some trusty pointers for making sure that you utterly dominate the single-player campaign.

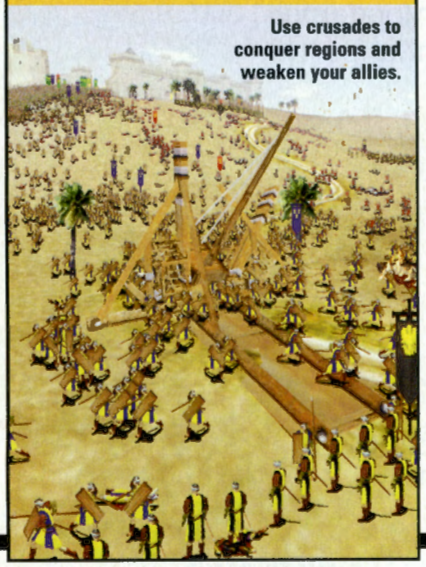
AUTO-MANAGEMENT: One of the most useful features in the campaign game is the auto-management tab. By clicking on the arrow to the righthand side of the mini-map, you'll bring up a number of options for allowing the AI to control parts of your empire — e.g., taxation, assignment of titles, construction of buildings, and so on. This feature allows you to customize the game to suit your particular preferences.

SHIFT: Hold down Shift to see the happiness ratings of the population in each of your regions. Regularly doing this will help you keep a check on the stability of your empire — and help prevent unexpected and unwelcome revolts throughout your provinces.

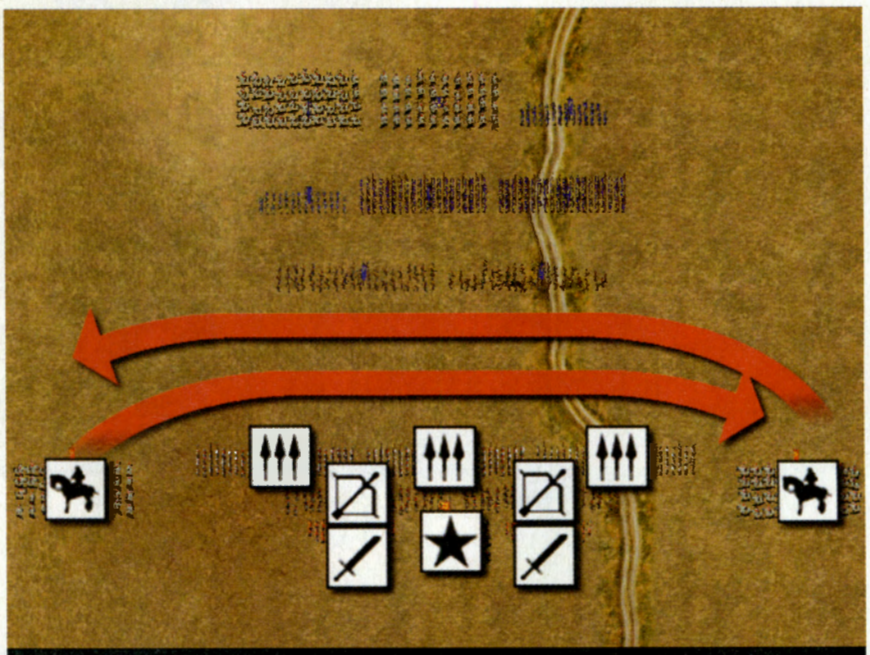
INQUISITORS: Use inquisitors to sit in regions that are vulnerable to revolt. If the region is feeling unhappy, the inquisitors will often deal with the problem by massacring the unruly mob and preventing the revolt!

CRUSADES: You can use crusades tactically in a number of ways. Early in the campaign, while you're still building up your armies, build as many crusades as you can and send them to the nearest destinations available. This way, once the destination region has been conquered, you'll have a new army of advanced units at your disposal. This tactic can also be used to extend the borders of your empire (provided you're able to send crusades to these regions).

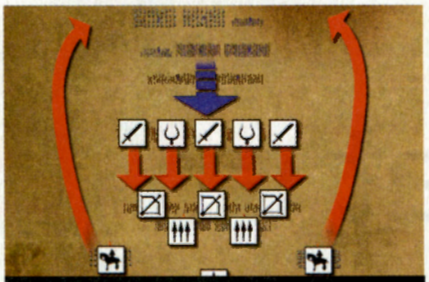
Another ploy is to choose destinations that require you to move through regions that are controlled by your allies. This way, you'll gather your allies' troops into your crusade and weaken their armies. (Hell, you'll want to kick their butts sooner or later — may as well make the job easier!)



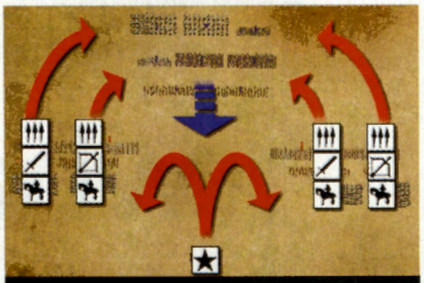
Use crusades to conquer regions and weaken your allies.



A modified Cavalry Charge, the Cavalry Sweep has your cavalry sweep across enemy flanks.



You'll look like a wuss, but the Feign Retreat formation is great for spreading the enemy thin.



You know how in *Star Trek*, enemies always want the captain? That's why Split Advance is genius.

the enemy frontline and then, just prior to engaging them, pull away and run back down the hill. You'll undoubtedly be taking heavy arrow fire by now, so try to make sure that the enemy takes the bait the first time around. If the enemy is reluctant to follow, clicking the "rout" icon for these infantry and peasants will make the enemy more likely to leave their positions to "mop up" your routing units. Your archers can fire volleys into the enemy as they charge down the hill, while your spearmen prepare to engage them. Your cavalry is in a position to be able to run flanking maneuvers against the now-weakened enemy army on top of the hill — or to bolster the defense at the foot of the hill.

■ SPLIT ADVANCE (OF)

This strategy is slightly harder to execute than many of the others. The idea is to use your general unit as bait to suck the enemy army into a vice-like trap. Split your army into two evenly balanced forces, and leave your general unit on his own in the middle. An unprotected general is a very tempting prospect for an enemy army. Concealing units in any nearby forests will also be a massive help in the deception. By gradually advancing your general toward the center of the enemy army, it should be relatively easy to draw some of the enemy units off a hill. Meanwhile, your two flanking forces should be advancing slowly along the flanks (keeping as wide a berth as possible), ready to spring the trap. Try to drag as much of the enemy army off the hill as possible before using your large number of flanking units to attack the enemy army from both sides. Your general unit is on horseback and should have little trouble rejoining the battle at a suitable point as soon as his deception job is completed. PCG

For more *Medieval* hints, tips, and strategies, visit the Total War forums at *www.totalwar.com*.

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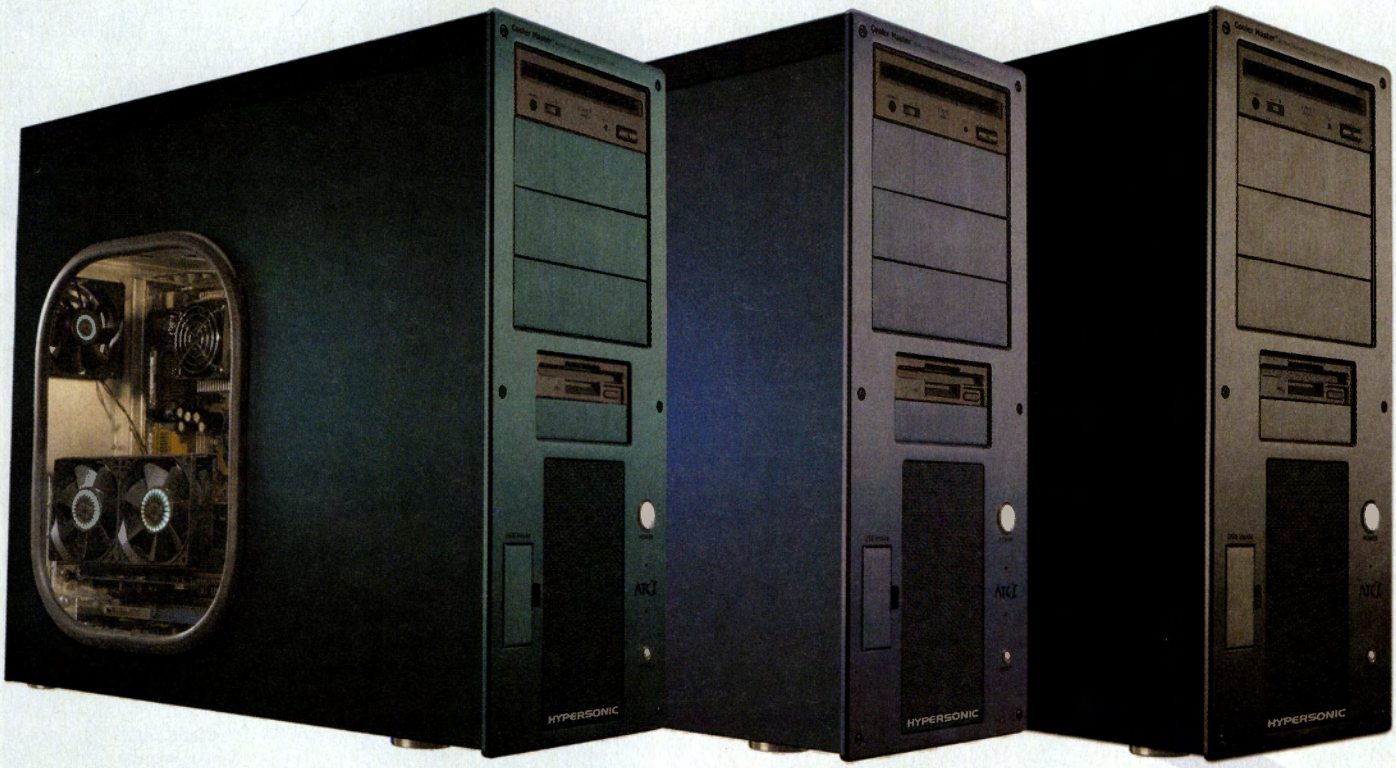

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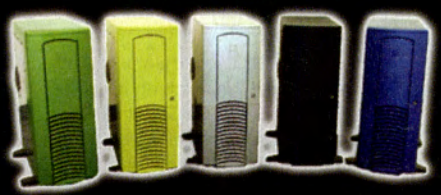

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Battlefield 1942

Axis or Allies, veteran or new recruit, you'll want some help in *this* war. Backed by an army of game testers, *BF 1942* Lead Tester Dave McCormick delivered these tips and tactics for battlefield supremacy.

Remember, when sniping a far-off target, aim above him, since your bullets descend with distance.

It may take a full clip, but an assault troop *can* shoot down a plane. Crouch and aim for its engine.

If that were an enemy tank, you'd want to aim for its back, where it's more vulnerable.

UNIT TIPS

→ SCOUT

■ Used primarily for sniping, the scout needs to lead targets with his sniper rifle, and aim *above* someone who's far away (due to the game's real-world physics). When sniping, hold down your right mouse button to stay zoomed-in on your target.

■ As a scout, you can set a camera, then run away and do something else — para-troop in to the surveyed spot, maybe, or be using artillery to shell this area.

→ ASSAULT

■ Side-strafing affects the assault guy's aim less than moving forward, so when engaging enemy personnel, move side-to-side or go prone (to tighten aiming) and shoot up at them.

■ Worried about running out of ammo? Careful: reloading mid-clip makes you lose bullets. In some situations, it may be faster to swap kits with a dead soldier — though you risk getting an inferior loadup.

■ Machine guns can't hurt tanks, so you'll need to use grenades. Three grenades will damage a light tank, not destroy it. (Land your grenades directly under a tank to do maximum damage.) Instead of attacking a tank head-on, stay in its blind spot. Also, hit the Enemy Armor Spotted signal to show your guys where a tank is on their mini-map.

■ Assault troops can shoot down aircraft by hitting their engine (it'll take you a full clip). To boost your accuracy, go prone and use sustained bursts.

A great combo: a medic and an anti-tank troop. The medic heals 'em both, the AT guy engages vehicles.

→ ANTI-TANK

■ If firing the anti-tank gun at a far-off target, aim high, since your shot will descend.

■ One hit with the anti-tank gun in the back of a light tank will destroy it. It'll take you four shots to the front, and about five shots (a full clip) if you're at an angle.

■ The anti-tank gun isn't as effective against personnel, as it doesn't do much splash damage — a guy with a BAR will kill you. Pick your battles, or switch to a pistol or grenade against assault guys.

■ Pick a vantage point from which to get the drop on guys. If you're on an ammo dump, you can reload while firing at tanks. If a guy's coming at you in a plane, go out in the open and move left to right, and while the plane's trying to get the drop on you, shoot him down. Even a glancing shot may set his engine on fire, which will sink him.

→ MEDIC

■ The obvious advantage of a medic: If you get in a fight, you can heal friends and then heal yourself (a huge bonus, since it means you don't have to find a medicine cabinet). So you can shoot someone, get cover and heal, and then come back to finish him off.

■ The medic isn't very good at long-range combat. When fighting personnel, get close and lay into a guy using sustained bursts. The medic's gun will damage a jeep and APC, and do a little bit of damage to artillery, but it won't really hurt tanks or planes. (It's almost impossible for a medic to shoot down a plane.)

■ Medics and engineers are both team players who aren't super-great alone — they should hang out near assault guys. A medic can get behind a really good player and heal

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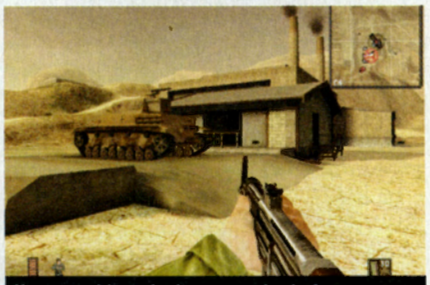
On Gazala, use a jeep to quickly reach the valuable airfield in the northwest corner of the map.

The medic's gun isn't very good for long-range combat, so you'll want to fight in close quarters.



If your tank's parked on a repair platform, you can fight while receiving steady repairs.

GENERAL TIPS

- If your main weapon is out of ammo, or you don't want to waste its ammo on unsuspecting snipers, use your knife or pistol!
- When on foot, quickly descend a hill by jumping and then hitting the prone key to slide down the hill. Do it right, or you'll take damage.
- In buildings, run up stairs backward and nail guys trying to snipe you from behind top of stairs.
- Knowing team commands is crucial for coordinating your side. The F4 key is particularly key, as it tells your guys which flag to attack.
- The mini-map is also a crucial part of gameplay. Learn how to use coordinates, so you can tell people where you are and vice versa. Take advantage of the three degrees of zoom. And remember: (1) If a vehicle disappears on the map, that means an enemy just took it — careful! (2) In CTF games, an enemy who's got your flag will be visible on the map, and you can tell whether he's on foot or in a vehicle by how fast he's moving. (3) To see the battleground all the time (particularly in CTF games), you can maximize the map and put its transparency at 100%, so you can still play the game.

him continually while the player is killing people and taking lots of damage. Many of the game's testers, for example, like to travel in pairs of medic and anti-tank guys, with the AT troop fighting vehicles and the medic fighting personnel while healing both soldiers.

→ ENGINEER

- The engineer is a great unit if you're driving vehicles a lot (or if you're with a squad of vehicle-drivers), since you can repair vehicles. By himself, he's particularly useful in a tank because he can repair and fight, repair and fight.
- Remember, when your engineer's deactivating mines, crouch while using your wrench on them: that way, they'll be added to your inventory.
- Some sly tactics for using detonation packs: (1) Put det. pack(s) in a jeep, drive it toward an enemy tank or soldiers at full speed, then jump out and detonate the det. pack(s). (2) Use the engineer as an anti-tank unit by putting det. packs on the back of an unsuspecting enemy tank, running around a corner, and then setting 'em off! (3) Put det. packs under a vehicle when the enemy's about to capture a base. When they capture the base, they'll jump in the vehicle, and then you can blow it up and take back the base!
- In a single-player game, if you're driving a tank and you encounter AI-driven tanks, exit your tank. Your being on foot will cause the enemy AI to switch tactics and fight you as personnel, for which they'll use machine guns (which won't hurt your tank). Now repair your tank, jump back in, and blow up the enemy tanks!

VEHICLE TIPS

First, a few general vehicle tips: (1) Running over people with vehicles is a good tactic. If you're an engineer, you can also bait someone with an empty vehicle and then use a detonation pack to blow them up. (2) Holding down the Use key will put you in a vehicle as soon as you're in range of it — you don't need to pause and then enter it. (3) Hangars repair/resupply tanks and planes, so if you hang out in one while in one of these vehicles, you're in a great spot. (4) When a vehicle is damaged, you can park it by an important spot on a map (e.g., a flag) and then jump out and, when the enemy's close, shoot the vehicle to destroy it and take out nearby enemies.

→ APC

- Because being in an APC fills your health and ammo, it's a great "refueling" station for your troops. If you're not using an APC to move troops around, put it in a spot where your troops can reach it.
- The APC is a great assault vehicle if you fill it up with troops — say, two anti-tank guys, two assault troops, a medic, and an engineer. (You might swap the engineer for another anti-tank guy, as you may not have time to repair the APC if you're heading straight into a firefight.)

→ JEEP

- Obviously, the jeep is great as a quick transport for getting you to the front lines — or helping you reach much-sought-after locations in a hurry, like the airfield in the northwest corner of Gazala.
- You can destroy a tank by ramming it with a jeep — though it's hard to jump out before impact, since the jeep will lose

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EXD2PCG1Y

To avoid the hassles of coordinating your efforts, have one guy man an artillery piece.

It's fun manning a tank's top-mounted machine gun, but be careful: you're easy sniper fodder.

To counteract the tank's limited view, use the F10/F11 keys (if your server lets you) to look around.

momentum quickly when you exit. (This tactic is good in Wake Island, for example, when your side is pinned down on one of the island's horns and the enemy has all the tanks.)

→ ARTILLERY PIECE

- This vehicle is a good one for a scout: He can place a camera so that it's watching a remote area, and then take an artillery piece and bombard that area, using the camera to see where the artillery strike is landing. (It's best to have one guy drive *and* shoot the artillery piece, so you can coordinate your assault.)
- When positioning an artillery piece, find a target area that's enemy-rich — like an enemy spawning ground or base — so you can do the most damage. If you put an artillery guy in some mountains covering an airbase, for example, you can cripple the enemy's air game because they won't be able to spawn planes. Use this tactic in conjunction with a plane to cripple the enemy's *ground* game, and you can dominate the map.
- Remember, the artillery piece is a weak vehicle: roughly two anti-tank rounds or one shot from a tank can destroy it. On the plus side, it has a *huge* firing range — on a map like Guadalcanal, possibly the whole map!

→ TANK

- Which tank to pick? A light tank is faster and more maneuverable, while a heavier tank can take more damage.
- Driving tips: While moving, cut to third-person view using F10 or F11 (if a server lets you) so you can see better; these keys are also helpful for taking a quick look at what's going on around you in mid-battle. Pay attention to the turret-direction meter in the bottom-middle of the screen, since your tank and turret move independently. You can take advantage of this independent movement if your tank is tilting down a hill by firing a shot — the backlash will right your tank.
- When driving a tank, don't just roll into a battle willy-nilly: scope out the scene, pick your targets, and then move forward steadily. You never know if an anti-tank guy is hiding nearby, and he can easily take advantage of your blind spot. Do keep moving to avoid guys chucking grenades, who are harder to spot than anti-tank guys since they may not be out in the open. Because the back of your tank is its weakest area, keep its back pointed toward places where enemies generally won't come from.
- Along those cautionary lines, if you're in a tank and you spot a jeep coming toward you, back up (in case it's going to ram you) and then use your front machine gun plus one big shot from your main gun to take him out.
- See a plane? If you're in a light tank, use one of the tank's machine guns (front or top) against him, or jump out and fight him. If you're in a heavy tank — which is particularly vulnerable to planes — you'll definitely want to jump out and fight the plane (or drive crazy to avoid him), unless you're an engineer, in which case you can stay in the tank and repair it while fighting.
- Join up with another tank — together, you're almost unstoppable, as one guy can cover another from troops or other tanks. Also, if an engineer is in one or both tanks, they'll usually survive firefights.
- Worried about mines? If your tank rolls over them very slowly, they won't blow up.
- Park a tank on an ammo dump to constantly refill your ammo.

→ AIRCRAFT

- Which plane to pick? The fighter is much more agile than the dive bomber, but the bomber can do more damage to ground targets. Also, the bomber has two seats, so you can get a buddy manning the gunner seat while you fly — or, if you're flying solo and an enemy plane is behind you, you can switch to the gunner seat and try to shoot him down.
- Aircraft are great against ground forces. Your machine guns will damage any vehicle — tanks, Higgins boats, and so on. For maximum damage, use machine guns on a ground enemy, then drop bombs on him: line up target, drop bombs, and then pull up. (Be careful not to dive into your dropped bombs!) After bombing, use F11 to see what you've hit.
- Look for heavy tanks when you're in a plane — they're easy targets since they don't have top-mounted guns. If you're flying near the water and you see a submarine's periscope, use the Enemy Armor Spotted command to alert your destroyers to the sub's presence on their map.
- Parachuting tactics: (1) On Conquest maps, you can fly over an area and drop yourself or your co-pilot into, say, the enemy's base. Parachuting gives you a good drop on the enemy, who won't always think to look *up* for personnel. (Try this tactic on the Market Garden map.) (2) You can open your parachute when you're pretty close to ground if need be — say, if you're being fired upon — and still live: the game is more forgiving than real life here. (3) You can jump out of a plane and, using a parachute or not, land safely in a vehicle — i.e., your abandoned plane crashes while you (holding down your Use key) plop into a vehicle and are ready to fight, having survived a fall that might normally have killed you. Since you don't fall straight toward the ground when you jump out of a plane, this trick is tough to master — but super-rewarding if pulled off successfully.
- Want to swap places with someone on the ground? Perform a plane-switch by coming in low and fast right above the person on the ground, and then jump out while the other person (who's holding their Use key) jumps in and flies off. To pull off this stunt, you'll need to pull up a bit before you reach the person on the ground because the plane drops when you jump out; also, the person jumping in needs to pull up immediately.
- Along the same lines: In capture-the-flag games, if someone on the ground has the flag and is holding down their Use key, you can fly real low over them in a bomber and pick them up. Another good CTF tactic is to use a plane to attack a flag-carrying jeep — fly right at the jeep kamikaze-style, and before you hit it, drop bombs for double damage, to ensure you take him out.
- More plane tips: (1) When flying, don't fly straight up, or you'll stall. (2) Planes can fly low over an aircraft carrier and resupply without landing. (3) Master the rudder to help you bank and turn. (4) Hitting F9 on some servers will ditch cockpit mode, giving you a better view while flying.

→ DESTROYER

- Your sea vehicles are crucial spawn points and moving-artillery points — protect them!
- Keep the destroyer moving to avoid fire

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from enemy planes, but be careful not to ground the ship — watch out on your map for the light-yellow area around the shore.

■ If you're piloting/firing guns on a destroyer and you're worried about planes attacking, you'll want to be an assault guy, so you can jump out on top of the ship and fight enemy planes with your machine gun (since the destroyer doesn't have anti-aircraft guns). It's also good to be an engineer if you're onboard a destroyer, since you can repair the ship as you go along.

→ HIGGINS BOAT

■ The main use of Higgins boats is getting you to shore. They're not really effective as a weapon, since they've got only a small mounted gun and it'd be too much work for an engineer to load a Higgins boat with dynamite and try to use it to ram a destroyer.

■ Reminder: use the up/down arrows to raise/lower the boat's ramp.

An anti-aircraft gun is easily the best weapon against planes, says Dave. Make this bomber pay!

MAP TIPS: STALINGRAD

Note: All of these tips are for Conquest mode (the scenario of choice for *PCG* editors).

Before getting into tips for Stalingrad and Iwo Jima, here are some general tips for *all* maps: (1) Learn where all the medicine cabinets and ammo bins are, so you can resupply quickly. (2) Learn to recognize enemies' uniforms, not just their color tags, so you can tell what team they are by, say, their feet. This'll help you in close-quarters fighting.

Also, on all Assault maps, it's crucial to capture the main base that has vehicles. Once you've got it, your guys will spawn there and you'll have doubled your weaponry (vehicles and such).

→ GENERAL TIPS

■ You're going to need at least three guys — probably more if lots of people are on the server — guarding Stalingrad's central flag. But don't cluster up too much, or one grenade could take you all out.

■ If you're in a big game, hide out in non-main thoroughfares (say, around the sides, or in corners that people run by) and just pick people off. Stay in the same general area, varying your specific location.

■ Both tanks and mounted guns near enemy bases are more important in big games because you can take out tons of people with them before dying.

■ Tanks and vehicles are precious on this map — but you need to keep 'em. Skirt around the edges of the map and lob in fire. Stay in the driver's seat, eyeing buildings for snipers. Also, train tracks damage tanks, so go over them slowly. Keep out in the open and find some infantry to take out.

■ Assault guys are handy on this map since your grenades will destroy tanks (especially if you're with a buddy) and the assault rifle is best against personnel. Also, you can snipe with an assault guy on this map since you won't be shooting enemies from very far away.

■ Medics are good on this map (and on Berlin) because everyone is concentrated near each other, with few vehicles.

■ Since this level doesn't have artillery, there's not as much need for the scout class. Engineers aren't particularly useful on Stalingrad, either, given its dearth of vehicles.

■ You might want to keep your vehicles fresh — particularly if you don't have an engineer — by destroying damaged vehicles so that they respawn.

■ The buildings with planks overlooking the middle flag are great sniping spots. You can see people in other buildings (to snipe them) and guard the flag from there. Just don't let anyone see you entering a building.

■ Firing under train cars at people's feet is a sly way to kill 'em.

■ Spawn-camping is very effective on this level. Have a couple of guys do it while others pick up flags.

■ The limited number of vehicles on this map means that if one of your guys takes an enemy tank, you'll deprive them of a vital vehicle.

While parachuting, look for targets you can get the drop on and vehicles you can drop into.

Stalingrad's full of great snipe points. Put a guy up here and a tank nearby, and that flag's covered.

→ ALLIED TIPS

■ Your side is more easily spawn-camped on this level because you have chokepoints.

■ To hold the flag nearest your base, you just need one guy at the top of the stairs in the flag building to nail guys coming up stairs.

■ In a tank, Dave likes to swing around the outside left edge of the map (west) because it's harder to spot you.

■ Good snipe spot: top of building directly west of northernmost flag. From this spot you can oversee northernmost and middle flags, plus get Axis that are coming from their base.

→ AXIS TIPS

■ It's harder for your side to be spawn-camped on this level because you spawn in spreadout places.

■ To hold the flag nearest your base, you just need one guy at the bottom of the stairs (by the ammo bin) in the flag building — he can shoot guys entering the building while constantly refilling his ammo.

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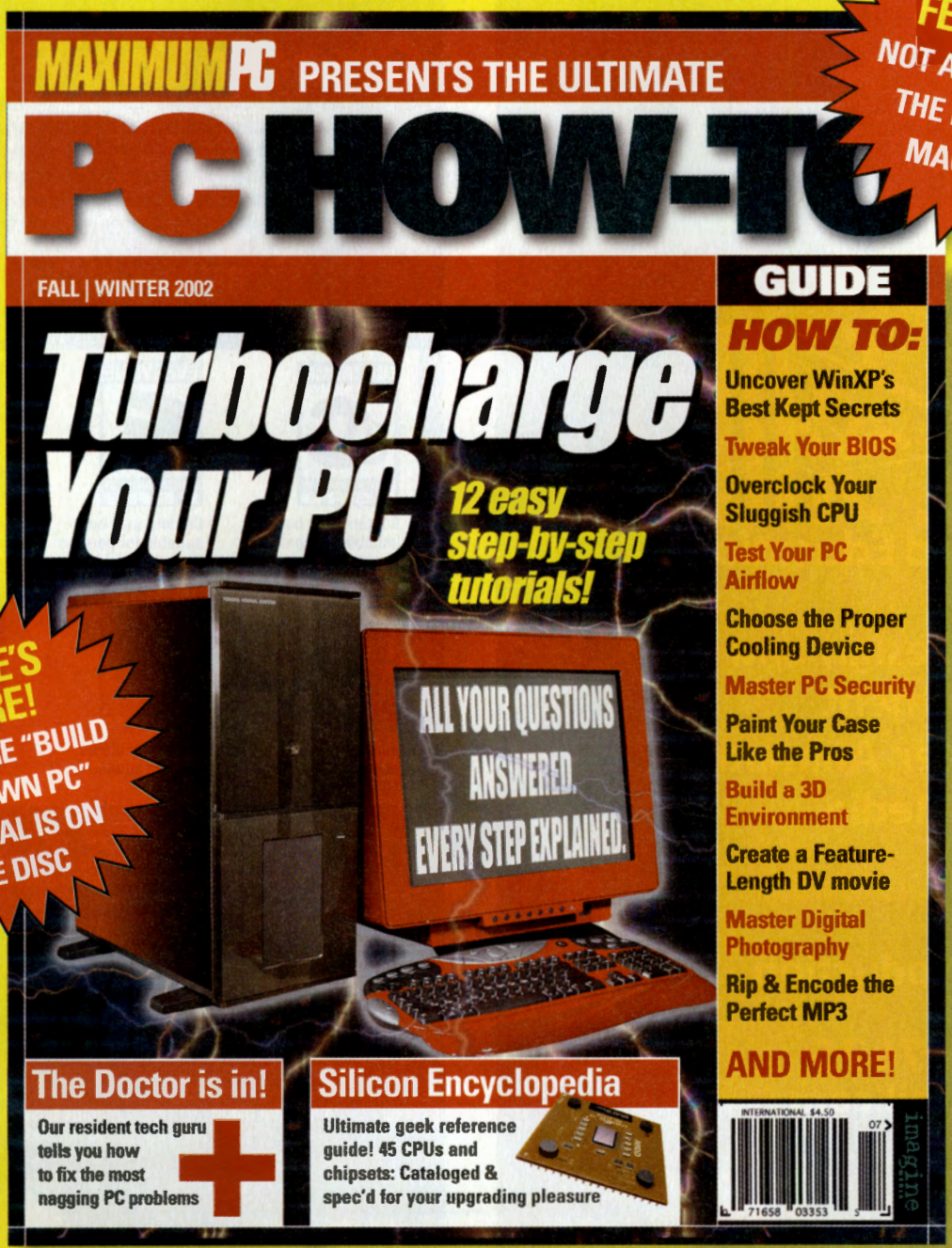

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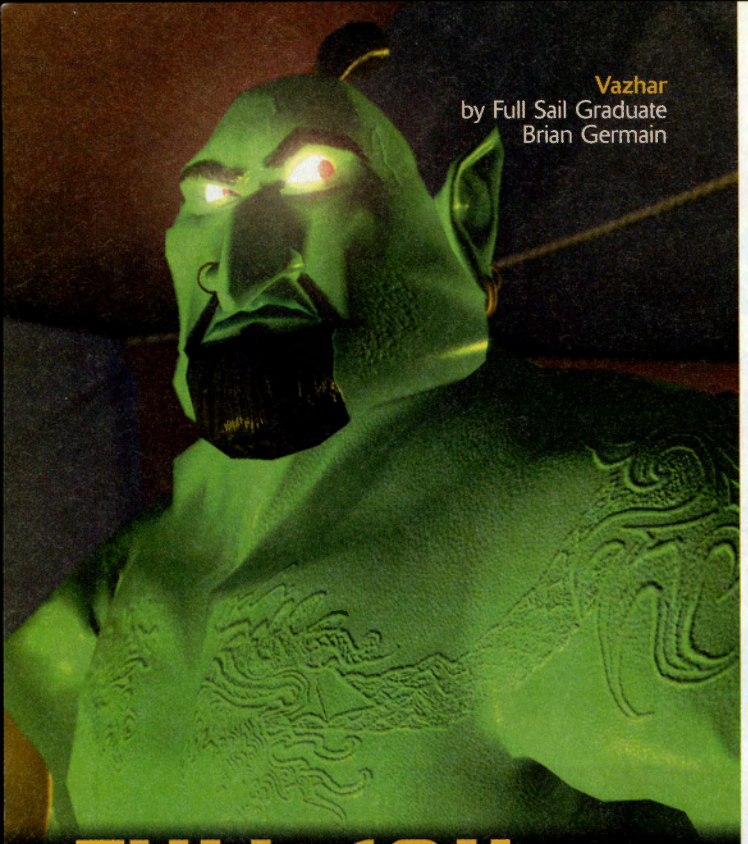

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BATTLEFIELD 1942

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 164

■ Good snipe spot: building with exposed stairs, east of the middle and southernmost flags. From this spot, you can oversee both flags, plus pick off Allies while they move out from their base.

■ North of the Allied base, between the base and the southernmost flag, is a gap in a wall that's also good for sniping (lay prone). When an Allied tank rolls by, shoot it in the back with an anti-tank guy!

MAP TIPS: IWO JIMA

→ GENERAL TIPS

■ Dave's favorite tactic on this map is to start out by quickly grabbing a plane, flying to a flag that's not by any enemy vehicles (i.e., few people will spawn there), and grabbing it. He also likes to fly around and grab different vehicles, to back-door the enemy. (For example, without even grabbing vehicles, an Allied player can fly in to the southernmost tip and attack the Axis from the back — though Dave suggests using this tactic later in the game, as you'll want to attack the middle of the island initially.)

■ Middle area of map (by two grab-able flags) is super-important.

■ People like to snipe from the large hill on the map: It's a good Axis point especially, since you can hit destroyers from there. You can also shoot down planes and train the anti-destroyer guns on the area south with a bunch of flags. Once the other team gets this hill, your team should use a plane to take out the AA gun, then keep bombing the hill to eliminate troops camped up there. Note: If you're flying and you don't see any dots up on top of the hill (on your mini-map), that means the weapons up there are all occupied — careful!

■ Assault guys and scouts are the best classes on this map. Engineers aren't as effective on Iwo Jima since chokepoints are few and it's not an easy map on which to mine. It's hard to be anti-tank on this level because there aren't many hiding places — though it's good to have an anti-tank guy against enemy armor. Medics are hard to use on this map, too, since their weapons aren't good at long range. If you use medics or anti-tank guys, use them together, as on Stalingrad.

■ The anti-aircraft gun is definitely the best weapon against planes. The AA gun in the west-middle of the island is a favorite spot for both teams. As the Axis, you can use it to take out Allied planes coming straight from the carrier. As the Allies, you can grab it and lay into the Axis base.

■ Shore batteries are good for shooting enemies on the beach — turn them inward.

■ Don't ignore the *sides* of the island: you can use them to sneak up on people (say, on the Axis airfield).

→ ALLIED TIPS

■ The flag on the beach that the Axis can't grab is a good rallying point for the Allies. Get one guy in a tank and others as, say, assault troops to run with him.

■ Have a scout overlook the southernmost flag, set up artillery shelling that area, and then switch to another class if need be.

■ In games with few people, don't stay in the destroyer — it takes away one person from capturing flags, and you need *everyone*! In games with more people, though, use the destroyer for sure. Make sure you have a scout check out the island so you can use secondary fire to shoot the destroyer guns more effectively.

→ AXIS TIPS

■ Team up with planes and shore batteries to wail on the destroyer.

■ The southern point of the island is extremely important to hold because without it, you don't have any planes.

■ Start out spawning in the north or south of the map so you can win the middle areas.

■ In a big game, defense is more important than offense. Even if you can just hold on to one last point, hold out until some of your guys can go around the Allies' backdoor and capture something.

■ Leave one tank at your airfield and roll others into the middle of the map. It'll be hard for troops to grenade you because the map's so open, so you can take 'em out. When you're in a tank, you can hang out on the repair platform in your base and the enemy will often need two guys to take you out. PCG

Want more? For Dave's tips on *Battlefield*'s Kharkov and Gazala maps, go to *www.pcgamer.com*.

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The PCG Crossword — Answers

ACROSS 1. Atari, 5. Hawk, 6. *Flanker*, 8. *PC Gamer*, 10. GeoMod, 14. Schilling, 16. Krug, 17. Shivans, 18. *Vice City*, 20. Queynos, 21. *Crimson Skies*, 24. Britney, 28. Nerve, 29. *Mortyr*, 30. *Fallen*, 31. Railgun, 32. Tsunami, 33. Faerun DOWN 2. Ranger, 3. Jan, 4. Dragons, 5. *Halo*, 7. *Nations*, 9. *Must Die*, 11. Dunya, 12. Killcreek, 13. *Mercenary*, 15. Live, 19. Best Buy, 22. Raven, 23. Cartman, 25. *Evolva*, 26. *Return*, 27. HOTAS

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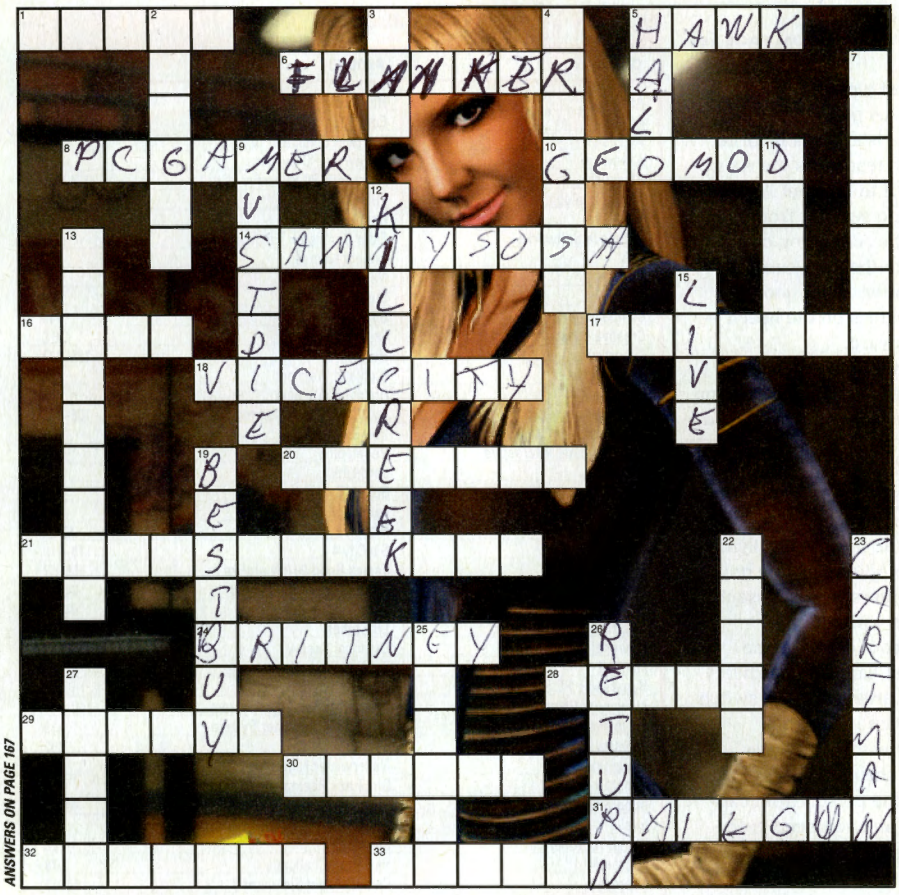

ANSWERS ON PAGE 167

THE PCG CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Brand name under which *Neverwinter Nights* was released
5. Avian skater who stars in his own Activision game series
6. Su-27_____
8. The World's Best-Selling PC Games Magazine
10. *Red Faction*'s game engine
14. *High Heat 2003* cover model
16. First hostile creatures you encounter in *Dungeon Siege*
17. Overarching enemy race in *Descent: FreeSpace*
18. *Grand Theft Auto III* sequel hopefully coming to PC next year
20. Westernmost human city in *EverQuest*
21. Microsoft's "red dawn" game
24. Diva superstar (shown above) whose *Dance Beat* was a misstep
28. Developed multiplayer mode for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*
29. Alternate-history WWII FPS released by Interplay in 1999
30. Before *Buffy*, The Collective developed *DS9: The* _____ for PC
31. *PCG* editor Billy was once felled by this *Quake III* weapon
32. A killer wave or a stinky game when followed by *2265*
33. Continent in *Icewind Dale II*

DOWN

2. *America's Army* 75th _____ Regiment
3. Name of Kyle Katarn's girlfriend (rhymes with Dan)
4. What the evil cult in *Pool of Radiance* worships (plural)
5. Xbox hit currently being ported to the PC by Gearbox
7. Brian Reynolds' *Rise of* _____ will be released in 2003
9. *Space Bunnies* _____*!*
11. Playable human mercenary in *Aliens vs. Predator 2: Primal Hunt*
12. Stevie Case's deadly *Quake*-playing alias
13. Expansion pack for *Descent 3*
15. Sound Blaster's premium sound card before the Audigy
19. Electronics (and games) retailer with alliterative name
22. *Quake IV* developer
23. *South Park* character featured on our January 1999 cover
25. Interplay's third-person action game that lets you tinker with your heroes' DNA
26. *Microsoft* _____ *of Arcade* (Hint: It had *Dig Dug*)
27. New-ish Thrustmaster flightstick

NEXT MONTH HOLIDAY 2002

You want reviews, right? And you're used to us having them before any other mag. It's because we care more. Well, next issue we're keeping that review love coming with the world-exclusive review of Ensemble Studios' *Age of Mythology*. If you see any "preview" coverage on magazine racks come early November, leave it there. Why? Because our story will be worth the wait.

PC GAMER

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I can't believe I escaped Bangkok alive. As I ran down Sri Ayudhya Street with my dog at my side, the lobby of the Hotel Chao Phya gutted by fire, the cries of the hundreds of people who lost their lives in the blast trampled through my brain in an intense wave of sorrow. And all that saved me was the image of you, in your red dress, your pearly white skin glistening under the Chiangmai moon, your reflection in the water reaching out to me. I mouthed your name, I think I screamed it aloud, but you couldn't hear me, no one could hear me — the sirens and the rumbling of the tanks drowned out my voice, my mind, as I escaped down the street to my car. And all I could think of was you in your red dress leaving the hotel moments before the blast, before my whole world came tumbling down.

GAVE PEACE A CHANCE.

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