

20 REVIEWS 007: NIGHTFIRE · HARRY POTTER  
DRAGON'S LAIR 3D · ASHERON'S CALL 2

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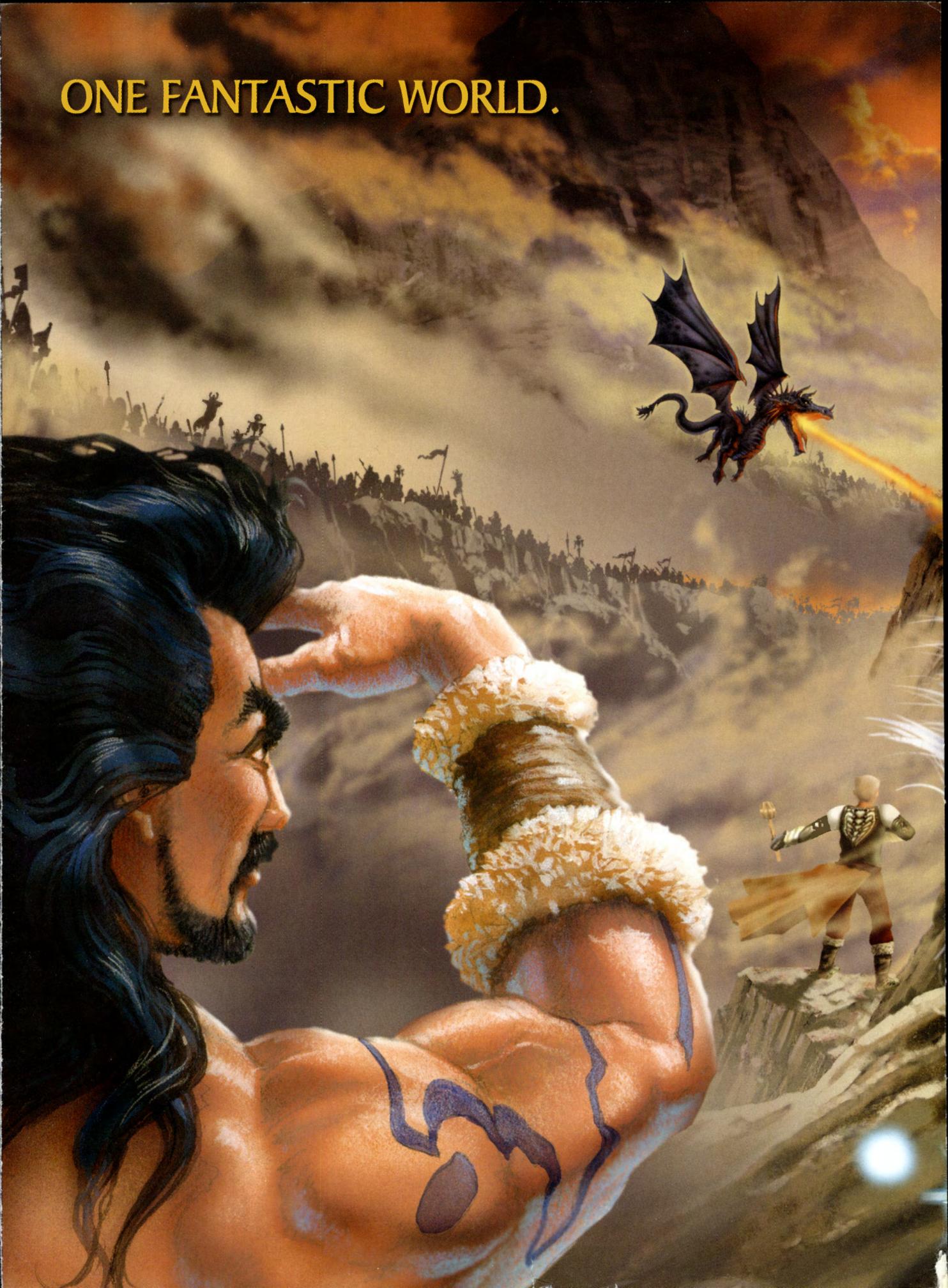
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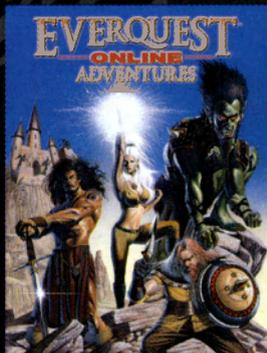


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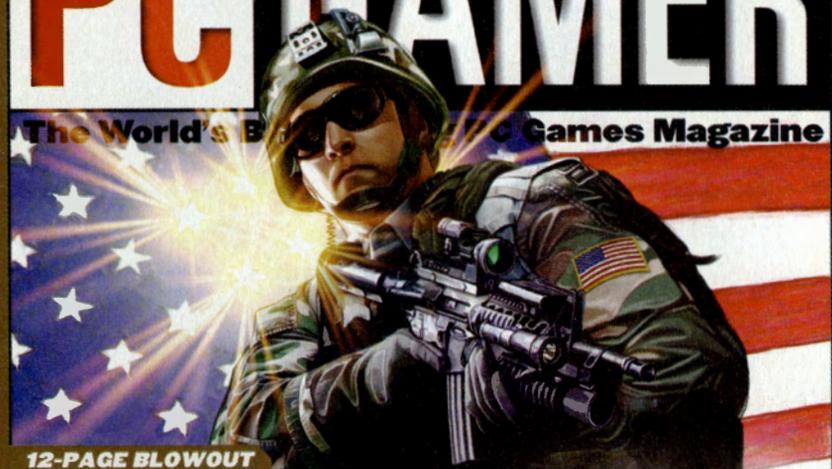
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## PC GAMER

The World's Best PC Games Magazine



12-PAGE BLOWOUT

## WAR GAMES

FIGHT AMERICA'S BATTLES ON LAND, SEA, AND AIR WITH **15** THRILLING GAMES:

- Black Hawk Down ■ America's Army ■ Condition Zero ■ Harpoon 4 ■ Battlefield 1942 add-on
- PLUS: 10 Mods for Ghost Recon, Quake III, Warcraft 4.0, and more!

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World Series 2001 Co-MVP (and hardcore gamer!)

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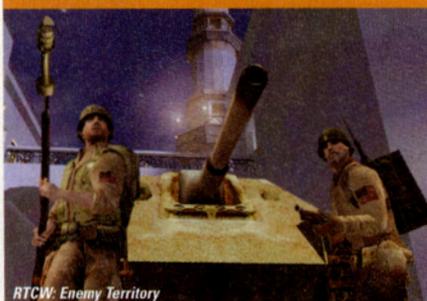
COVER STORY

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The greatest man who ever lived, General George S. Patton, would be grinning with joy at this month's feature, which covers the year's entire crop of military-based games. We've got all the details and screens, and there's something for everyone: *Black Hawk Down* conveys the brutal urban fighting of Somalia; the Cold War-era *Harpoon 4* drips with nuclear tension; futuristic warfare is prophesied in *Söldner*; and *Lock On: Modern Air Combat* offers combat at 36,000 feet. Plus, a hands-on report on *Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome!*

THE 10 BEST  
MODS TO  
DOWNLOAD  
FOR FREE!

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Command Ancient Rome's armies in this promising RTS from the creators of the *Commandos* series.



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Command & Conquer: Generals



**ON THIS MONTH'S PCG CD** Sweet merciful crap! We've got demos for *Warcraft III*, *O.R.B.*, *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries*, and *Black Hawk Down*. Plus, get interactive with your desktop via our EXCLUSIVE *PC Gamer*-themed 3D interface from 3DNA.

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"What if courage and imagination were to become everyday mortal qualities?"



With few exceptions, mainstream media coverage of the games industry has been junk. It's been particularly disgraceful on high-profile web sites that cite strong journalistic credentials but resort to tacky headlines to grab traffic. So, did the industry just

irrevocably change on Nov. 25, 2002? What was so special about that date? *Newsweek* ran a cover story about *The Sims Online*. In itself, this move said two things: (1) PC gaming is a legitimate, serious business, to be discussed and analyzed as a great entertainment medium, and (2) Games can push mainstream magazines to consumers.

A few days later, *Entertainment Weekly* followed suit with its own "Video Game Nation" cover story (featuring an Uncle Sam-decked Lara Croft) that explained the phenomenon of computer and videogaming, and even — perish the thought — had a fairly well-reasoned essay on whether games were "dangerous." *Time* magazine recently devoted a couple of pages to *The Sims Online*, and major newspapers have picked up the buzz, with the *San Jose Mercury News* devoting a couple of pages to *The Sims* and *Counter-Strike*, among others.

So has the games industry finally broken out into the mainstream? We'll see over the coming months if the bean counters at those magazines recorded positive sales figures. (If the games covers didn't sell, we'll not see them again for years — it's the way of the business.) Even if these covers perform well at newsstand — indicating a strong broad consumer interest in the subject — no other games in development have *The Sims'* franchise pedigree to warrant this kind of special coverage, but the precedent has been set.

At worst, all this Maxis coverage has put PCs front and center as a viable gaming platform, and at best, it's opened up powerful eyes to the potential of creating strong, broad entertainment brands via PC gaming. We'll see how this situation shapes out...

In the meantime, Mike Ginicola is receiving a game package for correctly ID'ing last month's line from *The Odd Couple*. I've got a special prize for this month's contest. Name the movie quoted atop this column and send your entry to [ednote@pcgamer.com](mailto:ednote@pcgamer.com), and you could be one of FIVE randomly chosen winners of the highly sought-after *Age of Mythology Collector's Ed!*

*Rob*  
Rob Smith  
Editor-in-Chief

THE HARD STUFF

88 This month Vede reviews ATI's ALL-IN-WONDER 9700 PRO, some booming speakers, and the MP3-tacular iPod. Plus, he has the inside scoop on NVIDIA's newest card, the GeForce FX.



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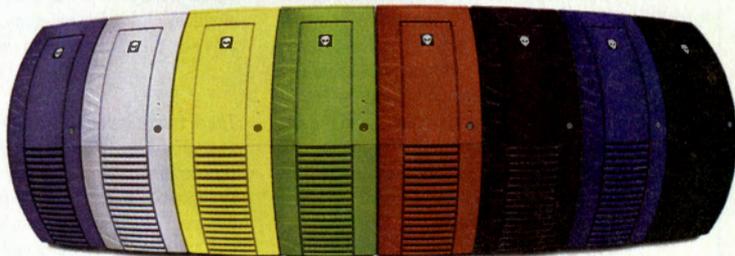
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# Rock of Ages

▶ 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](mailto:letters@pcgamer.com).



Bob's Big Boy stalks the cheats-enabled world of *Age of Mythology*. And is that...Dumbo?

## ▶ AGE OF DRECK

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY HAS TO GO DOWN in history as one of the worst RTS games. Where else can 10 towers and three strongholds behind six rows of walls be defeated by 12 guys carrying telephone poles? If I hadn't spent \$50 on this game, it'd be a frisbee right now. And the AI is terrible. Why in the (expletive) can't you lock your gates? Love it when a computer army is coming at me and my villagers decide they need to open the gate to get the last row of walls up. Yep, just sit right there with the gate open and let them in!

When I'm done playing *AoM*, I can't wait to go to work. Shouldn't it be the other way around? I should've bought a Danielle Steel Collector's Set instead.

— Jeff Smith

Tell us how you really feel, Jeff — don't hold anything back. We hate to tell you, but we like *Age of Mythology*. So do thousands and thousands of other players. By the way, can we borrow your Danielle Steel Collector's Set?

## ▶ COMPUTER VICE

Is *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* coming to the PC?  
— Thowzandz Ovreaders

Officially, Rockstar Games says "no comment." Unofficially (completely guesstimated by us), yes, it will come out, probably around mid-2003. And it'll be worth waiting for.

## ▶ NINJA CONTROVERSY

THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN DEBATED greatly between several of my friends. Which are better, space pirates or

ninjas? I figured who better to settle this age-old debate than one of the wisest groups known to man — computer-game-magazine writers. Just to be clear, the debate is between space pirates and regular ninjas, not space ninjas. I think we can all agree that space ninjas are pretty much better than anything else in the universe, but given how rare they are, they are not being considered in this matter.

— Joshua W.

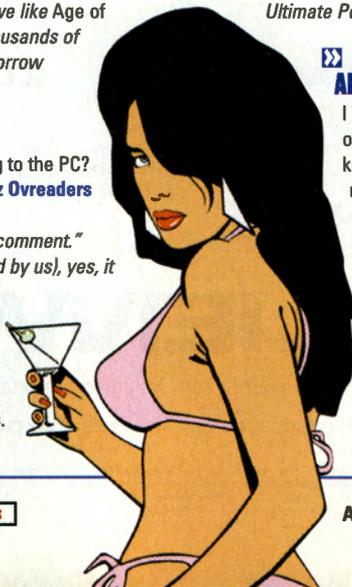
*There really shouldn't be any debate here at all: everyone knows that ninjas are totally sweet. Even regular ninjas (or faux ninjas like Lee Van Cleef in The Master) would have no trouble with space pirates. The technology gap is meaningless when you consider that a ninja can hide in shadows and then leap out for a spinning ninja-star attack of extraordinary magnitude. That is Real Ultimate Power.*

## ▶ OBLIGATORY QUERY ABOUT THEVEDE

I JUST SAW GREG'S OFFICE on TV and I just want to know what keeps him from running away and joining the circus?

— A Concerned Person

*We're really not sure. It seems like his office area is becoming increasingly circus-like anyway. Perhaps it's the stacks of cardboard boxes and chattering monkeys.*



A toast — to *Vice City* on PC!

# ▶ THE FUTURE IS TOLD, RIGHT HERE

PLEASE, OH STAFF OF *PC Gamer*, look in your magic crystal ball and tell me which of these momentous events will occur first:



**1** *Max Payne 2* is released.



**2** *Team Fortress 2* is finally released after all those delays.

**3** Charles Manson is released from prison.



**4** Wilson Phillips makes a comeback from career-death.

**5** Guns N' Roses' Slash makes a comeback from career-death.

**6** John Romero makes a comeback from career-death.



**7** People realize en masse that *RollerCoaster Tycoon* isn't very entertaining.



**8** Joe, your staffer, stops believing every commercial he sees (example: the *Maxim* hair color commercial that shows the men who use it being molested in public by hot women).



Please let me know which events are most likely to actually occur sometime in the future.



P.S. Before Joe retorts that he's molested in public often, let me reiterate the "hot women" part.  
— Ryan James



*It's our opinion that Number 5 has the greatest probability of happening first: Slash remains a phenomenally gifted heavy-metal guitarist, and his return to prominence (either with a resurgent Guns N' Roses or via some new project) could theoretically occur at any time. Then it goes 7, 8, 4, 6, 3, 1. We can't even guess about 2.*

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Terdog, maybe you're mistaking "smashed aerial events" for "floaty physics." *Hot Pursuit 2* is hell on wheels.



## ✘ PORSCHE SHAME!

I JUST GOT A COPY of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2* a few days ago, and all I can say is, What happened to the great driving model that was used in *Porsche Unleashed*? It seems that the cars are more floaty, whereas before they responded to my control on a whim. Now, this switch could be due to the fact that my main video card is seriously behind the times (TNT2, anyone?), but still, I can play the game okay at 640x480.

Also, has EA ever considered making a CFL football game?

— Terdog

*How do you jump from a rant about Hot Pursuit 2's controls to a request for a Canadian Football League game? Terdog, you win our annual "All Over The Map" Award for Letter-Writing. (Oh, and we asked EA about the possibility of a CFL game. A spokesperson said there are currently "no plans" for one.)*

## ✘ COMMANDO CHUCK

I'm quite interested in the picture of Chuck on the toilet in the Gamer's Bathroom portion of your Holiday 2002 Gift Guide.

So, does the guy go commando or something? Because he's sitting there on the toilet playing his little game with his pants around his ankles and there's no underwear anywhere to be seen!

On a lighter note, thanks for the great job on the magazine. I enjoy reading each issue and am grateful to know which games are worth buying for my husband and which ones are not!

— April Klungland



**P.S.** Glad to see that everyone on staff has new photographs. Your editor-in-chief, Rob Smith, looks very nice in his new picture. He's quite a handsome fellow.

*Chuck has given us several explanations for the outcome of that photograph, none of which we particularly want to burden our readers with. Suffice it to say that this issue will remain a controversy for a long time ahead. As for your comment about our editor-in-chief, we want to get ahold of whatever it is you're smoking. [And I want to get ahold of you. — Rob.]*

## ✘ GIVE LINKSTERS MORE CREDIT

I JUST WANTED TO REBUKE Dan Morris' Holiday 2002 Extended Play column. In discussing the merits of the *Links 2003 Championship Courses* add-on, he wrote: "Some might say this purchase is unnecessary, since a wealth of user-created courses will soon be available for free download. That's true enough, but as with most things, you get what you pay for — the quality of the amateur courses is hit-and-miss, and you can spend an awful lot of time sorting through them before finding one that's really well done."

He's absolutely wrong! I've been playing *Links* on the Zone since online play became available, and I guarantee you, you can't play "basic" courses or even the "Championship" edition courses there with any serious players or ladder players. These courses get old pretty fast, and are especially easy compared to what's offered online. There you can find lovingly created courses such as Augusta National, Bethpage Black, and TPC at Sawgrass, as well as most PGA stops. And all of them are very well done — as good as or better than "official" courses. You can also find beautiful fictional courses such as Rivendell, the legendary Elven golf course — probably the most stunning course I've seen.

What's more, these courses are free. In terms of quality, there are some bad courses out there. I'd suggest visiting [www.linkscorner.com](http://www.linkscorner.com) and downloading their Top 20 lists, as well as any four- or five-star courses, and you'll have a quality library of at least 50 courses.

— Chris Storhill

*Chris, you're right about Links Corner — it's one of several great repositories of standout user-created Links courses. (The best and most-frequented is [www.linkscountryclub.com](http://www.linkscountryclub.com).) But let's face it: for every "four- or five-star" course, there*

*are a couple of dogs whose only appreciable feature seems to be their weirdness.*

## ✘ CAN'T SUE OVER ION CANNONS

IN YOUR *UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003* review (Holiday 2002 issue), Chuck Osborn mentioned something about an "Ion Painter" that calls down an ion-cannon strike from an orbital platform. Didn't the original *Command & Conquer* (1995) have the same thing? Is Westwood going to sue the developer (Digital Extremes/Epic Games)? Did I mention PCs rule over consoles?

— Anonymous

*We're pretty sure H.G. Wells mentioned ion cannons at some point in the late 1800s. If game publishers started suing one another over every particle-beam appearance in every game, there would be no one left in America but lawyers.*

## ✘ MINING FOR OLD GAMES

I'M LOOKING FOR THE DOS VERSION of *Syndicate Wars*, a game that was released for PC and PlayStation in 1997. Can you guys tell me a good place to find it, as well as other computer-game classics?

— Tedford White

*eBay ([www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com)) is a good source for collection building and digging up old gems. You can find some great game bargains there from responsible sellers — we recently saw a boxed copy of Black & White going for just \$1, for example.*

## ✘ CORRECTION

IN DECEMBER 2002'S ED NOTE, Rob waffled on about Decipher Games bringing its Star Wars collectible card game online à la Magic Online. Of course, he meant to say The Lord of the Rings CCG. But what do you expect? He's a doofus.

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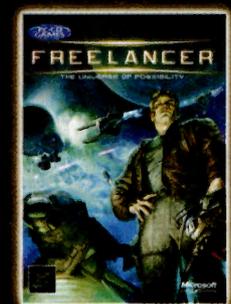
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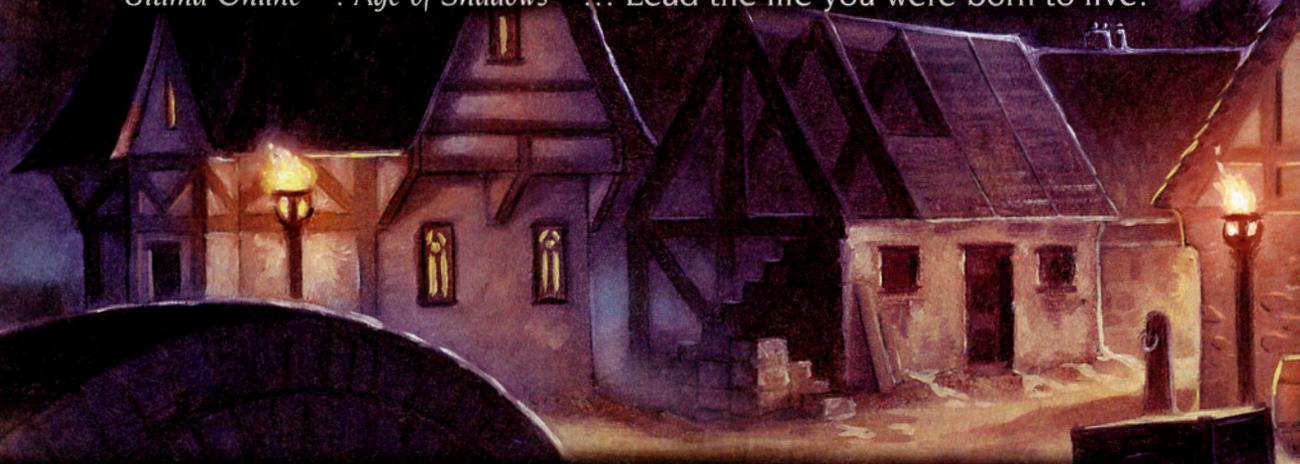


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# RTCW: Enemy Territory

**IN A NUTSHELL**
**More B.J. action, with added buddies for squad-based maneuvers**

The single-player aspect of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* was packed with delicious Nazi killin', but it was the glory of its multiplayer — which placed a premium on squad-based tactics — that made the game a permanent fixture on our PCs. In *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, the first expansion for *RTCW*, those squad-based tactics will be introduced into the single-player portion of the game. This time around, fascist-stomping super-agent B.J. Blazkowicz will have plenty of help eradicating those immoral Nazis.

You'll begin each mission with a number of squadmates, which include Medic, Engineer, Covert Ops, Soldier, and Field Ops. Over the course of a mission you can find and rescue other soldiers, who will then join your squad. An all-new streamlined interface lets you give simple orders to specific squaddies, such as telling the Engineer to blow up a wall or directing the Medic to heal a specific casualty.

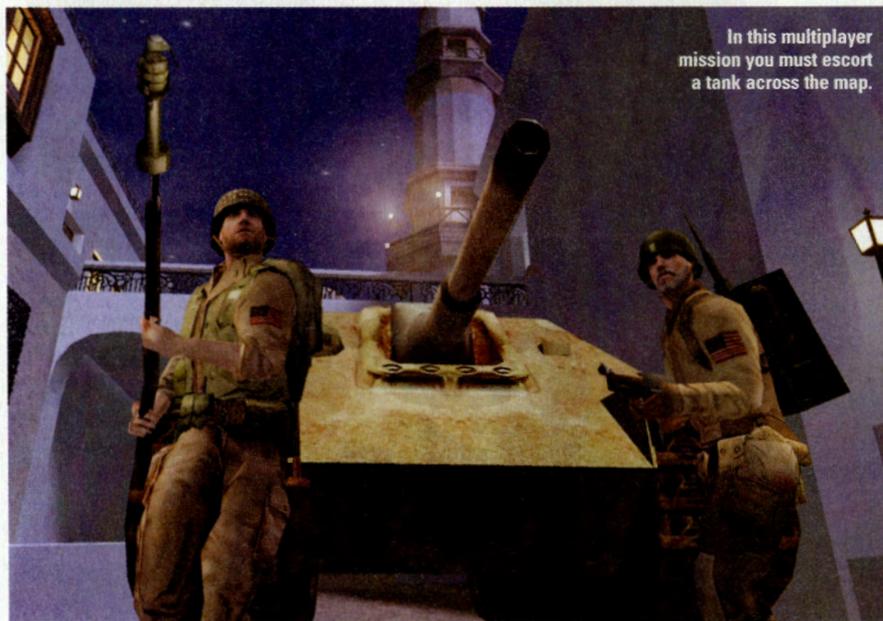
In other situations, squad control involves greater depth, like using the Covert Ops guy to locate and mark landmines, which are then disabled and cleared by the Engineer. In addition, the game's AI promises to be advanced enough so that during firefights the members of your squad will be able to fend for themselves by taking cover and returning fire with lethal ferocity.

"Our end goal," says Kevin Cloud, co-owner of id Software, "is to create a game where the type of action and level design make it so you'll see the action personally as a soldier, but also from the viewpoint of controlling a squad."

To that end, the current plan calls for missions to end in failure if any of your squadmates are killed. But the ultimate goal is for you to keep your group alive not simply because they're vital to the mission's success, but also because you come to care about them as individuals.

"Each squad member will have a distinct personality," explains Ian Davis, CEO of Mad Doc Software, which is developing the game's single-player portion. "We want [your teammates] to be unique and help deliver the story."

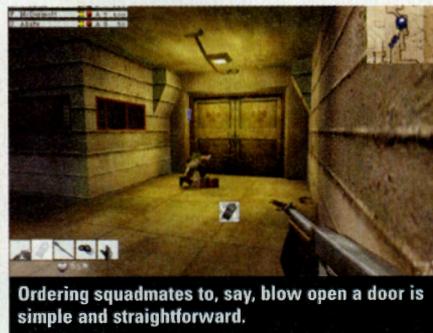
*Enemy Territory* will take place in 1942, before the events of *RTCW*. B.J. is an Army



In this multiplayer mission you must escort a tank across the map.



One section of the single-player game is set in the dank crypts of Egypt.



Ordering squadmates to, say, blow open a door is simple and straightforward.

Ranger and not yet a member of the OSA, and the Nazis control all of Europe. The current plan is for 20 single-player missions (the exact number is TBD) divvied among three acts. Since the game is set *before* those evil Krauts have become empowered by the occult, the number of zombiefied enemies should be significantly less.

The add-on's multiplayer side is being developed by Splash Damage, a new London-based company made of regulars from the mod community. Building on Nerve's superb work in *RTCW*, the expansion's biggest multiplayer enhancements will be the new battle sense and a cam-

panion mode. In campaign mode, three similarly themed multiplayer maps will be grouped together, and during each map you'll be rewarded with battle sense, which expands your skills. For example, veteran soldiers will be able to carry large weapons without incurring a speed penalty, and they'll also be able to detect land mines. And all of these improvements will be present throughout the three-map campaign.

Based on our extensive playtest of *Enemy Territory*, we think it could be one of the rare add-ons that actually outclasses the original game. We'll know for sure later this year. — William Harms

**E.Y.I.**


**CATEGORY:** Action  
**DEVELOPER:** Mad Doc/Splash Damage  
**PUBLISHER:** Activision  
**WWW:** [activision.com/games/wolfenstein/](http://activision.com/games/wolfenstein/)  
**PERCENTAGE COMPLETE:** 60%  
**RELEASE DATE:** First Half 2003

**WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?:** The focus on squad-based combat has us excited, and should give the game a more epic feel. Factor in the multiplayer enhancements, and you've got the makings of a must-have add-on.

**DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD:** Mad Doc made *Star Trek: Armada II* and *Jane's Attack Squadron*, both average, uninspired games. With id looking over its shoulder, though, we think Mad Doc will deliver the goods.

# STAY ALERT!

## Your next step could be your last.

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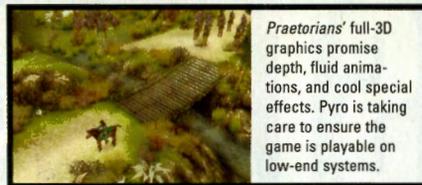
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# Praetorians

**IN A NUTSHELL**
**Take control of Julius Caesar's armies and smash the non-believers**


Praetorians' full-3D graphics promise depth, fluid animations, and cool special effects. Pyro is taking care to ensure the game is playable on low-end systems.

**S**panish developer Pyro made a name for itself with the critically acclaimed tactical strategy game *Commandos*, a chart-topper in Europe. Now the developer is setting its sights on the real-time strategy market with *Praetorians*. Set in Ancient Rome, *Praetorians* promises not only an intriguing setting, but also a rather unique twist on how RTS games are played.

The single-player campaign's 24 linear missions cast you as Julius Caesar, leading Rome in an ongoing fight against those reprehensible Barbarians from Europe and the tribes of Africa. As you'd expect from the creators of *Commandos*, a premium will be placed on scouting the land and situation, and then executing a precise attack.

"Recognizing the importance of terrain for its strategic value is one of the keys to playing *Praetorians* really well," explains Javier Arévalo, the game's project director. "The element of scouting is really dynamic, and a key to winning battles." The missions themselves cover a variety of strategic challenges from ancient warfare, such as attacking enemy strongholds, defending a fortress, or operations such as a mission in which you must rescue Commius, Prince of the Gaul tribe of the Atrebatas and a friend of Rome.

All of the battles will play out realistically, with soldiers lining up to defend fortress walls and towers, and a requirement that ladders and siege towers must be used if you plan to breach an enemy's defenses.

"The great thing is that you can approach the task of defending and attacking a fortress in several ways," Arévalo says, "and it's much more realistic and compelling than the standard method of hitting walls with a sword until they crumble." For spectacle alone, the sight of 500 soldiers or more on each side during some of the larger battles will be impressive.

Unlike most real-time strategy games, which require a healthy amount of resource management, *Praetorians* focuses the action on developing strategies with your units without having to worry about micromanaging a complex economy. And in keeping with the game's



Life in the military involves lots of standing.



Though you'd never know it from this screenshot, sieges promise to be extremely brutal.



Capturing towns will be key to gaining additional forces as you press locals into service.

setting, new units are usually acquired through brute force.

"In some missions you find allies along the way," Arévalo tells us. "Sometimes they remain your allies but you don't get direct control over them, while in other instances they'll join your ranks. The real way to increase your army is by capturing villages that exist in many maps, and then use your general (the Centurion for the Romans, the Barbarians' Chieftain, or the Egyptian Official) to train villagers into military troops."

*Praetorians* will also feature skirmish and multiplayer modes, each with 16 maps.

Multiplayer games will have a maximum of eight players, and you'll be able to command the Romans, Barbarians, or Egyptians. Each side will have special qualities and units in addition to basic grunt-type units. For example, the Romans will have access to gladiators, which boast the ability to wreak heavy damage on enemy units, while the Africans will have Parthian archer cavalry that can shoot while moving.

Pyro is currently polishing the game — balancing the three sides and refining the interface — and setting it up to go head-to-head with both *Age of Mythology* and *C&C: Generals*.  
— Bert Salkmoor

The original Praetorian Guard were the Emperor's private army, the only armed military personnel allowed within the city.

**E.Y.I.**


**CATEGORY:** Real-time strategy  
**DEVELOPER:** Pyro Studios  
**PUBLISHER:** Eidos Interactive  
**WWW:** eidos.com  
**PERCENTAGE COMPLETE:** 90%  
**RELEASE DATE:** Q1 2003

**WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?:** You get to experience the joy of controlling massive, sprawling, bloody Roman-era battles with none of the headaches associated with resource management.

**DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD:** Pyro gave us the *Commandos* series of games, and if the past is a prelude, expect *Praetorians* to be gorgeous, very detailed, and extremely challenging.

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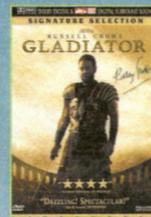
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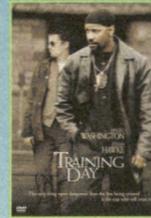
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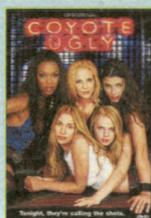
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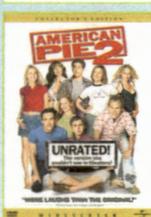
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**MORE TO CHOOSE FROM ON OTHER SIDE. →**



# Sea Dogs II

IN A NUTSHELL

Raise the roleplaying! Lower the ship combat! A pirate's life awaits in this seaworthy sequel.

In modern sea-faring parlance, *Sea Dogs* was a mere blip on the radar screen. A first-person action/roleplaying game about 19th-century pirates, it had the distinct disadvantage of being Bethesda's "other RPG," specifically because it was developed in the shadow of the RPG juggernaut *Morrowind*. What's often forgotten is that *Sea Dogs* (July 2001; PCG rating: 81%) was a pretty good game in its own right.

Now those scurvy buccaneers are setting sail once again. *Sea Dogs II* is set after the events of the first game, although it doesn't pick up from the same storyline. Gone is Nicholas Sharp; instead you'll play as either swaggering rogue Blaze Devin or the gorgeous vixen Danielle Greene. As before, you'll captain a ship on the high seas, forging a career as a bloodthirsty pirate, a peace-loving trader, or even a vigilante for hire.

A major criticism of the first game was the emphasis on ship-to-ship combat over traditional land-based roleplaying. For *Sea Dogs II*, the RPG elements have been beefed up considerably. The port towns will now be filled with accessible taverns, shops, and houses, all inhabited by over 150 colorful characters such as quest-giving NPCs, drunks, prostitutes, and loveable layabouts. You don't even have to dock at a pier anymore: you can land your craft on a beach and look for a hidden jungle cave brimming with loot, or simply take a path into town.

Akella says that the main quest, which will play differently depending on the character you choose, should take around 40 to 50 hours to complete. Solving it isn't the end of the game, though, because NPCs can assign missions indefinitely via a random quest generator.

In addition to the first game's four allegiances (France, Spain, England, or Pirate), *Sea Dogs II* will let you align with island colonies belonging to Holland and Portugal, allowing you to take on country-specific missions and dock at friendly ports. While in town, you can also recruit up to three officers to fight alongside you automatically, whether on land or sea, and hire a rowdy crew to bolster your ship's capabilities.



To find the really cool loot, you'll need to venture into the jungles populating the game's many islands.



The map screen has gotten an overhaul, but sadly, *Sea Dogs II* still features the cowardly French.

The scope of ship battles has been likewise expanded: For the first time, crewmen can be seen manning their stations on deck or even getting blown off the side of a ship during the game's sail-ripping, bow-breaking action sequences. And when it's time to board a rival ship, the original's mano-a-mano captain duel in cramped quarters has been replaced by a full-on swashbuckling skirmish between crews on the ship's deck. Over 30 historically accurate sailing vessels are available for purchase (that's 10 more than last time), and all can be upgraded with the finest in pre-20th century cannonball technology.

Once again, the game will be accompanied by an orchestral score provided by the Moscow Philharmonic. An updated version of Akella's proprietary Storm engine (appropriately named Storm 2) delivers the game's impressive visuals, including dramatic per-pixel lighting and pixel-shading effects that were so vibrant and detailed — weeds sway around your feet when walked through! — that I all but accused the developers of swiping *Morrowind*'s NetImmerse 3D engine.

Alas, all the pirating occurs in the game. Run, don't walk, the plank to get *Sea Dogs II* when it ships in May. — Chuck Osborn

The graphics are looking ultra-swank, compliments of the game's new engine.



CATEGORY: Action/roleplaying  
 DEVELOPER: Akella  
 PUBLISHER: Bethesda  
 WWW: seadogs2.com  
 PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%  
 RELEASE DATE: May 2003

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: In response to *Sea Dogs* critics, Akella has beefed up the RPG elements and augmented the ship-to-ship combat. Better graphics and a random quest generator only make the stew tastier.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Besides *Sea Dogs*, Akella is known for its lifetime naval wargame *Age of Sail II*. It's also a major publisher of self-developed games and foreign imports in its native Russia.

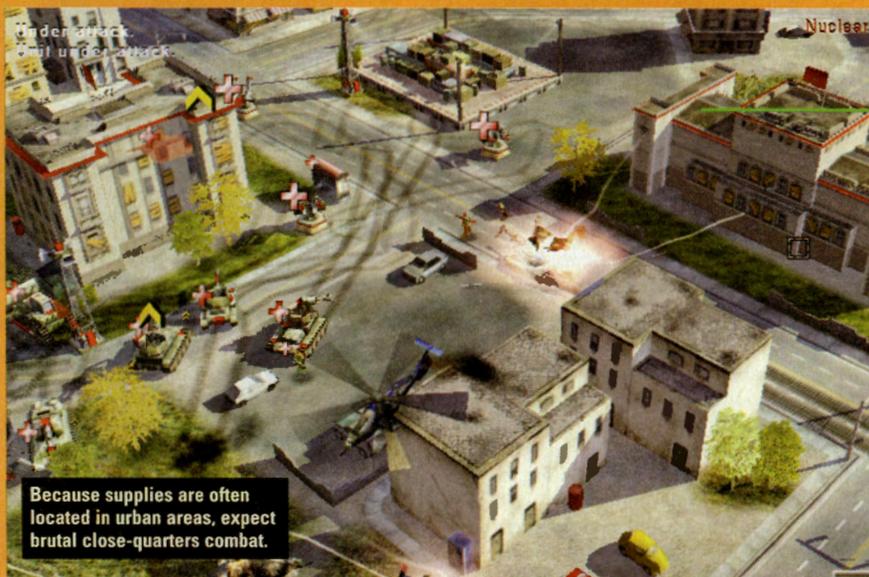
Stede Bonnet, who left his wealthy sugar plantation to become a pirate, was one of the few buccaneers who actually made his prisoners walk the plank.

EXPL.



# 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.



## C&C: GENERALS

Billy and Dan take their conflict to the global battlefield

**T**ake my word for it: There is no greater feeling in the world than lining up an enemy's base (preferably Morris' base, but any sucker will do) and then reducing it to glowing, charred, nuclear ruin. After spending the last few weeks wreaking online havoc, here are my thoughts on *Command & Conquer: Generals'* three factions:

**USA:** You'll have access to top-of-the-line weapons and technology, plus a distinct advantage in controlling the skies via both air defenses and offensive aerial weapons such as stealth planes. I especially enjoyed flattening bases with Tomahawk cruise missiles and calling in a squad of A-10s to unleash a hellish assault on enemy forces.



**DEVELOPER**

EA-Pacific

**PUBLISHER**

EA

**RELEASE DATE**

February 2003

**CHINA:** The Chinese are the only side with access to a nuclear missile, and they can generate nuclear artillery that can decimate the enemy (particularly infantry) in mere seconds. Chinese base defenses are also more developed since they can deploy mine fields

around key buildings. Because they can produce truly destructive weapons, I prefer to play as the Chinese.

**GLA:** The GLA rely on stealth and subterfuge to win, making them the most challenging side to control. They gather resources at a much slower rate than the other two factions, and they don't have aerial weapons; on the flipside, they don't have to construct power plants. A head-on assault gets the GLA nowhere, so it's all about creating bomb trucks (which can morph so they look like any ground unit) and rolling them into the enemy's base, where they unleash a massive explosion flavored with a sprawling toxic twist.

Some of the universal changes from *C&C* lore include the omission of engineers (you must research the ability to capture buildings) and the gaining of experience through successful combat, which you can then spend on upgrades and super-weapons. Also, the game has a definite emphasis on urban, building-to-building fighting.

I've been pretty damn impressed with *Generals'* multiplayer test, but I do have a couple of gripes: the GLA dialogue is extremely dodgy (the suicide bomber, for example, says "I love a crowd" ...ugh) and latency is a serious issue, especially in four-player games. If the multiplayer is optimized in the final product, expect the best *C&C* ever. — William Harms



1



2



3



4



5

■ From top to bottom: (1) Since you're no longer forced to build next to your power plants, you can build anywhere on the map, even next to an enemy's base. (2) Billy's superior tactics decimate Dan...or was it Rob? It's hard to tell one victory from the next. (3) The A-10s can quickly annihilate enemy forces. (4) Air defense is key since the enemy can call in additional air power. (5) The double whammy of an airstrike and a super-weapon quickly crushes enemy forces.



Vertical text columns in various colors (green, yellow, white) covering the top half of the page, likely representing a stylized or corrupted version of the movie title and credits.

# ENTER THE MATRIX

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY LARRY AND ANDY WACHOWSKI

5/15/03



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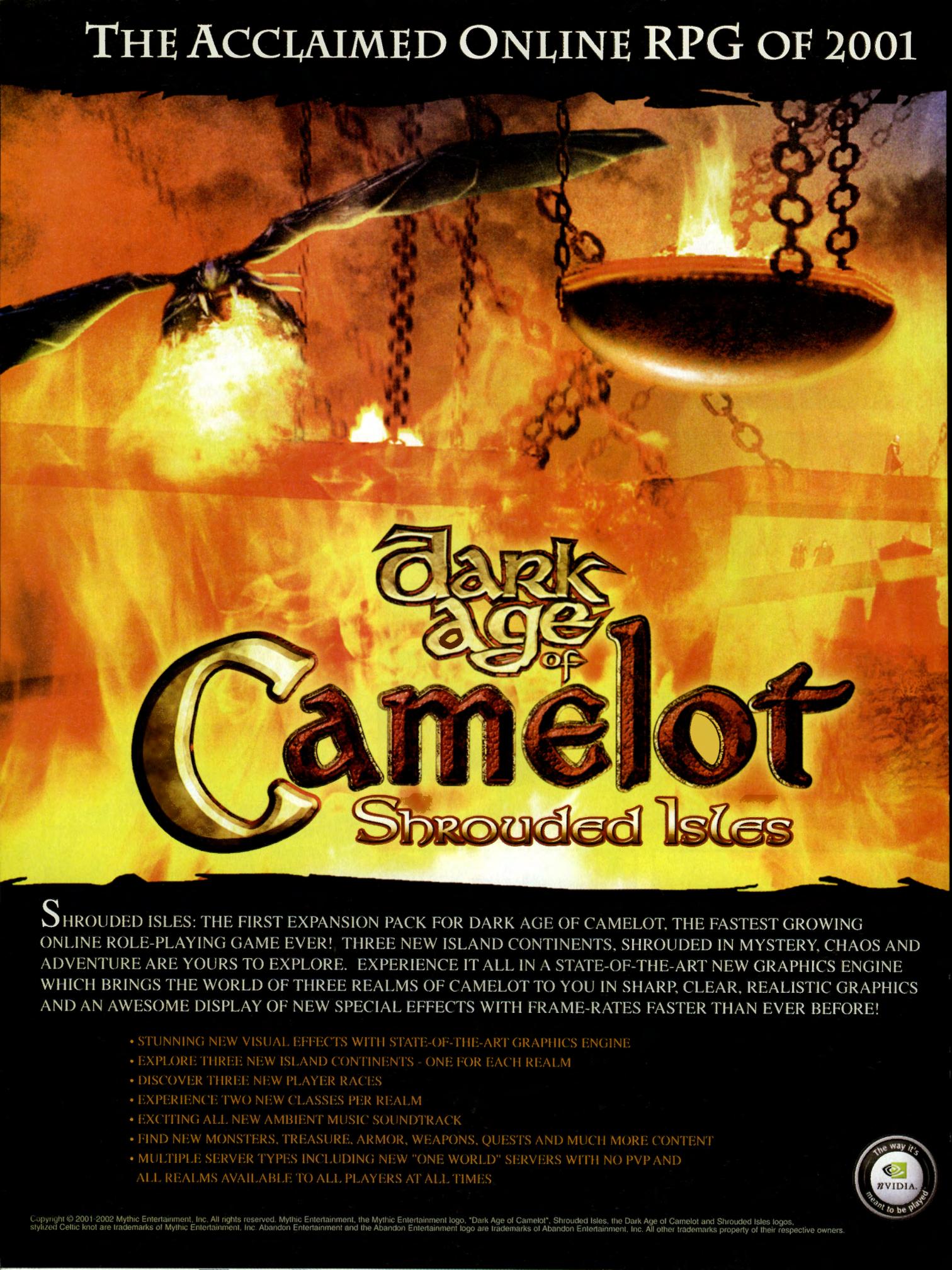
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The Institute of Creative Technologies has created a sim that will prepare military forces for various situations, including urban fighting.

## THE POWER OF SIMULATION: TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD

Our very own Colonel Trotter visits the recent I/ITSEC<sup>®</sup> Exposition to get the lowdown on the latest game-inspired training sims

About five years ago, I went up to Quantico and had one of the wildest gaming experiences of my career: playing *Marine Doom* on a LAN system with a dozen wild-man Leathernecks. The resulting article — the first in any commercial magazine to broach the subject — was one of the sweetest scoops in *PCG*'s history. We predicted that as soon as the PC-friendly generation of soldiers reached command rank, and processing/graphics power reached a certain level of sophistication, commercial game and sim designs would be joined at the hip with the professional military. The resulting synergy between a popular entertainment medium and the deadly-serious business of training for *real* war would not only be a unique phenomenon, but would also forever blur the line of demarcation that used to separate these two activities like the Berlin Wall.

It's finally happened, and on a scale larger than anyone could have imagined. The National Training Systems Association is the umbrella group for this exploding phenomenon, and this year's expo — held

Dec. 2-5 in the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida — offered dramatic proof as 350 exhibitors filled up 120,000 square feet of floor space. I joined the pre-opening media tour and was overwhelmed — the floor was packed with every simulation imaginable.

What's most interesting to *PCG* readers is that most of the powerful, ultra-realistic sims I saw are either direct adaptations of commercial "entertainment" software, or quantum jumps in technology that first appeared in the form of commercial game/sim products.

### "WE'RE STILL LOOKING FOR BETTER VIRTUAL DIRT..."

THERE WERE SYMPOSIA, LECTURES, and panel discussions galore, but I attended only a few of them — my time was limited, and all the fun was out on the floor. But NTSA did make available a 136-page book of the key speeches and another book containing abstracts of the 158 technical papers submitted for the event. I dutifully read all

of them except the severely technical ones, and from that mountain of verbiage I extracted the following nuggets.

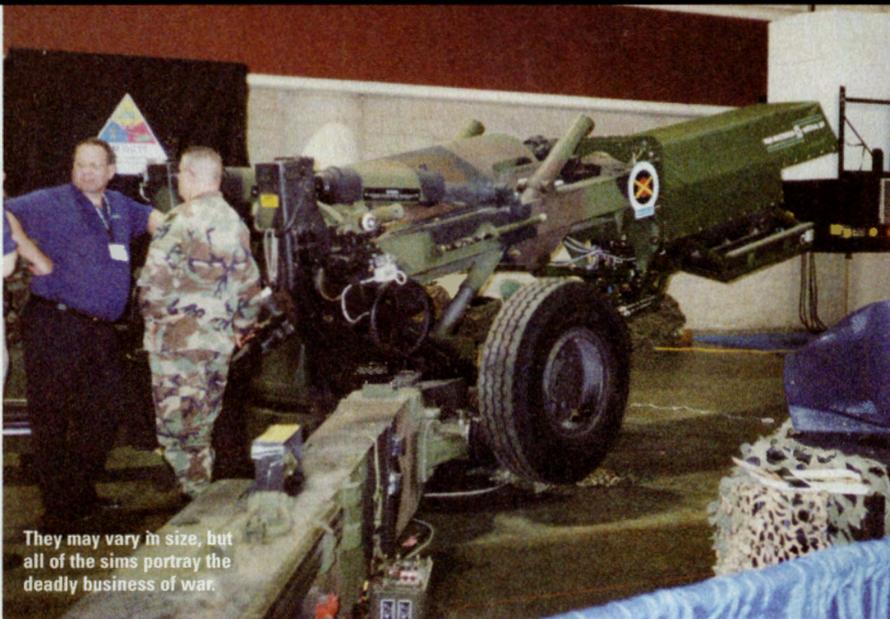
The hot buzzword of the moment is "EMBEDDED" sims. Put briefly, this descriptor means that full-range, networked training sims will be integral parts of the weapons platforms and units of the near future. In a few years, the crew of every newly fielded vehicle will be able to train, interoperatively, with everybody else, theaterwide, who's also assigned to that type of vehicle.

Brigadier General Stephen Seay, head of the Army's Simulation and Training Command (STRICOM), explains: "Soldiers today train for a wide variety of missions, from peacekeeping to full-blown war. This makes it imperative that training sims be as flexible as possible. The land and funds available for live drills are greatly diminished. Ideally, a unit wants to train for every contingency, over and over again, on the piece of terrain where they will be deployed. Mission requirements can change rapidly, so we need to train with freshly



## WIN YOUR VERY OWN COPY OF SIMCITY 4!

This month 10 lucky winners will receive a copy of the ultimate city-management game, *SimCity 4*, courtesy of the sim freaks at Maxis. To be eligible for our random drawing, just send an email to [eyewitness@pcgamer.com](mailto:eyewitness@pcgamer.com) with "Gimme SimCity!" in the subject heading, and include your name and address in the body of the message. Only one entry per person allowed. Contest ends March 31, 2003. See additional rules on page 111.



They may vary in size, but all of the sims portray the deadly business of war.

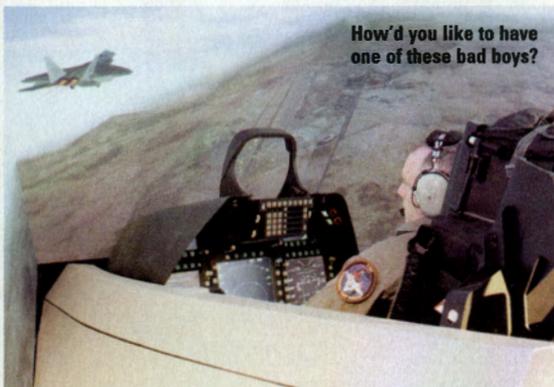
updated information — in bivouac, en route in transports — so that every soldier's on the same page, equipped with the same knowledge, before reaching the battlefield."

Eye-piece, Borg-like, helmet-mounted monitors and strap-on mini-PCs will make that possible, even for infantrymen. "We need to interoperate on the move," says General Seay, "so that everyone on a mission can rehearse and generate contingency plans in concert with everyone else." The Army calls this setup its "Future Combat System," and the technological challenges are huge: a "distributed network-centric ensemble of manned and

This concept is something new in warfare — and it's possible because of *game-driven* technology. General Seay is a zealous advocate of absorbing new commercial breakthroughs into real-war applications as quickly as possible. "We've come a long way in a short time," he quips dryly, "but we're still looking for more realistic virtual dirt."

### RAINBOW SIX, SKYWALKER RANCH, AND THE ARMY

IN 1999, THE ARMY CREATED the Institute of Creative Technologies. The purpose of ICT, according to Senior Scientist Michael Macedonia, is "to explore the use of commercial entertainment technology and content for military training and education." Currently under development by the ICT is a super-powerful version of Ubi Soft's *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six/Rogue Spear* program that Macedonia believes will "work brilliantly to sharpen decision-making skills at the small-unit level." Also set to debut in mid-2003 is a company-commander simulation — a PC-based amalgam of "several" existing games, graphically beefed up by the special-effects wizards at George Lucas' Skywalker think-tank. The project's working title is *Combat*



How'd you like to have one of these bad boys?

unmanned combat-related systems" embedded in the operational plan just as logistics, support assets, and ammo requirements are now.

Quick example: say the 101st Airborne is heading for Baghdad; satellite intel reveals newly built fortifications and redeployment of Republican Guard armored brigades. This information is quickly "patched" into the "Get Saddam" simulations that the 101st has been wargaming for weeks, and the division can rehearse new tactics even while they're flying toward their objectives in C-17s.

*System XII*, and you can count on seeing some of its cutting-edge features in commercial games... eventually.

The synergistic loop between PC entertainment and deadly serious real-war applications has become a powerful two-way river in a very short time. As Macedonia puts it: "If you're an 18-year-old going into West Point today, you don't remember a time when there were no electronic games. You've always had a computer and you've never seen a manual typewriter, except in a museum."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

## → PCG NEWS TICKER



"Eat this, over-rated wench!"

→ **How J.Lo Can You Go?** To immortalize the upcoming nuptials of Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez, director/actor/writer/comic-book god Kevin Smith commissioned a custom-made arcade game about the couple. *Jen Saves Ben*, developed by Powerhouse Animation Studios, stars J.Lo as a karate-kicking heroine out to save her fiancé from a raygun-toting Smith and the most evil force in the universe, Matt Damon.

→ **Honduras Bans Violent Games:** In response to a rise in gang crime, the Honduran Congress has unanimously passed a ban on all violent videogames. At long last, peace can flourish in this impoverished, war-torn nation. Way to go, Honduras!

→ **Frodo Fraggins:** Black Label Games and developer Liquid Entertainment have announced *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring*, a real-time-strategy campaign pitting good against evil. (Either side is playable.) The war begins in early 2004.

→ **SimHef:** Men's mag *Playboy* is skinny-dipping into the game pool, announcing a licensing deal with ARUSH and Groove Games to create, market, and distribute interactive simulations. The first game, set for a 2004 release, will allow you to play as founder Hugh Hefner: building a massive empire, living the playboy dream, and boinking bimbos you'll never have a chance to get when you're 76 (or at any age, for that matter).

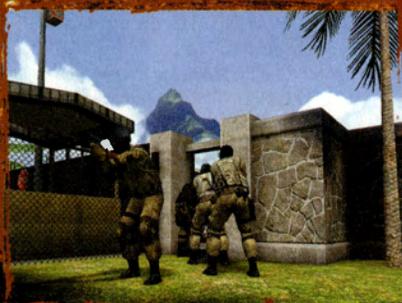
→ **Move Over, E3:** A three-day gaming expo, open to the public regardless of age, has been announced for later this year. The Ultimate Gamers Expo will take place at the Los Angeles Convention Center Aug. 15-17. For more info, go to [www.ugexpo.com](http://www.ugexpo.com). (Sadly, at press time, no game companies have confirmed attendance.)



→ Robert May has been named the Grand Prize Winner of Activision's *Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force* Sweepstakes. His likeness will appear in *Elite Force II*, where he'll play Franklin, a new member of the *Enterprise* Hazard Team. Congratulations!



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PC GAMER PLAYLIST



**ROB** Every year the latest iteration of *FIFA* sits on my hard drive until the next version. It's the same this year, and it's dominated my playtime. Besides that, I've also been playing the beta of *EverQuest Online Adventures* for PS2. It introduces some cool gameplay features, and having no keyboard makes the game appealingly "quiet."



**COREY** Feeling the return of my alter-ego, Sir Fanboy, I've been playing two licensed sci-fi games: *Starfleet Command III* (see page 64) and *The Thing*. I wish *The Thing* didn't have so many scripting oddities — like guys Thinging out a minute after testing human — but I do dig its dark, creepy, movie-esque atmosphere, à la *Aliens vs. Predator 2*.



**DAN** I am being utterly jackalized by Billy-led terrorists in the *Command & Conquer: Generals* beta. (I want to point out that he habitually makes a mockery of the Geneva Convention.) I've also been playing tons of *America's Army* ("Airborne!") and the new *Shrapnel Games/ProSIM* masterpiece *Armored Task Force*.



**CHUCK** I've been playing *Asheron's Call 2*, *Dragon's Lair 3D*, and *Nightfire*, and I just started *Neocron*. But enough about me: The most fun I've had this month has been watching Chiaki play *The Sims*. I haven't seen such wanton devastation and bloodshed since we played "Club the Intern" at the PCG picnic. (Ah, good times...)



**BILLY** Most of my time's been spent jackalizing Corey as he played *SFC III*. I loathe all things *Star Trek*-related, so I took particular glee in making Corey's life a living hell as he desperately tried to steer his little starship around some boring map while carrying out some lame mission objectives. He's a sad man, that Corey.



**JOE** My vote for sleeper of the year: *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin*. More vast and captivating than *Beyond Overlord*, *Barbarossa to Berlin* is simply a fantastic wargaming experience. And the realism is amazing. Someone bring me a bucket of Kubanskaya and load my SVT40 — the Wehrmacht is approaching Stalingrad!



**CHIAKI** Yes, I'll admit it: I don't have a domestic bone in my body. I can't decorate, I hate shopping, and I never make my bed. So I never tried *The Sims*...until now. After accidentally killing my Sims and/or making them so depressed that they couldn't work, I finally got a family to prosper. At least I now know I have some nurturing skills.



**GREG** I haven't had much time for anything other than *Asheron's Call 2* this month. I'm enjoying it, despite a few gripes. The graphics are amazing, and I like the combat, but the chat system is hurting, and I really wish I could tweak my stats. I bought *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* for the Xbox recently. No PC version, alas!

TROTTER GETS IT DONE

I HUNKERED DOWN INSIDE the Projected Crew-Served Weapon's mock-up bunker, complete with sandbags, camouflage nets, and wire perimeter between my firing slit and the target screen — a panel approximately 8 feet by 20 feet, filled with highly realistic 3D buildings, streets, gullies, and derelict vehicles. Range? Well, without magnification, the enemy soldiers were ant-sized, so I figure about 400 to 500 yards. I snuggled into the gunner's seat; the weapon is about the size of a .50-caliber, but chunkier and encrusted with sensors. To aid you in making precise laser tags, traverse is heavily damped.

I went for an RPG gunner on a rooftop, a pop-up target that had proven very hard to nail. I sequenced in two additional lases, in case he'd moved, or in case he had pals nearby. Lased him good on my second try. (Effects made it sound, and look, like his RPG sizzled right over my head!

Ouch, that was close!) Numbers danced on the sight reticules as each round programmed itself for distance, windage, weather, and god-knows-what else. Then I cut loose: simulated recoil was solid as a high-school kiss, and the whump-whump-whump sounded just right. In about 10 seconds, I'd lobbed 28 shells in three-round bursts. Their lethality was multiplied, since each trio of rounds is programmed to hit on the lase, and then five meters out from that point, on a left/right or front/back axis — if the target(s) sense they've been lased and try to pull away, they'll still get hit. You can't run from this sucker.

Tracer and damage effects were gratifying, rooftop and adjacent parts blew up con-

vincingly, and everybody gave a cheer when a tiny, bent RPG launcher spiraled out of the smoke and into the street. Post-mission analysis was enhanced by having the replay show the trajectory of every



round (blue for non-hits, red for hits). I'd obliterated the gunner and grievously wounded two unseen comrades, presumably a loader and a spotter. In real-life, this exercise would have cost tax-payers \$16,000; simulated, it cost a few pennies. And it was so intensely "real" that I was sweating bullets as I crawled out of the bunker.

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

He also points out that game companies have deeper pockets, fiercer competitive incentive, and more streamlined R&D departments than the armed services. "That's why we rely so heavily on the industry," Macedonia says. "Microsoft spent more than \$2 billion developing the Xbox — that's more than the Army's entire annual budget for science and technology."

Resistance to "games" among the top brass has vanished as the skeptical pre-digital officers have retired or been converted by the ineluctable facts. "Computer games are no longer dismissed as 'childish nonsense,'" Macedonia explains. "Being a soldier today means more than just shooting a rifle. We need warriors who can understand complex situations, articulate problems, and arrive at swift, creative decisions while under pressure. Computer games and simulations definitely sharpen those reflexes: they help train soldiers in three dimensions and they engender enthusiasm for the training process. They will help us win wars, and do so with fewer casualties. People were amazed at how well our soldiers and airmen performed in Afghanistan. I wasn't [surprised]."

The most powerful testimony I encountered at the expo came from Michael Durant, the elite Night Stalker pilot whose chopper was shot down in the Mogadishu fracas immortalized in the book, movie, and now game *Black Hawk Down*. Now a civilian consultant, Durant has become a true believer in the efficacy of sim training.

"The aircraft are so expensive that we can no longer afford to fly them for the many hours

needed to hone a pilot's skills," he says. "Now we have simulations of such quality as to offset the lack of real flying hours. There are at least 50 ways you can crash a helicopter — in a simulator, you can experience all of them, over and over again, until you're instinctively ready to react the right way in real life. That kind of preparedness can be perfected only in a virtual environment, because in real life, your first crash is usually your last."

THE GREATEST TOY SHOP EVER

AS FOR THE SIMULATIONS and training games I saw at the convention center, I had the time of my life driving, flying, or shooting everything from the latest Comanche to a Bradley to the Marine Corps' experimental new infantry-support weapon, an absolutely lethal 25mm cannon that fires intelligent laser-guided high-explosive rounds, known only as the "Projected Crew-Served Weapon." For the time being, would-be gunners must train on simulations, because each of the ultra-sophisticated rounds has to be assembled by hand, at a cost of around \$600 a shot. [See "Trotter Gets It Done," above, for the Colonel's experience with this simulated weapon. — Ed.]

All told, it was a dazzling, enlightening, intellectually stimulating event (not to mention a simply obscene amount of fun!). This phenomenon is only going to get larger, and all gamers should continue to stay abreast of it, because the games we play (and the breakthrough technology that's driven by gamers' demands) are going to play an ever-growing role in helping the Good Guys win battles.

# AMERICAN CONQUEST

----- Three Centuries of War -----

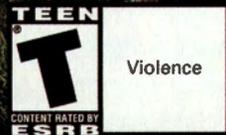
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## Legendary Adventure From a Design Legend

Gary Gygax, the "godfather of RPGs," tells us about his first computer-game project

For hundreds of thousands of pen-and-paper RPG players, the name of Dungeons & Dragons creator Gary Gygax conjures memories of tattered rule books, odd-shaped dice, and late-Friday night encounters with nefarious beasties. With D&D-based computer games proving extremely popular, it's surprising that Gygax himself has yet to lend his design talents to the computer market. Turns out it's not for the want of trying.

According to Gygax, he's been involved in two PC game projects in the past, both cancelled due to changes at their respective publishers. But his latest pen-and-paper RPG, *Legendary Adventure*, will make the transition to the MMORPG world courtesy of Netherlands-based developer Dreams Interactive.

"Computer games are not overly complicated by rules like a lot of paper [games]," Gygax told us, "and I wrote LA as a 'rules-lite' skill-based system." Entering

the crowded fantasy genre won't be easy, he says, and it's caused "a lot of rethinking of the fantasy milieu." Those thoughts have been assembled into a book, *Everyday Life*, to be published by Troll Lord Books in March 2003 (\$24.95).

While Gygax is incredibly prolific as both game designer and fiction author, he's had limited experience with computer games. Having not played *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online* or even *Neverwinter Nights* ("If I got involved, I'd get no work done," he offers), the whole process is new, although it presents some similar issues in game design. Gygax cites not having the DM actually there as the major challenge to LA's online design, so functions such as the player's control of politics and making laws become much more challenging. Then there are simple procedural problems. "If you allow thieves," he asks, "do you let them steal from other players?"

Though specific details about the gameplay mechanics are

scant, most problems have been solved effectively. "So far, of the issues that have come up, it's been surprising in the ways that they have worked."

*Legendary Adventure Online* is Gygax's daily project for the next several months. Having supplied Dreams Interactive with the core rules input, he's now giving them creature information, as well as spells and power details not yet published in the pen-and-paper version.

The game engine is impressive enough to have convinced NVIDIA and ATI to use it in demonstrations of the latest video hardware technology. That's an impressive credit for a developer that's yet to sign a publishing deal. But that deal should be forthcoming in time to meet the game's planned February beta-test date, something Gygax eagerly awaits. "I can't wait for the beta because I'll be allowed to play games 60 hours a week...which is what I always want to do."

### PC GAMER RELEASE METER

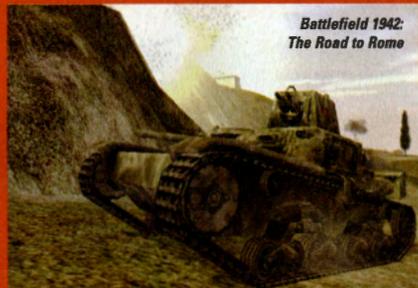
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#### FEBRUARY 2003

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome	EA	02/04/03
Unreal II	Infogrames	02/04/03
NASCAR Racing: 2003 Season	Sierra	02/04/03
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	02/11/03
Praetorians	Eidos	02/14/03
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	02/18/03
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	02/18/03
IL-2: Forgotten Battles	Ubi Soft	02/18/03
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	02/19/03
Rainbow Six III: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	02/25/03

#### MARCH 2003

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
AquaNox: Revelation	JoWood	03/04/03
Ghost Recon Gold	Ubi Soft	03/04/03
Harbinger	DreamCatcher	03/05/03
Star Wars: KOTOR	LucasArts	03/05/03
Rayman 3	Ubi Soft	03/06/03
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	Diversions	03/06/03

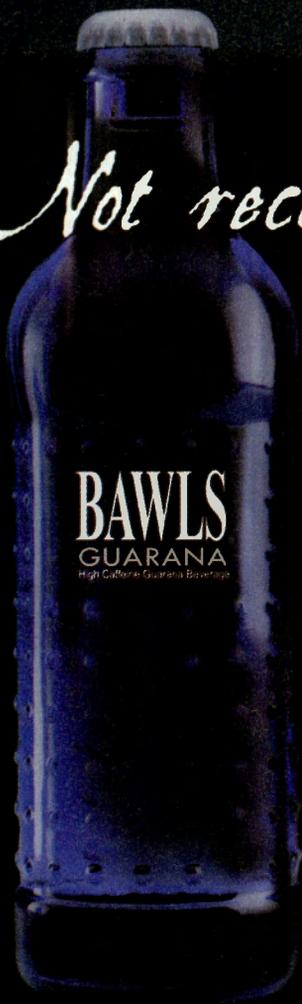


Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome

TRON 2.0	Disney	03/07/03
1503 A.D.: The New World	EA	03/07/03
Indiana Jones Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	03/07/03
EVE Online	Simon & Schuster	03/11/03
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	03/11/03
Freelancer	Microsoft	03/12/03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Universal	03/13/03
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	03/15/03
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	03/18/03
Castles and Catapults	Infogrames	03/18/03
C.S.I.	Ubi Soft	03/19/03
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Activision	03/20/03
Red Faction II	THQ	03/21/03
RTCW: Enemy Territory	Activision	03/26/03

<http://www.pcgamer.com>

*Not recommended for people  
who need their beauty sleep.*

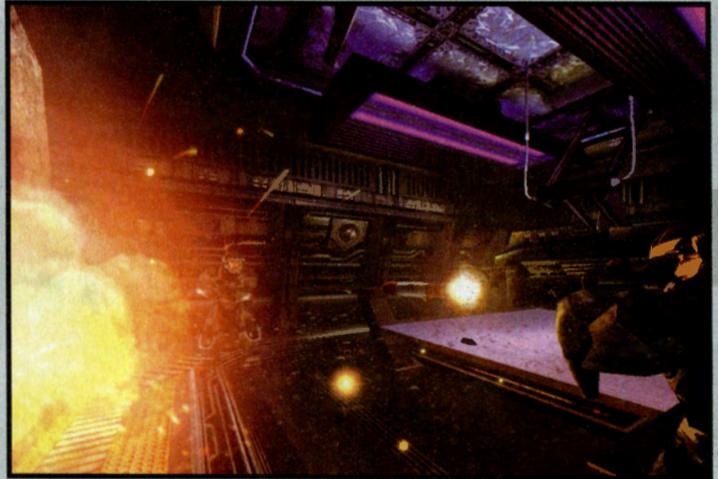


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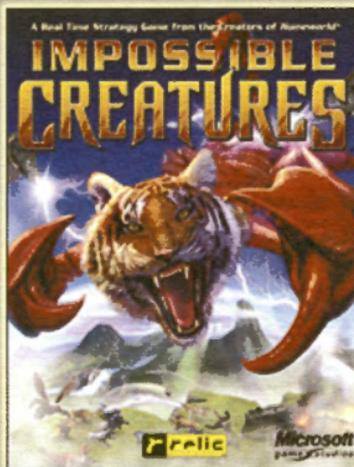
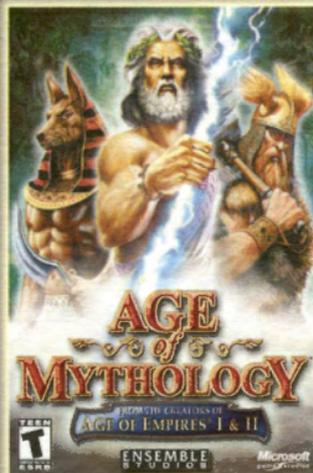
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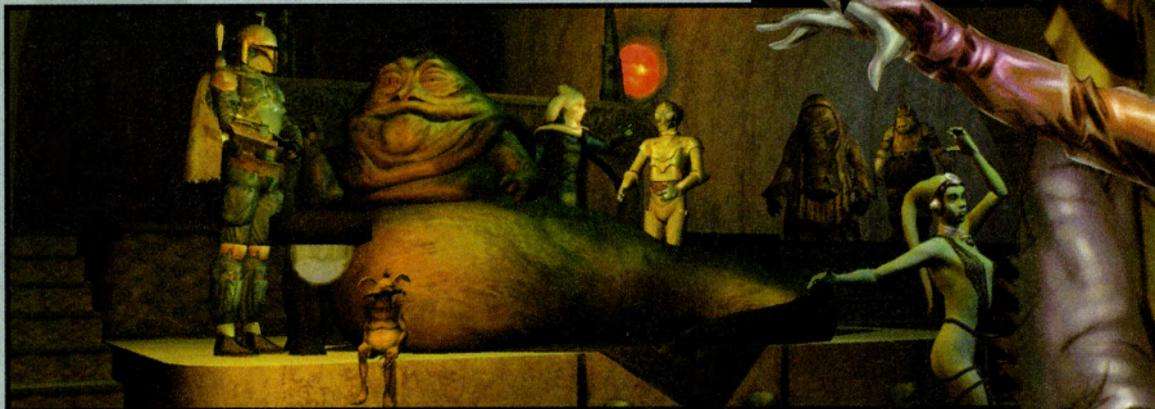
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# WAR

## THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT  
 WAR ON LAND  
 ISSN# 55-

15 GAMES, 9 MODS,  
 4 SECRETS REVEALED,  
 \* EXCLUSIVE FIRST  
 LOOK: IRAQ'S ARMY

*"Twenty years from now, when you are sitting by the fireplace with your grandson on your knee and he asks you what you did in the great World War II, you won't have to cough, shift him to the other knee and say, 'Well, your Granddaddy shoveled sh\*t in Louisiana.'"*

— George S. Patton addressing the Third Army the night before D-Day

Though most of us will luckily never experience real combat (or shoveling sh\*t in Louisiana), we don't have to miss out on modern authentic warfare. You want realism? You got it. We've compiled a sh\*tload of upcoming games promising the latest in real-world tactical military combat, nearly sh\*tting ourselves in the process. And holy sh\*t, did you say mods? We found the best. And last but not least, we fire up a sh\*tstorm by spilling the beans on a slew of top-secret games in development courtesy of our undercover mole in military-game intelligence. We sh\*t you not. †

† If any of you are offended by these words, please address all complaints to General George S. Patton, U.S. military. Thank you.



ILLUSTRATION BY GREG HORN



Urban combat is heated and hectic, with carnage-filled room-by-room battles in target buildings.



■ Different mission aspects: helicopter maneuvers, humanitarian aid, and stealthy attacks.

# BLACK HAWK DOWN

WE GET SOME HANDS-ON TIME WITH NOVALOGIC'S NEW DELTA FORCE

Initially intended as an effort to protect relief workers in Somalia, where up to 500,000 people had died of starvation, Operation Restore Hope became a difficult struggle against local clan militia. Drawn from the real-life actions of U.N. peacekeeping forces in 1992, *Black Hawk Down's* environments are authentic-looking, with the uniforms and vehicles all pulled from photos. Still, as just a few minutes of play demonstrates, it's first and foremost a shooter game.

And it's definitely an encouraging shift in gears for the *Delta Force* series. We've grown accustomed to shoddy production values in this franchise, but *Black Hawk Down* is almost self-consciously a kick in the proverbials, with great attention paid to the vehicle, weapon, and location details. The series has always had huge levels, but now they're filled with convincing buildings, street scenes, and other Third World urban detritus, making for an immersive setting.

The first thing I did, of course, was load up the Mogadishu firefight mission made famous in the recent movie. (Actually, it's broken up into two separate missions: the first is the raid into downtown Mogadishu to snatch the strongman's lieu-

tenants, and the second begins with the downing of a Black Hawk helicopter and the subsequent mayhem.) I'm very impressed with the visual flavor of these scenarios — every bit of the screen is constantly filled with the dilapidated clutter of the city, and provides a strong sense of place as well as tension, once the locals start coming at you in AK-toting droves.

There's definitely a true-to-the-movie feeling of total madness in the urban firefights. Literally dozens of locals run around each scene — some combatants, some just unarmed city-dwellers in the wrong place at the wrong time. These missions force you to distinguish combatants from non-combatants in a split-second, doing your utmost to prevent civilian casualties.

Overall, *BHD* seems like it'll be a game of great "bits" — such as the section of the Mogadishu mission in which you're helicoptered in to the firefight and snipe (or let rip with the Minigun) from the open bay door of your helicop-

ter. During groundfighting, when you open a door to be faced by a roomful of hostiles on the other side, a quick grenade toss can work wonders for peacekeeping. An "Alamo" mission has you defend a base complex for 30 long, long minutes against a swarm of hostile fighters.

The multiplayer battles in the city levels are already great fun, even at this early stage. *BHD's* urban environments are so crammed with wrecked cars, torn-up buildings, and ragged tent structures that they resemble more of a nightmare maze than a city. With a wide range of sniper nests, kill zones, and claustrophobic line-of-sight obstacles, these firefights aren't for the weak of heart.

The four missions I played were individually very thrilling — but, to be fair, they're the four "set-piece" encounters in the game. It remains to be seen if the rest of the missions are as packed or as ambitious, but so far we're pleasantly surprised by NovaLogic's work. — Dan Morris



# LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING —  
AND THEY'VE GOT OUR PLANES!

Combat-jet-sim fans have been waiting almost half a decade for a new A-list title to succeed *Falcon 4.0* as the genre's standard. With the release of *Lock On: Modern Air Combat*, the wait could be over.

Developed by Moscow-based Eagle Dynamics, *LO:MAC* is the latest chapter in SSI's acclaimed *Flanker* series of Su-27-themed sims. As well-received as the company's earlier titles were with hardcore flight-simmers, its high-fidelity depictions of Russian fighter planes were mostly lost on North America. After all, who wants to fly for the Russkies when sims like *Falcon 4.0* and *Jane's F/A-18* are around?

That'll all change with *LO:MAC*, though, because for the first time in the franchise's seven-year history, a pair of high-profile NATO warplanes will be added to the sim's mix of Russian craft (the Su-27, Su-33, Su-25 and MiG-29, in this case). The F-15C Eagle and A-10A "Warthog" are two of the most

potent weapons in the U.S. Air Force's inventory, and their inclusion should help attract legions of red-white-and-blue fans. When combined with *LO:MAC*'s jaw-dropping graphics, ambitious dynamic campaign engine, solid multiplayer support, and buttery-smooth flight modeling, the key components all appear to be in place for a genre-defining product.

After playing an early alpha for almost a week, I've developed a healthy appreciation for many of these features, but it's the spanking new graphics engine that *really* impresses. Set in Russia's Black Sea region, *LO:MAC* features over 100,000 square miles of lushly rendered terrain populated with over 1,700 cities and villages, 180,000 buildings, and 50 million trees! Bolstered by some stunning weapons pyrotechnics and the most beautifully rendered water effects ever to grace a sim, there's enough eye candy here to keep any gamer's sweet tooth fed well into the next decade.



The version that I test-flew didn't have a completed campaign in place yet, but there were still plenty of flightline options to devour my free time. A full-featured mission editor and a nifty "Fast Battle Planner" had me up and running in no time, while the scalability of the sim — designed to accommodate every conceivable proficiency level — makes *LO:MAC* one of the most accessible aerial combat sims in SSI's storied history.

With over 40 training sorties, dozens of single missions, a rich dynamic campaign, and multiple co-op and head-to-head online multiplayer planned for the final build, it's a pretty safe bet that *LO:MAC* will appeal to anyone with an appreciation for high-speed aerial combat. And that's especially true given that an Eagle and a Warthog are warming up on the runway. — *Andy Mahood*



When all else fails, fill 'em full of lead.

## IGI 2: COVERT \$TRIKE

ORIGINALLY SLATED TO SHIP last year, *IGI 2: Covert Strike*'s release was pushed back to this February. We tracked down Simon Humphries, the game's associate producer, to gather some updated recon on how this stealth-based shooter sequel is coming together.

**PC Gamer:** *IGI 2* was originally supposed to come out in May 2002 — why the delay?

What specific additions or tweaks have been made to the game during its additional months in development? What can we expect?

**Simon Humphries:** The development team has been hard at work the whole time, balancing and bug-fixing as well as adding extra content. Specific game-engine features added include reflection mapping on water and weapons, an improved animation system, and additional particle effects. Also, the AI will now make better use of grenades and explosives; [enemies] can now use flashbang grenades, and they'll make better use of cover.

**PC Gamer:** So how will the multiplayer part of the game work?

**Simon Humphries:** The focus of play is on team-based objectives. Each mission has multiple objectives for each team, and all of the objectives must be completed to win a round. Single-player elements such as the map computer, security cameras, time-based actions, and, of course, zip lines greatly enhance *IGI 2*'s multiplayer. All the weapons from the single-player game can be used in multiplayer, plus a few extra ones. Highlights include the SOCOM, the SMG-2, the G11, the Jackhammer, and, of course, the M82A1.

Multiplayer *IGI 2* will support 16 players over LAN/Internet (more players will be possible but not supported), and the game will ship with complete dedicated server functionality. — *William Harms*



An A-10 Warthog succumbs to the unwelcome advances of a Russian Apex missile.

# CONDITION ZERO

COUNTER-STRIKE'S SINGLE-PLAYER SIBLING IS BACK ON TRACK



**C**ounter-Strike, a fan-made mod for *Half-Life*, became an industry-defining online phenomenon when its terrorist-vs.-counter-terrorist team-based gameplay captured gamers' imaginations the world over. Tens of thousands of virtual soldiers packed countless servers, organized themselves into myriad clans, developed a new language of l33t speak, and cost the economy and woman-kind millions of man hours of bar-hopping and ogling, preferring to sit in front of monitors, lost in the thrill of the action.

Still, the success was limited on the commercial front. *Counter-Strike* was absorbed into the Valve Software collective, new retail boxes of downloadable code were thrown onto shelves, and the most talented players got better while noobs were vilified for their ineptness.

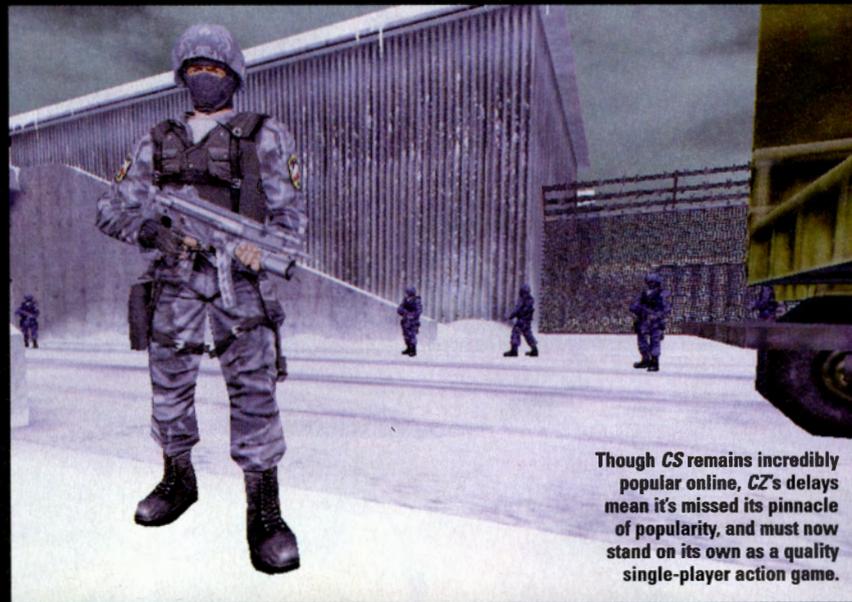
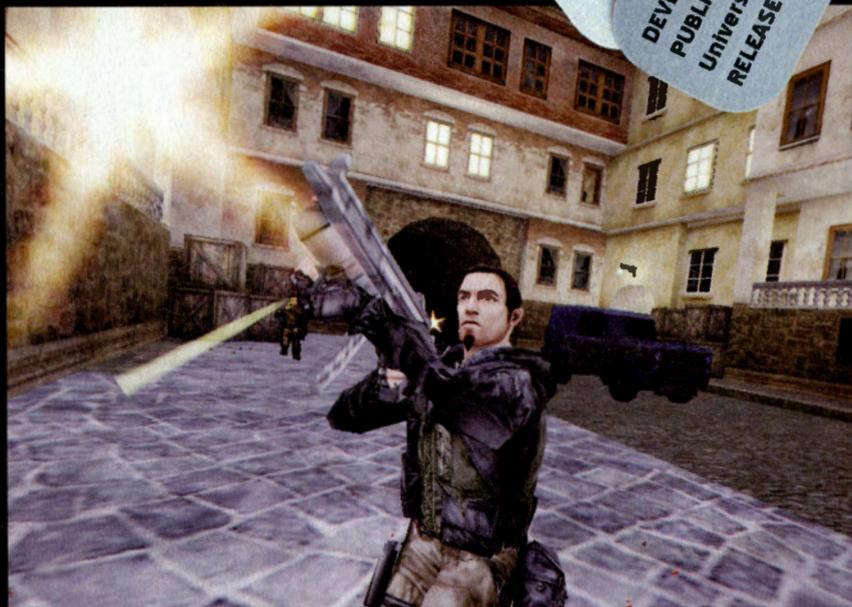
Cue *Condition Zero*, the single-player retail version of *Counter-Strike*. Its goal: to serve as a teaching aid for the online world, while also spinning its own yarn of counter-terrorism actions in hot spots "pulled from today's headlines."

Now, I'd play *Condition Zero* for all those reasons: the quality of the hardcore online crowd made even grown gamers cringe at the learning curve needed to be a playa. Plus, the modern-day setting, squad-based tactical action, and tried-and-true core gameplay design were all ripe for an engaging single-player experience.

Somewhere the plan came unstuck. Gearbox Software had taken over development from Rogue, but come July 2002, the developer stopped working on *CZ* (we presume due to spreading itself thin with EA's *007: Nightfire* and signing on with Microsoft to create the PC port of *Halo*). Now *CZ* is in the hands of Ritual (the developer currently finishing up *Elite Force II*) and slated for a June 2003 release.

What you're getting has remained pretty much the same. Valve's project manager, Erik Johnson, tells us that the extra time has been used to "create a bunch of new content"...but he won't say what extra content. It's certain that *CZ* is adding a range of new weapons and equipment to the *Counter-Strike* universe, including gas grenades (and gas masks), bullet shields, and hardware such as Famas and Galil automatic rifles, and even Molotov cocktails and machetes.

As you'd expect from an update, *CZ* will sport much improved texture detail in the environment and higher polygon counts for the character models. The "pulled from the headlines" theme of this style of game becomes a balancing act between the kind of locations that'll be interesting to gamers, and the politics of playing as terrorist organizations using chemical warfare and other troublesome tactics that could be too close to real-life headlines in the coming months.



Though *CS* remains incredibly popular online, *CZ*'s delays mean it's missed its pinnacle of popularity, and must now stand on its own as a quality single-player action game.

Johnson was appallingly vague when asked about *CZ*'s locations. "Each mission will be set in a real-world locale to lend context to the mission itself, but not to try to simulate a real-world event," he offers. One tidbit we did elicit, however, is that prior to *CZ*'s release, Valve plans to integrate a new set of communication tools into *Counter-Strike*, incorporating in-game instant messaging and server browsing. The developer will also make a couple of weapons from *CZ* available to the online *CS* community.

Given *CZ*'s development troubles, its future isn't quite as bright as we anticipated, and releases like the *Ghost Recon* add-ons, *Black Hawk Down*, and *America's Army* all provide powerful competition in the squad-based tactical battle arena. But *CZ*'s pedigree is certainly in place, and with the impressive AI we expect from our single-player opponents teamed with the strategic decisions of earning cash and buying equipment, *Condition Zero* should sit proud when it finally hits shelves. — Rob Smith

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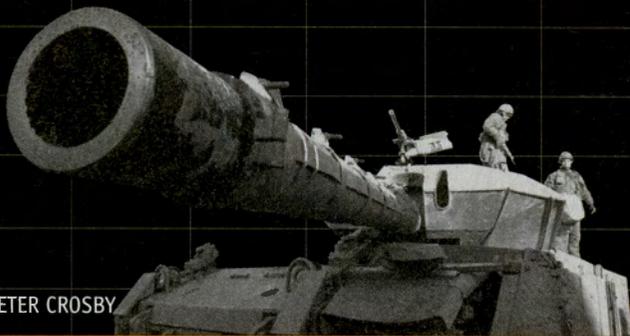
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# WORDS LIKE: "CARPET BOMBING," "SCUD LAUNCHERS"



By PETER CROSBY

**R**ecent military aggressions around the globe have many nation's worried. Between the United States, China and the Global Liberation Army, tensions run high. Their leaders profess no interest in escalating the situation, but words ring hollow when satellite photos tell a different story. The issue is no longer "Will there be military conflict?" but, "Who will prevail?"



## CHINA:

No longer just a red-communist step-child, China's modern army is well-financed with a strong nationalistic bent. Parading technology like Dragon Tanks and Nuclear Missiles, China's military goes beyond large troop numbers. But defeating the agile GLA is still no walk in Yangmingshan National Park. So while their new military is formidable, so is the task ahead.



Violence



## UNITED STATES:

Roused by GLA bio-terrorism attacks, the U.S. must now act decisively. America's military leader faces the unenviable task of rooting out an elusive foe. The world's most advanced military—armed with Daisy-Cutter bombs and Comanche Gunships—will make the job easier. But eradicating the cell-based GLA will also take courage, conviction and the will to see a prolonged campaign through to the end.



military resources



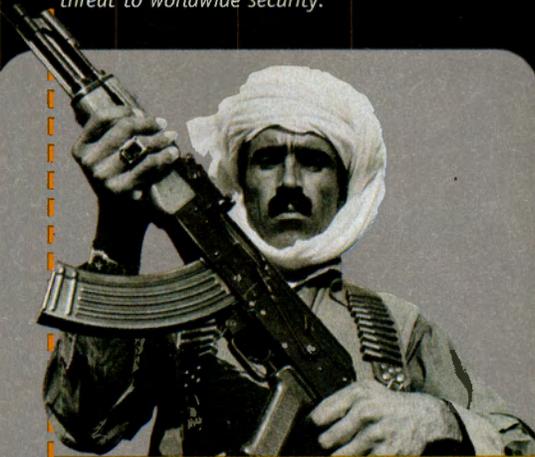
## TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE:

Despite the difference in resources, all three forces achieve an eerie kind of parity. The GLA's low-tech approach is no less effective than either China's superior forces or America's advanced technologies.

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## THE WILD CARD:

Despite inferior military resources, the GLA still poses a very credible threat to worldwide security.



## GLOBAL LIBERATION ARMY:

Facing superior firepower, the GLA embraces bio-terrorism, sabotage and suicide bombings to further its political agenda. But leading a chaotic group of "freedom" fighters against two global super-powers will take some doing.

# AND "TOMAHAWK MISSILES."



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February 11th, 2003



Challenge Everything™

# AMERICA'S ARMY

FOLLOWING A HIGH-PROFILE DEBUT, THE ARMY'S GAME GETS EVER-MORE-REALISTIC ADDITIONS



■ The already-impressive detail will get a boost from the upcoming update of *UT 2003's* graphics engine. Only the bead of sweat is missing.



■ By adding AI-controlled enemies, the mission designers plan to introduce some truly treacherous opposition forces.



■ Non-lethal weapons (like stun grenades) and civilian AI characters will add new tactical considerations to the rules of engagement.



■ The updated Karma physics engine promises to make indoor firefights even more vicious than before, with more interactive elements.

So you're already an Airborne-qualified, Ranger-tapped graduate of the Army's sniper school? You've still got a long way to go in your virtual Army career. The opening months of *America's Army* (January 2003; PCG rating: 88%) have been a success for the government's first-person shooter, but its creators aren't waiting around for acclaim—they're off developing the next "wow" elements of this already-excellent freely distributed game.

The beauty of an online-only game is that you can continually add content to it. The beauty of being funded by the U.S. government is that you benefit from a continuing development treasure chest, letting you fulfill the promise of a non-stop development cycle.

*America's Army* had a very smooth debut, a few server hiccups notwithstanding. (Its biggest problem was its out-of-the-gate popularity; initial demand overcrowded the Army's dedicated servers.) Now, with a new producer heading up the development studio, the creators are hard at work on new material.

The first order of business, according to producer Alex Mayberry, is updating to the current standard of the *Unreal Tournament 2003* engine. "This upgrade will enhance the stability and fluidity," says Mayberry. "We were the first

game to roll out this engine, and we're currently still using that foundation code."

Mayberry's other priority is a new front-end interface, one that's more intuitive and newbie-friendly.

As for gameplay itself, the team has brought aboard Rafael Paiz (like Mayberry, a Xatrix veteran of *Kingpin*) to work on in-game AI. "We'll start with civilian AI," reveals Mayberry, "so we can get non-combatants into the scenarios."

Eventually, the team plans to create cooperative scenarios in which human players form one side against an AI opposition side. One gameplay advantage of this setup: with "un-American" enemies, the scenario designers will be unconstrained in terms of what the nefarious enemy can be doing. Currently, both human sides are playing as the U.S. Army, so the firefights are all assault-vs.-defense situations. "With AI enemies who are obviously not American, we can have them doing things the U.S. would never do," explains Mayberry.

*America's Army* will also expand with new schools, soldier classes, and mission types. One new emphasis will be the Special Forces. The plan is to build a "spotter school" for SF candidates, where you learn how to call in virtual airstrikes—then, in the SF-enabled missions, you put these skills to use calling in airstrikes during battle.

Another new class will be the "combat lifesaver," better known as the medic. So now the angels of mercy will be crawling the warzone. And with some of the new dangers in the works, you'll need them.



"Overall, we're going to be expanding the battlefield," says Mayberry. "Airstrikes, mortars landing, tanks rolling through, and preferably all of it controlled by human players."

The main thing holding them back from this expanded battlefield is *AA's* physics engine, which is set for a major addition when the developers add the Karma physics model into the game. With Karma functioning, vehicle physics will be enabled.

So are we close to a fully implemented M1 Abrams tank?

"Without wanting to tip our hand too much, we're definitely working toward it," Mayberry tells us. All we have to say to that is, Hoo-ah! — Dan Morris

## IRAQ'S ARMY

NOT WANTING TO BE OUTDONE by the U.S. Army's official game, Saddam Hussein has announced an official *Iraq's Army* funded by the Iraqi government. It'll follow the U.S. model in being freely distributed at recruiting stations for young people considering a career in the Iraqi armed forces.

"This game will be a highly realistic portrayal of the professionalism and patriotism of our army," Saddam told *PC Gamer*. "When you try to desert your team, your character will be shot in the back."



■ In this screenshot of an infantry-training sequence from *Iraq's Army*, Republican Guard recruits practice surrendering.

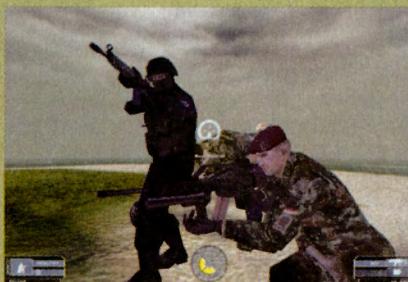
# MODERN WARFARE MODS

Can't wait to fight the good fight in the battlefields of tomorrow? These mods for games you probably (and should!) already own will give you a taste of contemporary weaponry, gear, and tools. Best of all, every one can be downloaded for absolutely free!



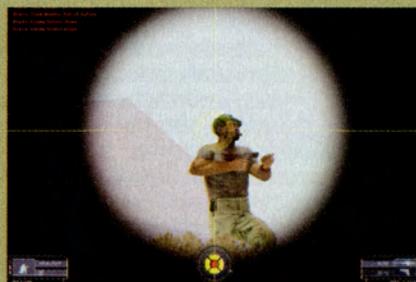
## Urban Terror (Quake III)

Currently at version 2.6, this total conversion has you duke it out in fast-paced multiplayer duels set in 15 urban and outdoor locations, from a secret Navy testing facility miles undersea to snowy Canadian mountains. *Urban Terror* has fresh gameplay mechanics like bandaging wounds, weapon attachments, and a balanced arsenal. ([www.urbanterror.net/](http://www.urbanterror.net/))



## Sabre Teams (Ghost Recon)

*Sabre Teams* takes an array of real-life tactical forces such as the UK SAS, U.S. Army Rangers, and French GIGN and pits them against one another in unique scenarios. A smooth interface makes implementation and assignments easy, with custom weapons and kits to satisfy gun freaks. ([www.tacticalgames.net/bajabravo/sabreteams/manual/features.htm](http://www.tacticalgames.net/bajabravo/sabreteams/manual/features.htm))



## Harntrox Desert Assault (G.R.)

Master modder Harntrox has created a package that's sure to please fans of *Ghost Recon*, adding over 100 weapons and dozens of new missions, including ones incorporating helicopters and tanks. A 12-mission campaign extends the battlefield through established *Ghost Recon* maps. ([www.speakeasy.org/%7Estarr00/staraudio/](http://www.speakeasy.org/%7Estarr00/staraudio/))



## Navy SEALs: Covert Operations (Quake III)

This lesser-known total conversion for *Quake III* is a great alternative to *Counter-Strike*. Focusing on teamwork and realistic Navy SEALs tactics, it puts as much emphasis on strategy as it does action. Of particular note is the great hit-detection system. The current version is Beta 1.45. ([www.ns-co.net/](http://www.ns-co.net/))



## Free Libya! (Ghost Recon)

This relatively new mod for *GR* set in conflict-ridden Libya adds weapons, player skins, and a new multiplayer "Command & Conquer" mode. Missions are well-scripted, complete with pre-mission voice-overs and commandable specialists. Extra missions are in the complementing *Free Russia!* mod, which sports more modern warfare fun. ([www.fl-ava.net/](http://www.fl-ava.net/))



## SuperPAK 3 for Falcon 4.0

The face-lift that the *Falcon 4.0* Unified Team has applied to the venerable F-16 sim is the single most comprehensive add-on that the flight sim world has ever witnessed. This 78MB download adds so many enhancements to your copy of MicroProse's four-year-old sim that a 180-page PDF manual is needed just to track them all. (<http://t4ut.fragulsworld.com/>)



## Operation Desert Storm theater for Falcon 4.0

If you're tired of blowing up North Korean assets every time you load *Falcon 4.0*, maybe it's time to move your Theater of Operations to the Persian Gulf. Besides this 1991 desert campaign, the site offers links to a couple dozen third-party *F4* campaign projects. (<http://falcon4.nekromantix.com/desertstorm.php>)



## Team SuperHornet add-ons for Jane's F/A-18

Still the finest carrier-based jet sim ever built, *Jane's F/A-18* is starting to age a bit. The Team SuperHornet project — which adds a number of new missions, high-resolution cockpits, and flyable planes like the A-10 and F-14 — is the dose of Viagra this old girl has been looking for. ([www.war-fighters.com/tsh/](http://www.war-fighters.com/tsh/))



## HyperLobby Pro

Although not title-specific, this matchmaking multiplayer software is gaining a reputation as *the* download to have if you want to hook up with some human opponents in sims like *Falcon SP3* or *Strike Fighters*. If you still play classic Jane's titles like *F/A-18* or *F-15*, it's pretty much the only game in town since the demise of Jane's Combat.Net. (<http://hyperfighter.jinak.cz/>)

# HARPOON 4

HISTORY'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE NAVAL WARGAME GETS A GRAPHICAL DRY DOCK, AND SETS SAIL IN BOLD COLOR



Without *Harpoon*, there would've never been a Tom Clancy, who was an insurance salesman when he met the game's creator, Larry Bond. Clancy sought him out to express his admiration for the board game, a superb simulation of modern "missile age" naval warfare. The game was all the more fascinating for being a civilian product, pieced together from publicly available data on world weapons systems — and yet so utterly realistic that the series quickly became (and remains today) an instructional tool used at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

Using *Harpoon* as his primary resource, Clancy was able to achieve the renowned realism that informed his naval thriller *The Hunt for Red October*. Bond himself would go on to a successful fiction career in the techno-thriller genre.

In 2003, six years after the appearance of *Harpoon Classic* on the PC, SSI is back on the scene with *Harpoon 4*. It's a testament to the obsessive appeal of this game's earlier versions that hundreds of user-designed scenarios are still available — and widely played — from any of several enthusiast websites. The buzz over *Harpoon 4* has been red-hot in the admittedly small but incredibly devoted circle of the series' fans.

At long last, I got hold of a playable beta of *Harpoon 4*. While the code is not yet ready for

primetime, it's stable enough that I've been able to play through a few scenarios.

The fundamentals of the *Harpoon* system — top-down regional map views and the true-to-life "electronic battlefield" readouts of a modern naval command center — haven't changed. The menu-driven orders system is the same, as is (thankfully) the helpful advice of the digital Executive Officer, who offers such nuggets as "Sir, the F-14s are low on fuel — perhaps we should recall them to the carrier?" Aye-aye.

What's new is the game's look. *Harpoon Classic* featured perfectly functional graphics but had all the visual pizzazz of a Windows defrag screen. SSI has taken a giant leap forward here — now, *Harpoon* actually looks like a game. Map overlays are brightly colored, with ships, subs, and planes marked by attractive, stylized icons.

Full-3D inset screens provide attractive close-in views of individual units in action, and they offer spectacular views of conflagration. The camera can send you down into the depths to watch a submarine evade depth charges, or up in the sky to follow a missile as it homes in on a jet fighter. It's a very cool way to stay "grounded" in the real-world feel of the combat, as opposed to just relying on the plodding progress of overlay icons.

What's not so good? The setting. The great majority of the scenarios and battle-sets are

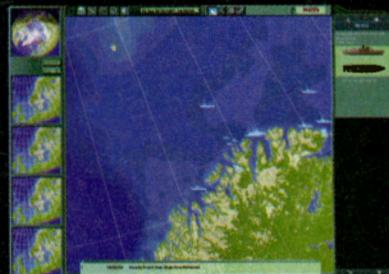
engagements from 1984. 1984!

Now, I could understand a couple of 1984 battle-sets, just because the old NATO-vs.-Soviet setting provides the big, booming Naval Wars That Might Have Been. But for heaven's sake, only a handful of scenarios are even set in the post-Cold War world. Sadly, little consideration has been given to Third World scenarios, in which (in case you hadn't noticed) almost all current and foreseeable conflict occurs. This situation may be what Larry Bond intended, but ultimately *Harpoon 4* will just be a prettier way to refight all the irrelevant, dated "what-if" battles of the Reagan years.

I wish the designers had provided some campaigns exploring the murky — and potentially explosive — world of current-era naval power projection. These days, a Navy frigate has far more to fear from a bomb-laden terrorist motorboat than it does from a Soviet Krivak-class missile ship. Luckily, the fans of this series are committed scenario-designers, and the scenario-design utility is as deep as before, so I'm hopeful that the future holds some more interesting missions.

*Harpoon 4* is a very welcome sight, all in all. Naval enthusiasts will surely be at battle stations around-the-clock when Ubi Soft ships the game in early 2003. — Dan Morris

■ Track your units in the action view, which provides 3D detail and battle animations. You can also eyeball the damage when a foe gets a strike in, or watch your own missiles fly off toward their target.



■ Bright, attractive map overlays replace the older version's bland "Windows look."



■ Running silent and deep, even submarines can be visually followed in-engine.



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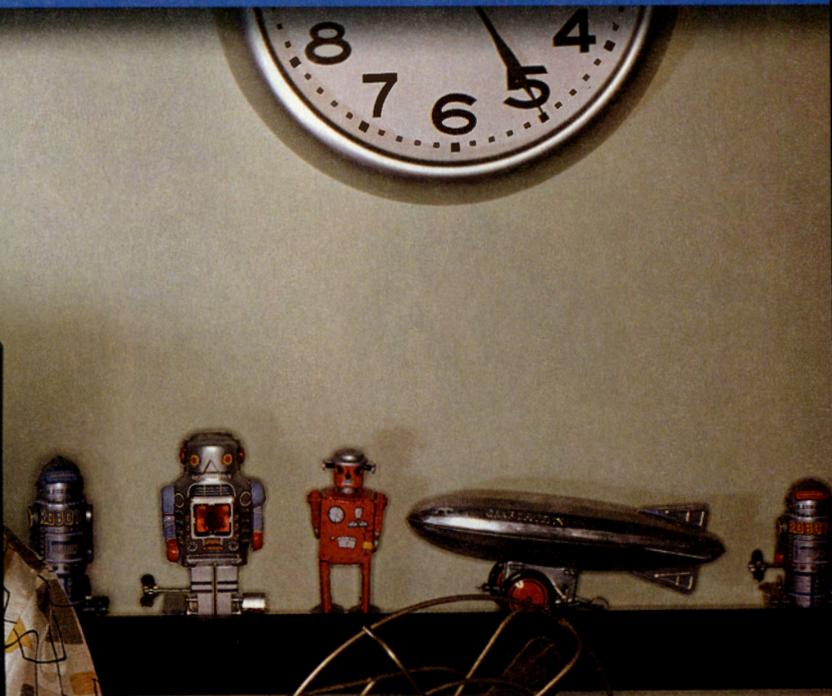
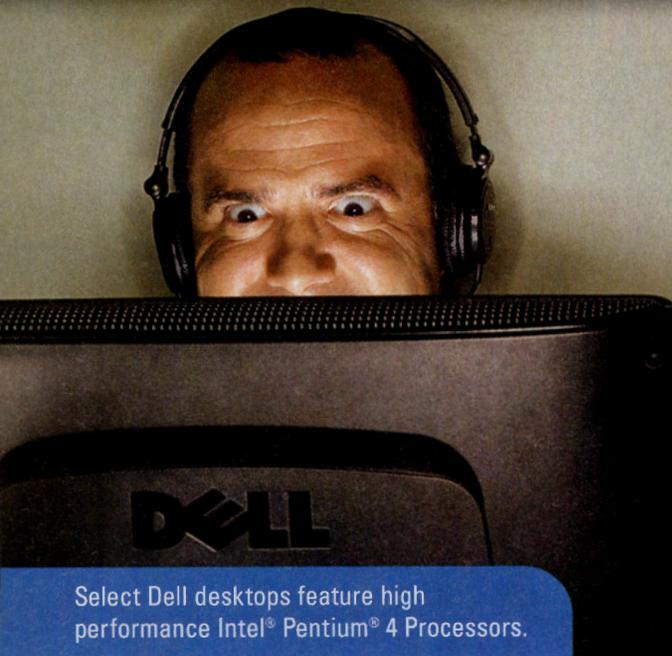
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# SÖLDNER: SECRET WARS

THE MAKER OF PANZER ELITE REVEALS ITS NEW MILITARY TACTICAL SHOOTER



"What you can see, you can destroy," say the developers. A co-op mode is also planned for the game's single-player campaign.

(Slightly futuristic equipment will originate from the designs of American weapon manufacturers like Skunk Works.) You'll have the opportunity to drive trucks, jeeps, Hummers, and the Bradley infantry fighting vehicle, man battle tanks like the T-80 and T-90, pilot Blackhawk and Hind transport helicopters, and of course, take off in VTOL (Vertical Take Off and Landing) jets such as the Harrier.

And just to make sure that battlefield conditions are the most current possible, Wings has created the world of *Söldner* around up-to-date satellite data. "If you change or update the data, you can generate different areas," notes Weidemann. Weather and day effects will play a role — performing military maneuvers in the Bering Sea during winter will be a frosty undertaking, for example — as will world topography.

"Our lead design principle with *Söldner* is 'What you can see, you can destroy,'" Weidemann tells us. Terrain can be deformed and cratered, illustrating the blast effect of any weapon up to a nuclear warhead. Foliage can be run down or pulverized in explosions. Houses can

even be demolished wall-by-wall.

"We also allow servers in online matches to 'keep' the destructions. After five matches or so, the entire landscape can look post-apocalyptic," adds Weidemann.

*Söldner* will come with 12 multi-player modes. In addition to the usual options — CTF, death-match, bomb runs, hostage rescue — you'll also be able to modify existing ones (e.g., turning "capture the flag" into "capture the vehicle" if you wish).

Is it the military game with everything? Could be. "Our team's mission was to create a game that we wanted to play ourselves, and we've accomplished that," offers Weidemann. We'll tell you if it's a game we want to play when *Söldner: Secret Wars* ships this summer.

— Chuck Osborn

**N**o, that title isn't a misprint of "soldier." *Söldner* is — as was pointed out to us by Teut Weidemann, studio head of German developer Wings Simulations — the German word for "mercenary."

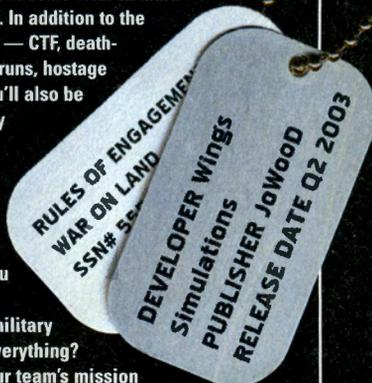
Appropriately, this third-person tactical shooter casts you as the commander of a crack special forces team in the year 2010. The world's superpowers have grown tired of policing the planet, reluctantly retiring their own resource-hogging militias to outsource the job to specially trained bands of mercenaries. Your team will fight a never-ending campaign of small high-tech battles on behalf of the nation with the deepest pockets.

Because *Söldner*'s single-player campaign is composed by a mission generator, there's literally no end to the game's replay value. "I'd guess that you'd need to play about 50 missions before you saw repetition," says Weidemann. "Even then, missions wouldn't be identical due to the game's plug-in system. [It] monitors how often specific missions are completed and changes them with special events like ambushes, counter-attacks, and so on."

Replay will be complemented by *Söldner*'s in-game diplomacy system. Since you're a gun-for-hire, working for or against various countries, diplomatic relationships can vary wildly, and it's this diplomacy system that will link campaign missions. Explains Weidemann: "For example, Japan gives you a mission to destroy a nuclear power plant in Siberia. If you succeed, Japan's diplomatic status to you might become friendlier, while Siberia will become more hostile. In addition, Siberia's allies may not welcome your actions."

To survive these tense times, you and your team of AI-controlled soldiers will have access to over 50 different weapons, including pistols, rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, and a range of grenades. Most will be based on current technology, but since the game is set seven years in the future, expect a few nods to advanced R&D tech such as GPS communication systems, fancy vision goggles and cameras, sophisticated explosives, and a device that allows you to coordinate troops in a tactical commander mode.

*Söldner* will also feature over 80 vehicles, helicopters, and jets, most based on real-world transports from the U.S., Europe, Russia, and China.



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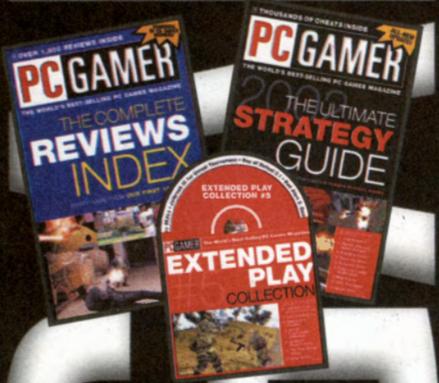
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**PC**

# BATTLING ON A BUDGET

People always ask why we don't review budget games. Mostly, it's because we, like you, don't discover them until we spot them on store shelves, serenading the world with their "\$29.99 or less" siren call. Publishers rarely offer them up for review because, well, you get what you pay for. Or do you? We snapped up a few value-priced modern combat games to see if they were diamonds in the rough or just cheap lumps of coal.

BY CHUCK OSBORN

## NAVY SEALS

"The only easy day...was yesterday."



YES, IT'S TRUE: THE ONLY EASY DAY was yesterday. I hadn't yet installed *Navy SEALs* on my PC.

Developed as a single-player FPS by Jarhead Games and released by ValuSoft, *SEALS* (\$19.99) begins by dropping you behind enemy lines in Iraq to recover a missing satellite. The 3D graphics engine won't give John Carmack night sweats, but it's functional. I'm armed with a SOCOM pistol, a MP5SD, a knife, and night-vision goggles, plus I can pick up AK47s. It's go-time.

I'm not sure if this knowledge applies to real-life war in Iraq, but here's what I've learned about Iraqi soldiers in Valueland: They'll stand motionless as you shoot them full of hot lead and watch in stony silence as you shred their buddies. Perhaps they've been broken by Saddam's cruel regime.

Unfortunately, I can't move past one mission. Apparently, Iraq has invested in magic tank shells that can zero in on me from anywhere on the map. Fighting an enemy with supernatural powers when you've got only a knife, 10 bullets, and scrappy determination just isn't enough. (D)

## SECRET SERVICE

"Sometimes the nation's security comes down to one person!"



I'M OBVIOUSLY NOT THAT PERSON. *Secret Service* (\$29.99) is one of the most difficult games I've ever played, and has forever erased my childhood dream of taking a slug for the president.

You're Mark Brophy, a new agent on his first assignment. Now I know why those guys never smile: I could barely survive for 15 seconds on my first mission, simply escorting the National Security Advisor to a meeting from the airport. My AI partner died in the first five seconds. Gun-toting terrorists swarmed the building we were holed up in from the left, right, behind, above, and below, perforating me and my protectee. I gave up after the 10th try.

On the plus side, *Secret Service* (from Romanian developer FUNLabs and Activision Value) is at least \$10 better than *Navy SEALs* in terms of graphics, AI, and configurability. You even get a choice of menu-interface skins, and it has a multiplayer mode. But since *Secret* pushes the boundaries of "budget" and is still insanely hard, it gets a (D+).

## U.S. MOST WANTED

"They can run — but they can't hide."



ALREADY, I CAN TELL THIS ONE IS A WINNER — it quotes President Bush and lists "3 modes of movement: Stealth, Jog, and Sprint" as a bulletpoint right on the box.

Another FPS pumped out by the FUNLabs and Activision Value factory, *USMW* (\$19.99) casts you as a recently retired U.S. Counter Terrorist operative who "unofficially" (wink, wink) comes out of retirement to deliver lethal justice to bank robbers, terrorists, war criminals, and other assorted scum. Thank goodness there's no red tape to hold me back.

While it's not quite up to *Splinter Cell* standards, you can easily eke out \$19.95 worth of fun from *USMW*. The single-player game is complemented by a range of multiplayer modes (deathmatch, team deathmatch, and Vigilantes vs. Tangos) playable over GameSpy or via a LAN. You can select a loadout from 24 authentic weapons before each mission, pick locks, and — of course — sneak, jog, and sprint. Not too shabby. (B+)

## SHADOW FORCE: RAZOR UNIT

"Rid the world of terrorism!"



NOW HERE'S A SENTIMENT I CAN GET BEHIND! FUNLabs/Activision Value round out their triumvirate of bargain games with a first-person shooter that places you behind enemy lines in "the Middle East" (they're not very specific) as an elite military operative tracking terrorist cells. The box claims the story has been "ripped from the headlines of today's leading newspapers" — good, because I'd hate to play a game based on a headline from a rinky-dink newspaper like the *Picayune Gazette* ("Area man wins \$50 in flower-arranging contest").

With 10 single-player missions, four multiplayer modes (though no GameSpy support), decent graphics and sound, and the ability to call down air strikes on ground targets, *Shadow Force* (\$19.99) deserves to be rescued from the clearance rack. It has some rough edges and last-generation visuals, but it's the one game here that almost made me forget I was playing a budget title. When you do take its low price into consideration, it rates an (A-).



*"A perfect bet for fans of online action"*

**IGN**



*"Possibly the best online team-based game ever"*

**CGM**

*Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome Expansion Pack requires Battlefield 1942 to play.*

Italy, July 18—Fighting is still heavy on all fronts with word of new battles raging throughout Italy. Reports continue to stream in of never-before-seen tanks and bombers joining the conflict, a total of 45 military assault vehicles at last count.

*Join the fight at: [battlefield1942.ea.com](http://battlefield1942.ea.com)*

# BATTLEFIELD™

1942

Intel suggests the possibility of online engagement with up to 64 soldiers of unknown allegiance. Armed resistance is expected to be fierce utilizing any combination of 25 lethal weapons. These battles are huge. But then again so is the prize: Victory.



Violence



# Onward to NIGHTSTRA

"The game could easily take it's rightful place among the very best online shooters"

**GAMESPOT**

"An online action experience no gamer should miss"

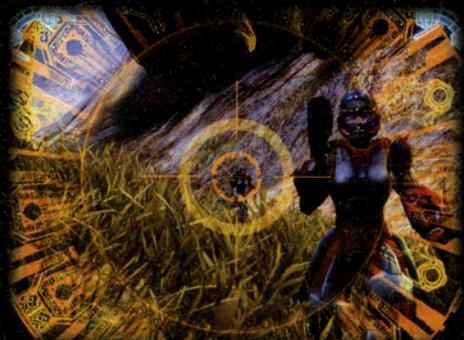
**GAMESPY**

"Battlefield 1942 is a special and wonderful game"

**PC GAMER**



"It's gonna save PC gaming as we know it." CGW





# Unreal III

## THE AWAKENING

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■ In this scene from Operation Husky, an Allied tank attempts to establish a beachhead. As in the Omaha Beach and Midway maps from *BF 1942*, capturing a spawn-point inland is the first order of business. Once you've got that foothold, the Axis will soon crumble beneath your might.



■ Once again, air power will play a key role in turning the tide of a battle, particularly when it comes to bombing enemy infantry.



■ *Road* introduces two new sides: the Italians and the French. And these French aren't wussies, either — they're full-blown Axis stompers.

# BATTLEFIELD 1942: THE ROAD TO ROME

NEW MAPS, NEW VEHICLES, NEW THEATER. SWEETNESS ALL AROUND

**N**o one would argue that *Battlefield 1942* was one of last year's best games. Its brilliantly realized focus on combined-arms combat set a permanent standard in multiplayer games, and the integration of seamless vehicle control is something that should be studied by every other developer. Not surprisingly, the road to financial success necessitates an add-on, so I took *Road to Rome* for a test drive.

I played three of the expansion's new maps — six will ship at release, all set in the Italian and Sicilian theatres of the war — and witnessed firsthand the fantastically brutal matches readying in this new setting.

The first map I played was the Battle of Anzio: a river cuts across the battlefield, and the Allies control a small port town while the Axis scum are situated upriver. Because of the river, battles can be waged on three fronts: in the air, on the ground, or in the river via Higgins Boats. Several bridges act as critical chokepoints.

Of all the new maps, my gut feeling is that Monte Cassino will quickly achieve classic

status. Re-creating the brutal and horrific battle for control of a vital hill south of Rome, Monte Cassino has the Axis positioned in an elevated monastery, with Allied forces trying to take it. The hill is heavily fortified with permanent guns, and despite the Allies' access to armor, the Axis can inflict some serious damage.

In one round of Monte Cassino, the chaos was exquisite: bodies were flying everywhere (I saw seven guys go up in one blast, their bodies twisting like rag dolls), and even when our Allies managed to reach the top of the hill, the Axis forces fell back into the monastery itself. At that point, the battle shifted from large-scale bombardment to small-arms combat.

The third map I played was Operation Husky, which will seem immediately familiar to fans of the original game's Omaha Beach level.

Operation Husky has the Allied forces trying to establish a beachhead (either by parachuting in or via Higgins Boats) while the Italian forces are dug in with heavy anti-tank and fortified machinegun nests. Before long, the sweeping, wide-open beach was littered with dead troops.

In addition to the new maps, *The Road to Rome* introduces eight new vehicles, including the British Mosquito plane, the Italian Carro Armato, and the German Sturmgeschutz. New weapons include the Sten SMG and the Italian Breda Modelo, and the Engineer will get the deadliest weapon of all, the bayonet. EA is also promising that *Battlefield's* bot AI and Internet code will receive enhancements.

Thankfully, the wait for *The Road to Rome* won't be long. Then we'll know the full glory of this mega-promising add-on. — William Harms



## RETRO

## WAR

With *Commandos 3*, Pyro promises to up the action quotient.



A sneak peek at some upcoming games set during the conflicts of the past

## COMMANDOS 3



## WWII RTS

(WORKING TITLE)



THE PUBLISHER OF *Operation Flashpoint* is following up its staggeringly successful military shooter with what it claims will be an authentic real-time-strategy depiction of battles that occurred during World War II. Codemasters and developer 1C (*IL-2 Sturmovik*) will cast you as a WWII commander leading a band of troops through over 100 accurately reproduced missions.

More intimate than most RTS games, *WWII* will allow you to zoom in on each of your individually skilled soldiers to discern their thoughts and feelings (hey, that's what the gamemakers tell us) during combat. Positioned as an introduction to the world of tactical wargaming, the game will implement authentic real-world uniforms and armaments belonging to the American, French, German, British, and Soviet armies.

■ Developer: 1C; Publisher: Codemasters; Release Date: Spring 2004

## VIET CONG



FROM EASTERN EUROPEAN studio Pterodon comes this all-American foray into the jungles of Vietnam. *Viet Cong's* graphics engine is actually pretty phenomenal, doing a terrific job of plunging you into the wet, foggy, muck-filled claustrophobia of a Southeast Asian jungle. A first-person shooter with an emphasis on squad leadership, the game features specialist subordinates whose unique skills are yours to manage in scripted, story-driven missions. The overall feel is very realistic, though we're a bit worried about the script's reliance on foul-mouthed chestnuts posing as gripping dialogue — profanity doesn't necessarily mean "edgy." With such hazards as tripwire booby-traps, machinegun ambushes, and plain old battle confusion, *Viet Cong* may be the most authentic first-person treatment of Vietnam ever attempted.

■ Developer: Pterodon; Publisher: Take-Two Games; Release Date: January 2003

DESPITE SELLING MILLIONS in Europe, the *Commandos* brand of tactical turn-based strategy hasn't sparked the same enthusiasm stateside. Catering primarily to the core fan base, No. 3 in the series will add some action and "wow" factor. Almost visually identical to those in *Commandos 2*, the supremely detailed backdrops still look spectacular.

Personnel changes on the development team could indicate a retooling of the oppressively difficult strategic elements. A focus on explosive set pieces and scripted action sequences should make this sequel more accessible, though you'll still control the same commandos from the second game, with scenarios set in European locations.

We're hoping that this enticing strategic series can up the oomph factor sufficiently to catch on with U.S.-based strategy gamers. Its feature-packed gameplay style deserves a wider U.S. audience.

■ Developer: Pyro Studios; Publisher: Eidos; Release Date: June 2003



## TOP SECRET



Military Intelligence

Government sources refuse to confirm if any lives were lost in the process of uncovering the following information...GHOST RECON 2 is in early development with a plan to take the franchise into a "specific direction." But with no design doc yet written, that direction could change at any moment, and we don't expect a word of where it's heading until around E3 time...OPERATION FLASHPOINT: THE SEQUEL is not yet confirmed, but we hear from our sources on the front lines that a Vietnam-set shooter may be the next game to follow in this franchise...Was SWAT swatted? After disappearing on the radar screen following a promising showing at E3 2002, the urban-based tactical shooter has apparently undergone significant changes — big enough to delay a release until late 2003...The TEAM FORTRESS 2 update is the same as the last update: our spies failed to infiltrate Castle Valve, suffering significant loss of life (and dignity) attempting to get the scoop. All we got: "Team Fortress 2 is still in development!" on "Valve's next-generation game technology." Interest...fading...

# C&C: GENERALS

U.S. at war with terrorists; GLA to "be blasted back to the Stone Age," says President Smith



Marketplaces have become highly dangerous places, as twitchy GLA operatives detonate bombs, destroying buildings and businesses.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — While we're busy flinging testosterone-fueled verbal barbs across the office, commanding our Generals forces in multiplayer duels, the single-player game has been kept under wraps. Its story of two powerhouse nations fielding vastly different military hardware — and a wild-card terrorist organization bucking all the traditional rules of warfare — has an eerie ring,

blending old-school Cold War mistrust with modern-day terrorist threats.

How close does C&C: Generals come to playing out real-world events in its fictional setting? Very...

#### OPERATION: SILENT DAWN (TRAINING MISSION)

Five U.S. Army Rangers. The Mazar el-Sharif Free Fire Zone in Northern

Afghanistan. A bio-chemical weapons factory. We have a situation!

From the outset of Generals, you're plunged into situations that so recently dominated our real-world headlines. And just like those brave boys on the ground, the U.S. Air Force is on hand to strike hard and ensure you're able to destroy the weapons factory.

#### OPERATION: FINAL JUSTICE (USA)

We're going into Iraq, boys. The real-world U.S. military believes that Saddam Hussein harbors a weapon called Scud Storm, and in Generals that weapon has been "liberated" by the terrorist GLA. Rumbling through the streets of Baghdad in Crusader tanks, chasing down the fleeing GLA, the super-weapon is detonated, leveling several city blocks and releasing a noxious cloud.

Time to move in, mop up, and chase 'em down so they can't do it again. Ever.

#### OPERATION: PILLAGE THE VILLAGE (GLA)

They're not collecting taxes (probably), so how are terrorist organizations getting funding? While members of the Saudi royal family have allegedly contributed to the coffers of some nefarious organizations, funding in Generals comes from intercepting supply convoys, with the GLA's objective in this mission being to collect \$40,000 in supplies. Robbing from the rich to give to the poor is not a policy we endorse.

# DIVINE DIVINITY™

CREATE YOUR OWN DESTINY!



## FEATURES

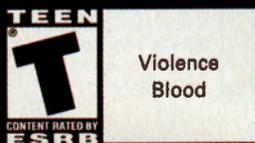
- Detailed role playing game
- A densely populated, versatile fantasy world
- Close to a hundred skills to learn through a new character development system
- An exciting background plot with many strands and sub-quests
- A huge world consisting of more than 20,000 screens
- A wide range of skills, spells, weapons and equipment

"Divine Divinity is addictive, open-minded and enormous fun." GameSpy

## WARRIOR, WIZARD OR SURVIVOR?

According to prophecy, you are the chosen one, and only you will be able to save the legendary land of Rivellon from the Lord of Chaos. But before you take on the fight against Evil, you must be discovered and blessed as the Divine Savior. Be careful — the apostate magicians must not get hold of you — no matter what happens! Choose your fate: Warrior, Wizard, or Survivor?

"Divine Divinity is a real pleasure to play." GameSpot



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



# reviews

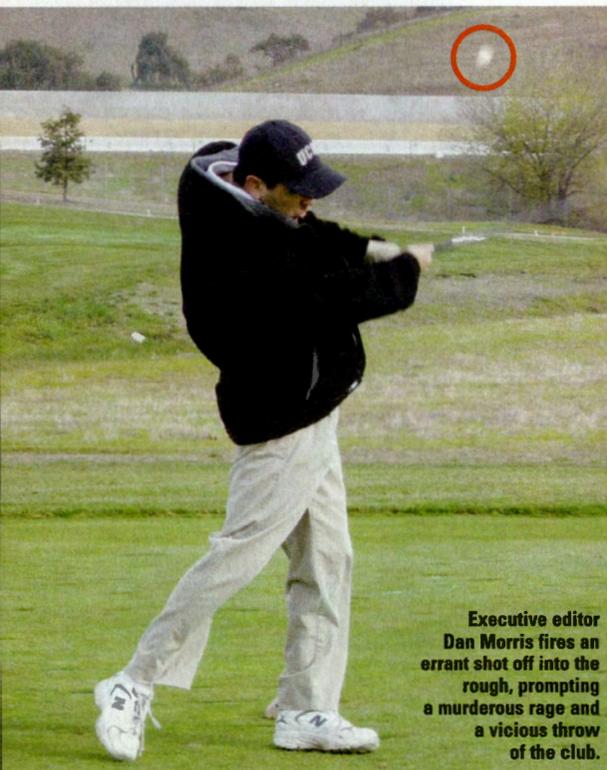
YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO NEW GAME RELEASES

## PC GAMER: "BAN GOLF!"

Staff study links game with real-world violence

A research team at *PC Gamer* has called for a nationwide ban on the sport of golf, after an on-staff study found a strong causal link between the game and real-world violence.

Four of five staffers — an overwhelming 80 percent of the study sample —



Executive editor Dan Morris fires an errant shot off into the rough, prompting a murderous rage and a vicious throw of the club.

"This new study clearly shows that playing golf — a deeply immersive activity in which players are edged toward aggression while clutching lethal blunt instruments — leads directly to violent behavior," said *PC Gamer* Editor-in-Chief Rob Smith, who oversaw the study at Poplar Creek Golf Course in San Mateo, Calif. Smith gave a press conference before reporters with the red, burning malice of golf-madness still coloring his livid cheeks. "Obviously, this is not a healthy activity...quite the contrary, it's plain to see that golf-inspired violence is a serious threat to all of our communities."

Experts have long suspected a relationship between golfing and acts of apparently random violence, noting that people from safe, non-deprived middle-class backgrounds were just as likely as anyone else to exhibit violent behavior during and immediately after extended sessions of golf. In 1998, several U.S. senators proposed legislation seeking tighter marketing controls on the sport; their bill is currently still pending.

Senator Joe Lieberman (D-Ct.), one of the co-authors of the legislation, commented on the *PC Gamer* study: "Here is the most solid proof yet of the correlation between golfing and violent outbursts. How many more Americans will have to be struck down before we get these clubs

were found to have committed acts of violence within minutes of bad golf shots. At least two staffers were reported to have angrily thrown clubs while screaming profanities, while in one extreme case an art director assaulted a garbage can with his pitching wedge.

out of people's hands?"

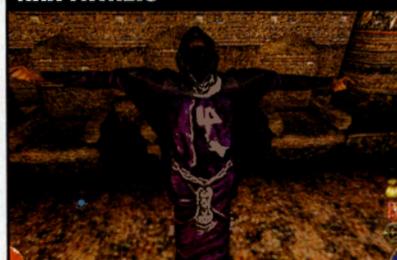
The *PC Gamer* staff joins Senator Lieberman, Colonel David Grossman, lawyer Jack Thompson, The Lion & Lamb Project, and John Daly in calling for an immediate ban on this increasingly controversial pastime.

### PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

Got some leftover holiday money? Pick up one of these hot new titles, all sure to please.

#### ARX FATALIS

JANUARY 2003



Ignore the goofy name and delve into this excellent roleplaying game. If you can't get enough of dungeon-crawling goodness, this one'll serve you well.

85%

#### COMBAT MISSION 2

JANUARY 2003



A mix of the very best in strategy- and wargaming, *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* lets you command a 3D battlefield in World War II.

90%

#### MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

JANUARY 2003



The Inner Sphere is once more aflame with conflict. Your king is the almighty dollar in this merc-themed *MechWarrior* extravaganza.

85%

### HOW WE RATE 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!

IGN Editors' Choice Awards ★ GameSpot scores it at 8.4 (great) of 10 ★ "Best of E3 2002,"

"The U.S. Army's new recruiting videogame is an online phenomenon"

—Newsweek

# AMERICA'S **A★A** ARMY SM

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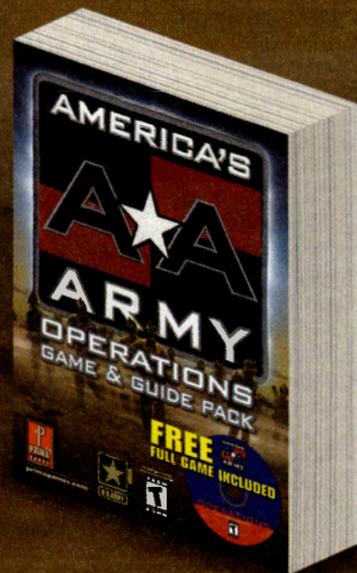
Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPCs. Scan all other product(s) being sold. Press "Total." Select "Yes" to apply package pricing. Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.



This game has received the following rating from the ESRB



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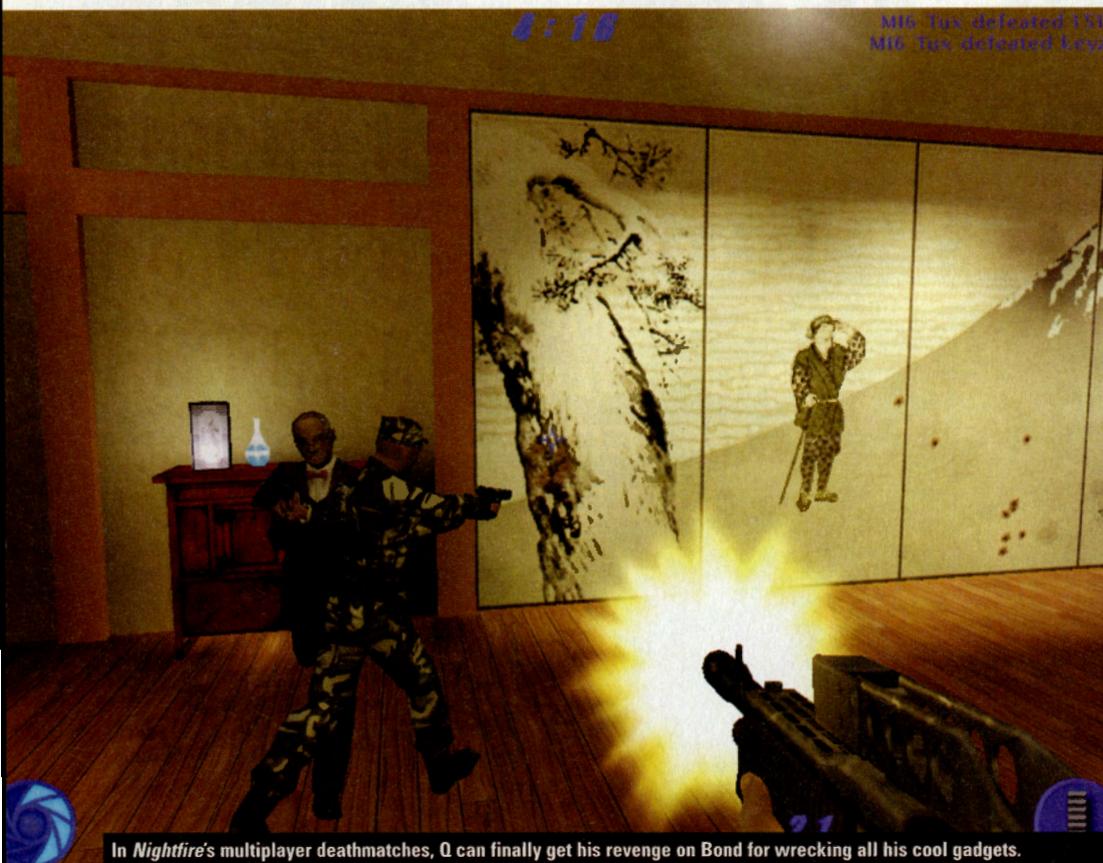




Don't be shy about using your X-ray specs — they're handy for getting a sneak peek at armed enemies and security cameras skulking behind closed doors and two-way mirrors.

# 007: Nightfire

EA's latest Bond romp is a ferocious misfire — aiming low and tragically hitting its mark



TOP: Implant Q-viruses into these. MIDDLE: Who needs a lockpick? BOTTOM: Your PDA can unlock doors by descrambling codes.

In *Nightfire's* multiplayer deathmatches, Q can finally get his revenge on Bond for wrecking all his cool gadgets.

It's an irony that only a master criminal being devoured alive by his own bionic piranha could savor — that *No One Lives Forever* and its sequel, jaunty pokes-in-the-eye at the Bond movie franchise, are far better games than one starring the venerable superspy himself.

In *Nightfire*, you're James Bond, Britain's MI6 playboy secret agent. Sophisticated, suave, cocksure — in this first-person shooter, you're none of these things. You see, I discovered the game's

secret — you're not Bond, you're M's gun valet: a stunt double who shoots the bad guys while the Pierce Brosnan-modeled 007 (who sounds more like George Lazenby) has all the fun during the game's tortured cinematic cut-scenes.

## ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET 007TH CIRCLE OF HELL IS FOREVER

BEFORE LAUNCHING THE GAME, YOU'RE TREATED to one of the title's high points — an intro-

ductory sequence modeled on the opening vignettes from the Bond films, complete with sexy power ballad. The intent, of course — from the appearance of the MGM lion to the blazing female figures somersaulting across your monitor screen — is to relay the message that *Nightfire's* original storyline is a thrilling cinematic adventure so tantalizing that it could be splashed on the big screen.

But the game's nine missions are actually a skeleton strung together by disjointed clichés. True, these are the clichés we've come to know and love — guns, girls, and gadgets — but they're presented with a perfunctory half-hearted yawn rather than silver-screen sizzle.

The head of Britain's secret service, M (obviously not voiced by Dame Judi Dench), has entreated you to investigate Rafael Drake, a slick industrialist and utterly forgettable evil super-genius who heads the Phoenix International Corporation. He's acquired some nuclear missiles and...well, frankly, he could be using them as giant pointy paperweights for all I know: *Nightfire* isn't big on coherent storytelling. What I do know is that you have to stop

him by attending a fancy dress party, infiltrate his secret underwater lair, and eventually blast off into outer space.

Now wait — that sounds a lot cooler than it actually plays. *Nightfire* is loaded with such sloppy bugs and rotten AI that I honestly believe Rafael Drake's first act of villainy was to eliminate the EA play-testing department.

From the first level, my attempt to crash a party with spy-chic stealth went pear-shaped: Merely touching the side of a truck bound for Drake's Austrian mountaintop castle bounced me back like a rubber Bond, sending me careening off a cliff to my death. And even though I'd blasted numerous guards with deafening automatic-weapons fire, and done so unmasked, I was welcomed into the soiree with open arms.

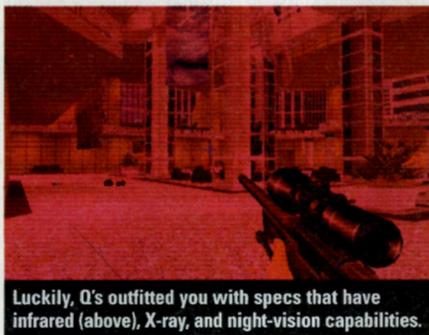
Next, M commands me to discretely photograph the slinky sex kittens in attendance (not her words) with my Q-issued cigarette lighter-slash-minicamera. (You wield a variety of gadgets throughout the game, such as pen-darts, a laser-watch, and very cool X-ray specs.) Here, another bug: multiple camera shots were required before the mission objective would register as completed.

### VITAL STATS

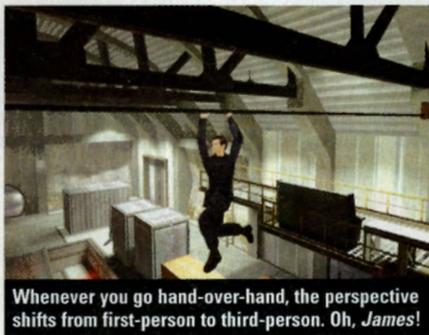
**CATEGORY** First-person shooter  
**ESRB RATING** T  
**DEVELOPER** Gearbox  
**PUBLISHER** EA  
**REQUIRED** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 675MB HD, 32MB 3D card  
**WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 1.4GB HD, 64MB 3D card  
**MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 32



Shades of *Moonraker*! The last part of the game takes place in Drake's outer-space lair. (See the lasergun?)



Luckily, Q's outfitted you with specs that have infrared (above), X-ray, and night-vision capabilities.



Whenever you go hand-over-hand, the perspective shifts from first-person to third-person. Oh, James!

Keep in mind that each of these irksome glitches occurred within the first 30 minutes of gameplay. Individually, they're annoying; in sequence like this, they're downright frustrating.

**THE SPY WHO BORED ME**

INCLUDING HIS TRUSTY WOLFRAM P2K PISTOL (with optional silencer), Bond can carry up to four firearms at one time — machine guns, sniper rifles, missile launchers, and a massive shoulder cannon among them. (It's surprising you don't jingle like a charm bracelet while sneaking around.)

You can also load up on frag and flash-bang grenades, tripmines, and body armor. You'll find the latter lying on desks or in stairwells, and sometimes inside padlocked



Alura is fully equipped for the job. She knows how to grip a shaft. She's got a leg up on the situation. And she has big breasts.

chests and lockers that can be broken into using your laser watch.

Objectives are relayed to you by M or by lovely allies like the alluring Alura McCall and secret agent Zoe Nightshade, a holdover from *Agent Under Fire*, a console game that never made its way to the PC. Unfortunately, these goals — blowing up a computer, setting charges on the base of a bridge, and so on — seem pretty straightforward and arbitrary. You have a license to kill, but little license to exercise creative problem-solving à la the forthcoming *Splinter Cell*.

The appeal of a James Bond game, Bond being Bond, is in the rendered cinematics: trading double-entendres with the ladies, parachuting out of danger, and driving your Q-rigged Aston Martin. Unfortunately, a driving mode was jettisoned from *Nightfire's* PC version, though it remains in the console iterations.

**FOR YOUR AI ONLY**

*NIGHTFIRE* HAS SOME OF THE WORST AI I'VE ever seen in a big-budget game release. Guards are idiot savants — incapable of hearing a firefight in the next room or noticing that a nearby co-worker just had

his head blown off, yet able to zero in on you immediately as soon as you enter their radius of fire (in one case, even while Bond was hidden inside an air vent).

The bipolar AI makes certain levels particularly grating, especially the forced-stealth "alert the guards and fail" missions. And though the manual suggests you should "shoot out overhead lights to remain hidden in the shadows," a whopping none of the lights I shot ever broke.

That's okay, because all the enemies are apparently laminated in bulletproof shielding. The damage model is dodgy, contrarily letting you get off a one-shot kill to the head using your sniper rifle while five pistol rounds to the face will barely make a bad guy flinch.

Boss battles are likewise uninspired. There are four bosses — a ninja, a laser-gun-toting underwater henchman, two ninjas, and then Drake himself, wielding the same lasergun but now out in space. Running away and shooting is the method for beating each one.

**VIEWS TO A KILL**

SO WHAT IS THERE TO LIKE ABOUT *NIGHTFIRE*? Well, if it was a movie, the set design would win an Oscar. Missions take place in a variety of minutely detailed environments, from a countryside paper-walled Japanese estate to cluttered rocket-ship hangars to Drake's opulent chandeliered inner sanctum.

A few sequences showed promise, such as one part where you're trapped inside a dangling elevator and have to snipe enemies before they can shoot through the cable that's holding you up. Infiltrating Drake's island facility was fun, too, mainly because, unlike in some other levels, I was given more latitude in choosing stealth versus brute force. (Though I would've liked the ability to knock out a jump-suited goon and steal his clothing.)

The multiplayer game is merely okay, offering deathmatch, team deathmatch, and CTF modes. Some classic Bond villains (Jaws, Oddjob) and hotties (Christmas Jones) are selectable skins, but the likenesses are hit-and-miss. Scaramunga, for example, looks as much like Christopher Lee as I do.

For a rollicking good spy caper, Cate Archer's *NOLF 2* definitely holds the upper hand this round. *Nightfire's* Bond is just bland. *James Bland.* — Chuck Osborn

**FINAL VERDICT**

**HIGHS:** Highly detailed visuals and set designs; a few creative sequences; the Bond theme song.

**LOWS:** Buggy; inconsistent damage model and AI; design too linear; no driving mode.

**BOTTOM LINE:** *Nightfire* promises intoxicating goodness, but Bond slips you a mickey.

**PC GAMER** 57%  
MERELY OKAY

# Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings

**Dereth has been reborn, with a lovely face and a little less going on upstairs**

**M**assively multiplayer games like *Asheron's Call 2* have a magical quality. Like an Everlasting Gobstopper, this one promises endless enjoyment — a sugary sweet, mouth-watering delight that lasts a lifetime.

Diehard fans of the original game are likely to find this sequel more sour-tasting than the rest of us. *AC 2* offers no user-

tweakable player stats, and at least in its out-of-the-box state, no NPCs. Spell-casting requires no ingredients, and long-range weapons rely on a never-ending supply of free ammo. In short, *AC 2* is a far simpler game than many veteran fans were hoping for — but chances are, a broader

audience will be willing to pay the \$12.95/month fee (first month free) as a result.

The new game is set 100 years after the inhabitants of Dereth were defeated by evil foes and forced underground to survive. The three playable races — Human, Lugian, and Tumerok — are finally coming back to the surface to reclaim their ruined lands, which is how the developers explain the current lack of NPCs. As cities are rebuilt by players, and by way of monthly updates, NPCs should start to trickle in.

Without NPCs to run shops, you can get weapons and armor in only three ways: swipe 'em from the bodies of slain monsters, craft them yourself, or buy them from other players. To craft them, all you need are the appropriate raw materials; at the start of the game, those are easy to come by. Very quickly, however, weapon and armor recipes start to require rare materials that cannot be mined and, as of right now, are tough to find. The player community has been grouching, though, so expect monsters to start dropping these rare items a little more often after the next patch.

In the absence of tweakable stats, you're given skill points to spend on an amazingly wide variety of skills unique to each race. Choose to change your character's direction, and you can even "unlearn" skills, losing only



the experience points you spent to buff them up over time. It's an idiot-proof system that even an idiot like me appreciates.

I also get weak at the knees over *AC 2*'s graphics. The character models look astounding. Realistic real-time shadows abound, and rolling hills spill out into expansive valleys and gorgeous waterways, inspiring me to never bathe myself or date.

Even on the most populated servers, Dereth is rather empty right now, and there aren't a great many quests yet. Crafting objects at forges substantially increases your likelihood of success, but very few of them have been rebuilt by players at this early stage, so you'll find yourself hanging out around the odd one or two that have. Like any new MMORPG, *AC 2* has shipped with a few bugs, such as invisible seams that occasionally hang you up for no apparent reason.

Based on Turbine's history of developing the original *Asheron's Call*, and its

ambitious update schedule for *Asheron's Call 2*, I'm confident that most of these issues will be resolved quickly. In the meantime, even though I've only been playing a skeleton of what I believe will grow into a fully fleshed-out behemoth, my mouth continues to water over the sugary-sweet treat that is *Asheron's Call 2*'s out-of-the-box experience.

— TheVede

**VITAL STATS**

**CATEGORY** Online RPG

**ESRB RATING** M

**DEVELOPER** Turbine

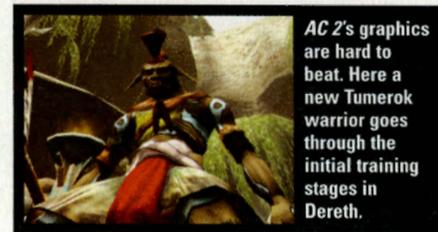
**PUBLISHER** Microsoft

**REQUIRED** PIII 733MHz, 256MB RAM, 2GB HD, 32MB 3D card with T&L, 56k modem

**WE RECOMMEND** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, broadband

**MAXIMUM PLAYERS**

Massively multiplayer



**FINAL VERDICT**

**HIGHS:** Sweet graphics; entertaining combat and crafting system; frequent updates.

**LOWS:** Useless manual; few epic-feeling quests; under-populated at launch.

**BOTTOM LINE:** *AC 2* may be simpler than the original, but it hasn't shed any of the fun.

**PC GAMER** **82%**

**EXCELLENT**



Such is the pace of the action, you have to savor your golden moments in replays.

# FIFA 2003

Even with a new uniform and new skills, it's the same old player

Every winter I look forward to the arrival of the latest *FIFA* game, even though in the last couple of years that feeling has been tinged more and more with trepidation.

For the 2003 version, EA Sports has introduced the "freestyle" control option, as it has with its other monolithic sports franchises. This one button, when triggered by a D-pad direction, causes your player to

juke and jink against a defender. It's actually a very subtle and effective approach. Gone are the crazy step-over moves, flicks over the head, and other nonsense that looked pretty but was virtually never seen on an actual soccer field.

The result distinctly illustrates why soccer is "the beautiful game." Scoring goals now requires a really delicate touch, and the goals look supremely realistic. It took me several games just at Semi-Pro (the second of four difficulty levels) to finally find the back of the net — but oh, what a glorious moment.

Unfortunately, it seems that the difficulty in scoring is the developers' way of balancing out the appalling defensive AI. AI defenders move within their own zones and can't react to events outside that area, such as when your central defender is pulled out of position, leaving the striker to run through to goal unchallenged. Against the computer, skilled players can exploit this weakness, regardless of the respective statistical abilities of these superbly rendered and animated players.



Controlling the velocity and trajectory of a free-kick is incredibly skillful, requiring a fine touch.

As always, the game looks phenomenal. Though some player resemblances need more work, it's easy to spot the world's biggest soccer stars. Across the hundreds of world club teams, even U.S. soccer star (and game-box cover boy) Landon Donovan is instantly recognizable.

Thankfully, the online matchmaking service is remarkably stable out of the box. I had no problems finding games, and lag was never an issue (though you'll likely have to play against European and Korean opponents, as the North American lobby seemed permanently deserted).

Once more, though, *FIFA* is the only soccer game in town, and as such it's a no-brainer recommendation for fans of the world's greatest sport. The sad thing is, as long as this series remains the only option, EA will see little need to invest the time to fix that damned defensive AI. — Rob Smith



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# Starfleet Command III

A home for the hardcore opens its door. Is it safe for newbies to enter?

Federation, Klingon, and Romulan vessels fight for control of the galaxy. On hexes. Yep, must be the newest *Starfleet Command* game.

Indeed, this fourth entry in the series (counting 2001's *Orion Pirates* add-on) brings back the trademark ship-on-ship tactical combat in full force. But it also marks some big changes for the franchise.

## VITAL STATS

**CATEGORY** Tactical strategy  
**ESRB RATING** E  
**DEVELOPER** Taldren  
**PUBLISHER** Activision  
**REQUIRED** PIII 450, 128MB RAM, 650MB HD  
**WE RECOMMEND** PIII 800, 256MB RAM  
**MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 6

Most obvious is the leap to the *Next Generation* universe. *SFC III*'s single-player game offers three campaigns — Fed, Klingon, and Romulan — with a pretty good overarching story involving the first two parties building a space station that

can monitor the Neutral Zone. Voiced mission briefings (with Patrick Stewart as Picard) add a new immersiveness to the 44 main missions, which include attacks on ships/starbases, scanning objects, and defending convoys.

*SFC III*'s a game of details, though, so what's crucial is the new *technology*. Playing as the Feds, you can captain Defiant- (*DS9*), Intrepid- (*Voyager*), and Sovereign-class (*TNG*) vessels. If you're a Klingon or Romulan, you can helm all-new Birds of Prey, Warbirds, and other recognizable ships. I love the newer, more powerful ships, and the new weapons — quantum



You can play as the Borg in single- or multiplayer skirmishes, Dynaverse 3 bouts, or Conquest mode.



In "Recall," your Klingon ship helps protect the Unity starbase from evil traitors.

torpedoes, shield-piercing polaron torpedoes, and an anti-cloak scan — are terrific.

Another big change: Taldren's finally streamlined *SFC*'s vastly complicated interface. It's still highly detailed, but some sub-menus have been eliminated — in many cases, by simply stripping out features. Gone are attack probes, different shuttle types, two of your shields, and the ability to personally helm other ships in your fleet (you now order them from afar). I'm sure some hardcore *SFC* fans will balk at losing options, but I really didn't miss what's been nixed.

In tweaking your ships' functions, Taldren made a few key additions, too. One is the ability to warp across the game map — a godsend, since sprinting across the battlefield used to involve going at full impulse and cranking up the game speed. Better yet is the ability to refit vessels: you can now

enhance/reduce shields, weapons, engines, cloak, and other features on every ship, which introduces an awesome new tactical component. Finally, Taldren's brought back *SFC*'s much-loved RPG element, wherein you can track the growth of several key crewmembers — even swapping them with more experienced officers if you wish.

The returning Dynaverse multiplayer mode is top-notch, letting you choose your empire and then fight in online battles of up to six players. The new ability to join other players' fleets enhances teamwork; cooler still is the ability to play as the Borg in both types of multiplay. Borg vessels are monstrous, shieldless hulks armed with cutting beams and other deadly weapons, and a fully loaded cube can often slaughter multiple vessels.

That's a whole lot of great stuff I've mentioned, so why the sub-80s score? *Bugs*. Though *SFC III* doesn't crash to the desktop like *SFC/SFC II*, its single-player campaigns — especially the Fed missions — have some supremely annoying glitches. Among the many examples: end-of-mission briefings that cut off prematurely; having the *Enterprise* be destroyed seconds after its health registered as nearly full; not being able to beam over to objectives — in one case, because a planet *vanished* off the map; and the frequent need to load save-games twice before they work. Ugh!

It hurts to see an awesome game in a series I love be diminished by bugs. With some good patching, *SFC III* will be an excellent game. Just not yet. — Corey Cohen



Flying a Defiant-class ship armed with pulse phasers is one of the highlights of the game. That Warbird's toast.

## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Easier interface; ship refits; more voiceovers; *TNG* license; warping; crew stats.  
**LOWS:** A number of sloppy bugs and glitches; fewer empires; less mission variety than previous *SFCs*.  
**BOTTOM LINE:** The most accessible *SFC* yet, and solid *Trek* gaming. But damn these bugs!

**PC GAMER** 79%  
**GOOD**

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# God's Hand

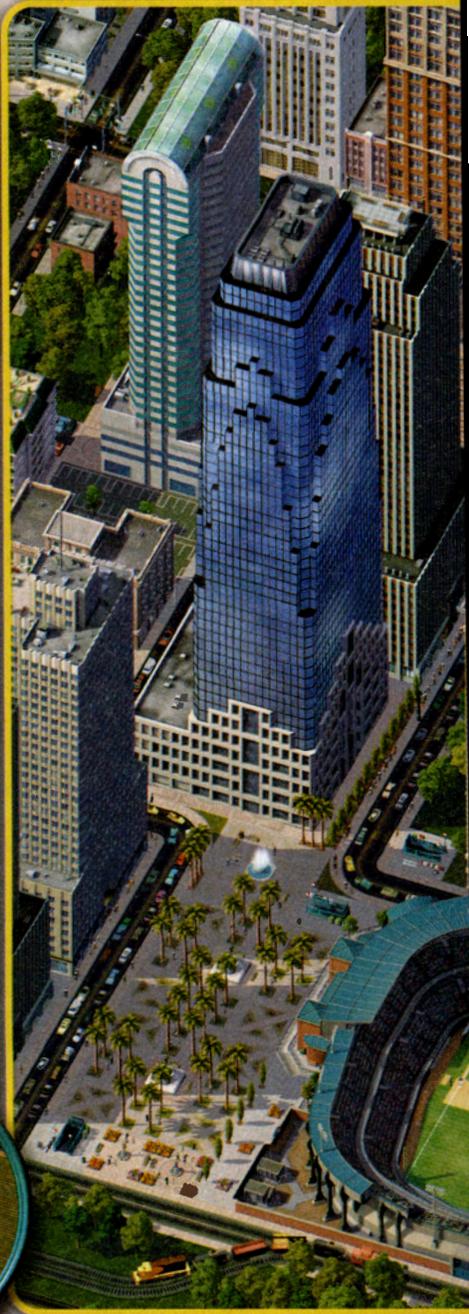


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Challenge Everything

# Platoon

See Charlie. See Charlie shoot. Order your men to hit the dirt. Watch them die. Repeat.

It might be called *Platoon* and have a picture of Willem Dafoe buying the farm on the box, but about the only thing this squad-based combat sim has in common with the Oscar-winning film is that you control a platoon in Vietnam.

Is it deceptive advertising? Yes. Could it be overlooked? Yes — if the game offered some degree of drama or fun.

Unfortunately, those two things are severely rationed.

The game puts you in the boots of one Martin Lionsdale, a “professional soldier” who graduated West Point with “very good results” and then received “Special Military Training” —

and earned the rank of *corporal*! Anyhow, you control Lionsdale and the troops under his command — rifle squads, machine gunners, engineers, medics, and so forth depending on the mission — from an adjustable third-person perspective. A tutorial quickly gets you up to speed on the game’s interface; it also reveals a camera system that’s so touchy, most players will abandon any notion of trying to rotate or pan the view.

Probably the hardest aspect of building a combat simulation is creating AI routines



See that black hole? One of your boys tripped a mine. It just knocked him down for a few seconds.



Wha...? These grunts won't turn to see who's waxing their asses with AK-47 fire until you tell them to!

that result in realistic behavior, but developer Digital Reality took a unique approach to the problem: they didn't bother with AI at all. That's right — your men won't do *anything* unless you give them specific orders. Order them to advance down a road, and they'll keep marching along even as the enemy cuts them down one by one with machine-gun fire. Should the enemy start shooting from the rear, they won't even bother to turn and get a look-see at who's peppering them with hot lead.

This stupidity extends even to Lionsdale and the engineer specialists who can disarm mines — they'll announce that they've spotted a mine *and then walk right over it*. The good news here is that mines in *Platoon* aren't quite the threat they were in real life: a soldier who steps on one will be knocked down and lose some health

points, but in a couple of seconds he'll be back on his feet and ready to be sent on his way. Too bad this farcical damage-modeling extends to your heavy weapons — score a direct hit with a LAW on an enemy bunker, and you'll discover the VC have the same ability to endure mortal wounds as your own men do.

The enemy behavior is similarly flawed. They're little more than cardboard cutouts that fire when you're in range, and they make no discernible effort to maneuver at all. Often you'll see them stand bolt upright within spitting distance of your soldiers, blissfully firing away until either they or your troops are dead.

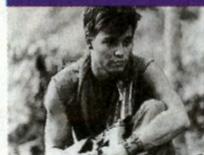
But the crowning fiasco of *Platoon* is the inability to save your game during a mission. Combined with the zombie-like behavior of your troops, it means you'll spend an insane amount of time going over the same ground and spotting the same enemies again and again. The problem is supposed to be fixed in a patch, but the point is that a game this frustrating and time-consuming should never have shipped without this feature.

I could go on about the hilarity of the manual, the ridiculous in-game dialogue (Lionsdale actually groans “They got me!” when he dies), and the paper-thin multiplayer support and documentation, but suffice it to say that the only feeling of authenticity you'll get from *Platoon* is the same sort of futility that pervaded the *actual* Vietnamese conflict. — Stephen Poole



The foliage in *Platoon* looks absolutely fabulous. There, I said something good about this game.

## VIETNAM 90210



No, you're not seeing things. That's pretty boy Johnny Depp in his breakout role as some nameless soldier in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986). A year later, his new home was TV's *21 Jump Street*.

### VITAL STATS

**CATEGORY** Real-time strategy  
**ESRB RATING** T  
**DEVELOPER** Digital Reality  
**PUBLISHER** Strategy First  
**REQUIRED** PIII 600, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D video card, 56K modem  
**WE RECOMMEND** PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, broadband Internet connection  
**MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 2

### FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Terrific visual detail; convincing animations; textures for the foliage look great.

**LOWS:** Weak AI; no in-mission saves; crazy damage model; awful vocalizations; twitchy camera control.

**BOTTOM LINE:** You'll spend more time laughing at the .WAV files than actually playing the game.

**PC GAMER** 30%  
**DON'T BOTHER**

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Mr. David English

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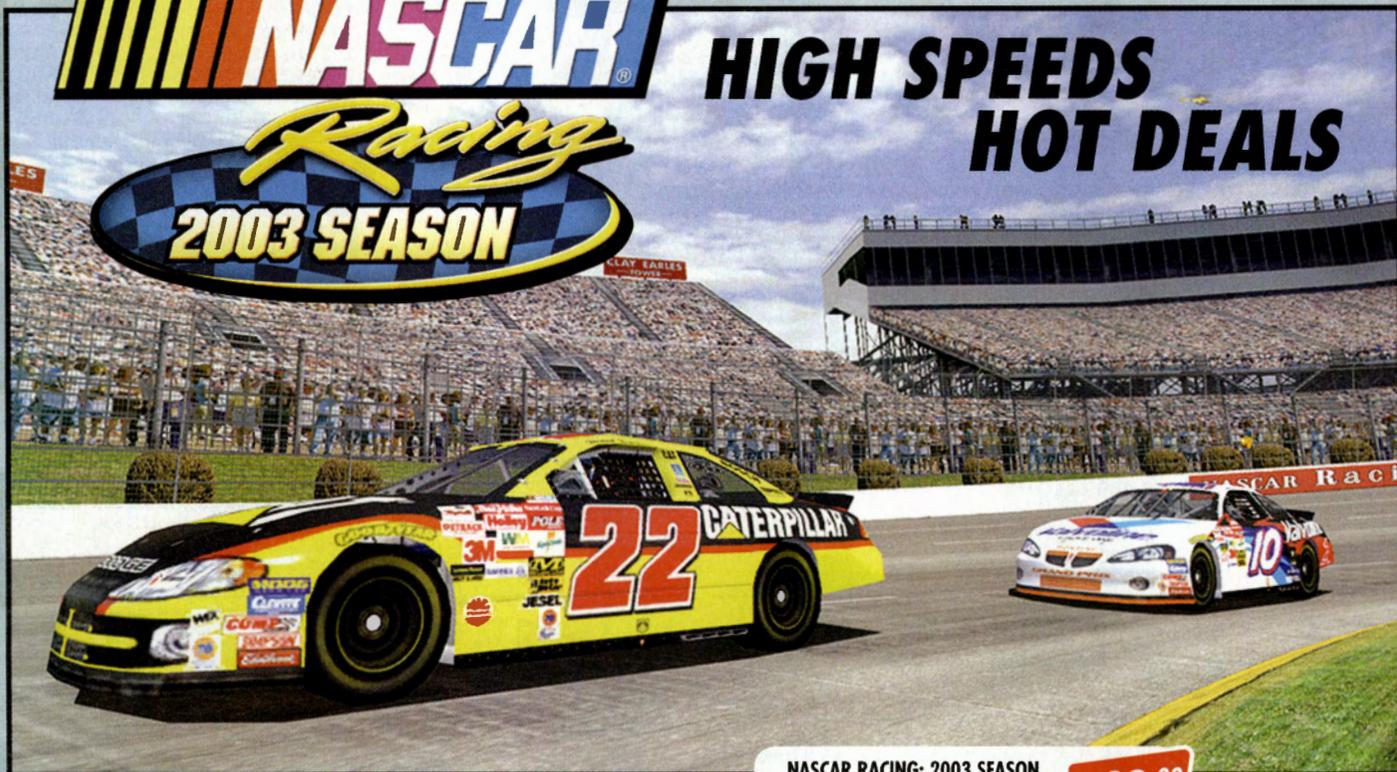
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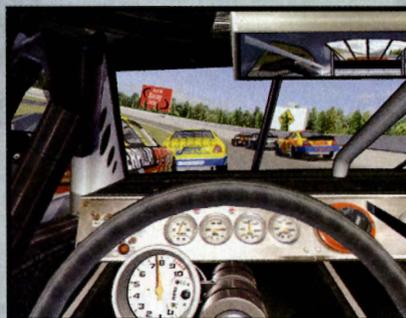
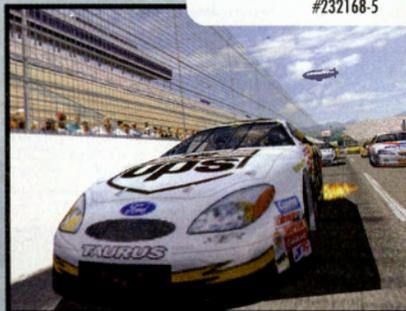
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# Dragon's Lair 3D

The laserdisc phenomenon bursts into the third dimension in this triumphant conversion

**T**here are two distinct levels on which to experience *Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair*. For the jaded under-20 set, it's a cartoon action/adventure title based on an old arcade game. But for older kids like myself, who can name the exact time and place they first saw a *Dragon's Lair* laserdisc machine and plopped down a then-unheard-of 50 cents a game, it's a cel-shaded godsend.

See, for once, not only does the remake not trample childhood memories of the original, but it's also superior in just about every way.

*Dragon's Lair 3D* is essentially an extended retelling of the 2D classic. You play as Dirk the Daring, an undeniably brave, if clumsy, doofus knight who's in love with leggy Princess Daphne. When the greedy dragon Singe kidnaps her — locking the vapid, high-pitched princess away in his treasure-laden subterranean lair — Dirk must survive a gauntlet of diabolical traps and fiendish villains (plus his own stupidity) to rescue her.

Appropriately, the game launches with an all-new animated sequence produced by Don Bluth, co-creator of the first *Dragon's Lair*. A welcome blast of nostalgia, it doesn't begin to prepare you for the game's awe-inspiring metamorphosis into 3D. As you take control, you're no longer limited to "left," "right," and "action": the free-moving Dirk lopes goofily toward the castle door, leaping over gaps and drawing his sword in real time to slash at a familiar-looking drawbridge eye-tentacle monster. This richly hued cel-shaded spectacle is what *Dragon's Lair* aspired to be: a playable cartoon.

By holding down the action button, you can charge up your sword for an energized attack.



Now, I fully expect that anyone over age 25 has already tossed this magazine aside and is currently racing to the store to pick up a copy of *Dragon's Lair 3D*. As well you should: Dirk's return to the lair won't disappoint his faithful followers. Everything's here: the multitude of zany deaths, memorable snares and elaborate traps, cinematic in-engine cut-scenes, and a lavish musical score. Like me, you'll be giggling and yelping with delight from the first scene.

For the rest of you, it gets a bit trickier. Without wistful adolescent memories, does *Dragon's Lair 3D* hold up as an action/adventure game? Well, if you're not expecting a revolutionary level of depth, then the answer is yes.

The action is still broken up into short interludes — for example, once you've beaten the electrical knight, exit through the unlocked door and you're off to the next adventure — but Dirk now has access to new abilities and items (gliding, fire-retardant dragon armor), new weapons (fire sword, crossbow), and special moves (such as a charged whirlwind attack). Think of it as a poor man's

## REIGN OF FIRE? WE THINK NOT.



As Singe sideswipes you with flame breath, step forward just enough to avoid his chin. When he finally shoots a single fire burst, catch it with your sword and fling it back at his belly.

*Zelda*: gorgeous animated sword-and-sorcery set pieces strung together by a series of puzzles and deathtraps.

As is common to this genre, the action is occasionally obscured when the camera clips into a wall or scenery. More troublesome, though, is the inconsistent control scheme — without warning, you'll lose the ability to steer with the mouse when in tight spaces or when the camera perspective shifts from behind to overhead.

Those faults aside, *Dragon's Lair 3D* does exactly what it sets out to do — it conjures the off-kilter humor and slapdash fun of the original. And though a twist has been added to the classic storyline, nobody will mistake its plot for *King Lear*: You're a knight, the distressed damsel is a princess, you save her. End of story.

That is, until we get a 3D remake of *Dragon's Lair II*. (Hopefully.) — *Chuck Osborn*

## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Beautiful cel-shaded visuals; cartoon-quality animation; imaginative levels; lots of laughs.

**LOWS:** Control is randomly wonky; Daphne's "nails-on-a-chalkboard" squeak can turn straight men gay.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A somewhat shallow but brilliantly faithful re-creation of an age-old classic.

**PC GAMER** 80%  
EXCELLENT



The familiar "rolling marbles trap" is a blast from the past.

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# Hearts of Iron



The world is at war, and now you can wage it on the military, political, and economic fronts

**H**old onto your history books and hook up the intravenous feeding tubes, because this one's going to sit you down and shut you up for the next month or two...at least.

*Hearts of Iron* is a grand-strategic wargame that gives you a shot at redirecting World War II as any one of several dozen countries between 1936 and 1948.

It's based on the *Europa Universalis* engine that wowed strategy gamers over a year ago. Buckling exhaustive historical detail onto compulsive gameplay, developer Paradox has delivered a compelling WWII grand-scale sim.

## VITAL STATS

<b>CATEGORY</b>	Real-time strategy
<b>ESRB RATING</b>	E
<b>DEVELOPER</b>	Paradox Entertainment
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	Strategy First
<b>REQUIRED</b>	PIII 300, 64MB RAM, 120MB HD
<b>WE RECOMMEND</b>	PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 370MB HD
<b>MAXIMUM PLAYERS</b>	8

When I say "grand," I'm talking about a King Kong Burrito Supreme with extra-special sauce and triple toppings. The designers have mapped the entire globe, breaking each country into provinces to give traction to the gradual conquest or defense of nations. The game plays out in real time (yeah-bob, that's no typo) in increments of hours. You can slow down or pause events as you like without compromising control. It's always a gamble pitting the tension of the clock against the complexity of a wargame, but Paradox pulls it off like Rommel on a roll.

After selecting a country at startup (including Belgium, Portugal, and others alongside the usual heavy-hitters of England and Germany), you're tasked with managing its internal resources, diplomacy, technology, and military activity. The primary currency of the game is Industrial Capital, which consists of sub-categories like consumer goods, supplies, research, and production. You generate industrial capital by controlling provinces that contain coal, oil, steel, or rubber resources, and by building additional industries.

Research in *Hearts of Iron* makes other games' tech trees look like grade-school doodles. Broken into 14 categories ranging from infantry research to naval warfare doctrine, the massive array of upgrades affects everything from tank armor to radar capabilities to the eventual development of The Bomb. You have literally hundreds of unique technologies to poke at, all with slick historical pictures and informative descriptions. It's nothing short of dazzling.

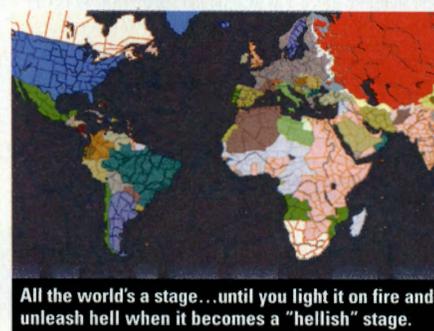
The other side of all this detail is combat, which is executed very smartly thanks to a brilliant little innovation that allows you to time-coordinate all your unit attacks



If you let it run unattended, the game consistently plays out (generally) true to historical form.



The famous "dogpile" maneuver: an awful strategy, but check the size on that Soviet army list.



All the world's a stage...until you light it on fire and unleash hell when it becomes a "hellish" stage.

by the hour. For example, you can plan a typical German blitzkrieg bomber-armor-infantry attack in that very chronological order, meaning that *Hearts* is one RTS that *doesn't* demand that you be clicking individual units in sequence. The designers even added the ability to switch between 3D units or standard NATO symbols for display preference.

But you'll need more than a few casual sessions to absorb this monster. For example, it tracks complete global weather patterns from hour to hour (since weather greatly impacts attacks). You'll need to learn the ins and outs of running sea convoys, creating coalition armies, managing your political appointees, and above all else, coming to grips with a killer AI that'll run you straight out of Dodge on higher difficulty levels.

Is it all too much? At times it really can be a bit overwhelming, simply because

you're controlling (in most cases) vast European nations and their conquests and colonies. If your idea of a serious mental workout hits the ceiling at *Red Alert 2*, you're better off passing entirely.

But if you've been waiting eagerly for a definitive grand-strategic WWII simulation, that glorious day has finally arrived. You have your marching orders. — Matthew Peckham

## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Brilliant battle-management tool; has tremendous historical fidelity; extremely deep.

**LOWS:** Almost excessively complex; a few bugs involving the timing of canned events.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A grand strategy classic, but only for those with the mettle to tackle a huge game.



# Civilization III: Play the World

CATEGORY Strategy ESRB E DEVELOPER Firaxis PUBLISHER Infogrames REQUIRED Civilization III, PII 400, 64MB RAM, 400MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 128MB RAM, broadband MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8



The classic "waiting" phase gets even longer in some human-on-human modes.



Never without its sense of humor, the game makes some great gags at history's expense.

After struggling to enjoy *Play the World*, the new add-on to the phenomenally enjoyable *Civilization III* (Holiday 2001; PCG rating: 92%), I've come to the conclusion that this game was just meant to be single-player.

The main addition in this expansion is a "simultaneous mode" for online play, employing an adjustable time limit wherein all players get to make their moves and then the results are calculated. The problem with the add-on's time-based modes is that the current code is very laggy, and you're always struggling against the game rather than the turn

clock. Play-by-email mode works better, but the inability to replay your opponent's turn can cause a lot of problems, especially when he's threatening your cities or has eliminated one of your units.

Among the other modes are Elimination (lose a city, lose the game), Regicide/Mass Regicide (protect your king from being killed), and Capture the Princess (capture the flag). They're more stable and can be played as single-player variants, but they feel purely like mini-games.

Perhaps the best reasons to buy *Play the World* are the additions to *Civ III*'s single-player game. The interface has been

improved — all of a unit's options are now listed as buttons, instead of your having to remember keyboard shortcuts for lesser-used functions. Three new city improvements help you earn more money (a much-needed tweak), while three new worker actions help you expand your zones of control. You also get a new Wonder — the Internet.

In the end, these additions are what we'd normally expect from a patch, not a \$30 retail product. The fact that *Civ III*'s online game was nearly unplayable before being patched is inexcusable, and even now further improvements need to be made to deal with the lag (scrolling and changing info screens are still very slow) and the crummy code (lost connections are common, and full-bore system crashes still occur).

I personally think *Civ III* is a near-perfect single-player game, and it seems only to suffer for the multiplayer element. But if you must "play the world," you might want to wait and "play the patch." — Bert Salzmoor

**PC GAMER** 68%  
ABOVE AVERAGE

# WWE Raw

CATEGORY Sports sim ESRB T DEVELOPER MicroVision PUBLISHER THQ REQUIRED PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 128MB HD, 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card MAXIMUM PLAYERS 4

Wrestling games are rare on the PC — but good wrestling games are rare on consoles, which is why even PC-centric wrestling fans have had little cause for weeping. But THQ is now in business with Anchor, the Japan-based wrestling/ultimate-fighting shop that produces some of the best fighting games on any platform — and so the arrival of *WWE Raw* to the PC is a cause for chair-bashing celebration.

The in-the-ring action is really darn good, with lifelike 3D models, smooth animations, and effective rock-paper-scissors grappling that Anchor has nearly perfected. Each "WWE superstar" (to use Vince McMahon's phrase) has his or her own repertoire of rampage, including slaps, stomps, clothesline maneuvers, turnbuckle leaps, submission holds, and all the classic pins.

Modes include one-on-one, tag team, tournament format, and even two-on-one "dirty wrestling" matches. Everything's presented in TV format, complete with gaudy entrances. The degree of customiza-

tion is surprisingly high, with a deep character-creation mode. (You can even select a WWE celeb to be your manager — he/she can then influence the match through nefarious interference.)

Best of all is the tutorial, which might honestly be the very best I've ever seen in a game. Why is it so great? Simple — it puts you in the ring and walks you through every move and combo. Any brainless chimp can learn the moves in five minutes of the tutorial. That's what I'm saying: these games can be frustratingly complex, but one miraculous demo sequence sets it all straight.

Ultimately, though, there's only so much you can do in a wrestling game before it all fades into the same blur of trappings and pin falls. As a tag-team multiplayer brawl



Pin fall! Humiliation! Finish him! The People's Champ gets the job done.

it's good fun, but it doesn't have much staying power. It might've been more fun if it included masked luchadores. — Dan Morris

**PC GAMER** 73%  
GOOD

# NBA Live 2003

A great-looking highlight reel posing as a basketball game

**S**orry, simulation fans, but it looks like we've lost another one. Much like the direction of EA Sports' NHL franchise, the *NBA Live* series has now officially gone over to the dark side, eschewing any sense of realism for a graphics-focused, super-speedy, wow-look-at-that-dunk (again) gameplay experience. It's certainly impressive in its own over-the-

top way, but if you're looking for depth and strategy in a basketball game, you'll be thoroughly disappointed.

Topping the feature list this year is what EA Sports is calling "Freestyle Control." Of course, to use it you'll need an analog gamepad, preferably with

two sticks, so if you're dusting off your SideWinder or other old reliable pad, you're stuck with the standard control option.

With the Freestyle option you can do all sorts of fake dribbles using palming maneuvers, jab steps, and crossover dribbles. It offers defensive options, too, but these are much more subtle in their effectiveness, especially when you need the reaction time of a frightened cobra on uppers to keep up with the ball handler. The CPU has pretty much no chance of stopping you once you



Nope, it's not a cinematic: this is what the default action camera will show you in on-court action.

get the hang of it, regardless of the difficulty level, making the game a cakewalk.

At least you get to enjoy the effort that was put into making *2003* the best-looking *NBA Live* game yet (except for the abysmally animated crowd — if you can't do better than this, just let us play in an empty arena, for cryin' out loud!). The players look superb, whether they're chatting with the authentically rendered head coaches, making a nifty pass, or slamming it through the rim (a very common occurrence). The variety and quality of the animations are incredible.

Unfortunately, the same level of effort wasn't put into the game's audio portion. The monotone Don Poier is back behind the microphone, and if I have to listen to Robert Elliott repeat his inane color commentary again, I'm going to go on a ram-



Get used to the sight of defenders staring impotently as attackers glide effortlessly to the basket.

page. Some of the sounds are poorly synched, too, like when the ball goes through the net — you see it, and then you hear it. It's a jarring presentational misstep compared to how good the game looks.

Even without the benefit of going "freestyle," *Live 2003* loses its challenge alarmingly fast. The developers must be proud of their around-the-basket animations, because you only need to be in the same zip code to trigger a drive to the lane by pressing the shoot button. Game speed is also a major headache, both in how fast the game plays, and in that you need to play only six- or seven-minute quarters to rack up 100 points per side. Blocked shots and steals, which have always been an issue, are worse than ever — both come in large numbers and with little effort. Foul shooting, using the same old dull crosshair system, is back for another year.

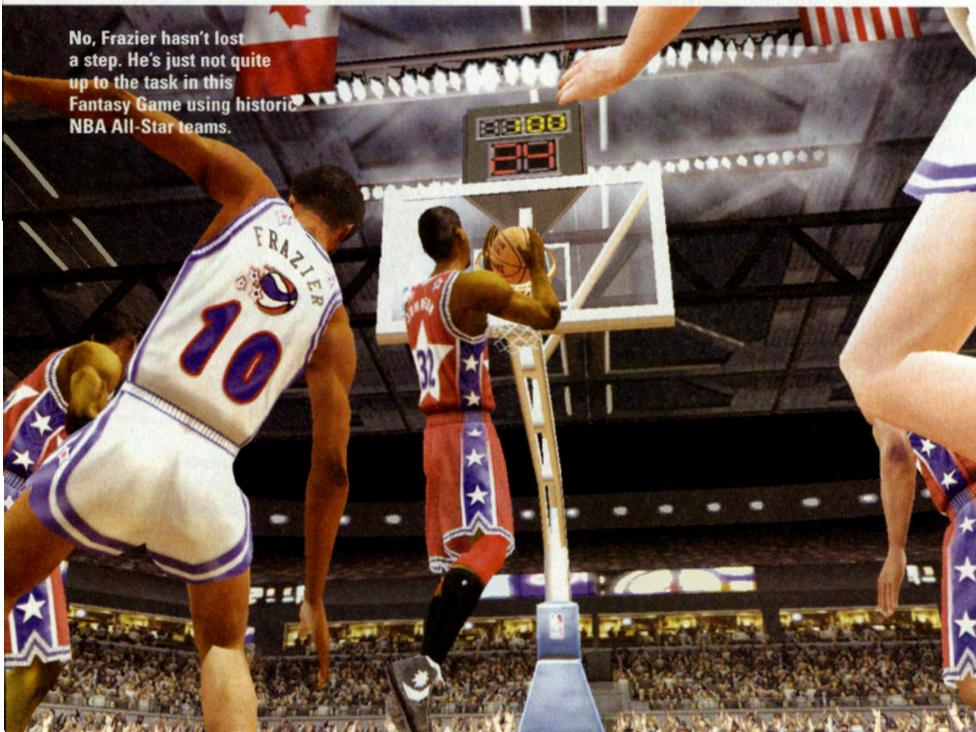
Taking your game online via the EA Sports matching service is predictably unpredictable. At times, the lag is unnoticeable, offering a fun (if still too frenetic) experience. Too often, though, the lag makes *Live 2003* frustrating to play, and the offense-heavy bent of the game turns boring in short order.

Casual gamers who want an exciting basketball game are going to be thrilled with *NBA Live 2003* — they should be, since they're the crowd for whom it was obviously made. Those of us who were hoping for a game we could sink our teeth into will be left assed-out. — Bert Salkmoor

## VITAL STATS

<b>CATEGORY</b>	Sports
<b>ESRB RATING</b>	E
<b>DEVELOPER</b>	EA Sports
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	EA Sports
<b>REQUIRED</b>	PII 450, 128MB RAM, 300MB HD, 16MB 3D card
<b>WE RECOMMEND</b>	PIII 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, analog dual-stick gamepad
<b>MAXIMUM PLAYERS</b>	4

No, Frazier hasn't lost a step. He's just not quite up to the task in this Fantasy Game using historic NBA All-Star teams.



## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** New control scheme; gets the visual details right; huge number of animations.

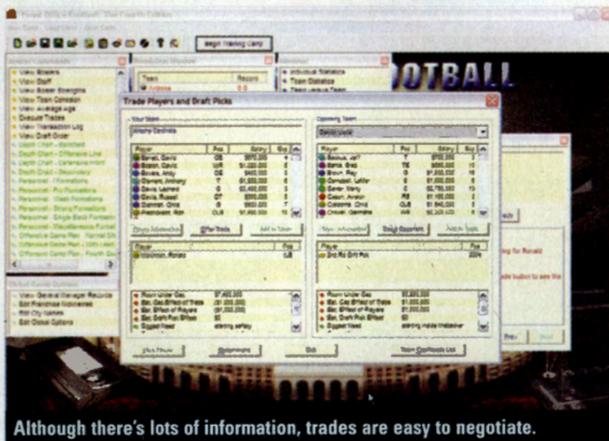
**LOWS:** Not even close to a simulation; gameplay is way too fast; AI can't keep up.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Fun in a hyperkinetic kind of way, but it doesn't hold up under extended play.

**PC GAMER** 63%  
ABOVE AVERAGE

# Front Office Football: Fourth Ed.

CATEGORY Sports sim ESRB Not rated DEVELOPER Solecismic Software PUBLISHER Solecismic Software REQUIRED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 58MB HD WE RECOMMEND PII 400, 128MB RAM MAX. PLAYERS 1



Although there's lots of information, trades are easy to negotiate.

After having its games published by EA Sports for the last couple of years, Solecismic Software has gone the independent route and released this version of *Front Office Football* itself through its website ([www.solecismic.com](http://www.solecismic.com)).

This hardcore professional football management simulation will appeal to football fanatics who like to crunch lots

and lots of numbers, and who don't mind that it lacks the NFL license and the players' license, meaning all the teams and players are fictional. Gameplay unfolds via a series of Windows-esque screens, each filled with player stats, stadium and city information, revenue data, and every other fact and figure you can imagine. Your task, as owner and general manager, is to steer your club to victory and profit. Since the entire experience hinges on the ability to easily move and manage all of this info, the user interface is extremely important — and at times it falls short. If you have multiple windows open, you can't toggle between open windows; instead, you have to close a top-level window to get to a lower-level window. I felt like I had to dig around too much to find vital info.

Two big complaints: you can set ticket prices only once (at the start of the season), and you have little interaction with your team scout, leaving you to make some uneducated guesses.

All the stats-herding aside, the real fun comes when you play an onfield game. You can simulate an entire season (or just a week) and let your coach run the game, or you can pull a Jerry Jones and call every play. The latter way takes a lot of time, and I preferred to let my coach call the plays. Watching the game unfold via scrolling stats was a tension-filled experience, especially during the playoffs, when you feel doubly helpless as the ball snaps.

I've played better stats simulations, and this kind of game will appeal only to a very small number of gamers anyway, but those looking for the spreadsheet experience of football GMs will like what they get here. — William Harms

**PC GAMER** 68%  
ABOVE AVERAGE

# Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

CATEGORY Action/adventure ESRB E DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA Games REQUIRED PII 350, 64MB RAM, 500MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 650, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 1

You knew this was coming, like it or not. As in Master Potter's first PC game, Harry tries his best not to be crap. And once again, with a little bit of magic, he manages to pull it off. Given that, realistically, EA could have shipped a turd in a *Harry Potter* box and still made millions, it's gratifying to see that *Chamber of Secrets* shows some craft, care, and attention to detail.

This \$30 game follows the book's plotline very closely — you're helping Harry through his second year at the magical school of Hogwarts, and along the way, you're treated to a mix of familiar characters and locales, such as the creepy Professor Snape and the dungeons under-

neath the academy. As you search for the Chamber of Secrets, you also get to play Quidditch once again, and participate in one-on-one wizard duels, a new feature not found in the first game.

If there are any graphical enhancements over *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, they're wasted on me, because to my eyes the two games look almost identical — but still impressively colorful, with big improvements in the lighting department.

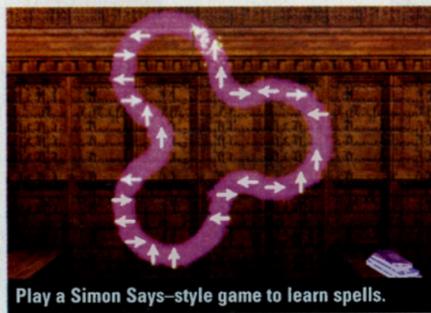
The controls are like those in any other third-person game: you move with the WASD setup and look with the mouse. The only catch is that for some reason, you can free-look only when you're casting a spell or standing still. But this isn't a game-killing quirk, and thankfully, you can now strafe to avoid enemy projectiles, which you couldn't do in *Sorcerer's Stone*.

*Chamber of Secrets* is a solid action/adventure game. You have plenty of objects



Icons on key objects will let you know that you can cast a spell on them.

to collect and hidden areas to explore, and the game itself offers a good mix of puzzles and action. It may be a little short for some — you'll probably finish it in under 10 hours — but god knows there are worse licensed games, and the price is right. — Li C. Kuo



Play a Simon Says-style game to learn spells.

**PC GAMER** 75%  
GOOD

# YOU'RE BEING ATTACKED (HALF PIRANHA/HALF



James, 20  
biology student  
Denver



**Jessie the Kid:** let's face it. The only good Pirawolf is a dead Pirawolf. 😊

You need to have balance. A good air combat squadron of Vulturesharks, plus a battalion of Hyenadragons, and finally, Turtlelions for the amphibious fights. "Snakes and snails with scorpion tails." These are what real men are made of.



Tommy, 23  
computer programmer  
San Francisco



Violence  
Comic Mischief

Microsoft  
game studios

relic

# BY AN ARMY OF PIRAWOLVES (WOLF)... **WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

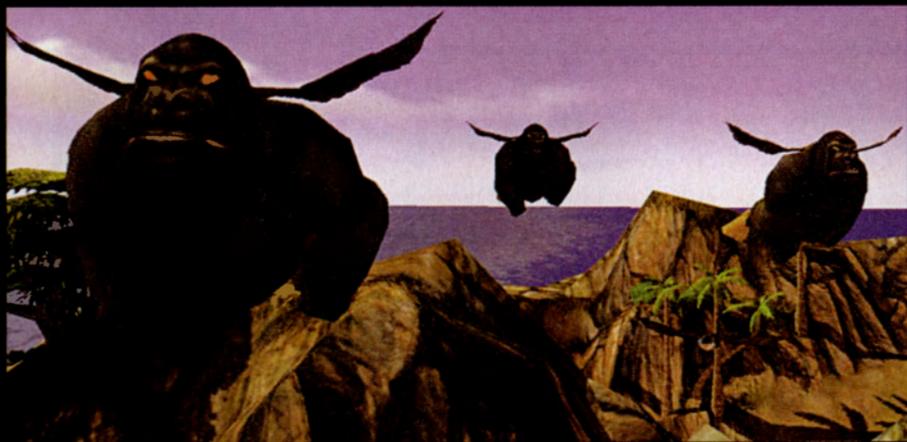
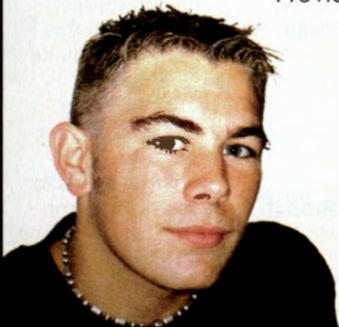


cjm1565: send in my goons. Egorillas and Rhinobulls.

These boys will punish anything. If the French had them, they wouldn't have needed us in WWII.

END OF STORY, BIZATCH!

Craig, 22  
pro skateboarder/slacker  
Providence



Tom Tom: let's just say,

MAJOR PAIN IN THE...;)

A Tigebra is pretty wicked, or a Tiganzee. Haven't tried a tiger and a rhino yet.

My bet is it terminates with extreme prejudice. I like that.



## IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ANIMAL

Coming January 2003

Welcome to Impossible Creatures, the next real-time strategy game from the makers of Homeworld®. Get ready for a world where you create completely whacked-out mutant animals and then unleash them on your enemies. Fast-paced RTS action and dynamic 3D environments combined with over 40,000 possible animal creations equal combat like you've never seen. And with intense online multiplayer action, your opponents are as limitless as the creatures you create.

[www.microsoft.com/games/impossiblecreatures](http://www.microsoft.com/games/impossiblecreatures)

# Project Nomads

An intriguing premise that's better on the drawing board than in practice

It might seem odd that the README file for *Project Nomads* contains a complete walkthrough, but those with enough pluck to stick with this quirky title to its finale will find the guide doubly useful: it can get you past the game's few sticky spots, then help you recall the specifics of this remarkably forgettable action/strategy hybrid.

*Nomads* seems to promise a lot — control of a heavily armed floating island, magical skills to be mastered, airplanes for dogfighting and bombing, first-person ground combat — all in one package. After just a few hours of play, though, you'll

realize that it's essentially a nice-looking shooter coated with a thin sheen of strategic elements and mission variations.

The action takes place on Aeres, where a long-forgotten war has left nothing but nomads who live on floating islands, and an evil group called the Sentinels who apparently don't care too much for the nomads.

On one of the deserted floating islands, you manage to awaken a "master builder" named Basaltface (really!), who teaches you how to collect and use magical artifacts to erect gun turrets, power plants, aircraft hangars, and other buildings. Basaltface promises to lead you to the city where the Sentinels are holding prisoner two of your best buddies — and off you go, battling both the Sentinels and the insectoid Skrits, island-hopping to acquire new artifacts to upgrade your floating fortress.

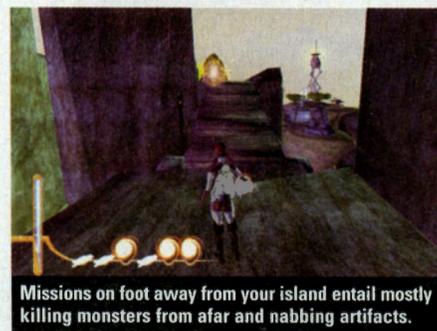
It sounds good, but in execution *Nomads* falls short because each component of the game is either too simplistic or just not very well-designed. Take navigation, for instance: the only control you have is turning the island's "engines" on and off and selecting a navigation point. As the island is attacked during travel, your duties are pretty much limited to firing non-automatic weapons, jumping in aerial fighters to duel arcade-style against pathetic AI-controlled enemy planes, and dashing around making repairs to damaged installations.



On a couple of occasions you'll get to fly aircraft you haven't created in your island's hangar. They all handle pretty much the same.



It'd be nice if you could fly this dreadnought, but instead you're relegated to escorting it with your island.



Missions on foot away from your island entail mostly killing monsters from afar and nabbing artifacts.



Grab a backpack and zip around an island to speed up the repair process or find new artifacts.

"Away" missions are played from a third-person perspective, but the lack of a strafe feature and non-configurable controls makes combat needlessly frustrating — though it's still none-too-challenging.

If these varied gameplay styles suggest some strategic depth, prepare to be disappointed: the only real decisions involve where to place each building on the cramped island and how to store the numerous artifacts acquired over the course of the game. As you upgrade weapons and buildings you discard little-used artifacts, but that doesn't help much when you're dashing around the island unable to grab the one artifact you need until you get rid of one you're already carrying.

It's possible that strong multiplayer support could give *Nomads* more legs because in that mode you can actually steer the island, but the U.S. version shipped without support for Internet play (a patch is promised). On second thought, though, adding

steering wouldn't change the game's root problem: the strategy elements just aren't deep enough to be interesting, and the action is too rudimentary to be exciting.

*Project Nomads* is definitely an ambitious project, but unfortunately, it's only the floating-island concept and not the actual gameplay that will make it stick in the minds of gamers. — Stephen Poole

## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Interesting designs for ships, aircraft, and fortifications; good visual effects.

**LOWS:** Frustrating inventory; paper-thin strategic components; non-configurable controls.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A game with lots of elements — just none of them very exciting.

**PC GAMER** 58%  
MERELY OKAY

# World War II: Panzer Claws

CATEGORY Strategy ESRB T DEVELOPER In Images PUBLISHER Eidos REQUIRED PII 450, 128MB RAM, 16MB video card WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB video card MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8



My well-fortified front line demolishes a giant squadron of enemy tanks.

Ever wished someone would remove the tedium of micromanagement from the RTS formula? Well, here you go: *Panzer Claws* deals with the strategic action of battle, and leaves the resource-gathering to the (invisible) supply clerks.

As either the German, Allied, or Russian forces, you command tank, infantry, and air units on the battlefields of WWII. No-hassle management means that the majority of the game isn't spent build-

ing and upgrading units, but instead focuses on carefully organized tank battles.

The strategic element mandates that you take your time to carefully plan out assaults. Over 50 units are available, each evenly balanced so that simply rushing with all your men guarantees defeat. Tanks, ranging from light to heavy, may be great against bunkers and buildings, but they're vulnerable to just a few well-placed anti-tank

infantry squads. Similarly, establishing a heavily secured front line doesn't protect you from artillery strikes, bombers, or even paratroopers. Vigilant positioning and selection of your units is paramount in any scenario, whether you're attacking or defending.

Construction and unit development are kept at a minimum, so as not to burden you with constant resource demands. In both campaign and skirmish mode, capturing buildings and facilities lets you "call in"

more reinforcements. While this aspect of gameplay succeeds in alleviating many dreary tasks, you still need to attend to the constant refueling, reloading, and repairing of your units.

In fact, what most hinders the action is the excruciatingly slow pace of combat. Tanks seem to take forever to turn their turrets to face targets, while the formation and movement schemes are clumsily implemented. Even the most well-thought-out engagement can become a chaotic mess when units arbitrarily seem to abandon your formations.

The lengthy single-player campaign is complemented by entertaining multiplayer and skirmish modes, though when playing with over four teams, the frame rate bogs down to barely acceptable levels.

*Panzer Claws* effectively dodges dull micromanagement in pushing faster tactical action, but it still throws some sticks in the spokes of smooth gameplay. Maybe a sequel will hit the perfect note. — Norman Chan



# O.R.B.: Off-World Resource Base

CATEGORY Real-time strategy ESRB E DEVELOPER Strategy First PUBLISHER Strategy First REQUIRED PIII 600MHz, 128MB RAM, 500MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8

When you aim for mediocrity, there's no shame in achieving it and delivering a fair (if uninspired) real-time space opera. *O.R.B.* is set after the collapse of a universal empire; two surviving races are brawling over a mutually claimed holy text and their place in the cosmos. *O.R.B.*'s place in the cosmos is easy to understand — bland RTS knock-off.

The single-player campaign is the standard build-up toward better technology. Missions are reduced to three basic imperatives: scan objects, research new technology, and blow stuff up. A typical mission requires that you scour as many resource-rich asteroids as possible for your O.R.B. while deflecting enemy incursions and plowing through a boring tech tree. The AI is dim-witted enough that you're almost always able to finish all research branches unhindered before building a massive fleet and performing the obligatory foe-crushing tank rush.

Occasionally you investigate some mysterious part of space that triggers a progression of the story. The biggest problems are in the scenario finales: after you've delivered



Raining down death from above (relatively speaking).

the coup de grace you must still hunt down stragglers to meet an arbitrary objective.

Ideally you'd play the entire game in lovely 3D mode, but camera panning is a mouse-jerking mess. Consequently, you end up stuck in the lamentable 2D view most of the time, where blurry asteroids pile atop each other and tiny colored dots represent your ships. It's like someone squashed 3D space with a frying pan.

In addition to the campaign, *O.R.B.* includes skirmish and multiplayer modes. Without the story as incentive, however, the



A big plus: wonderful lighting and colorful graphics.

game loses its luster. Once you've got the technology and the military force, it's a simple matter of point, click, and wait for the body count. Why tell a unit to go "kamikaze" or be "evasive" if it doesn't really impact anything?

Diehard RTS fans may have a good time playing through *O.R.B.*'s campaign, but keep those expectations low. — Matthew Peckham



# EverQuest: Planes of Power

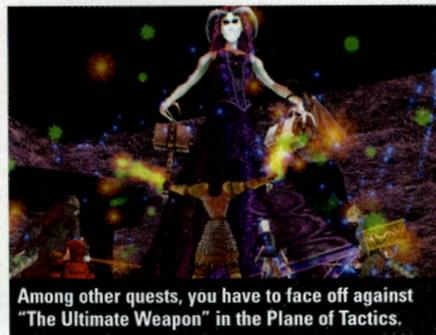


When you play at the highest level — whether in baseball or as a monk — you've gotta bring your AAA game

If the phrase “Trebtor Sux” means something to you, or you’ve ever sat through an attack of Creeping Coins, or been shocked and beaten by a horde of Dragon Puppies, then two things are true: (1) You’re so hardcore that you go way back to the first computer role-playing games, and (2) You still enjoy a great RPG as much as I do.



Teamwork is critical in the trials. Focus on attacking one foe collectively as you work against the clock.



Among other quests, you have to face off against “The Ultimate Weapon” in the Plane of Tactics.

## VITAL STATS

**CATEGORY** Online RPG  
**ESRB RATING** T  
**DEVELOPER** Sony Online  
**PUBLISHER** Sony Online  
**REQUIRED** EverQuest, PII 400, 256MB RAM, 450MB HD, 16MB D3D card with T&L, 28.8 modem  
**WE RECOMMEND** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 1.6GB HD, 64MB D3D card, broadband connection  
**MAXIMUM PLAYERS** Massively multiplayer

I’m sure it’s odd to see a professional athlete writing a game review in a PC gaming magazine; hell, it’s odd just trying to do it. But one thing, among many, that I know I have in common with most computer gamers is the love of a great RPG.

Those opening references stem from probably the most fun times I’ve ever had playing computer games — the original *Wizardry*, which seemed like the be-all-end-all when it appeared almost 20 years ago.

I cut my computer RPG teeth on *Wizardry*, and here I am a couple of decades later, reviewing the modern-day version of the same experience. See, I’ve played them all, and like most of you, I know my games, and I know what I like. I

entered the MMORPG genre through *Ultima Online*, and man, was that fun. Then a new first-person MMORPG came out, and that’s where this story starts to shape itself.

I made my first foray into *EverQuest* one night while my team, the Arizona Diamondbacks, was traveling on a road trip back east. It didn’t last long: I wandered my first-level monk all the way to a guard tower in the Karanas. Not long after that, while standing around checking out the game controls and panels, I noticed a large dark silhouette standing near a tree. What was that, I wondered?

Well, as any experienced *EQ* player familiar with the Karanas will tell ya, this was one half of the twin towers known as Froof and Froom, huge Ogres looking to maim newbie idiots like me. Two brutal

punches later, I was looking over my corpse, a bit miffed. I logged off and spent a few days playing some other games, but something kept drawing me back to *EQ*, teasing me to take another shot at it.

Three years later, I don’t regret one minute of going back and getting into it: it’s been a fun ride and I’ve had a blast along the way.

So now that you know about my RPG history, let’s talk about the newest *EQ* addition, *Planes of Power*. Quite simply, if you have a character of high enough level (realistically, 60th or higher), you’d better not be waiting to pick it up. Everything — and I mean *everything* — that could be considered a game-mechanic weakness prior to this expansion has been addressed, and the developers went above and beyond in many categories.

There are 25 new zones — 25! I have yet to see all of the lands introduced in earlier expansions, and here we are with 25 new places to go and die in. But they’re not just new areas: The 25 new zones are very different from anything you’ve experienced in *EQ* before. Characters of any level have access to portals that’ll gate you to the Plane of Knowledge, *PoP*’s central hub. These portals can be found all over the Antonica mainland and are easily accessible to all. This feature, to me, is a huge change for the better, without sacrificing the feel of the game.

So you arrive at the Plane of Knowledge — what next? Well, that depends on what you’re here for. This plane is another well-crafted zone in



Quests force you to complete certain tasks (like slaying this mechanical dragon) before gaining access to new locations.

that it's made for everyone, of every race. It's split into two separate zones — one good, one evil — with portals to all points in each zone. From the Plane of Knowledge you can portal to the Plane of Tranquility, and then after completing different quests within this plane, open up the entrances to the remaining four planes.

These new locations include the Plane of Innovation (just think 'roided-up gnomes and garish mechanical beasts) and Plane of Justice (now you know what a *real* executioner's hood should look like, and when you hit the jail, you won't be the first one startled by the "Guards" patrolling the hallway if your sound's turned up). Visit the Plane of Nightmares, too — it's...well, it's a nightmare up there.

Many new quest styles are introduced in the Plane of Knowledge, beyond the familiar FedEx types. These quests require (and let me emphasize *require*) you to pay very close attention to the dialogue between the NPCs and your characters. You won't be able to progress in your conversations with NPCs if you aren't listening carefully to what's being said/asked for/stated.

Another thing you *must* do if you plan on playing this expansion is to make sure you've got a good sound and speaker setup. Until I played my first 3 a.m. session of *Doom*, I never realized the chilling impact of good sound and music, but this area is another in which *PoP* really excels. Every zone has its own music and sound effects, fitting the place's flavor perfectly. The "feel" adds a ton of fun to those late-night sessions by scaring the crap out of you when you least expect it.

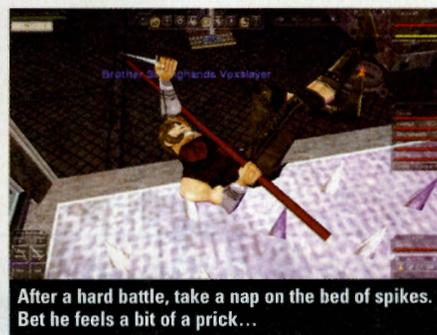
One thing to note: I got my first look at *PoP* the very first day I brought home my new revved-up game system, which has video memory out the wazoo, unreal 3D capabilities, and some absurd amount of RAM. Just 10 seconds after logging into the world, I knew something was very different. While graphically every ounce of texture detail is getting pushed into an aging core engine, *PoP* still ups the fidelity level with some stunning detail on main characters and locations. Without giving too much away, I urge you to visit the Plane of Nightmares and battle through for a peek at Terris-Thule — *Maxim* cover babe potential, even with her armor on. And her bed? Well, let's just say it gives a new meaning to "Pokémon."



The Tribunal issue quests in the Plane of Justice, and give access to portals that warp you to the inner chambers.



Improved textures give the fur of these planar guards a surprisingly lifelike sheen.



After a hard battle, take a nap on the bed of spikes. Bet he feels a bit of a prick...

The Trial Judges on the Plane of Justice doled out some of the most enjoyable (and toughest) missions I've tried: You'll need massive amounts of teamwork and coordination (with just your six-party group able to make an attempt at the enclosed battles) to complete even one of them. On that note, high-level Guild members will love *PoP* for the cool storylines that are ingrained in each unique task; if you're a loner, you'll need to get social to attempt the quests with a team.

*PoP* introduces other gameplay tweaks as well, the most significant one being the handling of death. Each plane has a graveyard now. When you die, which I promise

will happen at least once, your remains are gated out to the graveyard, located near the entrance to the new zones.

Now, don't get me wrong: if I thought *PoP* stunk, I'd have no qualms telling you so. It doesn't. This expansion has depth, it's incredibly challenging, and it highlights superlative production values in all the areas you'd expect, and even in some you wouldn't. My hats off to the artists, level designers, and story writers for this one. Very rarely has a computer game with this much life gotten this much better as it's gotten older. Indeed, *PoP* adds nothing but pluses to the world of Norrath in every instance.

— Curt Schilling



You're fighting against the clock again as you battle Maareq. He grows stronger as he absorbs creatures that move slowly toward him, and eventually, he turns into this Cthulhu-like monstrosity.

## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Incredible art; heart-thumping sound; vast new array of monsters, zones, and quests.

**LOWS:** Having a main character that isn't of high enough level to see it all.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A must-have for any *EQ* player, and certainly another raising of the bar in MMORPGs.

**PC GAMER** 90%  
EDITORS' CHOICE

# Robin Hood



The "real" Robin Hood has long been considered a legend, but a recent archaeological find in Nottingham, England, raises intriguing questions. A tunnel system found beneath a church lends credence to classic tales of how Robin Hood used just such a network to escape the Sheriff of Nottingham.

CATEGORY Strategy ESRB T DEVELOPER Spellbound Studios PUBLISHER Strategy First REQUIRED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 900MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 128MB RAM MAX. PLAYERS 1

He takes from the wealthy, gives to the poor, and fights for peasants' civil liberties — a medieval liberal Democrat. Some 400 years after his legend emerged, the robbin' hoodlum in the green tunic is back in the latest retelling of treachery and heroism in Sherwood Forest.

A squad-based real-time strategy game, *Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood* has you assembling a crew of bandits with different skills to ambush tax collectors' carriages, rescue distressed damsels, and raid keeps.

The classic cast is all here: Maid Marian, her beau with the bow, plus Little John, Friar Tuck, and Pete Cooper. Wait — who's Pete? He started as a faceless extra, and I trained him up to be a mean swordsman who was a must-have on each of my missions. Unfortunately, you can improve only archery and swordsmanship, so aside from his impressive skill with steel, Pete — despite my sentimental attachment to him — was really a lot like all the other Merry Men. All other skills, like apple-tossing and wall climbing, are hard-wired, with some abilities unique to the main characters.

The infiltration missions stand at the heart of the story, and here the designers



Welcome to Mr. Hood's 'hood. His posse rests in a Sherwood hideaway that looks straight out of Endor.

display plenty of imagination. Robin tosses bags of gold that cause castle guards to go into a greedy frenzy that sometimes ends in multiple casualties as each scrambles to get the loot. Other similarly endearing gameplay gags keep the missions from being boring exercises in purely guessing the right approach.

Problem is, the developers also reuse their bright ideas repeatedly, despite the game taking me only about 12 hours to finish. A limited number of convoy ambush missions meant that I was forced to play through two or three I'd already beaten while waiting to be offered the



The Merry Men cut a swath of destruction as they make their way to Prince John's castle.

next plot-advancing mission. Your characters and the NPCs also regurgitate the same phrases over and over, until they burn themselves into your soft brain tissue like a hot branding iron.

Those moments of imagination do qualify *Robin Hood* as an enjoyable squad-based game, though, making it another feather in Robin's cap. Think of it as *Commandos* for the tights-wearing set. — Thomas Leupold

**PC GAMER** 71%  
GOOD

# Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf

CATEGORY Real-time strategy ESRB T DEVELOPER Liquid Ent. PUBLISHER Ubi Soft/Crava REQUIRED PII 400, 64MB RAM, 600MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 780MB HD MAX. PLAYERS 8

Two good reasons to consider purchasing this add-on: (1) It comes bundled with the original *Battle Realms* (February 2002; *PCG* rating: 70%) for just \$30, and (2) It doesn't change the excellent core gameplay one iota. Subtract points for being too short, and you've got an above-average game that doesn't rock the boat.

The expansion itself is a bit on the skimpy side, weighing in at 11 brief missions, eight additional expansion units, and four new Zen Masters. Set seven years prior to the events in *Battle Realms*, *Winter* casts you as Grayback of the Wolf Clan, a burly rebel with a hankering to free his people from bondage and maybe kick a little tail along the way.

The first few missions are disappointing, forcing you down linear paths and relying on too much scripting to advance the story. Combat occurs frequently in these early levels, but requires only minor interaction on your part, which is nearly as much fun as watching rats stumble through a maze. Once you see the light of day around the fourth mission, however, the game

gets down to business with the same high-quality, open-ended "design a unit" gameplay that graced its forebear.

Probably the most innovative feature in this series is the ability to mix-and-match units by sending them to different training facilities. A single peasant could advance from weenie farmer to kung fu dragonlord just by pinballing from dojo to dojo. That's still the case here, but the new units are generally only slight permutations on the originals, and don't distance themselves from the pack enough to warrant a wholehearted thumbs up.

Compared to the latest crop of real-time darlings, this one's showing its age a bit, but genre veterans will still appreciate its trustworthy play mechanics. If you haven't played *Battle Realms*, this nicely priced bundle will show you what the initial buzz was about. — Matthew Peckham



Incoming! When you reach 'em, the winter boards are a refreshing change.

**PC GAMER** 68%  
ABOVE AVERAGE



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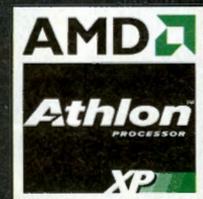
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## PLUMBING NEW DEPTHS OF LAZY



### SOME OF THE EDITORS

around the office have told me recently that they wish they had a monthly column like mine, where they could spout off about random crazy stuff with blatant disregard for their

column's supposed subject matter. Well, I'll be damned if I'm going to give up my spot full-time to any of those jokers, but I think it only fair that I throw them a few table scraps. As such, I've decided to get the rest of the *PC Gamer* team involved in penning my monthly masterpiece.

Yes, we're all going to write a little paragraph together. I'll write the first sentence, and then each *Gamer* guy or gal will take his or her turn writing each subsequent sentence until it's done. Man, I'm really looking forward to seeing how this turns out! My sentence will be in **white**, Chuck's will be in **red**, Billy's will be in **yellow**, Rob's will be in **green**, Dan's will be in **magenta**, Corey's will be in **purple**, Chiaki's will be in **orange**, and Joe's will be in **blue**. Our theme will be NVIDIA's new GeForce FX card. Do me proud, fellow staffers! I'll start us off:

I just returned from Comdex with an amazing story about NVIDIA's upcoming GeForce FX video card! **Greg, you tool. Greg, I cannot believe how lame you are. You really have reached a new low with this thinly veiled attempt to get out of work, Vederman. Oh man, and here I thought Billy was a lazy cuss. Greg, your mom is smooch-a-licious. Whatever — Greg is such a dork. And to think we have to design this garbage.**

Well, that didn't quite turn out the way I expected...

Greg Vederman,  
Senior Editor

### PRODUCT TYPE



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](http://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	\$37
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V333	\$73
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	\$20
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	
v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
17-inch Optiquest Q71	\$130
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce4 MX 440 64MB DDR	\$50
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Joystick	\$25
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech Z-340 (2.1)	\$39
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	\$39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$711</b>

### MID-RANGE SYSTEM ROUGHLY \$1,250

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	\$50
PROCESSOR	
AMD Athlon XP 2000+	\$90
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V333 (Award 1007)	\$100
MEMORY	
512MB PC-2700 DDR SDRAM	\$122
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	
v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE950+	\$292
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce4 Ti 4200	\$115
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision 2	\$45
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech Z-540 (4.1)	\$60
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	\$39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,229</b>

### DREAM SYSTEM ROUGHLY \$3,000 AND ABOVE



CASE	
400-watt ATX form factor	\$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel P4 2.8GHz	\$449
MOTHERBOARD	
Intel D850EMV2	\$140
MEMORY	
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SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy 2 Platinum	\$160

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v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
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VIDEO CARD	
ATI RADEON 9700 PRO	\$310
JOYSTICK	
Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar	\$269
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	\$399
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Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$40
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# GEFORCE FX

## A NEW NAME AND A NEW GAME



Judging by the number of emails I've received in recent months, what everyone wants to know is, Will GeForce FX be the second coming, and if so, when will it be available? The second part of the question is easier to answer than the first: February 2003 is what I've been told, but I won't be surprised if it slips by as much as a month. Why? That question leads us back to the first part: whether GeForce FX will be the second coming...

### WHAT GEFORCE FX ISN'T

It's not a giant leap past ATI's new RADEON 9700 PRO — at least in terms of supported features. It's a DirectX 9+ part, much like the RADEON, the "+" signifying that it enables certain technologies above and beyond the current DX spec, such as extremely complex shader programs that can be written to better represent real-world textures and materials in the games of tomorrow. But is it "tomorrow" as in *tomorrow*, or as in two years from today? That's hard to predict.

### WHAT GEFORCE FX IS

It's the first consumer-level video card to use DDR2 memory, which functions much like standard DDR except that it's significantly more efficient, and capable of operating at much higher frequencies. As far as the top-of-the-

line GeForce FX is concerned (expect an entire line, much like the GeForce4 of today), its DDR2 memory should be clocked at close to 500MHz, meaning that it will, in effect, be running at 1,000MHz — a huge leap beyond RADEON 9700's 310MHz, which operates at 620MHz.

GeForce FX will need that extra memory speed to help make up for the fact that it uses a 128-bit memory interface, half that of ATI's 256-bit interface. Without fast memory like DDR2, and a new compression scheme that helps streamline and speed up data flow, it's unlikely that GeForce FX would be able to run any faster than the 9700 PRO at high resolutions with features like antialiasing and anisotropic filtering enabled.

Even with DDR2, how much faster GeForce FX may or may not be is pure conjecture at this point. Our sister publication *Maximum PC* was kind enough to share with us the few benchmark scores its staff was allowed to take on a P4 3GHz-based system (*Max PC's* own coverage appears in its February 2003 issue), and I compared those numbers with what we got out of the same machine running a 9700 PRO. Unfortunately, since the GeForce FX card and its drivers were early beta, and since NVIDIA themselves selected the tests, resolutions, and settings, drawing any hard conclusions from these figures is difficult.

In addition to fast memory, the GeForce FX core should ship at around 500MHz — a full 175MHz faster than the 9700 PRO's. It's the card's memory and core speeds that have caused it to slip into next year. DDR2 is bleeding-edge new, and initial yields are expected to be very small. Furthermore, NVIDIA went to a new 0.13-micron fabrication process with the GeForce FX GPU, which is what allowed them to clock the core so high and will let them go even higher in the future. In contrast, ATI is still at 0.15 microns, and that process is unlikely to give them a chip that runs at 500MHz or above. We expect ATI to drop to 0.13 in the near future as a result.

### WHAT TO BUY

Without a GeForce FX of our own to test, it's difficult for me to get behind NVIDIA's claims that the FX will beat the stuffing out of the RADEON 9700 PRO. There's still so much we don't know. Will GeForce FX's 128-bit memory interface handicap it in any appreciable way? Will the fact that it can run in 128-bit color — or that it has the potential to bring us that much closer to Pixar-level graphics in games — even matter in its lifetime? What about price: will it be \$399, or will it be as much as \$499? By the time this card launches, ATI's next-generation card should be only another two to three months out. What will it offer?

One thing's for sure: as of today, the fastest card on the market is ATI's RADEON 9700 PRO. I'll be surprised if GeForce FX isn't faster than it overall, but I'll also be surprised if the difference between the two is dramatic once we're able to turn on anisotropic filtering and 4x anti-aliasing. However it turns out, *PC Gamer* readers will be the first to know!

I saw this Ogre demo running in real time at NVIDIA's GeForce FX launch event. It shows off powerful next-gen Blinn bump-mapping effects, self-shadowing, and real-time adaptive subdivision surfaces.



### BENCHMARKS

	GEFORCE FX	RADEON 9700 PRO
QUAKE III	209 fps	147 fps
UT 2003 ASBESTOS FLYBY	140 fps	119 fps
3DMARK2001 SE GAME 4: NATURE	41 fps	45 fps

\*All tests run at 1600x1200, 32-bit color, 2x AA enabled.



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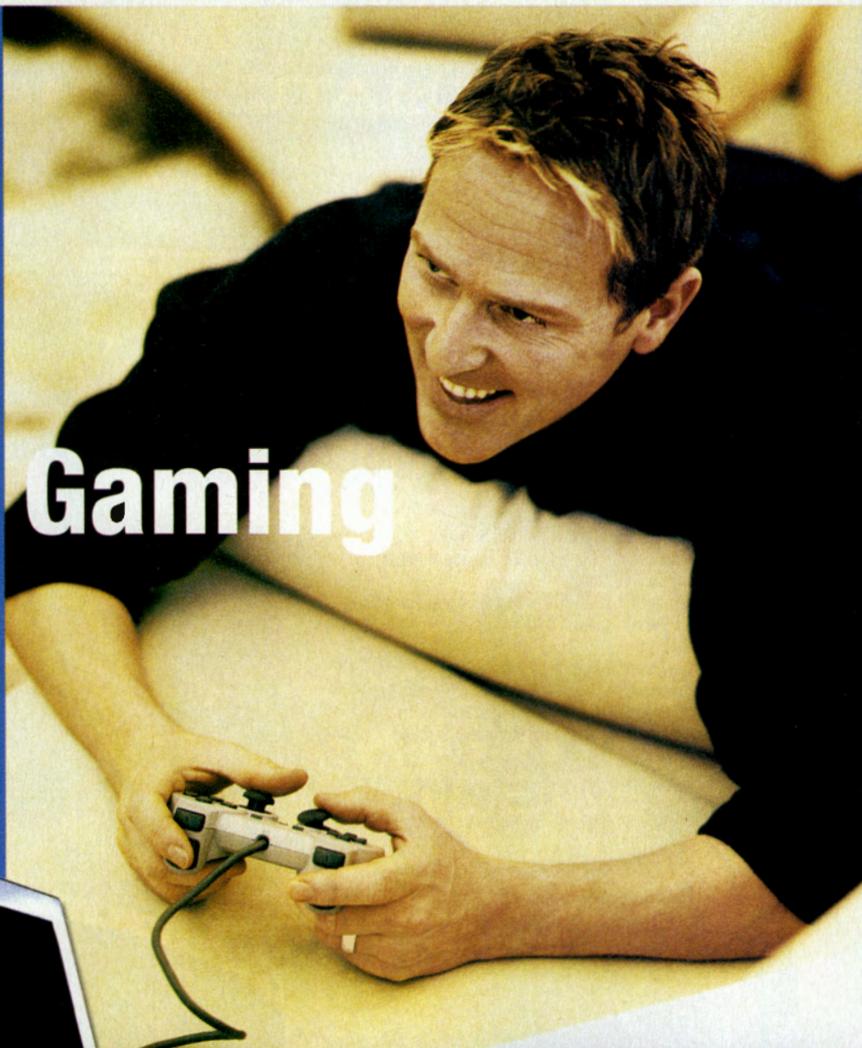


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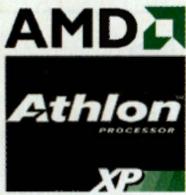
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# ALL-IN-WONDER 9700 PRO



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Traditionally, ATI's ALL-IN-WONDER cards have been a mixed bag. On the one hand, they've offered some of the best multimedia features of any similar boards on the market; on the other, gaming performance has often played second fiddle to broader functionality. And let's face it: the drivers, like so many of those for ATI's products, have pretty much stunk up the joint at each and every turn.

These days, though, ATI smells of roses. Its new cards are not only the fastest on the market, but the cards' newly unified Catalyst drivers (especially those using the v. 7.79 package) are rock-solid as well. The big daddy of this new line, RADEON 9700 PRO, has even won our coveted Editors' Choice award. We were expecting great things from the ALL-IN-WONDER 9700 PRO, but we weren't expecting *this*.

The big news is that, unlike earlier iterations of the ALL-IN-WONDER, the 9700 PRO version is exactly as fast as its standalone kin. That's right: this card uses the same exact GPU, has the same 128MB of DDR RAM, and is clocked at exactly the same speed — meaning that it benchmarks exactly the same as all of the \$399 RADEON 9700 PROs we've

reviewed in recent issues. The ALL-IN-WONDER is \$50 more expensive than any of those cards, but it's money well spent for the extra functions.

The RADEON 9700 PRO comes standard with VGA, S-Video, and DVI outputs, but no inputs. The ALL-IN-WONDER has those same outputs (its one DVI-out can be used as either a DVI-out or as a standard VGA-out via the included adapter), plus it supports S-Video and Component inputs via its



included breakout box. It also comes with a built-in TV tuner that can be used with either a regular antenna or your standard cable

line. (You'll need to supply your own splitter if you want to keep your TV wired in at the same time — I picked up one at Radio Shack for about \$10.)

Cool hardware means nothing if you don't have the software to run it. To that end, ATI ships Pinnacle's Studio 8 for all of your video-editing needs; Matchware Mediator 7.0 for creating Flash, HTML, and CD-ROM presentations; Guide Plus+, a really nice piece of PVR (Personal Video Recorder — think: TiVo) software; and a full version of *Morrowind* for when you tire of editing your home movies. Before I even played any games, I gave Studio 8 a try. Using a camcorder, I shot a few minutes of my roommate — former *PC Gamer* EIC Gary Whitta [Ah, so THAT'S how *TheVede* got a job here... — Ed.] — wandering around the house in a drunken stupor. Then, I copied the video over to my PC using the S-Video adapter and stereo inputs ATI includes, and sent the AVI (you can also save as MPEG) out all over the

## BENCHMARKS

3DMARK2001 SE*	3D Marks	13,117
	Game 4: Nature	98 fps
QUAKE III*	1280 x 1024	129 fps
	1600 x 1200	89 fps
JEDI KNIGHT II*	1024 x 768	89,89,88 (fps)
	1280 x 1024	89,89,88 (fps)
	1600 x 1200	88,88,86 (fps)
DUNGEON SIEGE*	1024 x 768	70,68,69 (fps)
	1280 x 1024	68,67,66 (fps)
	1600 x 1200	67,66,58 (fps)

\*Tests run at 1024x768 in true color with all settings maxed. †Tests run in true color with all settings maxed and 4x anti-aliasing enabled. ‡Tests run in true color with all settings maxed. First score: No AA. Second score: 2x AA. Third score: 4x AA. (All benchmarks run on P4 2GHz test bed with 512MB PC-800 RDRAM and Windows XP Home Edition.)

Net. If you find any "Priceless" movies featuring Gary in a tank top and a tutu, that's my work!

I don't have a TiVo, so I was *really* looking forward to putting Guide Plus+ through its paces. As it turns out, it's good but not great. I've spent a great deal of time with TiVos, and I know how simple they are to use. Guide Plus+ isn't difficult per se, but it's not nearly as elegant or seamless as a dedicated set-top box. It works as advertised, though, as I was able to record a very tasty-looking episode of the *Springer* show with nary a hiccup. I never knew transvestite prostitutes who cheat on their men could be so hot!

As superior as they've been in this generation of ATI cards, drivers have still been a sore spot with the 9700 family. The good news is that the latest drivers, Catalyst v. 2.4 and above, seem as stable as any drivers we've ever seen. Teething issues like lock-ups and crashes in certain games seem to be a thing of the past for all 9700s — including this new ALL-IN-WONDER 9700 PRO.

We at the Hard Stuff are absolutely in love with this new board and are unanimous in declaring its greatness. At only \$50 more than the RADEON, it could very well be ATI's best-ever graphics card.

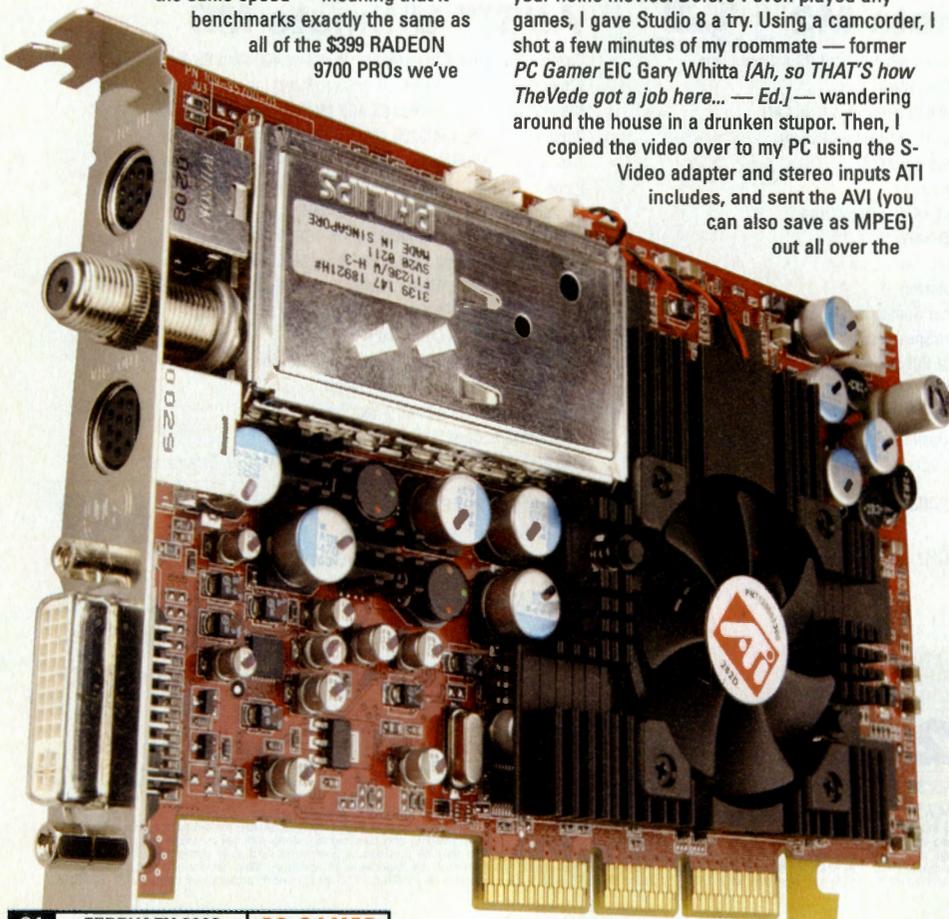
## FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Full-blown 9700 PRO under the hood; stable and easy to use; comes with a wireless remote!

**LOWS:** Guide Plus+ is nice, but isn't likely to replace a TiVo if you've already got one.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Look up "pimp" in the hipster dictionary, and you'll see a picture of this hot product.

**PC GAMER** 95%  
EDITORS' CHOICE



COMPANY APPLE, WWW.IPOD.COM, 1-800-MY-APPLE ■ PRICE \$299 (5GB); \$399 (10GB); \$499 (20GB)

ENTRY

MID

DREAM

# iPod for Windows

WANT THE MP3 EQUIVALENT OF A TROPHY WIFE? BETTER SHELL OUT THE BIG BUCKS.

**A** product from Apple in *PC Gamer*? Heresy! Admittedly, testing a portable MP3 player from the strange, alien world of Mac-land is like flirting with a gorgeous foreign exchange student who'd never give you the time of day if your dad wasn't totally loaded.

Like her, the iPod is exotic — its lithe 7.2-ounce seamless frame is a lesson in design elegance. Simplicity is the key word here: nary a jot of space is wasted on unnecessary buttons, switches, or logos. Its alluring two-inch backlit display sits above a ring of four buttons (menu, play/pause, back, and forward) encircling a touch-sensitive pad on the unit's front. The back and sides are silver; its face is a milky-smooth white.

And just like a foreign accent, the iPod is a lot of fun to listen to. Audio quality is

crystal-clear — there's absolutely no garble, tinniness, or background fuzz to ruin the experience. The internal hard drive runs whisper-quiet, a feature that Creative Labs' players have yet to master.

The onboard software isn't as flashy as Creative's EAX suite, but it does offer a range of equalizer settings for any musical genre or audio output you can think of — from Acoustic to Vocal. Apple's accompanying iTunes 3 PC software is likewise a breeze for ripping and storing files.

She's playful, too — literally. A *Breakout*-type game is selectable from the unit's Extras menu, coaxing you to play ball while listening to music. Additionally, the iPod is compatible with Palm Desktop, Microsoft Outlook, and Eudora, allowing you to store up to a thousand contacts from your li'l black book. And like Creative's Zen, you can

use it as a portable hard drive for transporting data in a neat, compact way.

But like most intercontinental romances, there are communications problems. Here's the deal-breaker: the iPod connects to a PC only via FireWire. (Translation: No USB connection.) The upside is that file transfers will take seconds instead of minutes, and you can recharge its 10-hour lithium polymer batteries while connected.

Dislikes? Well, unless you have the unit locked, it's too easy to turn on accidentally. The plastic tab covering the FireWire port is flimsy, and the packed-in earbuds deliver sonically but sport easily lost covers. And while the 10GB and 20GB versions come with a handy slipcover, it covers the screen and controls (you can still pause and control volume with a remote control, though).

Lastly, she's costly. The iPod sells at a premium price, yet delivers premium performance in a slim, sexy package. Darn those foreign girls!



**PC GAMER** 88%  
EXCELLENT

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- ENTRY
- MID
- DREAM

# Altec Lansing 5100

SOMETIMES PRETTY SOUNDS PRETTY DARN GOOD

These speakers really surprised me. They're quite small and very attractive to the eyes, which led me to think that they'd be a disaster for the ears. I'm not ashamed to admit that I was wrong. Gamers without a lot of space on their desk who are looking for an elegantly designed set of 5.1 speakers should really give these new Altec 5100s a close listen.

This system isn't exactly bristling with overwhelming power like, say, a set of high-end Klipsch or Logitech speakers, but at 73 watts (RMS), they still get plenty loud before they start to distort. Each of the unit's 7.5-inch by 2-inch satellites gets seven watts of power, which it then squeezes out of its dual one-inch neodymium micro drivers. And that can sound a little thin at times. The sub and center channels each get 22.5 watts to do their business.

I found the subwoofer to be surprisingly effective given its small size and power output. Not only did it supply full, rich bass and extra mid-range punch at medium volumes, but it did so equally well at lower, "typical" listening volumes. Of course, at moderate and high volumes it got farty, but that's to be expected given this unit's price point. The bass volume (as well as

treble) is easily adjusted via this unit's wired remote if the "pooting" gets out of control, and 2.1, 4.1, and 5.1 speaker modes can all be selected from this same remote. It also offers easy access to master, rear, and center volume controls, as well as a headphone jack.

A switch on the back of the subwoofer lets you enable the system's center channel in stereo and 4.1 modes for times when 5.1 isn't available to you because the app you're using doesn't support it. I left the center turned on because I found that it dramatically improved my listening experience in games, movies, and music.

If you're worried about setting up 5.1 speakers, don't be: Altec Lansing made connecting the 5100s a no-brainer. Each speaker is pre-wired and color-coded, and attaches to the subwoofer, which is also labeled and color-coded. It's almost impossible to screw up.



Altec's got a really cool set of PC speakers here, folks. At \$179, they should be music to your ears *and* your wallet.

**PC GAMER** 88%  
EXCELLENT

COMPANY TELEX, WWW.SONICXS.COM, 952-884-4051 ■ PRICE \$299 (M.S.R.P.)

- ENTRY
- MID
- DREAM

# EV SonicXS 4.1

TELEX PROVES THAT MORE SPEAKERS DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN MERRIER TUNES

If you read last month's review of Telex's EV SonicXS 2.1 speakers (PCG rating: 82%), you were probably expecting big things from the 4.1 version. I know I was. Unfortunately, this set takes its little brother's problems and compounds them times two.

The 2.1 set sounds fabulous, and the 4.1 set does as well, but pre-wired speaker cables that are much too short for the typical gamer's setup plague both systems. Both provide only five feet of speaker wire for the front satellites, and in a miscalculation of monstrously misjudged proportions, the 4.1s give you merely 10 feet for the rears. Does Telex expect me to mount these gargantuan speakers on my

shoulders? Maybe if I face my computer on all fours, I can mount them on my ass and point them at my head? They're not going to get much farther back than that.

The 2.1 system's \$199 price made the fact that it came with hard-wired speaker cables almost acceptable. At \$299, however, I simply can't let that gaff slide. Note to Telex: The next generation of these speakers must have detachable speaker wires so that people can (a) use longer cables if necessary, and (b) use higher-quality wire if they wish.

A problem not shared with the 2.1s is this system's unresponsive volume-control knob. You turn on the speakers by turning the volume dial on the primary satellite from seven o'clock to around eight.

That's how things work on the 2.1s as well. Unfortunately, with 4.1s, you don't get any volume at all until you turn

the dial up to 12 o'clock, and then at 1 o'clock it's so deafeningly loud, you're pretty much blowing your teeth out the back of your skull.

As I said at the start of this review, I really like the sound produced by these speakers. The satellites are rich and full, and make hard, heavy music and game sound effects come alive — much like a set of high-end Klipsch or Logitech speakers. The subwoofer is respectable, but leaves a little to be desired in that it's nowhere near as powerful and boomy as the ones that come with Logitech's THX-Certified Z-560s (PCG rating: 90%) or Klipsch's THX-Certified ProMedia 4.1s (PCG rating: Editors' Choice).

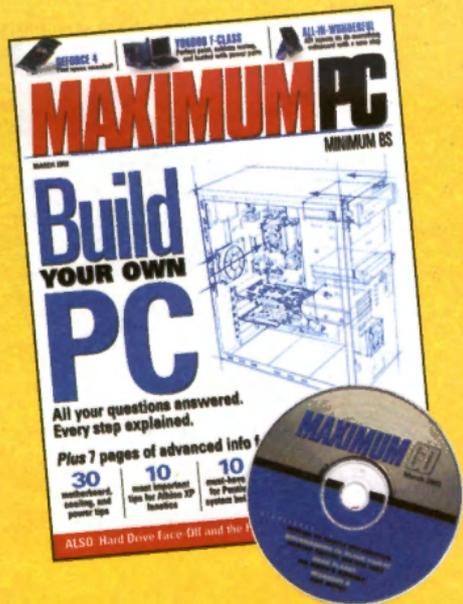
These days, the ProMedia 4.1s can be found online for \$249 while the Z-560s are a steal at \$199, and both of these speaker sets use detachable speaker wire. Telex is either going to have to drop the price of the SonicXS 4.1s or add features, because at \$299, I just can't recommend them over the competition in their current condition.

**PC GAMER** 67%  
ABOVE AVERAGE



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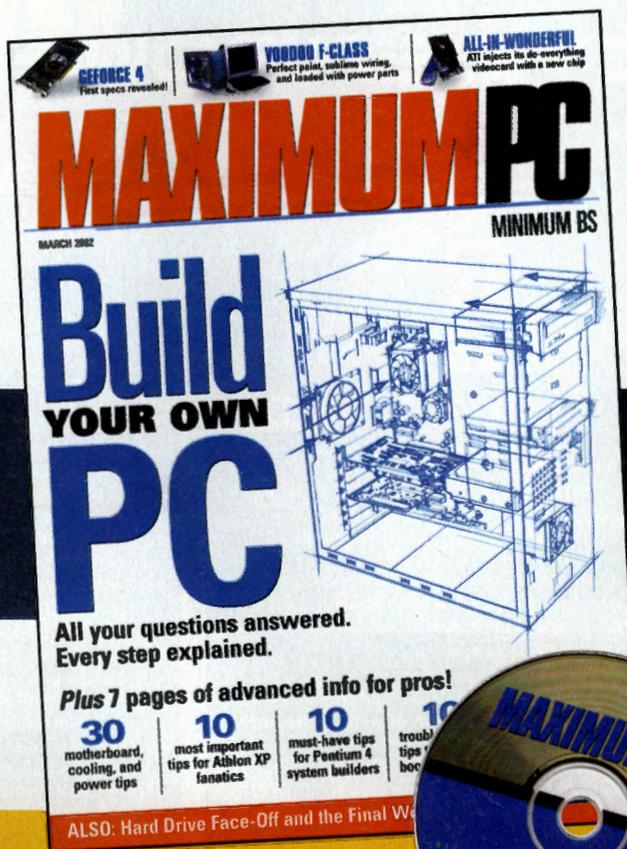
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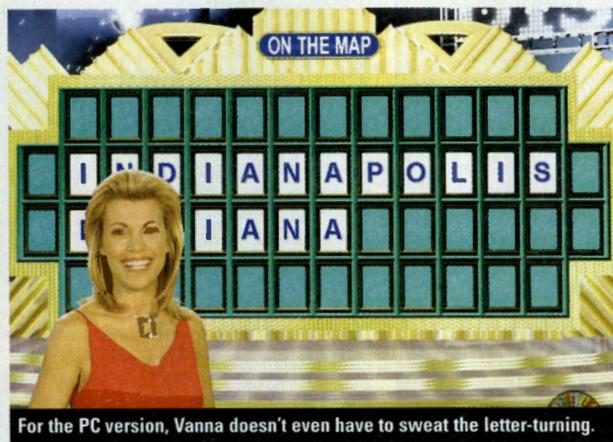
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# Casual-Games Friday

Even us high-minded game snobs can appreciate some low-tech licensed goodness



For the PC version, Vanna doesn't even have to sweat the letter-turning.

works quite well, and fans of the game show will have no trouble projecting themselves into the wheel-spinning, letter-guessing action. One downside: Vanna White is captured on video as well, and not even PC technology can limit the ravages of cruel Father Time. She'd have been better off going with a render.

canned bits, with a different guy voicing the answers. (Of course, Trebek does do plenty of jackalizing when you get an answer wrong — though it's nice to hear him compliment you on your knowledge of history when you respond correctly to certain queries.) Cool extras include sample contestant exams, so you can find out if you'd make the cut as a real-life contestant; the ability to track your money winnings over a sequence of shows (just as a real-life champ gets to do); and wagering your dough on the Daily Doubles. Best bit: you get to use the mouse to write your name on the little electronic placard in Final Jeopardy. There's no online mode, however — just three-player hotseat multiplayer.

Sometimes, ensconced in our cocoon of 3D-accelerated mayhem, we forget that there's a whole world of folks out there more in tune to Pictionary than *Unreal Tournament 2003*. Fortunately, Infogrames is both more aware and more accommodating, and presents a trio of TV and boardgame classics, each selling for a mere \$19.99. If you're on the lookout for inexpensive breaks from the first-person numb and grind, you'll be well-served by Casual-Games Friday...

What's surprising about *Wheel* is just how absorbing it is — I'm not even a fan of the show, yet it's impossible not to get into the excitement of letter-guessing with all that virtual cash on the line. It was remarkable to find out just how tense a \$20 game-show adaptation could make me.



## MONOPOLY

Milton Bradley was the company to first dream up the "tycoon" genre, and Monopoly still remains the category's highest expression. For this new PC version, Infogrames has added a full-3D, isometric-view game board with 3D character pieces. (Only suckers play as anything other than the battleship.) You get 10 individual map boards, each representing a different city, which makes for a very fun region-specific perk — now you can own San Francisco's Market Street and the Embarcadero instead of Broadway and Park Place. With six-player Internet play, *Monopoly* is \$20 very well spent for an ageless "budget" title.



## JEOPARDY! 2003

Computerized *Jeopardy!* relies more on graphics overlays to insert you in the studio set. Alex Trebek is on hand to host, but his interaction is limited to a dozen or so

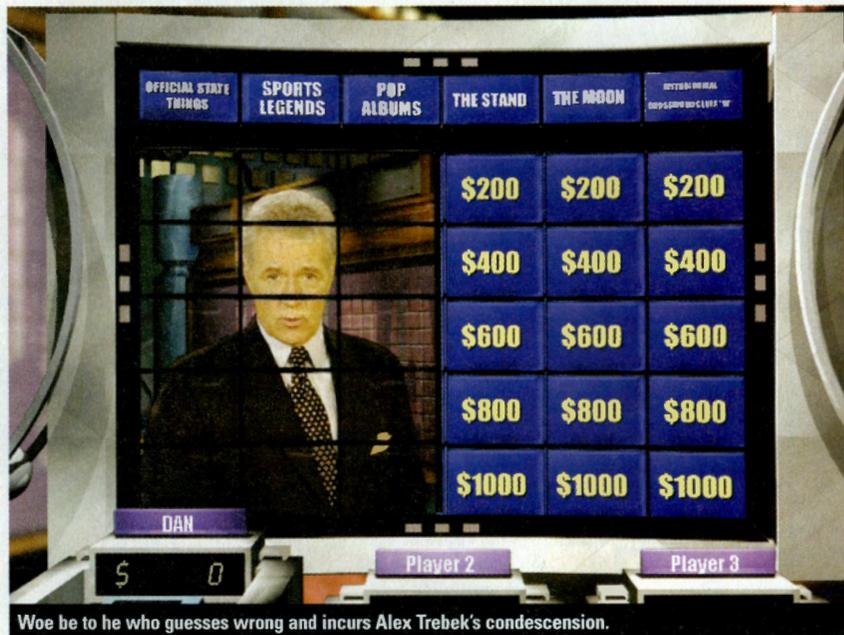
So I've got to tip my Monopoly top-hat to Artech Studios, the developer of all three of these titles. In a segment of the PC market populated by the dregs of low-budget projects, Artech applied some care and devotion to each of these three licenses. Infogrames should be very happy with what they got from this studio, and if you're a fan of any of these classic shows and games, you'll consider the PC versions accurate translations. Even a hardcore gamer will be delighted by what awaits here.

— [extendedplay@pcgamer.com](mailto:extendedplay@pcgamer.com)



## WHEEL OF FORTUNE

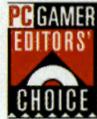
This game is an interesting rendition in that it uses video to bring to life the impossibly gaudy and bombastic *Wheel of Fortune* studio set. For what it's worth, the trick



MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. BLACK HAWK DOWN (BETA), 2. AMERICA'S ARMY, 3. JEOPARDY! 2003, 4. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2003, 5. WWE RAW

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Chuck Osborn



# The Naked Tomorrow

Chuck went to Comdex and brought back these lousy predictions

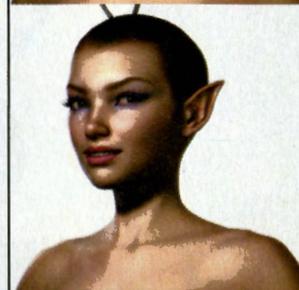
**W**hy am I writing about Comdex? Land of heat sinks, doodads, and nary a booth babe? It's no E3, that's for sure. Las Vegas' annual shindig offers little in the way of gaming news...unless you know where to look, which I do. Where technology leads, games follow. (Well, actually, porn leads both, but that's another column.)

Here's what I discovered about games of the future:

**SEX CELS** If I learned anything from NVIDIA's GeForce FX launch spectacle, it's that girls in games are getting naked-er. There was so much rendered woman-flesh at the event — from NVIDIA mascot Dawn's realistic shoulder skin to the enormous glistening boobies sported by the underdressed gals of *EverQuest II* and *Unreal II* — that I figured I must've wandered into Cheetahs by mistake.

All kidding aside, consumer 3D technology has finally reached the point where it can convincingly render human bodies in real time. Mark my words: controversy awaits.

Think I'm going overboard? Well, just for the record, I'd like to be the first to coin the phrase "masturbation stimulators" as a euphemism for sexually explicit video games. When you hear Gloria Allred use it on FOX News,



The pixie-ish Dawn is the unofficial leader of undressed game characters. Aw, she's got a pouty mouth!

think of me. [At your peril... — Ed.]

**PCs LOSE CONTROL** It's no secret that the PC peripheral market has been gradually shrinking. These days, fewer and fewer games require, or even recommend, gamepads or joysticks. (Witness next year's space shooter *Freelancer*: it's keyboard-and-mouse only.) Still, you could always count on seeing a dozen or two controllers scattered around Comdex — usually little-known foreign brands that would never see the light of day in the U.S., but at least they were there. This year? Nada.

Don't get me wrong: PC peripherals aren't disappearing entirely. There will always be a mildly thriving market for flight-sim sticks. But I don't write about those games: I cover action. So, action gamers — no joystick for you!

**GAMES GET SMALL** Cell phones were the belles of the Comdex ball this year. Some, like Nokia and its color-screened memory card-powered N-Gage, plan to challenge Nintendo as a portable-game manufacturer. Nokia is even publishing its own games.

Great. Car accidents of the future = teenagers playing Nokia games while driving. Cue controversy No. 3!

— killingbox@pcgamer.com

## MOD OF THE MONTH

Okay, I know...ANOTHER *Half-Life* mod? Trust me, this one's worth the reinstall. *Natural Selection* (now at version 1.03) has finally been released, pitting a team of hardened military soldiers against slimy aliens. Perfect for clans, this FPS/RTS hybrid lets you play on either side and with different abilities. Get it at [www.natural-selection.org](http://www.natural-selection.org).



MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. FREEDOM FORCE, 2. DRAGON'S LAIR 3D, 3. UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003, 4. NATURAL SELECTION, 5. ASHERON'S CALL 2

sim column

# A Flyboy's Dream: the HOTAS Cougar

**COMBAT FLIGHT SIM FANS** can be divided into two camps: the clinically insane and the well-equipped clinically insane. Ever since I got my hands on one of Thrustmaster's new HOTAS Cougar flightstick-throttle units, I've definitely moved over to Camp B.

For those of you who haven't heard about this remarkable new peripheral — or who didn't catch the praise-filled review in October 2002's Hard Stuff section — the HOTAS Cougar is the most robust, most technologically advanced, and priciest (\$299) joystick-and-throttle combo that you will ever plug into your machine's USB port. It's also the last joystick that you'll ever need to buy — and that's not an exaggeration.

Priced at a cool three bills, the Cougar is the closest thing to an *objet d'art* that your gaming desktop will ever host. The heavy black die-cast metal construction accounts for most of its tactile beauty, but the real art comes from its 28 programmable buttons, five hat-switches, and ultra-smooth, multi-axis digital response.

How smooth? Well, when I loaded up *Falcon 4.0* and floated the sim's diabolically touchy F-16 down to a perfect *hands-free* two-point landing on my very first attempt, I knew I had found the flightstick of my dreams.

I've had mine plugged in for almost six months now, logging extensive flight hours with titles like *Falcon 4.0*, *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002*, *Strike Fighters*, *Combat Flight Simulator 3*, *IL-2 Sturmovik*, and *Flanker 2.5* along the way, and the Cougar has handled almost everything I've thrown at it without a hiccup.

In fact, apart from some minor conflict issues with a cordless optical mouse, the only problem that the HOTAS Cougar has ever really given me is a pair of overly stiff Speedbrake and Dogfight switches on the throttle unit when I first pulled it out of the box. A month of hard use was about all it took to smooth out both of these, however, and the action has been slicker than Shinola ever since. A gaming peripheral that actually improves with age? Not surprising, really — the all-metal stick and throttle units weigh in at close to 20 pounds, and in a pinch, these puppies could probably be used to jack up your damned car!

The Cougar isn't cheap, but if you're a serious simmer who's finally ready to trade that little girly-man plastic stick of yours in for an honest-to-god heavyweight military contender, then Thrustmaster's stick will do you proud.

— simcolumn@pcgamer.com

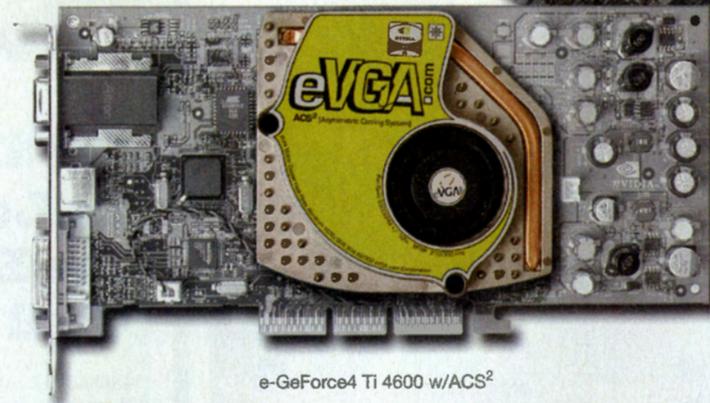


Andy Mahood

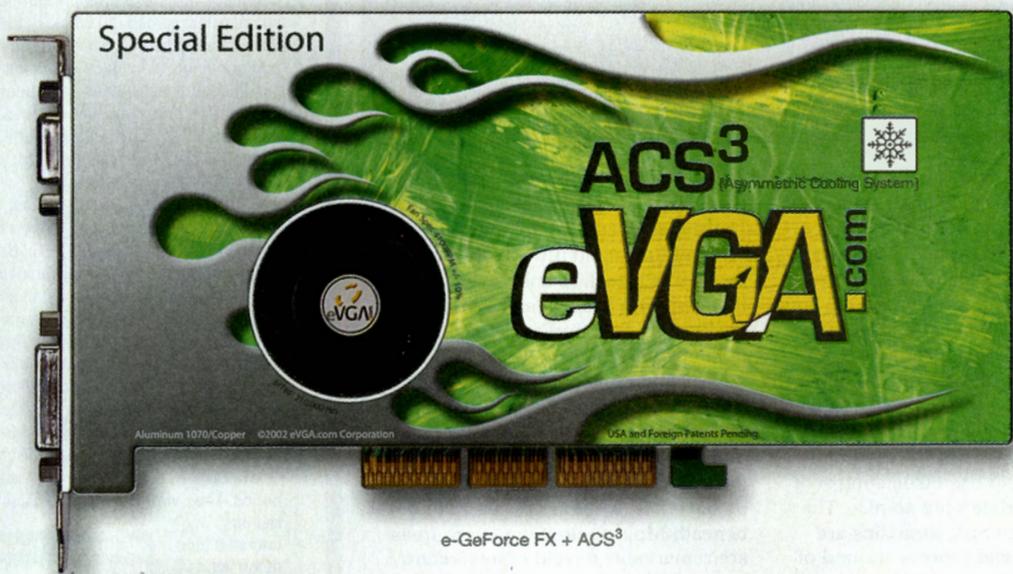
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alternate lives

Steve Klett



# The Trials of *Tribunal*

Morrowind's massive world expands with this official add-on



The Goblin is one of the few new foes to fight in *Tribunal*. Ugly, ain't he? So's his dog!

**W**ith smug satisfaction I sat back in my chair on a recent Monday morning, quite pleased with myself. Dagoth Ur was *finally* dead — slain by yours truly! The blight that had infected Morrowind for so long was lifted, all thanks to me.

Lost in my self-congratulatory reverie, I almost didn't hear the doorbell ring. There, delivered by the dependable Brown, was a copy of *Tribunal*, the first official add-on for *Morrowind*. It seems a new king has taken control of Morrowind, and he's not so nice. The gods have gone crazy, assassins are running amok, and reports abound of new types of monsters lurking beneath Morrowind's capital city of Mournhold (where most of *Tribunal* is set).

Well, at least I can say I had finished the game for the 20 minutes it took to get *Tribunal* installed, locked, and loaded.

You don't need to have finished *Morrowind* to play *Tribunal*. The add-on's new areas and quests are slotted into the world in a similar way to any plug-ins you might have used already, and the story integrates with the main game in a clever and subtle fashion. When your sleep begins being interrupted by assassins, you have to ask yourself why. Finding the answer leads you to Mournhold.

*Tribunal* adds several features fans have been screaming for since *Morrowind* debuted: you can now

annotate the map; a quest-sorting system (albeit a klunky one) is added to the Journal; mercenaries are available for hire in Mournhold (though they're pretty much useless unless you outfit them with the best kit *and* watch their back); and you'll find some pack animals to haul your loot around.

The add-on could've been more polished: I encountered several bugs in conversation trees, where some characters didn't react correctly to actions I'd performed. Once, a merc simply disappeared on me while exploring the vast dungeons beneath Mournhold. Some new areas are remarkably devoid of interesting sites, and the map system's "fog of war" repeatedly and inexplicably reset itself.

It's a bit strange to be confined to Mournhold and its municipalities after enjoying the free-form, outdoor-exploration nature of *Morrowind*. And I'd have liked to have fought more new beasties. That said, the add-on does *perform* better because most of it takes place indoors.

*Tribunal* brings a lot of good things to *Morrowind*'s already laden table, and it's worth the \$30 for rabid fans, regardless of whether you've "finished" the original.

— alternatelives@pcgamer.com



Good ol' boys get a rough welcome to the age of high-powered war.



desktop general

## At Long Last, the End of the Civil War Jinx?

**INCREDIBLY TALENTED GAME** designers have managed to depict the entire Russian Front campaign — Gary Grigsby made the vast *Pacific War* manageable, as well as the five-year strategic air campaign against the Reich. But *no one* has ever successfully gamed the whole of the American Civil War, despite the much-less formidable technology and grindingly slow pace of the major campaigns.

The landmark battles have been gamed to near-perfection, many times over, but not once has a single game captured what Kantian philosophers call *das Ding an sich* — the total metaphysical reality of "the thing in itself."

Frank Hunter came the closest, in the third and biggest iteration of his *Sumter to Appomattox* engine (Interactive Magic, 1995). But for all his fierce dedication, not even Frank could juggle the tactical, strategic, technological, and political elements into a seamless, playable gestalt.

But now, it looks like Walker Boys Studio has a better-than-fair shot at breaking this jinx. Chad and Eric Walker are respected commercial and comic-book illustrators, as well as passionate Civil War buffs. Their artistic merits are proven by the beauty of their website ([www.walkerboystudio.com](http://www.walkerboystudio.com)), one of the best-looking I've ever seen, period. Their virtues as game designers remain

untested (no demo yet, and no public commitment from a publisher; both can be expected fairly soon, according to the grapevine), but several factors lead me to expect that *The War Between the States* may soar above its hobbled predecessors. So far, it looks to have an elegant interface; a wide variety of play modes; a fresh, creative approach toward integrating economics and politics with strategy; and drop-dead gorgeous 3D graphics that capture the Arcadian lushness of Walt Whitman's American landscape in an almost magical way.

Two negative first impressions, alas, temper my excitement: the inexplicable choice to make *WBS* a *real-time* game, despite the proven failure of real-time engines to replicate combat beyond the scale of platoons or, at most, companies. The other red flag is the gushing, apparently clueless amateurism of the prose. I am *not* reassured about historical accuracy when I read about "craters" made by "exploding cannonball shells," an oxymoron guaranteed to provoke snorts of derision from real Civil War historians. I'll say this just once: Chad, Eric — have this stuff revised by a professional writer!

I'll be watching *WBS* with keen interest, and hope to bring you a hands-on preview soon.

— desktopgeneral@pcgamer.com



William R. Trotter

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MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. TRIBUNAL, 2. COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3, 3. ICEWIND DALE II, 4. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY, 5. C&C: GENERALS (BETA)

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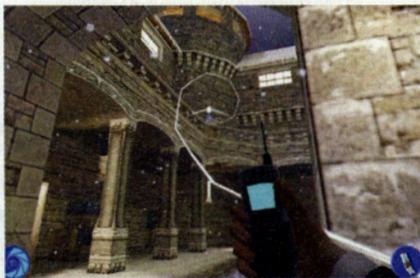
# 007: Nightfire



Stromberg had Jaws, Bond has Q, and you've got *PC Gamer*. With our brilliant strategy, you'll save the world once more from the clutches of diabolical madmen.



Crouch to avoid shots from the chopper, then use the rocket launcher to down it. ("Rendezvous")



Shoot the cellphone grapple at the gray ring to reach the balcony. ("Rendezvous")



Jump up on the tower's controls and shoot the two catwalk guards from above. ("Airfield Ambush")

## RENDEZVOUS

■ Start by using your silenced pistol to knock out the spotlight, so you'll go-unnoticed when you jump on the truck. Duck down on top of the truck and sneak through the gates. (You can also kill the guards and simply open the doors.) Once inside the gates, go through the courtyard in front of you and enter the building. Deactivate the power for the electronically locked doors, then go outside to the next courtyard and deactivate the generator that powers the spotlights.

■ Sneak into the building and go through the now-unlocked door on the right. Enter the party, receive the gadget lighter/micro-camera from the waiter, and take pictures of each woman at the party. Meet Dominique

Paradis and Zoe Nightshade, and then make your way through the guards in the museum. Walk across the beams in the Red Room, dispatching the guard, and use your Q-Specs' X-ray ability to locate the safe behind the painting. Make your way outside and onto the tram, and use the AT-42 Sentinel rocket launcher to destroy the helicopter.

## AIRFIELD AMBUSH

■ Don't kill any guards or get spotted, or the mission ends. Go around the building and disable the spotlight generator, using your laser watch to burn through the lock on the panel. After returning to your original spot, wait for the guard to come, kill him, and take his security card. Use the security card to infiltrate the building on

your left. Sneak past the security cameras and get the second security card. Use a security card to open the electronically locked door, and then climb the stairs.

■ It's now OK to take out guards. Wait in the stairwell by the observation-deck door until the cameras are disabled by Nightshade. Continue up the stairs and eliminate the control-tower personnel and pick up the sniper rifle. Jump onto the controls and kill the guards walking on the observation deck below. Shoot the computers in the control room, and then go downstairs onto the observation deck and snipe guards to allow Nightshade to escape. (Take out the rooftop guards first because they're aiming at you.) Exit the building and enter the next building on the left, entering the door opened by a guard. The inside door opens to a warehouse with many guards, so open the door and use a flashbang grenade to stun them. Move through the middle of the warehouse crates and on to the secondary hangar. Climb the tower while Nightshade fuels the plane, providing her with cover fire from the sniper rifle. When the plane is ready, run to the airstrip, where she'll pick you up.

## UNINVITED GUESTS

■ Take out guards while following Mayhew to the secret bunker. Climb the ladder up to the first courtyard and wade through the koi fishpond and under the house to the secret passage. Take the ladder up to a secret entrance to the Bathhouse, and rescue the hostage. Go back down the passageway and take it to the second courtyard. (You can also take the main gate to the second courtyard, but the guards will see you and you'll have to fight your way through. If you take the pond passage, you can snipe the guards with your silenced Wolfram P2K.) After eliminating the guards, shoot the two red lanterns to clear the way for you to go hand-over-hand



Protect Nightshade with some long-range coverfire. ("Airfield Ambush")

across to the pavilion. Time your scaling of the lantern wire so that the sparks don't shock your hands.

■ Make your way through the house, rescuing the other hostages. The rice-paper walls are thin, so your X-ray specs enable you to see and shoot guards through them. Destroy Mayhew's computer with a few rounds from your gun. Go upstairs to the main bedroom and move the dragon statue to reveal the bedroom safe, and swipe its contents. Return to the bunker and follow Mayhew to the carport. When fighting the ninja, avoid the effects of its flashbang grenades by looking away when you see its arm wind up to throw the grenade.

## PHOENIX RISING

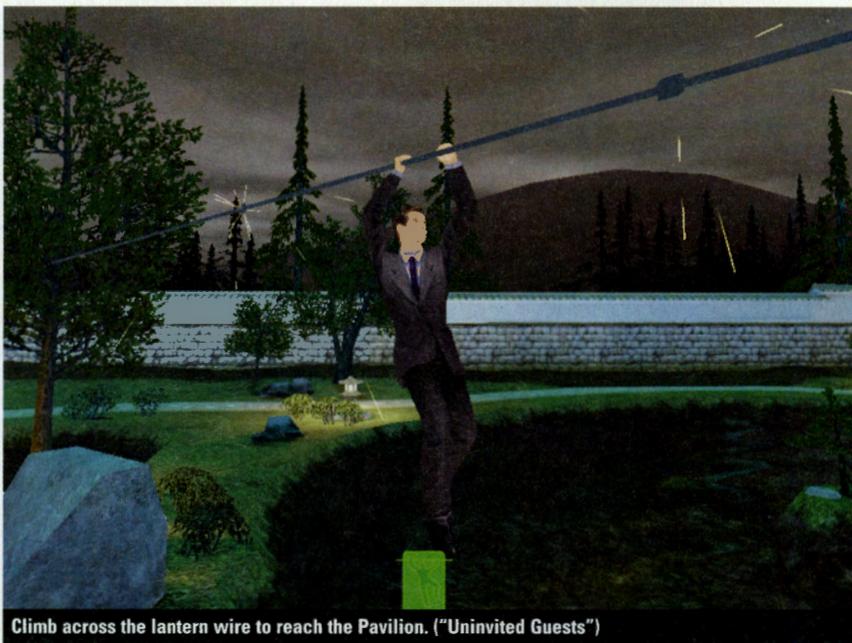
■ Use your gadget stunner and dart pen to subdue the security guards, making sure not to kill them because they're civilians. (At this point in the mission, if you're detected and someone rings an alarm, you fail.) Take the stairs up to the lobby floor and sneak your way up to the front desk, using your X-ray specs to make sure the guard isn't looking from behind the large one-way mirror. Steal the security card and make your way to the security room behind the large one-way mirror, again using your X-ray specs to pass the mirror while the guard isn't looking. Use your decryptor to enable the elevators, and take them up to the offices. Subdue the guards and avoid security cameras, which will trigger the alarm.

■ Make your way to the administrator's office and insert the Q-worm disc drive. On your way out, the other lit office has more tranquilizer darts. Go to the accounting office and load the Q-worm disc into that drive. Start the test cycle to disable the laser sensors, and then exit. Subdue the guards, upload the Q-worm disc into the elevator controls, and go outside to the observation deck. (You can now start using lethal force.) Scale the building using the Q-grapple, watching out for guards looking through the window — move horizontally to avoid them seeing you.

■ Upload the Q-worm into Mayhew's computer, and then use your PDA to open the Terminal Room door. Get the Nightfire file



Stay below Rook and you'll avoid his deadly blasts. ("Hidden Agenda")



Climb across the lantern wire to reach the Pavilion. ("Uninvited Guests")



Use the stunner to keep guards from sounding the alarm. ("Phoenix Rising")



Watch out for guards who are watching out for you! ("Phoenix Rising")

from the computer, place the bugs in the Executive Meeting Room, and exit to the stairs. Use your PDA to open the armory door in the penthouse office and armor up, then plant bugs in the office. Shoot at the helicopter and wait for it to blow up the secondary door of the armory, and then access the rocket launcher. Use the rocket launcher on the helicopter, crouching behind the desks for protection.

## HIDDEN AGENDA

■ Make your way through the ventilation shaft and open the grate with your laserwatch and drop below. Power up the elevator and take it up. Pass the locked security room, then return to find it open. Turn off the electronic locks for the control rooms below. Shoot the red barrels by the gate to blow it open, and take the stairs down. Access each control room and engage the turbines. Get the spacesuit and go through the water passageway, killing the guards in the shuttle bay. Swim back through the tunnel, and time your way through the lasers. When fighting Rook, crouch down and generally stay below him to avoid his laser

blasts. You can leap from platform to platform with the help of the giant fan below. Drake will draw back the protective covering of the fan, so make sure not to fall into it. He also lowers a grate from the top, so be sure to kill Rook before the grate crushes you.

## HIGH TREASON

■ As the platform falls, use your sniper rifle to kill the rocket-launching enemies first, then waste those wielding normal guns. After the enemy attacks from across the platform, kill him and use the grappling hook to latch onto the ceiling fixture. Go back to the Administrator's room; as guards shoot at you, one will blow a hole in the wall using a rocket. Go through the hole to the conference room, and then step into the hallway. You'll see a large window that, when shot, will reveal a room to enter. Disengage the gates and stop by the Accounting room for grenades.

■ Use your rocket launcher and grenades to blow up the servers in the Server Room. Exit down to the stairwell. Guards are at the doorway of floors 38, 33, 29, 26, 25, 24, and 19. As the stairway explodes after floor 19,

## CHEATER'S CORNER

## 007: NIGHTFIRE

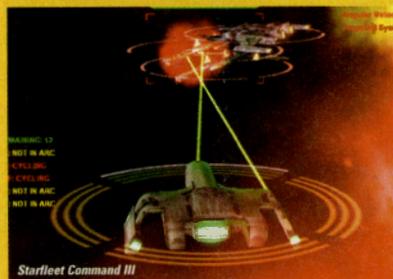
To access *Nightfire's* cheats, use Notepad to create a new file called `autoexec.cfg`. Inside the file, type these lines:

- `sv_cheats 1`
- `console 1`

Place the file inside the `Nightfire\Bond` folder and launch the game. Now, during gameplay, hit ~ to lower the console. Type one of the following codes and hit Enter.

- `god` Toggles god mode on/off
- `impulse 101` All weapons/items (type repeatedly for more ammo)
- `notarget` Toggles invisibility on/off
- `noclip` Toggles clipping on/off

To unlock all missions, add the line `sv_iamdone 1` to the `autoexec.cfg` file. Now, at the game's main menu, click on *Nightfire* and you'll see a Mission Select option.



## STARFLEET COMMAND III

**Mission Tip 1:** In the Romulan mission "Gray Area," you'll be attacked by pirates after scanning most of the asteroids — and these rogues are tough to beat with the ship you've got at this point in the campaign. A good tactic is to refit your vessel so that you have no heavy weapons and the maximum possible phaser power. That way, you can allocate your heavy-weapons energy to your phasers and shields, and slowly whittle away at the pirates with your heavily powered-up phasers.

**Mission Tip 2:** Before engaging in the Romulan mission "Trojan Horse," equip your ship with a Tachyon Pulse. That way, when you engage the mission's two Federation enemies, you can fight one vessel while using a tachyon burst to prevent the other ship from warping away.

## BATTLEFIELD 1942

**Quick Tip:** If you want to really surprise the enemy, initiate an airborne assault! Simply have one person act as the pilot in the B29 and have the rest of your team jump up onto the plane's wings. As long as the aircraft is kept level and everyone on the wings pushes forward with the walk button while you're flying, your team members will stay on the wings. Fly the plane to the target area and then have everyone on the wings jump off and parachute to the ground. To see this trick in action, check out the awesome *Battlefield 1942* movies at [www.northernbrigade.com](http://www.northernbrigade.com).



Use the sniper rifle to quickly eliminate enemies wielding rocket launchers. ("High Treason")

jump to floor 18 and drop down the hole in the ground to floor 17 and exit down the stairs. At the 13th floor, guards will emerge as you pass, and it's a good place to use the Phoenix Ronin machinegun suitcase. Exit the stairwell on the seventh floor. Avoid or shoot the laser tripwires and proximity mines, and as you approach the open hallway, gates will block the exits. Many enemies with rocket launchers will emerge on the floors above and below, so kill them with your sniper rifle.

■ After you kill the rocket launcher-wielding baddies, slaughter the soldiers coming out of the Meeting Room, then pick up the explosive charges. Destroy the servers scattered throughout the other rooms with rockets or grenades, then enter the elevator. Blow up the mobile and stationary vans with rockets or grenades. Exit down stairs. Back in the reception area, activate the suitcase in front of the mirror to kill guards and to watch your back. You can use the grappling hook on the gray hooks above the hanging stone decoration to reach the second floor, giving you a vantage point. Run down one of the stairways toward the reception area, where gates will come down. Return to the main lobby area and shoot the large mirror, revealing the security room. Disengage the gates from the security room, and exit toward the reception desk.

## ISLAND GETAWAY

■ Enter the hut and upload the Q-worm to the computer, which will disengage the automatic machineguns outside. Take the trail alongside the mountain, go through the tunnels, and take the stairs on the right. Get the



Deactivate the cannons by uploading the Q-worm to the computer in the hut. ("Island Getaway")



Lob the suitcase in front of the mirror for optimum carnage. ("High Treason")

explosives from the Demolition Room and go upstairs. Use the PDA to open the door, revealing a rocket launcher. Don't kill the civilians in haz/mat suits, or you fail the mission. Swim down to plant the explosives in the room under the rocket. To get out of the water, climb up the ladder on the opposite platform.

■ Go upstairs and upload the Q-worm into the missile-launch computer. Swim to the other ladder and go around, across the platforms, and onto the moving rocket platform. Jump to the second level of the rocket tower and go up the ladder, and then jump to the top of the rocket-tower brace, which will lift you to the catwalk. Jump onto the catwalk, exit through the door, then take the pathway up and through the building. Continue up the path and use your PDA to unlock Alura. Go outside and around the path, protecting Alura from fire. Jump to the other side of the cliff, down the path, and into the tunnels.

■ Follow Alura down into the valley. Enter Tower 1 by going to the shed and using the underground pathway, or by using your grappling hook to pull yourself up to the smallest radio receiver on the roof. In Tower 1, deactivate the ECM by pulling the red switch in the control room. Exit the tower and go through the main gate. Go to Tower 2 and deactivate the ECM. Move toward the truck and go through the door by the large tunnel. Jump down the path via the platforms on the right. Jump into the water and plant the explosives on each of the three bridge supports.

## ZERO MINUS

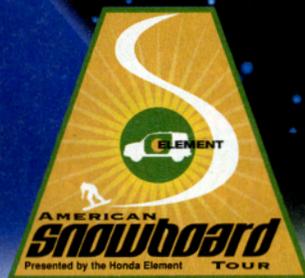
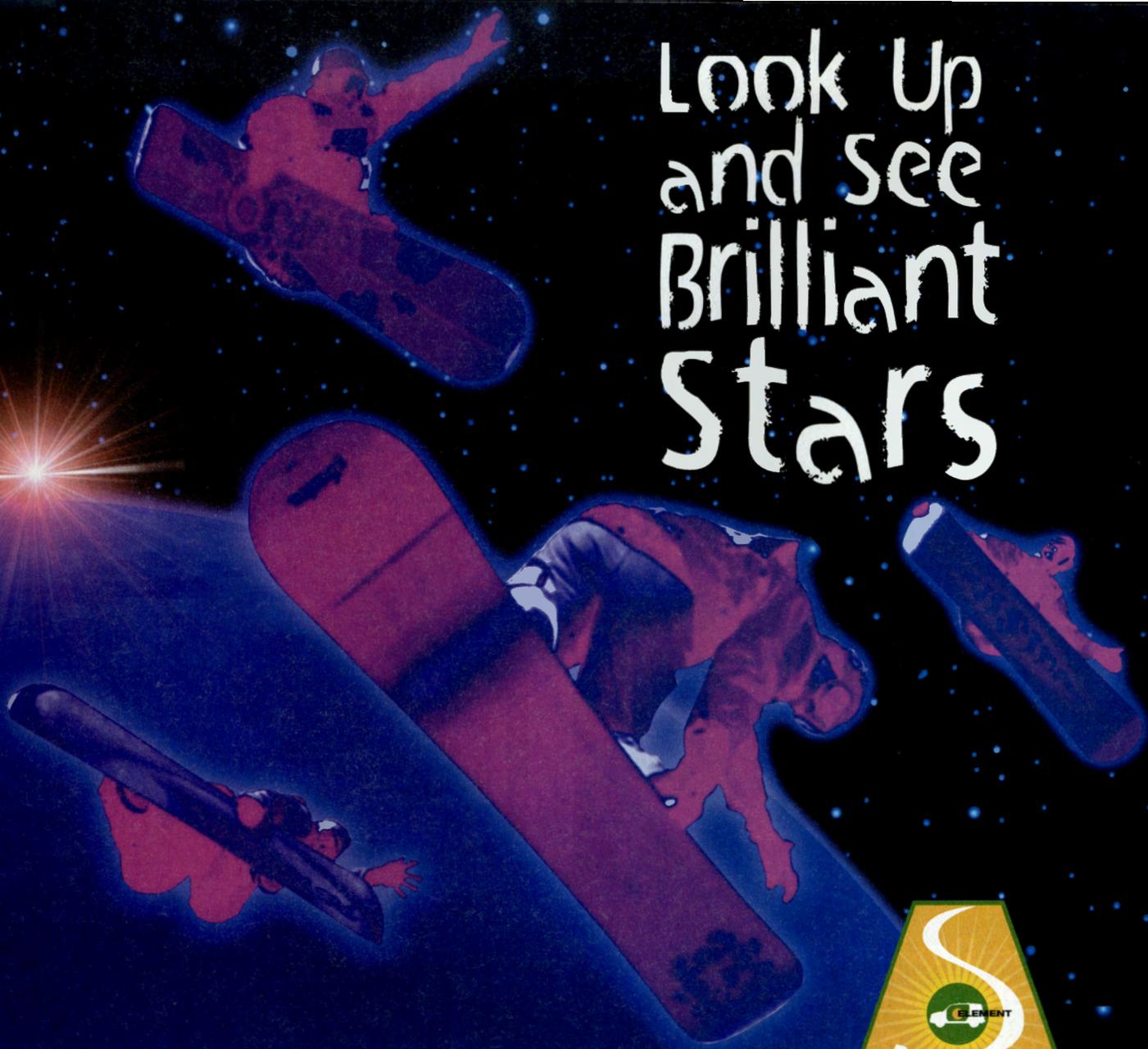
■ Sneak into the building and pull the switch to move the hook away from the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 111



Quick tip: run into a room, stop, and make the soldiers come to you. ("Zero Minus")

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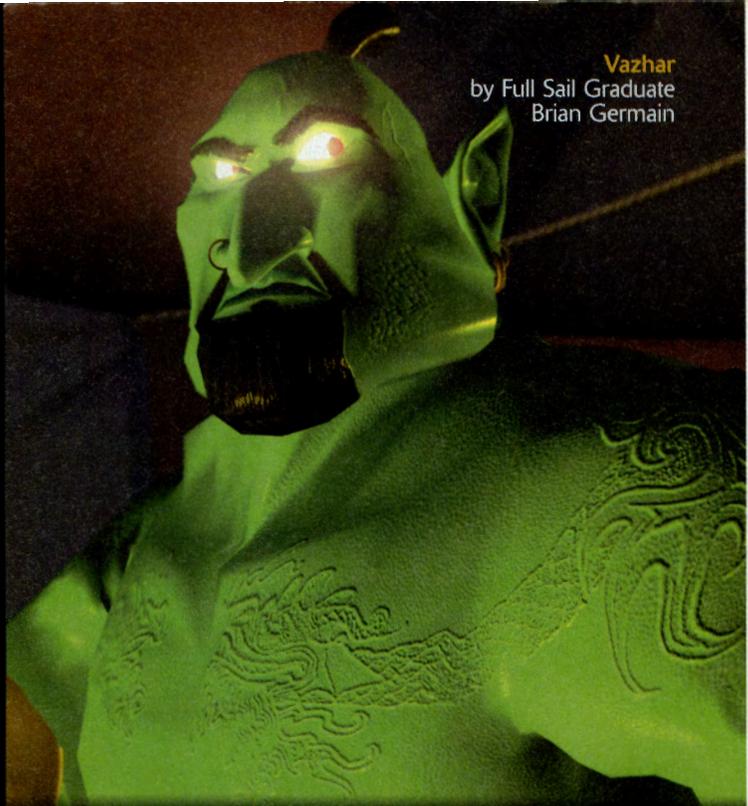
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(found on the front of the game box):



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Content may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older.



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**ESRB**  
Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.



CONTENT RATED BY  
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Content may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older.



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**ESRB**  
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The content descriptors tell you whether the game includes elements such as:

- Mild language
- Strong language
- Mild animated violence
- Mild realistic violence
- Comic mischief
- Animated violence
- Realistic violence
- Animated blood and gore
- Realistic blood and gore
- Animated blood
- Realistic blood
- Suggestive themes
- Mature sexual themes
- Strong sexual content
- Use of tobacco or alcohol
- Use of drugs
- Gaming
- Edutainment
- Informational content
- Some assistance may be needed

**ESRB**

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This publication abides by the Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices developed by the Advertising Review Council of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

## 007: NIGHTFIRE STRATEGY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 108

wall. Use your grappling hook to climb up to the gray ring to the left of the gap in the catwalk, and go hand-over-hand to the other side. Use your PDA to bypass the lock on the door. Don't go down the ladder to cross the room — a guard will see you on the ladder. Instead, use the grappling hook to reach the other side of the room. Cut the lock on the grate with your laser and enter the ventilation shaft. After crawling forward in the shaft, you'll fall through the floor and crash into the room below.

■ Go into the elevator. Take a photo of the blueprint and get the security key from the Security Room. Pull the switch to move the crane's hook, and use the grappling hook to get to the catwalk. Climb down the catwalk and move along the tracks. Jump onto the train and get off when it stops. Open the door with your PDA and go inside to the Target Computer area. Override the launch controls by uploading the Q-worm into the computer, launch the rockets, and escape in the elevator. Use the PDA to get through another door, moving up the staircase, through the door, and down the large platform.

■ Make your way through all the enemies in the tunnel, also avoiding the tripwires. The tunnel has small rooms on both sides that contain lockers with armor

and ammo. Run into the rooms and blast the soldiers as they enter. Kill hidden soldiers by using the grenade launcher to lob grenades over crates (their blasts will probably trigger the laser tripwires for added explosiveness). The last security room on the left will have a Phoenix Ronin suitcase in a locker. PDA through the door, then approach the partially open elevator and use the grappling hook to climb on top of it. Walk across to the other elevator shaft and use the grappling hook to climb up.

## REENTRY

■ Use your PDA to get through the door, and then walk onto the catwalk. A lot of soldiers are around the corner, so use a flashbang grenade to stun them, and then run into the security room. Wait for blastoff, then fight through the ninjas and into the next open room and wait for the second blastoff. Go to the elevator. Run through the open door to Shuttle 4 (if you're too slow, you fail the mission). Jump up the canisters on the left, and across to the platform adjacent to the jetpack-refueling station. Use the jetpack to jet-jump up to the platform above, and go to the Missile Control room.

■ Shoot the glass and drop down to the missile bay. Open each missile's door using control panels in front of each of the four missiles on the raised platform. Use the jetpack-refuel station below because the jetpack holds just three charges. Jet-jump up to each missile door and disarm the missiles by pulling the two switches and then pushing the button between them. You can jump across to the opposite missile door without using the jetpack, but you'll have to drop down and jetpack up to the second set.

■ Get out through the platform door for your final encounter with Drake. Stay low to avoid his blasts, and shoot him with a steady stream of laser shots. If he strays near the oxygen tanks mounted on the walls, shoot the tanks to ignite them. After finishing Drake, escape to the pod and kick back with a martini, shaken, not stirred. You've lived up to the Bond name!

PCG

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## GENERAL TIPS

■ Plenty of guns and ammo are available throughout the game, so you don't have to be conservative.

■ Use Bond's laser watch to burn through locks on lockers and chests, and to cut away latches on grates.

■ Your silencer-equipped Wolfram P2K is a great weapon for executing headshots that go undetected by other guards.

■ During the outdoor missions, use your infra-red glasses to see enemies clearly through trees.

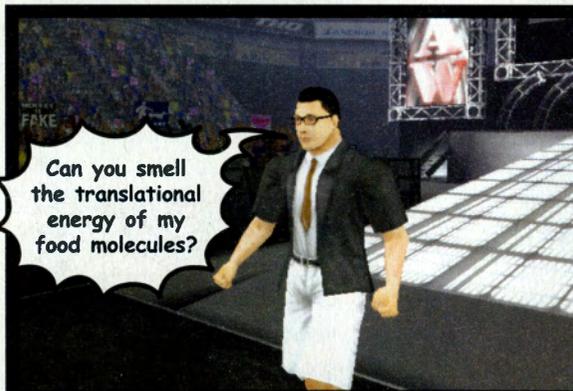
■ Most of your guns are fairly inaccurate because of their recoil, so you'll have to squeeze off a lot of ammo and reload. If you need quick kills, use the sniper rifle without the scope.

■ Look away after throwing a flashbang grenade — it'll blind you as well as your targets.

# Wrestling for Weenies™

Our editors enter the ring in *WWE Raw* — where they're still wimps

When we loaded up *WWE Raw* (reviewed on page 75) and realized we could create our very own wrestling superstars, we wasted little time. Dan was the first to set up a wrestler, taking advantage of a character portrait that happens to be an absolute dead-ringer for him, right down to the white T-shirt and baseball cap. He came up with the imaginative name "Dan" for his wrestler. Chuck Osborn was next to the keyboard, crafting the hulking sartorial slickster "The Gentleman Grappler." Then it was time to take their wrestlers into battle against the best female in the business — Trish Stratus!



Can you smell the translational energy of my food molecules?

## CHUCK "THE GENTLEMAN GRAPPLER" OSBORN

strides confidently into the arena, amid roars of crowd approval. A mild-mannered professor by day, his angle is that he tries to explain political and philosophical truths to his opponents before resorting to mangleing them. His drunken fans' trademarked chant is "Less deep-thought, more on-slaughter!"



I've got your "penis envy" right here, nerd!

## ALAS, THE GENTLEMAN GRAPPLER MEETS

his match in furious combat with the beautiful (and deadly) Trish Stratus. She responded to his opening-bell monologue on chaos theory in the thermodynamic sphere by clotheslining him from off the turnbuckle. Then the battle was on — and unfortunately for Chuck, the lady wrestler was just too much for him.



## RESULT

Loser? Hardly...

1P DAN

03:00 Pin Fall

2V TRISH STRATUS CPU

## CHUCK WASN'T ALONE IN BEING DISGRACED

by an AI-controlled girl. Dan was next to challenge Ms. Stratus — and he fared no better, getting pinned (as you can see) after just three minutes of pathetic action. COMING SOON: "English Bob" Smith and "Creamy Smooth, the Nebraska Cornhusker" take on Trish Stratus in tag-team mayhem! Ooooh yeah!!!

## NEXT MONTH MARCH 2003



One of the coolest movies of all time? *The Matrix*. With two movie sequels coming in 2003, there's a huge game project underway, too. We've got the full, exclusive scoop on the PC's *Enter The Matrix*, with details on the brand-new footage shot with the movie actors that's going to be available only in the game. Don't miss it. Plus, it's celebration time: **The 9th Annual PC Gamer Awards!**

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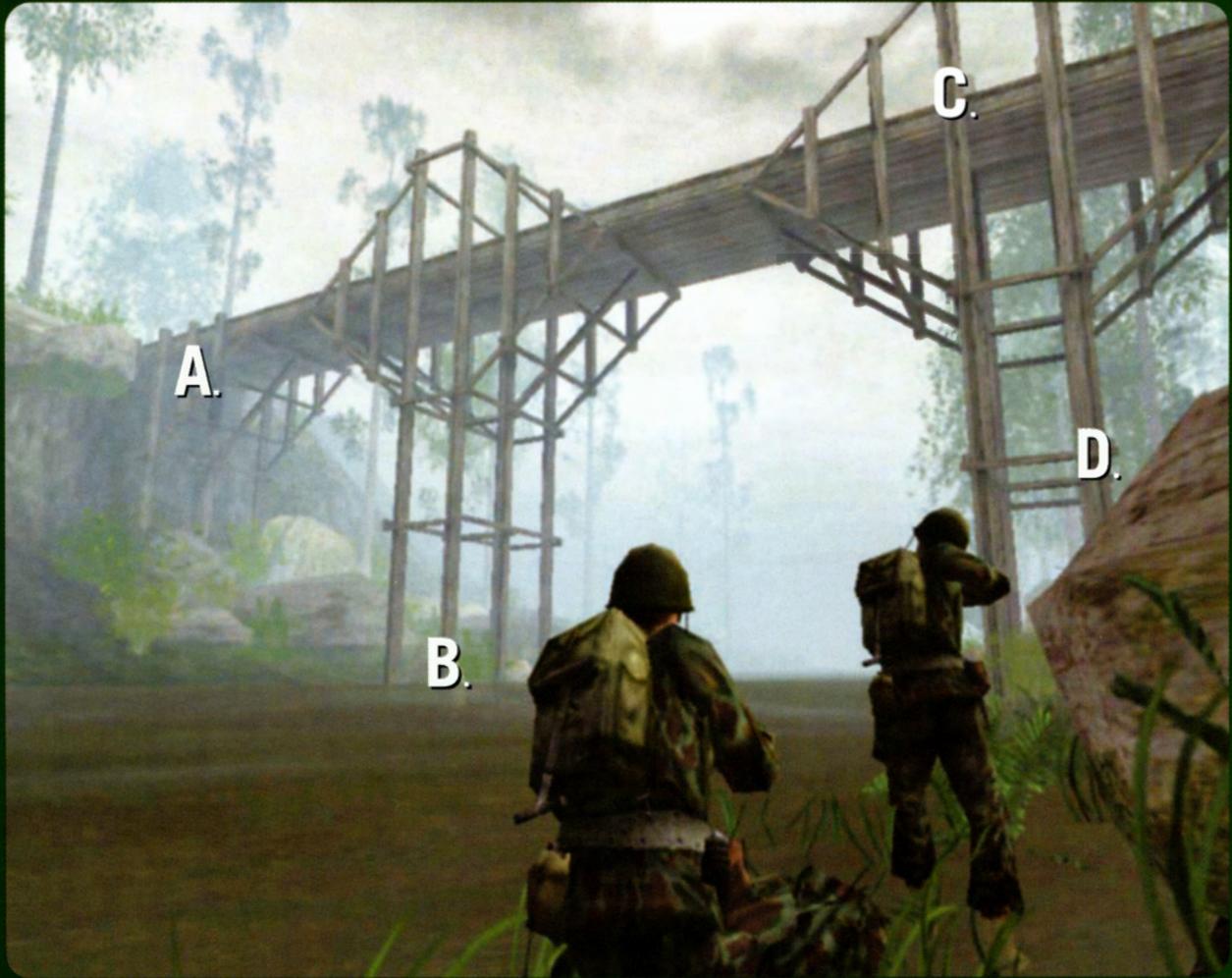
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"Beep-beep-beep," blared the tracker urgently. The agent ran through the desert, his legs pumping like pistons. "Why do cults always attack Las Vegas with their big steel monkeys?" he thought. "How stereotypical." Rounding a dune, he spotted an ape-like noggin jutting up over the horizon. "Bingo." Meanwhile...the dark shape astride the Cult of the Monkey's harbinger of doom stopped to address the crowd gathered before him. It had to be quick: The Mirage's fake volcano was about to erupt. "People of Las Vegas, assorted tourists, cast of *The Real World* — hear me," he began. "Though it's true that I can grind your bodies into chalky-red paste at will, I mean you no harm." He fingered the Death Beam™ controls anxiously. "I would like," he paused, "to talk to you about gravy..."

# THE ENEMY IS HIDING BEHIND:



ANSWER: You took too long to answer. You're dead.

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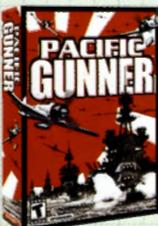
"9.0/10" - GameZone

"It improves on the original in every way" - GameSpot

### INTELLIGENCE REPORT:

Stealth is your best friend, quick reflexes are a must and pulling the trigger is just an afterthought. As part of an elite WWII commando unit, you'll rescue POWs, assassinate Japanese commanders and destroy key enemy targets. Time to test your combat skills.

### ADDITIONAL RESEARCH:



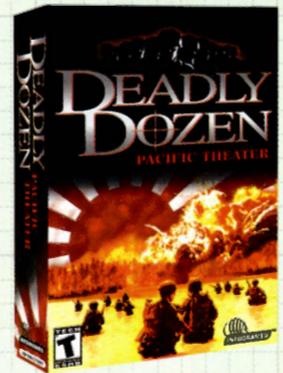
For more WWII naval action, be sure to check out this title.

### RECONNAISSANCE IMAGES:

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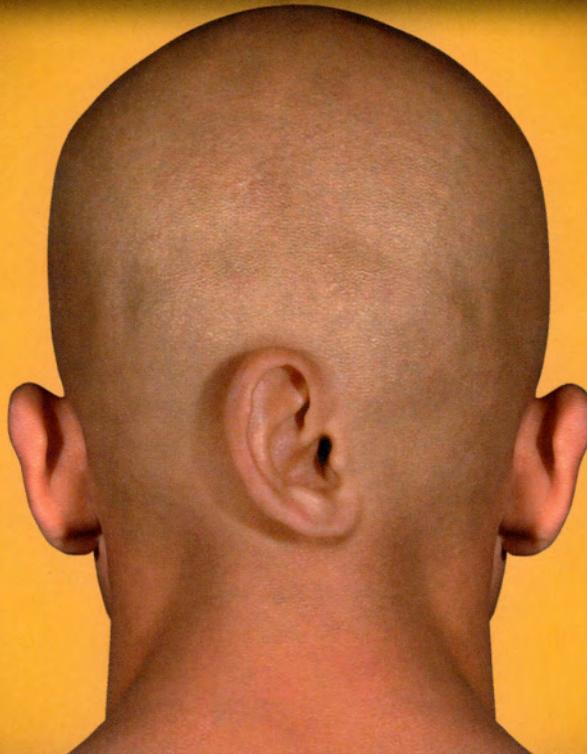


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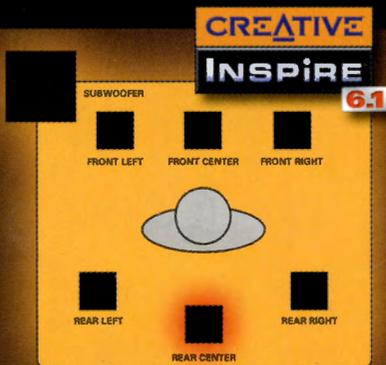
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