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Computer Gaming World

OCTOBER 1997
NO. 159

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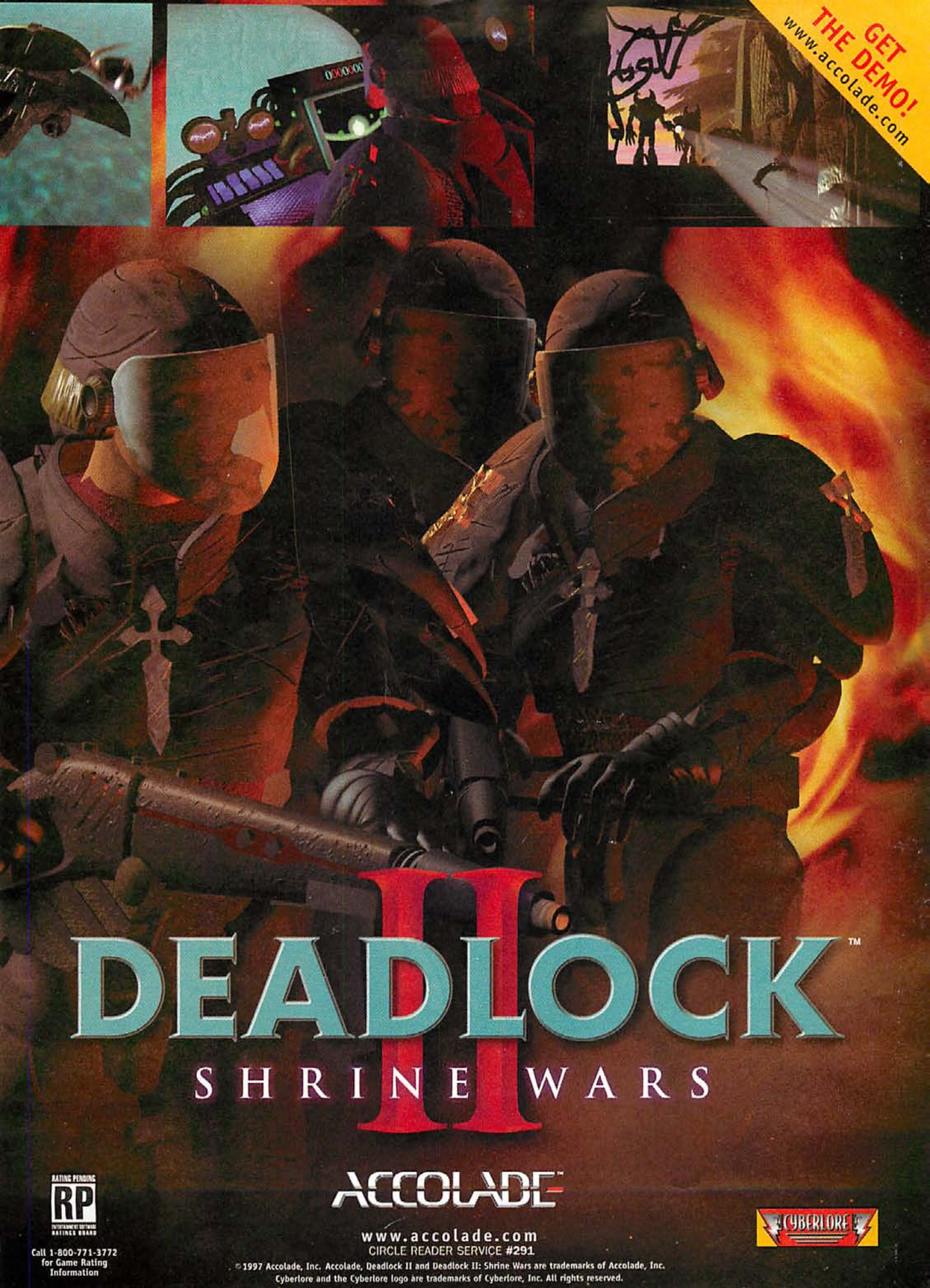

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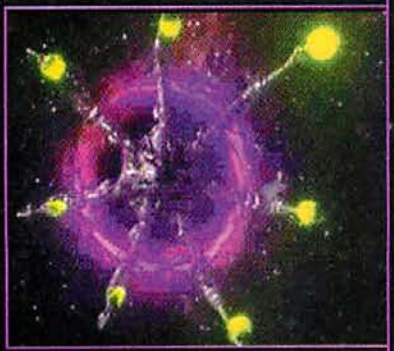
94 **All new, from the landing pad up, the fifth game in Origin's popular space fighter series is a visual knock-out. With a powerful new 3D engine and a renewed emphasis on gameplay, PROPHECY looks to eclipse all previous WING COMMANDERS and both PRIVATEERS. So climb into the cockpit for your exclusive first look at the future of space combat.**



FEATURES

Role-Playing Roundup!

104 After a long dry season in quality RPGs, role-playing is poised on a bona fide revival. We're staring down the dungeons of more than a dozen titles, with enough hack-'n'-slash to keep your fires lit 'til spring. Also, see our picks for the best RPGs of all time!

3D Graphics Overview

162 You've seen the hype, now get the facts. Our own Mr. Wizard, Loyd Case, helps explain the issues surrounding 3D cards, their features, and their failings. Find out what you need to know about the most important new technology in gaming.

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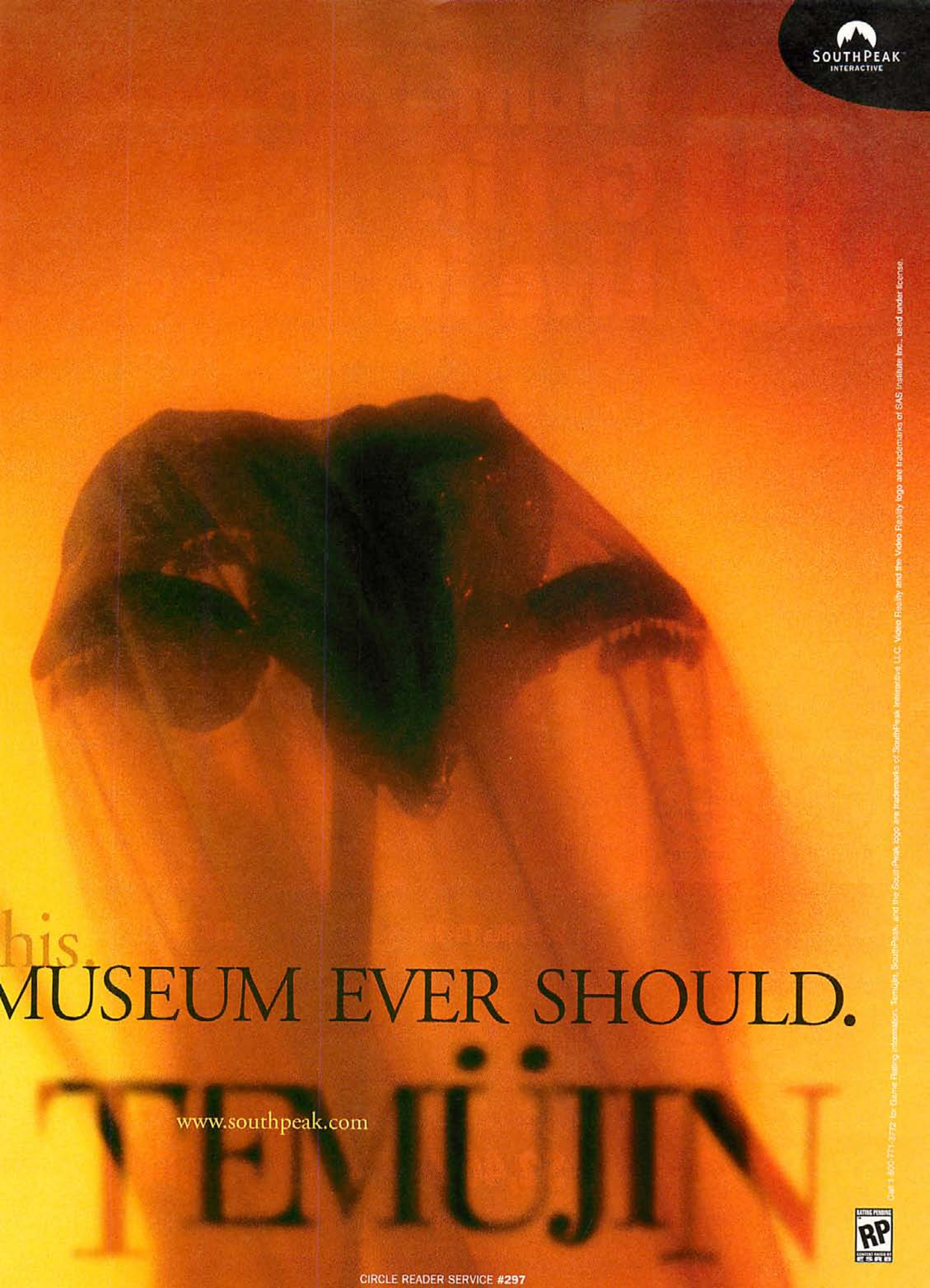
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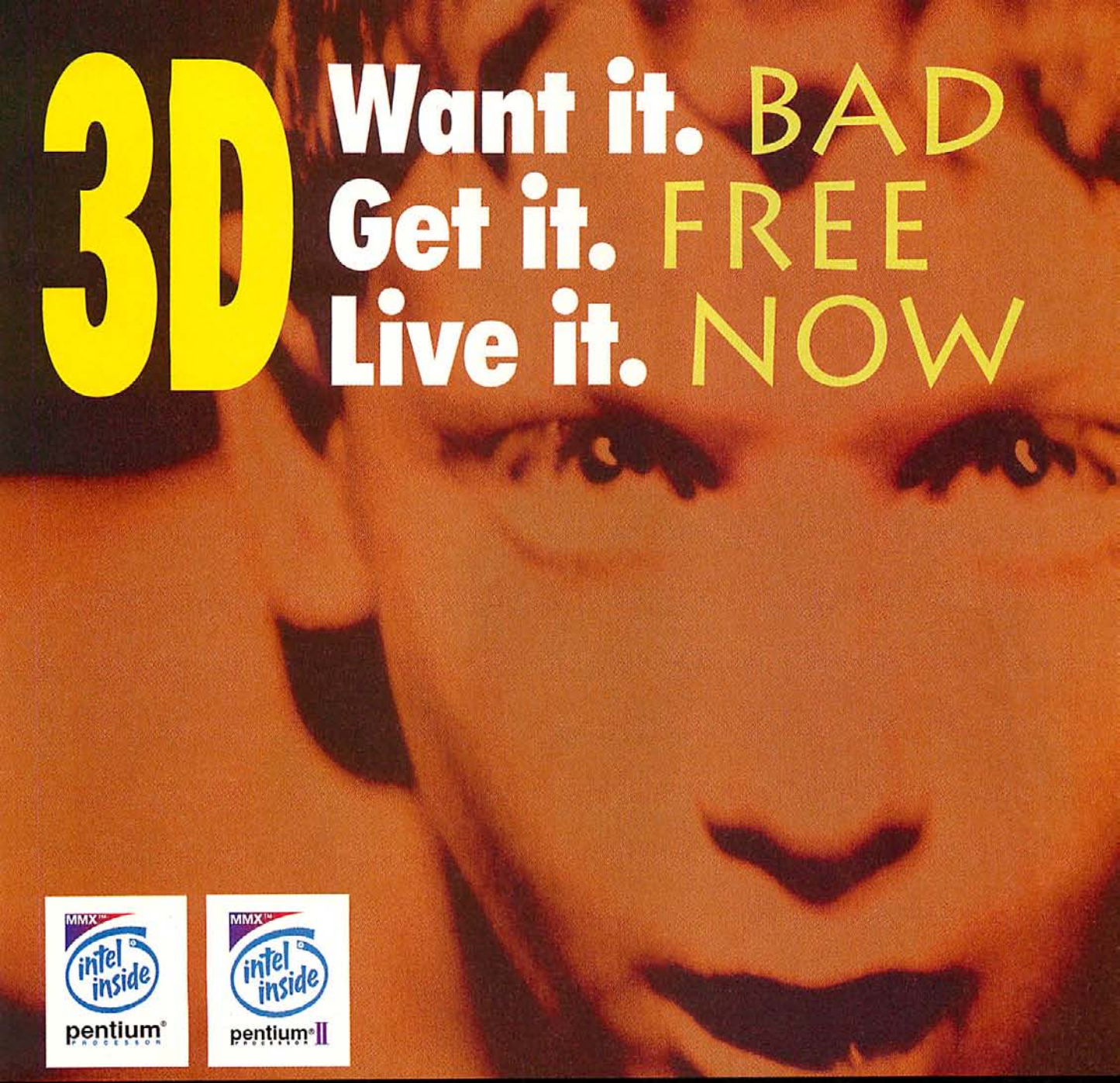

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Get Medieval on Your PC!

CGW Squires have fetched many a demo for thee...

A mixed bounty awaits thee at thy table tonight. Feast your eyes upon eight AVIs that preview many of the role-playing games featured in this very issue. Those who desire more than an eyeful can play the 11 playable demos, in addition to five of the greatest RPGs ever made for the PC. 'Tis a good time to be an RPG fan, yea verily.

CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND The much-anticipated third chapter to LucasArts' popular adventure game.

LEGENDS OF KESMAI

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

WIZARDRY VI: BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE

How to Use the Disc

The CD is Autoplay enabled and should begin when you load it into the CD-ROM drive. Otherwise, select Run from the Program Manager in Windows 3.x, or Start Menu in Windows 95, and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. You may type D:\INSTALL to create a *CGW* program group on your Windows desktop for future fun. Many demos require the disc to be in the CD ROM drive in order to run; therefore, we recommend installing the demos from our disc.

How to Access Patch Files

Click on Patches under the *CGW* Features, and then read the text window that has instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You can also access the patches from a DOS prompt by typing D:\PATCHES (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copying them directly to your hard drive. We strongly recommend that you back up any previously saved games before installing a patch, as this may overwrite your existing program.

WIPEOUT XL Psygnosis brings the popular PlayStation arcade-racer to the PC.

WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY Sit down, grab your popcorn, and enjoy the trailer for Origin's next space epic.

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NASCAR RACING 2 Two new tracks for the best racing-sim of '96 from Sierra On-Line.

CONSTRUCTOR SimCity with attitude from Acclaim.

OCTOBER CG-ROM TITLES

TITLE	PLATFORM	DIRECTORY	EXECUTABLE
BattleSpire	Win	BATTLESP	battle3.avi
Betrayal at Krondor	Win/DOS	KRONDOR	setup.exe
Constructor	Win/DOS	CONSTRUC	install.exe
Curse of Monkey Island	95	COMI	curse.exe
Dynamic Gin	95	SIC\D32GIN	dgsetup.exe
Exile III	Win/95	EXIL3INS	install.exe
Fallen Heroes	DOS only	SIC\FALLEN	install.exe
Heavy Gear	95	HEAVYGEAR	gearCD.avi
Lands of Lore: Guardians	95	LANDSOF	lol_hres.avi
Legends of Kesmai	Win/95	LEGEND	iku068.exe
Magix Music Maker	Win/95	MUMA30	install.exe
Meridian 59	95	M59	setup.exe
Might & Magic I	Win/DOS	MM1\GAME	install.bat
Might & Magic VI	Win/95	MM6	mm6demo.avi
NASCAR Pak	Win/DOS	root:N2FANTAS	install.exe
Pro Backgammon	95	SIC\PROBACK	proback.exe
Quake	N/A	N/A	N/A
Quest for Glory V	Win/95	QUEST	splash.htm
Temujin	Win/95	TEMUJIN	temujin.avi
Ultima IV: Quest ...	Win/DOS	ULTIMA4	install.bat
Uprising	95	UPRISING	uprising.avi
Wasteland	Win/DOS	WL	wl.exe
Wing Commander 5	95	WC	prophecy.avi
Wipeout XL	95	WIPEOUT	launcher.exe
Wizardry VI: Bane ...	DOS only	WIZVI	install.bat
X Fire	95	XFIRE	xfire.avi

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GameSpot

CGW's Home on the Web

Ziff-Davis has combined the expertise of *CGW* and *GameSpot* to bring you the best gaming resources on the Web. Whether it's the latest game demos, breaking reviews, hot scoops, or detailed strategies, you'll find everything you need to stay on the cutting edge. In addition, watch for our groundbreaking new hardware site, Upgrade!, with Loyd Case's top picks for peak performance.

http://cgw.gamespot.com/october

As you read through your issue of *CGW* each month, watch for the CG Online bug, which points to a related online article at **www.computergaming.com**. If you're interested in taking part in our discussions about gaming, check out the *CGW* Forums on ZDNet at **www.zdnet.com**. *CGW* reviewer and columnist Dennis McCauley and *CGW* Sysop Arlan Levitan host ongoing discussions on ZDNet's Community Center.

If you're looking for the earliest news and reviews in gaming, turn to the experts at *GameSpot*. Here's a brief overview of what you can expect on *GameSpot* over the next few weeks. To see these articles and others, point your browser to the ultimate gaming page at **http://cgw.gamespot.com/october**.

Computer Gaming World

Turn to *CGW* Online for news, reviews, strategy articles, and behind-the-scenes features on hundreds of top computer games. Because of our joint venture with *GameSpot*, you'll also see some articles posted online before they're in print!

Highlights this month include an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at Westwood Studios! You'll see the latest on Westwood's incredible new lineup, including BLADE RUNNER, COMMAND & CONQUER: SOLE SURVIVOR, LANDS OF LORE III, COMMAND & CONQUER 2 and more. You'll also want to see Sir-Tech's upcoming X-FIRE, one of the hottest titles on display at E3. If you like your combat fast and furious, this third-person action game will light your fire. Point your browser to **www.computergaming.com**.

What's On GameSpot?

STRATEGY GUIDES

Where's the best place on the Web to find strategy guides for all the games you're playing? *GameSpot*, of course. If you're looking for help with X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER, look no further. You'll find everything you need to become the ace pilot of your dreams.

For those who prefer to hide out below ground, *GameSpot*'s guide to DUNGEON KEEPER will help you maximize your potential. With our help, neither pesky heroes nor

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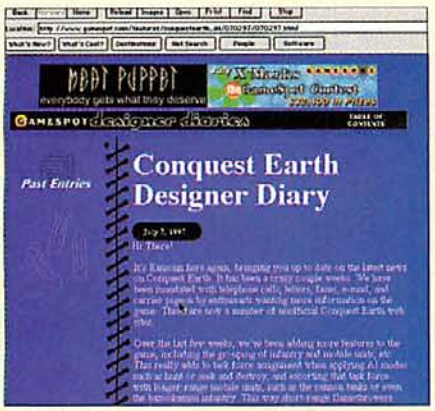
other dungeon keepers will be any match for you. And it doesn't stop there. Check out our strategy guides for INTERSTATE '76, MDK, MAGIC: THE GATHERING, DIABLO, and many more of the hottest games.

GAMESPOT NEWS

If you've been watching *GameSpot News* over the last few months, you'll know that we were the first to bring you live coverage from the show floor of the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) each day. You'll also remember that we had exclusive screenshots of GT Interactive's new action-RPG YOUNGBLOOD, and that Dave Perry talked to us first about MESSIAH, his new game for Shiny Entertainment. The proof is in the pages. For the very latest in computer and video game-related news, *GameSpot News* is the place to be.

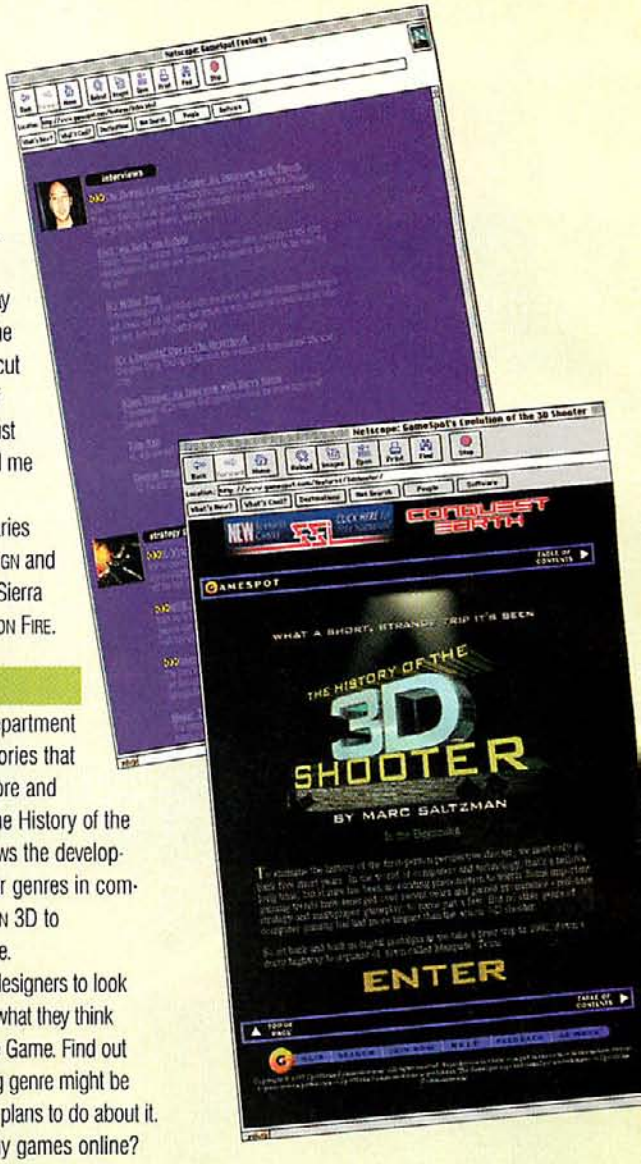
DESIGNER DIARIES

GameSpot's Designer Diaries provide ongoing coverage of games in development, as told by the developers themselves. Tom Hall of



ION Storm, who reports weekly on the progress of his new game ANACHRONOX, recently discussed the process of making design decisions for the perspective and control system in the game. "We're choosing a new way of doing things, and I think it is the best way...there aren't any clear-cut choices nor any true examples of what I want to do, so I have to trust my instincts. And my instincts tell me this is going to rock!"

Look out, too, for Designer Diaries from Activision, for both DARK REIGN and ZORK GRAND INQUISITOR, and from Sierra Online for QUEST FOR GLORY: DRAGON FIRE.



FEATURES

The *GameSpot* Features Department covers a wide variety of stories that will appeal to both hard-core and casual gamers alike. Examine the History of the 3D Shooter, as our feature follows the development of one of the most popular genres in computer gaming. From WOLFENSTEIN 3D to QUAKE...and beyond. It's all there.

We've asked adventure game designers to look into their crystal balls and tell us what they think about the Future of the Adventure Game. Find out their opinions on where this ailing genre might be headed, and what each designer plans to do about it.

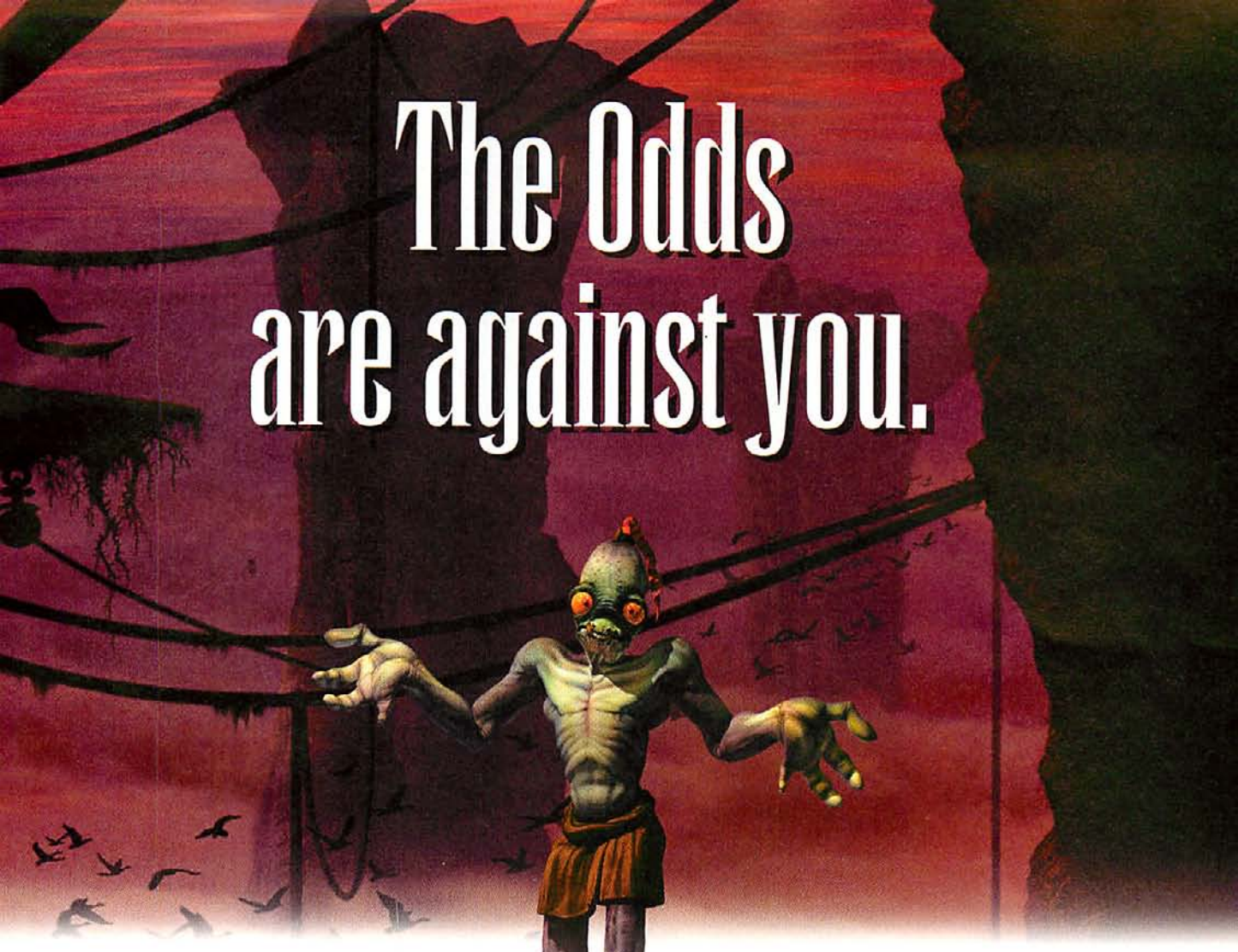
Wondering where you can buy games online? *GameSpot*'s recent feature, a Guide to Buying Games Online, not only shows you where you can purchase your favorite games, but also compares prices and availability, to ensure you get the best possible deal, every time you shop.

For all this and more, head over to *GameSpot*'s Special Features section.

DEMOS

GameSpot has one of the most extensive libraries of game demos, patches, and utilities online. In fact, you can try many of the games reviewed in this month's issue of *CGW* by downloading the demos from *GameSpot*'s site. Look out for MEAT PUPPET, WIPEOUT XL, CARMAGEDDON, FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO '98, WARLORDS III, and X-COM: APOCALYPSE. We upload new demos daily, so be sure to come back for more.

The Odds are against you.



He's skinny. He wears a loincloth. He has no weapons.
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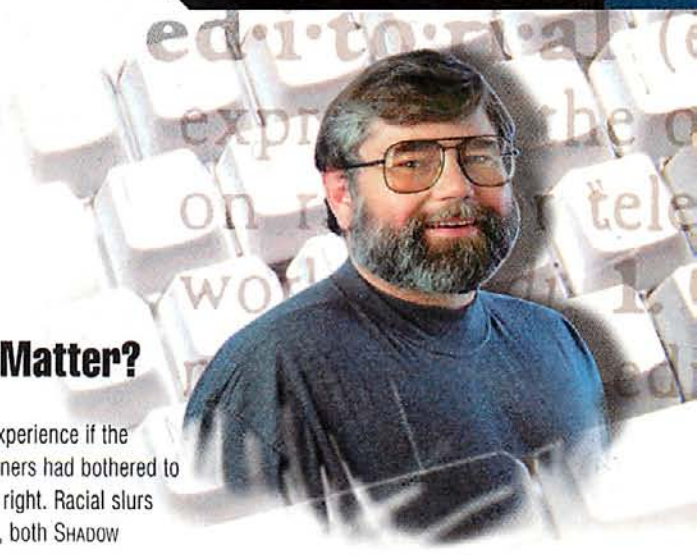
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #364

The Critic As Busybody



Does Anyone Really Care About Subject Matter?

Some people don't think that editors and game reviewers should ever write about anything except the computer games themselves. Others think that we should merely talk about the way the game plays and never comment on particular artistic techniques, design decisions, or technological innovations. Such people either have tunnel vision or live in a world of denial, insisting that neither art, fiction, movies, nor games affect the way we view ourselves and view life.

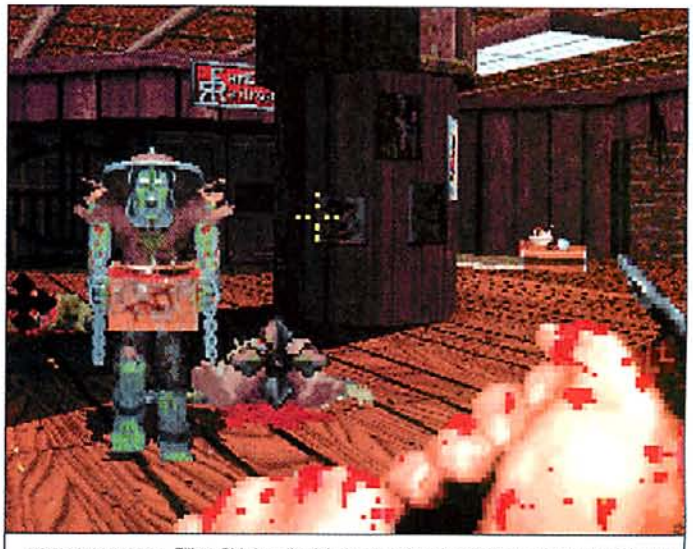
Yet, art forms do affect the way we view life. Just as Impressionists rejected "realistic" painting and tried to show something new about light and color, so can games force us to see life in a new light. They can be a catharsis, as we reject what we don't like about life and exult in a Dionysian feast of near-unlimited power and resources; a cultural corrective, as we view fictional actions from another perspective and decide to reject the bogus perspective; or they can be inspiring, as they raise our consciousness about something that we have overlooked. They may even cause us to do further research. But, of course, they can also be irrelevant.

As I write this editorial, Elliott Chin has received virtual tons of flaming emails because of his stand on the racial slurs and sloppy research contained in SHADOW WARRIOR and how those elements impoverished the game experience. Most of his critics hit upon his racial heritage as a cause of bias, thereby proving his point. Others claimed he had no sense of humor. Yet, what they didn't hear was his point that the game would have been *better* without the cultural denigration.

> **"SHADOW WARRIOR and DEATHLORDS are just games. But they could have been *good* games!"**

This isn't the first time *CGW* has castigated a game publisher for tapping Oriental source material to develop a cheap knock-off of a successful game system. Scorpia, who is not of Asian heritage, insisted that Electronic Arts' DEATHLORDS was a cheap rip-off of ULTIMA, with only a thin veneer of Orientalia to cover its tracks. She insisted that the Eastern cultures would have provided a richer gaming experience if the designers had bothered to get it right. Racial slurs aside, both SHADOW WARRIOR and DEATHLORDS could have educated, stimulated, and entertained more effectively if they had paid attention to true Asian culture. Yes, they're just games. But they could have been *good* games! (See the Letters column for more on this controversy.)

I recently had a similar experience when I mentioned my pacifist political leanings in the CG-ROM Welcome Letter. I was told that I was a hypocrite. I don't think so. I like to play wargames because they are analytical history. They teach lessons of geography, leadership, resource management, and strategy. I like to see what went wrong or right and try to figure out experientially why a given battle came out the way it did. Sometimes, my pacifist leanings are affirmed as I realize the stupidity of a particular move. Sometimes, I shake my head in wonder at the sacrifices paid for the freedom I enjoy. Frankly, I don't think it's wrong for me to share my insights from time to time, even if you don't agree with them. Our hobby would be a meaningless place if we didn't hold up the games to the real world from time to time and see how they stack up.



TOTALLY UNCOOL Elliott Chin's editorial about racism in 3D Realms' SHADOW WARRIOR (this coolie hat-wearing zombie is a good example) ruffled some feathers. But just imagine if this zombie were an African-American with an Aunt Jemima bandana.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #359

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DEEP THOUGHTS

I've been one of those typical types who has been reading your magazine since the mid-'80s. Many games and systems have come and gone from my desk ever since, but I guess it's just now that I've got some "Food for thought" questions that have been bugging me....

1. Do you notice how the majority of five-star rated games in your magazine are either wargames or sims? I don't think even those gems in the sand like DIABLO and RED ALERT rated five stars. Sure this is a generalization but...

2. Do you notice how you can tell a highly anticipated game has missed its mark by the distinct silence by the masses (PRIVATEER 2 and quite possibly, X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER) in contrast to the shield banging that preceded its release?

3. I'm sure some will start hammering Elliott Chin's article on SHADOW WARRIOR, but the man does have a point. One of your competitors, in response to a "Why are there no African-American heros in PC games" pointed (quite seriously) to the character of "Superfly Johnson" in ION Storm's upcoming game DAIKATANA as some kind of consolation. Superfly Johnson? I had to shake my head at that one...and yep, you guessed it, I'm an African American (and a computer security specialist who's never been called "Superfly," or "Shaft" for that matter.... Although I hear that Shaft is a bad mutha.)

These aren't necessarily critiques of your magazine, mind you, just some pseudointellectual musings from a dedicated reader.

Chris Marin
via the Internet

1. We rate only between 15–20 games with five-star ratings each year. Sometimes, sims and wargames get the edge because there are real-world measurements by which to judge them. Also, we factor difficulty levels into the ratings and may be more lenient on the graphics or interface of a more difficult game that we know will appeal to the hard-core, even if it might not appeal to the masses. For the record, DIABLO was given a 4.5-star rating, even though we eventually picked it as Game of the Year, because it was too short and the role-playing elements weren't that deep. Since it was positioned as an RPG by its advertising, we had to be tougher than we normally would. Also, we had to compare RED ALERT with its award-winning predecessor. Did it advance the state of the art? Some of the staff said "yes!" while others said "no!" We settled for 4.5 stars.

2. That silence explains why it's our policy to wait to review a game until we have a final copy. You can't know until you play the code as it is tested and play-balanced. Anything else is merely an educated guess—a guess that can be wrong.

3. With regard to Shaft, "Shut yo' mouth." Well, you are talking about Shaft. You're right. See the letters under "Shadow Horror" in Johnny Wilson's editorial this month.

SHADOW HORROR

When I read Elliott Chin's article [August] on my favorite game, SHADOW WARRIOR, I was outraged and in disbelief; the first thing that came to mind was hypocrisy! I love this game. It is the heir to DUKE3D and I look at it as a game that has a cool sense of humor like DUKE did. My friends and I laughed hysterically at how it was racist. No, Elliott, you missed the point; it is in a Jackie Chan type of chop-socky humor. If this is racist, so is DUKE because he is a womanizer. But that is okay because he is white.

How come you don't complain about Lara Croft in TOMB RAIDER being stereotyped, or REDNECK RAMPAGE. No, that isn't racist. I think Lo Wang is a great character and I would love to be him. I think that 3D Realms is doing their job because they thrive on controversy. You started to even knock PREY for having a Native American hero. I think it is great that 3D Realms is even having a hero from this great culture! And I bet you didn't see the screenshots or the story and how it is the most advanced game ever. Well, Elliott, better bite your tongue because the full SHADOW WARRIOR will have more fun and controversy.

James R. Horning
via the Internet

Elliott Chin's article blasted SHADOW WARRIOR for what he felt was an inaccurate portrayal of Asian culture, and for failing to adhere strictly to the historical fact of the ninja of Ancient Japan. Beyond that, the column positively damned 3D Realms for blatant insensitivity to the damaging effects the racial stereotypes in the game might have upon its audience. Mr. Chin expressed repeatedly the offense he took at 3D Realms' "ignorance and disregard for real Asian culture." Mr. Chin requests that SHADOW WARRIOR be the last 3D Realms game to obtain its "cheap laughs" at the expense of a minority.

"My friends and I laughed hysterically at how [Shadow Warrior] was racist."

I, on the other hand, would prefer that Mr. Chin's article be the last in *CGW* to assume that its readers look to 3D action shooters as a primary source of cultural education. How can he expect anyone with the intelligence to install a recent computer game to sit down to a session of SHADOW WARRIOR with the same degree of intellectual involvement as one might devote to, say, RAMA? Mr. Chin's comments fail to persuade on two separate counts. Firstly, his "ignorance and disregard" for my own capacity for critical thought. Secondly, because he has fallen

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face first into the saddest trap of political correctness—a complete lack of humor.

The major criticism made against SHADOW WARRIOR is that, when attempting to create an authentic ninja adventure, 3D Realms merely caricaturized the subject matter. It *is* a caricature, as much as DUKE NUKEM 3D was a caricature of action films.

Unfortunately, I cannot look upon Mr. Chin's comments as any sort of objective review because, I'm sorry, he's Asian. Perhaps I would have respected the article more if he had come to the rescue of our downtrodden Midwestern brothers so rudely affronted in REDNECK RAMPAGE. What was it Voltaire said? "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Just don't say it about me, eh Mr. Chin?

If I seek cultural education, I'll see *Farewell My Concubine* again. If I want to play an ultraviolent computer game, I will do so without regard for any bruised egos on the part of those who might associate themselves with the game's subject matter. Such an association is purely their own invention. If Mr. Chin wishes, he always has the right to avoid ever playing that game or any game ever again. (If he ever does exercise that right, I'd like his job.)

The last thing I would expect from 3D Realms is edutainment. The last thing I would expect from a magazine that has always championed complete freedom in game design—a magazine that adopted a cavalier attitude toward the depiction of women in DUKE 3D—is a diatribe on the industry's confusion about the differences between China and Japan. Perhaps DUKE 3D was even more offensive, but the newness and innovation of the Build engine made it all forgivable. Now that the engine is showing some age, the tolerance for questionable subject matter choices has fallen. But such behavior is hypocrisy, and if you as the media and we as the audience begin to permit such behavior, we must realize that it weakens our resistance to the likes of Senator Lieberman. If we insist that anything and everything is fair game, there is little such men can do to regulate us. Once we start qualifying our own freedom, we are in trouble.

Fred Snyder
via the Internet

I was about to write a letter to *CGW* when the August issue arrived in my mailbox and I saw that Elliott Chin had already spoken up for me. The first time I saw the SHADOW WARRIOR ad, I was extremely disgusted. Not just by the violence, but by the making fun of Asian culture. Worse of all the yin-yang symbol has been defaced with blood splattering out of one "hole." And nothing spoiled my day even more than seeing it on the front page of my favorite magazine. I know that *CGW* in the past has had certain criteria for ads appearing in its magazine (first the X-rated, then the violent kind of ads). Maybe this should be extended to racist ads as well?

All in all, SHADOW WARRIOR will not be getting my (and this half of the world's) support. 3D Realms' reputation has also fallen in my regard as a sadistic company that abuses others for laughs. And, yes, fortune cookies do not exist here; they were probably created by Americans.

Rick Ong
Singapore

After reading Elliott Chin's editorial on the offensiveness of SHADOW WARRIOR, I was curious to hear what people are saying on the Apogee forum on AOL. Being Asian, I too was offended by the portrayals in SHADOW WARRIOR. I thought Mr. Chin's comments were right on the mark. Anyway, I found a few comments on the Apogee forum that pertained to the *CGW* editorial. Most are just snide remarks about Mr. Chin and blew off his comments. However, I found a response by Mr George Broussard of Apogee on the editorial dated July 2, 1997. He wrote:

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #273

"This was not a game review, but just an editorial by Elliott Chin on how offensive he found SW. Personally I think he needs to get out more ;) All of his points are easily defeated. —George Broussard, Pres., 3D Realms"

I was rather taken aback by his statement that Mr. Chin's comments are "easily defeated." I wanted to know what it is to "defeat" an Asian-American gamer's perception of racism and inaccuracies in SHADOW WARRIOR. I then posted a message on the Apogee forum with my comments and invited Mr. Broussard to "defeat" Mr. Chin's points. I hoped for a reply but I was surprised to see my post removed from the board on the following day! Is this the way Apogee and Mr. Broussard respond to criticisms from Asian-American gamers?

Willis Huang
via the Internet

This controversy definitely affirms our decision to print the editorial. The hostile reactions suggest that many gamers do not think of the larger consequences and messages of the games they play. Elliott Chin responds:

I understand that the point of SHADOW WARRIOR is to have and make fun with Asian stereotypes, but it's only funny for those non-Asians who don't care to put themselves in an Asian American's shoes.

3D Realms says it created all the stereotypes on purpose, choosing to create an outrageous parody of old "chop-socky" movies. But using coolies and fortune cookies goes too far. Coolies were actually slaves, captured and coerced into servitude; you wouldn't create a game with black slaves, so coolies should likewise be off-limits.

Yes, Lara Croft's proportions do smack of sexism, but as for REDNECK RAMPAGE, that's a little different. If you are the Asian community and have zero visibility in the media, you can hardly afford to have your only exposure be one of ridicule and stereotypes. Caucasians, on the other hand, have the most exposure of any group in America. The heroes in nearly all computer games, not to mention movies and TV shows, are white. Believe me, if there were more Hiro Miyamotos and Asian heroes in games, I wouldn't complain so vociferously about SHADOW WARRIOR. Also, decades of Asian stereotypes and discrimination in the media simply make SHADOW WARRIOR's stereotypes seem gratuitous and insensitive, as opposed to REDNECK's humorous caricatures of whites, who have never suffered any form of discrimination in this country.

Rednecks were never taken from their homes and forced into concentration camps for no reason other than the color of their skin, as Japanese-Americans were. Nor have they ever had their homes and property confiscated. Unlike Chinese-Americans, Rednecks were never pressed into service to build the more treacherous western half of the American transcontinental railroad. Rednecks were never denied education, job opportunities, or homes because of their skin color, as all Asian-Americans were before a few decades ago. And Rednecks were never considered second-class citizens by law, as all Asian-Americans used to be.

I would like to thank everyone who responded, because you showed me that I was correct in writing a column on SHADOW WARRIOR's stereotypes.

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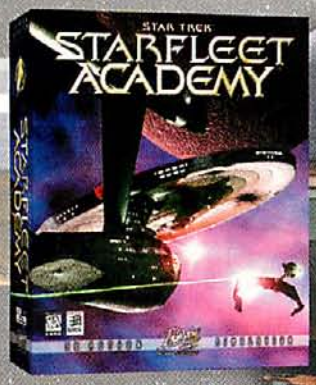

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PlayStation
Coming Soon

VOKECH _ _ _ _ _ _ _
6 10

1. Unscramble the names of the 3 legendary Star Trek instructors featured in Starfleet Academy.

RIKK _ _ _ _ LUUS _ _ _ _ _
17

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VIRTUAL POOL 2™

The ultimate pool simulation just got better. *Guaranteed.*

Over 2 million pool players have taken a break with Virtual Pool the #1 pool game in the world. Now, after 8,000 man hours of enhancements, new 3D look and 50 new game features like called shots and the ability to jump balls, the ultimate pool simulation is better than ever. And it's still the only pool game guaranteed to improve your real pool playing. **Virtual Pool 2** includes 5 new games, 3 modes of play (Amateur, Pro and Championship), all new 3D-rendered graphics and 3 texture-mapped pool halls. Plus, unlimited camera angles, adjustable table characteristics, an all new physics model and a multi-player tournament mode with up to 64 computer opponents. There is even a new pool tutorial with lessons on specialty shots and pool strategy.

So, get **Virtual Pool 2** today. It's all new and it's still the only game with the balls to offer a money back guarantee. Have you had your break today?

WINDOWS®95 PC CD-ROM

Celeris

VR SPORTS

Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Beat The House™

The Ultimate Gaming Tutor & Simulator

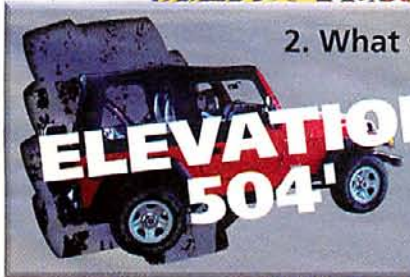
Prepare yourself for the #1 casino gaming experience! Featuring vividly detailed graphics and superior sound, **Beat The House** will make you feel like you are part of the action. Not only will you experience the thrill of casino gaming but you'll also learn the skills and techniques of the experts.

WINDOWS®95 PC CD-ROM

Interplay™ BY GAMERS, FOR GAMERS.™

Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

ESRB RATING ADVISORY ALL SUITABLE FOR ALL AUDIENCES



2. What sequel to the best-selling virtual game is so real it will improve your actual play?

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

7

_ _ _ _ _ _

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #258

REDNECK RAMPAGE™

"The Trailer Park Won't Be The Same"
- Computer Gaming World

Redneck Rampage is a ruckus-raisin' riot of a first-person 3D shooter set in the fictional town of Hickston, Arkansas. Armed with up to ten impractical weapons, players blast their way through country bars, trailer parks, and chicken processing plants in search of their missing pig who's been abducted by evil aliens. But they ain't gonna make it without enough fuel (pork rinds and whiskey) to fend off good ol' boys with sawed-off shotguns who aim to blow away their bony behinds.

PC CD-ROM

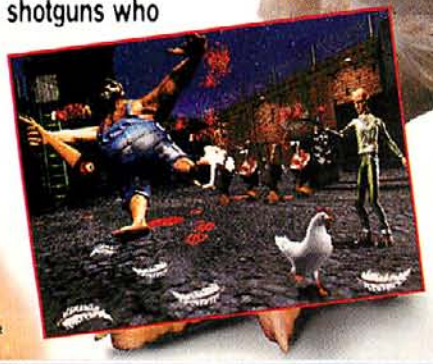
"It's A Heck Of A Hayride"
- Gamespot

"The Funniest Game We've Played this Year Y'all"
- Happy Puppy

"One Of The Most Hysterical Games In Years"
- Online Games Review

"The Bestest Thing To Hit The South"
- Strategy Plus

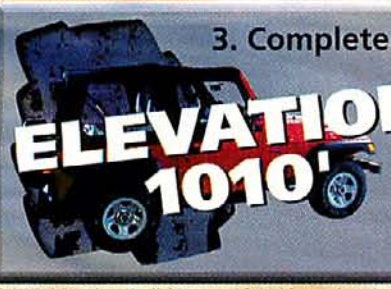
All The KILLIN', Twice The HUMOR... Half The INTELLIGENCE.



XATRIX entertainment

Keep Yer Eyes Open For Official Redneck Rampage Levels

Interplay™
By Rednecks, For Rednecks.



3. Complete the Redneck Rampage Word Search.

G	B	G	I	P	V	D	I	C	C			
T	U	R	D	M	I	N	I	O	N			
K	B	N	I	I	X	I	W	O	E			
R	B	O	N	Y	E	R	S	T	I			
O	A	D	R	A	N	O	E	L	L			
P	I	N	E	K	C	I	H	C	A			

Gun
Pig
Vixen
Coot
Cow
Turdminion
Bony
Yer
Leonard
Pork
Chicken
Alien
Bubba
Rind

5 letters are unused. 4 are the letter I. What's the 5th?

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CARMAGEDDON™

THE RACING GAME FOR THE CHEMICALLY IMBALANCED.

THE CARMAGEDDON XV5. 520 HORSES UNDER THE HOOD. EVEN MORE PEDESTRIANS ON TOP.

Interplay BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Some race for glory. Some for money. Then there are those who drive for the sheer ecstasy of crunching bones against their bumper. Introducing **Carmageddon**, the racing game that separates the men from the grease spots on the road. Pit your wits and wheels against 25 maniac drivers over 36 formidable race circuits to become The King of Carnage and The Prince of Pile-up. **PC CD-ROM**

STAINLESS SCi MATURE M AGES 17+ ESRB

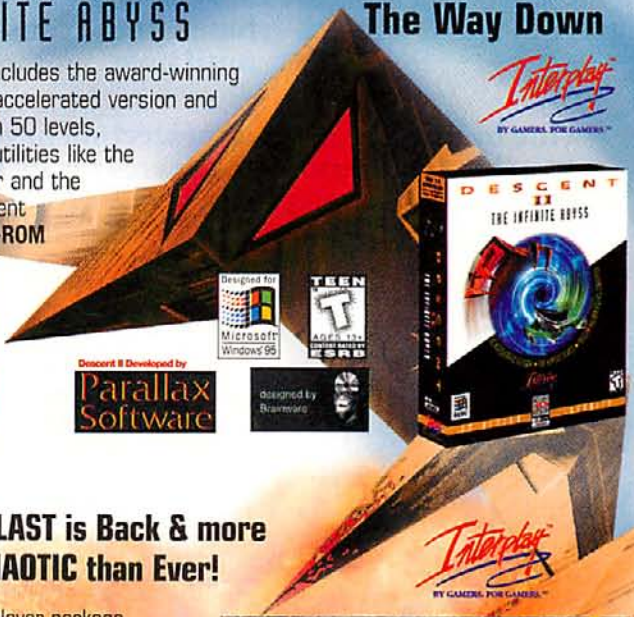
DESCENT™ II

THE INFINITE ABYSS

This Time, You're Going All The Way Down

Interplay BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Descent II: The Infinite Abyss, includes the award-winning Descent II with an optional 3D accelerated version and the all new Vertigo Series. With 50 levels, 40 enemy robots, easy to use utilities like the Mission Builder, Level Converter and the Robot Texture Editor your Descent experience is infinite. **PC CD-ROM**



Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

TEEN T AGES 13+ ESRB

Descent II Developed by Parallax Software

designed by Brainwave

ATOMIC BOMBERMAN™

The BLAST is Back & more CHAOTIC than Ever!

Since 1989 **Bomberman** has been defined by gamers as the ultimate multi-player game. Now "the man" is available in an enhanced multi-player package complete with 3D rendered graphics, new character animations, and a vast repertoire of spiteful canned and custom taunts. Keeping true to the original addictive gameplay, you better think fast as you vie for deadly power-ups, race against the clock and blow your opponents to smithereens.

WINDOWS®95 CD-ROM

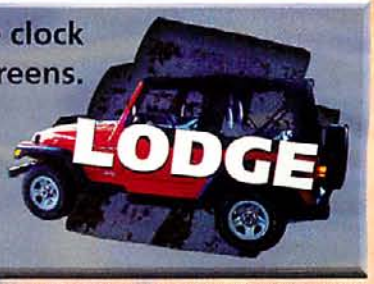
HUDSON®

Compatible Windows 95 Compatible

KIDS TO ADULTS KA AGES 9+ ESRB

4. It's an addictive action/arcade game, where you race against the clock to blow your opponents to smithereens.

4 5 1 15 13



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Realms of the Haunting™

THE BATTLEGROUND BETWEEN ULTIMATE GOOD AND EVIL

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE BATTLE OF ALL EXISTENCE?

Forged in the Beginning and protected by the Seven Seals, there lies a place where thought and creation intertwine. The center for all realms of existence, it is the balancing force between good and evil, man and spirit. A focal point for all energies, and the one element that has kept the consuming nature of darkness at bay... until now.

One by one, the Seals of protection have been broken. Step by step, Darkness prepares for its final assault. And as the apocalypse draws near, only one force can stop the shadow of evil from eternal reign...you.

★★★★★ *Computer Life*
...offers one of the most fluid, absorbing fantasy-horror game experiences available."

★★★★½ *CGW*
"ROTH covers all the bases."

AVAILABLE NOW ON PC CD-ROM

Interplay™
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Gremlin

TEEN T AGES 13+ ESRB

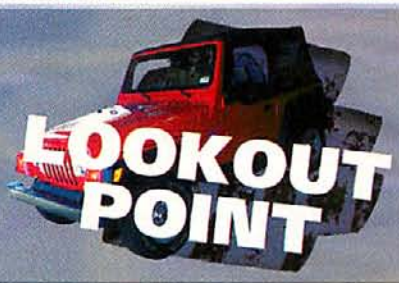
COMPATIBLE Windows 95 COMPATIBLE

5. In Realms of the Haunting, it's the Battleground Between

__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

__ __ __ __ and __ __ __ __ __.

3



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FORGOTTEN REALMS
Dungeons & Dragons

DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN™ ADVENTURE

TSR

The AD&D® game's most famous world, the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, is now powered by the award-winning Descent™ engine.

DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN™ is the most revolutionary new AD&D® FORGOTTEN REALMS® computer game ever. Based on an enhanced, SVGA version of the award-winning Descent™ engine, you are challenged to build an authentic AD&D® character and plunge deep into Undermountain — a twisting, monster-filled dungeon labyrinth located beneath the city of Waterdeep.

COMING SOON ON PC CD-ROM

Interplay
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Survival comes down to two things: The role of strategy. And the roll of the die.

Introducing the new CD-ROM version of TSR's blockbuster dice strategy hit, DRAGON DICE. Players are challenged to build and command dice armies from an assortment of races and creatures that struggle for territorial dominance. Multi-player features, animated tutorial and special collectible Dragon Master die make DRAGON DICE a must buy for strategy enthusiasts.

DRAGON DICE™ GAME

FREE
EXCLUSIVE DRAGONMASTER DIE INCLUDED

Interplay™
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

TSR

AVAILABLE NOW ON PC CD-ROM

All the Legendary Games. All the Magnificent Stories.

The FORGOTTEN REALMS® Archives – the ultimate ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® PC game collection. Twelve of the greatest role-playing fantasy adventures ever created are gathered together in one incredible boxed set.

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

TSR

FORGOTTEN REALMS
Dungeons & Dragons

All 12 FORGOTTEN REALMS™ Titles
in a CD Collector's Edition

- POOL OF RADIANCE™
- CURSE OF THE AZURE BONDS™
- SECRET OF THE SILVER BLADES™
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- HILLSFAR™
- EYE OF THE BEHOLDER™
- EYE OF THE BEHOLDER II™
- EYE OF THE BEHOLDER III™
- DUNGEON HACK™
- GATEWAY TO THE SAVAGE FRONTIER™
- TREASURES OF THE SAVAGE FRONTIER™
- MENZOBERRANZAN™

AVAILABLE NOW ON PC CD-ROM

Interplay
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

6. It's 12 of the greatest role playing fantasy adventures ever, gathered in one boxed set.

11 12 16 14

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Fallout

A POST NUCLEAR ROLE PLAYING GAME

"Fallout has everything necessary to be the best roleplaying game of all time"

- Next Generation

A NEW BREED OF RPG

In the recent wave of fantasy RPG-lites, FALLOUT's post apocalyptic vision sets a new standard for today's role-players.

Cutting edge technology with 3D-rendered personalities adds a whole new level of dynamic sophistication to character interaction.

With unusual characters, hidden surprises, unique locales, and multiple death sequences, FALLOUT packs a replay value few games can match.

- If you agitate someone with your comments, they'll look and act agitated and remember that encounter. Depending on the player's choice of conversation topics, characters will look happy, normal, and/or angry.
- Over 50 mini-quests with multiple solutions take you through devastated wastelands such as Rad Scorpion dens, Junktown, and the Brotherhood of Steel.
- Meticulous turn-based combat system lets you target specific body parts to wound, cripple, or kill as you see fit
- Make your own character or start with one of three pre-generated types: Diplomatic, Deceptive, or Combative
- Victims don't just perish-they get cut in half, melt into a pile of goo, and explode like a blood sausage into chunks of flesh.
- Improve your character's skills through play and receive perks tailored to your character's abilities.
- Available on WIN®95/DOS and Mac CD-ROM.

Interplay BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™ MACPLAY CD-ROM Mac OS Designed for Microsoft Windows 95 MATURE M AGES 17+ ESRB

7. Fallout is a post-nuclear role playing game with over 50 mini-quests where you can target specific body parts to:

__ __ __ __ __ __, __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __,

or __ __ __ __ __, as (2) __ __ __ __ __ __ (9) __ __ __.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #287

PUZZLE SUMMIT

Interplay Presents An

Avalanche of Excitement

To receive your rebate & be automatically entered in the sweepstakes drawing:

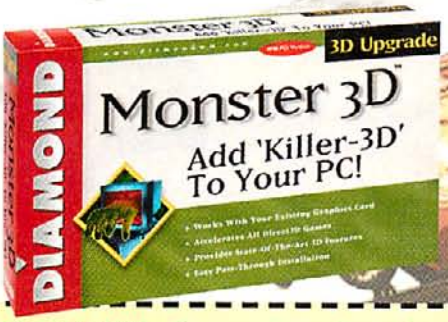
1. Complete the puzzle
2. Complete rebate portion
3. Mail this form to:
   Avalanche of Excitement Rebate
   P.O. Box 19129, Irvine, CA 92623

To enter the sweepstakes only:

1. Complete the puzzle and mail this form to:
   Avalanche of Excitement Sweepstakes
   P.O Box 19641, Irvine, CA 92623

DIAMOND MULTIMEDIA

ACT·LABS MAX THE EXPERIENCE



Entry Form

Take circled letters from puzzles on the previous pages & decode message:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Eligible Interplay Titles:
(check all that you purchased, maximum of 4 games without additional accessory purchases, maximum 6 with accessory purchases)

- ☐ Starfleet Academy™
- ☐ Virtual Pool™ 2
- ☐ Fallout™
- ☐ Beat the House™ Win 95/Win
- ☐ Realms of the Haunting™
- ☐ DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN™
- ☐ DRAGON DICE™
- ☐ The FORGOTTEN REALMS® Archives
- ☐ Redneck Rampage™
- ☐ Atomic Bomberman™
- ☐ Descent II™: The Infinite Abyss
- ☐ Carmageddon™

BUY: Any combination of Interplay games and accessories listed below **between 10/1/97 & 12/31/97.**

MAIL: 1. Proof of purchase (original UPC) from each product package purchased. 2. Original cash register receipt w/store name or Interplay invoice, title purchased, and date of purchase circled (receipts cannot be returned). 3. This original completed certificate in a stamped envelope to: Interplay Avalanche of Excitement Offer P.O. Box 19129, Irvine, CA 92623.

RECEIVE: Up to $100 cash back (via rebate check). Allow 8-10 weeks for processing.

PRODUCTS PURCHASED

- ☐ $30 - 1 featured Interplay game and 1 Diamond Multimedia Monster 3D Accelerator Card
- ☐ $30 - 1 featured Interplay game and 1 ACT LABS EagleMAX Joystick
- ☐ $10 - 1 Interplay game
- ☐ $20 - 2 Interplay games
- ☐ $30 - 3 Interplay games
- ☐ $40 - 4 Interplay games

TOTAL REBATE: $_____ (UP TO $100)

Interplay
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

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Address _____
City _____ State_____ Zip_____
e-mail Address _____

The product must be purchased and receipt dated on or between 10/1/97 and 12/31/97. This request must be postmarked by 1/15/98 and received by 1/31/98. Allow 8-10 weeks for processing. This original certificate must accompany your request and may not be reproduced in any manner. Offer not valid with any other offers. Only the original retail store receipt or Interplay invoice will be accepted. Receipts will not be returned. Materials from noncompliant or duplicate requests will not be returned. Not responsible for late, misdirected, incomplete or illegible requests. Offer good in USA and Canada only. Void where prohibited, taxed or otherwise restricted. All rights reserved.

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1. HOW TO ENTER: No purchase necessary. Sweepstakes begins 10/1/97. Decode the Interplay jumble puzzle and mail the answer on this form or a 3 x 5 card hand printed with your name, mailing address, zip code to: P.O. Box 19641, Irvine CA 92623. Entries must be received by 1/31/98. Sponsor assumes no responsibility for lost, late, misdirected, mutilated, illegible, stolen, incomplete or postage-due mail. 2. ODDS OF WINNING: depends on number of entries received, total circulation of entry forms approximately 1,000,000. 3. WINNERS: will be randomly selected on or about 2/15/98 from all entries that correctly decode the puzzle & are received during the promotional period. PRIZES: ONE (1) GRAND PRIZE: A 1998 Jeep® Wrangler SE. ARV $15,000.00. Tax, license, registration, title and any other fees will be the responsibility of the winner. One hundred (100) first Prizes: An Interplay library of twelve (12) titles. (ARV $468.00) Total Prize package ARV $61,800.00. Taxes are responsibility of winner. No cash substitutes. 4. Sweepstakes open to all continental U.S. and Canadian (except Quebec) residents, ages 16 or older, except employees of Interplay Productions, HWB, Inc. their affiliates, subsidiaries, advertising and promotion agencies and the immediate families of each. 5. By entering the sweepstakes, participant acknowledges that he/she (or if a minor, the parent/guardian) agrees to allow the use of participant's name and/or likeness and/or voice in publicity concerning the promotion without compensation, unless prohibited by law. 6. Interplay Productions, its subsidiaries, affiliates, directors, officers, agents, employees, and HWB inc. shall not be responsible for any damages, compensatory, direct, incidental, consequential or otherwise, with respect to, or in any way arising from this sweepstakes. Grand Prize winner will be required to sign affidavits of eligibility and a liability/publicity release which must be returned within 15 days of notification. Canadian resident winners will be required to answer a mathematical question. 7. This sweepstakes is being conducted by HWB, Inc., and independent judging organization, whose decision in all matters shall be final. 8. Offer void where prohibited or restricted by law. Offer void in Quebec. Subject to federal, state and local laws and regulations. 9. For the names of the major winners, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Avalanche Winner's List, PO Box 17129, Irvine, CA 92623. Requests for winners list must be received by 3/1/98.

Edited by Charlotte Panther (CPanther@zd.com)

Feel The Force

LucasArts Adds Another Star Wars Title to Its Fall Lineup

For the past year we've been waiting to play a Jedi or an Emperor in LucasArts' JEDI KNIGHT or REBELLION, respectively, but it looks like the next *Star Wars* game to hit the PC desktop won't be either of them. SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE PC, a game that unfolds between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, is set to arrive this fall. Though the release dates for LucasArts games have always been tenuous, SHADOWS PC could come out on schedule because of one important fact: The game's been done for a year.

SHADOWS PC is actually a port of the successful SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE game that LucasArts developed for Nintendo's N64 launch. The game received mixed reviews, but was a commercial success. Now that Nintendo's one-year exclusive on the title has expired, LucasArts is ready to release SHADOWS for PC fans who just can't get enough of the Force.

One important note, though: You will need a 3D accelerator to play this game. SHADOWS had amazing graphics on the Nintendo 64, and in order to maintain that same level of visual quality, a 3D card will be required for PC Play.

SHADOWS PC is the story of a mercenary named Dash Rendar, who stumbles headlong into a turf war between the Emperor's two main pit bulls—Darth Vadar and Prince Xizor (Xizor is the leader of the Empire's most powerful crime syndicate, Black Sun). As Dash, you help the Rebels fight against the Empire, play bodyguard to Luke Skywalker, and assume a key role in the penultimate battle between Vadar, Xizor, and the Rebel Alliance.

Gameplay in SHADOWS is incredibly varied. In the first level (which is possibly the most fun) you pilot a snowspeeder on the arctic planet

▸▸▸Continued on pg 46

The Hoth Planet

Dash Rendar

THIS JUST IN

Short takes on games and hardware released just prior to press time.

JANE'S COMBAT STICK

HOT

An updated version of the F-16 Combat Stick, this flight controller sports some mechanical fine-tuning as well as a bundled copy of the full DOS version of JANE'S ATF. With two four-way view hats, six buttons, X- and Y-axis trim adjustments, and an analog throttle, Jane's Combat Stick by itself provides all the options many gamers need.

The stick features a larger base than its F-16 predecessor. One limitation of the Combat Stick series has been its use of chorded buttons to get extra functions—multiple buttons couldn't be read simultaneously. The Jane's stick, however, adds a switch that allows any combination of simultaneous button presses when attached to a CH Pro Throttle. The stick isn't programmable by itself, but is when used in combination with the Pro Throttle. *—Denny Atkin*

CH Products, (800) 624-5804

PC Flight Controller

Reader Service #: 301

FORMULA 1

WARM

If you liked WIPEOUT, you'll probably like FORMULA 1. Psygnosis' latest racing game features great graphics, an excellent soundtrack,

Poe Will Join Bruce Willis on Apocalyptic Journey

Gold-selling recording artist Poe recently signed an agreement with Activision to take part in the company's upcoming title, APOCALYPSE. The alternative songstress, whose hits include "Hello" and (my personal favorite) "Angry Johnny," will find herself doing battle with *Die Hard* actor Bruce Willis, who signed on for a key role in the project earlier this year. The game takes place in a dark, futuristic world where the dominant cultural forces—religion and science—preach their respective forms of salvation. Poe plays rock diva and pop culture queen Mary Magdelene, who has been transformed into the evil Plague, one of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. With the help of Willis, your virtual wingman and sidekick, you'll seek out and destroy Plague and the other Horsemen of the Apocalypse, thus saving the world.—*Charlotte Panther*

Poe

News Flash

Sierra On-Line recently announced that it has dropped the price point on its Screamin' 3D Accelerator Card from $199.95 to $149.95. This $50 reduction comes just in time to help strengthen Sierra's position in the competitive 3D-card market during the holiday season. The Screamin' 3D Accelerator uses the Rendition Vérité V100 graphics processor with 4MB of EDO DRAM, and supports DirectDraw and Direct 3D.

Sierra's Parent corporation, **CUC**, has announced a new distribution deal with **CyberFlix, Inc**. CUC will distribute CyberFlix's adventure game, TITANIC: ADVENTURE OUT OF TIME. The deal follows the announcement that TITANIC's previous distributor, **GTE Entertainment**, will discontinue operations.

SSI (Strategic Simulations, Inc.) and **Headland Digital Media, Inc.** announced that they are working together on an online gaming venture. The two companies will form Club SSI, an online community for wargame and strategy gamers. Club SSI will provide a place for game enthusiasts to meet and match up with other players online. The launch of Club SSI is scheduled to coincide with the release of PANZER GENERAL II in October. At press time, a pricing plan for Club SSI had not yet been determined.

Hollywood developer **Chronic Entertainment** is currently working on MEN IN BLACK, a third-person action-adventure game based on the hit movie starring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones. The title will feature hand-drawn polygonal animations of Smith and Jones, along with a vast array of weapons from the movie and, of course, the aliens. The game is scheduled for a fall release, and will be published by **The Design League**.

and all of the classic tracks. Yet, it doesn't have the amazing driver AI of GRAND PRIX II, nor the incredible physics model of Microsoft's upcoming CART PRECISION RACING. Instead, what you get is fast-moving action, the names (but not even the artificial personality) of famous drivers, the basic characteristics of the various cars (but without the depth of the models in competing products), and a full circuit of Formula 1 races. Still, the 3D looks great and the action is non-stop. Only serious simulation buffs will have quibbles. —*Johnny L. Wilson*

Psygnosis, (800) 438-7794
Win 95 CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 302

EVE

Part art project, part game, Peter Gabriel's EVE doesn't have enough of either to succeed. Gameplay focuses on exploring various symbolic worlds and uncovering musical loops. Gabriel's music is the real highlight here, but there isn't enough of it to draw the disparate art projects, by a selection of visual artists, together. Unlike similar products from true performance artists like Laurie Anderson and The Residents, EVE just doesn't add up to a compelling, unique whole. With only the most rudimentary of gameplay (most of it of the pixel-hunting variety), there's just not enough to EVE to warrant gamers' time.—*Robert Coffey*

Ignite/Real World Multimedia, Inc., (310) 312-5705
Win 95 CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 303

SHANGHAI DOUBLE PACK

Watching Activision trot out another SHANGHAI pack is a lot like buying a ticket for Guitar Legends of the '70s at

Microsoft
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Look here ace, you've got just 90 feet of runway before you earn your wings the hard way. Face it. Your fixed-wing rules do not apply here. What you need is a helicopter. And now you've got one in Microsoft® Flight Simulator 98, the most

significant upgrade of this product ever. With it you'll soar over painstakingly detailed landscapes that include 3000 airports (10 times more than the previous version) and more than 45 cities around the world. Flight Simulator 98 supports multiplayer and

force feedback technology so you can achieve all new levels of flight realism. Take control of the widest range of aircraft, including this Bell 206B JetRanger III helicopter, a machine that's guaranteed to make you feel like a rookie all over again.

Your coordinates for take-off are www.microsoft.com/games/fsim

pective owners.

PLAYING LATELY

CGW Survey*

	Last Month	Months on Chart
1. **Diablo** (Blizzard)	1	6
2. **Civilization II** (MicroProse)	2	17
3. **Duke Nukem 3D** (3D Realms)	3	18
4. **Quake** (id Software)	5	10
5. **Heroes II** (New World Computing)	6	7
6. **Magic: The Gathering** (MicroProse)	10	2
6. **Red Alert** (Westwood/Virgin)	4	7
8. **Tomb Raider** (Eidos)	10	5
9. **Steel Panthers II** (SSI)	-	17
10. **Steel Panthers** (SSI)	-	16
10. **Heroes II: Price Of Loyalty** (New World Computing)	-	-

** Check your mailbox. We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly-chosen subscribers each month. The results of Playing Lately indicate what games readers are blowing the most time on, as opposed to the reader's overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.*

PC Data Best-Sellers**

1. **Myst** (Broderbund)	3
2. **Diablo** (Blizzard)	2
3. **X-Wing vs TIE Fighter** (LucasArts)	1
4. **Red Alert** (Westwood/Virgin)	4
5. **Monopoly Multimedia** (Hasbro Interactive)	-
6. **Microsoft Flight Simulator** (Microsoft)	6
7. **NASCAR Racing II** (Sierra)	10
8. **C&C: Counterstrike** (Westwood/Virgin)	8
9. **Need For Speed II** (Electronic Arts)	5
10. **Police Quest V: SWAT** (Sierra)	-

*** This list indicates which PC games were the top-sellers, as calculated by PC Data, during June, 1997.*

Feel The Force

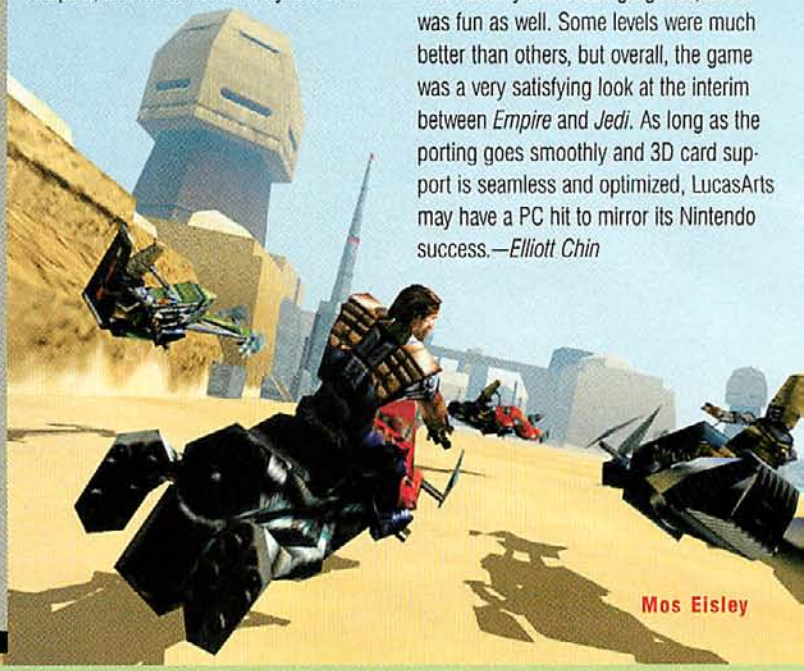
Continued from pg 42

Target Release Date: Fall 1997
Publisher: LucasArts

SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE is the PC port of the successful Nintendo 64 game. It is a collection of different types of action-gaming set between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*.

Hoth during the infamous invasion of the Rebel base. You can play either from a first or third-person view, as you blast Imperial drones and AT-ST walkers. You can also bring down Imperial AT-ATs with your harpoon cable (as Wedge did in *The Empire Strikes Back*). There's also a QUAKElike level where you guide Dash through the corridors of the Hoth base, a 3D asteroids level where you direct your ship's cannons at swarming TIE fighters while the ship is on autopilot, and one level where you ride a swoop (similar to a speeder bike) through Mos Eisley while blasting enemies and dodging pedestrians.

We played the N64 version of SHADOWS, and not only did it look gorgeous, but it was fun as well. Some levels were much better than others, but overall, the game was a very satisfying look at the interim between *Empire* and *Jedi*. As long as the porting goes smoothly and 3D card support is seamless and optimized, LucasArts may have a PC hit to mirror its Nintendo success.—*Elliott Chin*



Mos Eisley

THIS JUST IN

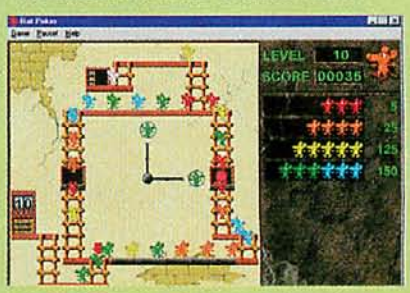
your local nightclub. You probably already have all the hit CDs, and the players certainly don't look as good as they did in their prime. There are moments, however, when this set of games does hit the high notes. The computer opponents are decent, and DRAGON'S EYE is still a riot when played by two evenly-matched human opponents. Best of all, the package includes separate disks for Mac and PC versions, so you can pass a tile on to a friend. Maybe the next version of this classic will include Internet play.—*Terry Coleman*

Activision, (800) 477-3650
PC/Mac CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 304

MICROSOFT ENTERTAINMENT PACK: THE PUZZLE COLLECTION

CG HOT

The MICROSOFT ENTERTAINMENT PACKS are perfect when you desperately need a five minute distraction. The latest addition to the series, THE PUZZLE COLLECTION, includes 10 all-new puzzles, several of which were created by TETRIS designer Alexey Pajitnov. The TETRIS influence is noticeable in puzzles like *LineUp*, in which players must place five-block pieces onto a grid to form complete lines (vertically or horizontally). Other puzzles are completely off the wall—*Rat Poker* has you trapping and releasing different colored rats to create winning poker hands. Once you start playing these highly addictive puzzles, it's hard to tear yourself away. You have been warned.—*Charlotte Panther*



Undercover Gaming

PalmPilot's Stealthy Games Let You Goof Off Without Getting Caught

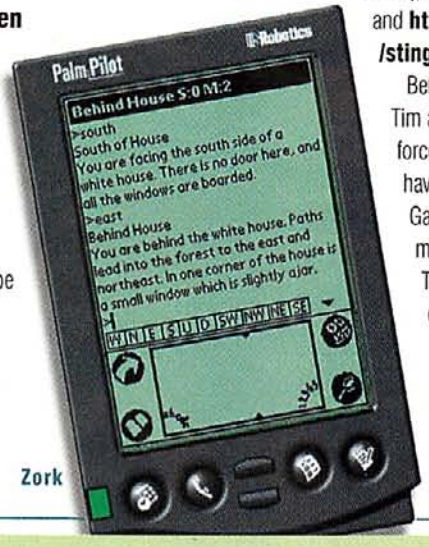
The US Robotics PalmPilot is quite the personal productivity device. It allows you to keep track of your schedule, phone numbers, and "to do" lists. You can use it to take notes in meetings, track expenses, read books, and even to tune your guitar. You may know all that, but did you know it might also save your sanity?

Say, for example, you are stuck in a three-hour meeting or a class that just won't end. Perhaps you are attending a lecture and the speaker seems to have a Ph.D. in rambling. Wouldn't you rather be...

West of House

You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door.
There is a mailbox here.

That's right. While everyone else assumes that you're taking copious notes, you can actually be playing ZORK, PLANETFALL, or any of the text-based Infocom games that have been ported over to the Pilot. You can also play classics like CHESS, SUB HUNT, MISSILE COMMAND, BLOCKS (a TETRIS clone), PONG, LIFE, BLACKJACK, and SOLITAIRE.



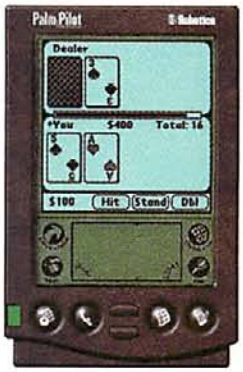
Zork

If any of you are thinking "Big deal. I'd rather play QUAKE or WARCRAFT or DAGGERFALL," consider this: There are times when pulling out a notebook computer and launching DIABLO will get you in trouble. Try it in a meeting at work some time if you think I'm kidding. The next time you're sitting there, bored to tears with no conceivable escape route, you'll wish you had a Pilot loaded with that ZORK III game you never finished.

For more information about the things you can do with your Pilot (including shareware and freeware game downloads), check out **www.pilotgear.com** and **http://198.70.114.128/stinger/stingersoft.cfm**.

Before I go, let me say something to Tim and Michael, my managers. *CGW* forced me to concoct this story. I really have no idea what I'm talking about. Games on the Pilot? That's news to me. I've never heard of such a thing. The whole idea is just preposterous. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard in my life. Just please don't ask me to show you my notes from last Tuesday's meeting....—*Greg Fortune*

GAMER'S DELIGHT: With a little help from the PalmPilot, a tedious meeting becomes a gaming-fest.



Microsoft, (206) 882-8080
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 305

PRO PINBALL: TIMESHOCK

While some pinball games maintain the sense of table size by scrolling, Empire Interactive has decided to cram the entire table into one screen. While the sites and sounds of the game are well done, the fact that the entire table is packed into whatever size monitor you have makes it difficult to follow the ball at times. The game is pretty tweakable, and requires a lot of pinball savvy to actually finish, so hard-core pinballers will want to check it out. The rest of us will need to brush up on our skills, or else just admire the pretty (but busy) table.—*Thierry Nguyen*

Empire Interactive, (301) 916-9302
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 306

TENNIS ELBOW

Most tennis games on the computer or console are little more than PONG on steroids. To its credit, TENNIS ELBOW tries hard to be real tennis, complete with overhead smashes and low volleys. The French love of tennis comes out in the variety of shot selections, as the game even differentiates between a defensive lob and *lob d'attaque*. The world circuit, featuring more than 50 events and rankings for 250 simulated players, is robust as well. Still, much of this we've seen before—most notably in the Amiga version of PRO TENNIS TOUR (1991, Ubi Soft)—and it's a real shame that the controls for tennis simulations don't seem to have advanced much in the past half-decade. —*Terry Coleman*

Prepare to meet thy maker.

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Fight one character at a time, or up to three others with its multiplayer networking mode – either way, you'll encounter combatants of all shapes and sizes attacking from all angles. And with more than 54,000 different playing combinations, you could play this game forever.

Assuming you don't meet thy maker first.

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Developed by: 9th WONDER™ GAMES

RATING PENDING RP ESRB

Windows® 95 CD-ROM

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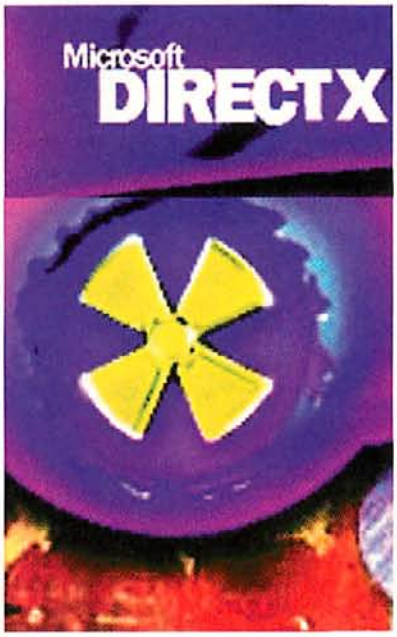
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #295

3D IRON WORKS

3D Iron Works

Researching this edition of the Works took me to Seattle for **Microsoft**'s big DirectX Love-In, known as Meltdown. This bi-annual event is a chance for hardware guys and software guys to get together and see if they can all just get along. As a new version of DirectX nears rev. 1.0, hardware guys bring their wares, while they're still working on drivers, and software guys bring their DirectX titles under development and try running them on the different hardware platforms. The idea is to kill bugs dead before games or drivers hit store shelves. The hardware guys consist mostly of system and graphics chip and board makers, so naturally it is a primo opportunity to do some snooping around and see what's shakin'.

Among the graphics guys, the usual suspects were holding forth on the chip side: **3Dfx**, **Rendition**, **Matrox**, **S3**, **ATI**, **Number 9**, et al. But the chip that seemed to be the conference darling was **NVIDIA**'s Riva 128, a newcomer to the scene whose 2D and 3D performance will make it a very tough competitor this fall. The Riva 128 is featured on boards from both **Diamond** and **STB**, and 4MB boards will most likely hit the streets for under $200. We'll be looking at both boards in next month's 3D graphics roundup.



Rendition was testing their V2200 part and, just for grins, waited until developers noticed how much faster their games ran to tell them it was the V2200, not the first-generation V1000. We'll be putting a V2200 reference board through its paces next month as well.

But the real shocker had to be Matrox's decision to do a PowerVR-based board, which should be shipping soon after you read this. Check out our review this issue of **VideoLogic**'s Apocalypse 3Dx which also uses PowerVR. It looks like Matrox's part will be 3D-only, though coupling it with Matrox's Mystique would make for a pretty dynamic duo.

For more on 3D iron this issue, check out our 3D graphics feature, where we'll show you which features do what, bring you up to speed on the latest 3D jargon, and give you the latest dish on the Direct3D vs. OpenGL skirmish.—*Dave Salvator*

THIS JUST IN

GOTO Software, (011-33) 3-20-66-5500
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 307

BABYLON 5 ARCADE SERIES ENTERTAINMENT UTILITY: SHADOW WARS

Despite the "Arcade" in this package's name, and the general quality of any product associated with *Babylon 5*, do not buy this package for the game. The SHADOW WARS arcade game is a substandard GALAXIANS/GALAGA knockoff, but without the gameplay of those early '80s classics. Series creator Joe Scraczynski must have been taking a day off when this turkey got the stamp of approval. If you're the kind of *Babylon 5* fan who knows one Zathrus from another, though, you'll appreciate this package for its B5 screensavers, wallpaper, icons, and audio and video clips. But please, don't buy it for the game.

—*Denny Atkin*
Sound Source Interactive, (818) 878-0505
Windows CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 308

DRAGON DICE

Based on the popular TSR dice game, DRAGON DICE is strategy gaming at its simplest. Gamers vie to control "terrains" across the mythical land of Esfah, marshaling armies of elves, dwarves, and goblins that are represented by—you guessed it—dice. Offering single scenario, campaign, and tournament play, DRAGON DICE allows players to customize their polyhedral forces before squaring off against the computer

KINGDOM TO COME

Interactive Magic's Real-time Strategy Game Tries To Climb Above the Crowd

As we've seen in Microsoft's AGE OF EMPIRES (see the sneak preview in this issue), developers are taking real-time games in a more intelligent direction. One of the games that exemplifies this is Interactive Magic's new game, SEVEN KINGDOMS.

You play as one of seven ancient civilizations (Greek, Chinese, Mayan, and the like), building an infrastructure, much as you do in other real-time strategy games. You also have to harvest resources and maintain a sizable army for defense and, if you choose, offense.

What we particularly like in this game is the use of each civilization's mythos to flesh out the culture's repertoire of units. Each civilization can summon one godlike creature from its pantheon (the Chinese summon a dragon, the Norse summon Thor), who bestows benefits upon their troops and is a controllable megaunit.

The game will also emphasize multicultural cooperation, as in order to utilize each god, you have to have members of that god's race in your nation. Thus, the best players will welcome all the cultures into one homogenous civilization, and summon all the gods to smite their foes.

Another great feature of the game is the espionage model and spy unit, which we'll reveal more of in next month's Real-Time Strategy Roundup, as well as in an upcoming preview.—*Elliott Chin*

Summon powerful creatures such as this Chinese dragon to assist your troops.

What, No Quake?

CGW recently attended the 1997 Shareware Industry Conference (SIC), in Providence, Rhode Island. While the conference's round tables always result in lively discussion about the shareware industry, the highlight of the event is the annual SIC Awards Ceremony. *CGW* presented the awards to the winners in each category. The results are as follows:

Best Shareware Game: QUAKE, by id Software

Best Action Game: QUAKE, by id Software

Best Strategy/Logic Game: FALLEN HEROES, by A&B Entertainment

Best Card/Casino Game: DYNAMIC GIN32, by SyberSyn

Best Boardgame: PRO BACKGAMMON, by WinGames, Inc.

For more information about the winners, check out our accompanying CD-ROM booklet (if you get the CD version of the mag). You'll find playable versions of all of these games on the CG-ROM...except for one. Despite the fact that QUAKE was clearly the star of the SIC awards, id Software absolutely refused to let us include the game on the CD. "It will interfere with the OEM sales," said id CEO, Todd Hollenshead.

You call that shareware?—*Thierry Nguyen*

or up to three friends. Though it's short on real depth and saddled with dorky graphics, DRAGON DICE is surprisingly engaging. Its quick and easy gameplay might be enough to satisfy gamers hungry for strategy but short on time.—*Robert Coffey*

Interplay Productions, (714) 553-6678

Win 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 309

GUBBLE

Remember all the fun you used to have with your old pal Pac Man? Now you can virtually relive the experience with GUBBLE. As the cutey-pie alien, Gubble D. Gleep, you must navigate through 150 mazes while outrunning, I kid you not, "Wangry Wobots," just like you did in the early '80s with our hungry yellow friend. The twist? Pretty DirectX graphics and a power-tool theme. Yes, instead of munching pellets, Gubble's mission is to remove a variety of hardware fasteners using name-brand power tools. These innovations help provide an interesting take on a classic theme. Maze addicts should feel right at home.

—*Matthew Schaefer*

RandomSoft, (800) 788-8815

Win 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 310

DOGDAY

I've never had a particular desire to interact with a painting of poker-playing dogs. Unfortunately, that's what playing DOGDAY feels like. It's about your life as a dog under a totalitarian regime. At least, I *think* so. It's hard to tell, since the dialogue consists entirely of barking, and there isn't a subtitling feature. Slated as an adventure game, DOGDAY is more a collection of annoying puzzles. If you're looking for a way to spend an afternoon, don't make it a DOGDAY.—*Kate "Pinky" Simonton*

Impact, Australia, (00 11) 612-9674-7399

Win 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 311

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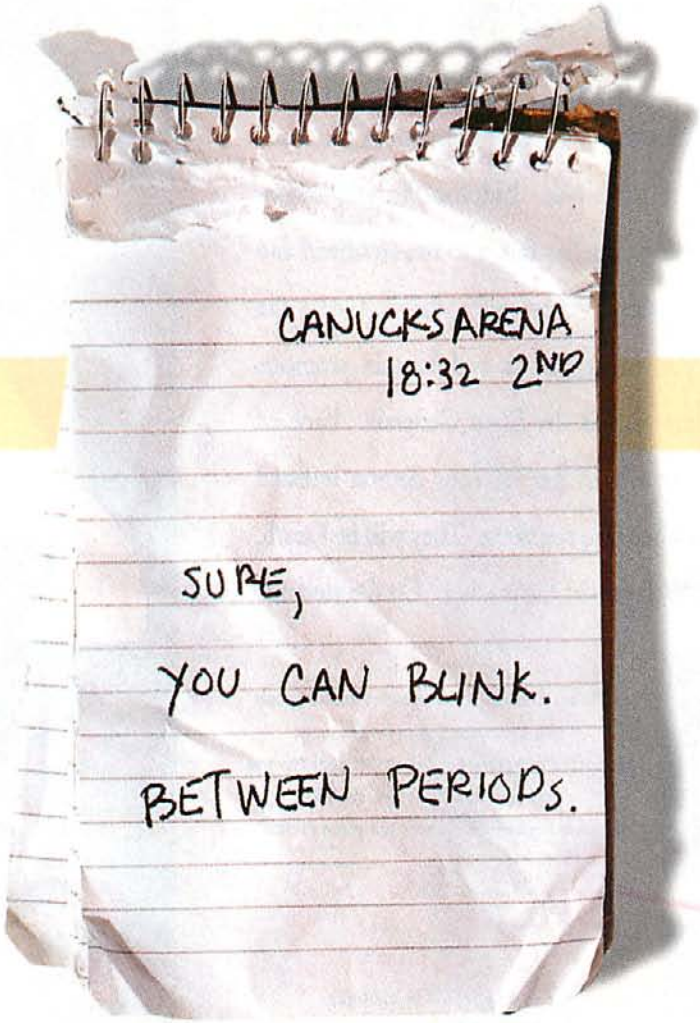

NHL 98

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THE MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL OFTEN SERVED AS A CENTER FOR LEARNING. THIS IS GOING TO BE A VERY PAINFUL LESSON.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse lurk in the shadows before you. And they are not alone. Eidolon, the last-known Serpent Rider, lives. All of humanity has fallen to the archfiend and his Hell-spawned hordes. As the Necromancer, the Assassin, the Crusader, or the Paladin, you must put an end to this ravenous onslaught. But first, you must defeat the Dark Generals. Each of them awaits your arrival separately in one of four demon-infested worlds. You will know them when you see them. They will be Death, Pestilence, Famine and War. Will you be the teacher? Or the student?

- Possess distinct spells, powers and weapons. With experience, gain levels; more hit points and certain abilities that apply to your specific character class, such as increased speed, fire power and jump distance.

- Lose yourself in lightning storms, blowing leaves, earthquakes, spraying fountains and pouring rain.

- Bludgeon your way through four demon-infested worlds — Medieval, Egyptian, Mesoamerican and Roman. Smash stained glass windows, collapse structural beams, pulverize trees and shatter egos.

HEXEN II™

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

QUAKE ENGINE

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #141

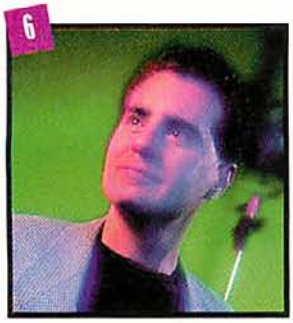
The Most Influential People in Computer Gaming

CGW ON-LINE

CGW and *GameSpot* recently decided to hold an internal ballot to find out just who the most influential people in this industry are. First we voted for the people we felt had had the greatest influence over computer gaming since its nascence. Then, we voted on those people who we felt had accomplished the most for the industry during 1996. To find out more about these pioneers and their contributions to gaming, point your browser to **http://cgw.gamespot.com/october**.

The 15 Most Influential People of All Time

1. **Sid Meier** for game design (CIVILIZATION, COLONIZATION)
2. **John Carmack** for technology (QUAKE, DOOM, DOOM II)
3. **Richard Garriott** for design (ULTIMA series)
4. **Alexey Pajitnov** for TETRIS
5. **Nolan Bushnell** for Atari and PONG
6. **Brett Sperry** for game design (COMMAND & CONQUER, DUNE II)
7. **John Romero** for game design (QUAKE, DOOM, DOOM II)
8. **Miyamoto** for game design (DONKEY KONG and MARIO)
9. **Trip Hawkins** for inception of current software distribution model, affiliated labels, and the like
10. **Roberta Williams** for adventure game design (KING'S QUEST)
11. **Peter Molyneux** for game design (MAGIC CARPET, SYNDICATE)
12. **Will Crowther** and **Don Woods** for creating The Original Adventure games
13. **Alex St. John** for MS-Windows for gaming
14. **Scott Miller** for originating the shareware model
15. **Ron Gilbert** for inventing the SCUMM engine for adventure gaming



The 5 Most Influential People of 1996

1. **John Carmack** for 3D technology, QUAKE, and QUAKEWORLD Internet Play
2. **Gary Tavoli** for architecture (and hyping) of the 3Dfx chip
3. **Brett Sperry** for game design (RED ALERT)
4. **Erich Shaefer** and **David Brevik** for game design (DIABLO)
5. **Andy Hollis** for game design (LONGBOW)

Deadly Diva

Quake 2's Babe Will Have Brains, Beauty, Brawn, and Balls

Artist Paul Steed's homage to the female Quake clan, CrackWhore

If you've been following the development of Quake 2, you're sure to have noticed a foxy, red-headed, long-legged honey strutting (and jiggling) her stuff across id's Web site. But if you think you're going to run into this leather-clad, BFG-wielding bombshell when you play Quake 2, think again.

The character currently up on the Web site is Quake 2 artist Paul Steed's homage to the all-female Quake clan, CrackWhore. Steed is quick to state that he created this highly-characterized cartoon-like vixen just for fun, and she will not be the female-player character in Quake 2. However, one of the monsters will be a Borg-like version of CrackWhore. Instead of that glorious mane of red hair, she'll have cables running through her body and protruding out of her scalp.

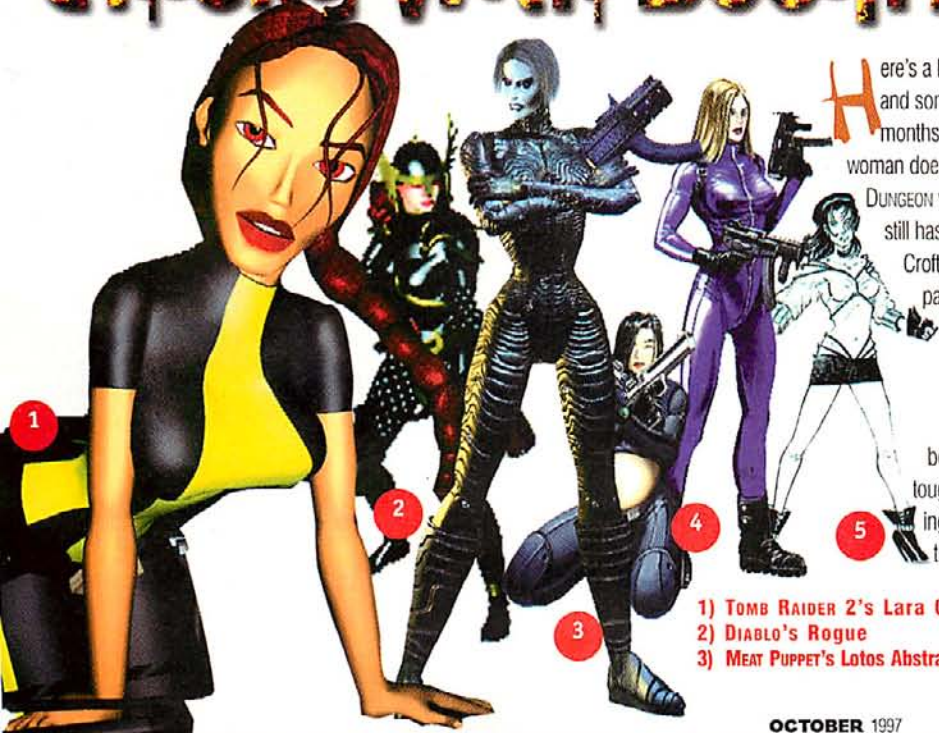
Although the real Q2-babe is in the early stages of development right now, Steed has a clear idea of what he wants her to look like. For one thing, she won't be running around half naked. Steed wants this character to be taken seriously, and despite what other developers seem to think, a female wearing three strategically-placed triangles as her only battle-armor is hardly realistic. Steed's femme fatale will be based on Private Vasquez, the super-tough marine from the movie *Aliens*, and will be dressed in similar attire—a sleeveless vest and full-length pants. That's not to say she won't be feminine. This tough-girl will definitely boast womanly curves, but according to Steed, we can expect her proportions to be more realistic than those of the women we've seen in games so far. "She'll be very cool—attractive, yet tough," Steed says.

Steed stresses that Quake 2 will be a far more visual experience than it's predecessor. As you approach a character in a DeathMatch, for example, you'll clearly be able to distinguish if they're male or female (the female character may even have a pony-tail to make identification easier). You'll also be able to tell which weapon they're carrying, and if they're wearing armor.

Quake 2's female character will be based on *Aliens'* ultra-tough marine, Vasquez

And how does Steed think his wondrous creation would fair if pitted against some of the other bimbettes out there? "She could shoot Lara Croft to bits," he proudly proclaims.—*Charlotte Panther*

Chicks with BoomSticks



Here's a look at some of the female characters we've seen and some we can expect to see over the next few months. Finally, more designers are realizing that a woman doesn't have to be naked to be sexy. If the DeathTrap Dungeon women are anything to go by, it seems that Eidos still has a lot to learn. Nonetheless, we did hear that Lara Croft will be wrapping up in a jacket during certain parts of Tomb Raider 2, and we'll also see her donning a wet-suit (see picture). Nikki and Amy from SegaSoft's Vigilance appear to be pretty tough cookies (despite the bare midriff factor). But if we had to choose one character to play, it would be Diablo's Rogue. This babe gets tougher and tougher as the game progresses, and instead of taking her clothes off, she piles the armor on. Now that's refreshing. —*Charlotte Panther*

1) Tomb Raider 2's Lara Croft
2) Diablo's Rogue
3) Meat Puppet's Lotos Abstraction
4) Vigilance's Nikki and Amy
5) Anachronox's Stiletto

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AN UNBEATABLE COMBINATION

The AD&D game's most famous world, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*® setting, is now powered by the award-winning *Descent* engine.

INTRODUCING DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN, THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY NEW AD&D FORGOTTEN REALMS COMPUTER GAME EVER. BASED ON AN ENHANCED, SVGA VERSION OF THE AWARD-WINNING DESCENT ENGINE, YOU ARE CHALLENGED TO BUILD AN AUTHENTIC AD&D CHARACTER AND PLUNGE DEEP INTO UNDERMOUNTAIN — A TWISTING DUNGEON LABYRINTH LOCATED BENEATH THE CITY OF WATERDEEP. HERE YOU WILL ENCOUNTER AN INCREDIBLE 360° WORLD FILLED WITH SHADOWY HALLS, ANCIENT CRYPTS AND ABANDONED TEMPLES — NOT TO MENTION A TERRIFYING ASSORTMENT OF CREATURES WHO CALL UNDERMOUNTAIN THEIR HOME. SOLVE THE RIDDLE OF UNDERMOUNTAIN AND YOU WILL CERTAINLY AMASS A PILE OF GOLD. FAIL AND YOU WILL BECOME A MERE PILE OF BONES.

EITHER WAY, YOU'RE GOING DOWN LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN™

- Experience more than 25 different levels that come alive in full 3D 360° detail, from a dwarven temple to an ancient Egyptian crypt.
- Build your character using true AD&D role-playing elements — 6 different races and single or multi-classed options. Your choice of character class leads to unique abilities and will also affect the way the game plays — if you choose a thief character you can climb walls!
- Battle more than 50 different 3D monsters — skeletons, mummies, giant insects and more...
- Seek out and utilize more then 160 magical items and 40 different spells, including the powerful magic missile that homes in on its targets and the fireball that engulfs its target in a shroud of flames!

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #079

Going Postal

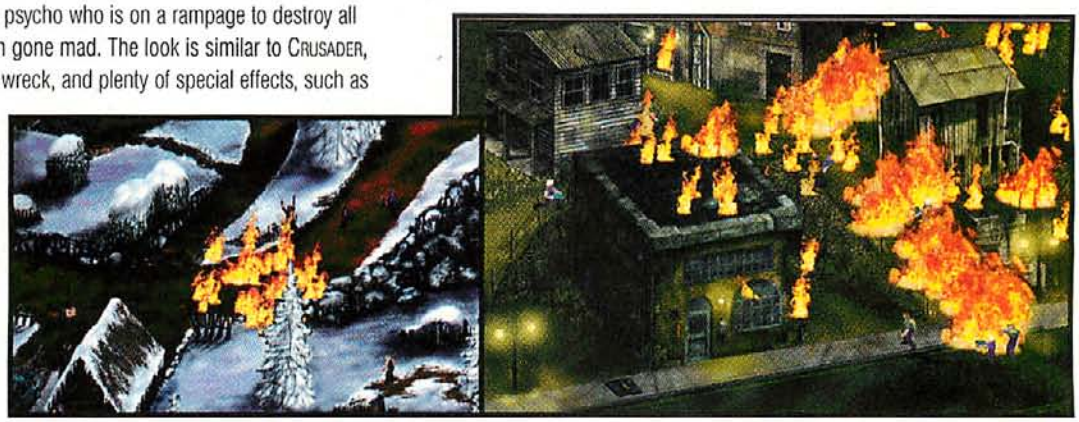
Ripcord Productions To Unleash a Bloody Flurry of Action on the Gaming World

Ripcord is the name of the startup game-publishing arm of Panasonic Entertainment. Now, that's the last you'll hear of Ripcord's connection to Panasonic in these pages, because Ripcord is definitely trying to deliver *gamers'* games to the public. The first will be POSTAL, an intense action shooter from developer Running With Scissors.

In POSTAL, you play a gun-toting psycho who is on a rampage to destroy all the wackos and evildoers of a town gone mad. The look is similar to CRUSADER, with lots of objects to destroy and wreck, and plenty of special effects, such as blood tracks in the snow, adding to the grisly atmosphere. Running With Scissors promises plenty of nasty weaponry, including rocket launchers and flame throwers, as well as crafty level design and swarms of enemies.

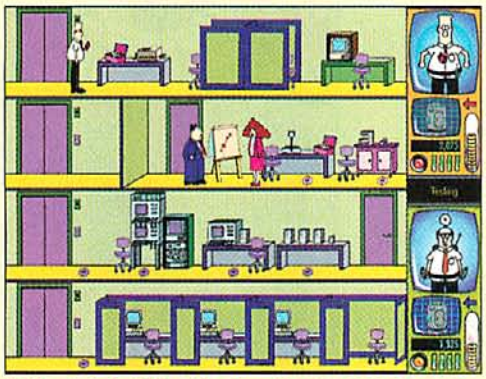
You'll also discover, as you play through the game, that the initial premise is questionable. You'll start to wonder who's really going mad: Is it the whole world or you? But before you find out, you'll have to blow everyone away.

The game should come with a robust editor that will allow players to make levels as well-done as the designers'. Look out for POSTAL sometime in September.—*Elliott Chin*



Dilbert's Desktop Distractions

Feeling overworked, under-appreciated, and severely underpaid? Spend some time with Dilbert, the world's most put-upon employee, and you'll learn a few important lessons about survival in the work place. Rule number one? Do as little work as possible while giving off the impression that you do more than anyone else in the office. To help you fulfill your goal, DreamWorks Interactive has created DILBERT'S DESKTOP GAMES, a collection of 10 games and activities specifically designed to decrease productivity as we know it.



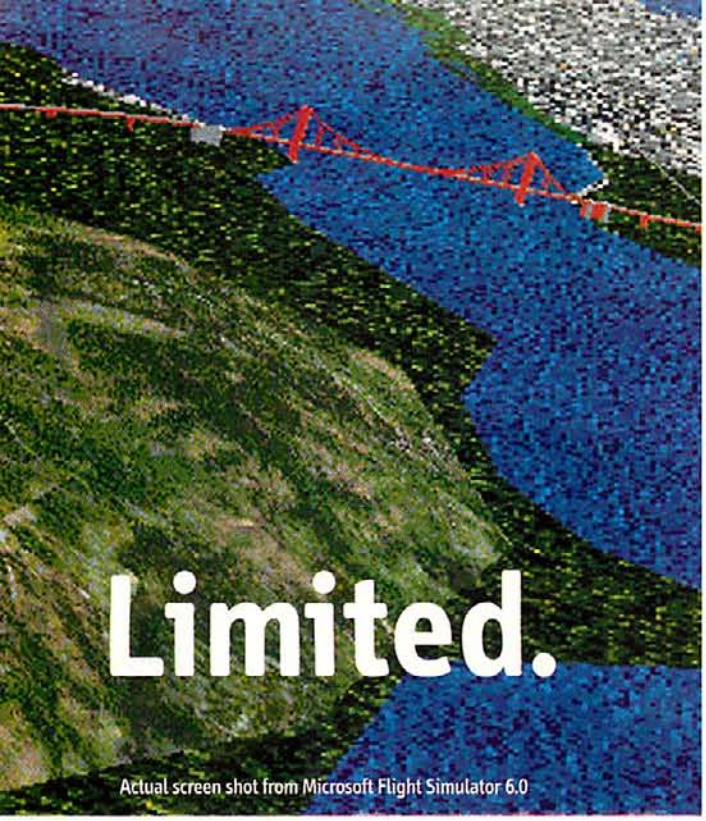
Daily Grind: Dilbert's daunting task is to pick up as many donuts as possible.

Games include *Techno Raiders*, a platform-style game in which Dilbert must collect donuts and gadgets on his way up the corporate elevator...er...ladder. There's *Project Pass-Off*, a foosball-type game, in which Dilbert and Zimbu the Monkey try to snare good projects as they fall onto the conference table, and pass the bad ones off to each other. Relieve frustration with the *Can-O-Matic 2*, a machine that allows you to shoot fellow employees at targets. And then there's *CEO Simulator*, a chance for players to build their own company from the ground up, nurturing it and providing it with the same sort of care and attention that one would give a pet dog.

DILBERT'S DESKTOP GAMES will begin its destruction of the workplace in October —*Charlotte Panther*

e-parcel Provides a Smart Solution to Your Download Nightmares

You hear there's a new add-on pack available on the Internet for a game you're playing, but you're reluctant to download it because you know it will tie up your computer for hours. Sound familiar? Well, e-parcel, an Internet delivery service, has developed SmartLoad, a product that will securely deliver electronic parcels of any type or size to your desktop without slowing down the other running desktop applications. The software also boasts crash-resistant capabilities, so that if a disconnection occurs while downloading, SmartLoad will recommence and complete the transmission at the point of interruption, instead of having to start over. Once a file has been deposited on the user's desktop, it can be viewed simply by clicking the SmartLoad icon. SmartLoad is currently available for Windows 95 and NT 4.0. For more information, check out **www.e-parcel.com**. —*Charlotte Panther*



The best just got better. Introducing Flight Unlimited II from Looking Glass. The most realistic flight experience ever in a PC simulation.

FLY THROUGH A SKY FILLED WITH COMMERCIAL, CIVILIAN AND MILITARY AIRCRAFT. REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOU AND AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL GETS YOU THROUGH THE JAM.

EXPERIENCE 25 HEART-POUNDING ADVENTURES, INCLUDING DODGING TWO F-16S WITH THE LICENSE TO KILL WHEN YOU VIOLATE RESTRICTED AIRSPACE.

AT THE CONTROLS OF THIS DEHAVILLAND BEAVER SEAPLANE, YOU CAN TRY SOMETHING TOTALLY NEW IN A FLIGHT SIM—LAND ON WATER.

Throw everything you know about flight sims right out the window. Because Flight Unlimited II takes the realism and thrill of simulated flying to a higher plane. Over 11,000 square miles of incredible Bay Area terrain accurately modeled for the most precise detail ever in a flight sim. The most advanced weather effects—rain, lightning, cross wind and more. Visual and instrument navigation. Six of the coolest civilian aircraft, including the legendary P-51D Mustang. Whether you're a high-flyin' veteran or just getting off the ground, check out the sim that sets the standard once again. Flight Unlimited II from Looking Glass...coming this summer.

"The Real Deal"
C/Net's GameCenter

"The richest, most detailed environment yet seen in a PC flight sim."
Computer Gaming World

FLIGHT UNLIMITED II™

Now You're Really Flying

Take the "Unlimited Challenge" and win really cool prizes.

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #069

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

LOOKING GLASS TECHNOLOGIES

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YOU'VE LOOKED

Even your high school yearbook picture was more becoming than this. But as an alien, glamour is not high on your agenda. So, bust out of the traditional strategy game mold, morph into a human and make enemies with your friends. Conquest Earth is a world you'll want to step into very carefully.

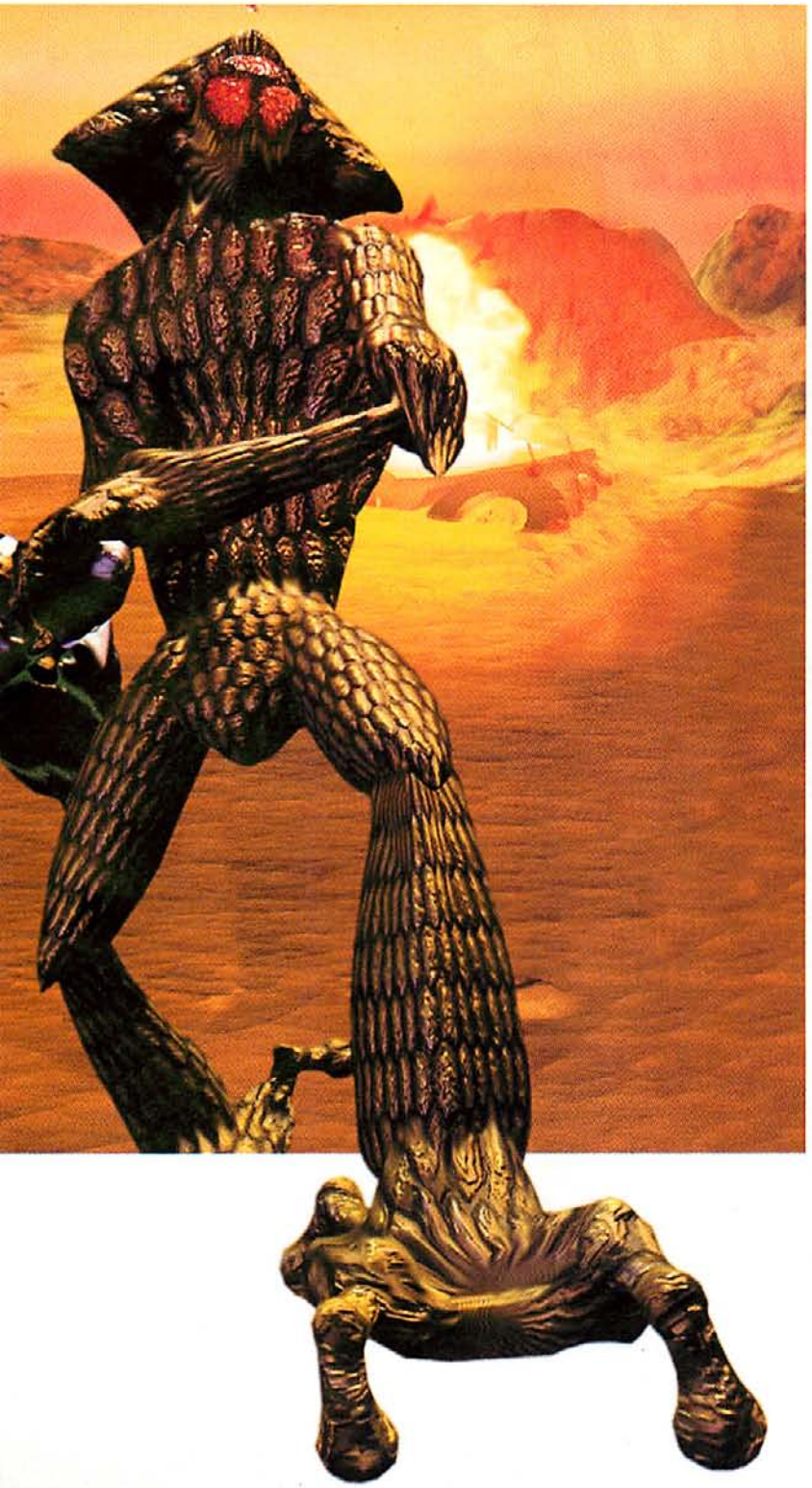
"THE VISUAL EFFECTS ARE SPECTACULAR"
COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

"STUNNING VISUALS AND INTENSE GAMEPLAY"
PC GAMER

CONQUEST EARTH

WHERE STRATEGY TAKES ON A NEW FORM

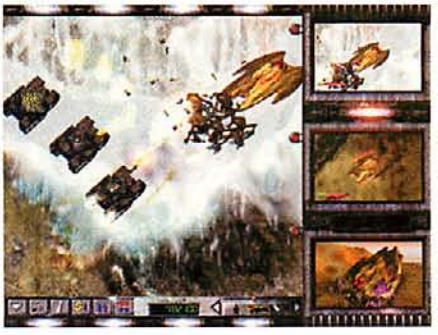
BETTER.



You can play either side in this intergalactic strategy game. Instantly morph into a weapon or battle tank—even a human being.

When playing the alien side, you'll experience a unique interface with different rules and capabilities. You'll employ never-before-seen tactics and strategies to foil your human counterparts.

Vary your strategy to keep your opponents guessing. Keep track by monitoring them through your interface portals. With over 65,000 colors, the action will come to life like never before.



Playing the human side, you'll need to manage your resources wisely. Thwart the aliens' attempt to mine oxygen from the atmosphere. Only one race will remain standing after this war. Make sure its yours.

WWW.CONQUESTEARTH.COM

EIDOS
INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

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A NEW KIND OF FLIGHT SIM IS EXPLODING ON THE SCENE.

Flying Nightmares 2 isn't just the next great flight sim.

It's a new kind of flight sim.

One where you'll need a lot more than quick reflexes to survive.

And with so much air and ground action, you may need help. Lots of help. So we designed the most extensive multi-player capabilities ever seen in a flight sim. Up to 16 players over a LAN or internet connection.

So don't get left in the blast. Reserve a copy of FN2 now.

- *Full strategy war game*
- *65,000 color, high-resolution graphics*
- *Supports up to 16 players*
- *Fly both Harriers and Cobras*

FLYING NIGHTMARES 2

WHERE STRATEGY TAKES FLIGHT

www.fn2.com

"FN2 will dazzle you ...

an intriguing mix of simulation and strategy ...

with the potential to redefine the two genres."

Computer Gaming World

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

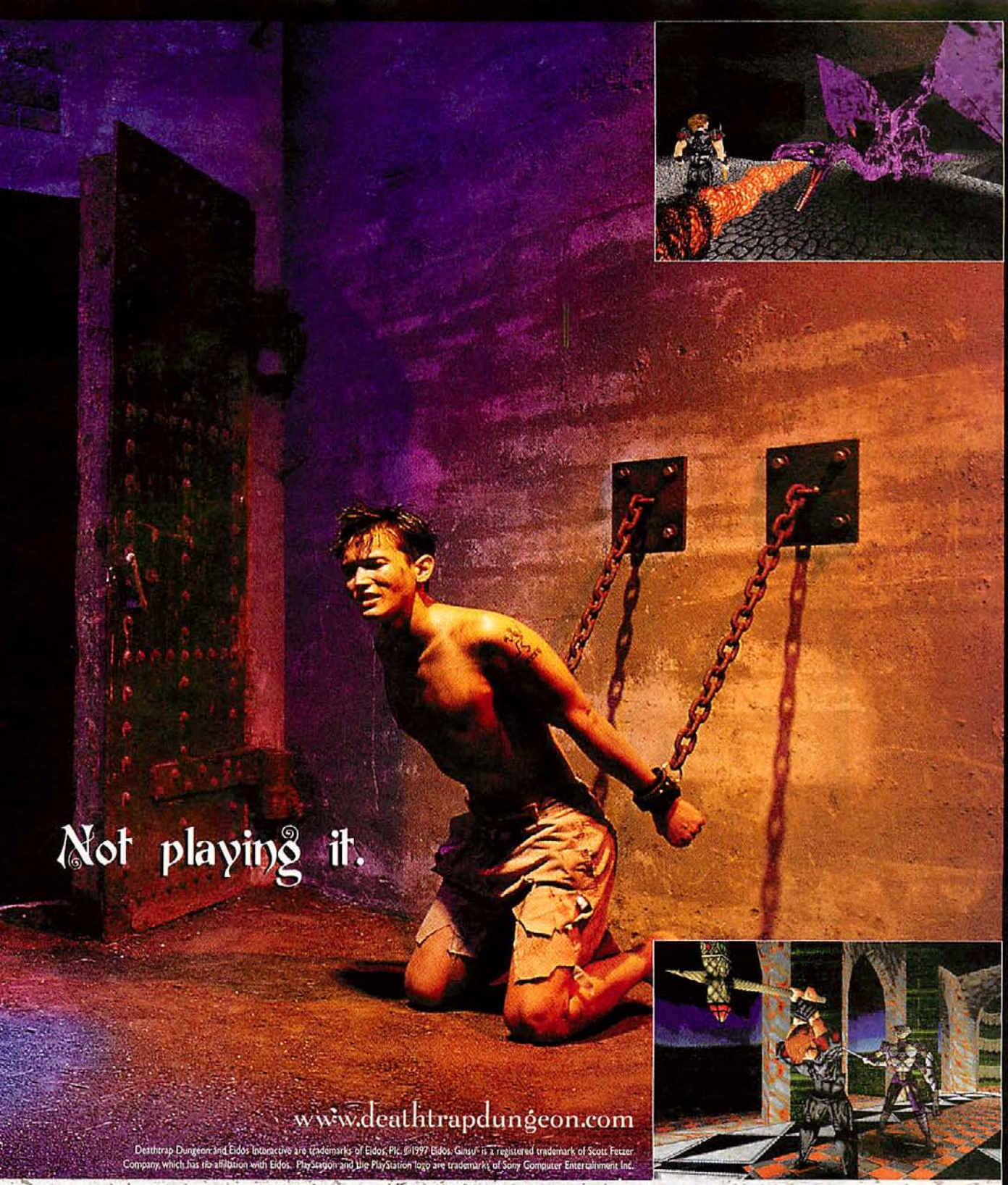
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #274

There's only one thing more torturous than playing Deathtrap Dungeon.

-IAN LIVINGSTONE'S-

DEATHTRAP DUNGEON

"Beat me. Whip me. Just don't hit that Quit button." Consider it your battle cry. Then bring on the skeletal warriors, zombies and countless other undead denizens. Each one is another chance to slice and dice like a Ginsu® knife gone bad. Or simply cast a spell



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on the evil priestess who's done you wrong. Because in this cavernous maze of devious traps, it's all about cheating death at every turn, blurring that fine line between pleasure and pain. And just when you think you can't take it anymore, consider the alternative.

PC CD

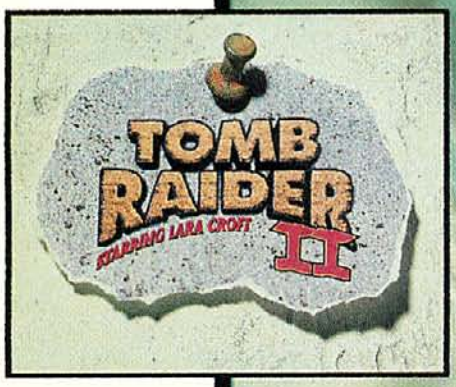
PlayStation

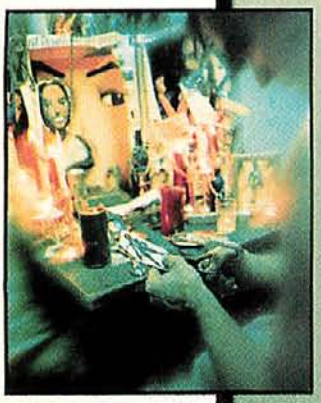
EIDOS

INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #276

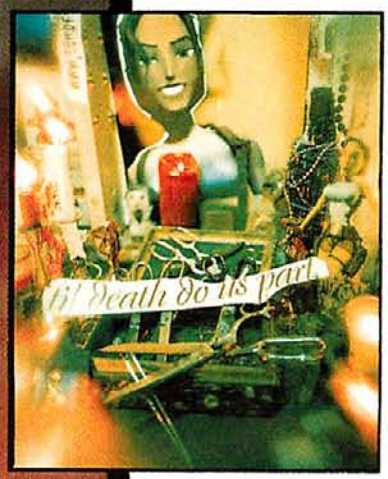




Top: The Second Coming, slated for this fall. **Bottom:** Preparing for her return. **Opp page:** Committed for life.

4 A.M., TALLAHASSEE, FL --

TWO DRUNKS BATTLE IT OUT DOWN THE HALL. THE 38 EXPRESS SQUEALS TO A HALT EVERY HALF HOUR ON THE STREET BELOW. SLEEP DOESN'T COME EASY IN ROOM 23. BUT FOR 19-YEAR-OLD RAY COOPER, IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE NOISE. AS HE SAYS, "IT'S BECAUSE SHE'S ALL I SEE EVERY TIME I CLOSE MY EYES."



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #278

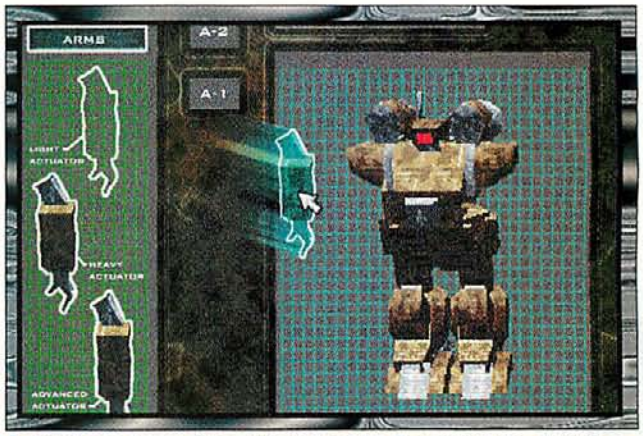
Pipeline

10th Planet Bethesda	11/97
Aces: X-Fighters Sierra	Xmas 97
AH-64D Longbow 2.0 Jane's Combat Sims	Winter 97
Anachronox Ion Storm	late 98
Asheron's Call Turbine/Microsoft	early 98
Baldur's Gate Bioware/Interplay	Winter 97
Banshee 3DiX	Fall 97
Black Dahlia Take 2	10/97
Blade Runner Westwood	11/97
Challenge # 2 Smart Games	10/97
Close Combat II Microsoft	11/97
Confirmed Kill Eidos	Fall 97
Curse of Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 97
Daikatana Ion Storm	11/97
Deep Six Virgin	Spring 98
Earthsiege 3 Sierra	11/97
East Front TalonSoft	Fall 97
Epic Warhammer 40K: Redemption SSI	Xmas 97
European Air War MicroProse	Xmas 97
F-22 Raptor NovaLogic	Xmas 97
Falcon 4.0 MicroProse	Early 98
Fighter Squadron Activision	11/97
Final Fantasy VII Squaresoft	Early 98
Flight Unlimited II Looking Glass	Fall 97
FPS Football 98 Sierra	11/97
Guardians: Agents of Justice MicroProse	11/97
Guardians of Destiny Westwood	Fall 97
Half-Life Sierra/Valve	11/97
Heavy Gear Activision	Fall 97
iA-10 Warthog Interactive Magic	Early 98
Intel740 3D Chip Intel	Xmas 97
Interstate '77 Activision	Fall 97
Jack Nicklaus Online Accolade	Fall 97
Jane's F-15 EA/Jane's	Early 98
Joint Strike Fighter Eidos	10/97
King's Quest: Mask of Eternity Sierra	12/97
Longbow 2.0 EA/Jane's	Fall 97
M-1 Tank Platoon II MicroProse	Mid 98
Madden NFL 98 EA Sports	Early 98
MechWarrior III MicroProse/FASA	Mid 98
MiG Alley Empire	10/97
Might & Magic VI New World/3DO	Winter 97
Myth Bungie	Winter 97
NHL 98 EA Sports	11/97
Panzer General II SSI	11/97
Populous III EA/Bullfrog	Fall 97
Prey Apogee/3D Realms	Spring 98
Quake II id/Activision	11/97
Quest For Glory V Sierra	11/97
Redguard Bethesda	Late 97
Return to Krondor 7th Level	Early 98
Screamin' Demons Activision	11/97
Skies SegaSoft	Mid 98
Siege Sir-Tech	Winter 97
SimCity 3000 Maxis	Xmas 97
Sin Activision	Early 98
SODA Off-Road Racing Papyrus	Fall 97
StarCraft Blizzard	10/97
Starship Titanic Simon & Schuster	10/97
Su-27 Flanker 2.0 SSI	Winter 97
Tomb Raider II Eidos	11/97
Trespasser: Jurassic Park DreamWorks	Winter 97
Unreal GT Interactive	Fall 97
WarCraft Adventures Blizzard	12/97
Warhammer II: Dark Omen SSI	Winter 97
Wing Commander: Prophecy EA/Origin	Fall 97
Wizardry VIII Sir-Tech	Mid 98
You Don't Know Jack TV Berkeley Syst	10/97
Zork: Grand Inquisitor Activision	Fall 97

GEAR UP YOUR WAY

HEAVY GEAR Offers Full Constructability

One advantage to licensing a pen and paper game universe, as opposed to creating one from whole cloth, is that the pen and paper game has thousands of hours of free playtesting (actual gaming done by satisfied customers) behind it. When you implement those rules, along with the inevitable clarifications that occur as gamers identify potential problems in the rule sets, you have confidence that the game will be well play-balanced. You also know what the aficionados of the game universe like and don't like.



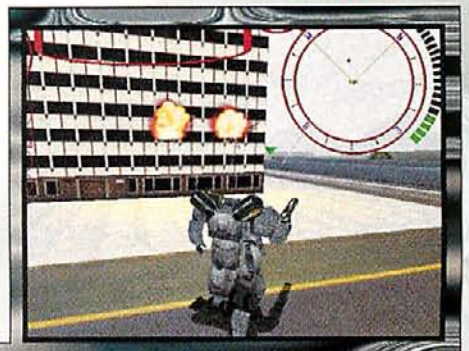
Activision's HEAVY GEAR Allows you to Construct the Robot of Your Dreams

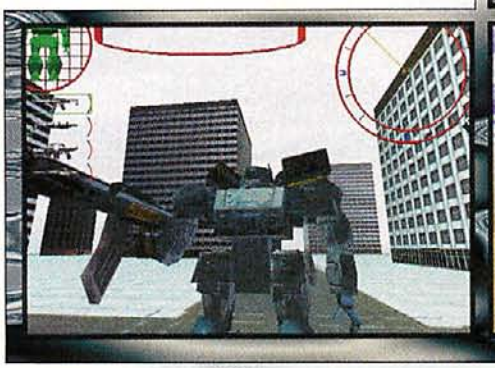
Faced with recreating the HEAVY GEAR universe, Activision quickly recognized that a new computer game would not have the elegance of the HEAVY GEAR rules if it did not feature full constructability. MECHWARRIOR 2 had some of this with the Mech lab, but it was not nearly as robust and full-featured as it would need to be to reflect HEAVY GEAR's universe. Why? Because HEAVY GEAR is supposed to reflect Gear technology that is constantly being designed, built, and refined by the denizens of its universe. The *BattleTech* universe, on the other hand, is made from Iostech-scavenged technology that is imitated and evolves much more slowly.

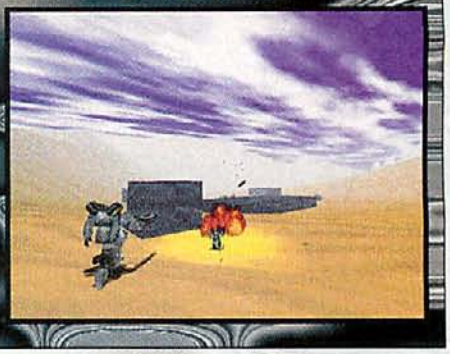
As a result, everything about the gears in HEAVY GEAR is supposed to be customizable. The Activision team's goal is to allow you to change powerplants, weaponry, and armor almost transparently by using the click and drag technology of the construction module. Instead of merely retrofitting new weaponry and armor onto the same old hulks, you'll now have a chance to create your dream killing machine by keeping in mind the trade-offs between speed and power. Anything you can build according to the pen and paper rules, you should be able to build in the Activision game.—*Johnny Wilson*

CG-ROM

FOR A MOVIE PREVIEW-STYLE LOOK AT HEAVY GEAR, WATCH THE .AVI ON THIS MONTH'S CG-ROM.







ATI Takes Xcitement to Xtremes

If you can see it, you can be it – when you're an ATI **XPERT@Play™**

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MORE FEATURES

FEATURE	XPERT@Play (RAGE PRO)	Creative 3D Blaster (Verite 1000)	Diamond Monster 3D (3Dfx)
Triangle Setup Engine	●	●	
4KB Texture Cache	●		
Bilinear/Trilinear Filtering	●	●	●
Special Effects: Texture Composing, Specular Highlights, Edge Anti-aliasing	● ● ●		●
Texture Decompression	●		●
Alpha Blending/Fog	●	●	●
2D Acceleration	●	●	
Ready for DVD Playback	●		
True Colour Video in any Mode	●		

KILLER 3D PERFORMANCE[1]

ATI 3D VERSION **STANDARD VERSION**

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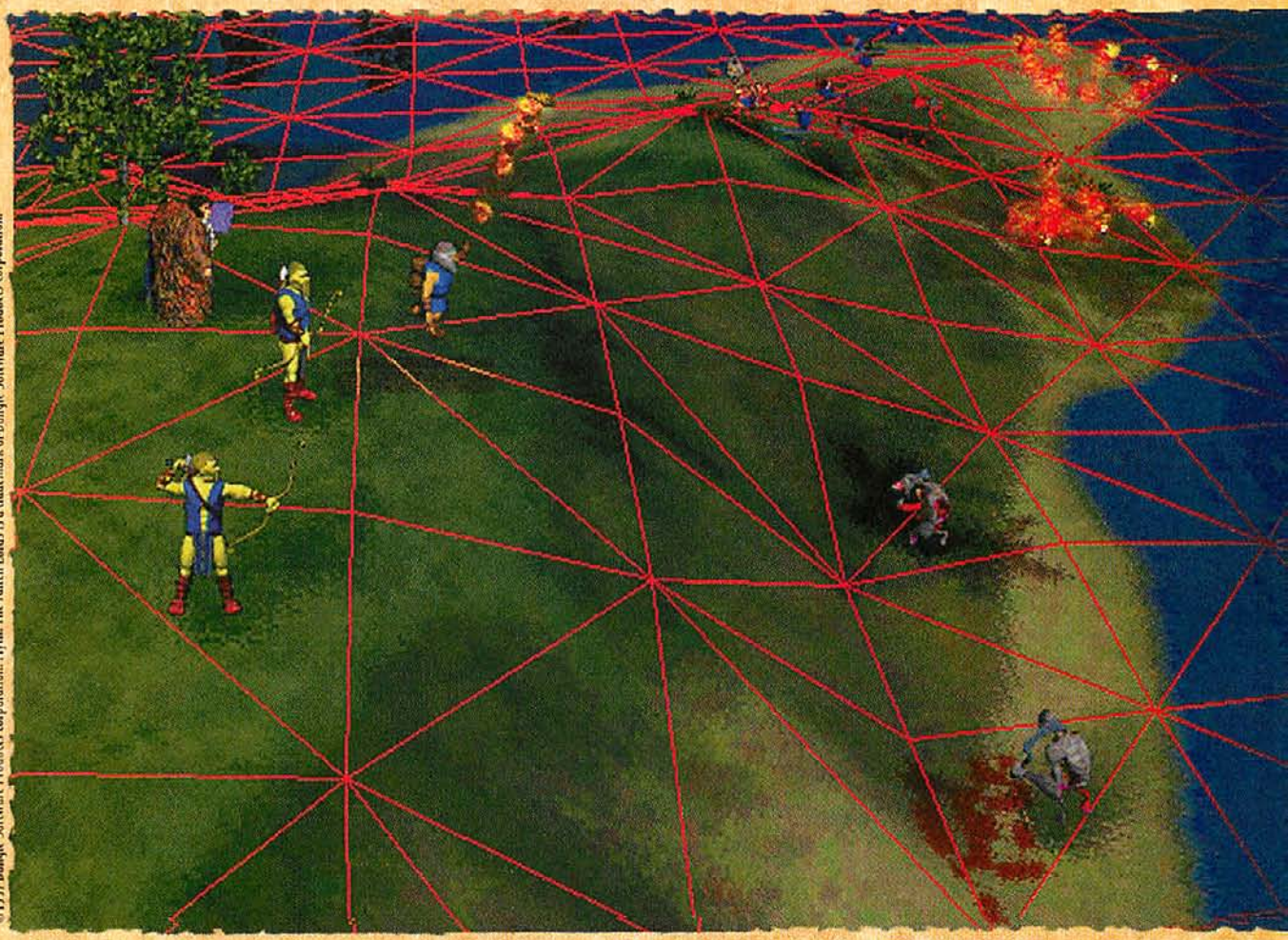
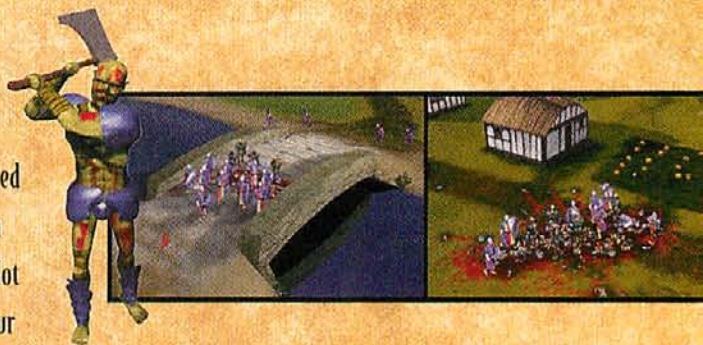
Now You See It.™

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #106

Myth Sports A 3D Eng
Renders Other Stra



© 1997 Bungie Software Products Corporation. Myth: The Fallen Lords is a trademark of Bungie Software Products Corporation.



Now you can go hand-to-hand with the enemy on a smoothly rolling 3D landscape the way you've always imagined. The environment of Myth: The Fallen Lords is so real that every bloody limb, every scattered sword, every unexploded charge tossed by a ground-rippling explosion remains a live element ready to be seized and used by or against you. Not limited to a simple overhead view, you'll rotate around the heads of your troops, follow the arc of a burning arrow and zoom in on the slaughter.

BUNGiE®

Get an eyeful of stunning detail: reflections in the water, lightning frying the enemy to cinders, smoking craters ringed with the heads of the inept and every ounce of blood remaining on the scarred battlefield.

ne So Advanced It Even
egy Games Obsolete.

But don't stare too long. Learn the art of war and the importance of physics as you move fast to seize the high ground where the archers have greater range and pyromaniac dwarves can shower targets with explosives.

Multiplayer games include classic scenarios like King of the Hill and Capture the Flag, and uniquely challenging variants like Assassin and Steal the Bacon, even in teams! Play over the Internet for free using bungie.net or turn your local network into your own personal war zone.

So call 800-295-0060 or surf to www.bungie.com for the only strategy game where "uphill battle" is more than a figure of speech.

myth
THE FALLEN LORDS

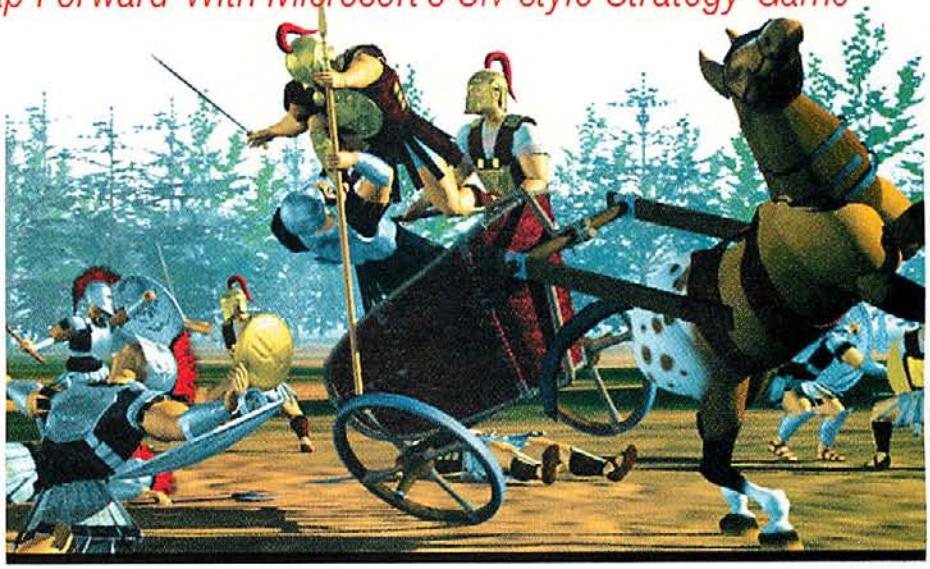
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #264

Target Release Date: November 1997
Developer: Ensemble
Publisher: Microsoft

It's About Time

Realtime Takes a Leap Forward With Microsoft's Civ-style Strategy Game

by Elliott Chin



Critics often charge that real-time strategy games have no depth; that victory in an RTS comes down to who clicks fastest. I've always thought it comes down to who *thinks* fastest, a truth that probably hurts for all those who fail in real-time wargaming. However, when it comes to the depth of current real-time games, there is some truth to the notion that what we've been playing so far isn't as rich or complex as turn-based legends like MASTER OF MAGIC and CIVILIZATION (even my favorite real-time game, WARCRAFT II, though incredibly complex, lacks the depth of CIV). Well, no less than the cocreator of CIVILIZATION, Bruce Shelley, will soon be taking a step toward changing that situation. With his next game, AGE OF EMPIRES, he and his codesigners at Ensemble Studios are taking real-time games to a new level of sophistication and complexity.

SMART GAMES AGE OF EMPIRES has an intelligence and complexity that's been missing from real-time games thus far. You do things that make sense for a growing civilization, like researching, farming, and hunting.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

At its most basic level, AGE OF EMPIRES can be considered a cross between CIVILIZATION and WARCRAFT II. You can play as one of twelve ancient civilizations as you vie for supremacy, battling it out in frantic WARCRAFT-like ferocity or advancing through economy and production, as in CIVILIZATION.

The game has an isometric look to it and gorgeously rendered graphics that are similar to CIV II's, though sharper and more colorful. However, the units in AGE move with uncanny realism; the animation for the villagers, troops, and even wildlife in the game are fluid and precise. You'll see woodcutters heft their heavy axes over their heads with mighty effort as they fell large trees, and hunters return to town weighed down by heavy game cradled in their arms.

The controls are very much like those for WARCRAFT II, as AGE uses a right-click interface for issuing commands. However, like many of the real-time games under development, it offers more flexible user commands, such as saving groups (like in COMMAND & CONQUER), having hot keys for buildings and commands, and issuing way points for unit movement.

AGE OF DISCOVERY

I liken AGE to CIVILIZATION because of its emphasis on discovery and research. Unlike many real-time games, AGE OF EMPIRES requires you to advance your civilization through various ages of discovery. You begin in the Stone Age, but can move on to the Tool, the Bronze, and, finally, the Iron Age. Each age offers a new collection of structures to build, weapons and instruments to acquire, technologies to research, and units to train. To advance to a succeeding age, your civilization needs to be well established in your current age, with a surplus of food and an economy to support the transition to a new era of growth. In game terms, this means you have to build a certain number of structures and

accumulate lots of resources before you can "research" the next age.

As in WarCraft II, the gameplay in Age hinges on a single support unit. In WarCraft II, it is the peon/peasant. In Age, it is the villager, whom you use for hunting and foraging food, mining gold and stone, and chopping wood. He is also used to build structures, as well as to provide reconnaissance in the early parts of the game.

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

Warfare is indeed a significant part of this game, but Age is distinguished from the real-time crowd in that victory and survival are not ensured by military might alone. Many of the upgrades you can research, and many of the technologies you can acquire through your science, are of economic and industrial value. For instance, you can learn and build a market in the Tool Age, which gives you the ability to learn woodworking, domestication, and stone and gold mining, all of which are economic benefits that increase resource gathering. You can research the wheel to increase travel speed for troops and villagers, build merchant ships in order to trade with your neighbors, and train priests to convert enemy troops to your side.

My worry when I first played Age of Empires was that the campaign would be open-ended, as was the case with Civilization and Deadlock. With Civilization, that open-endedness works, because there is so much to do that the game doesn't end too quickly. But with Deadlock, ending too quickly is exactly what happens, and gamers complained that the game was simply too limited. Thankfully, Ensemble Studios recognizes that there isn't enough to do in an open-ended game of Age to make it enough of a single-player challenge. So, they will include four campaigns in the game. As in WarCraft II, the scenarios in the campaigns will slowly introduce you to the game, with increasingly difficult scenario victory conditions. Once you've graduated from the beginner campaign, you can play the other three campaigns, which provide different sets of challenges. Age of Empires will also have many historical and hypothetical one-shot scenarios.

THE GREAT MARCH In addition to ideal multiplay, Age will have a good single-player component as well, including four well-done campaigns.

MANY HUMAN EMPIRES

Clearly, the designers put much thought into multiplayer gaming, and Age of Empires shows great potential as a multiplayer product. There is a good balance between what you can and can't do; for example, there isn't so much that games will take forever (as is the case with MOO2), but there is still enough to do that you feel as if you are getting the same intelligence and complexity of gameplay as in Civilization, except in realtime.

You can achieve victory in multiplay simply by conquering your enemies, but you can also win games through religion, exploration, research, or production. Peppered about the gaming map will be Stonehenge-like religious sites. The first civilization to claim all of them on the map, and hold them for a certain amount of time, wins. There are also artifacts in the game that bestow victory upon the first civilization that gains and holds all of them. You can also win by researching all of your technology before everyone else exhausts their research tree, or by being the first to build a Wonder and sustain it for 2,000 years (roughly 2,000 seconds).

As I played Age of Empires, I got a good overview of the gameplay and the direction in which Ensemble Studios is heading. I wasn't able to play against final AI, so I can't comment on how intelligent your troops or the enemy civilization will be in the final version. Ensemble says, though, that your own units will be intelligent enough to look for food and wood on their own if you leave them alone. If the AI is smarter than the usual paltry fare we get in typical real-time games, and if the Internet play is seamless and smooth over Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, then Age of Empires could secure a coveted spot on both the traditional strategy gamer's *and* real-time fanatic's must-play list.

The Resource Game

Age of Empires, like most real-time strategy games, has several resources for you to harvest. The great thing about Age, unlike the rest of the real-time pack, is that these resources make absolute sense. You're not looking for a fictional ore or water or energy source. This is the dawn of civilization, and the resources you have to gather are the same ones that early man had to acquire: food, wood, stone, and gold.

In the first age, you hunt and forage, but if you advance to an age beyond stone, you will gain the ability to build farms, which are a self-replenishing food supply. I thought this dynamic (of hunting and foraging, then learning self-sufficiency) was brilliant, because it created the sense that you were following in the footsteps of early man. The food is, logically, used for "building" new units.

LABOR FORCE The villager is your civilization's backbone, whether he's hunting or farming for food...

chopping wood...

or mining for stone...

...or gold.

The other resources are wood, which you need to harvest in abundance for buildings in the Stone and Tool Age; stone, which has a like use in the Tool and Bronze Age; and gold, which is a necessity in the Iron Age, since by then man's economy thrives on money and not such barbaric currencies as meat and wood.

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Target Release Date: October 1997
Developer: Visceral Productions
Publisher: Avalon Hill Game Company

Defiant Departure

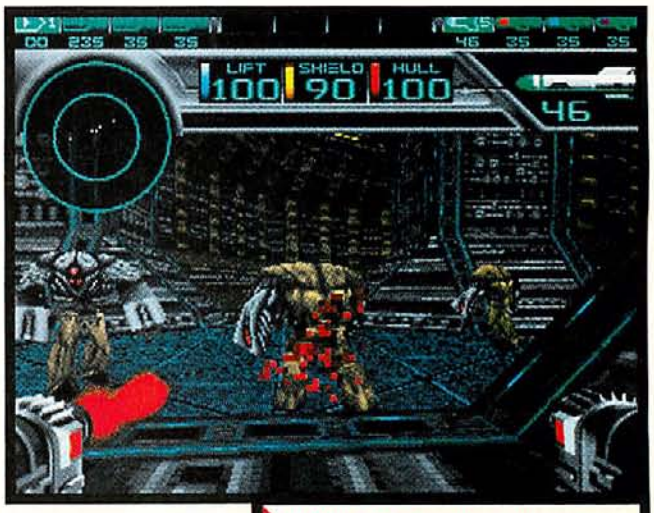
Avalon Hill's Next Game Will Surprise Longtime Fans

by Thierry Nguyen

Avalon Hill has a long background in making both boardgames and hard-core wargames. Mentioning the company's name conjures up titles like WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN, ACHTUNG: SPITFIRE, OVER THE REICH, and CAVEWARS. So what will gamers think when they hear the name DEFIANCE? Is it a hard-core strategy game that entails playing a rebellious state or power? Well, die-hard strategy gamers will be surprised to know that DEFIANCE is not the title of Avalon Hill's next strategy game, it's the title of their next action game. Action fans, take notice.

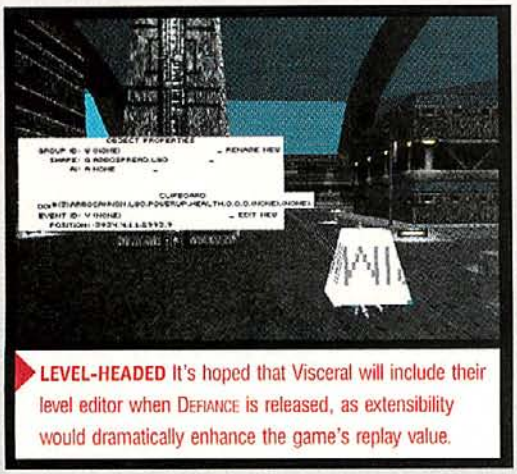
PLOT? WHERE?

DEFIANCE is the first game from the new action division of Avalon Hill: Visceral Productions. It's an attempt to merge the action of DESCENT with the storyline of WING COMMANDER. The game starts with you being called to a secret military research center. On arrival, you are told to test a new type of craft that will revolutionize the way combat is carried out. Sure enough, you're having fun blowing away drones in your LAV-6 Saber gunship, when the base suddenly comes under attack. As you battle hostile biomechanical creatures, you realize that you are probably the only survivor on the base.



MOON SHOT These biomechanical creatures will be your main enemies in DEFIANCE.

Now, the plot could easily end there. Go play with the new toy, kill the aliens, win the game. But Visceral wants to meld the action with a good storyline. So, through various voice-overs and cut-scenes, you learn about a scientist who was working on biomechanical weapons and suffered a funding cut. Is this tale of a scientist-gone-postal the cause of the massive attack? Or is there more?



LEVEL-HEADED It's hoped that Visceral will include their level editor when DEFIANCE is released, as extensibility would dramatically enhance the game's replay value.

DESCENT INTO DEFIANCE

In terms of actual gameplay, DEFIANCE is a lot like DESCENT. You'll pilot a ship around 3D levels and blast all sorts of enemies. Unlike DESCENT, your ship doesn't naturally defy gravity, so you will have to use your lifts and maneuvering jets in order to access areas higher than you. The version I played had only four guns, four types of missiles, and one level, but Visceral promises a greater variety of weapons and at least 13 large levels featuring areas such as canyons and cities.

The graphics of the game look decent, but Visceral says the engine is still in development, and that they plan to have MMX and 3D card support. Whether they go for Direct3D or card-specific support is still up in the air, but as it stands, the beta I played looked only slightly better than DESCENT II. Hopefully the art for the other levels and the added support will make the game look more contemporary.

So, did Avalon Hill's sudden shift in game development help? That can't be judged until the game ships, but for now, it looks to be a good first entry. If they manage to pull off adding a good story to go along with the decent action, they could have a solid game on their hands. And maybe Avalon Hill will be known for both turn-based hex-filled patience *and* real-time 3D frenzies.

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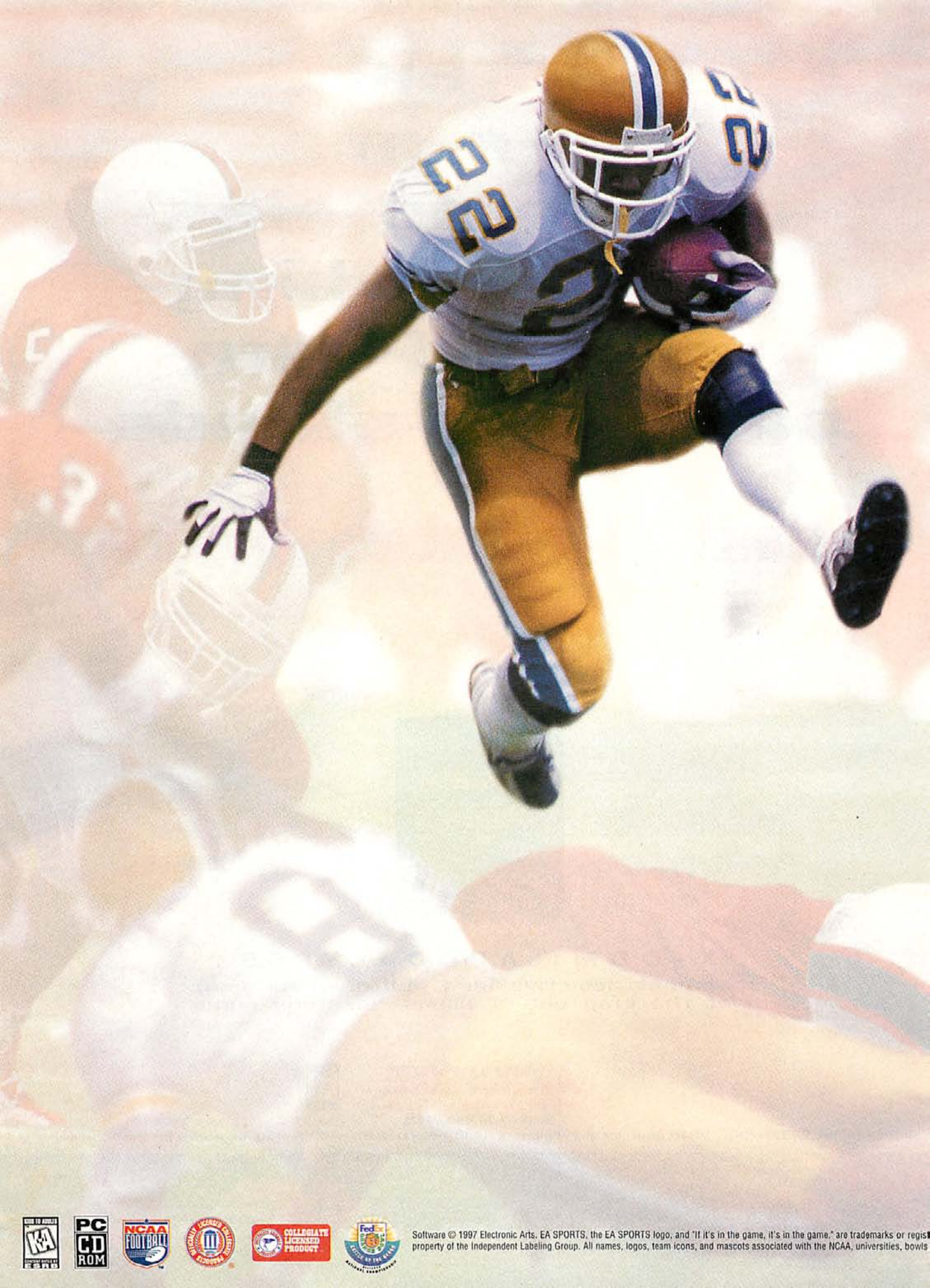

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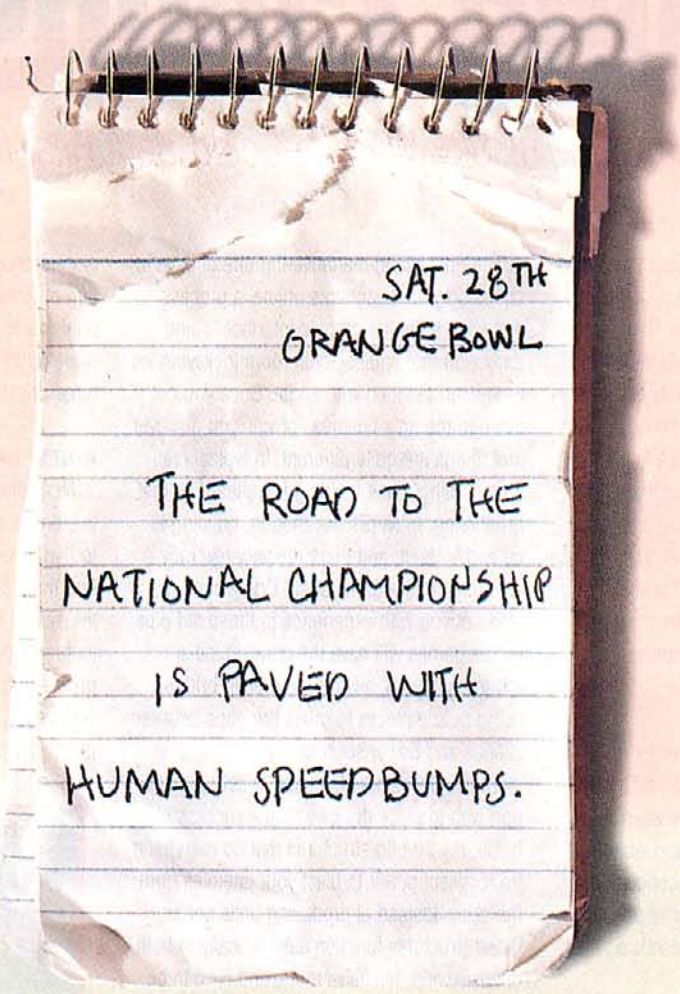

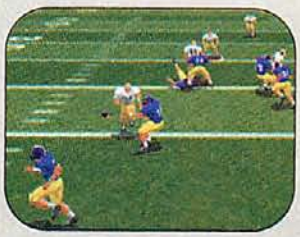

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Target Release Date: October 1997
Developer: Tsunami
Publisher: Activision

Battling Clouds

Activision's Online Game of Sky Warfare Could Be a Real-time Sleeper

by Martin E. Cirulis

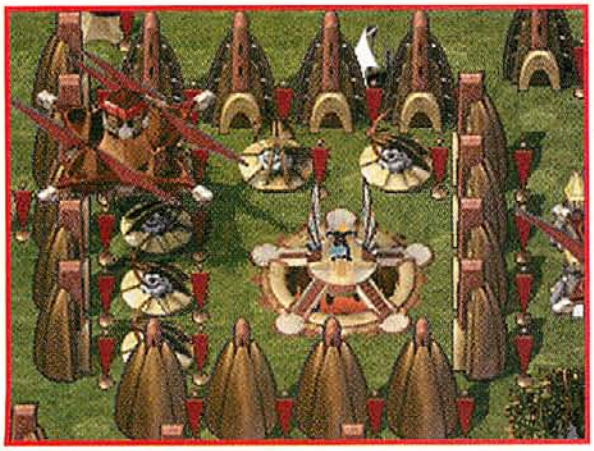
Well, Activision must be listening to somebody out there. Their newest offering to the online community is squarely aimed at giving the wires back to hard-core strategy types—without making them go through the social gymnastics required to keep eight people together through games that last for 20 hours. NetStorm may not blow the socks off the action crowd, but it does contain many features that have been a long time coming.

WAR WEATHER

This game takes a few risks in order to be original. The premise is not the usual fantasy fare. Instead of another firefight between Tolkien rejects, NS offers us a chaotic realm without solid land, where most of our preconceptions are turned upside down and magical priests battle each other using floating islands as their operational bases.

The only island-maneuvering one does is in choosing your opponents online, a process that uses a unique graphic interface, doing away with that endless chat-room jockeying we have been plagued with so far. Once you get down to the ugly business of war, you discover that things are quite different. In typical real-time gaming, base building is a means to unit production. In NetStorm, though, building is an end in itself, and there are very few movable units in the game at all. Oddly enough, those of you with experience in those old pipe-puzzle games will have the greatest initial advantage in NS, as you must build bridges using puzzle pieces to cross the gaps between islands and power sources.

These pieces are also used to set up a support web to place the keys to any successful battle: the 30-odd structures that do everything from collect power to blast your enemies from the skies. Instead of producing units per se, these structures function automatically in both offensive and defensive mode and have to be deployed across the skies in almost chesslike fashion in order to engage and destroy your opponents. The object of the game is to protect your own island while laying siege to enemy islands and blasting opposing high priests senseless. Once you have a high priest paralyzed, one of your transport units, the only class of directable mobile units in the game, can be ordered to drag the prisoner back to your island for the grisly victory ceremony. In perhaps the darkest abstraction of research I have seen in a long time, the only way to gain new knowledge, and thus more structures to build, is to sacrifice captured priests to the Storm Furies.



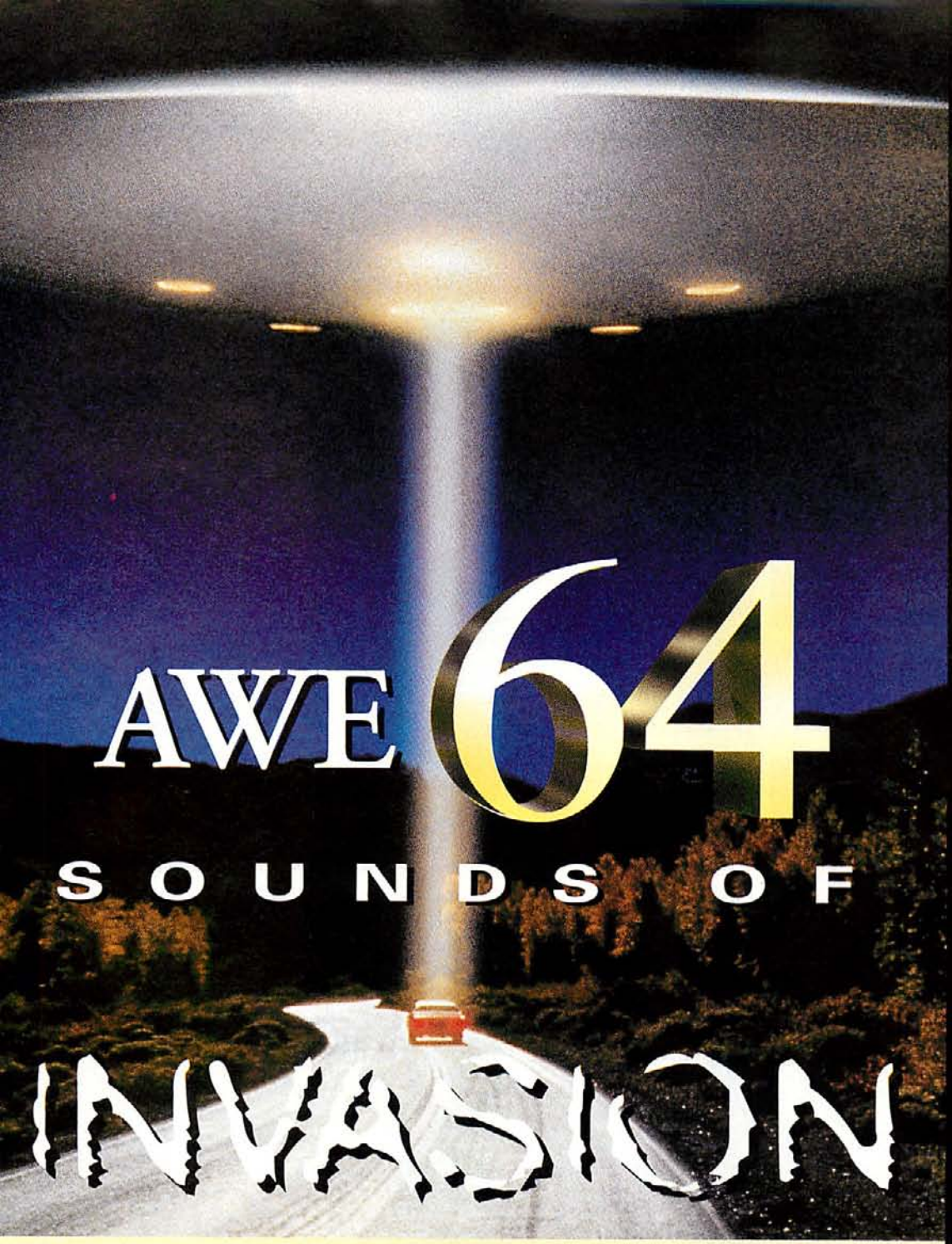
MAIN MAN The point of NetStorm is to capture rival priests and take their knowledge by sacrificing them to the gods in a grisly ceremony.

A NEW DAWN

NetStorm will have a wide variety of innovative online options, including the built-in ability to flag other players as "friends," so you can find them quickly and easily when you link to the server. A sense of attachment will also be included in the game, as your islands will grow along with you in an almost RPG-like way. Lastly, NetStorm will offer a full single-player campaign for sharpening your skills.

DUELING ISLANDS Rather than requiring micromanagement of units, most of the game's combat involves strategically placing stationary weapons platforms.

While gamers used to fluid games where everything is in motion may have a few initial problems adjusting to the pace of NetStorm, those with the patience to recognize a deep tactical game when they see one will be glad they put the time into it. It remains to be seen whether NetStorm can be a truly satisfying single-player game, but it is already easy to see that online gamers may never look at a storm-cloud the same way again.



1. "We Come In Peace."
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6. Whirring Space Ships.
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8. Bones Crunching.
9. Aliens Phoning Home.
10. Metallic Scraping.
11. Cars Crashing.
12. Kidneys Bursting.
13. Insertion of Probes.
14. Heads Exploding.
15. "Run for Cover!"
16. "Warning."
17. Aliens Melting.
18. Pods Hatching.
19. Destroying the Monster.
20. Buildings Imploding.
21. Spaceships Docking.
22. Boiling Flesh.
23. "Mayday, Mayday!"
24. Exploding Spaceship.
25. People Running.
26. "I saw a UFO!"
27. Planes Taking Off.
28. "We're at DefCon 4."
29. Aliens Communicating.
30. Children Crying.
31. Slurp.
32. Clinking of Autopsy Instruments.
33. Laser Swords Crashing.
34. "Hyperspace!"
35. Flesh Being Torn Off Bones.
36. "They're Coming."
37. Wailing Sirens.
38. "You Must Die."
39. "Beam Me Up."
40. Zap!!!
41. Air Locks Closing.
42. "Oh, My God!"
43. Lasers Charging Up.
44. "We Need More Power!"
45. Ray Guns Blasting.
46. Calling the Mothership.
47. Horns Blaring.
48. "We Won!"
49. "Lock on Target!"
50. Crystals Charging.
51. Area 51 Guard: "No Admittance."
52. Zap-Zap!
53. Warning Alarms.
54. Air Locks Opening.
55. "Set to Stun!"
56. "Red Alert!"
57. Shields Up.
58. Warp Speed.
59. "Blast 'em!"
60. Eyeballs Squishing.
61. Spaceships Cloaking.
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63. "Fire at Will!"
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Target Release Date: Fall 1997
Developer: Revolution Software Ltd.
Publisher: Virgin Interactive

Smoke and Mirrors

Revolution's New Adventure Has Some Tricks up Its Sleeve

by Thierry Nguyen

Virgin was one of the few companies in recent memory to release a traditional graphic adventure in a market dominated by Myst-alikes and full-motion-video filler. Revolution's Circle of Blood (known as Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars in the UK) not only had gorgeous animation and background art, but it also possessed a tight and intriguing story that was filled with irony and historical/mythological accuracy. Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror, the next episode in the series, promises an equally compelling story underneath a refined interface.

NOT JUST A SEQUEL

Project Director Charles Cecil insists that the game isn't a mere sequel that just rehashes the old engine and characters but, rather, a new episode that retains certain characters while improving numerous design elements. The interface has been tweaked (many of the icons are now consolidated into one universal icon, similar to what LucasArts did in The Dig) and the overall graphic quality of the game is improved. While the new graphic effects such as translucency, shadows, and lighting will need a fast machine with the latest DirectX drivers, the engine will scale itself appropriately in play, so you can still play the game using DirectX 2.0 with 8MB of RAM.

In this episode, familiar characters such as George, Nico, and various supporting cast members (such as André Lobineau and the gendarme in the café in Montfauçon) return, and you'll find the same attention to historical detail and mythic lore. The focus of the first game was the Knights Templar; this time it's the Mayan Indian culture. The plot has George and Nico running around locales like Paris, Marseilles, Quaramonte (a fictional South American city), and the Caribbean in order to find artifacts that will prevent the return of Tezcatlipoca, a vengeful Mayan god who will bring about the apocalypse predicted in Mayan folklore.

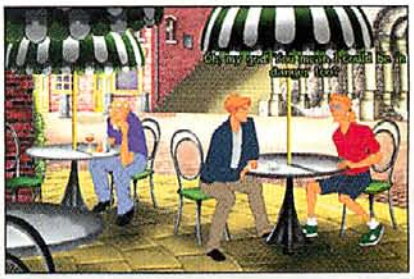
MEANWHILE...

Many elements of the game have been fine-tuned. Graphic backgrounds are multilayered, giving scenes more visual depth. The amount of dialogue has been halved (while still maintaining the strong story), addressing the criticism that the previous game was entirely too "talkative."

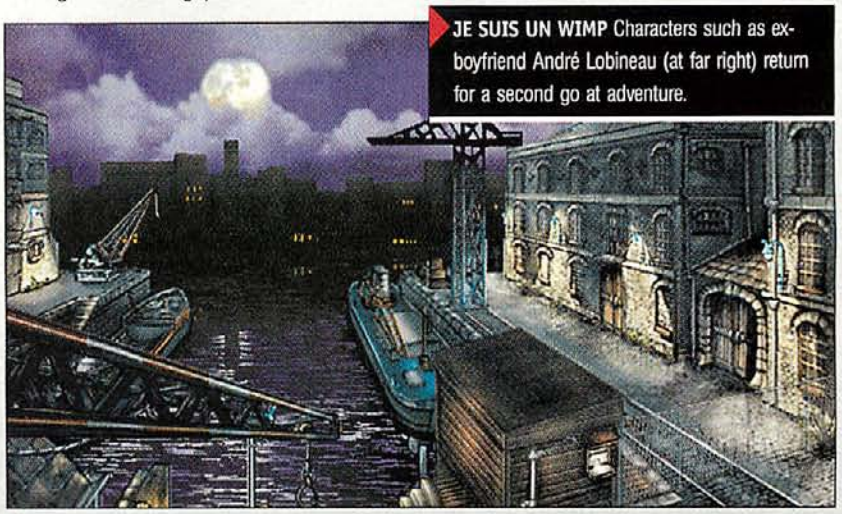
Nico is much more involved in this game. The previous game cast her in a filler role, in which she provided some information, but didn't do much else. Here, not only do you need her help in some of the puzzles, but you actually get to *play* her character. At certain points in the game, you'll switch between playing George and playing Nico. What's interesting is that Nico ends up embarking on the more dangerous quest, while George looks for pirates in the Caribbean, a nice change from the tired "guy does macho, danger-filled quest while girl does thinking quest" motif.

Look for more danger and less mindless clicking when solving puzzles in this game. Cecil explained that the team grew tried of the "try every inventory object on every item" type of puzzle, and while puzzles like that exist still, they aren't the focus of the game. Some puzzles are dangerous, in that they require quick thinking in a limited time span, which can result in either victory or death.

Virgin's next foray into graphic adventure looks quite promising. Circle of Blood was already an excellent game, and Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror looks as if it will be one of the better traditional adventure games this year.

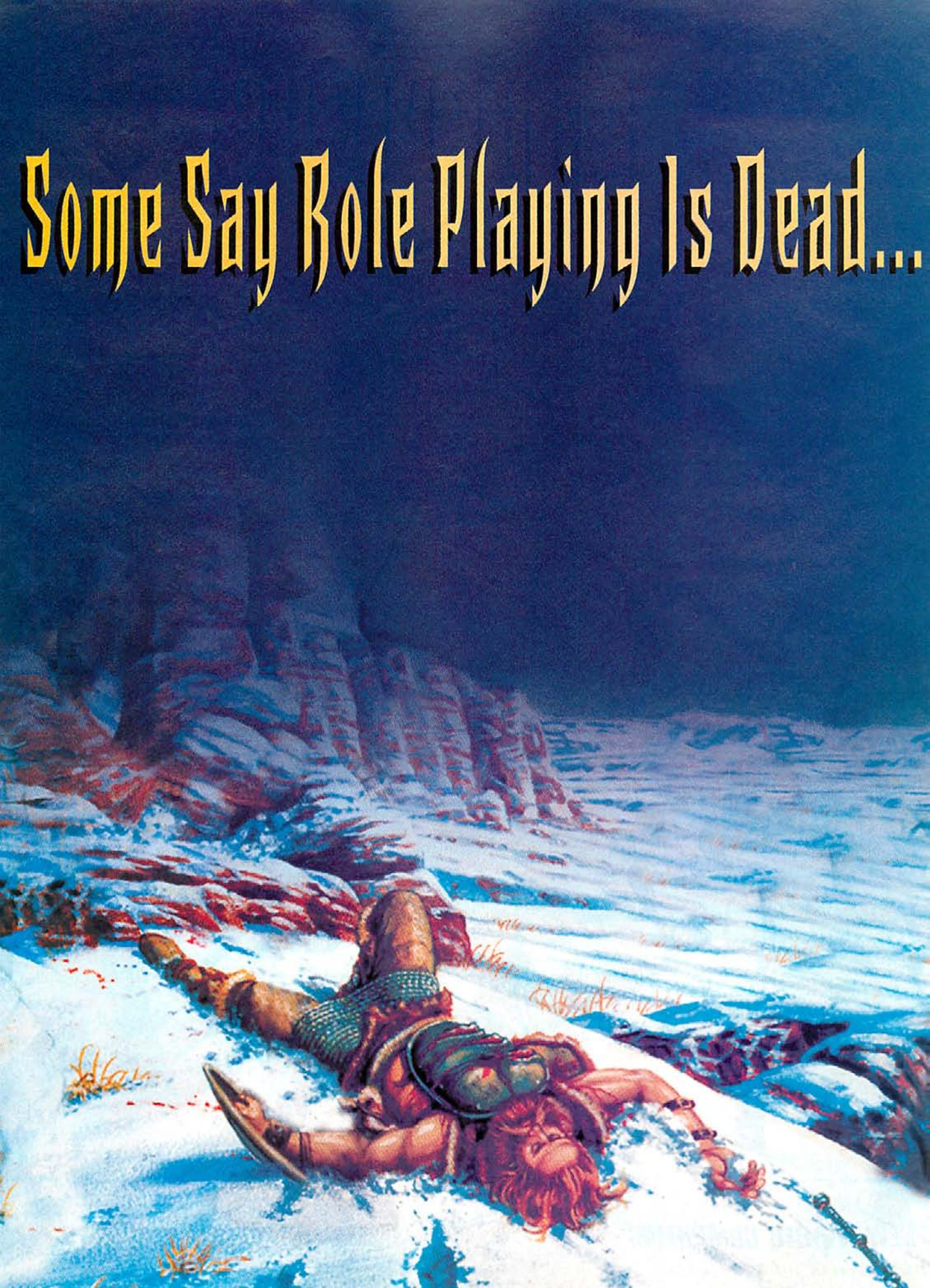


JE SUIS UN WIMP Characters such as ex-boyfriend André Lobineau (at far right) return for a second go at adventure.



FULL MOON TONIGHT The background art this time is even more stunning than in Circle of Blood, with multiple layers that give a better sense of depth and space.

Some Say Role Playing Is Dead...



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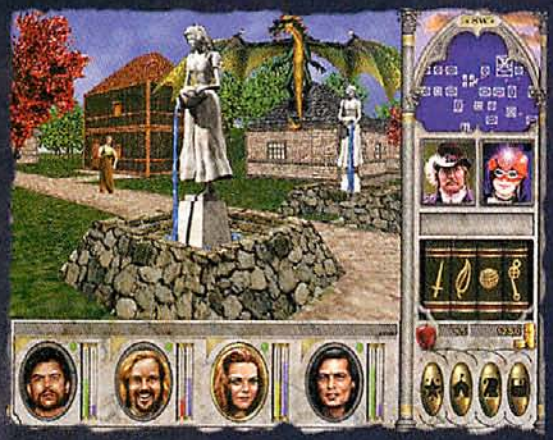

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #144

Target Release Date: September 1997
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: EA

A Legend in the Making

Accolade Brings Gridiron Heroes to Life

by Terry Coleman

ALL-TIME MATCHUPS Call me cynical, but I suspect that the Buffalo Bills' Super Bowl woes will continue, even when they're playing the Canton Bulldogs.

Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers are used to dealing with adversity, from holdouts in training camp to injuries involving key players. But nothing has prepared them for this difficult season. Bewildered by the 49ers' West Coast offense, the Pack suffers three Young-to-Rice TD passes in the first half and loses on opening day at 3Com Park (all the while, Lombardi mutters, "I thought we were playing at Candlestick"). After winning a squeaker against Joe Namath's Jets, Green Bay falls to the leather helmet-clad Chicago Bears, as Red Grange scores 24 points. But this week will be different, says star halfback Paul Hornung, because the cheeseheads will be out in force at the frozen tundra of Lambeau Field for the homecoming game against their most hated rival, the 1950 Cleveland Browns.

A PIGSKIN DREAM COME TRUE

Who says fantasy has to be restricted to overly muscled guys with swords; fairies; and women with improbable cleavage? Sports fans have always argued whether Man o' War could have passed Secretariat down the stretch at Churchill Downs, or whether Muhammad Ali would last 15 rounds with Rocky Marciano. For football fans, the wide variety of rules and equipment changes over several decades have made it difficult to compare great teams from different eras.

Now, NFL LEGENDS '98 changes all that, as it lets you play the greatest teams of all time in an action-oriented, but still very realistic, setting. The game focuses on teams from four critical years of professional football:

In 1928, there are no facemasks, and leather helmets are all the rage.

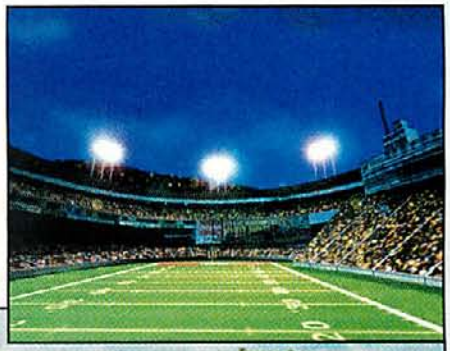
In 1950, the NFL still uses a larger football than that of today, but the ball is now moved in from the sidelines to the interior hash marks.

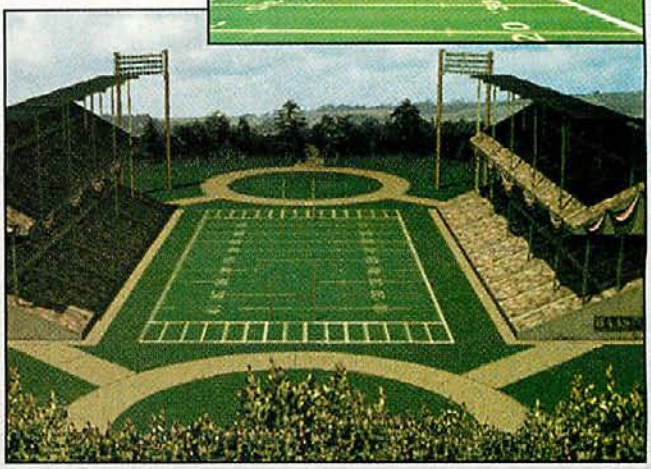
In 1968, both the AFL and NFL have opened up the passing game, although "bump-and-run" coverage is still allowed.

In 1997, 2-point conversions and kickoffs from the 30-yard line change the game even more.

NFL LEGENDS '98 may be a fantasy, but it's rooted in solid research, which makes it feel far more realistic than other action-oriented games such as HARDBALL or NBA LIVE. Football, you see, is won and lost in the trenches, and LEGENDS has the best dynamics of offensive-versus-defensive line play yet seen on the computer. A 300-pound guard like the Cowboys' Larry Allen will blow smaller players from the 1930s off the ball in the first quarter, just as you'd expect. But since the players from yesteryear were accustomed to playing nearly every snap on both offense and defense, their adjusted fatigue levels allow them to run circles around modern athletes as the game clock winds down.

The potential player matchups are mind-boggling. Who can resist sending Bronko Nagurski into the heart of the 1997 Pittsburgh





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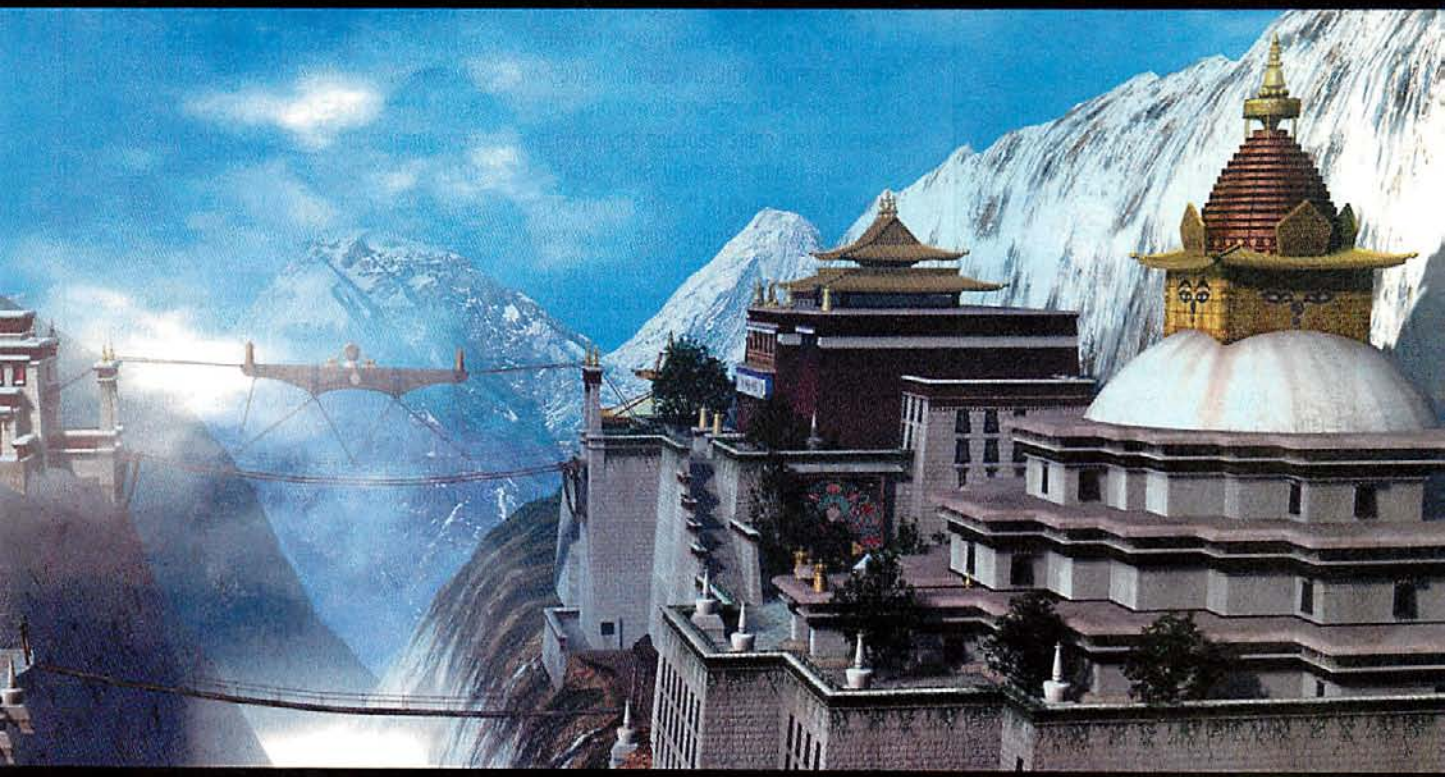

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #198

Famous Teams Featured in NFL Legends '98

1968 Green Bay Packers

Mere months removed from their second consecutive Super Bowl win, the mighty Packers are a team at a crossroads. The nucleus of the team, including Hall-of-Famers Bart Starr, Carroll Dale, and Paul Hornung, is past its prime. Can you find the right mix of veterans and rookies to do what even coach Vince Lombardi couldn't—win a third consecutive Super Bowl?

1968 Miami Dolphins

This young, talented group would become the only undefeated team in NFL history in 1972. The quintessential ball-control team, led by Bob Griese's passing and the running of Mercury Morris and Larry Csonka, the Dolphins scored the most and gave up the fewest points in the league two years running. Think you can beat Don Shula's timetable for an AFC dynasty by four years? Better work on that No-name Defense.

1950 Los Angeles Rams

Formerly the Cleveland Rams (what is it with teams leaving that locality?), this team found tremendous success on the West Coast, with attendance figures of more than 80,000 per game. Here you have not one, but two Hall-of-Fame quarterbacks, Bob Waterfield and Norm van Brocklin, throwing to Crazy Legs Hirsch and Tom Fears. This is one of the great aerial attacks in football history.

1968 Kansas City Chiefs

After having the best record in the AFL during the regular season, the Chiefs lost in the '68 playoffs, only to win the Super Bowl the following year. From QB Len Dawson and linebacker Willie Lanier to long-range kicker Jan Stenrud, this was not just the best of the old AFL teams, but one of the best ever in pro football.

1932 Chicago Bears

This team is to pro football what Babe Ruth's Yankees were to baseball, with almost too many stars to count: Red Grange, Bronko Nagurski, Beattie Feathers (the first documented 1,000-yard rusher)—the list goes on and on. What's really scary is that these guys performed at such a superlative level while playing both offense *and* defense. Can you imagine Dan Marino or Emmitt Smith doing that today?

1950 New York Giants

For the entire decade of the fifties, New York had only one losing season and played in three championship games. One of the all-time great running teams, lead by all-purpose back Frank Gifford, the Giants match up better versus modern teams than you might think. And their uniforms haven't changed much in a half-century, either.

Steelers' defense? Can Troy Aikman's confidence hold up after being intercepted by Dick "Night Train" Lane? Will Barry Sanders frustrate defenders from the fifties just as he does those of the modern era? How well will Bob Griese's famed "computer brain" be able to decipher modern defenses with their cornucopia of zone blitzes? Just imagine the numbers that Otto Graham could put up passing from the Run-and-Shoot offense....

When you match up teams from different eras, a key consideration is deciding in which era to play. A pampered quarterback from the '90s, for example, won't do you much good on a '30s roster, since you are allowed only 20 players on your entire team and playing both sides of the ball is mandatory. Still, certain modern players, such as the Bills' lightning-quick defensive end Bruce Smith, are so talented that they would likely thrive even in the days of Knute Rockne. Whomever you decide to coach, the main limit is your imagination; it's as if you have the entire Pro Football Hall of Fame on your desktop.

BLITZ WITH A BUTTON

The interface is tailor-made for a gamepad. If you are using a Gravis pad, your receivers are color-coded according to whether they are the primary, secondary, or tertiary receiver in the pass pattern—an elegant way to simulate the quarterback "checking off" each receiver. Accolade plans to support Direct Input and daisy-chaining for Microsoft gamepads as well.

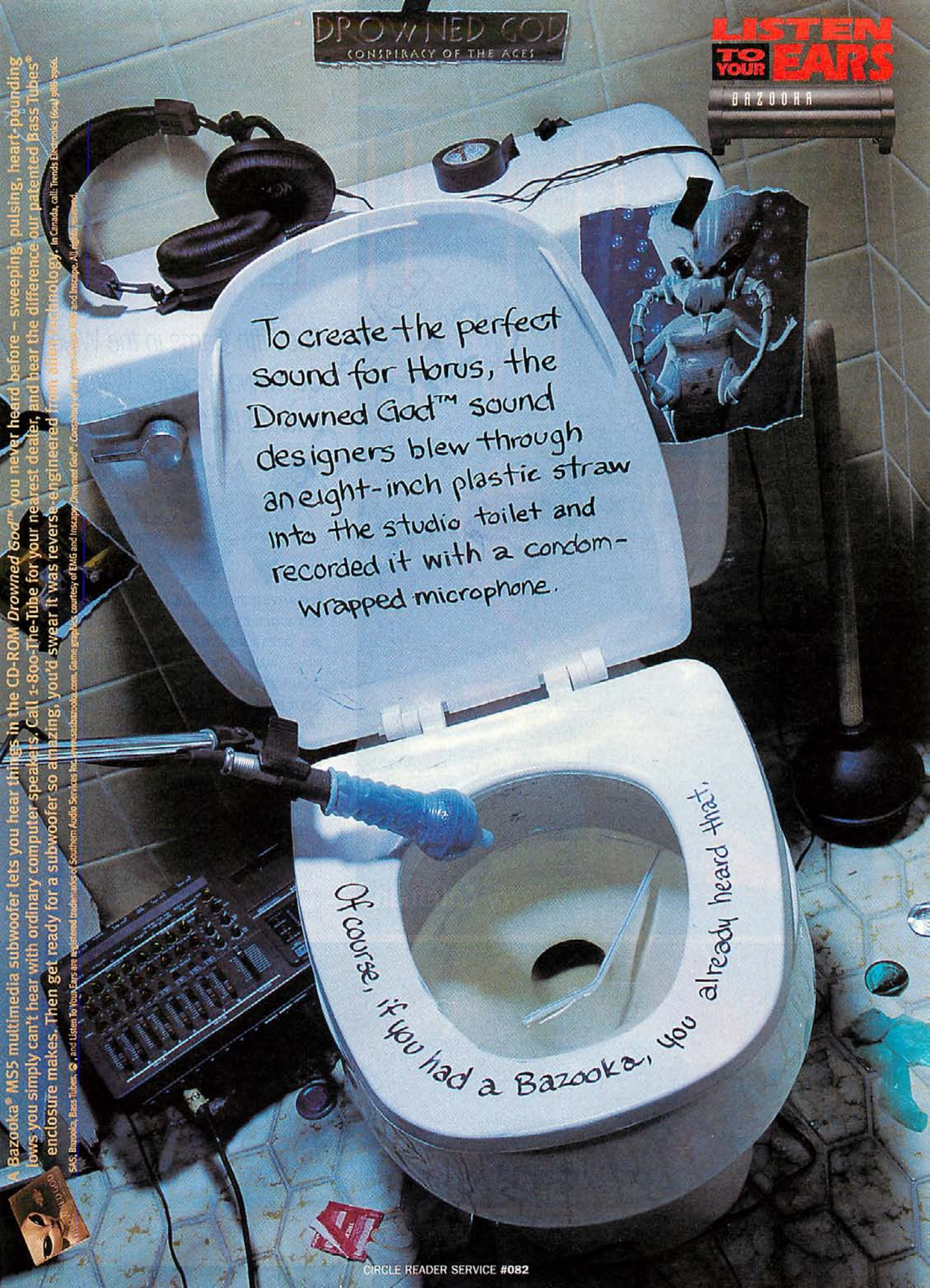
Calling audibles at the line of scrimmage is similarly easy, as you can designate up to four different offensive and defensive plays. While this system lacks the infinite versatility of ABC Monday Night Football, it works well in practice: How many different audibles are you going to call from a given formation, anyway?

Finally, taking a cue from Sierra's venerable Front Page Sports line, NFL Legends '98 supports multiple camera angles. You can spin or rotate the camera, adjust the zoom levels and even the tilt—all with a handful of hot keys.

THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

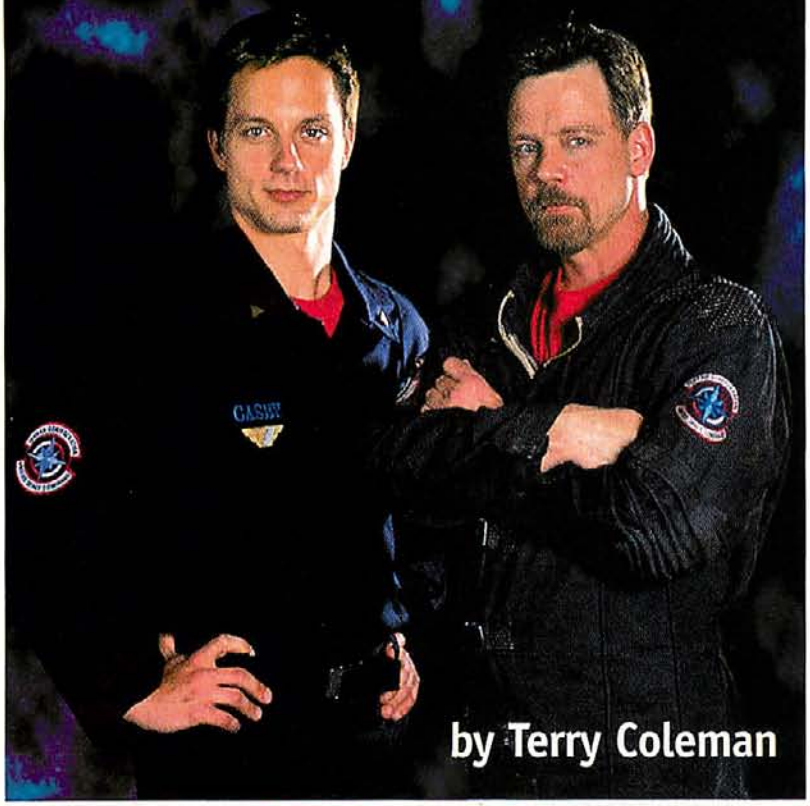
Right now, the season-long simulation aspects of Legends are at least equal to its competitors. The preseason draft, for example, is tailored to the era in which you are playing. In a big departure from earlier football games, you can trade players for future draft picks, which makes multiseason leagues really competitive. Because the statistical base is really integrated into the game design, season-ending stats have the right feel: In Legends, you don't have superhuman scoring, as opposed to say, NBA Live, where even poor teams routinely score 120 points in a regulation game.

It's hard to imagine who wouldn't enjoy NFL Legends '98. Both console and PC gamers alike will enjoy the blend of fast action and gritty gridiron feel. Those who wish to play Legends just for its realistic aspects will appreciate the coach-only mode, already a cut above recent editions of FPS: Football. In addition to robust solo play, you can suit up your players for gridiron wars against another human coach via modem, serial connection, LAN, or TCP/IP. Fresh and fulfilling, Legends is one of those rare game designs that transcends its genre. This promises to be not just one of the best sports games of the year, but one of the best games of the year overall.



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #082

PROPHECY MOTIVE

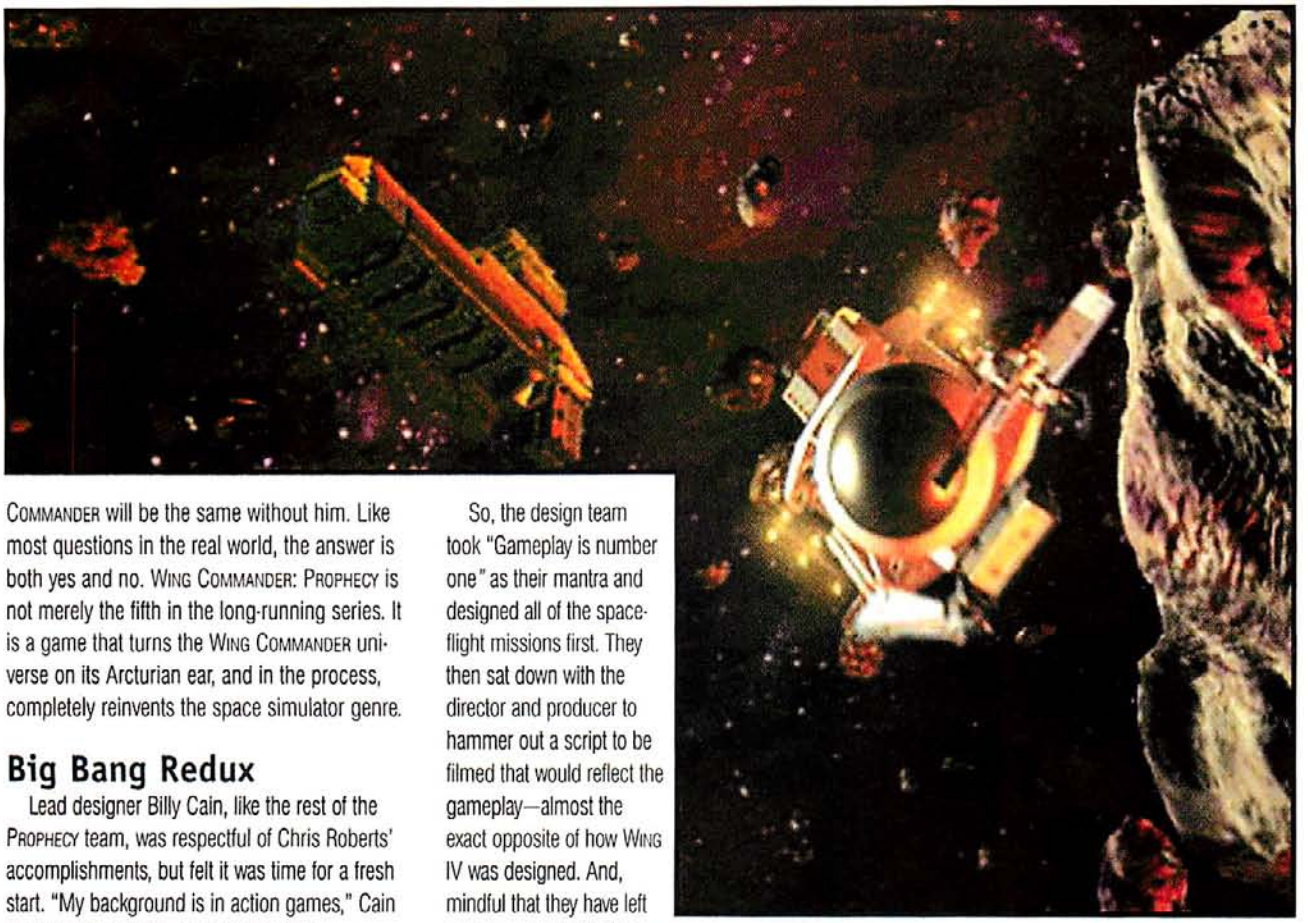


by Terry Coleman

The Fifth Game in the Wing Commander Series Warps Back to Its Action Roots

Wing Commander is the most successful space sim series—both commercially and critically—yet created for the PC. Each Wing Commander game in turn has pushed the available technology to the point that it nearly snapped, and later games in the series form the only "interactive movies" worthy of the name. At least through Wing Commander III, the increasingly multimillion-dollar budgets translated directly into enhanced gameplay. And with the advent of DVD, even Wing Commander IV (sometimes called Wing Commander 3 1/2 by gamers disappointed at its use of the same game engine as WC III) has received a new lease on life (see the sidebar on DVD).

Now comes the turning point. Series founder Chris Roberts has gone to form his own company, Digital Anvil. And while Roberts' excesses (especially monetary ones) were often pointed out by his detractors, it's a fair question to ask whether Wing



NOT JUST SPACE DUST Asteroids are back with a vengeance in Prophecy–and they look even more threatening when viewed with 3D accelerator cards.

COMMANDER will be the same without him. Like most questions in the real world, the answer is both yes and no. WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY is not merely the fifth in the long-running series. It is a game that turns the WING COMMANDER universe on its Arcturian ear, and in the process, completely reinvents the space simulator genre.

Big Bang Redux

Lead designer Billy Cain, like the rest of the PROPHECY team, was respectful of Chris Roberts' accomplishments, but felt it was time for a fresh start. "My background is in action games," Cain says. "I cut my teeth on consoles. WING COMMANDER was the first game that I really thought just *rocked* on the computer. When I look back at WING COMMANDER II, for instance, there was this really cool plotline—a cinematic feel even with the limited technology they had back then—but all the missions were great in and of themselves. What we wanted to do was to take the ideals of WING COMMANDER I and II and combine that with the cinematics and technology from WING III and IV."

So, the design team took "Gameplay is number one" as their mantra and designed all of the space-flight missions first. They then sat down with the director and producer to hammer out a script to be filmed that would reflect the gameplay—almost the exact opposite of how WING IV was designed. And, mindful that they have left some gamers behind the technology curve in earlier WING COMMANDERS, PROPHECY's design team is trying hard to offer a rich gaming experience on several levels. 3D accelerators are supported through Microsoft's Direct3D API and also have native support for 3DfX (and possibly other cards as well). Those without a 3D card will find that Origin's software engine provides a surprisingly high frame rate, even with more than 65,000 colors and a more than adequate range of shading and textures. Of course, if you have the latest Pentium 233, PROPHECY has plenty of bells and whistles to give you maximum bang for the buck: rotating pods on larger ships, tiny particles in explosions, even vapor trails that stop just short of being over-the-top. It's tough to be all things to all gamers, but PROPHECY looks to bridge the hardware gap better than most.

PROPHECY

"By losing the multiple-choice responses and going to a specific cinematic where what you see is based on how well you perform in the game, we've achieved a certain clarity."

—Adam Foshko, Movie Director

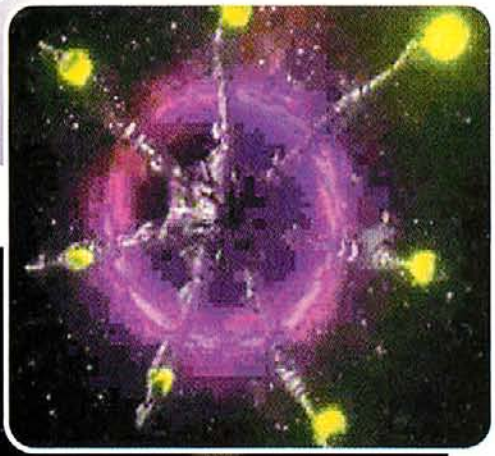
INSIDE THE INNER SANCTUM Director Adam Foshko (left) and Lead Designer Billy Cain work in the PROPHECY War Room.

Villains, Knock Off All That Evil!

WING COMMANDER IV suffered from, among other things, a lack of good villains. Thus, the time would seem ripe for a comeback by those bad kitties we all love to hate, the Kilrathi. And indeed, it appears that they are poised to return with a vengeance. The Confederation has issued warnings of a fully decked-out Kilrathi battle armada, ready to sail. But on your arrival you discover that the Kilrathi were brutally declawed; the fleet has been destroyed, and all you find are lifeless hulks drifting in space.

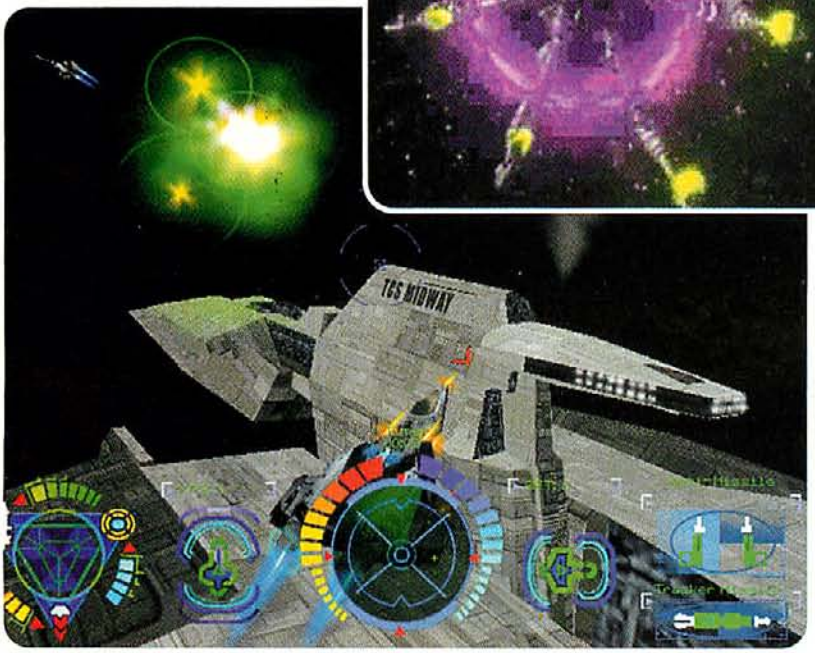
Obviously, whatever took out a fully primed Kilrathi invasion fleet—leaving no casualties of its own—is something that seriously compromises Confederation security. The game thus begins to unfold in the manner of a taut mystery, as you gather intelligence about your alien foe. What you find (without giving away too many secrets) is a race so terrible that it makes the Kilrathi look like household pets.

The design team went to a lot of trouble making the aliens look totally different from any race yet portrayed in the WING COMMANDER universe, even eliciting the aid of Syd Mead (of *Blade Runner* fame) as a consultant. The end result is a rich, organic look for the alien ships—sort of a *Babylon 5*-meets-SPACE MARINES motif.



The design involves more than eye candy, however. Owing to their organic design, the alien vessels have special capabilities. Imagine the surprise of a Confederation pilot when the three small alien vessels approaching his squadron suddenly combine into one craft—especially when the newly formed vessel has more firepower than its three constituent parts!

If that isn't enough, try piloting over one of the alien capital ships. These behemoths require that you take out a ship's systems one at a time—no more launching a single point-blank torpedo and flying back for the medal ceremony. As a result, you might be required to fly multiple missions to take out *one* capital ship. The sheer volume of these vessels—some over *three kilome-*



MORE LIGHTS, MORE SOUND, MORE ACTION Even in this early state, PROPHECY shows a lot of improvements over WING IV. Check out the pivoting engines on the Confederation Vampire (top), the opening octopus arms on the secret Alien vessel (center), and the clean "no cockpit" HUD and multicolored explosion (bottom). And with the Dolby Pro Logic Surround sound, in space they *can* hear you scream–from any angle.

ters long—has to be seen to be believed. It takes a long time just to fly past one of these monsters. In comparison, the *Star Wars* Death Star would look like a PT boat in the wake of a battleship.

The Minimalist Approach

Certain WING COMMANDER tactics have been changed for PROPHECY. You won't have to jump back to the rear and side turrets on your torpedo bomber, because the AI takes care of all that now. A lot of your choice as to which fighter to fly has been taken away. This is a step backward, but according to Billy Cain, it's a step back to better gameplay: "It's the WING I paradigm. If we know what ship you (and your wingman) are in, we can design the mission to take advantage of that. Our goal is to make every mission unique, as alive and vibrant as we can."

Likewise, your ability to choose your wingmen has been curtailed. If you chose to always fly with Maniac, for example, and you had a pivotal scene with another character, you wouldn't have any investment in that character (simply because you would never have gotten around to flying with him). The result would be a flat scene, something the PROPHECY team is determined to avoid. They have a point: If you think back, the defining moments of the WING COMMANDERS have generally occurred when losing a companion, such as when Spirit sacrificed herself in WING II. It's also justifiable from a gameplay standpoint; since you no longer portray Colonel Blair, you wouldn't have the authority to make personnel decisions.

So, in this new chapter of WING COMMANDER, you become Casey, the latest hotshot Confed pilot; it's almost like starting back at WING I. Any lingering feeling of deja vu is limited, however, by the fact that

A WING COMMANDER Retrospective

Chris Roberts' dream was to recreate the scintillating combat scenes from movies like *Star Wars* on the computer screen. When those plans fell through, Roberts came up with The War Against the Kilrathi, a grand struggle truly worthy of an epic trilogy. The WING COMMANDER series began with

bitmapped vessels that look creaky indeed when matched up against the sleek vessels of later spaceflight games. Even so, gamers braved the MCGA-graphics galaxies in their jaggedly polygonal craft to take on increasingly ferocious feline foes, simply because there wasn't any game remotely like WC. And just as the Confederation scientists added new technological marvels in the game, so did Origin continue to push the hot hardware of the day. The series hyperjumped to true VGA graphics, then SVGA graphics, and simply by putting wingman voiceovers in the cockpit, made Sound Blaster into the default technology for "subspace communications" in the gaming universe.

Yet Chris Roberts' greatest legacy wasn't an array of technical achievements. The secret of WING COMMANDER's success is that it was the first action-oriented PC game to involve us with the characters. From the "hot washup" scenes in the bar of the Tiger's Claw during WING COMMANDER, to the elaborately staged film clips of WING COMMANDER IV, the cut-scenes were truly cinematic (and a welcome break from wrist-wracking action). The designers made sure that we knew why Vagabond was obsessed with playing cards, or how honor was more than a word to Spirit. As a result, your wingmen felt like characters in an RPG, rather than just another few lines of AI code.

With each new chapter in the WING COMMANDER saga, the story became more important. The writers, led by science-fiction author Ellen Guon, explored such themes as the fine line between heroes and traitors, the effects of a long, drawn-out war, and how the winners always write the final history. By the time of WING COMMANDER III: HEART OF THE TIGER, these universal themes were given a big budget, and filmed as though they were a full-length motion picture. Three years later, WING III is starting to show its age: The Kilrathi often look like angry Muppets, and a few of the big-name actors were visibly uneasy with the interactive format. Even so, WING III is more than a museum piece, because it was the first—and still is the best—example of that strange hybrid, the interactive movie.

WING COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM is a cinematic extension of WING III. It's essentially a galactic docudrama, featuring seven CDs packed with full-motion video. The acting is much more assured than that of WING III, featuring fine performances by Tom Wilson (Maniac) and Mark Hamill (Blair) among others. But while the story itself is quite engaging—particularly when exploring the dynamic relationship between war hero Colonel Blair and his mentor, Admiral Tolwyn—FREEDOM lacks the visceral punch of Roberts' earlier work, as the gameplay takes a definite backseat to the film.

When you consider that a very good game such as WING IV is considered a setback, however minor, it shows just how high expectations are for the next installment. Our bet is that WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY does such a good job of blending gameplay and cinematics that it will shine as one of the brightest in the WING COMMANDER canon.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #110

PROPHECY

"The most fun I've had with WING COMMANDER was bringing my *CGW* acting award [for WING III] to rehearsal for WING IV. At first, Mark Hamill thought I made it up—then he asked why he didn't win one."

—Tom "Maniac" Wilson

Colonel Blair (once again played by Mark Hamill) is still around. If you can get over the fact that in a previous existence, you *were* Col. Blair, you'll have fun being virtually young again—although you do have to show the proper hero worship to Blair.

Some of the rest of the old gang are still around as well, most notably Tom Wilson, who never gets enough lines as Maniac. (While Origin/EA has no official comment, it's obvious that everyone concerned would love to do the long-rumored "Maniac Missions" for WING COMMANDER. It's mainly a matter of time and money.) Ginger Lynn Allen reprises her role as Rachael, after a hiatus during WING IV. In a nice touch, she gets to actually *act* this time, instead of just raising the blood pressure of every male pilot on the carrier.

I'll let you decide whether PROPHECY is more or less dramatically effective than its predecessors. But I will say that I was particularly impressed with the performances director Adam Foshko elicited from his actors, especially since most of them had never even played a computer game before. We'll see how well those performances translate into the final product.

The Best Elements of Each

The missions themselves are a cornucopia of classic WING COMMANDER themes, except that there will be special multiplayer missions for Internet play. The ever-present branching tree is more dynamic than before. Missions now have degrees of success or failure, which give more variety for both the in-flight and movie sequences. In addition to the torpedo runs on larger craft, you have both small and medium dogfights, which may occur anywhere: The

OOZING ALIEN HORDES Three alien ships move to combine into a larger vessel for attack (top left). Above, a damaged alien seems to almost bleed blue into a nearby planet's atmosphere. From the asymmetric spines of the Porcupine to the sleek and deadly Manta (left), each alien ship displays a unique and eerie organic quality.

designers of PROPHECY are big fans of WING II, in which you often had to scramble to protect the carrier from surprise attacks, so expect to see those kinds of elements in PROPHECY as well. Then there are escort missions, which are designed to be difficult, as in the SECRET MISSIONS disks, plus a few covert operations that we can't tell you about just yet. Finally, it is possible that asteroids—a staple of WING I and II—will make it back into the line-up for PROPHECY.

What you *won't* find during the missions are the same old audio and video cues, such as Maniac's annoyingly repetitive dialogue every time you told him to attack in WING IV. The new engine allows for Dolby Pro Logic sound, which, if you have the right audio equipment, provides dynamic sounds for every object in the environment. Thus, if you are in a battle and an enemy vessel is slightly to the left and behind you, that's where you'll hear it. The constant buzz of radio chatter, zooming ships, and explosions adds tremendously to your perception of the battlefield.

Another big change is in the cinematic sequences. Generally, these happen between missions, but without the interactive "multiple choice" responses of WING III or IV. What now happens is very much as in WING II, where the movie clip you see is dependent on what you do in the flight combat sequences. Director Adam Foshko feels that this approach gives the linear portions of the game more punch, since you aren't playing "20 questions" in every scene.

In the end, what's most impressive about PROPHECY is not just the technology, even though the 3D engine beats anything on the market (even without an accelerator card). Neither is it that the movies are more tightly focused, or that the missions are better designed. It's that the team took chances rather than repeat a best-selling formula. They completely dissected what has made WING COMMANDER the best gaming series to date, kept the best parts, and discarded the rest. The fact that PROPHECY will cost much less than WING IV will doubtless make EA very happy. The fact that this could be the best WING COMMANDER ever in terms of gameplay will doubtless make a lot of gamers very happy as well. As for myself, I can't wait to make multiple torpedo runs on one of those mile-long alien capital ships.

WING COMMANDER Goes DVD

For a Hollywood type, WING COMMANDER PROPHECY's producer, Mark Day, is an odd sort, and not merely because of his *Three Musketeers*-vintage beard. You see, Day has a deep, dark secret: He is also (hold on to your joystick) a *serious gamer*. Born of two worlds, yet belonging entirely to neither, Day spends his time in Mr Spock-like fashion, striving to create the killer app that will forever bridge the gap between FMV and traditional games. Small wonder, then, that he has found a home at Origin, where he is currently finishing the DVD version of WING COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM. This DVD epic will feature the same gameplay as the original, but the movies will lose their compression artifacts, finally becoming truly cinematic in scope.

MARK DAY, PROPHECY PRODUCER (LEFT) WITH TOM WILSON (MANIAC)

In addition to rhapsodizing about the DVD version of WING COMMANDER IV, Day had plenty to say on the subject of FMV games in general. "To me, an FMV game is any that benefits from video, whether it's a postage stamp movie (as in CIVILIZATION II) or a full-screen treatment. For example, you can click right past the video sequences in COMMAND & CONQUER, but why? They really enhance the experience. I can hardly wait for the day when 3D-shooters like QUAKE incorporate video in a similar fashion to draw you even further into the experience."

Day describes DVD as "a technology in search of a home, much like CD-ROM when it first appeared. At first CDs were seen as a way to avoid putting your game on 12 floppies; now, of course, they're much more. I expect the same for DVD, once designers learn how to best make use of the new technology."

The conversion of WING IV to DVD was obvious, according to Day. "You had something with the highest production qualities of any game ever produced. What you see with the DVD version was that all the time and money spent shooting WING COMMANDER IV on 35mm film was well spent. There's a huge difference between the MPEG-2 capability of DVD versus the compression routines used for earlier versions."

WING COMMANDER IV will be aggressively bundled with DVD units, making it a great "look at what my hot-rod computer can do" conversation piece. If you haven't yet played WING IV, and you're tempted to get a DVD player anyway, this gives you a good excuse. If, on the other hand, you are waiting for that one killer application before taking the plunge, don't worry—WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY has already been slated for DVD.

All the money spent on WING IV is a little more justified in the DVD version.

The Baron

Bullets riddle your plane, shattering wood and shredding canvas. The sky screams with red tracers, smoke and explosions. And as the Red Baron himself blasts out of the sun's glare... as your palms start to sweat and your pulse races... as you hear the ominous groan of stressed wings the instant before they shatter... you realize that this is much more than just a game. This is a taste of history. And your next move will determine whether you become a legend... or another kill in the Baron's book.

Eight years ago we set the standard for flight simulation with a product so timeless and revolutionary that it has remained unchallenged... until now.

The Baron is Back.

Visit our website and download the original Red Baron™ for free! www.sierra.com/RB2

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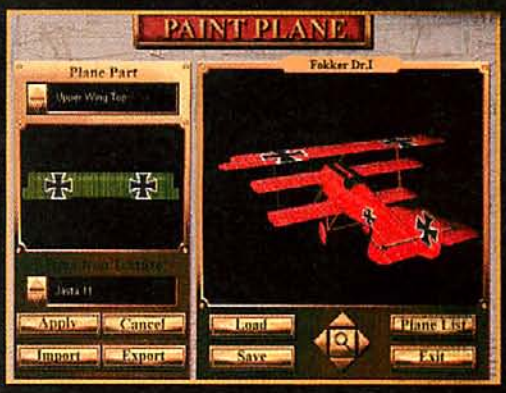
Over three years in the making, Red Baron II is an epic achievement. From gamer directed features to state-of-the art technology, it is the ultimate recreation of the men, machines and experience that marked the birth of aerial combat.

- Dynamix's revolutionary new 3Space 2.0™ engine takes a giant leap ahead of the competition with unmatched realism in terrain modelling.
- User-definable difficulty levels for players of all skill levels.
- Multiplayer dogfighting action featuring internet, network and head-to-head modem support.
- Fly single missions for quick action or select Campaign play for a full tour of duty.
- Over 40 unique aircraft with 22 flyable planes.



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Red Baron II™

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #370

Get Me

Times have been tough lately for computer role-playing games. Once the proudest of warriors in all of computer gaming, RPGs came sputtering into the mid-'90s like a group of gasping, wheezing old men—riddled with dated engines, hackneyed stories, and flaccid gameplay. While we watched the rest of the industry flourish, magazines such as this one and gamers everywhere began to openly wonder: Is the RPG genre finally on its last legs?

The answer, we're now happy to report, is a resounding no—not by a longshot! You see, a funny thing happened on the way to the old-age home: The RPG managed, somehow, to inject itself with a fresh dose of health and mana, and it's beginning to radiate with life again. Now, as we approach the end of 1997, role-playing games are poised to make a triumphant return to the center of gaming.

What accounts for this great reversal of fortune? We credit three things.

First, the genre is finally catching up with gaming's technological advances of the past few years. RPGs have notoriously long development times, and only now are we beginning to see RPGs featuring things like fast 3D engines, high-resolution color, multiplay, and stereophonic sound.

Second, now that gamers have feasted upon such graphically stunning games as QUAKE, they're hungering for something a little meatier. You see it happening in the action genre itself, where a number of upcoming titles are beefing themselves up with RPG-style characters and story elements. Instead of being a pariah, the RPG has suddenly become something to emulate.

Third, there's the little matter of a game called DIABLO. Yes, Blizzard's megahit boiled the RPG down to its most basic element—dungeon hack-and-slashing—but it did it with such style and addictive gameplay that its value as *entertainment* was impossible to ignore. (Even the grande dame of role-playing herself, our own Scorpia, recently admitted to the editors how much fun she had with DIABLO.)

We can argue endlessly—as the Usenet threads will verify—over whether DIABLO was a "real" RPG, but why bother? Just be glad that it made RPGs cool again for gamers. Thanks to this one game, you suddenly have thousands of new gamers who are familiar with concepts such as armor and weapon class, and experience points—and who are now ready for

dieval On Your PC!

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something deeper. Be glad, too, that the game inspired a number of RPG designers to angrily declare, "That's not an RPG. I'll show you a *real* RPG!" Good. Thank you. We've been waiting. DIABLO proved to be the kick in the pants that the genre desperately needed.

Treasure Chest

The payoff for RPG fans is a bounty of new games—the richest in years. Over the next 20 pages, we'll focus on the highlights of what to expect in the coming year. Along with previews of major releases from the Grand Triumverate of RPGs—ULTIMA, WIZARDRY, and MIGHT AND MAGIC—we also look at a number of long-delayed projects, as well as at the first PC version of the extraordinary FINAL FANTASY console series from Japan. We'll point you in the direction of some of the more high-profile online multiplayer games, and focus on two of the more promising shareware RPGs.

But enough talk. Let's adjust our armor, light our torches, and head forth upon our quest. It's time to get medieval!

Legend

Single Player . . . . . Action . . . . .
Multiplayer . . . . . Traditional . . . . .
Online . . . . . Adventure . . . . .
Console . . . . .

Might and Magic VI: The Mandate of Heaven

New World Computing's Fabled Franchise Returns for More RPG Magic

Four long years have passed since DARKSIDE OF XEEN, New World Computing's previous entry in its landmark MIGHT AND MAGIC role-playing series, and for those of us who love the series, it has seemed like an eternity. For New World Computing, though, those years were anything but quiet, as the company shifted its focus to create two of the greatest strategy games of the past decade—HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC I and II. And given the phenomenal success of those games, it's hard to argue with the company's plan.

Now series creator and New World president Jon Van Caneghem is turning his attention back to role-playing with a new game due this November—MIGHT AND MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN. Those familiar with the previous games, however, should not expect more of the same. Van Caneghem and his team are pushing the series forward technologically to create a MIGHT AND MAGIC unlike anything you've seen yet.

HAIL MARY M&M VI provides you with an endless siege of monsters to slay. Unless you've got the proper might and magic to defeat this minotaur, however, you might want to say your prayers.

Paging Roland

MIGHT AND MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN takes place in the same universe as the previous games, but instead of placing us back into the long-running storyline of the struggle between Sheltem and Corak, this game moves to another world seeded by the Ancients long ago. This new world happens to be Enroth, the setting—hardly a coincidence—of the two HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC strategy games.

As M&M VI opens, you discover that King Roland has mysteriously disappeared, and Enroth has been plunged into chaos. Floods, earthquakes, and an invasion of hellish flying demons are destroying the land, and the people are beginning to wonder if the trouble is a sign that the Ironfist Dynasty has lost the Mandate of Heaven, the divine right to rule. Your main quest is to discover what lies behind the chaos in Enroth and to try to return the land to order.

Along the way, you'll participate in dozens of nonlinear sidequests and learn more about the Ancients' struggle—the uberstory behind the whole MIGHT AND MAGIC series. What's more, New World tells us you'll be preparing yourself for HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III, which the company says will weave into the M&M VI storyline. (HEROES III is as yet unannounced—so calm down for now.)

Face Lift

New World has completely revamped the character creation and spell systems for M&M VI. Instead of randomly rolling stats, as in the previous games, you can customize your characters with the new allocated point system. You'll be able to choose the class and initial secondary skills of each member of your party (composed of four characters, down from the previous games' six) and then increase the stats for each character from a pool of points. As Van Caneghem puts it, "You can make [for example] a really strong but really dumb fighter, if you like, or create a very well balanced thief."

For the new spell system, New World has eliminated the need to collect gems for spellcasting, and has gone instead with a straight spell-point system. The new spell system comprises nine categories of magic, ranging from elemental to spiritual magic. Different character classes will be able to use different kinds of magic. Spells will overlap somewhat, so that if a quest requires a specific spell, gamers will have access to it no matter what character types make up their party.

MIGHT AND MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN upgrades every aspect of the M&M gaming system, with a new 3D engine to provide smooth-scrolling, 360-degree movement.

Target Release Date: Winter '97–'98
Developer: New World Computing
Publisher: 3DO
www.nwcomputing.com

HELLO DOWN THERE M&M VI features a smooth-scrolling 3D engine that will let you move in all directions, including, at times, straight up into the air.

TRAIN IN VAIN You'll be able to get buff at the game's various training grounds, as long as you have the experience points to pay.

Graphically, M&M VI represents a quantum leap over the previous games, with a brand-new 3D engine that will provide smooth-scrolling (as opposed to tile-based scrolling), 360-degree movement throughout the fantasy world. The world itself is a vivid hi-res, 3D environment (though New World promises that a 3D accelerator won't be needed to play the game).

The biggest news, for some fans, will be the addition of real-time combat—which will coexist with the game's traditional turn-based model. Why did New World go this way? According to Van Caneghem, it's because of the new engine's capability for smooth-scrolling movement. "It didn't make sense to force turn-based movement, hence turn-based combat, on the player," he says. "We're giving gamers the option to play in either mode, whichever best suits their style of play."

In keeping with the real-time model, New World stresses that M&M VI will be a living, changing world as you play. Events won't always be triggered by your actions, and the game's dozens of NPCs will often follow their own agendas through the world. In addition, locations will not remain static as you continue to play. For example, if you hack and slash a group of monsters in a forest and then move on, you might come back later to find it reinhabited by another group of monsters.

Red Eye

Fans of New World's MIGHT AND MAGIC games (both the strategy and RPG titles) know that the company always manages to infuse the series with that mysterious X factor—that addictive ingredient that makes you play the game night after night until your eyes hurt. Based on what we've seen so far of MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, you may want to start catching up on your sleep now. They just may have done it again. *—Jeff Green*

Jon Van Caneghem: The Hero of MIGHT AND MAGIC

Jon Van Caneghem has headed the MIGHT AND MAGIC franchise ever since MIGHT AND MAGIC I in 1986 (his first computer game), which he designed and programmed almost entirely by himself. Van Caneghem was gracious enough to take a break from the hectic schedule of the new game to answer a few questions.

CGW: *As someone who has been developing computer RPGs for more than a decade, you've seen the genre's popularity ebb and flow. For the past few years, everybody has been saying that the genre was near-dead, but now it seems to be on the rise again. Any theories as to why it's making a comeback?*

Van Caneghem: Rumors of the death of CRPGs have been greatly exaggerated! The product development cycles of CRPGs are typically much longer than that of the standard run-'n'-gun games that have been so popular in recent years. With the hardware advancing at such a staggering rate, it just didn't make sense—financially—for most companies to invest resources into the genre. However, the gaming audience is looking for products with more "meat" in them now, a hunger that 3D shooters and pseudo-RPGs can't satisfy.

CGW: *Have you played any of the newer RPGs, like DIABLO and DAGGERFALL? If so, what do you think of them?*

Van Caneghem: Yes, I have. Both give a pretty good gaming experience for what they are. However, DIABLO is an action game disguised as an RPG, and DAGGERFALL is a fine RPG saddled with 1994 technology.

CGW: *What other games are you into these days?*

Van Caneghem: Lately I've been fiddling with DUNGEON KEEPER and BETRAYAL IN ANTARA, but my time is really dedicated to MIGHT AND MAGIC VI development.

CGW: *In the beginning, you did all the work yourself. How much of MIGHT AND MAGIC VI are you directly involved in?*

Van Caneghem: I'm still involved in virtually all aspects of game development. There's everything from designing the interface, maps, and quests to overseeing and directing the artwork, storyline, and overall look and feel of the game. The buck stops here.

CGW: *Do you still enjoy getting your hands dirty with development, design, and coding?*

Van Caneghem: Yes! That's where the fun of this job is.

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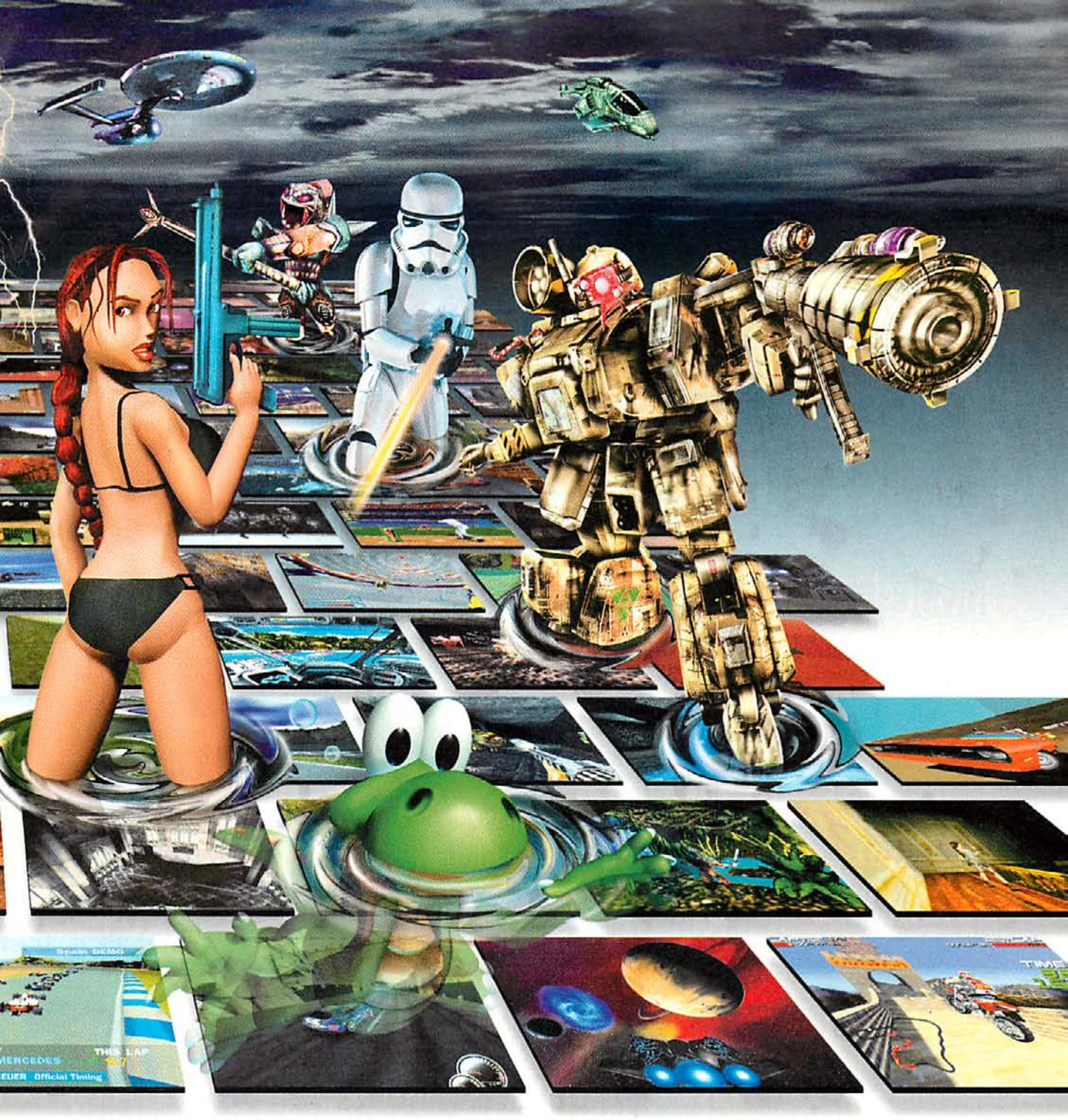

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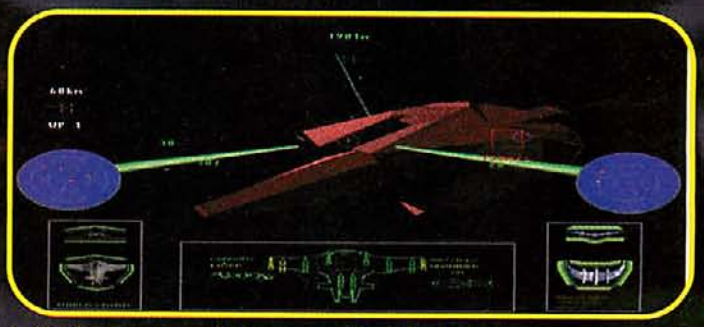

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Return to Krondor

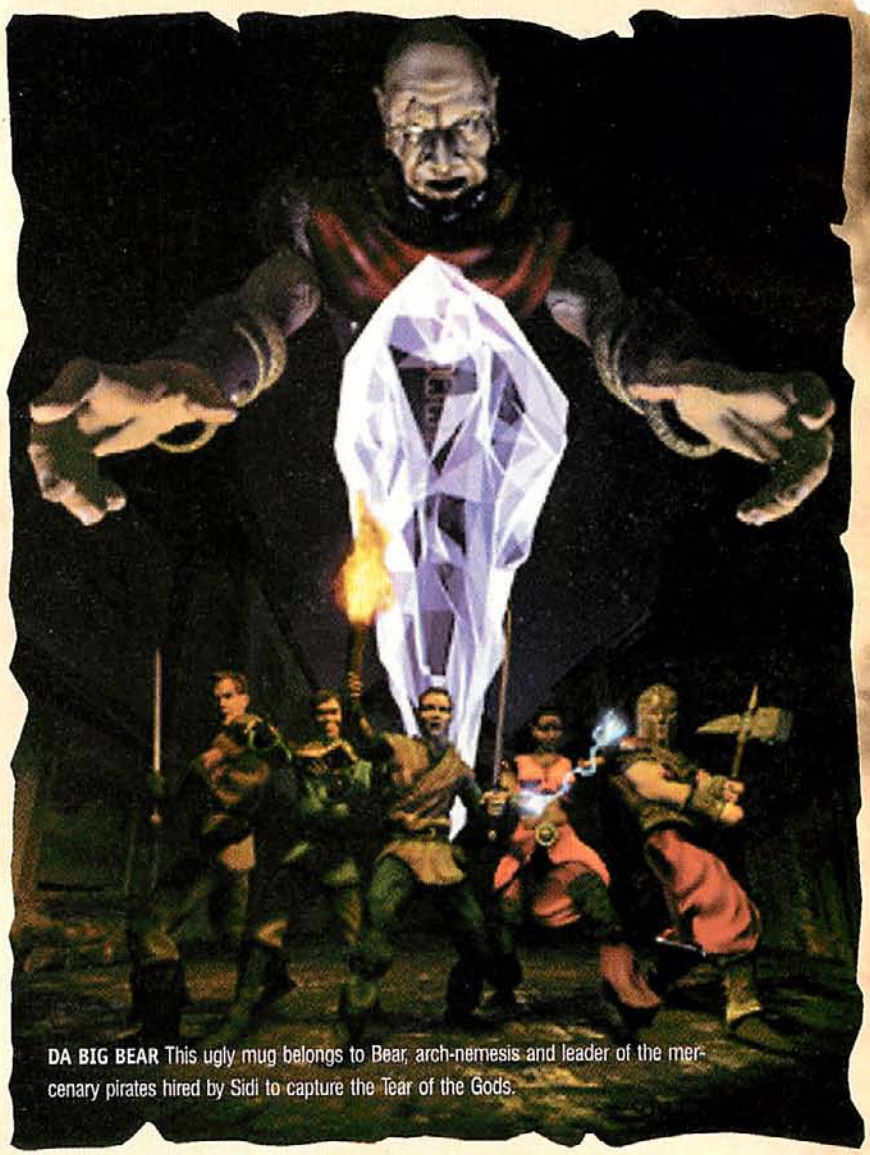
Raymond Feist Makes a Triumphant Return in the Long-Awaited sequel

In 1993, Sierra On-Line released BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, the first RPG based on Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar* saga. It subsequently went on to win both *CGW*'s Premier Award for CRPG of the Year and a place in the Hall of Fame, mainly due to the fact that Feist actually helped in the writing and design of the game.

Subsequently, though, there was a fallout between Feist and Sierra On-line, and Feist moved his services over to 7th Level, while Sierra continued work with their own RPG based on the KRONDOR engine, the recently released BETRAYAL IN ANTARA. Now, after a couple years of work, Feist and 7th Level are preparing to release RETURN TO KRONDOR, the true sequel to BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR.

Dig It

RETURN TO KRONDOR takes place about a year after BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR. Prince Arutha still rules over the city of Krondor, Pug is still the master Magician at Stardock, and James, though now a Seigneur, is still up to his roguish activities. This time though, the game doesn't start with a mere "escort service" plot setup, as in BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR. Instead, we begin with a treasure hunt.



DA BIG BEAR This ugly mug belongs to Bear, arch-nemesis and leader of the mercenary pirates hired by Sidi to capture the Tear of the Gods.

A priceless artifact, the Tear of the Gods, is lost at sea. It was being transported by members of the Temple of Ishap (the prime god in Midkemia) when they were attacked by pirates working for a mad sorcerer named Sidi who, for reasons unknown, wants the relic. Unfortunately, the ship containing the Tear accidentally sunk, leaving the Tear at the bottom of the sea. The initial, overall quest is to simply find a way to recover the Tear from the ocean floor. But in the process of recovering the Tear, the player characters are drawn into a massive, three-way conflict for the Tear, and end up fighting an evil that may even be older than the gods of Midkemia (the Valheru perhaps?).

This time, you'll be playing five characters, of whom only one was from the previous game. Of the characters we've seen in the books, you'll be portraying James (one of the more popular characters in *Riftwar*), and William, the Knight-Marshal of Krondor and son of Pug the Magician. The three other player characters will

be new ones made for the game: Jazhara, the Keshian sorceress (from an exotic, Middle Eastern-style empire); Solon, warrior-priest brother of the Temple of Ishap; and Kendaric, a reluctant Midkemian wizard.

The game is separated into 10 chapters with an overall goal. As in the previous game, each chapter has one main "quest" you must fulfill in order to move the story along, but you are free to do just about anything you want until you finish that main quest. Within these chapters, while different party members come and go, none will leave permanently, unlike in BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR.

A Whole New World

Since Sierra retains the rights to the original BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR engine, 7th Level went ahead and created a new one for its game. Rather than go with the first-person perspective in the first game, they went completely third-person. And if their ideas for this engine actually come through, it will be immensely better than its predecessor.

When traveling large distances around the game world, the overview map is used, but when the player reaches a specific place of interest, it switches to the third-person view where you navigate the area with the cursor.

Combat is still turn-based, and is seamlessly integrated into the game's action. Instead of walking down a street and seeing the words "you encounter a gang of thieves," you'll actually see the thieves approach you on the street, taunt you, and then draw their weapons as combat begins.

Combat uses the same rules as the original Midkemia role-playing pencil-and-paper game (on which the books are based). While fighting, a wide variety of activities are possible. Characters can fiddle with their inventory, defend one another, cast spells, and even interact with the environment. One example would be a prison break in which the characters can attack the guards, pick the locks, and equip themselves from their fallen enemy, all during combat.

Perhaps the coolest feature in RETURN TO KRONDOR is the use of animated 3D models for characters. 7th Level is hard at work creating well-animated models that will be placed on top of beautifully rendered background art. The use of these models allows for minute details that enhance the overall atmosphere. During dialogue, for example, characters will scratch their heads in puzzlement, shake their fists in anger, or helpfully point you in the right direction; while during combat, wizards will make the necessary hand motions when casting spells.

RETURN TO KRONDOR also includes such features as an Alchemy Lab, where you craft your own potions, and lock picking, which involves solving an actual lock-oriented puzzle (as opposed to the simple "use lockpicking skill" found in most RPGs). Features like true line-of-sight, shadows, and lighting round out the game.

With Raymond Feist adding his writing savvy and being even more involved with the design than in BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, RETURN TO KRONDOR looks like it could be one of the best RPGs in years. —*Thierry Nguyen*

FIRE ON THE PORT BOW If 7th Level can use their 3D models in both cut-scenes and actual gameplay, RETURN TO KRONDOR will definitely be one of the best *looking* RPGs.

Riftwar Reading Rainbow

While not absolutely necessary, it would be a good idea to read Feist's *Riftwar* novels before playing RETURN TO KRONDOR. Here's a recap of the important details of the *Riftwar* saga.

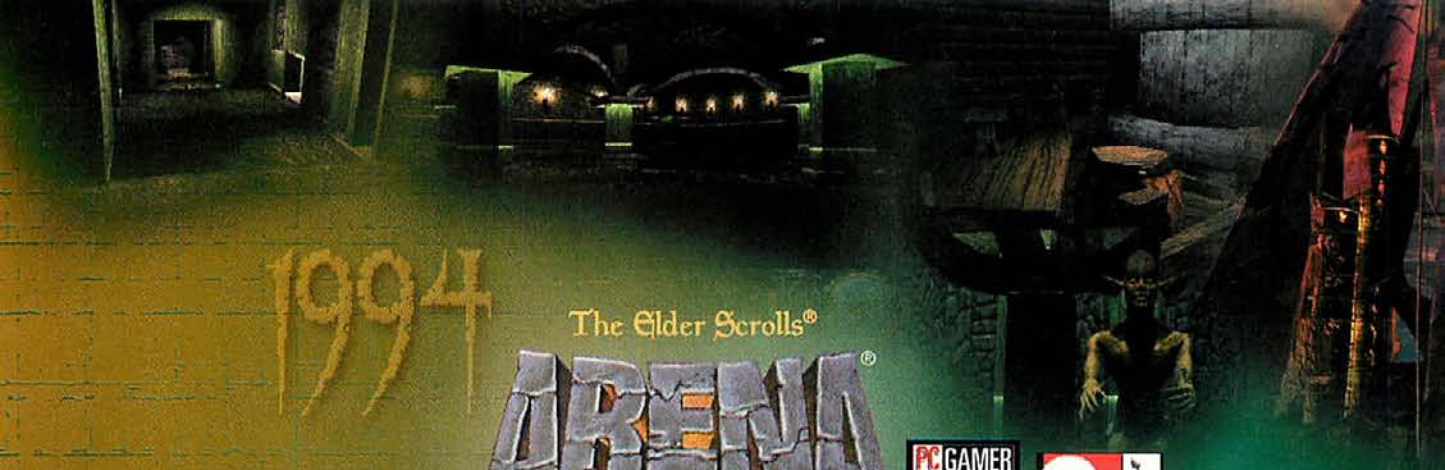
Magician: The uber-novel of the saga, this novel was subsequently split into two separate ones (*Apprentice* and *Master*) due to its sheer size. This introduced the master magician Pug, and gave many details on the Midkemian universe, such as the Tsurani, the Valheru, and magic in general.

Silverthorn: This book introduced the villain Murmandamus, as he sets a plot to assassinate Prince Arutha. Here, Arutha's bride-to-be, Anita, took an arrow meant for him—an arrow tipped with the rare poison Silverthorn. Arutha then sets out to find a cure and gain more information about Murmandamus. This novel developed the character of boy-thief Jimmy the Hand, one of the reasons the book was so popular.

A Darkness at Sethanon: The final chapter in the Riftwar, this brings back all of the main characters of the Riftwar together as Murmandamus marches to Sethanon in order to kill Prince Arutha and free the Valheru from the Lifestone.

You should also play the first game based on the series:

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR: In the prequel to the new game, the flag of Murmandamus is raised again, and Gorath, a moredhel clan-leader, goes to warn Arutha. But, things get twisted and the true enemy is found and thwarted before disturbing the Lifestone again.



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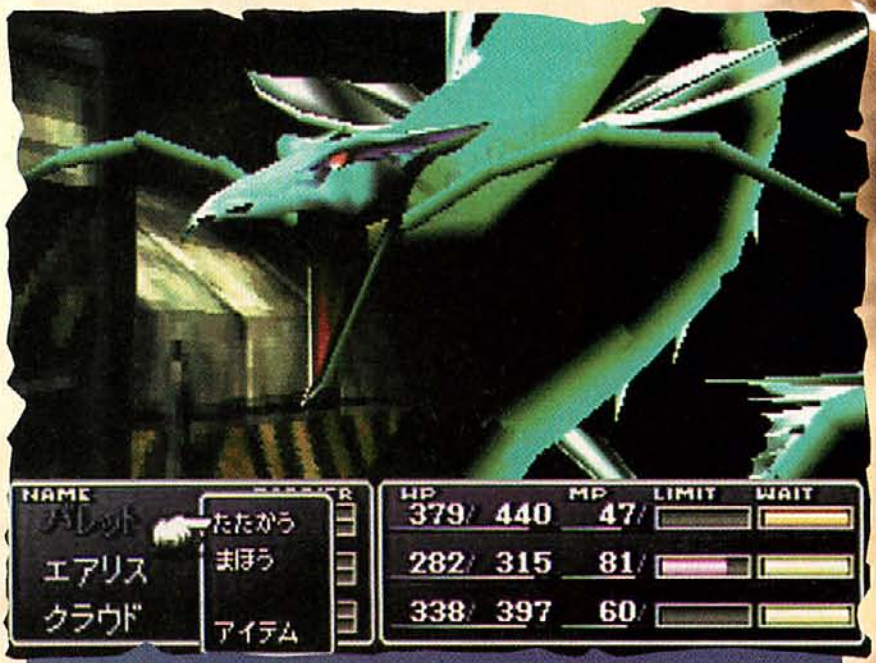
Final Fantasy VII

RPG Fans Can Prepare for an Invasion From the East

The console world's equivalents of MIGHT AND MAGIC and ULTIMA are the role-playing series DRAGON WARRIOR (DRAGON QUEST in the U.S.) and FINAL FANTASY. Both command huge followings and have spawned television shows and top-selling music CDs in Japan. When a game from either series debuts in Japan, it is an event tantamount to a big-budget movie's premiere. For years, PC gamers have wondered and (admit it) scoffed at the success of these two console RPGs. How could a game made for a medium as limited as an 8- or 16-bit cartridge inspire such a following? The answer: It's the storytelling and the characters. But don't take our word for it. You'll be able to see for yourselves when FINAL FANTASY VII comes to the PC in early 1998.



SCREAM The most powerful magic in FINAL FANTASY VII is call magic, with which you can summon great beasts like this Leviathan to destroy your enemies.

Your First Fantasy

The FINAL FANTASY series resembles MIGHT AND MAGIC in that the characters and, occasionally, even the worlds, are different in each game. Only the game engine and a few recurring creatures and themes remain the same, and thus allow the name to carry over. So, you can enjoy FFVII without having played the earlier FINAL FANTASY games. Of the six previous games in the series, only three have made it to the United States; FFVII is already out in Japan and should arrive here for the PlayStation on September 7 before making its way to the PC next year.

The story deals with a world crushed under the iron rule of a country-corporation called Shinra. Shinra controls the world's resources and is responsible for siphoning off Makou, the planet's life energy, making all that lies outside of Shinra's domed city lifeless and barren. The freedom-fighting group Avalanche wants to halt Shinra's parasitic reign. To that end, Avalanche wages a guerrilla war against the establishment, and the characters you play get involved with both groups, creating a plot of betrayal and intrigue.

The three main characters are Cloud Strife, a defector from the Shinra who has joined Avalanche for money; Barret Wallace, the leader of Avalanche, who is on a personal quest to avenge the death of his wife; and Aerith Gainsbourg, a civilian unintentionally drawn into the conflict. Several other characters appear during your ongoing quest, including a foul-mouthed pilot, a naive female ninja, a beautiful street fighter, and a lost soul who has been cruelly biomechanically altered by the Shinra. As it's a Japanese RPG, FINAL FANTASY VII also features a few weird and funny player characters that normally wouldn't be seen in American games, including a talking, red tigerlike creature and a strange character duo of an intelligent cat and the yeti-like Moogle (a furry, white, magical creature that is a FINAL FANTASY staple).

Love and War

Each of the characters has a distinct personality and his own storyline. Some characters have side stories that only peripherally deal with the game's main plot, while others are inextricably tied to it. FINAL FANTASY games traditionally have extensive stories for each of their characters, and part of the FINAL FANTASY magic is that these stories sometimes have *nothing* to do with the game, but are simply there to flesh out the character.

Many of the stories merge with the side-quests, which, again, aren't integral to the game but create a sense that you are roaming a world

that is real and alive with its own concerns and personalities. In previous FINAL FANTASY games and in Squaresoft's other major U.S.-released RPG, CHRONO TRIGGER, some characters get married, some mope with unrequited love or get involved in love triangles, others travel back in time to save a loved one from an accident or confront a parent who abandoned them. The series has always featured storylines with very interesting twists, and a game wouldn't be worthy of the name FINAL FANTASY if the plot didn't contain at least one betrayal. Brothers turn on brothers, and kings betray their loyal servants. Don't be surprised if friends turn out to be foes in FFVII.

KNOCK, KNOCK In FFVII, story and character interaction is the most vital part of the game, so you'll go searching for people to talk to and places to visit.

Swords and Sorcery

Through six iterations, Squaresoft has refined the FINAL FANTASY combat engine into an elegant system. Combat isn't real-time, but is played in phased turns. Every character has a different attack speed, which is measured by a time meter. When the time meter is at full, the character can attack. Once the attack is completed, the meter resets to zero, and the character must wait before he can attack again. Your enemies also have speed meters, and if they are faster, they can attack you while you wait for your meter to fill. This creates an exciting dynamic that is missing from traditional turn-based combat, but still allows for different strategies of attack that aren't possible in real-time games. Each character has a normal attack, but some have special powers or spellcasting abilities, and all can defend or use items during battle.

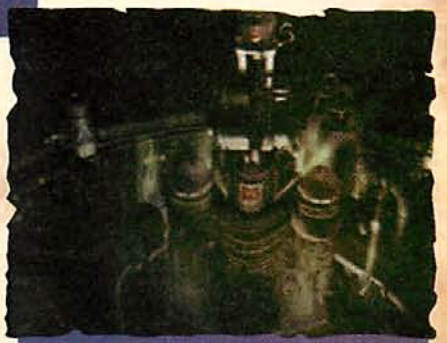
EN GARDE Here is the timed-turn combat of FINAL FANTASY, which allows you to strategize your attack, but also conveys a real sense of excitement and urgency.

Magic has always been a large part of FINAL FANTASY, and FFVII is no exception. Most of the previous games have had various schools of magic. Traditionally, the three types of magic were Black, White, and Calling Magic, which could be categorized respectively as attack, healing, and monster-summoning magic. Certain individuals in the game would be magic-users, or callers, and would have the ability to use these types of magic.

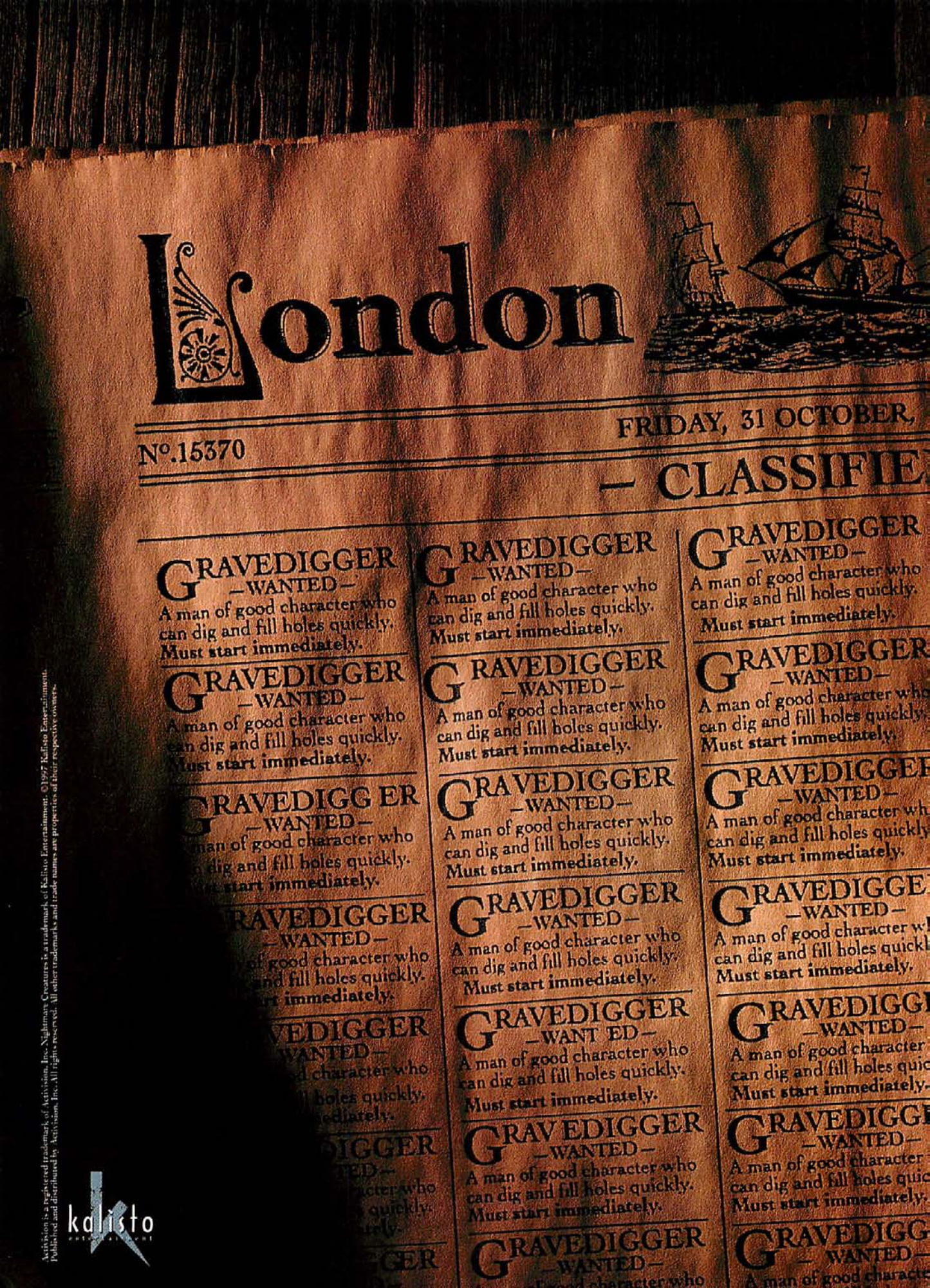
In FINAL FANTASY VII, these spell conventions are maintained and two new types are added: Blue Magic, which is magic you learn from your enemies; and Mysteria Orbs, magic artifacts that draw on Makou and can be used by all characters. The Mysteria Orbs can be attached to weapons to add attack and defense bonuses, worn by characters to boost attributes and defense, and used to cast spells that are normally reserved for a specific character class. The orbs are a vital part of the FINAL FANTASY magic system and can be bought, taken from enemies, or found in your travels. Calling Magic, which has been with FINAL FANTASY since the early games, is perhaps the most impressive of all the game's magic, as it allows you to summon awesome magical creatures—dragons, gods, and titans—to attack your enemies.

Finally, We Wait

As of this writing, it's not known if Squaresoft has begun the porting process for the PC version. The only real obstacle in the port is the translation of Japanese text, a task that is already under way for the American PlayStation version. Squaresoft will bring the game to the Windows 95 platform, and currently it is holding to a late first-quarter 1998 release date. All indications are that the game will be identical to the PlayStation version, though a 3D card might be recommended or required to maintain the same level of detail and graphics. However, since the PC version seems to be taking a backseat to the PlayStation version in Squaresoft's U.S. offices, we won't really know more until the PlayStation port has been completed. By then, Squaresoft might be ready to talk more extensively to the PC gaming press, and we'll be able to bring you more up-to-date information on what could well be the role-playing event of 1998. —*Elliott Chin*



MIDGAR This is the initial setting for the PC port of the Squaresoft RPG FINAL FANTASY VII, which pits the freedom fighters of Avalanche against the ruling Shinra.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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #189

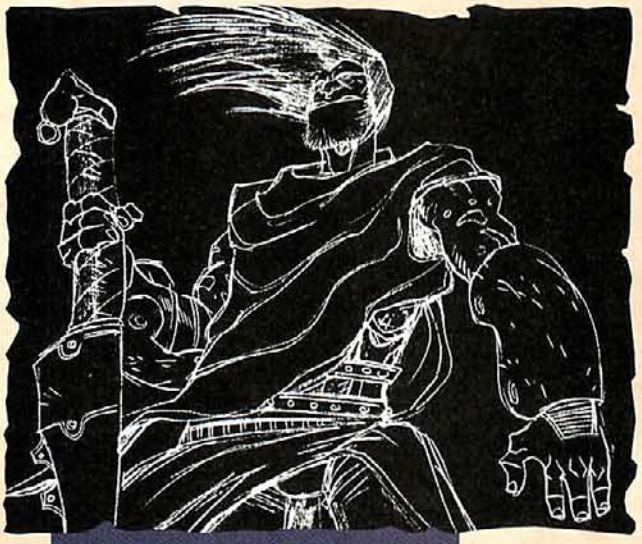
Anachronox

Tom Hall Explains His Role-Playing Vision

Tom Hall, one of the legendary founders of id software, has some distinguished action games to his credit, but what he has always wanted to create is a role-playing game. Now, as a member of ION Storm, he is fulfilling his wish, crafting a role-playing game inspired by both his years-long desire and the Squaresoft console RPGs he has grown to love.

The game is called ANACHRONOX, and while it's still early in the game's development cycle (the game won't ship until late 1998), Hall was gracious enough to talk to us about the project.

"ANACHRONOX is a 3D role-playing game using the QUAKE engine. The player controls up to three characters at a time, from an eventual cast of seven, exploring the galaxy and three different dimensions. Gameplay is exploration of the galaxy, melee with various galactic foes, and discovery of unique weapons and items that aid you in your quest. You can choose different characters and ways of doing things, leading you to a variety of events and areas in the game."



RAJI'IN Hall won't comment on the exact types of enemies you'll face, but there will be recurring villains among the 180-strong rogues' gallery, including this baddie.

Sender One

ANACHRONOX takes place in the future, when the galaxy has been connected by huge planetary wormholes called Senders, artifacts left by a dead alien race and which are now the hubs of trading and civilization. One particular Sender gives the game its name. "At the center of the universe lies Sender One," says Hall, "and in a time bubble inside the titanic Sender floats the city of Anachronox. Theory has it that Anachronox was once home to millions of quarantined aliens who slowly died of some horrible plague (the name literally means "poison from a previous time"), leaving the city to fall to ruins, only to be taken over by the refuse of the galaxy to become the center of their nefarious dealings."

It is here that your adventure starts, as you assume control of the main character, Sylvester "Sly" Boots, and his partner, Stiletto Anyway. You soon discover that the galaxy is collapsing upon itself and embark on a grand quest to stop this alarming phenomenon.

Elementary Characters

Like FINAL FANTASY, Squaresoft's premier role-playing franchise, ANACHRONOX will be very character-driven. "Each of the characters has a [story] arc, some of which are solved by the end of the game." Hall says. "There's a reason everyone is doing what they are doing, and their agendas are important to the story and to what actions they choose and how they go about them." Hall wasn't prepared to reveal all the characters, but he did describe a third: "Grumpos is an old wise man with ridiculously long hair who studies the Elementor discipline of MysTech [Mysterium Technology]—he is able to actually make new weapons by combining modules called Elements."

This system of combining modules to create unique weapons is one of the more exciting features of ANACHRONOX. "The Elementor weapons system is a whole new way for the average user to explore the game and create things," says Hall. "Without any programming knowledge, they can combine Elements to make new weapons and make them part of the game." Hall also plans to introduce an Element-maker program so that gamers can incorporate custom-made Elements into the game world for experimentation.

Hall's design calls for the game's scope to be truly epic, so you'll be traveling to three dimensions and numerous worlds, and through time, facing hundreds of enemies. Hall feels it's too early to reveal the worlds you'll see and the enemies you'll fight, but we promise to loosen his lips and bring you more information in the months to come.

Other vital information Hall could confirm was that the game will be played in third-person, using the QUAKE II engine. Combat will be real-time, and it will be a single-player game.

Hall's ION Storm team is already busy into development, but with myriad worlds and events to craft, Hall is very careful not to underestimate the duration of this grand project: He anticipates a late 1998 release. Look for *CGW* to bring you a full sneak preview as the game progresses. —*Elliott Chin*

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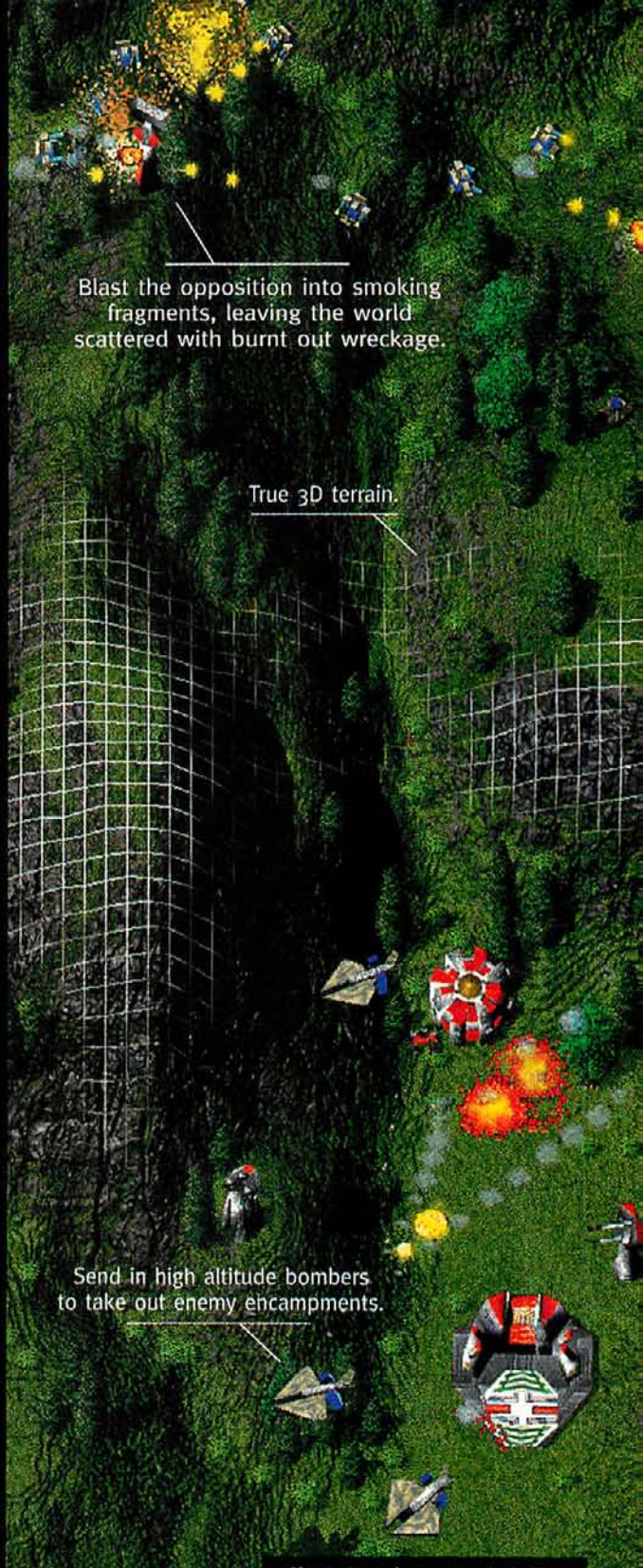

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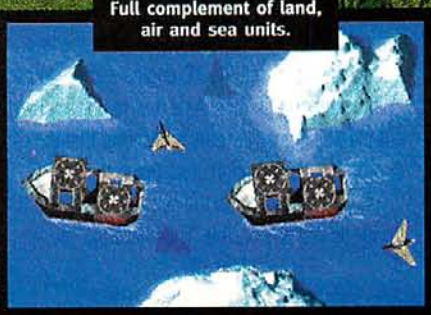


Full complement of land, air and sea units.

Extensive multi-player support including 'Watch and Join modes'.

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #368

An Elder Scrolls Legend: Battlespire

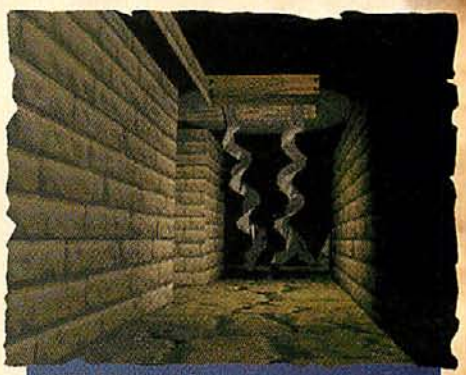
Bethesda Unveils a New Focus in Battlemage Tale

Imagine that you've been selected for training as a member of an elite commando unit, but discover upon reporting that the "best of the best" have been slaughtered by a more powerful enemy. Such is the setup for AN ELDER SCROLLS LEGEND: BATTLESPIRE, Bethesda's next installment in the land of the Elder Scrolls.

This isn't a sequel to THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL; you can expect THE ELDER SCROLLS: MORROWIND to assume that mantle of epic, free-wheeling role-playing in 1998. Rather, BATTLESPIRE portends a series of Elder Scrolls Legends—focused games with an emphasis on combat and action in a story framework in which you have the opportunity to finish the game without the massive time commitment required by DAGGERFALL.

BATTLESPIRE has the advantage of drawing from the richly defined cultures and world designed for the larger games without being tied to the style of play and the sometimes disorienting freedom of the massive quests. You already know what Battlemages are because you've encountered them in various castles around Tamriel. You'll still be able to customize your characters and build your spells in much the same way you did in DAGGERFALL. You'll already know something about the demonic spawn known as the Daedra because you'll have studied the lore and language of these diabolical monsters in order to fight and/or use them in previous games. Yet, BATTLESPIRE will infuse the familiar trappings of Tamriel with better graphics (particularly the new special effects for magic spells), a new combat system (real-time with new weapons and spells), and multiplayer modes (cooperative play, team play, and deathmatches for LAN, point-to-point, and Internet play).

LIGHT MOTIF You'll find the lighting effects in BATTLESPIRE to be much more impressive than those in earlier ELDER SCROLLS games.

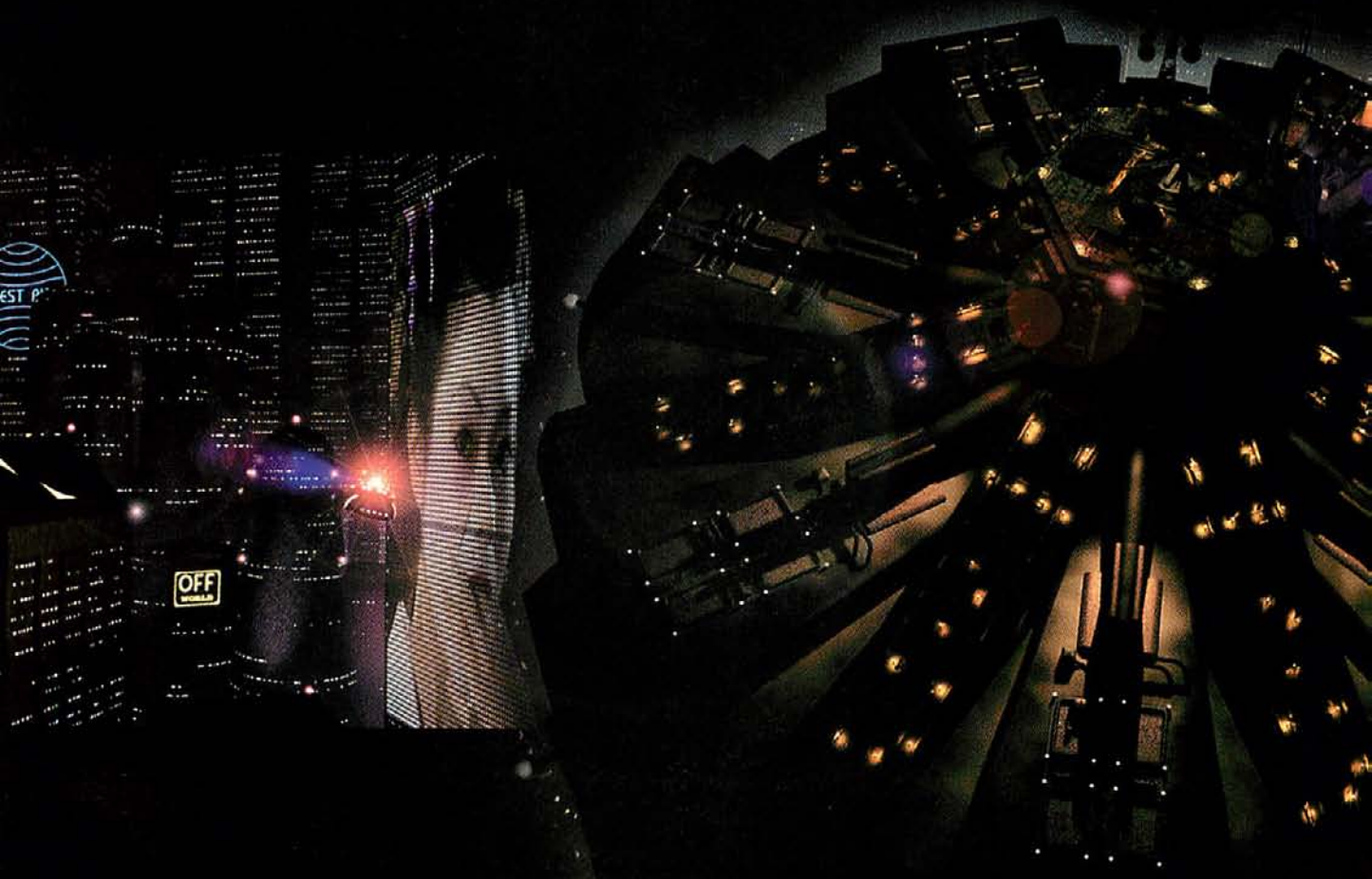


MEET GRINDER BATTLESPIRE features diabolical traps that serve as nasty physical logic puzzles.

Within the background story, the eponymous Battlespire is a dimension created by the Emperor's Elite Guard, the Battlemages, as the ultimate testing and training ground for the elite corps. The dimension consists of a variety of battlefields: dungeons, which allow the designers to exploit their lighting effects and plant nasty traps in the shadows; and castles, which allow the level architects to exploit the 3D engine's ability to handle height and physics. As a new recruit, you arrive at the training facility only to discover that the elite corps has been slaughtered. Being the heroic type, you opt not to do the sensible thing and run away as fast as possible. The challenge you face is to get to the bottom of the mystery and right the wrong done to the empire you call home. Since you'll face a literal prince of darkness—a Daedra noble named Prince Mechrunes Dagon—it will take you a while to get to the heart of the situation. You'll need to build up your strength, skill, and sorcery in order to be able to wipe out the Daedra minions and, finally, the ultimate bad guy, Mechrunes himself. *—Johnny L. Wilson*

LOS ANGELES NOVEMBER, 2019

BLADE



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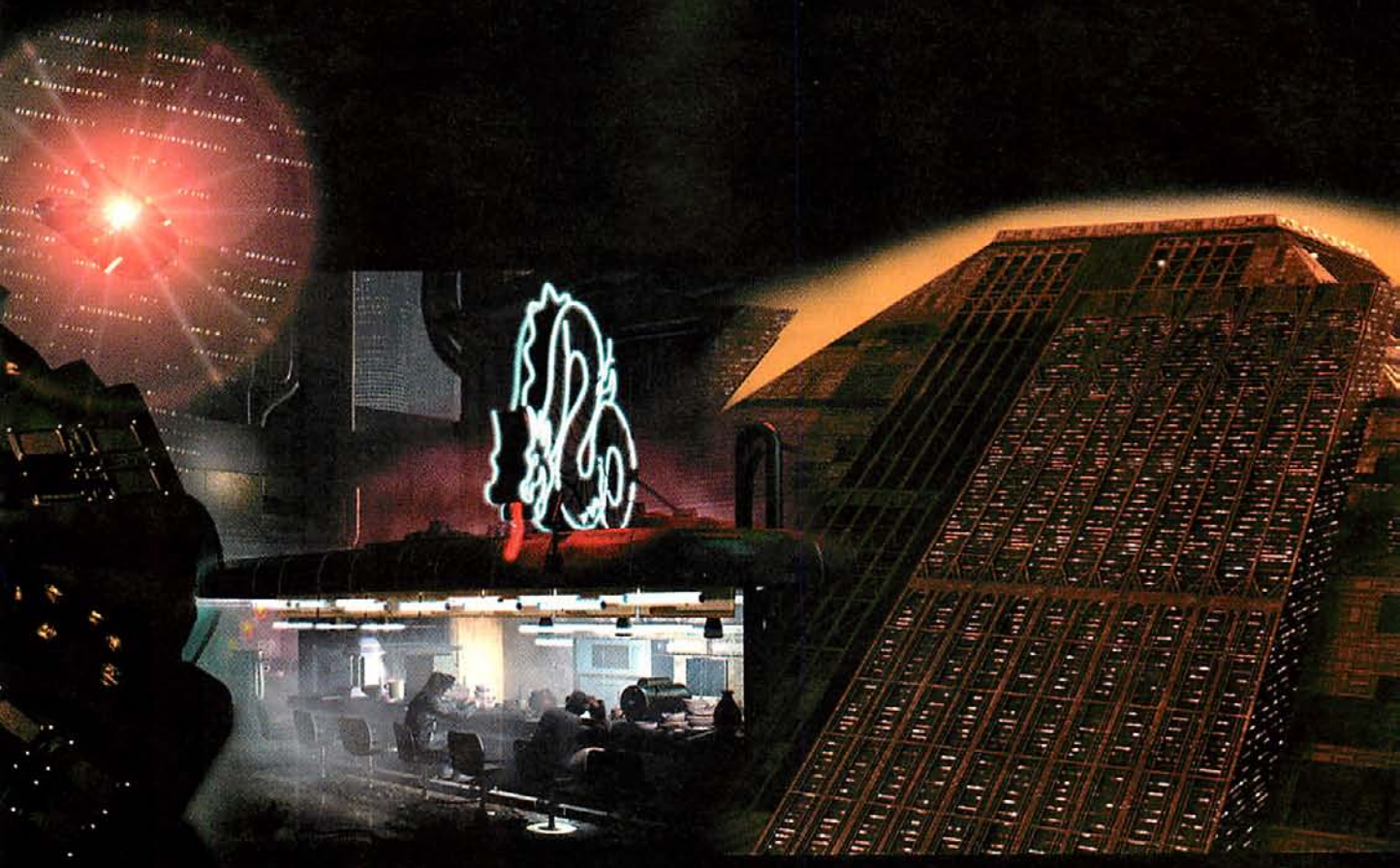

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Forsaken: Thrall of Chaos

Eidos Takes On the Devil in a New Isometric Action RPG

Once Diablo proved to be a megahit, it didn't take an archmage to predict that, as with the real-time strategy blitz, other companies would jump on the bandwagon in an attempt to duplicate Blizzard's massive success. One of the first "Diablo clones" out of the gates will be a fantasy RPG from Eidos, called Forsaken: Thrall of Chaos. Actually, you should take the game's title with a grain of salt, because Eidos, in a fine example of marketing wizardry, has changed the name four times in the week we were preparing this article: from Forsaken to Exiled: The Forsaken Saga, to Exodus, to, as we go to press, Forsaken: Thrall of Chaos. Who knows what it will be called by the time you read this.

The Devil Made Them Do It

Developed by Cinematix Studios, makers of the action game Total Mayhem, Forsaken is a third-person, isometric, action RPG, which the designers acknowledge has been consciously inspired by Diablo. They hope to improve on Diablo, though, by focusing on that game's biggest weakness: the lack of a truly immersive storyline.

Forsaken takes place on the island of Ahkuilon, which is ruled by three brutal Warlords. You play the role of Locke (an homage to Final Fantasy III?), a member of a race of warrior mages who have long been disbanded and exiled from the rest of society. One of the warlords hires you to take revenge upon a cult group on the island that has slain his daughter in a ritual sacrifice. But as you might expect in an RPG, this is just the beginning of the story—and Locke soon discovers that the situation on Ahkuilon is far different than he first realized.

At present, Forsaken's most compelling feature is its incredible artwork. Canadian artist Den Beauvais, well known for his cover drawings for *Dragon* magazine, is hand-painting all of the game's prerendered backgrounds. Beauvais's early results show a game with a remarkably rich color palette—with lush greens and blues—an interesting change of pace from the dark look of most recent RPGs.

Unlike Diablo's 2D sprites, Forsaken will use 3D polygonal characters with motion-captured animations (3D acceleration will probably be supported, but not required). These characters (also being designed by Beauvais) will appear on top of the prerendered 2D backgrounds, with 3D collision detection underneath. The game also utilizes real-time lighting effects, including colored lights and changes from day to night—when we saw this running in the beta, it was truly beautiful.

Fantasy Island

Although the entire game takes place on an island, Eidos says there will be some 10 to 12 distinct locations, including cities, forests, underground caverns, and two castles. Conversation with NPCs will be a big part of the game, but there will, of course, be plenty of action. Each character will have spellcasting abilities and five weapon types with three attack styles. The best weapon in your arsenal won't always be the same for every player, but will depend upon how you have developed your character throughout the game. Character advancement will be skill-based, not level-based.

Whether Eidos's first-generation RPG will have the mettle to compete with big franchises like Might and Magic and Ultima remains to be seen. —*Jeff Green*

BRIGHT LIGHTS Forsaken's dynamic colored lighting effects help create a creepy mood for late-night battles.

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Deep Six

D.W. Bradley, the Wizard of Wizardry, Returns With a Brand-New RPG

Virgin has never been known for its role-playing games, but next year, that's likely to change. For its first RPG, tentatively titled Deep Six, Virgin has at the helm none other than D. W. Bradley, the acclaimed RPG designer, whose most recent work includes Wizardry V, VI, and VII for Sirtech. Although the project is still far off (the release is projected for next spring) and Virgin wishes to keep it mostly under wraps for now, we were able to chat with Bradley long enough to get a sense of the game.

Set in a medieval fantasy world, Deep Six will be a party-based, traditional RPG, in which a group of adventurers sets out on a quest to retrieve an enchanted sword and soon finds itself on a larger mission to help defeat an ultimate evil: the Lord of Death. The game world will be completely 3D and will incorporate multiple settings, including forests, castles, dungeons, and an ancient temple that has sunk deep beneath the sea.

Bradley and his company, Heuristic Park, are designing the game engine from the ground up to incorporate both single- and multiplay (over LANs and modems). In Deep Six, unlike in Diablo, you'll be able to build your character in single-player mode and bring him or her into a multiplayer game—and vice versa—in the hopes that you'll develop a character you really care about.

DEMON SEED This little terror from below is only one of the many monsters you'll face on your journeys in Deep Six.

Most intriguing so far is the designer's take on the old turn-based versus real-time dilemma for the game's combat system. "I've talked to a lot of RPGers over the years," Bradley says, "and one of the biggest complaints from some was that they lost a lot of strategic decision-making in real-time combat, and felt like a mechanical monkey clicking the mouse. On the other hand, real-time gamers want a continuous world, where things are constantly changing. I needed a new approach that would eliminate the dichotomy between real-time and turn-based, and would let every user play the way he or she wants to play."

Bradley's solution is to offer the gamer a choice, available at any time—even during combat—between the two modes. Thus, you can move through the game in realtime, but if you encounter a particularly tough enemy, you can slow the pace to give yourself some time to plan out your moves. Bradley says that the game will be balanced so that neither system has an advantage over the other and so that all gamers, regardless of preference, can get the same essential experience.

Trying to please everyone can be a tricky business, but Bradley says that he and his Heuristic Park team are "making the game that we, as role-playing fans, want to see ourselves." Given the designer's track record, we're going to want to see it too. Look for an in-depth sneak preview of Deep Six in an upcoming issue of CGW.—*Jeff Green*

YOU BE THE JUDGE Gamers will have a choice between real-time and turn-based gameplay.

PARADISE LOST...

What Went Wrong?

Henrietta Emerson

Age: 64

Retired

DECEASED

Former charity worker and treasurer of the Wives of Foreign War Veterans. Killed tragically during anti-videogame violence protest rally.

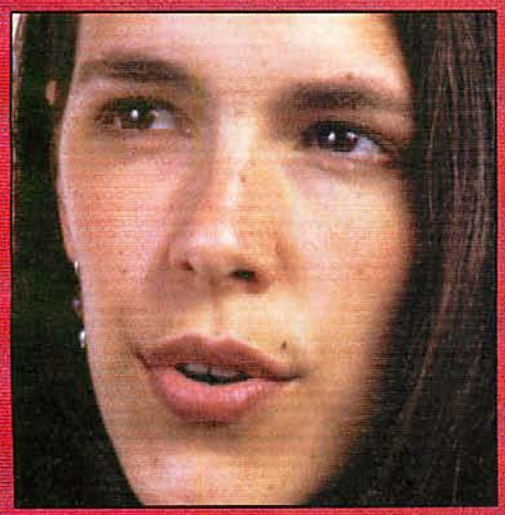
Ronald Wanker

Age: 52

DECEASED

Mental Health Technician

Employed at Paradise Psychiatric Center for 27 years. Fatally wounded by multiple bullet wounds.



Jennie Peters

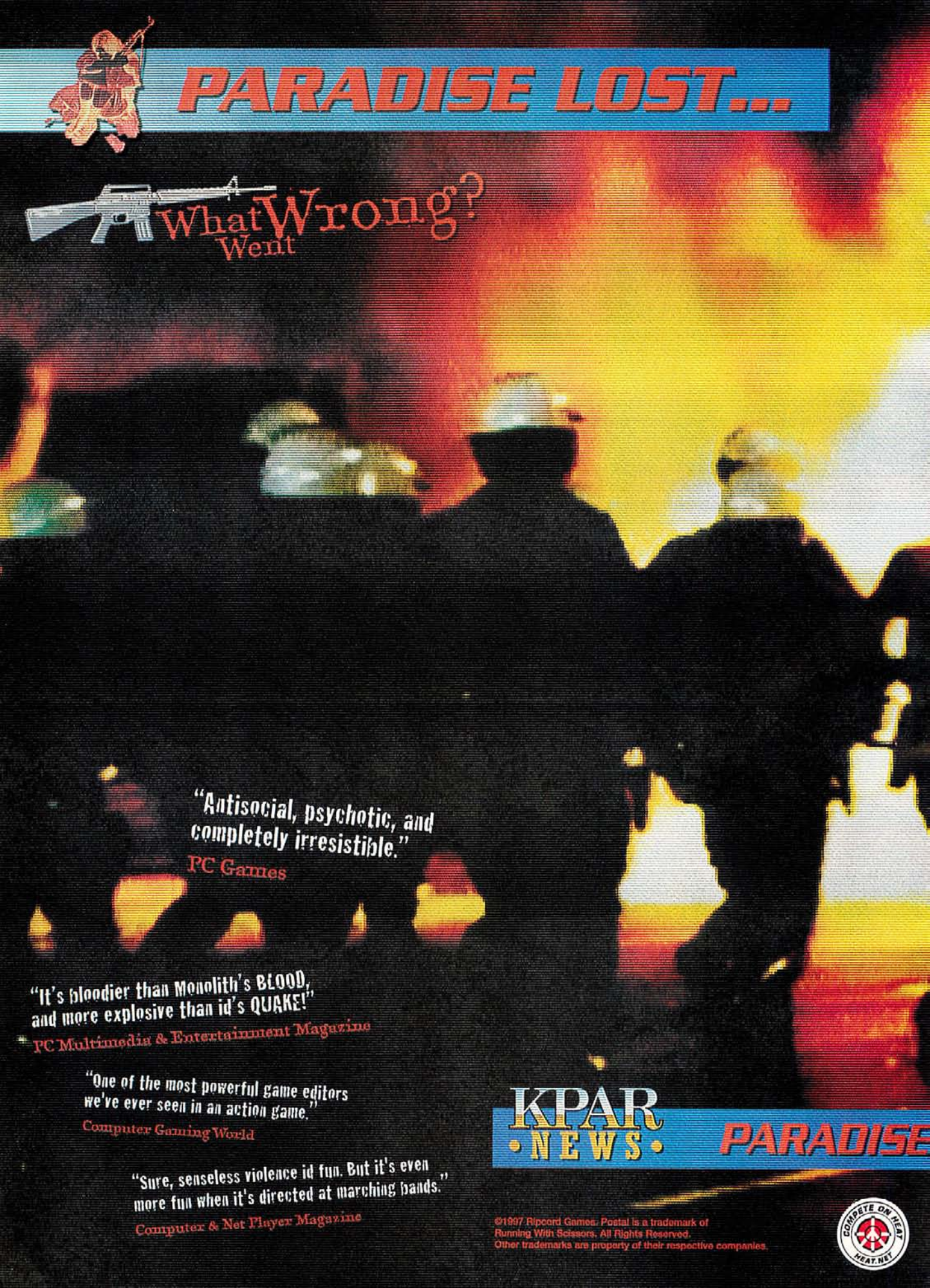
Age: 17

DECEASED

Paradise High Senior

Majorette in local youth marching band. Death caused by 3rd degree burns inflicted by exploding napalm.

KPAR •NEWS• PARADISE, ARIZONA LIVE


PARADISE LOST...
What Went Wrong?
"Antisocial, psychotic, and completely irresistible."
PC Games
"It's bloodier than Monolith's BLOOD, and more explosive than id's QUAKE!"
PC Multimedia & Entertainment Magazine
"One of the most powerful game editors we've ever seen in an action game."
Computer Gaming World
"Sure, senseless violence id fun. But it's even more fun when it's directed at marching bands."
Computer & Net Player Magazine
KPAR
NEWS
PARADISE
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Welcome to Paradise ... Arizona.
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- Brutal shooter/strategy combo challenges you to keep one eye on your target and the other looking over your shoulder at all times.
- Real-time 3D characters rage against beautifully hand-painted killing fields.
- So freakin' real, your victims will actually beg for mercy and scream for their lives!
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POSTAL™

Forgotten Realms: Baldur's Gate

Dungeons & Dragons Fans To Enjoy Relief From the AD&D RPG Drought

For years, *Dungeons and Dragons* fans could turn to their computers for role-playing excursions courtesy of SSI. As the years went by, though, SSI's games lost their magic, and TSR went shopping for a new partner in computer role-playing. It's been several years, but TSR has at last found a new partner, and the first RPG game to come of this liaison could be one of the best in a long while.

DARK TIMES AHEAD BALDUR'S GATE starts out with you getting to the bottom of trade disputes on the Sword Coast but mushrooms into a darker tale of evil.

Your Adventure Begins

From Bioware, the designer of SHATTERED STEEL, will come the first *Forgotten Realms* CRPG in several years, to be called FORGOTTEN REALMS: BALDUR'S GATE. The game, which Interplay will publish, takes place on the Sword Coast of Faerun, after the Avatar crisis of the Forgotten Realms, and chronicles your amnesiac character's quest to discover his or her origin. This personal quest, though, will intersect with a larger quest to halt a dark plan to resurrect a fallen evil that predates the Avatar crisis.

Bioware's employees are big *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* fans and hope to make BALDUR'S GATE very story-driven. Sidequests will abound, and the game's mysterious plot will unravel as you visit key locations and talk to NPCs.

The game features a third-person isometric view and will doubtless beg comparison to Blizzard's DIABLO. Like many of the RPGs in this roundup, BALDUR'S GATE will boast impressive graphics, such as dynamic lighting and 16-bit color. There will also be special effects like fog and falling snow.

The combat, surprisingly, is real-time, despite the fact that the *AD&D* combat system is turn-based. Aside from that, say the designers at Bioware, all the *AD&D* conventions, including Thac0 and die rolls, will be incorporated into the combat, although many of them will be invisible to the gamer. What you will see is a fifth-level fighter hitting more frequently than a first-level fighter. For the very seriously reflex-impaired, Bioware plans a pause feature so that you can stop combat, issue orders, and then resume the game.

Dungeons and Dragons Returns

Since BALDUR'S GATE is an *AD&D* game, you'll be able to choose from among the many familiar character classes and races to create your onscreen persona. You can play only one character, but his or her makeup can be customized. You can be an elf, dwarf, halfling, fighter, or mage. You can also be a multi- or dual-class character. As a low- to mid-level adventure, BALDUR'S GATE will allow character progression to a maximum of sixth level. Sequels will let you import your character and advance to higher levels.

Don't worry about going solo in your quest, though. NPCs will join you and form a party. You'll be able to control them in battle, but they will also have their own interests and goals. In fact, some members of your party may fight amongst themselves depending on your and their alignment.

In BALDUR'S GATE, unlike in previous *AD&D* CRPGs, alignment will matter. Rather than being forced to adhere to your chosen alignment, you'll be able to have an impact on your alignment through your actions. That alignment will also affect your meetings with NPCs and monsters.

Like any good RPG, BALDUR'S GATE will feature lots of spells, magic items, and monsters, and Bioware will have the advantage of being able to draw from the rich *AD&D* rule books for those things.

Let's hope that the abundant background of the *Forgotten Realms* universe and the passion of the Bioware team can create an *AD&D* role-playing game that will rival—or even surpass—the old gold-box adventures of years past.

—Elliott Chin

Lands of Lore II: Guardians of Destiny

Westwood's Long-in-Development Sequel Has a Bit of a GoD Complex

Religion in most RPGs follows either the Christian standard of "one Supreme Holy One asks you to fight one Supreme Evil Lurking Down Below" or the polytheistic slant of "there are many gods around the world, and you help a few of them." Well, the newest RPG from Westwood Studios has taken a different slant on things, which is just one thing in its suite of features and improvements.

The Newest TLA: GoD

When you read the basic plotline for LANDS OF LORE II, you'll wonder if the initials for its subtitle, "Guardians of Destiny," are a coincidence or not. For this sequel, Westwood managed to paint a very humorous treatise on gods and creation.

Here, we have a story about gods (Ancients) who take a "prime directive" when it comes to creating worlds—that is, they have a pact of non-interference with the worlds they create; allowing them only to observe. One of these Ancients, Belial, decides to fiddle with our world, making one race his favorite and causing massive wars with lopsided fighting (his race will always win with his help). The other Ancients have him executed, but before he dies, he creates a Mother Beast that will use the energy of the Ancients to resurrect him. Unfortunately, all the Ancients leave, and the Mother Beast is dormant for several thousand years.

LANDS OF LOUVRE While a bit dated by today's standards, LANDS OF LORE II still has some nice graphics.

This is where the original LANDS OF LORE, released back in 1994, stepped in. To recap, Scotia was a sorceress who wanted an artifact called "The Nether Mask" that would allow her to change shape and assassinate King Richard of Graystone. Little did we know that she had a son, Luther. And when you thwarted her in that earlier game, she tried to magically send the Nether Mask to Luther. What he got instead was the Nether Mask's ability to shapeshift, but no means of controlling it. Add to that the fact that the Nether Mask was an artifact of the Ancients, meaning its power was enough to resurrect Belial. Now that he has the power of the Nether Mask within him, Luther is caught between Belial's forces (who want to use it to resurrect him) and Gladstone's forces (who want to defeat Belial on their own terms).

New and Improved

Similar to the first game, you navigate the game world in first-person perspective, and combat in real-time. The main differences between the two games is that LANDS OF LORE II looks slightly better, and apparently you only portray one person. Rather than have a party like in the first one, you're on your own in this adventure.

Differing itself from traditional role-playing games, LANDS OF LORE II is more plot-driven, which means it plays out a bit like an adventure game. You'll be talking to a lot of NPCs in order to make sense of your predicament and further the plot along.

The coolest part of the game is the curse placed upon you: uncontrollable shapeshifting. Throughout the game, you will have to learn to live with this curse and control it. But until you do, you're doomed to randomly change into either the Beast or the Lizard, and wait for a while until you change back to human. The Beast is mightier but can't use weapons or spells, while the Lizard is more agile and magic-prone, but can't use weapons either. Morphing is random and can create some interesting situations.

LANDS OF LORE II is shaping up to be one of the more interesting RPGs to premiere this year. While the graphics are a bit dated (it *is* a year late), and it doesn't have earth-shattering new features, the familiarity of the game-world to fans of the previous game and its unique storyline make it one of the more promising titles to help the RPG genre get back into the game.

—Thierry Nguyen

Elements: New

[Centauri Galaxy]

Fe Fear .0032						
Ex Extinction .0149	**Su** Suffocation .002					
Re Rebellion .081	**It** Intellect .999	**Gm** Global Maps .703	**Mp** Multiplayer .1005	**Sv** Survival .703	**Tc** Tactics .0202	**Ad** Adrenali .299
Cm Combat .03	**Sa** Sabotage .011	**Ct** Construction 0.080	**Ev** Evacuation .302	**An** Anxiety .0408	**Cd** Command .105	**S^E** Seismic Ev .505
M Morale .171	**Fi** Fire .189	**Me** Meteor .52	**Vc** Volcano .905	**Wr** Wreckage .408	**Cnf** Confrontation .002	**Ms** Mission .0849

Element of Surprise Element of Danger Element of Destruction Element of Disaster

Dynamix

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nger 3	Mi Mining .091	Di Discovery .081	Rs Research .032	Dn Desperation .217	Bc Balance .1003	Dn Day and Night .055
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #369

Quest for Glory 5: Dragon Fire

Sierra Returns to Glory With One of Gaming's Oldest RPG Franchises

The original QUEST FOR GLORY was an immensely popular role-playing game. It had stats and spells, but it also combined classic Sierra adventure-game elements with intense combat. After the success of the first title, the series grew to encompass three more games, set in various fantasy locales based on the Middle East, Africa, and Transylvania. While the quests, monsters, and environments changed from game to game, the main character and a few nonplayer characters did not. Moreover, an overarching plot was weaved into each game, meaning that a continuity was achieved that compelled you to play each successive title. It's been a long four years, but, at last, the final game in the series is about to debut: QUEST FOR GLORY 5: DRAGON FIRE.

IN HONOR OF THIEVES There aren't levels in DRAGON FIRE, but, rather, skills that you advance through with frequent use. As a thief, you could practice pickpocketing on this dummy.

A Mediterranean Holiday

You reprise your role as the hero (always nameless), and have ventured to the land of Silmaria, a Mediterranean-type environment. The kingdom has just lost its ruler to assassination, and monsters prowl the land whilst a great black dragon looms over the horizon. Lori Cole, the designer of all previous QUEST games, is hinting that this could be the finale of the series, so the story will tie up all loose ends, and gamers will finish the game with a feeling of completion.

EN GARDE Combat now occurs in the game world, rather than on a separate screen. Before, combat was a little jarring, but now it is seamlessly integrated.

Many of the previous games' NPCs will return for this encore, including Rakeesh the liontaur from QUESTS 2 and 3, Katrina the vampire from QUEST 4, and Erasmus, the wizard who taught you spells in QUEST 1. However, as a new game, QUEST 5 will thrust you into a whole new environment with its own share of brand-new faces. As with other QUEST FOR

DRAGON FIRE is the final entry in the QUEST saga. You'll travel to the Mediterranean land of Silmaria, battling undead, Greek monsters, and a terrorizing dragon.

Target Release Date: November 1997
Developer: Lori Cole
Publisher: Sierra On-line
www.sierra.com

GLORY games, Cole promises to deliver characters with personality, as well as plenty of humor and even romance in the story.

Stats and Skills

Like previous QUEST games, you'll be able to choose from three classes: wizard, warrior, and thief. You will be able to import your characters from previous games. DRAGON FIRE isn't level-based, but skill-based. You have standard attributes, such as strength and intelligence, as in other games, and a variety of skills. You'll have a different set of skills depending on your class, such as pickpocketing for thieves, spellcasting for wizards, and defense for warriors. You can increase your skills through normal use or practice. For example, in the Thieves Guild, you can practice pickpocketing on the dummy and advance your skill level. If you fight constantly, your weapon skill will automatically increase. Continual spellcasting will also improve your spell skills.

The game does change depending on your class, as you'll have to defeat major enemies according to your skill set (through trickery, spells, or combat). As far as spells, there are quite a few, including fireball, levitation, lightning ball, open doors, protection, and flight.

LIGHTS OUT As in previous games, time will pass, so you can adventure during both day and night. Some actions, especially thievery, can be performed only at night.

SPLASH The Queen of Atlantis is only one of the various creatures you'll meet.

To Be King

In the tradition of the series, there will be several subplots to play through before the final showdown with evil. After the king has been assassinated, you and two other heroes come forward to compete for the right to take the crown in the Rites of Rulership. These Rites will take you through the game's various quests and subplots. You'll have to stem the invasion of a neighboring kingdom, battle the monsters in the beleaguered kingdom, thwart an army of undead from the dark realm of Hades, defeat a monstrous Hydra, and discover the sunken city of Atlantis. Ultimately, though, the dark hand that has guided all these evil forces will throw its last menace at you: the black dragon, Fire.

The biggest change in the series, apart from the much updated graphics and beautiful pre-rendered environments, is the combat. It is no longer played in a separate screen that draws you out of the game world. Now, combat occurs in the adventuring environment in realtime.

The other big change is the inclusion of multiplayer support. You can actually play through the whole game with up to two other characters. Presumably, each of you will play as one of the three contestants in the Rites of Rulership. There will be support for modem or LAN play.

QUEST 5 still needs to be polished; game speed is fairly slow now, but Sierra does plan to optimize the game. Also, while we've played a little of the game, we still haven't seen the full quests, Rites, and NPCs. However, if Sierra can implement these elements as well as they did in previous QUEST games, all the while polishing the game's speed and look, DRAGON FIRE should not disappoint. As the probable last entry in the QUEST FOR GLORY line, you'll meet old friends and finally make your way to the promised land of Silmaria. With an improved, integrated combat engine; a variety of locales to visit; and numerous quests and monsters to surmount, QUEST FOR GLORY 5 could prove to be the best of the series. *—Elliott Chin*

SUNKEN TREASURE Here is a look at the Atlantis environment in DRAGON FIRE. The environments are beautiful scenes that will be populated with 3D objects.

Scud

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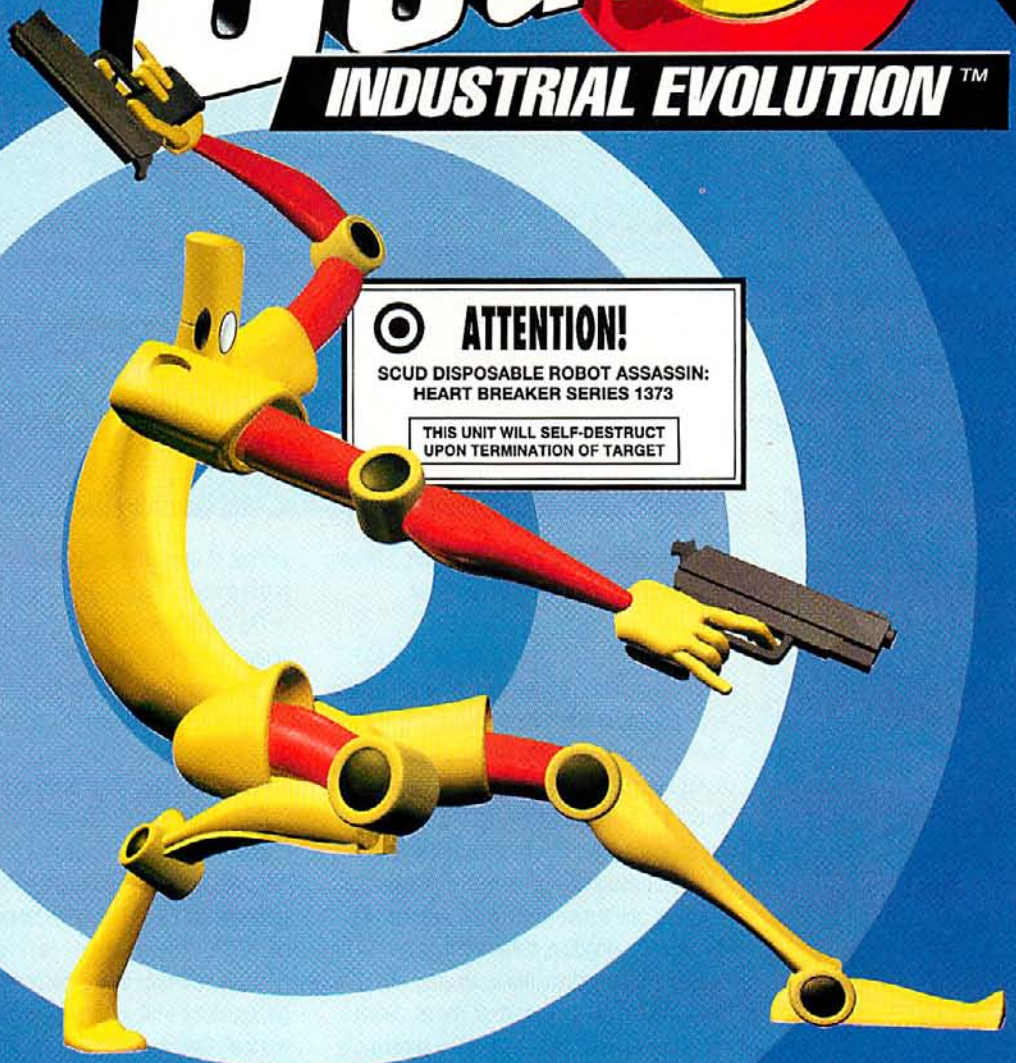
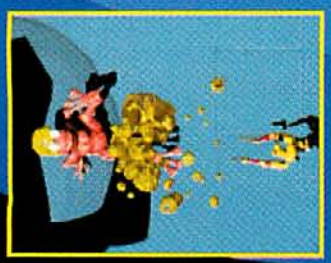


Disposable, like a diaper. But he doesn't take any crap.



Multiple Missions pit Scud against a bizarre collection of villains and enemy Scuds.

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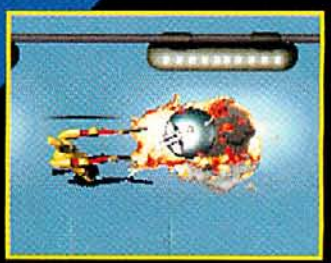

Top down view and easy to master controls keep action fast and furious.

www.scud.com

Scud is the coolest robot assassin to ever be dispensed from a vending machine. He's programmed to self destruct, but intent on sticking around quite a bit longer. He's a coin operated killer hellbent on customer satisfaction, but there's always one sick, twisted freak who won't listen to reason.
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FATSUCKING ABDOMAX 9000
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That's easy, get Scud: Industrial Evolution! You get to wreak bloody havoc with a ton of powerups and weapons.
Go on multiple missions! Be one of three different characters! Destroy up to 16 of your freak friends in multiplayer competition!
It's the kind of senseless violence that makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside.
Compared to this game, your Fatsucking Abdomax is weaker than Kenny G.
PC games are wack. I'd rather tune my tummy.
SNAK! SNAK!
Another hopeless case.
Sweet mother of Ghandi!
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
MY HAIR!

"Illustration by Edvis"

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #268

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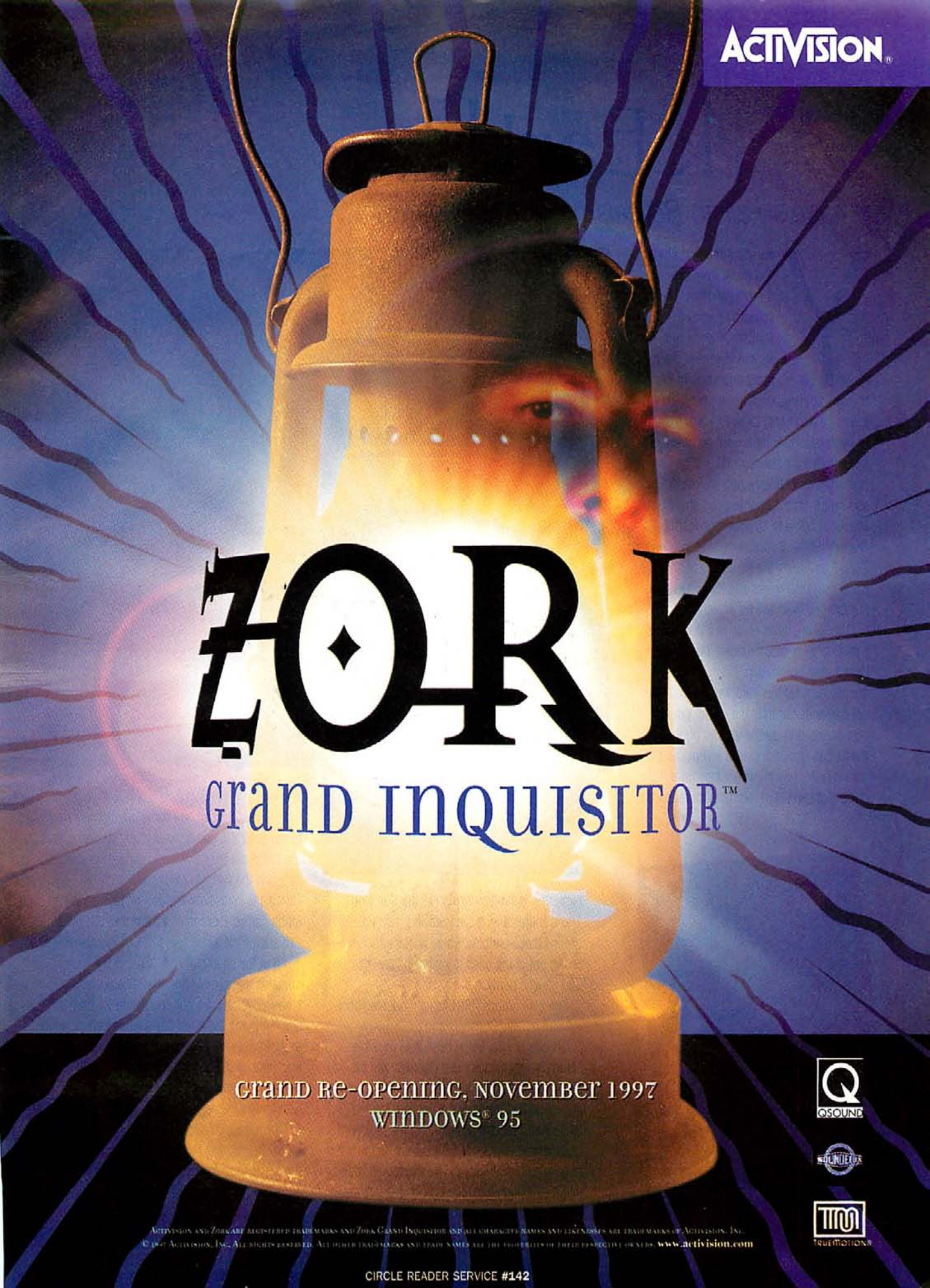
Actual 360° views from the game

NOW ALL IT HAS IS YOU. Since 1979, evil forces have tried to destroy magic in Zork.

Now a mighty oppressor threatens to take the "Great" out of the Great Underground Empire forever.

The Grand Inquisitor is a failed magician who claims technology will make magic obsolete.

And, you're the only adventurer brave enough to stop him. It could only happen underground.



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #142

Dark Earth

France's Kalisto Reveals the Art of Darkness

You see it the first time you move from one room to another. The colorful room with its stylized Jules Verne architecture and the primary character in his brightly adorned uniform are both swallowed by darkness. DARK EARTH is a study in contrasts: light/darkness, good/evil, freedom/fear, initiative/ritual, humanity/monstrosity, and life/death. Just as Francis Ford Coppola used sharply etched shadow to suggest the fearful majesty of the Godfather's hidden power, DARK EARTH uses the backdrop of an all-consuming darkness and its corresponding images to shape its universe.

DARK EARTH takes place in a postapocalyptic world in which mankind has experienced near-obliteration. So much debris fills the air after this cataclysm that perpetual darkness shrouds the world; poisonous clouds drift overhead, and photosynthesis has stopped. Only a few pockets of light remain. Into these pockets have flown the uncontaminated remnants of humanity.

FENCE OF DARKNESS You'll see impressive close-ups of the action as you fence, fight, slash, and smash your way to success in DARK EARTH's combat sequences.

First, they build temples to Ra, the Sun God. Then, entire cities (called Stallites) rise up around these temples. Entire social structures evolve out of the need to maintain light, heat, and genetic purity.

Two elite groups rule this light-oriented society: the priestly Sunseers and the military Guardians of Fire. In the best of all possible setups, your character is a Guardian of Fire named Arkhan, a policeman trained for immediate action and the son of a Sunseer named Rylsedaar—you are sensitized to the history, myth, and dynamics of your culture. In the worst of all possible situations, you are soon thrust into a situation where the bulk of this cultural structure stands against you.

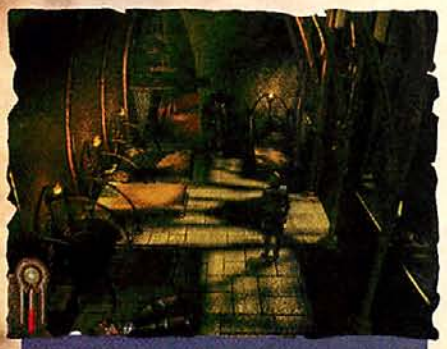
Dancin' in the Dark

For the most part, the game is extremely easy to navigate. You use arrow keys to move around, the space bar to use objects or initiate conversation, and the C key to enter combat mode. Combat is in realtime and can be set for easy or tough battles. Once in combat mode, you press Ctrl and hit the arrow keys for your various moves.

All of the characters are 3D, and the game contains numerous attractive 3D objects. However, rooms are not connected for pure 3D scrolling, and there are times when objects such as staircases are not fully implemented as 3D, leading to some awkward animated sequences in which the characters do not mesh perfectly with the environment.

Of course, you might wonder why Kalisto opted for 3D figures and objects if you aren't viewing the action in first-person and you can't scroll smoothly from one room to the next. The beauty of the 3D art is that whenever you enter combat,

DARK AEGIS Monuments from an earlier era guide you through the cultural background of the DARK EARTH universe and provide vital clues for the endgame.



DARKOVER Whenever you see the symbol of Ra on the wall, you can save your game of DARK EARTH.

you get fast action, smooth animation, and plenty of camera angles. At first, this might seem disorienting, but as you play the game, you realize that the close-ups, pans, and over-the-shoulder views add to the excitement of each encounter. Easy mode will prove to be too much of a cakewalk for action gamers, but its inclusion means that even those who don't care for action sequences can get through the game without dying.

Gameplay consists of combat and conversation separated by the occasional puzzle (of the find-the-right-object or -information variety). Successful combat sequences, appropriate conversations, and the mere zen of being in the right place at the right time lead to cinematic cut-scenes with intriguing camera angles, impressive graphics, and visceral levels of violence. The downside of the design is that your conversational options are predetermined by the attitude you adopt in an out-of-interface setup screen. The conversations play more cinematically this way, but some gamers may feel that this is the old FMV problem (read: lack of control) all over again.

Stallite 19

DARK EARTH has an extremely well-conceived storyline. You start with a clear-cut concept of light versus darkness and good versus evil. Your first combat pits you against murdering guerrillas who have invaded the sacred confines of the Temple of Ra and do not hesitate to slaughter the Sunseers. Unfortunately, when you defeat the first foe, you find yourself caught in a vain attempt to rescue Lory, the greatest of the Sunseers, only to end up being contaminated by a black, porous, ice-cold parasitic ooze called Shankr Archessence.

This substance, you soon discover, causes you to slowly transform into one of the mutant creatures of darkness from which you have always protected society—and now, your fellow Guardians of Fire are out to get *you*. You learn that you must locate your father and get him to show you a hidden crypt wherein lies the secret to your healing. Your own Stallite becomes a prison to you as you try to free yourself—and the world around you—from the danger.

As events unfold around and upon you, you learn the wisdom of a statement propounded by an old priest: "Night is an ordeal feared only by the impure." You discover that a perfectly ordered society may not be quite as perfect as you once thought.

Of course, this penetration into deeper and deeper shades of gray is exactly what design director Guillaume Le Pennec is striving for: an attempt to portray prejudice and fear in (pardon the pun) an entirely new light. Kalisto adds just the right touch of moral ambiguity to DARK EARTH to stimulate the imagination and compel you to keep playing.

In terms of story, game world, and artistic touches, DARK EARTH is an objet d'art. As a game, it is even having some success as a pen-and-paper role-playing game in France. (*Casus Belli*, the marvelous French role-playing magazine, gave the pen-and-paper game a positive review and is currently publishing additional scenarios.) Whether the combat and puzzles are enough to carry it as a computer game remains to be seen. The puzzles are lighter than the typical adventure game, and the combat doesn't have quite the subtlety of a pure action game. It's a nice balance for some, but may seem too lightweight for others —*Johnny L. Wilson*

DARK SECRETS You manipulate weapons and objects in DARK EARTH via an inventory screen that is strictly click, drag, and drop.

Company's Coming.

Resource management, import-export, arsenal development and technological research are just a few of the dynamic game play features in this multi-player clash.

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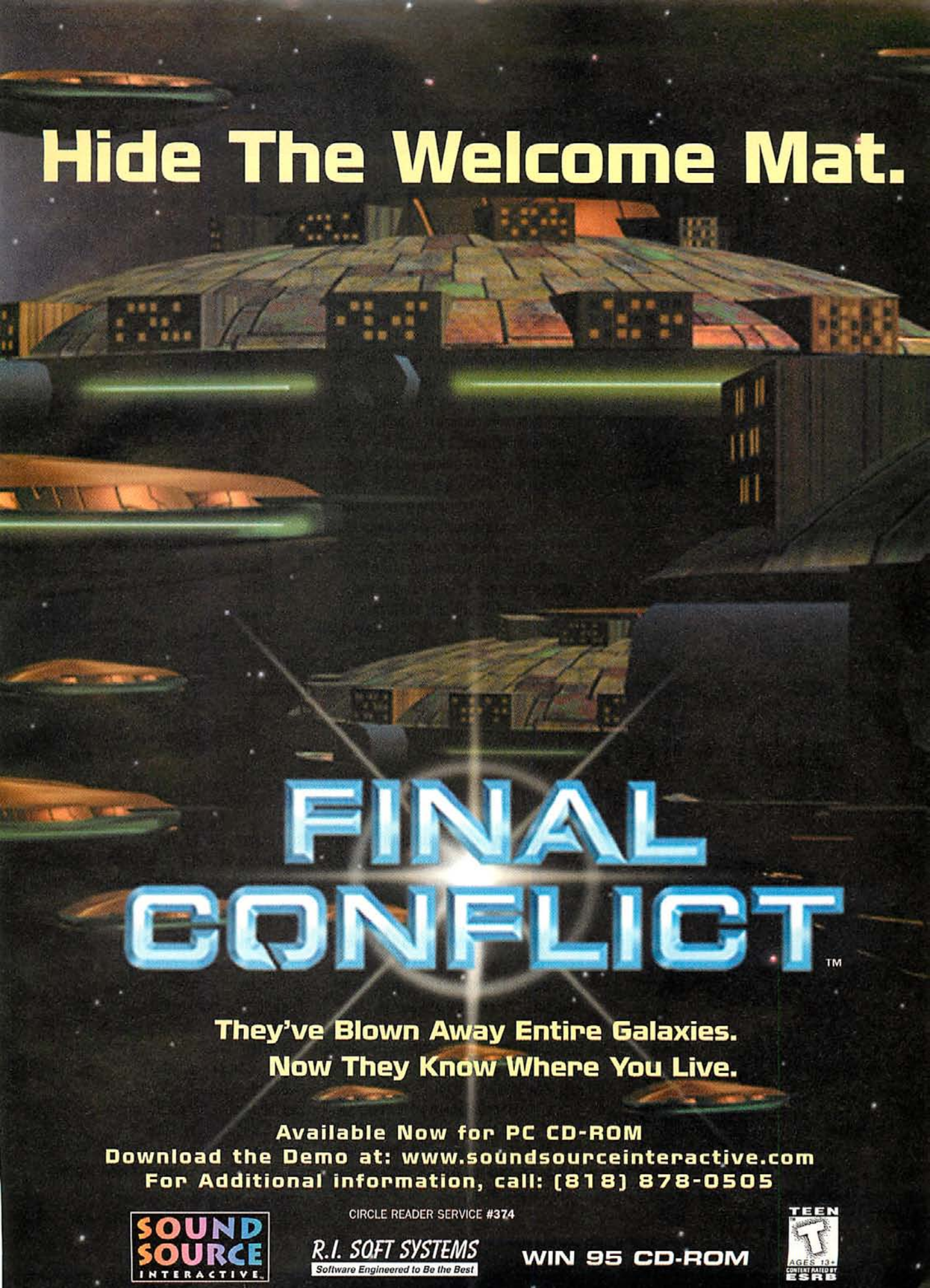
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Exile III: Ruined World

Questing the Old-Fashioned (and Inexpensive) Way

This game from Spiderweb Software—appearing on our CG-ROM this month and available as a download from Spiderweb's Web site—has been a big hit among role-players for months, almost entirely because of word-of-mouth on Net newsgroups.

EXILE III is the third game in Spiderweb's epic tale of the struggle between the Empire and the Exiles. In this game, after years of a stalemate, the Exiles have found a way to reach the surface, and you and your party are sent to explore.

At first, the game looks exactly like what it is—a shareware game with primitive graphics. But if you keep playing, you'll discover a remarkably deep, traditional RPG far more complex than its appearance would indicate.

Character creation is very flexible—you can even assign disadvantages such as "magically inept" or "bad back," which will affect how much experience you need to advance levels. Combat is turn-based, the spell system—divided into two classes—is deep, and the ample dialogue with NPCs is well written and witty throughout. Rounding out the game are elegant touches such as an automap and a journal that automatically keeps track of your quests.

Jeff Vogel—EXILE's designer and programmer—has created an RPG "like they used to make." And it costs only $25 to play.

—Jeff Green

EXILE III won't blow you away with its graphics, but everything else about the game—characters, plot, design, dialogue—is first-rate, traditional RPG gaming.

Target Release Date: Available now
Developer: Spiderweb Software
Publisher: Spiderweb Software
www.spidweb.com

Grimoire

A Classic Computer Role-Playing Game From the Net

GRIMOIRE sends you through mazes of woods, dungeons, caves, and more in the search for the Metronome Mysterium.

Target Release Date: Fall 1997
Developer: Cleveland Mark Blakemore
Publisher: Cleveland Mark Blakemore
http://192.216.191.21/TimesSquare/Alley/3806/

Two classic computer game references popped immediately to mind when I first booted the alpha version of GRIMOIRE, a CRPG available only via the Internet. The first was MIGHT AND MAGIC. In GRIMOIRE, you constantly explore the world via a 3D first-person window—just as you did in the original MIGHT AND MAGIC (and WIZARDRY before it). The second was ZORK. Remember that maze of look-alike passages? You're always in a maze in GRIMOIRE—at least in the parts we've seen.

If you like the character classes of classic role-playing, you'll immediately find yourself comfortable with the Adepts, Clansmen (humanoid player characters evolved from other biological strains), Conjurors, Guardsmen, Pickpockets, and Traders to be found in GRIMOIRE. You'll feel comfortable with the skill sets and the career paths that are available. Most gamers will enjoy the many combat options at their disposal: Hide, run, shield, fight, cast (spell), use (artifact), or surrender.

Also in the classic vein is the background story for GRIMOIRE. You outfit a party to quest in search of the "Metronome Mysterium," the so-called Clock of Fate that winds down into anomie and portends the end of the world. Instead of trying to "Kill Foozle," it's the party's task to find the cosmic pendulum and rewind the clock that ticks off the world's fate.

GRIMOIRE has solid potential and may be just the unguent necessary for long-time role-players who want more than real-time, first-person dungeon crawls. It may also prove the worth of online distribution for independent designers and publishers. *—Johnny L. Wilson*

Online RPGs

While the online revolution may not have happened yet, it is getting more interesting out there for gamers—and for role-players in particular. Here are a few of the more promising upcoming online RPGs.

Ultima Online

Of course, no RPG guide would be complete without mentioning the ultrahigh-profile Ultima Online, the online RPG with the potential to either soar into gaming greatness or take a Wile E. Coyote nosedive. Given the publicity surrounding the game, it has turned into a real event—and if Richard Garriott and the folks at Origin can pull it off, it will be a stunning achievement. As of this writing, Phase 2 of the public beta test was taking place, and we had hoped to have a play report here. But in a week of trying, we were unable to log on. Typical beta problem or a sign of difficulties to come? Will the game finally be up and running when you read this, or will Origin still be kicking all the bats and chipmunks out of its servers? There's no reason to be pessimistic, but, after writing about this game for more than a year, we're going to stop saying "It'll be out soon." Now we'll just say we *hope* it's out soon. Lord British, your greatness, your subjects are ready to play.—*Jeff Green*

Meridian 59: Revelation

Meridian 59 may not get the same attention that Ultima Online is receiving, but 3DO's Internet-based RPG has boasting rights for one huge reason: It actually celebrates its one-year anniversary this October. In that year, the game's thousands of fans have created a living, breathing alternate universe, and the developers have continued to tweak the game with upgrades and expansion packs.

Now, 3DO is readying the biggest upgrade yet, called Meridian 59: Revelation, which is essentially an entirely new version of the game. Due this fall, Revelation promises to improve or expand virtually every aspect of the game. On the aesthetic front, the developers have completely redesigned the interface and upgraded the first-person graphic engine to keep up with the times. Player and monster graphics have also been improved, and they've tweaked the monster AI so that monsters can now ally with each other in combat—or be tamed by you to fight on your side.

3DO has added tons of new quests and sidequests, and promises to make the experience more "game like" for those seeking more than just a MUD-like social hangout. The team has created an entirely new island city complete with a race of beings with their own culture and language. The overall quest in Revelation involves traveling to this island city and uncovering the mysteries therein. But it won't be something that any random newbie just logging on can join. Newcomers will need to explore the existing world of Meridian 59, garnering strength, experience, and magic, before they're strong enough to deal with the new land. This will keep the game friendly enough for new users, while giving longtime gamers a brand-new challenge for their already battle-toughened characters.

A host of new weapons and more than 100 new spells to master round out the changes to this already hugely popular online RPG. Whether new players will discover the game amid all the noise being generated by Ultima Online remains to be seen, but Meridian 59—as of this writing, anyway—has one irrefutable competitive advantage: It's up, live and running.—*Jeff Green*

Is the sudden resurgence of computer RPGs attributable to their popularity online? Stephen Poole examines this question for GameSpot saying, "Many developers believe it's the Internet's ability to allow gamers to role-play together that's moving the genre back into the limelight." Get the whole story, and take a look at 15 upcoming online RPGs on GameSpot's Guide to Online RPGs.

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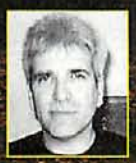

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Asheron's Call

A surface glance at ASHERON'S CALL will give you a sense of déjà vu. The first pages you see look a lot like an updated WIZARDRY with more character skills. A second look shows you that the view in the familiar window offers real first-person in 3D and an option for going full-screen with the action window. A deeper look reveals that the game does not restrict you to the traditional "character classes" of earlier role-playing games (bards, wizards, fighters, thieves, druids, and the like), but allows you to tailor a skill set at will. So, if you want to build a dreamthief character drawn from Michael Moorcock's *Fortress of the Pearl*, you can create a reasonable facsimile based on skill selection, even if he/she doesn't have exactly the same skills as in the book. Experienced RPG players will love the flexibility.

WHAT A CHARACTER You'll build your own custom "character classes" from the wide assortment of skills and heritage groups available in ASHERON'S CALL.

Peer even more deeply and you discover a sensitivity that's often missing from RPG worlds. Most games use the idea of race to create distinguishing characteristics and attributes in both player and nonplayer characters. Yet the very use of race in this way can be divisive. Rather than serve as the underpinning for stories that help us understand and improve the situation (ULTIMA VI is a sterling exception to this rule), such fantasy-based racism can suggest that some races are subhuman. Much as we may protest that these are *only* games (see this month's editorial), the idea of innate superiority/inferiority can subtly lead us into real-life discrimination. ASHERON'S CALL, instead, very sensitively labels the variety of cultural backgrounds found in the game as "heritage groups." Such a designation offers a nonhomogeneous population for the game world without emphasizing racial stereotypes (whether drawn from reality or fantasy).

ASHERON'S CALL offers online multiplayer interaction in a complex, dynamic social environment, where politics are as important as combat.

Target Release Date: First Quarter 1998
Developer: Turbine Entertainment
Publisher: Microsoft
www.microsoft.com

As you continue to view the game, you realize that this is an RPG with true beauty and originality. Social interaction in ASHERON'S CALL is "allegiance-based." This means that your actions and social standing, as well as the overarching social dynamics in the world, are based on the groups to which you belong, and their agendas. The agendas are, in turn, established and evolved by the player characters themselves. The design team will occasionally plant seeds for a given agenda, but the players can opt to go with the seeds or not. The social design of ASHERON'S CALL may well be the most intricate ever in an online role-playing experience.

A final inspection shows that ASHERON'S CALL has been designed for the Internet from the ground up. The design structure itself reduces data handling and, hence, the effect of latency. We were amazed at how smoothly the game worked using a remote server. Of course, we haven't yet tried this massively multiplayer game

CATTLEPULT ANYONE? An early screenshot promoting ASHERON'S CALL portrays benign cows on the screen as though they were monsters.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #063

with thousands of simultaneous gamers. We just hope the theories will hold up.

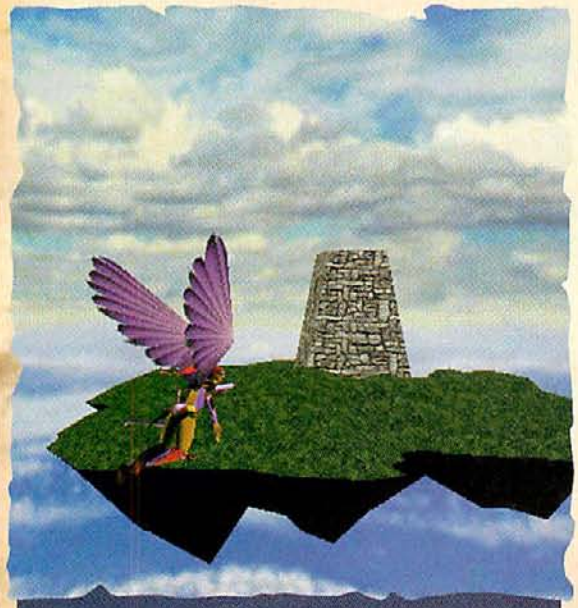
Unlike many online RPGs, ASHERON'S CALL will be a premium game in which you can pay by the day or by the month. Additional lands and items will be added as the game needs it—and as the gaming public is willing to pay.—*Johnny L. Wilson*

SKIES THE LIMIT Segasoft hopes to lure you into its persistent-world, online RPG with the chance to roam among the clouds of a fantasy world.

Skies

Imagine a fantasy world of cloud castles and floating islands. That's the setting for SKIES, Segasoft's persistent role-playing game of winged creatures, set to debut in mid-1998. You'll choose from among angels, demons, dragons, and other winged creatures to play, but they won't be the images you know from popular fantasy culture. Dragons might not necessarily breath fire, and an angel won't always be good. Gamers will have the opportunity to customize their characters in unique ways so that each player character will be very different from the next.

Characters in SKIES will be skill-based, as in ULTIMA ONLINE, not level-based. As you develop, your appearance will also change, meaning that players will be able to tell at a glance how powerful you are. The game world will comprise various locations above and below ground and in the sky. Segasoft also says that these locations will change dynamically according to your and other players' actions.



ANGEL EYES The fantasy creatures in this world won't necessarily follow the attitudes set by Tolkien. Expect surprises.

Segasoft is pushing its transactor technology as a prominent feature of SKIES. Though we have yet to see it in action, transactors are digital objects that are serialized and attached to specific characters. These transactors can be abilities or objects, and players will be able to customize their powers using these transactors. Your own character will be a transactor, called a LEDO (Limited Edition Digital Object), which you can trade with others. The transactor technology enables an open-market economy in which LEDOs and transactors can be bought, sold, and traded according to the demands for and scarcity of objects in the SKIES gaming population. Segasoft hopes that the dynamic will be similar to the card game *Magic the Gathering*, with transactors being the cards that build your LEDO, or hand.

The game is played in third-person, and the graphics should be good. Segasoft has employed the talents of Michael Turner, cocreator of the comic heroine *Witchblade*, to develop the characters and monsters in SKIES. —*Elliott Chin*

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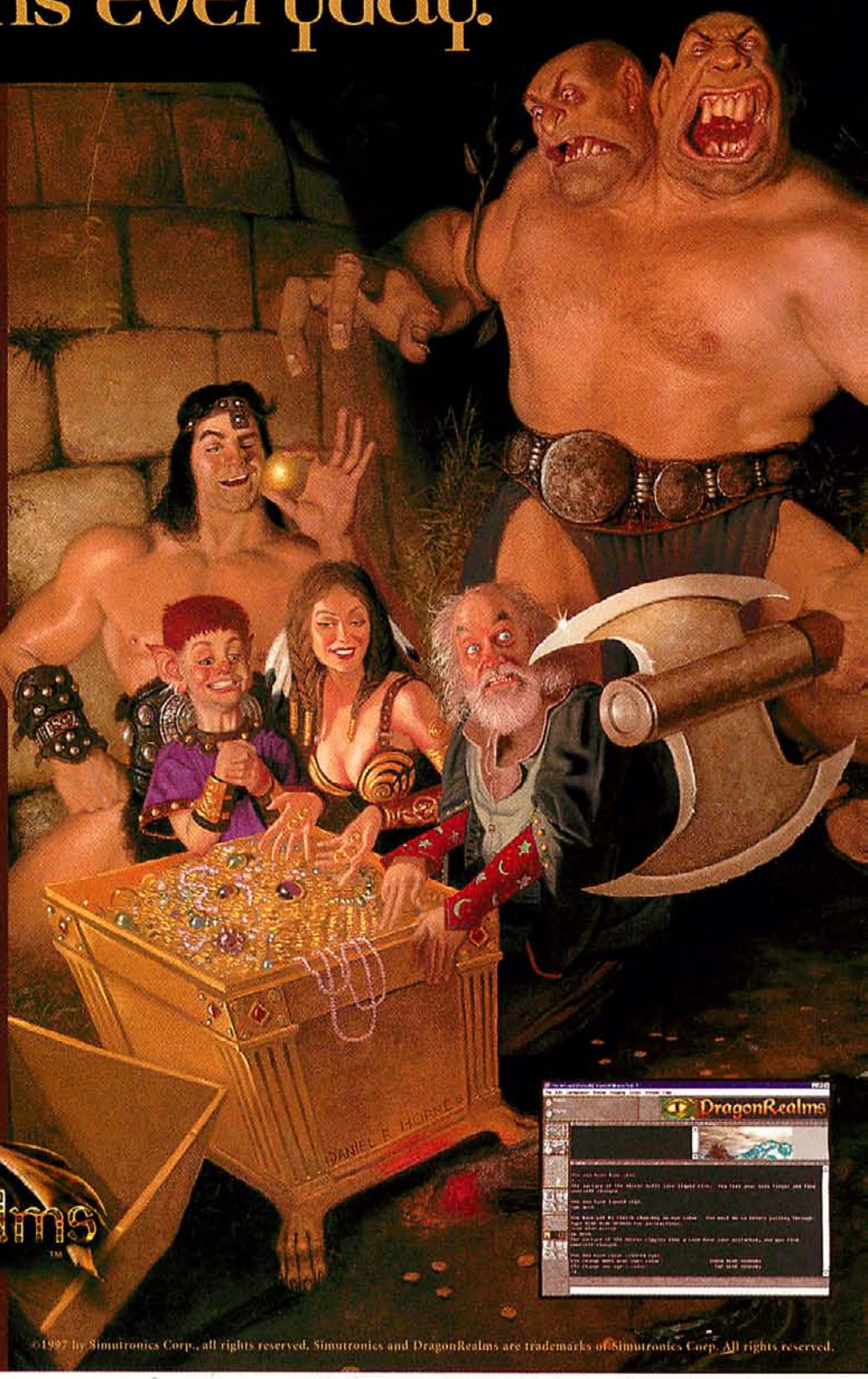

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The Five Greatest Computer Role-Playing Games of All Time

If you had to name the five greatest computer role-playing games of all time, you would probably pick the ones we've selected (or other entries in the same series). We've provided the complete games for these five RPGs on this month's CG-ROM. Play them for yourself and see if you don't agree with our reasons.

Ultima IV

When Richard Garriott decided to put virtue in Ultima IV, he wasn't satisfied with preaching a static morality. He wanted, from character-creation onward, to confront the gamer with moral dilemmas, challenging choices, and a powerful story. With the concept of avatarhood, Garriott succeeded in doing what many other role-playing games had failed to do: Cause gamers to think about real life in new and different ways.

Wasteland

With a story by Mike Stackpole (of *BattleTech* and *X-Wing* novel fame) and maps by Liz Danforth, Ken St. Andre, and others, Wasteland emerged as an epic game of postapocalyptic combat, mystery, and puzzles. For the first time, gamers found that they couldn't necessarily count on nonplayer characters to share ammunition, take the point, or perform dangerous deeds in order to save the rest of the party. Other nice touches included Danforth's infamous "rabid dog" scenario, in which you were forced to pay the consequences of your deed.

Betrayal at Krondor

This game wasn't special just because it brought Raymond E. Feist's Midkemia to life on the computer screen, although that might have been enough. It was the first adventure game to try to give you a 3D first-person feel (even though some of the characters look like paper dolls pasted onto the environment). It also offered a very fresh and new magical interface that worked wonderfully and fit the Midkemian milieu perfectly. All in all, a great game with solid balance and lots of surprises.

Might and Magic

The first game in a hugely successful series, Might and Magic redefined the term *epic*. It had the largest map of any fantasy RPG up to that time and featured the most upscale documentation for its era. Most of all, it had great pacing as you maneuvered through intricate mazes in breathless suspense, a tremendous amount of hack-'n'-slash combat, a wide sampling of magical spells, and a simple, yet charming story. The graphics have improved over the years and its progeny, Might and Magic VI, promises to offer another fresh perspective with its 3D graphics and architectural styles, but there's something special about the original. It's tough, but worth it.

Wizardry VI

To many gamers, the Wizardry series as a whole could fill any list of the Top Five RPGs of All Time. It was the first maze-view dungeon crawl and offered deep and challenging role-play at a time when many computer games were merely stickman versions of Hack, a mainframe hack-'n'-slash game. Wizardry VI stands high as the first game in the series to blend fantasy and sci-fi into its realms and the first Wizardry game to offer full-screen color. Some gamers would argue that Wizardry IV is the best, given its diabolical puzzles and the opportunity you have to play the villain, but we chose Wizardry VI as the most accessible Wizardry yet available.

An early screenshot from Wizardry VIII, which Sir-Tech is promising for a late '98 release.

Crystal Ball

Gazing further into the future, your RPG soothsayer sees a number of promising titles on the horizon. We predict that about the time you read this, you'll be hearing an announcement about Diablo 2—though Blizzard won't confirm this as we go to press.

Last month's E3 roundup reported that Sir-Tech was working on Wizardry VIII. While this is still true, we have since learned that it will be a fall 1998 release—at best.

Finally, rumors abound about Ultima IX. Lord British and his minions at Origin all promise that this is still going to happen, but the immense difficulty of developing Ultima Online has pushed the single-player game back to the point where no one is talking dates at all.

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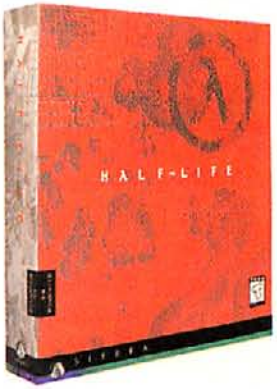

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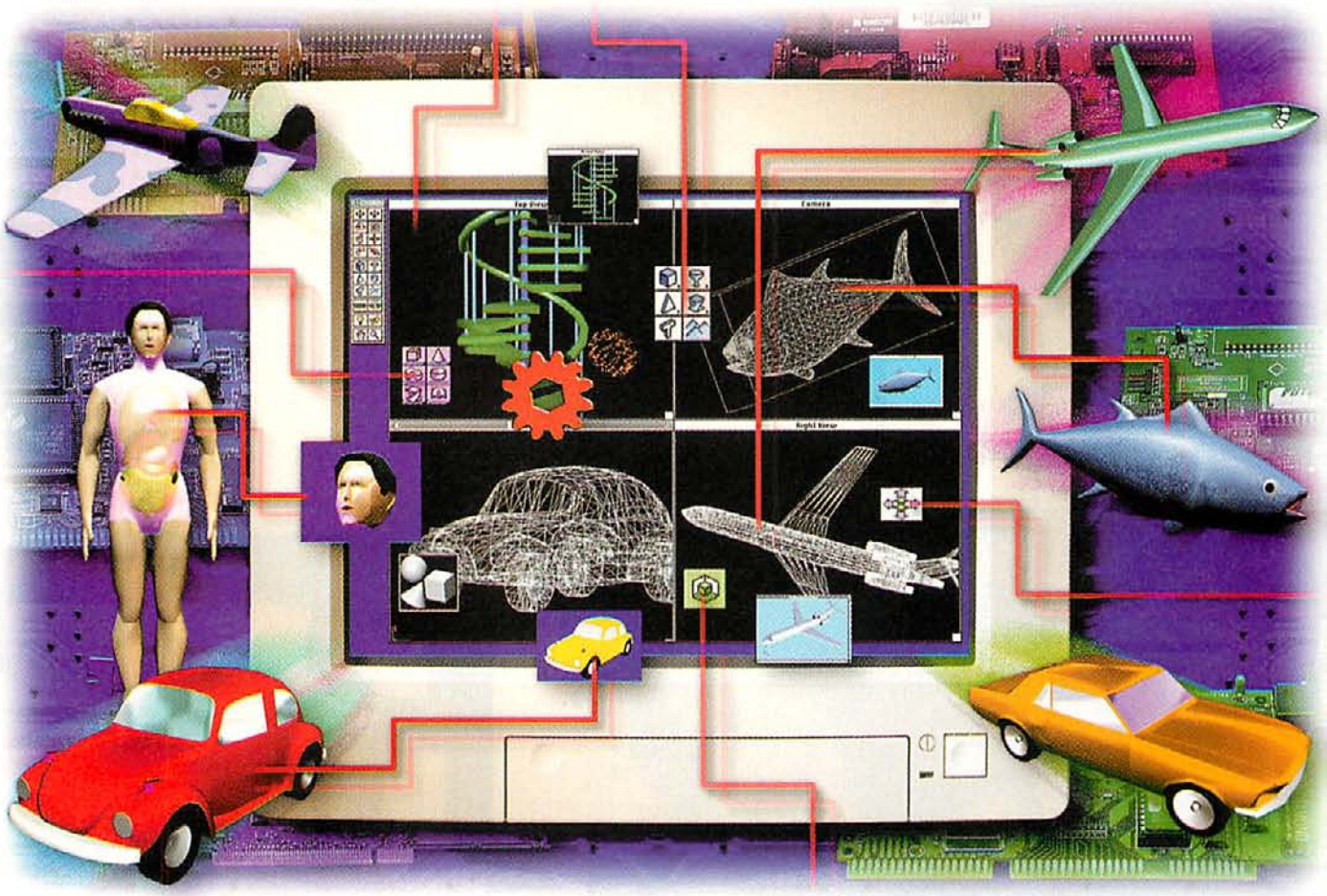


...Last Year

The New Generation of 3D Chips Comes of Age

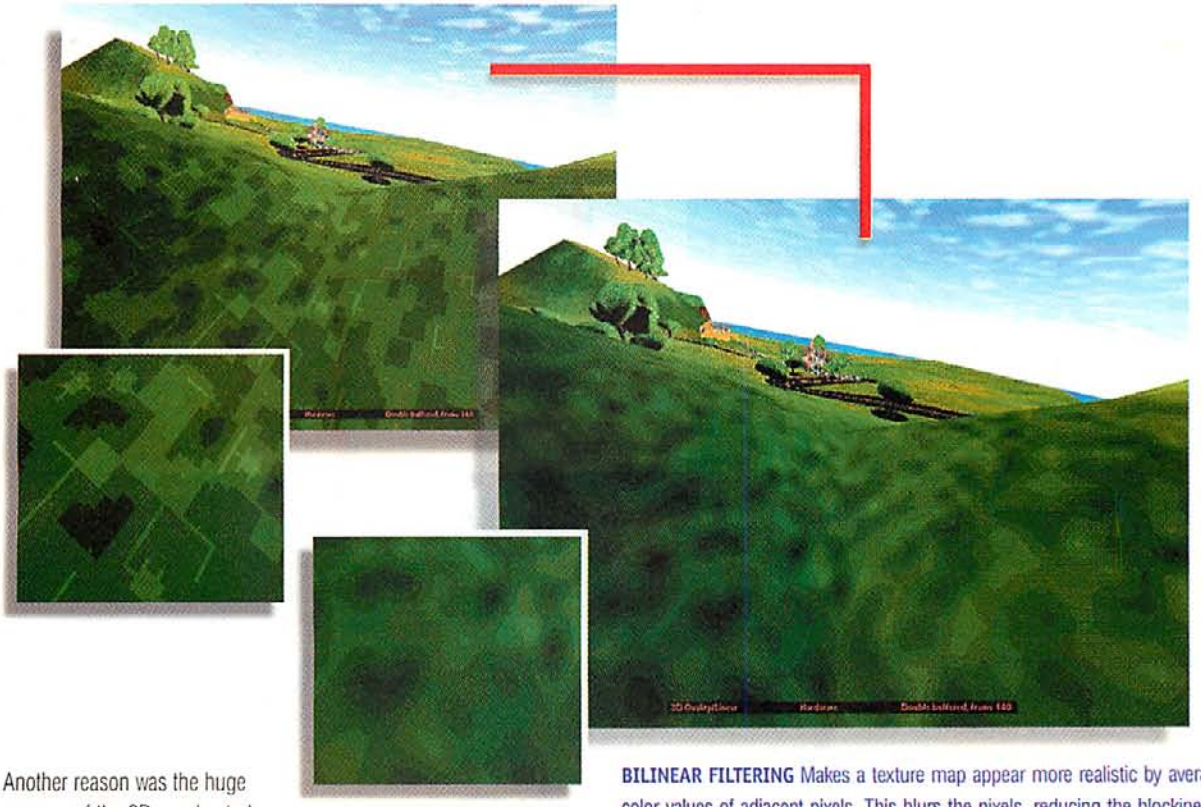
by Loyd Case

In the computer-gaming business, there's a hot new topic every year. 1996 was supposed to be "The Year of 3D Acceleration." Uh-huh. Sure.

Don't get me wrong, there were some interesting point products. Boards using the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset stole the show with their stellar performance and image quality. Rendition proved you could have solid 3D performance alongside reasonable 2D- and SVGA-graphics performance. Cards using the S3 ViRGE chip proved you could slap "3D" onto the box and sell a lot of cards despite underwhelming 3D performance. Matrox proved there was a market for 2D/3D accelerators that left out certain mainstream 3D image-quality features.

The hardware was there. It was the software that came up missing. For months, the only accelerated software titles out there came bundled in the same box with their graphics cards. A few titles shipped that offered support for a specific chip, but because Microsoft shipped Direct3D late, and because Direct3D proved somewhat difficult to use, titles have only just begun to hit store shelves.

Despite this dearth, a lot of 3D cards were sold. One reason was the huge consumer education effort undertaken by many 3D vendors.



BILINEAR FILTERING Makes a texture map appear more realistic by averaging the color values of adjacent pixels. This blurs the pixels, reducing the blockiness when viewing the texture up close. If a board doesn't support this feature, you'll get point-sampling (on the left).

Another reason was the huge success of the 3D-accelerated versions of QUAKE—first, Rendition-accelerated VQUAKE proved that you could have significantly enhanced image quality and a good frame rate, then GL QUAKE arrived on the scene with its superb lighting and transparency effects.

Another showcase title was TOMB RAIDER from Eidos, with its beautiful, motion-captured virtual-action diva, Lara Croft.

Enter the Hardware Onslaught

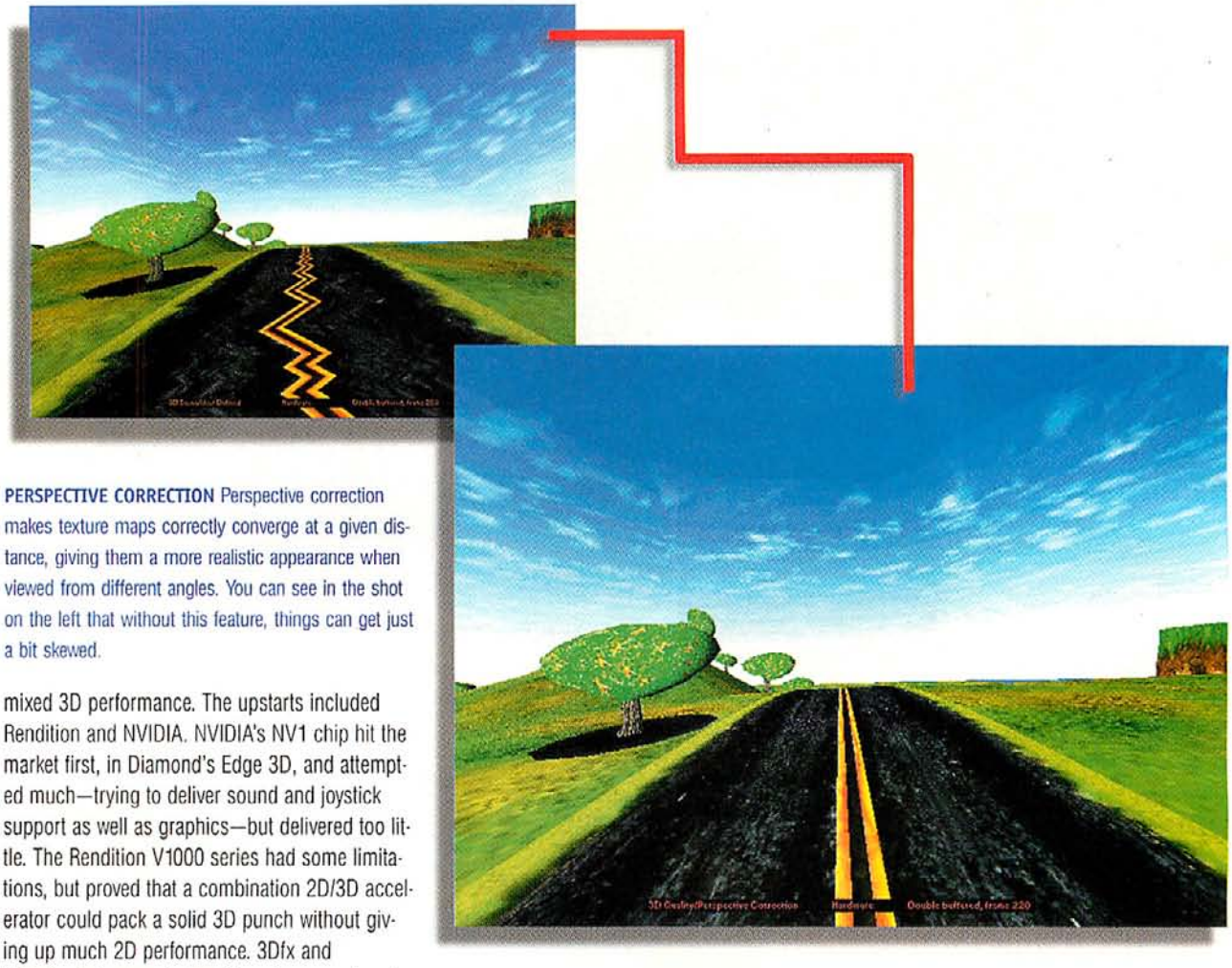
Soon we'll have a host of hot 3D iron, as well as some seriously accelerated 3D titles. If last year was the beginning, 1997 is the arrival. With any luck, 1998 will move along at warp speed. If you read our July 1996 issue, some of the 3D techno-speak covered here is probably old hat by now, though we'll also tell you about some new developments of interest. But if you're just beginning to get versed in 3D, then this will be a good place to get started.

FOG EFFECTS Blending objects in the distance with a fixed color yields a haze or foggy appearance. If a chip doesn't support fog, it'll be pretty obvious. But looking at the image on the right, you see that fog can add tremendously to the overall effect in a game scene.

Evolution of the Revolution

In the summer of 1996, 3D accelerators began to arrive in quick succession. Last year, we tested quite a few 3D cards, and a year ago a lot of these cards looked pretty good. There were no reliable benchmarks on the market, DOS games were still king, and the handful of Direct3D games out were not very good at measuring performance.

The landscape was divided up into the mainstream players, the upstarts, and the dedicated 3D chips. The mainstream players—ATI, S3, and Matrox—delivered fast 2D cards, but had



PERSPECTIVE CORRECTION Perspective correction makes texture maps correctly converge at a given distance, giving them a more realistic appearance when viewed from different angles. You can see in the shot on the left that without this feature, things can get just a bit skewed.

mixed 3D performance. The upstarts included Rendition and NVIDIA. NVIDIA's NV1 chip hit the market first, in Diamond's Edge 3D, and attempted much—trying to deliver sound and joystick support as well as graphics—but delivered too little. The Rendition V1000 series had some limitations, but proved that a combination 2D/3D accelerator could pack a solid 3D punch without giving up much 2D performance. 3Dfx and VideoLogic took radically different approaches in bringing dedicated 3D accelerators to market. The 3Dfx Voodoo chipset delivered stunning performance and image quality using a more traditional rendering pipeline. The PowerVR chip took a more radical approach that eliminated the need for frame-buffer memory, but suffered Direct3D teething problems (see this month's review).

All of these players are poised to deliver new chips that promise significant increases in rendering performance. After wandering in the wilderness, NVIDIA has stormed back with the RIVA 128, a chip focused on just three things: hot-rod 3D graphics, superb 2D graphics, and digital video acceleration. Rendition is set to deliver the V2200, which will offer a 3X performance increase in 3D and serious 2D and video features—all the while maintaining compatibility with the V1000.

VideoLogic is bringing the second-generation PowerVR chip, the PCX2, to the forefront, while 3Dfx has given users a real Rush—Voodoo Rush, that is. Even mainstream stalwart ATI is poised to bring a potentially hot performer in the form of the Rage Pro—its third generation of 3D accelerators and probably the most innovative architecture it has done yet.

Then there's software. While the controversy over the Direct3D versus OpenGL issue looks like a Tyson-Holyfield bite...er...bout (see sidebar), scores of Direct3D titles are set to be delivered this fall. OpenGL isn't left out, though, since games based on the QUAKE engine will all support OpenGL, and some of them promise to be blockbusters.

It's the Experience, Stupid

It's easy to overlook the fact that 3D graphics isn't an end in itself but, rather, a means to deliver an immersive experience. Recently, we booted up the Direct3D version of MECHWARRIOR MERCENARIES on a Monster-3D card and were sharply reminded that it's the experience that counts. MERCENARIES is almost a different game using Direct 3D, with night battles taking on an eerie feel as laser bolts and missiles light up the darkness. Aiming seems much easier, and the ground looks a lot more real when you fall over after one of your mech's legs gets blown off.

Several factors contribute to an immersive experience. Certainly, frame rate is critical. The prettiest image quality is pointless if the game looks like a slide-show. On the other hand, if you can average a solid 25–30 frames per second with the kind of image quality that 3Dfx delivers, 40fps of blocky, pixelated scenery suddenly loses its appeal. So you need to weigh both issues: Look at the claimed image quality delivered by the 3D hardware and the frame rate actually delivered by a variety of games. Benchmarks like 3D WinBench help, but it's really the games that tell the story.

Next month, we'll take a look at a variety of 3D accelerators and test them with several game titles, as well as 3D WinBench.

Most accelerators support a variety of 3D features. The minimum set you need to look for is perspective-corrected texture mapping and point sampling. However, we believe quite strongly that bilinear filtering adds a lot to the mix, and MIP-mapping (see glossary) improves image quality, particularly in games with lots of movement across distance. Good transparency effects are rapidly becoming a must (think of the water effects in GL QUAKE). And fog effects can add that last little bit of verisimilitude—climbing to the top of a foggy hill in MERCENARIES really keeps you on your toes.

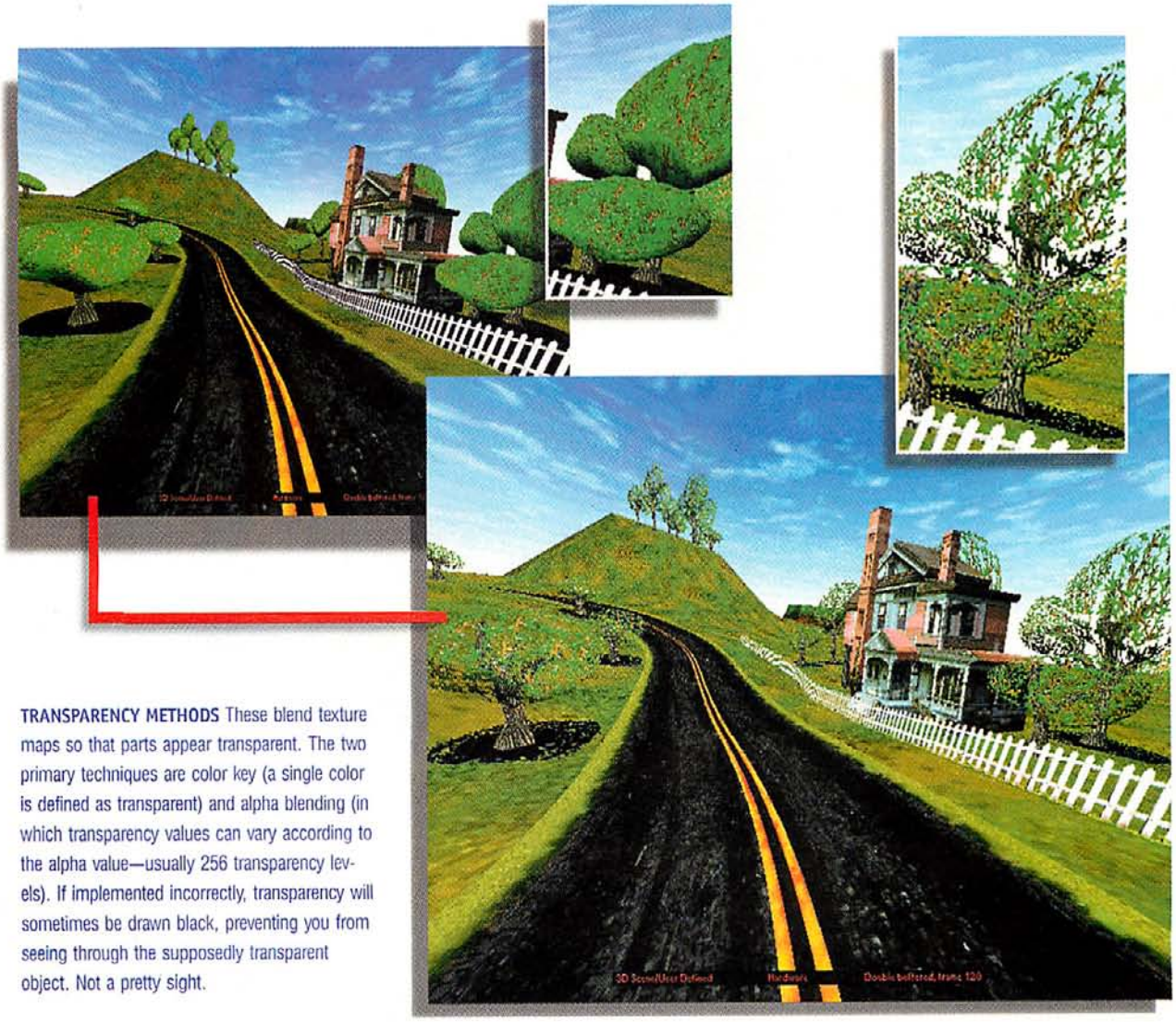
Finally, don't discount the performance of the CPU. There's a myth going around that a fast 3D card will make up for a slow CPU, but as our CPU testing last month indicated, that's not the case. Yes, a 3D accelerator will help an older system keep up with some games, but there's still a lot of geometry being calculated by the processor in order to give the accelerator something to render.

Things to Come

Next month's graphics card roundup will consist exclusively of 3D-capable hardware. We have a number of very cool cards on the way, including your first look at several new AGP boards. Here's just a taste of what's in store:

- Boards from Diamond and STB, using NVIDIA's new Riva 128 chip
- ATI's new Xpert@Play, using ATI's new Rage Pro
- Two boards using 3Dfx's Voodoo Rush chipset from Hercules and Intergraph
- Hercules' and ELSA's new Permedia 2-based boards
- VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3DX and 5DX, using NEC/VideoLogic's PowerVR chip
- Matrox's new Mystique 220, plus a new 3D surprise they've got in the works
- Number Nine Revolution 3D

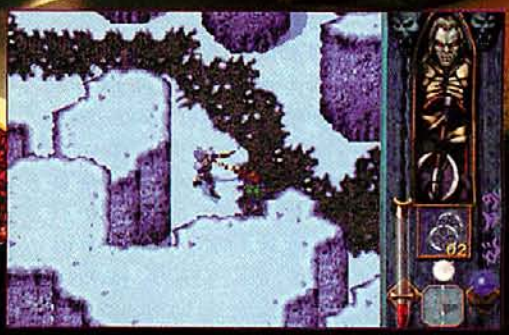
We'll also give you an early look at 3D iron still in development, including Rendition's V2200, Tritech's Pyramid3D, and Oak Technology's Warp 5 chip.



TRANSPARENCY METHODS These blend texture maps so that parts appear transparent. The two primary techniques are color key (a single color is defined as transparent) and alpha blending (in which transparency values can vary according to the alpha value—usually 256 transparency levels). If implemented incorrectly, transparency will sometimes be drawn black, preventing you from seeing through the supposedly transparent object. Not a pretty sight.

Reuer

Gory Combat Action: Brimming with 170 horrifying enemies and 21 demented spells — each with a unique bloody graphic.



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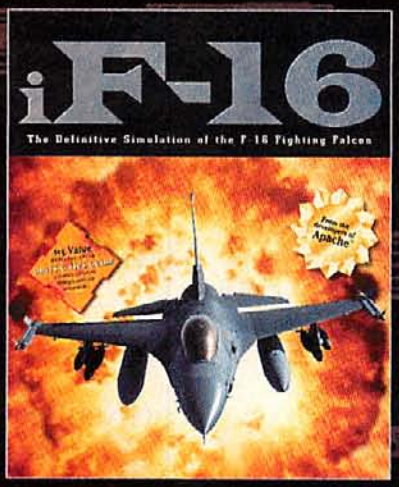

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Developed by: Digital Integration

Published by: INTERACTIVE MAGIC™

Direct3D versus OpenGL: The Debate Rages On

by Dave Salvator

Microsoft undertook a major initiative about two years ago: To build a global 3D graphics Application Programming Interface (API) that high-performance games could use and 3D chips could accelerate. Dubbed Direct3D, this API would let game developers write their game code once and have it run on anyone's hardware, and hardware guys could write one set of drivers, meaning that most game titles would then run on their hardware. A great idea. A needed idea. So why has there been so much flak about this API? And what's all this about OpenGL being a viable API alternative for 3D game development?

Before its current incarnation, Direct3D was Reality Lab, a software-based (CPU-only) 3D API. Since Microsoft bought RenderMorphics' API and rechristened it Direct3D, it has undergone the growing pains of learning how to talk to 3D accelerators—something it wasn't accustomed to doing. Most graphics vendors had been focusing their efforts on fast 2D performance and had to quickly come up to speed on 3D. To allow them some breathing room, Direct3D implemented a feature known to programmers as "capabilities bits." Using caps bits, programmers could ping a 3D accelerator's driver to see which 3D acceleration features it supports, use the ones it does, and disable the ones it doesn't. This allowed graphics vendors to more gradually implement their 3D acceleration features, rather than implement everything at once.

So why the ruckus? One inherent problem with "universal" APIs is what's called API overhead, which tends to cause something of a least-common-denominator effect. The result tends to be more detrimental to stronger performers, meaning that the not-so-hot chips can come to the party too. Another issue was the sheer difficulty involved in using Direct3D, which Microsoft has recently tried to address in DirectX5.

Combine these factors and the fact that several graphics companies are effectively marketing their own "straight to the iron" APIs to game vendors along with the lack of compelling Direct3D titles, and you have a situation where no one is happy. Enter OpenGL.

A Knight in Shining Armor?

OpenGL is a road-tested, feature-complete API that some game developers are considering as an alternative to Direct3D. SGI, a maker of high-end graphics workstations, has taken up the cause of making OpenGL a viable alternative for developers who don't want to use Direct3D. Id guru John Carmack used OpenGL to create GL QUAKE, which has greatly fueled this ongoing debate because it showed that compelling games could be written using OpenGL. But Microsoft quickly countered by running GL QUAKE—with some code tinkering—on Direct3D.

A consortium of game developers, led by Chris Hecker, asked Microsoft to incorporate OpenGL as the "guts" of Direct3D, and adopt it as the 3D API for games development. Microsoft balked, stating that its focus will be to make Direct3D its premier games API. Microsoft asserts that OpenGL isn't the ideal platform for action games in which frame-rate takes priority over accuracy, but the developer consortium contends that they want a choice as to which API they'll use to create games. SGI has stepped into the breach and announced that it will supply a hardware interface kit with which hardware makers will be able to implement OpenGL acceleration in their parts.

It Comes Back to Content

Where is this all headed? It boils down to which platform will have the most top-shelf games. Microsoft has a head start, and despite the early shortage of killer titles, the picture will be much rosier for the holidays, with JEDI KNIGHT, SABRE ACE, and UNREAL all nearing completion. OpenGL has one feather in its cap: QUAKE; plus all titles written using the QUAKE engine. Many developers are looking at OpenGL; and SU-27 FLANKER and WARBIRDS 2.0 will support it.

3D Glossary

There's a whole new jargon that comes with 3D graphics cards. Here's a brief rundown of the most important features.

CLUT COLOR LOOKUP TABLE A method of creating texture pallets, which is a form of texture compression (by reducing the amount of memory they need). Sometimes used in the absence of bilinear filtering.

EDGE ANTI-ALIASING Gets rid of "jaggies" along the sides of polygons and smoothes the appearance of diagonal lines in a scene.

HAL, OR HARDWARE ABSTRACTION LAYER Another name for the hardware driver software portion of Direct3D or any API that talks to the registers of a specific chip.

MIP-MAPPING MIP maps are multiple textures of varying resolutions that represent the texture when viewed from varying distances, and are swapped onto the texture as the viewpoint moves closer to the object.

POINT SAMPLING The simplest method of texture mapping, where a single pixel of a texture map is drawn as a single texel with no filtering.

SPECULAR HIGHLIGHTING An effect applied to a texture to make it appear to be lit.

TEXTURE MAPPING Applying a bitmap to a polygon to make it appear more realistic.

TEXEL A pixel from a texture map that has been applied to a polygon.

TRILINEAR MIP-MAPPING A more elaborate filtering technique whereby the four neighboring pixels from the current MIP map and the four neighboring pixels from the nearest MIP map are averaged. This can produce a smoother effect than bilinear filtering.

Z-BUFFERING A technique for managing which surfaces are visible along the distance axis (z-axis) by storing depth values before calculating hidden surfaces. It is more CPU- and memory-intensive than the less-accurate z-sort method.

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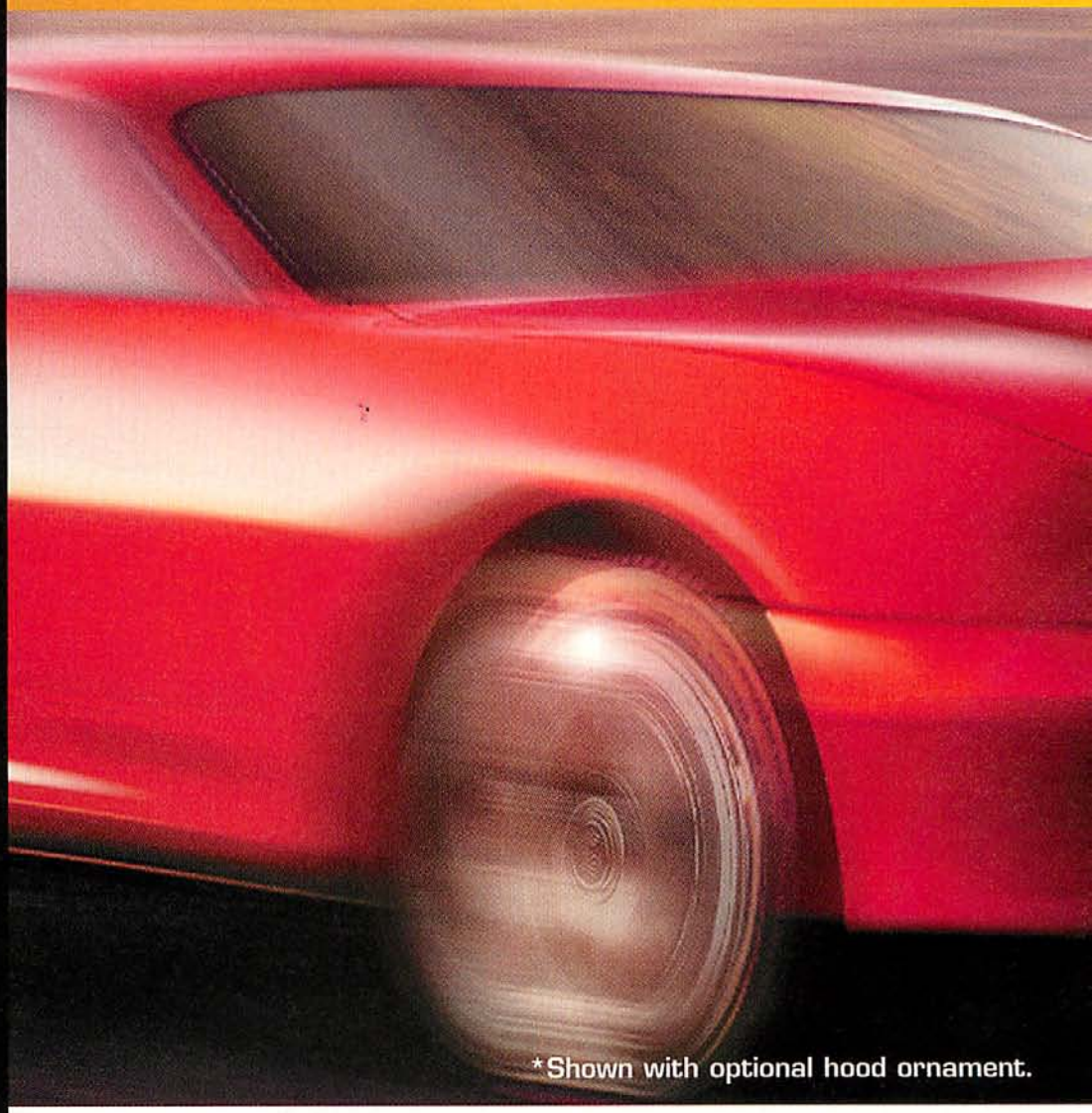

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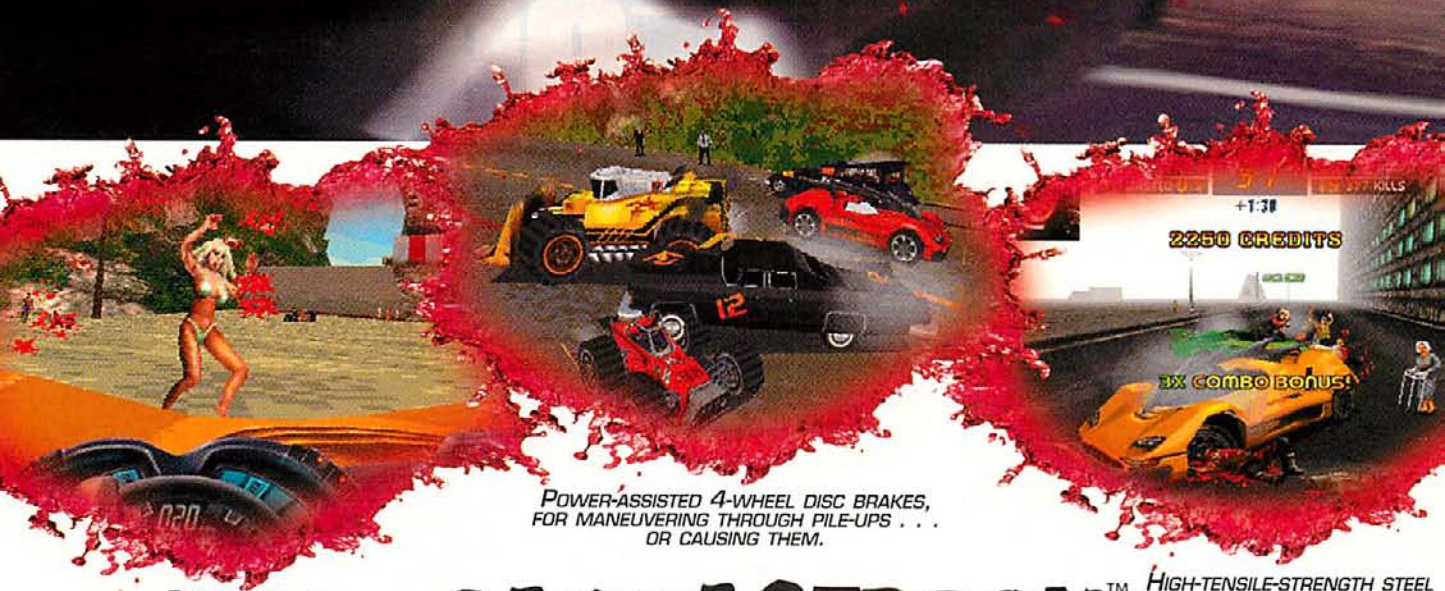

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PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT PIE

This Is Not Your Father's PC

New Appendages Coming to a Rig Near You

For the last four or five years, changes in the PC have been somewhat evolutionary. The last really significant change was the addition of the PCI bus. Other than that, it's been incremental improvements—faster processors, different memory formats, ATX form factor for motherboards, and so on. Even Windows 95 was an evolutionary improvement, although DirectX may eventually revolutionize the programming of PC games.

In the next year, though, several innovations promise to utterly alter the face of the PC—and the result will be pretty alien compared with what we have today.

TODAY'S BEIGE BOX

All computers on the market today are basically similar to one another. Inside they have a motherboard with some PCI slots and some ISA slots. There are also memory slots—72-pin SIMMs are still prevalent, though the shift to DIMMs is accelerating (DIMMs allow you to upgrade your memory by adding a single module at a time, rather than in pairs). All systems now have two built-in EIDE connectors for disk drives, a floppy disk drive connector, serial ports, and parallel ports. There are also keyboard connectors and, usually, a dedicated PS/2-style mouse connector (although there may just be pins on the motherboard—in this case you have to supply the mini-DIN connector).

Disk drives, CD-ROM drives, and floppies are mounted in bays. Some of the more clever designs use trays that snap out easily, but attaching the actual ribbon cable is often a chore, even for an extremely dexterous person with very small hands. Although some systems come with built-in graphics and audio, for the most part expansion cards inserted in slots handle the graphics and audio chores.

As I've built more and more systems, I've become increasingly comfortable with this paradigm. As paradigms go, though, it's very "high priest." In other words, you've gotta be well versed in the appropriate religious…er…I mean…*technical* dogma to make it all work.

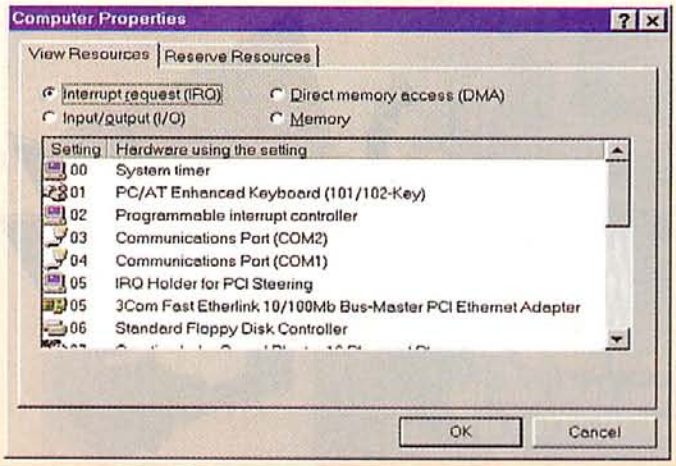
I've never been much for dogma, though. While it's fun knowing all this stuff, I've always believed that a PC should be at least as easy to run as a car—and maybe even as easy as your home entertainment center. (Those of you who will crack wise about setting the clock on VCRs haven't kept up. VCRs can now set their own clocks.) As for me, I no longer get cheap thrills

> **"In the next year, several innovations promise to utterly alter the face of the PC."**

CGW TIPS!

▶ Taking a Gander at the Ins and Outs

If you're about to install a new piece of hardware and want to see what resources are available—let's face it, Plug-and-Play doesn't get it right all the time—you can get a listing by IRQ, DMA, and Base I/O address. Right-click on the My Computer icon, and select Properties; then go to the Device Manager tab dialog, and double-click on the Computer icon.



by slicing my fingers trying to insert another $&%@!! interface card. I want a revolution, dammit.

THE PC IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE PC.

The boys in Redmond (Microsoft), Intel, and a number of systems and peripherals vendors have gotten together to redefine the personal computer. The main idea is to make everything easier to set up and easier to use. They even plan to make unattended setup more feasible. A whole host of technologies is being brought to the table. What follows is a laundry list of some of the items. If you want to take a look yourself, download the preliminary PC-98 spec from Microsoft at **www.microsoft.com/hwdev/pc98.htm**.

There won't be a single PC standard. There will be a basic PC-98 standard, which all the others have to begin with, but they'll diverge from there. There'll be a "consumer PC 98," an "entertainment PC 98," and a "workstation PC 98." The version we're most interested in is the entertainment PC 98.

LIGHT MY FIREWIRE

One of the most important features is high-speed connectivity. The PC-98 spec calls for IEEE 1394 as a primary high-speed interface. IEEE 1394 began life as Firewire, a serial link for high-speed peripherals (ironically, it was invented by Apple). Peripherals can be daisy-chained together, and Microsoft is calling for a minimum data rate of 600Mbits/sec, or roughly 75MB/sec. This is some serious bandwidth, folks; it's suitable for hard-drives, which are one of the connection options. In fact, embedded deep in the document are words like "EIDE drives should be connected via IEEE 1394." This will certainly make it much easier to connect high-speed peripherals.

IEEE 1394 is also good for anything that requires a big pipe for data. One of the other interesting features that will be included is video capture. Yes, you'll be able to take your camcorder or VCR and capture video to your hard disk for editing. DVD drives will also likely be attached by IEEE 1394, as will printers and scanners.

UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE

The other main connectivity source will be the Universal Serial Bus (USB), which may prove more significant than Firewire from a day-to-day usage perspective. In the future, you'll connect your keyboard, mouse, multiple joysticks/controllers, modem, and other serial devices by USB. The cool thing is that USB is "hot-swappable." You plug the device in, the system autoconfigures for it (no reboots, folks), and off you go. You may have to install a driver the first time you connect it, but that will just mean popping in a CD and walking away—the PC-98 spec talks often about installation without user intervention.

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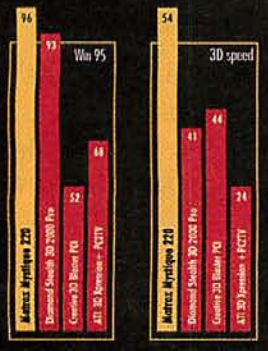

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #259

THE BIG SLEEP

How the computer handles power will be very different from today as well. The power switch in the future PC will not be a real power switch but, rather, a "sleep" switch. When you punch the power switch, it will go into a very low-power, quiescent mode. Press the button again, and you'll find yourself just where you left off. I can just imagine doing this in the middle of a QUAKE level: "Ohmigosh, a Vore! Hit the power switch!" Imagine the reaction when your spouse comes along and turns on the computer....

You'll be able to turn the computer completely off by selecting Shutdown from the start menu. Can you say "Macintosh"?

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

What about "legacy" devices? One key feature that will be missing are ISA cards. In fact, the PC-98 people would love to do away with ISA slots entirely. Since most audio cards are ISA, the sound card and modem vendors had better move to PCI, USB, or IEEE 1394 pretty quickly—and it seems they will, what with audio migrating to PCI and modems going to USB. It's very likely that next year's PC will still have serial ports, parallel ports, and so on, but the move to faster, friendlier connectivity will be strongly encouraged.

The biggest change on the graphics front, without a doubt, will be the new Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) architecture, which will move graphics off the PCI bus and onto the main memory bus itself. This migration will make room for other PCI devices (disk controllers, sound cards, and the like) and give graphics up to a 4X bandwidth increase, which will be vital for more complex 3D games. Other changes are less dramatic: All PCs will have TV out and 3D acceleration. In fact, one gem buried in the PC-98 spec is that MS Internet Explorer 4.0 will use Direct3D—for VRML, but also for user-interface tweaks. So, 3D will be the mainstream.

PLUG IN AND PLAY

Finally, there's DeviceBay, an emerging standard for expanding your system. Instead of popping open a case, cutting your fingers, and trying to use screws made for inhumanly small hands, you'll just pull out the old device and insert the new one. This will work for all devices except graphics and your boot drive. Upgrading to the latest, fastest, biggest, whizbang device will be a cinch. DeviceBay makes use of IEEE 1394, which allows devices to be hot-swapped.

So it looks as if the PC for the millennium will be easy to configure and upgrade; and it will be very, very fast. It's the Nirvana that all computer gamers dream of. Now if we can only get DirectX to install that easily....

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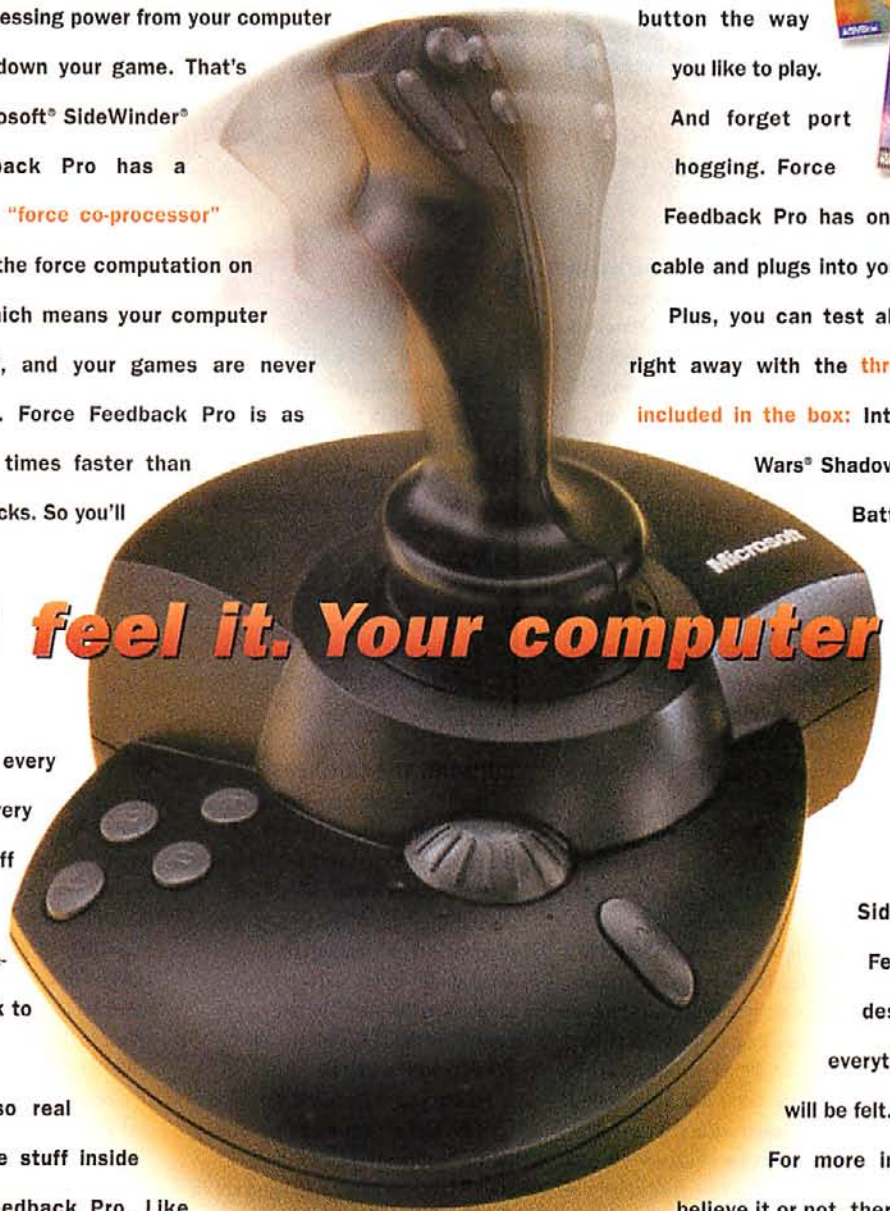

see and feel every Uzi recoil, every stall on take-off from O'Hare, and every nine-iron you shank to the left.

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Mean Machine

Intergraph Delivers Much Performance Though Few Extras

by Dave Salvator

Intergraph is not a name known to most gamers. But anyone who's ever shopped for a 3D workstation has undoubtedly heard of these guys. As the consumer PC space begins to concentrate more on 3D graphics, Intergraph has jumped into the fray with a variety of system offerings, and these boxes are priced to move. Intergraph also has a build-to-order, direct-purchase Web site where you can build the rig you want, with all the bells and whistles, and find out the total price. The TD-25 is Intergraph's higher mid-range system, using Intel's 233MHz Pentium with MMX (P55C), and what it lacks in extras, it makes up for (somewhat) in performance.

Setting up the TD-25 is fairly straightforward, though none of the ports on the back of the box are labeled. The documentation, though somewhat brief, makes setup easy, and within about 10 minutes, the TD-25 is good to go. The innards are easily accessed sans tools after removing six "thumb screws," and the interior layout allows easy access to most system components. The Phoenix BIOS is pretty rudimentary, and doesn't allow for much in the way of low-level tweaks.

The unit we evaluated included a keyboard with embedded speakers, which may be fine for corporate types who want to hear "ding" every time they do a no-no, but for gamers these speakers clearly are not up to the task. Intergraph was investigating speaker upgrade options at press time.

We did encounter several other rough edges along the way: For starters, the DOSSTART.BAT isn't properly configured to bring up real-mode drivers for the sound card and CD-ROM drive. Also, Intergraph doesn't include a copy of DirectX 3.0a (current version) on the hard-drive to re-install drivers should a misbehaving game hose your DirectX setup.

Price: $2,899 with 17" monitor
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Motherboard: Micronics Thunderbolt ATX with Phoenix BIOS and 430TX chipset
Memory: 32MB SDRAM
Graphics: Intergraph Intense 3D-100 w/4MB
Monitor: 17" Intergraph 17SD69
Hard-Disk: 5.2MB EIDE
CD-ROM: Toshiba 5702 (16X)
Audio: Ensoniq AudioPCI
USB Ports: 2
Modem: None
Game Controllers: None

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

The TD-25 is the first system we've seen that ships with a graphics board based on Rendition's Vérité 1000 chip in Intergraph's own Intense 3D 100 with 4MB of EDO DRAM. Intergraph has done some deep tweaking on the Windows 2D drivers, and delivers solid numbers on this front. The other good news is that the TD-25 will run all Rendition-optimized titles.

For comparison, we stacked up TD-25's numbers against those recently posted by Falcon Northwest's venerable five-star 200MHz Falcon Mach V. In Windows 95, TD-25's Graphics WinMark numbers are not far behind those of Mach V at both 800x600x24 and 1024x768x16. TD-25's CPUMark scores are about 20 WinMarks ahead of Mach V, though this is due in large part to TD-25's faster 233MHz clock speed, so we'll call that one a draw. Looking at the storage sub-system, TD-25 is 100 WinMarks slower on the Disk WinMark than Mach V, though its CD-ROM performance is a hair faster. But with the slightly faster CD-ROM performance comes higher CPU usage: 78 percent, compared with Mach V's 46 percent. In 3D WinBench, TD-25 is clearly bested by Mach V, scoring 51 WinMarks to Mach V's 132. It warrants mention that DirectX 5, which should be shipping as you read this, can use DMA. This will boost 3D WinBench scores for all Rendition-based boards.

Win 95 titles generally run well, though when running the Direct3D version of MDK (with the patch), certain scenes have incorrect colors. But USNF '97, MotoRacer GP, and Psygnosis' Formula 1 run fine.

In DOS, TD-25 pretty much paces Mach V in Quake's TimeDemo tests both at 320x200 and at 640x480. Running at mode 0 (x-mode, 320x200) the TD-25 has choppy audio, but Intense 3D 100 supports VESA display modes, and using vid-mode 11 (320x200) lets Quake use Vérité's much faster RISC core and solves the audio problem. Also, TD-25 runs VQuake, the first 3D chip-optimized version of Quake, with a similar glitch at 320x200, but at 640x480 is very playable and looks great. In CBench's SVGA-graphics test, TD-25 and Mach V are even.

TD-25 turns in positive performance numbers, despite a few rough edges. These numbers are all the more impressive considering that Intergraph costs under $3,000. If you already have game controllers, a good set of speakers, and a speedy modem, this rig will serve you well. If not, be prepared to source out the extras elsewhere.

APPEAL: Gamers looking to upgrade their current rig who don't need new peripherals.

PROS: Solid performer across the board; painless setup.

CONS: Lack of extras; some driver trouble with Direct3D games.

CG RATED ★★★½

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★★★★½ **REVIEW • ARCADIA AR 27 MONITOR**

Seein' the Big Show

by Dave Salvator

When it comes to displays, bigger is better. As first-person games have become all the rage for shooters, flight sims, and driving titles, the bigger picture can go a long way toward total immersion. And while 17-inch monitors have become affordable, larger displays (over 20 inches) have remained expensive. Until now. Princeton Graphics has unveiled its 27-inch Arcadia Home Monitor, the AR27, both with and without speakers, and both units are less than $1,000.

The first thing you notice about the Arcadia is that it's huge, and heavy. You'll need a pretty big space, and you'll definitely want help getting this behemoth set up unless you're fond of hernias. Once you get the monitor in position, the remainder of setup is a breeze. Arcadia's maximum resolution is 800x600, with a top vertical refresh of 60Hz. This isn't that much of a limitation; remember, it's a 27-inch monitor.

Arcadia's versatile audio/video ins and outs include VGA, three video (two composite, one S-video) inputs, and two stereo audio inputs. There's also an audio out that acts as a pass-through so you can route your audio signal to your stereo amplifier.

At 800x600, the monitor's image quality is solid across the board. Using a testing tool developed by sister publication *Computer Shopper*, we looked at focus, geometry, convergence, color tracking, and flicker. On all fronts, Arcadia delivers sharp image quality. On the flicker test, there is no noticeable flicker.

Game video looks great, and having a screen this big makes playing games of any genre more enjoyable. Turning off all the room lights and running QUAKE through a 27-inch monitor made for an eerie experience indeed. VCR video also looked fine running through one of Arcadia's composite inputs.

The only mild disappointment was the embedded speakers' sound quality. Bass response was surprisingly good, considering the absence of an external woofer, but the mids and highs were muddy. If you've got a good pair of speakers, opt for the speakerless version, and you'll be fine.

If you're looking to build your own living room PC, or just want a colossal screen for all your gaming adventures, Arcadia's AR27 is a great choice.

Price: $999; $799 without speakers
Vendor: Princeton Graphics Systems (800) 747-6249
www.prgr.com
Reader Service #: 317

APPEAL: Gamers looking for a frickin' huge monitor.

PROS: Huge viewable screen, great image quality; multiple AV inputs; inexpensive.

CONS: Very bulky; audio quality is so-so.

CG RATED

★★★½☆ **REVIEW • YAMAHA SYSTEM 25**

Big Sound, Small Price

by Loyd Case

The System 25 is Yamaha's 3-speaker entry into the budget category, consisting of a powered bass unit and two satellites. The list price is a mere $129, but it's likely that the street price will be under $100.

Haul the System 25 out of the box, and you'll be amazed at just how tiny the satellites are. Measuring a scant 3.5x2.5 inches (about 4.5 inches deep), they can either be placed on a desk or mounted on a monitor. Miniature stands attached to each satellite swing out so that you can easily adjust speaker angle.

Setup is straightforward. The satellites plug into the bass unit—and the connectors are different, so you can't make a mistake. There's a power button and volume control on one of the satellites. The bass unit has its own bass boost control. You plug your sound card output into one of the two input sockets on the back of the bass module. The power supply is built into the bass unit—no power brick, thank the gods.

I tested these speakers with a wide array of music and had a very odd reaction. High-end response is quite good for such tiny units; bass response is surprisingly robust; and voices sound lively and realistic. But the overall feeling left me wanting, and it took a while to realize what was happening. Stereo imaging is very precise—note that I didn't say accurate—but the entire stereo image is between the two speakers. When you set them on either side of a monitor (a typical setup for home or office computing) the imaging is very two-dimensional. There's no feeling of depth at all, as if the entire band or orchestra has been squeezed down into a two-foot wide space. So these aren't the greatest speakers for music.

Games are another story. I ran QUAKE, Jane's new 688i, RED ALERT, and WING COMMANDER III through them, and for gaming they sound quite good. The compressed stereo imaging seems nearly ideal for game playing. Voice and sound effects sound great, and game music sounds just fine, although you won't shake any rafters with the System 25.

For about a hundred bucks, these little guys deserve some serious consideration. Check 'em out.

Price: $129 (MSRP)
Vendor: Yamaha (714) 522-9000
www.yamaha.com
Reader Service #: 318

APPEAL: Gamers on a budget looking for good sound.

PROS: Easy setup; good sound quality; compact size; low price.

CONS: Compressed imaging for music; lack of deep bass; limited power.

CG RATED

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★★★★☆ **REVIEW • TERRATEC BASE 1 SOUND CARD**

Sounds Like a Deal

by Loyd Case

I've always been a little leery of bargain-basement sound cards. I've had more problems with cheap audio cards than with just about any other peripheral. Yet, I'm always on the lookout for low-cost audio, hoping to find a gem in the rough. I'm happy to report that I think I've found one.

Terratec is a German manufacturer of sound cards; its previous efforts have mostly focused on high-end audio for audiophiles and musicians. The Terratec Base 1 is the company's first foray into the true consumer-audio space. Installation is a snap. Just pop the card into a 200MHz Pentium MMX system, and on boot-up, Windows 95 auto-detects the card and installs the Windows drivers without a murmur of complaint. You need to run a separate install to set up DOS drivers (which allow Base 1 to emulate a Soundblaster Pro).

This $60 card doesn't come with a built-in wavetable—you only get FM synthesis—but the digital audio sounds very clean. The only jumper on the card activates or deactivates the onboard amplifier; and with the amp disabled, the card is very quiet (through powered speakers). Windows wave audio sounds very good and MIDI playback is typical FM synthesis—let's just say it works as expected. There's also a 3D sound option called VSPACE that spreads out the stereo field much like Spatializer or SRS audio, although VSPACE seems to be reverb-heavy.

As for DOS performance, QUAKE—normally very finicky about sound cards—sounds great, as does WING COMMANDER III. One minor negative is that the MIDI port solidly grabs IRQ 9 and doesn't share it.

In addition to the base card, there's a connector for a wavetable daughtercard. Because of the small size of the Base 1, a standard daughtercard hangs out in the air, but Terratec will soon ship a compact version of Yamaha's DB50XG MIDI wavetable card. There's also an optional radio tuner card, which is available separately.

Overall, the Base 1 is a solid, inexpensive card that sounds good, seems very compatible, and installs like a dream. For gamers on a budget, this just might be the cat's pajamas.

Price: $59.95 MSRP
Vendor: Terratec
(714) 493-4600
www.terratec-us.com/ttec1.htm
Reader Service #: 319

APPEAL: Gamers on a tight budget looking for good sound quality.

PROS: Inexpensive; easy installation for both DOS and Windows 95; great sounding digital audio.

CONS: Cheesy FM synthesis; odd mounting for wavetable cards.

CG RATED

★★★½☆ **REVIEW • LOGITECH CYBERMAN 2**

Beyond the Joystick

by Tara Calishain

With the development of new 3D-graphics technology, it's not surprising that game controllers now go beyond the joystick. That's what the Logitech CyberMan 2 is all about—taking you into 3D games with full 3D control. If you can handle the steep learning curve, you'll be rewarded with a much more immersive experience in games like DUKE NUKEM 3D and DESCENT.

The CyberMan 2 is fairly large, with eight buttons on the left and a knob that looks like it should rotate (but doesn't) on the right. It's comfortably heavy; and even in the midst of frenzied action, it stays put.

CyberMan 2 installs in a snap and comes preloaded with several game-specific configurations, including QUAKE and MDK. It's easy to add your own configs: Creating a playable controller for the X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER demo takes less than five minutes. Don't get out all your games, though—CyberMan 2 runs only in Windows 95 or a Win-95 DOS box.

The biggest drawback of the CyberMan 2 is its counter-intuitiveness. The direction controller looks as if it should be spun, but instead you have to tilt it, nudge it, pull it up, or push it down. In a game like DUKE NUKEM, this leads to a lot of initial frustration, as you find yourself looking up instead of moving forward and jumping instead of looking up.

If you can stick with it for about two hours, it pays off. Motion in DUKE becomes incredibly fluid. Flying around with the jet-pack becomes almost a game in itself as you smoothly rise, sink, and fly around. Plus, CyberMan 2 is ergonomically friendly, so you don't end a game with numb fingers or a case of "joystick clench."

Unfortunately, the controller is a little too sensitive—even when you're used to it. In DUKE this isn't a big deal, but in CyberMan's bundled game, DESCENT II: DESTINATION QUARTZON, accidentally looking down flips you over. CyberMan 2 already has sensitivity settings, but could be improved with desensitizing settings.

If 3D shooters like QUAKE and DUKE are your cup of tea, CyberMan 2 is a must-have. If not, the frustration of learning the particular motion of the controller might outweigh your gaming payoff.

Price: $99
Vendor: Logitech
(800) 231-7717
www.logitech.com
Reader Service #: 320

APPEAL: Ideal for 3D games and shoot-'em-ups.

PROS: Fluid motion; easily programmed.

CONS: Oversensitive; at times counter-intuitive; steep learning curve.

CG RATED

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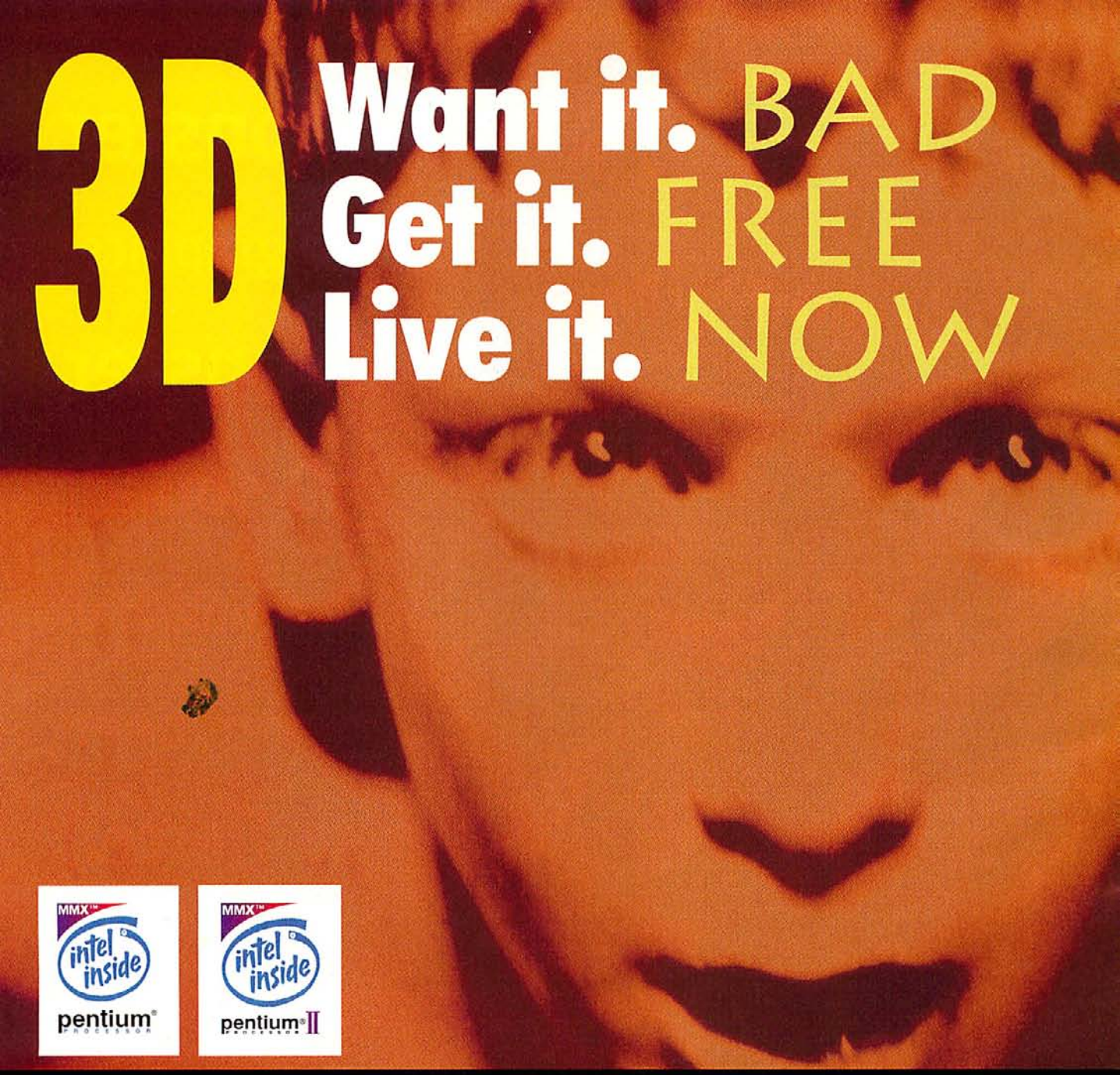

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★★★☆☆ **REVIEW • VIDEOLOGIC APOCALYPSE 3DX**

A Different Way

by Loyd Case

3Dfx's Voodoo 3D-accelerator chipset represents a fast, traditional 3D rendering pipeline. But VideoLogic/NEC's PowerVR PCX2 takes a different approach: it uses a "chunk" rendering scheme that breaks the scene up into small pieces, rendering it a piece at a time. A benefit to this approach is PowerVR's ability to do z-buffering "on the fly," rather than allocating memory for a z-buffer. All 3D display data is then sent via the PCI bus to the 2D board's frame buffer. In a look at VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3Dx, based on this second-generation PowerVR chip, the results of this novel approach are mixed.

PowerVR doesn't support the fog effects used by 3D WinBench, has only limited transparency ability, and no specular highlighting. 3D WinBench 97 reports that the 3Dx only supports bilinear filtering, filtered MIP mapping, perspective-corrected textures, and hardware dithering. Some minor rendering errors occur in the last 3D WinBench scene. The Apocalypse 3Dx posts a 69.2 3D WinBench score on a 200MHz P55C system with an ET-6000-based STB Lightspeed 128. Because PowerVR uses the 2D board's frame buffer, a slower 2D board could negatively influence PowerVR's performance. Direct3D apps refuse to run with an early version of the Lightspeed 128 drivers; updating the primary driver enables the PowerVR to run, so make sure you have a working DirectDraw capable card.

Games directly ported to the 3Dx look good and run well. ULTIMATE R@CER looks very pretty, but some of the ground textures in MECHWARRIOR II look weak. MDK's built-in performance metric reports a score of 300 in the Direct3D, whereas the DirectDraw version generates a score of 90. Occasional system lockups occur with the PowerVR card—something we didn't see with either Rendition or 3Dfx cards. The Direct3D demo of TERRACIDE runs without any problems, however.

The Apocalypse 3Dx generates a decent 3D WinBench score—not as fast as 3Dfx, but faster than most chips, and some of its bundled titles are very sharp. Given recent price drops in 3Dfx cards and the imminent shipment of the RIVA 128, ATI Rage Pro, and Rendition V2200 boards, it remains to be seen how well PowerVR will keep up.

Price: $149 (approximate street), $99 (upgrade from PowerVR)
Vendor: VideoLogic
(415) 857-4167
www.videologic.com
Reader Service #: 321

APPEAL: 3D Gamers on a budget.

PROS: No pass-through cable needed from 2D card; direct ports run great.

CONS: So-so Direct3D performance; limited rendering feature set; performance may be hindered by 2D board.

CG RATED

HARDWARE

★★★★½ **REVIEW • SAITEK X36**

CG CHOICE

Flight Done Right

by Denny Atkin

Attention, Thrustmaster and CH Products: This is your wake-up call. Saitek's X36 PC Flight Controller is the first joystick and throttle combination that really gives the old standards competition. And at a cost of only $150, it also gives them a run for the money.

The X36 system consists of the X36F joystick and the X35T throttle/rudder controller. They are available separately as well, but the throttle only functions with the X36F joystick. The joystick has a trigger, four fire buttons, two eight-way hat switches, and X- and Y-axis trim controls. The throttle sports an eight-way hat switch, two three-position switches, a fire button, and two rotary dials. A small stick can function as a radar control (it emulates a mouse) and an innovative rocker control emulates rudder pedals.

A three-position switch lets you assign three functions to each button and hat, and a pinky shift switch on the joystick allows a second function for each stick button. You'd be hard-pressed to find a sim with more functions than you can program here. The stick can also emulate a CH F-16 Combat Stick.

The X36edit Windows programming utility is the friendliest I've seen yet (that's relative, as joystick programming software has never been better than mediocre). You're given a list of functions, such as Flaps, Jamming, and Radar Zoom, and you input the key sequences for the sim you're programming. You then assign these functions (instead of the actual key-presses) to various input switches on the stick and throttle. It's a bit of a convoluted process, but it makes fine-tuning your program files much easier when you're looking back—it's far more intuitive to alter a function later when you see "Radar Mode" rather than "Alt-R."

The controls themselves are very comfortable. The throttle is probably the nicest design I've seen; its only downside is that the promised detentes weren't noticeable on the early production unit. The stick has a very smooth feel, neither too loose nor too stiff. My only gripe is the goofy-looking hand guard—you're flying planes here, not swashbuckling.

Price: X36 Flight Control System (pair) $150, X36F alone $99, X55T alone $69 (requires X36F)
System Requirements: Windows 3.1 or 95; gameport that supports two joystick channels.
Vendor: Saitek
(310) 212-5412
www.saitek.com
Reader Service #: 322

APPEAL: Flight sim fans looking for a high quality, flexible HOTAS system that doesn't cost a bundle.

PROS: Good programming software; comfortable; individual functions easily disabled.

CONS: Extra cable needed to use mouse emulation

CG RATED

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-Computer Player

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #262

★★★★½ **REVIEW • CAMBRIDGE SOUNDWORKS PC WORKS**

Such a Deal

CG CHOICE

by Dave Salvator

In the world of audio, you get what you pay for. Or do you? Cambridge Soundworks has revisited that question, and has come up with a speaker system for $100 that should make some $250 systems nervous. And while this system lacks the deep, low-end punch and louder volume of its pricier sibling, the Microworks, it nonetheless delivers impressive PC audio, and is easy on the wallet.

PC Works comes in the form of two small satellites and a woofer, but these satellites are even more compact than those found on the Microworks.

Setup is painless, and takes all of five minutes. One grumbling point: Though there's a single power supply, it's a "wall-wart," which eats most of an electric outlet, rather than the preferred "soap on a rope" approach. There are two volume adjusters, one to adjust bass volume on the woofer unit, and another (an in-line volume fader) to tweak the overall volume level.

Running audio CDs—ranging from Beethoven to Bruce Hornsby—through the PC works, the overall sound quality is very clean, with well-defined highs, clear mids, and solid bass. With the sound card mixer's faders at about 75 percent, the PC Works distorts at about 70 percent maximum volume. But backing the control off a bit produces reasonably loud, clean imaging. The only complaint is that the PC Works' stereo field feels "focused," and is very much contained within the physical space between the two satellite units.

In a comparison with the Microworks, the PC Works' high-end has comparable clarity and definition, though the PC Works' low-end and maximum volume are clearly not as strong.

Gaming audio in shooters and flight sims is solid, with more-than-adequate bass on explosions, and a clear high-end. In gaming audio uses, the PC Works' somewhat constricted stereo imaging is much less perceptible.

Cambridge has created what may be the shape of things to come: A set of speakers for your PC that will more than fill the bill, and not crimp your budget to pay for it. And while I still would give the nod to Cambridge's Microworks, the PC Works warrants serious consideration if you're budget-challenged but still want big sound.

Price: $99
Vendor: Cambridge Soundworks (800) 367-4434, **www.hifi.com**
Reader Service #: 323

APPEAL: Gamers who desire champagne-quality sound on a Budweiser budget.

PROS: Great sound for the money.

CONS: Lacks clean low-end at higher volumes; wall-wart power supply.

CG RATED

★★☆☆☆ **REVIEW • PANASONIC 24X ATAPI CD-ROM DRIVE**

The X Factor

by Greg Fortune

There seems to be a trend developing in the marketing of certain types of computer hardware. Rather than reporting what a device is capable of on a consistent basis, many companies have begun advertising the performance of a part based on the absolute maximum performance of the equipment, the kind of performance that you will rarely see during real-world use. Particularly guilty of this have been CD-ROM manufacturers, who would like you to believe that their drive will give you 16x, 18x, or higher performance. In actuality, these drives provide far less performance, peaking at that level only occasionally. So, guess what we found when we tested Panasonic's new 24x drive....

Installation of this drive was painless under Windows 95, and the drive lives up to its claim of working while mounted on its side—a nice touch.

Our WinBench 97 CD-ROM tests were run from a Pentium 166 machine with an Intel Bus-Mastering PCI EIDE controller. We expected to see about 16x performance overall, which is roughly what the drive delivered. The WinBench 97 CD-ROM tests came in at an average of 1,100 on two different machines, with the highlights being sequential throughput scores that averaged in the 2,500s and peaked at 3,500KB/sec transferred (when reading from the outer tracks only).

Every give has some take, and this drive took it in the shorts performing random reads. The average throughput for randomly accessed reads averaged a scant 86KB/sec, not exactly stellar performance. CPU utilization was generally around 40 percent during the random reads, but remember those blazing sequential transfer rates? During high-speed sequential transfers the CPU utilization shot up to a whopping 85 percent with an impressive access time consistently just about 100 milliseconds.

Panasonic's 24x CD-ROM does have very good performance, as long as the data is being read in large blocks from the outer tracks on the CD. However, gaming requires more flexibility than that. Buy a drive designed to give you all-around high performance, not one tweaked so that "24x" could be written on the box.

Price: $209
Vendor: Panasonic (800) 726-2797, **www.panasonic.com**
Reader Service #: 324

APPEAL: Gamers who prefer fast installs to smooth game-play.

PROS: Blazing sequential transfer speeds.

CONS: Random access transfer speeds tank; chunky game-play; high CPU utilization.

CG RATED

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CG Choice Games This Month

DUNGEON KEEPER

p. 259

688i ATTACK SUB

p. 244

WARLORDS III

p. 256

READER QUOTES

Since its release, DIABLO has been addressed as an RPG. Though a good game, it is not worthy of the RPG title. DIABLO is basically a third-person shooter (as is CRUSADER: NO REMORSE) with a developed character. There is more to an RPG than character. Back when RPGs were genuine, they had a very complex world, if not worlds, to travel through. They had the famous battle sequence that relied on skill and thought, rather than reflexes. Several people were in your party at most times. Most of all, there was a story. These elements that make up the game go hand in hand, and should not be separated.

In your June issue, you addressed the new QUAKE Killers. I think they are a joke. They are called "action" games, but with developed characters and a better story. Action games don't need a story. All you do is progress through levels and kill, kill, kill, anyway.

I was very impressed, though, by your article in the August issue about ION Storm's ANACHRONOX. The fact that Tom Hall made his team play CHRONO TRIGGER before starting work on [ANACHRONOX] would have been exactly how I would have done it. I hope that game companies read this and follow in the footsteps of Square, makers of the best true RPGs ever.

—Aaron P Low

COASTER OF THE MONTH

p.228

Review Quote of the Month

"Who would have guessed that 20 years of goody-two-shoes gaming could be countered by a single game?"

—Chris Lombardi, reviewing DUNGEON KEEPER

HOW DO WE RATE?

We only review finished products, not pre-release versions. The ratings are as follows:

Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest *buying* recommendation.

Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. It may have minor problems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.

Average: A mixed bag. It can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. It can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.

Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, ill-conceived, or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place.

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KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

LUCAS Arts

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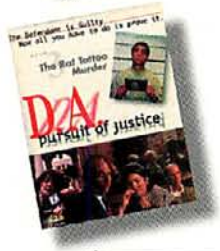
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

No Appeal

Three Games in the D.A.: PURSUIT OF JUSTICE Series Is Too Much Law & Order for Anyone

by Charles Ardai



Price: $29.99 each
Minimum System Requirements: P75 (P133 recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), 15MB hard-disk space, Windows 95, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Windows-compatible sound card.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Craig Brannon, Christina Taylor
Publisher: Legacy Software
Los Angeles, CA
(800) 532-7692
www.legacysoft.com
Reader Service #: 327

At a recent high-school reunion, it seemed to me that everyone I talked to had become a lawyer. No supermodels, no computer-game designers, no presidents of the United States. Enough attorneys, though, to staff a president's cabinet, his supreme court, and his personal legal-defense fund.

This either bodes really well or really badly for a game series like Legacy Software's D.A.: PURSUIT OF JUSTICE. D.A. casts you as an up-and-coming prosecutor in the office of Los Angeles District Attorney Frank Jarrett. To take over Jarrett's job, you've got to prove yourself by getting convictions in three increasingly difficult cases. The gimmick here, as in Sierra's long-running POLICE QUEST series, is that the gameplay is procedurally realistic. No Perry Mason theatricality; no quaint, Matlock-like charming of the jury—just textbook law of the sort you'd find in a law school classroom.

Judging by the apparent appeal of law school to my fellow alums, such an approach might be a popular one. In practice, though, I wonder whom this game will appeal to. Not everyone who goes to law school wants to practice law, but I suspect that everyone who wants to practice law does go to law school. For a lawyer or a law student, playing D.A. would be as much of a busman's holiday as playing a POLICE QUEST game would be for a cop. And while I can imagine a casual John Grisham reader getting excited if the game featured conspiratorial legal skullduggery, how excited will he get when he discovers that his first case focuses on a drunk driver arrested for plowing into a bus stop bench?

IN THE 2ND DEGREE

Nearly two years ago, Broderbund released a very good (though not very successful) game called IN THE 1ST DEGREE. Produced at the height of the O.J. Simpson trial, that game focused on a high-profile interracial murder case, and leavened the legal proceedings with lots of social satire. There is no satire here, and instead of one somewhat lurid case you have several cases that are far more mundane. In almost all other respects, D.A. could be a sequel to IN THE 1ST DEGREE.

Both games play out entirely in full-screen video, featuring strong production values and good actors in the roles of defendants, witnesses, judge, jurors, and so forth. Both games ask you to compile evidence and analyses and then use them at trial. Both feature visits to the scene of the crime and interrogations of witnesses in the pretrial phase, followed by examination and cross-examination in front of the judge, all over the course of several timed game "days."

After preparing your case (see the sidebar), you go to trial. First you call witnesses and select legally appropriate questions from multiple choice sets that include inappropriate questions; next you select relevant precedents to cite in response to objections raised by the defense attorney; then, when the defense asks inappropriate questions, you get to object; finally you get to cross-examine the defense's witnesses. The computer manufactures your opening and closing arguments automatically, based on what you've done up to that point.

If you have too little evidence, the judge dismisses the case; if not, you either win or lose. Either way you get a rating on your performance. You can then replay the case to improve your rating or go on to the next case. You don't have to wait until you've won one case before going on to the next. There is some bad news, though: You have to buy each case separately.

LAWYERS, GUNS, NO MONEY Broderbund's IN THE 1ST DEGREE [top] and Legacy's D.A. [bottom] *do* look and play similarly.

LEGAL EXPENSES

Imagine if each level of DOOM were a separate shrink-wrapped title, or if you had to purchase each subquest in a standard adventure game like NOIR or CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON

STOP THE EXCITEMENT Maybe the reason that your boss, Frank Jarrett, wants to retire is that 80 percent of the cases he's seen in 20 years are drunk driving cases—just like your first, THE SUNSET BOULEVARD DEUCE.

separately. That's what this is like. None of the cases here is good enough to stand on its own; to the extent that the game is appealing, it's largely because of the development of your career over the course of several cases. The first, THE SUNSET BOULEVARD DEUCE, is the drunk driving case, and it's almost laughably introductory. The second, THE GATSBY DIAMOND JEWELRY THEFT, raises the stakes, but only a little: A theft-inclined debutante steals a car and the diamond necklace it contains. The last, THE RAT TATTOO MURDER, finally wakes you up with a bit of homicide, but even this case isn't great courtroom drama.

The full game (the series) comes on eight CDs, and with tax it will cost you about a hundred dollars. How could it possibly be worth that much? Of course, you could skip cases 1 and 2 and jump right into the murder. But as long as you're doing that, why not skip all of them? Instead, pick up the much superior IN THE 1ST DEGREE at discount. Then, if you're really serious, save the rest of your money for the tuition down-payment to Georgetown.

APPEAL: Anyone who thinks *Law & Order* is too exciting.

PROS: Nice production values and FMV spice up the daily legal grind.

CONS: Too much realism and too little control over gameplay; having to buy each case as a separate game makes the total cost as painful as hiring an actual lawyer.

Preparing a Brief

D.A. differs from other courtroom games by giving you better tools for organizing your case before the trial, but it allows you much less freedom to actually do things. The tools include a terrific interface for ordering a variety of tests on evidence (such as fingerprint, handwriting, or chemical analysis) and for constructing a legal case, by selecting specific pieces of data as being relevant toward supporting the assertions you'll need to make in court. In the drunk driving case, for instance, you have to choose separate pieces of evidence to support your assertions that it was the defendant who was driving, that he was driving a motor vehicle, that he was drunk, and so on.

However, when you visit the scene of the crime, it's just a still photo of the location—you don't get to interact with the scenery in any way. In 1ST DEGREE, you conducted interrogations yourself, selecting which questions to ask a witness. Here, the interrogations have already been conducted and videotaped by the police, and all you get to decide is which videotape to watch.

And, in practice, you have to watch all of them. Similarly, in the police evidence room, you basically have to pick up all available pieces of evidence and scan them into your "Case Constructor." Because you have to click on not some, but all, the videotapes and not some, but all, the evidence, D.A. often feels less like a game than a mechanical exercise. The ticking clock imposes some urgency—days slip away unbelievably quickly, and you get only four before you have to go to trial—but otherwise the game feels automatic. It's also arbitrary: Why the maximum of 20 facts in the Case Constructor? In what real-world case would a prosecutor have to choose between two equally important facts because he wasn't allowed to go to court with 21? Perry Mason must be spinning in his grave.

VIRTUAL PARALEGAL The Case Constructor is your road to judicial success—provided you use only 20 pieces of evidence.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #146

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MATURE M AGES 17+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Death and the Maiden

Don't Call This Wickedly Funny and Brutally Intense Game a CRUSADER Clone

by Robert Coffey

MEAT PUPPET's isometric shooting action and its female protagonist might cause some to dismiss it as an unoriginal CRUSADER knockoff (CRUSADER: NO Y CHROMOSOME), but such an assumption would be unfair. MEAT PUPPET is different, distinguishing itself with a dark sense of humor; brutal, macabre enemies; and a hectic style of gameplay all its own. Playmates Interactive has itself a killer title…in more ways than one.

DEATH OF THE PARTY

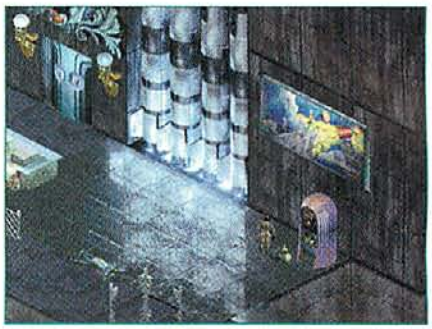
After attending a party, our heroine, Lotos Abstraction, wakes up with no memory. A mysterious figure known as the Martinet has erased her mind and implanted several gel sacs filled with chemicals under her skin. As Lotos, you must follow the orders of the Martinet and assassinate the leaders of six corporations, lest he detonate the gel sacs, resulting in a rather messy total body meltdown. Helping you is Dumaine, a digital assistant and fellow hostage. Succeed and you can confront your oppressor. Fail, and...well, you'd better get a mop.

Wielding a veritable Swiss Army knife of a gun that is capable of functioning as a flamethrower, machine gun, and rocket launcher—among other things—Lotos wreaks havoc across a beautifully blighted landscape. Three different resolution settings all deliver stunningly detailed graphics, but the highest setting is something really special, rendering a gorgeous gameworld. The rich detail is evident in slime-slicked sewer walls you can practically feel and cavernous chambers where highly glossed floors mirror the towering walls. The fire effects are tremendously cool.

ABSTRACT ART

The look of MEAT PUPPET sets it apart from CRUSADER—or any other game, for that matter. It is a much more *vertical* game than CRUSADER, with rooms that soar and provide different planes for action. Platform gaming conventions play into several areas emphasizing jumping, particularly in a series of rooms that feature trampolines.

A dark, over-the-top sense of humor colors the physical gameworld but is most evident in the inventive army of adversaries facing Lotos. Evil nannies called Mucklewraths puff on cigarettes and mutter "Where's a man when you need one?" before herding their bone-saw and scalpel-wielding toddler charges after you. Borglike Whipmasters, cannibalistic sewer abominations, and whimpering giant brains round out the 30-odd enemies. Unfortunately, the creative well runs dry a little later in the game when you face enemies that are just well-armed humans. All the enemies boast a daunting AI; they run away when over-



NICE PLACE TO VISIT, BUT... The world of MEAT PUPPET is chock-full of menace, but the SVGA graphics are easy on the eyes. Note the level of detail in the painting near Lotos.

Price: $49.99
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 100 or better, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 85MB hard-drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, Direct Draw-compatible SVGA-graphics video card (2MB video card recommended), mouse; Direct Sound-compatible sound card.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Kronos Digital Entertainment, Inc.
Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment, Inc.
Costa Mesa, CA
(714) 428-2112
www.playmatestoys.com
Reader Service #: 328

MEAT PUPPET TIPS

You've got to move quickly if you want to keep the Martinet from liquefying your innards. These tips might keep you alive long enough to free yourself and exact revenge on your puppet master.

Kill in numbers. Let abominations chase you until you've got a gang behind you and then torch 'em. Scare toddlers back to the Mucklewraths then light up the Mucklewraths with a couple of rockets. They'll ignite the gathered toddlers as they run around screaming.

Use the environment as a weapon. Stand near fire jets to lure not-too-bright abominations to you and a fiery death. Lions of Industry will gladly walk into fire spouts if you play your cards right. Standing near meat grinders will result in buckets of toddler-gore as the killer kiddies fall into the blades trying to reach you.

whelmed and coordinate withering group attacks. A host of environmental hazards, including wicked whips, fire jets, and ridiculously gigantic guns add to the challenge.

KILLER MOVES

Keyboard commands or a combination of mouse and keyboard can be configured to maneuver Lotos. But since the mouse is used for shooting in both, mouse mode is the only practical option, since the need to hold down multiple keys while whipping the mouse around will challenge any gamer lacking a prehensile tongue. While Lotos can front- and backflip, as well as roll to either side, she has significantly fewer movement options than the CRUSADER hero. Since Lotos finishes rolls by facing a slightly different direction and standing upright again, rolling across rooms and using cover isn't an option. Finicky controls also make lining up jumps frequently frustrating.

Shooting is simple: The mouse's targeting reticle turns red over any destructible object. Click the mouse and fire. The main drawback here is when enemies get obscured by a column, yet are still in Lotos' line of fire. The reticle won't target them no matter what, apparently "seeing" only the column, which isn't destructible. In these cases, enemies can shoot away without fear of retaliation.

BEAT THE CLOCK

And shoot they will, for the action in MEAT PUPPET is nonstop. Lotos is under constant assault as she leaps and sprints her way to switches, ammo, and powerups. Armor provides some protection, but at a price—recharging it requires electrocuting Lotos and taking some damage. With the Martinet threatening to kill her if she doesn't assassinate quickly, Lotos is in a literal race against time. While this adds a definite sense of urgency to the game, it also proves to be its biggest drawback.

Gamers intent on blowing away everything and getting every powerup will likely run out of time and die. You'll have to leave a lot of creatures alive, but does anyone really play this sort of game *without* intending to indulge in a bloodbath? This time constraint is compounded by the sprawl of the gameworld. The embassies are huge, and frequently confusing, and backtracking is often required. Included maps will speed your journey, but shortchange playing time. Every room presents unique challenges, but you'll find yourself skipping the unnecessary ones while racing dual clocks for multiple assignments. An option to shut off the clock is definitely in order.

SHOCKING BEHAVIOR Recharging Lotos' armor is a simple matter of finding a blasted fuse box and indulging in a little self-electrocution.

TERRIBLE TANDEM Carry out all your assassinations and you'll get to square off against the Martinet and his little buddy. With luck you won't end up another bloody splotch on the wall.

MEAT PUPPET's other shortcomings are niggling things, and don't detract much from the absorbingly violent gameplay. Death animations come in just two varieties, doubtlessly due to Lotos' limited arsenal. Only specific objects can be destroyed, resulting in rooms that remain relatively pristine despite a barrage of bombing. Unconscious enemies are inexplicably invulnerable to attack, even with mini-rockets, until they get up again. As is the case with CRUSADER, there is no multiplayer option.

Even with the time limit and funky controls, MEAT PUPPET has plenty of mayhem to offer action fans. The colorful assortment of enemies, obstacles, and puzzles keeps gameplay fresh and fun. This is no CRUSADER clone; it's a good game in its own right.

Try backflipping away if you find yourself overwhelmed by any group of creatures. Use flips to get past floor whips, fire jets, and the like. You'll get past faster and often won't take any damage.

The various cannons and turrets in Distopia pose a bigger threat than the Wenches of Distopia. Knock the Wenches down with a rocket blast, quickly destroy the missile launchers and guns, then wipe out the Wenches after they regain consciousness.

Even if your system doesn't support MEAT PUPPET's high resolution, it's handy if you find yourself getting totally bombed to death in a room. Toggle the high resolution on, then scroll to get a larger view of an area, its defenses, and where switches are located. Once you're done with your reconnaissance work, toggle back to a lower resolution and use your new knowledge to lay waste to all.

APPEAL: Gamers hungry for an action-packed, darkly funny, third-person shooter.

PROS: Addictive, violently frenzied gameplay; great sense of black humor; impressive graphics and animation; wildly entertaining assortment of victims and obstacles.

CONS: Time limit for missions shortchanges exploration and gameplay; touchy controls complicate portions of the game; limited movement options reduce strategies.

CG RATED

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #196

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Fast Beat

A Futuristic Ride of Ups and Downs

by Mark Clarkson

Imagine screaming down the gnarliest slide at your local water park in a jet-powered luge. At night. In a thunderstorm. Oh, and there are gaps in the slide, and a dozen other guys are jet-luging along with you, hurling bombs and rockets at each other and at you. Set it all to a pounding techno beat, and you've got my first impression of WIPEOUT XL.

The game's actual setup has you piloting a futuristic, anti-gravity race car over narrow, twisty, banked race courses. You jump gaps, ride high on the walls, and work the air brakes to slide through turns—it's furiously frenetic, purely arcade action.

SECOND TIME'S A CHARM WIPEOUT XL is the PC port of the PlayStation hit. The first WIPEOUT port was terrible, but this port is actually pretty good.

FAST BREAK

WIPEOUT XL is fast and it's gorgeous. I played the game on a PI33 running an Orchid Righteous 3D, and a PI33 with a Diamond Monster 3D. (WIPEOUT XL *requires* hardware 3D acceleration.) Even at 640x480, the textures look remarkably clean. There are weather effects including lightning, rain, and snow. I would have liked to see better explosions, light sourcing from the weapons, and shadows that are darker than their surroundings (rather than lighter), but none of these faults detracted from the gameplay. The game sounds pretty good, too, in full Dolby Surround.

You choose from four different craft with different attributes, which you steer with mouse, keyboard, or your trusty analog joystick. If you can win every race by dint of sheer reflex, great. If not, WIPEOUT XL provides you with a plethora of fun weapons: salvos of rockets, sizzling electrical bolts, guided missiles, mines, bombs, and the awesome Quake Disruptor, which churns the track like a giant shaking out his bed sheet. These weapons drain opponents' shields, slow their craft, and even destroy them. But rest assured: They'll be doing the same to you.

Watch your shield strength. If it drops too low, swing into the pits: an alternate loop of track where your shields recharge on the fly, à la DESCENT.

POWER UP You can pick up weapons, and other power-ups in the game, including shields and turbo boost, by running over special marks on the track.

WIPED OUT

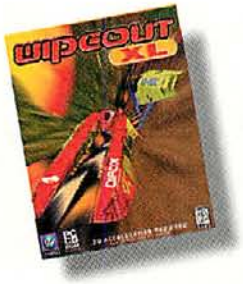
Unfortunately, WIPEOUT XL does have some problems.

The first is a pain for some, and a challenge for others: The game is hard. WIPEOUT XL has six tracks: two easy, two tricky, and two difficult. Come in first in all six races and you face the Arcade Challenge: same tracks, tougher competition. Take the gold again on every track, *without* finishing fourth or worse more than three times, and two new, really-damn-hard tracks appear. Good luck.

The second, and real, problem is XL's lack of head-to-head play. Hell, even the PlayStation version has head-to-head racing. Psygnosis says a multiplayer patch is on the way, though, with Internet, LAN, and modem support.

The game also had a slew of minor technical annoyances. It wouldn't recognize most of the buttons on my CH F16 Combat Stick, and had ongoing, varying problems with my CH pedals. It wouldn't run in 800x600 resolution and, for some reason, it always turned the sound off in Windows 95.

WIPEOUT XL *is* a little limited. There are only six tracks—eight if you're superman. Still, if NEED FOR SPEED can't satisfy you, WIPEOUT XL could be your ticket to the fast track.



Price: $49.99
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 133 (P166 recommended), Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, 4MB 3D accelerator (3Dfx, 3D Labs Permedia, Videologic Power VR, Rendition Verite, Matroc Mystique, or ATI 3D Rage), Sound Blaster-compatible sound card.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Psygnosis UK
Publisher: Psygnosis
Foster City, CA
(800) 438-7794
www.psygnosis.com
Reader Service #: 329

APPEAL: Those searching for pure, fast arcade action.

PROS: Good graphics and sound; blindingly fast racing action.

CONS: Technical glitches, too few tracks, and no head-to-head play.

CG RATED ★★★★½

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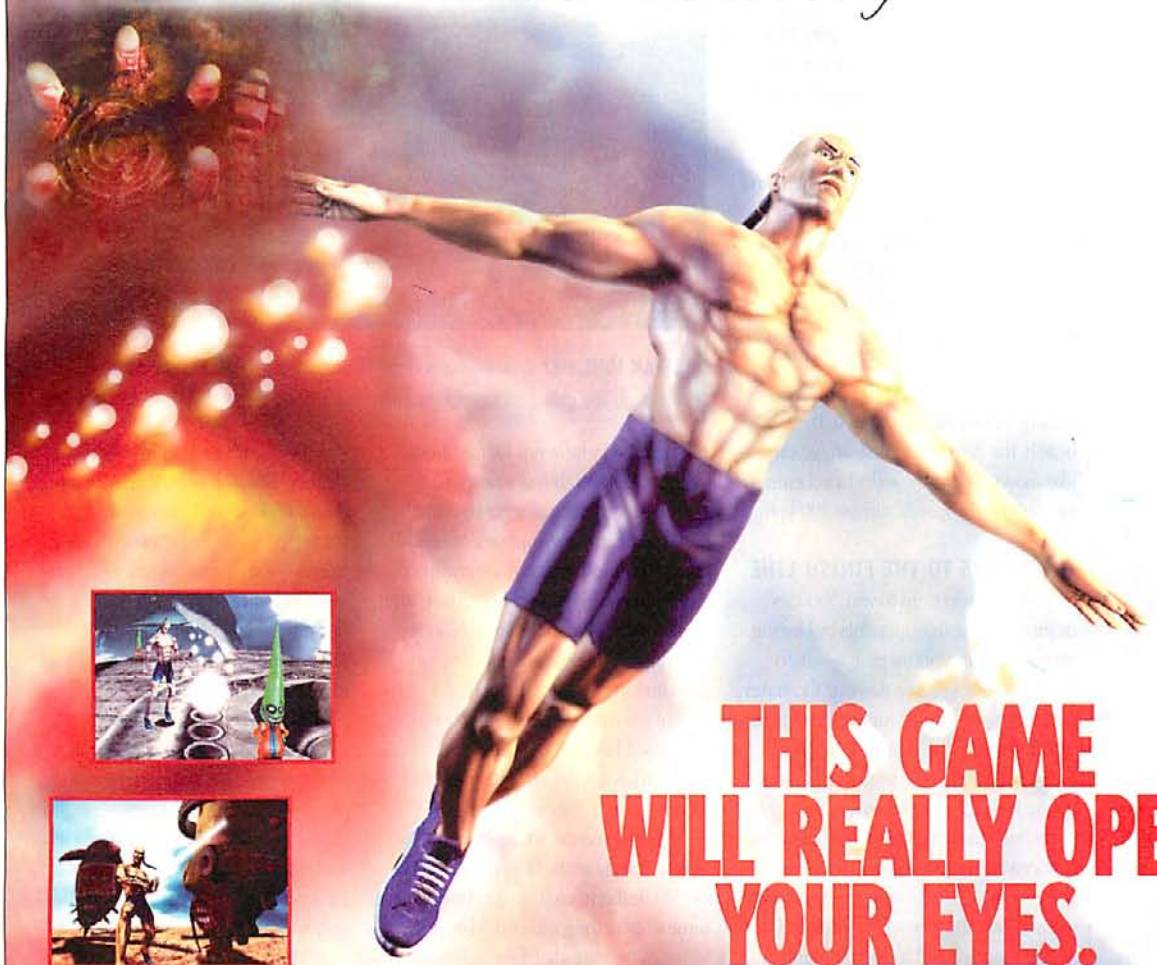

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #132

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Let the Blood Fly

Could Interplay's Gory Racer Be the Ultimate Racing Game?

by Peter Olafson

Somewhere along that stretch of country highway, between plowing through a herd of cattle and discovering that my roadster wouldn't make that monster loop-de-loop, it occurred to me: It's been a long time since a driving game has been as much fun as CARMAGEDDON.

This racer is like DUKE NUKEM 3D, as played from inside a serrated pseudo-Corvette. It's got the gibs, it's got the piquant detail, and it's got the personality.

You're one of six participants in 36 open-ended races carved out of five brawny 3D worlds (city streets, the beach, the American West, an Aspen-like snowy hideaway, and a treacherous factory) where speeds surpass 300 kph.

STEAK TONIGHT? CARMAGEDDON's most hilarious feature is the comedic excess of violence. You gain bonuses for the more outrageous displays of gore and mayhem.

FOUR WAYS TO THE FINISH LINE

How you win is up to you. You can destroy all of your opponents by beating them to an automotive pulp—which this game's progressive damage illustrates perfectly—or by pushing their carcasses where the sun don't shine. You can kill every pedestrian on the streets. Or you can tick off the checkpoints in the right order and reach the finish line before an unforgiving clock runs out.

Any type of interesting chaos you can wreak along the way will grant you either an extension or add to your bankroll. A good head-on collision? Why not? The little old lady with the walker? Run her over. The streets are fairly thronged with pedestrians who shriek and flee upon your approach, and obligingly turn into chum on contact. A multiple somersault over one of the omnipresent striped barricades, or a 20-story leap of faith from a downtown office building? Do both.

All are standard operating procedure. Your starting car (others can be acquired along the way) is happily durable and bottom-heavy, and can take a good amount of abuse before it begins spouting smoke.

There's very little not to like about CARMAGEDDON. It has a range of aggressive opponents; a great, crunchy metal score and a symphony of sound effects; pointed and profane commentary from your Jay Leno-like driver; and small touches like skidmarks, bloody tire-marks, and delicate handling on grass and underwater. It also has a richness of off-road scenery and free-form structure I haven't seen since TEST DRIVE III—a relief after the raft of recent "trough" racers.

I expect someone, somewhere, will make a fuss about the violence. It won't be me. While this would be a good racing game without the gore, it would be just a racing game, instead of the silly, magnificent black comedy it has become.

FINAL LAP

That's not to say that it couldn't be improved. The other drivers appear to key on your car and seem less interested in each other. The shop where you can upgrade your car between races is sadly generic and underdone. (Where are the James Bond staples like machine guns, rocket launchers, mines, and oil slicks?) Pedestrian targets also needn't be quite so helpless. Sidearms and snipers would have been a nice touch.

CARMAGEDDON could also be a bit cleaner. The hi-res DOS version simply didn't work on my Pentium rigs. On later tracks, the game had a tendency to freeze—sometimes for just a few seconds and sometimes for good. And, on one machine, invoking the comical replay mode sometimes seemed like daring the game to crash.

But the few problems I had with CARMAGEDDON never overrode its addictiveness, nor stopped me from playing, and I wound up answering each crash of the program with a dozen soaring ones of my own. CARMAGEDDON is the kind of game that most racing titles only wish they were: the fun kind.

Price: $49
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90 or faster, Windows 95 or MS-DOS 6.2, 8MB RAM (16MB for Windows 95 version and network play), 4x CD-ROM drive, 20MB hard-drive space, 1MB VGA-graphics card (SVGA recommended); supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards, Microsoft compatible mouse, joysticks, and steering wheels (Thrustmaster, Mad Catz, and Performa).
Multiplayer Support: IPX
Designer: Stainless Software
Publisher: SCI/Interplay Irvine, CA (800) INTERPL
www.interplay.com
Reader Service #: 330

APPEAL: Racing devotees with strong stomachs, fans of DEATH RACE 2000, and people who think crosswalks are really crosshairs.

PROS: We don't have the space. Just about everything you could want in an arcade driving game.

CONS: AI isn't the brightest; shop is out of stock; freeze-ups get to be a nuisance.

CG RATED ★★★★

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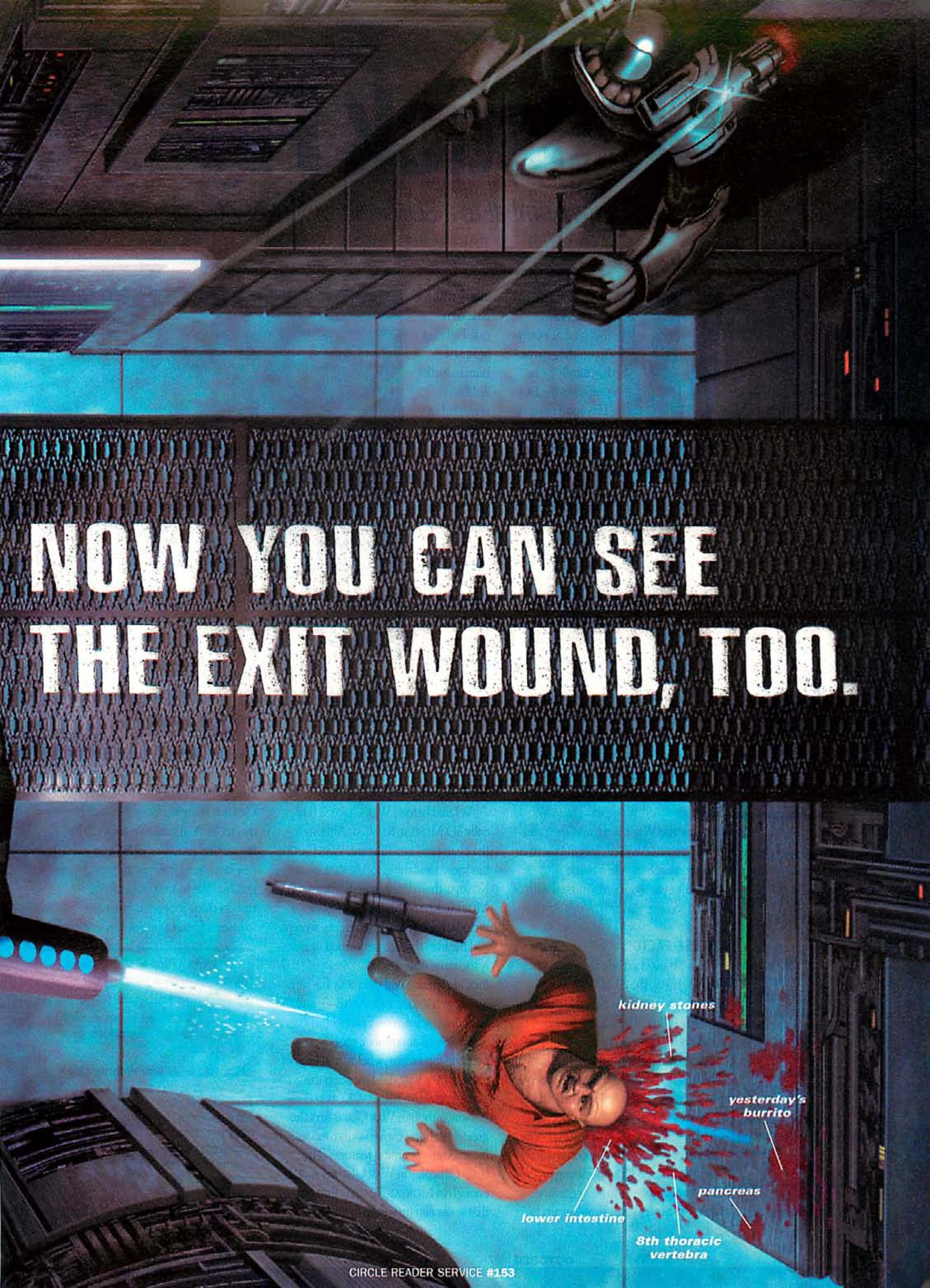


CIRCLE READER SERVICE #153

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Slapstick Fighter

Midway Brings Kombat to a 3D World of Cheesy Gods

by Kelly Rickards

WAR GODS, Midway's ill-received 3D coin-op fighting game, has finally been ported to the PC. The good news is the PC port is just about arcade perfect. The bad news is that it suffers from the same deficiencies for which the arcade game was criticized.

Basically, WAR GODS is nothing more than a polygonal MORTAL KOMBAT with a few added bells and whistles. Need proof? To begin with, the storyline in WAR GODS adheres to the MORTAL KOMBAT school of melodramatic, overwrought narrative and corny themes. Billions of years ago, an alien being's cargo of life-giving Ore crashed on Earth, scattering it over the molten surface of the planet. Through the millennia, ten humans came into contact with the Ore and were transformed into (insert drum roll here) Super-Evolved Warriors. These Warriors are the War Gods, and their destinies are intertwined, forcing them to confront each other in battle.

Don't even concern yourself with this bogus storyline.

CHEESE FACTOR

As with most arcade fighting games from Midway, the AI in WAR GODS' single-player mode is cheap to the point of being unfair. The CPU-controlled Gods fight with a technique known in the arcade fighting world as "turtling." The dreaded turtle technique is when a player blocks and positions their character in such a way that the opponent can do very little or no damage. As soon as the turtler sees the turtlee commit a mistake, he attacks. This infuriating procedure forces a player to be aggressive while the turtle player simply waits to attack with little or no risk. Fighting against a human turtler is difficult enough, but battling it out with a CPU player (who always attacks with perfect timing, executes the most damaging combos, and takes half the damage of the human player) is just too frustrating. Even if the game is played on its easiest difficulty setting, a novice player will struggle for a while before winning. Do yourself a favor and play against another human player.

WARPED GODS WAR GODS is Midway's testbed for 3D fighting. It's an arcade fighter that's been ported to the PC almost perfectly. The gameplay is shallow, but still fun.

MORTAL KOMBAT 4?

As I said before, WAR GODS is basically 3D MORTAL KOMBAT. Although the characters are different, WAR GODS has more similarities to MORTAL KOMBAT than differences. Some of the MORTAL KOMBAT hand-me-downs include: basic moves (uppercuts, sweeps, and the like) that are performed in exactly the same way; special moves and fatalities, also performed in exactly the same way as in MORTAL KOMBATS 1–3; and the ominous voice samples and sound (deep-voiced announcer, moody music, over-the-top groans, whelps, and cries of pain). By the way, did I mention this game is a lot like MORTAL KOMBAT?

Now, although WAR GODS isn't the greatest fighting game around, it does have some redeeming features. The basic gameplay in WAR GODS is similar enough to MORTAL KOMBAT that fans of that series can just jump in and have fun with the game. One of the (few) things I enjoy about MORTAL KOMBAT is how the game doesn't seem to take itself seriously. The way MORTAL KOMBAT presents even the most basic move with an over-the-top outrageousness has a certain entertainment value in itself, and WAR GODS is stamped from the same humorous mold. And while WAR GODS lacks the tactical precision of STREET FIGHTER (my favorite fighting game series) or the graphic flair of VIRTUA FIGHTER, it is easy to enjoy for casual fun. Just be sure to bring a friend along or you're toast.

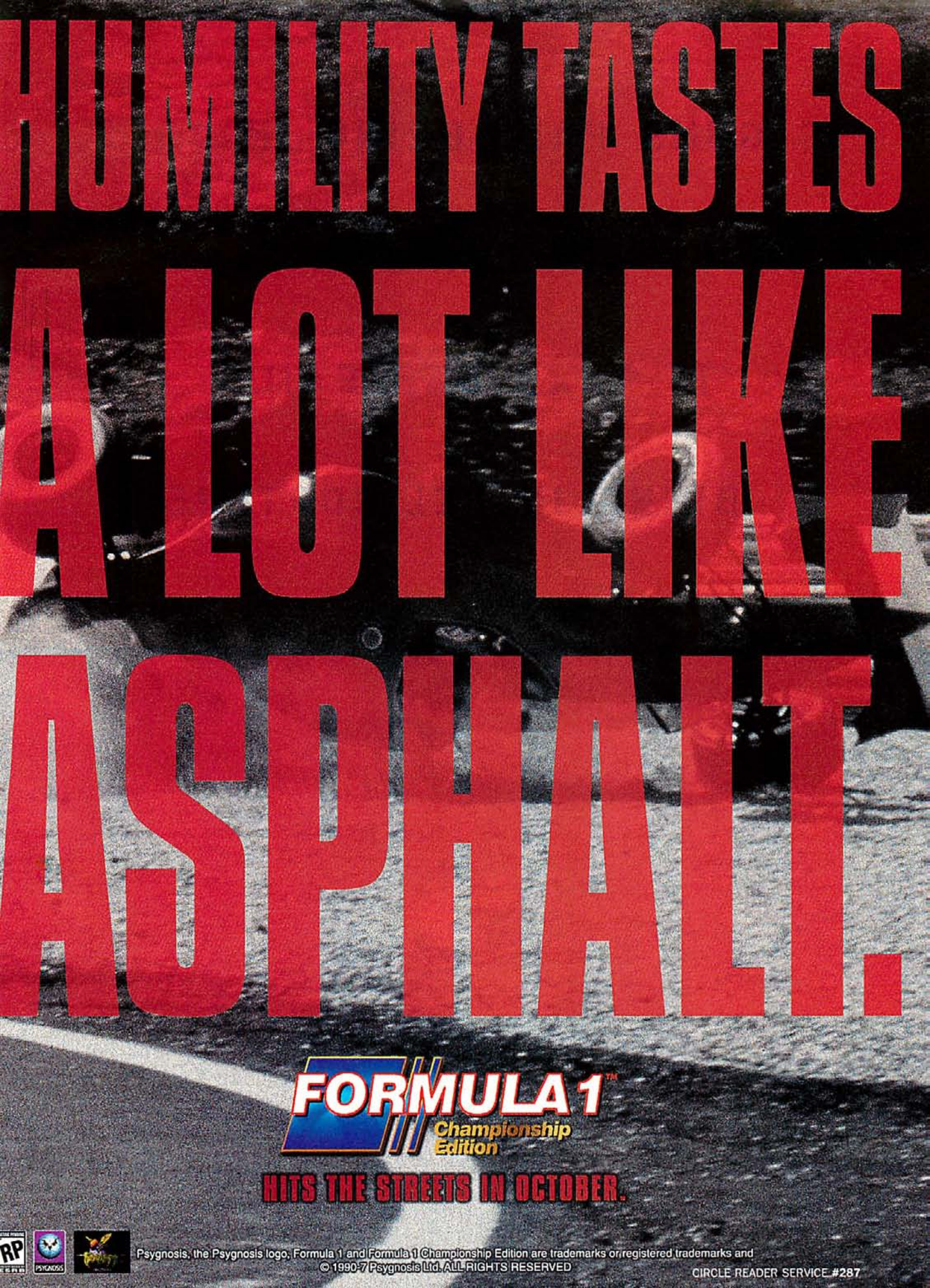
Price: $29.99
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 60 (P120 recommended), Windows 95, 12MB RAM (16MB recommended), 2x CD-ROM drive (CD must be present to play), DirectSound-compatible card, DirectX-compatible Local Bus SVGA-graphics video card; supports Gravis PC game Pad Pro, Gravis GriP or other DirectX-compatible multiplayer adapter.
Multiplayer support: Hot seat (2 players).
Designer: Midway
Publisher: GT Interactive Software
New York, NY
www.gtinteractive.com
(800) 469-5961
Reader Service #: 331

APPEAL: Fans of MORTAL KOMBAT who have been waiting for the game to switch from 2D to 3D.

PROS: Gratuitous violence; cool fatalities; polygonal graphics; over-the-top humor.

CONS: Gratuitous violence; CPU opponents are too hard on even the easiest difficulty settings; gameplay lacks some of the precision seen in other 3D fighters.

CG RATED ★★★★



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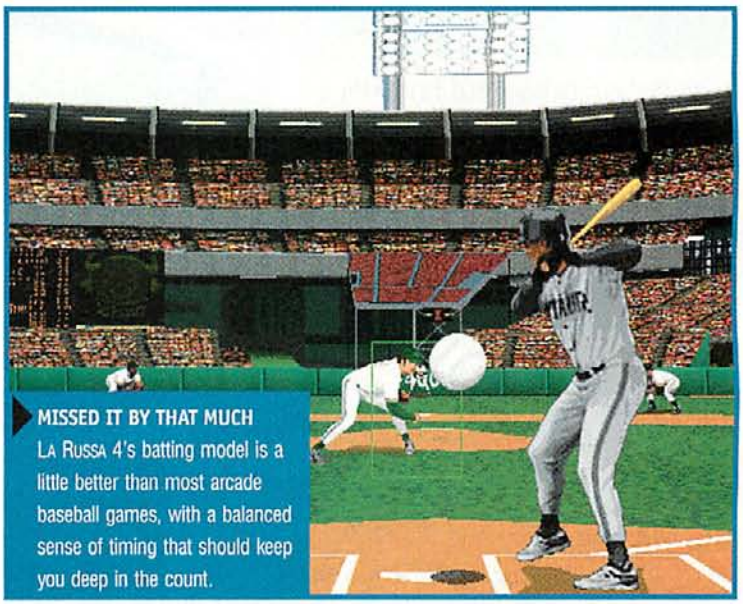
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Tony the Tired

Stormfront's Tony La Russa 4 May Need Some Time on the Bench

by Jim Gindin

Tony La Russa Baseball 4, the latest version of Stormfront Studios' well-regarded baseball simulation, is an exercise in frustration. I found myself surprised by its ability to produce fairly realistic numbers in a very short amount of time. I was pleased with its attempt to provide full league support, a complete fantasy draft, and career play with a hint of minor-league development. But I was irritated with slow arcade play, sloppy stat-keeping, and an inability to blend rookie careers with established Major Leaguers. There's quite a range of function here, some of it implemented with surprising depth, but inconsistency spoils the overall package.



MISSED IT BY THAT MUCH La Russa 4's batting model is a little better than most arcade baseball games, with a balanced sense of timing that should keep you deep in the count.

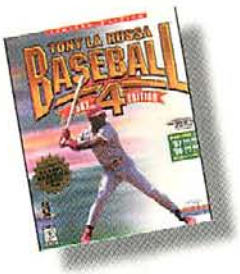
HERE'S THE PITCH

Pitching is the heart of any arcade baseball game. In La Russa 4, the pitcher begins the play by selecting from one to four available pitches. Crosshairs appear in the strike zone, then there's an endless amount of toe-tapping and batter shuffling while the pitcher waits to begin his windup. You can move the crosshairs to direct the pitch until slightly after the pitcher releases the ball. The pitch heads toward the selected area, affected by the pitcher's fatigue and his control rating. For the most part, pitches look fairly realistic—sliders suddenly drop as they approach the plate, and curveballs bend slowly, according to their spin. But fastballs, change ups, and sliders never move from side to side, and a hanging curveball or slider is treated exactly like a belt-high change up.

Hitting, as in most games, is an exercise in timing a button-press as the pitch approaches the plate. Stormfront did a great job with this, giving you a sense of pitch location just before it's time to swing. If you wait just a tiny bit too long, you'll be a split second late to make contact. Because of this, La Russa 4 is the only arcade game I've played where I found myself going deep into the count against the computer pitcher. If the pitch is in the strike zone, and your swing is well timed, you'll almost certainly make contact. There really isn't a sense of great contact versus mediocre contact, and ball direction and distance are more a reflection of the hitter's profile than an understanding of physics. But, all in all, if it weren't for the extremely slow speed of this game (even at its fastest settings, with stadium detail turned off), this would be an excellent batter-pitcher interface. The pitchers and hitters look very realistic, with movielike animation of the warmup, windup, and swing. There's no differentiation among players, however, except for uniform and skin color.

The fielding interface is not as good. Fielders simply don't move very well in proportion to the size of the stadium. If a ball is hit right at a player, there's enough time to make the catch, throw the batter out at first base or even complete the double-play. If the ball is out of reach, however, computer runners are off to the races. Fly balls between outfielders consistently drop for easy triples. On more than one occasion, I've seen a batter bunt the ball past the pitcher and the second baseman into the right side of the infield, before it finally came to rest a little way into right-center field. Switching to the correct fielder can take time, as can sending the second baseman out to retrieve the ball. The hitter stops at third with his bunt triple, then is credited with a home run as he scores when the sec-

BLINDING ME WITH SCIENCE For some inexplicable reason, Stormfront scrapped the appealing interface of La Russa 3 for this nightmarishly hideous redesign. A note to the designers: Day-glo pink is not a Major League color.



Price: $44.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 20MB hard-disk space, 2x CD-ROM, DirectX-compatible SVGA Card.
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Maxis Sports
Walnut Creek, CA
(800) 336-2947
www.maxis.com
Reader Service #: 333

ond baseman's toss back to the pitcher goes straight to the mound, rather than where the pitcher is standing after failing to field the bunt.

TAKE A NUMBER

Statistically speaking, LA RUSSA 4 is virtually identical to its predecessors. It simulates games fairly quickly, and is easily capable of finishing a 2,000-game season in 15 minutes. The numbers are far better than any of the other arcade games on the market, but still fall short of the text-based games. Offense numbers are a little lower than in real life, especially in the American League, where the games average about 1 ½ runs less per game than real 1996 numbers. Most seasons feature one player breaking the all-time home run record. Was this built into the game to add excitement?

Pitching is not simulated quite as well, with little interest in individual home run or walk totals. For which pitches a player is rated is almost random. Randy Johnson, the game's most feared strikeout artist, isn't rated for the slider, which many think is even nastier than his fastball.

LA RUSSA 4 lets you create leagues with varying division sizes and numbers of teams. It can create new schedules for these leagues and import teams from other leagues. When simulating, it does a fair job assigning playing time, though there's a tendency to overuse the top setup reliever and no ability to set lineups beyond providing one against left-handed pitching and one against right-handed pitching. Even if your league is using the designated hitter and you have one in your pre-set lineups, simulated games will not use him, making stars like Edgar Martinez completely useless. That's almost certainly where the 1 ½-run American League deficit comes in.

LA RUSSA also includes a fantasy draft module and the ability to trade against computer teams. It's easy to grab stars from opposing teams by offering up several mediocre players, however, and the computer does not draft particularly well. I was able to draft a 120-game winning team without preparation while going against the 27 computer managers. While the computer teams seemed to understand who the superstars were, they had trouble telling a mediocre middle reliever from a solid starting pitcher.

HIT THE SHOWERS

The LA RUSSA series has not aged well, despite its prominence in the market for several years. Bugs in scoring decisions reported in earlier versions still appear here. The graphics display, state-of-the-art with LA RUSSA 3, is slow and behind the times. The extra modules, which should provide a lot of entertainment value for relatively little programming complexity, still don't work properly. If you own any version of LA RUSSA baseball created in the last three years, you won't find this much of an upgrade. It's a shame, because with so many mediocre titles out there, this should have been the time for a mature product to shine. LA RUSSA 4 brings the series close to a demotion to the minor leagues.

APPEAL: Baseball fans who want a taste of everything, without requiring a great amount of depth. Fans who don't have either of the last two LA RUSSA releases.

PROS: Good statistical simulator; decent support for league play; fairly realistic gameplay.

CONS: Mind-numbingly slow speed on lower-end machines; statistics deteriorate in career play; poor understanding of baseball's dimensions; many errors in tracking stats.

CG RATED

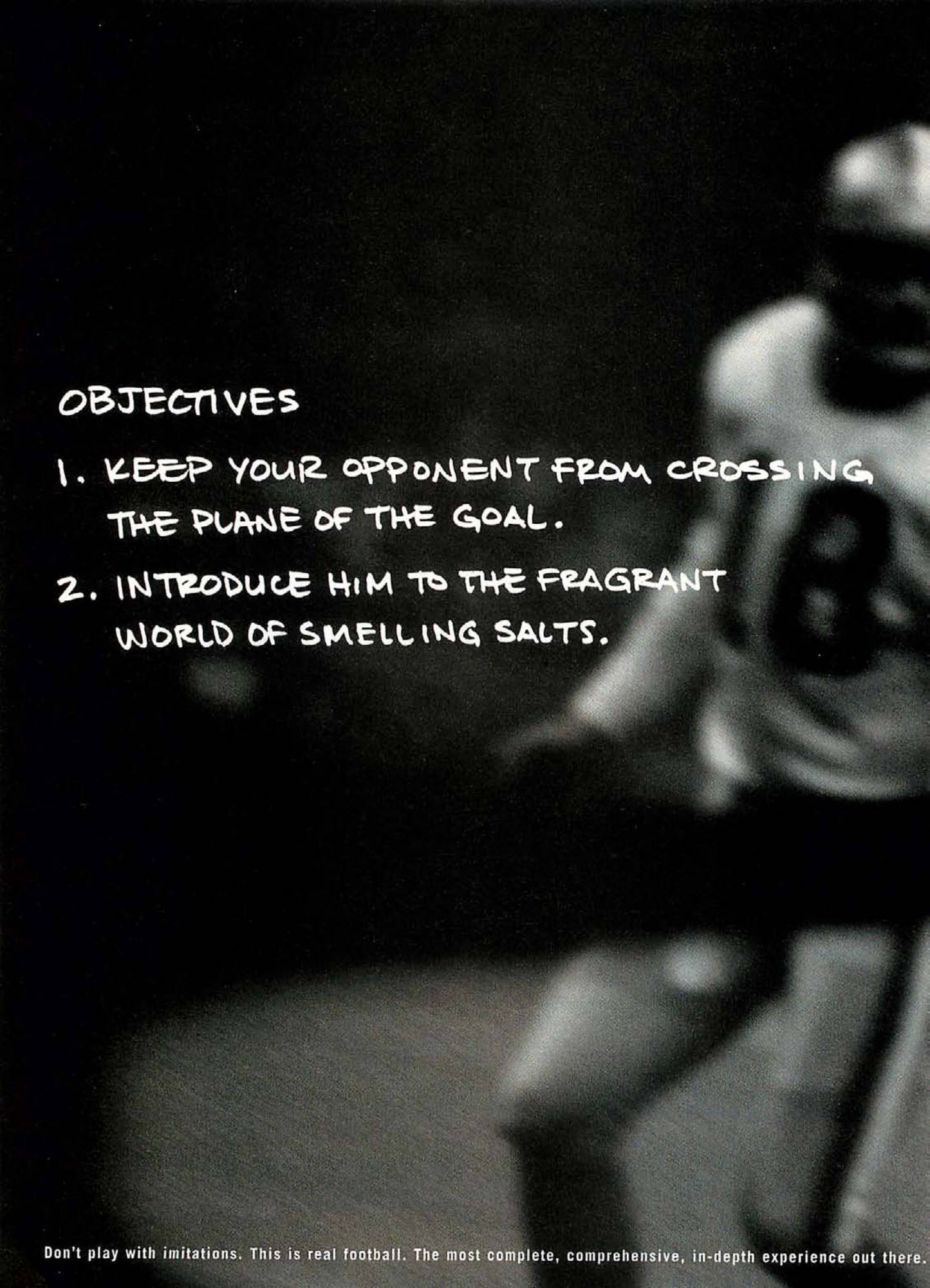
On the Farm

The most appealing, yet most poorly implemented, feature in the game is LA RUSSA 4's GM Challenge, a module that lets you compete against other teams in career play. Each season, the computer provides you with up to 25 minor league players to evaluate, with their positions based on whatever you decided to emphasize when scouting. Over time, the established veterans retire and your rookies develop.

Each season, you receive a scouting report and some statistics on each rookie, then have the option of replacing a player on your roster, releasing the rookie, or keeping him in the farm system. However, especially with pitchers, the evaluations seem random, and the only way to get a true sense of a rookie's performance is to put him on the roster and look at how the computer rates him for trading purposes.

Established players retire each season, although their statistical ratings don't really deteriorate with age. You should try to play as many years as possible at once, since the game doesn't always save career statistics properly. The rookies can pitch very well, and it's easy to find a starter who can fill a gaping hole in your rotation. But they can't hit. After a few years, once the newcomers fill most of your batting order, your offense will suffer. It's not unusual to see team batting averages below .200 after seven or eight years of this simulation. Also, these newcomers make 95 percent of the errors in the field. It's not unusual to see Cincinnati's Barry Larkin make just two errors in a season while the rookie at second base makes two dozen. The GM Challenge was an excellent idea when introduced with LA RUSSA 3, but it's still not ready for prime time.

BLAME IT ON COSTANZA LA RUSSA's best feature is the GM Challenge, which lets you indulge in fantasy career play, but the statistical model is mired with mistakes.



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SIERRA

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #158

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Minor Leaguer

It's Better, but Sierra's Ambitious Baseball Sim Still Can't Make the Big Leagues

by Robert Coffey

You should know that FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO '98 has zapped many of the bugs that plagued the '96 version. Position players no longer lead the league in saves, the pitch indicator works, and the World Series is no longer a one-game affair. Like its predecessor, it's a game of great promise, aiming to be the most comprehensive baseball sim yet. But lost among the glut of detail is a sense of real *fun*. More disappointingly, a new bunch of bugs (plus some old annoyances) can be found buzzing around the bat rack.

HITTING THE WALL Frustrated by the game's refusal to reset after a fielding play, Atlanta's John Smoltz falls down after being directed to repeatedly bang his head against the outfield wall. You may want to join him.

Price: $29
Minimum System Requirements: Windows 95, P60 (P120 recommended), 16MB RAM (32MB recommended), 18MB hard-disk space, 256 colors video drivers (accelerated video card recommended), 2x CD-ROM drive (4x recommended), sound card with Win-95 drivers (16-bit sound card recommended), mouse, *modem for remote leagues* (28.8 modem recommended), joystick supported.
Multiplayer Support: Hotseat (1–2 players).
Designer/Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Bellevue, WA 98007, (800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Reader Service #: 334

WANTED: COMMISSIONER

Any baseball fan who has lamented the boneheaded moves of their favorite team's management will love the degree of control in BASEBALL PRO '98. You lord over every aspect of a baseball organization, from managing the minor leagues to designing the uniforms. If you're the kind of GM who likes making trades but doesn't want to bother with the amateur draft, the game will let you hand off various chores as you see fit. Simulating games still takes forever, but a new "Fast Sim" option reduces that to about a third of forever. "Fast simming" an entire season will still consume an entire day.

While the scope of league operations is commendable, it borders on bloat and gets in the way of the fun. Why teams can't be accessed simply by clicking on them from the league screens is beyond me, but the nonintuitive interface dictates a tedious series of mouse clicks triggering countless pulldown menus for every task. New associations must have a minimum of eight teams and the length of the season can't be set except by choosing one of three options—bad news for six people looking to play a 40-game season.

There's no way to propose or execute three-way trades except as a series of day-consuming two-way deals. And BASEBALL PRO '98 has no designation for utility players, allotting players only one extra qualified position. San Diego's utility-man extraordinaire, Archi Cianfrocco, is listed as a first baseman and pitcher, in spite of his playing every infield position and catching last year—and all of them more than the one or two innings he pitched. But put him at second and you're begging for errors.

THE UNNATURAL

BASEBALL PRO '98 still makes the mistake of principally defining players through ratings for their attributes. While these numbers can be tweaked during spring training and can be modestly useful in assessing talent during amateur drafts, they aren't really meaningful in predicting performance, since highly rated players like Tony Gwynn can have hideous seasons (see sidebar).

Yet you're confronted with these numbers constantly, even though changes in batting averages, RBIs, and strikeout totals are what define and shape both the players and the season. For all of BASEBALL PRO '98's flexibility, there's no way to get the game to show historical, or accumulated, stats in the pitching/batting screen or even to set them as defaults in the manager's lineup card.

Accumulated averages and current game stats *do* show up in one of the many windows that clutter the screen during games, a ticker that acts as a

sort of silent play-by-play guy. Gamers with less robust computers will want to close the window to enhance performance, while everyone else will close it (along with other unnecessary windows) so they can see the game better.

FIELD OF SCREAMS

Depending on levels of difficulty selected, gamers can decide when, how, and where to swing the bat. Pitching requires deciding which pitch to throw, where to throw it, and how fast it will go. As for fielding, well, you had better let the computer do it. At anything above the easiest setting you must aim your fielder at a diminishing circle to catch a ball in the air and then, instead of just pressing a certain key to throw to the proper base, you have to *line up* the player to the bag and throw.

Letting the computer field the ball means putting your faith in a Little League-caliber fielding AI. The kind of AI that has the left fielder run in past the ball to cover second while the second baseman is running out to left to get the ball after a bad throw from the first baseman. Somewhere this makes sense to someone.

There's more. Far too many balls are hit right back to the pitcher, and computer-controlled batters never swing at a pitch out of the strike zone. Watching the ball carry and carry in Coors Field's high altitude is kinda fun, as is being thrown off-balance by a sidearming pitcher when you're at the plate, but the lackluster games just don't generate all that much excitement.

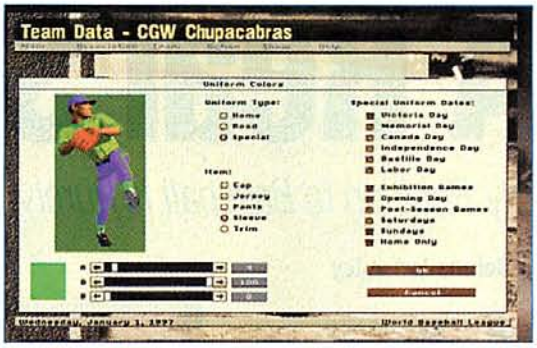
More than a decade ago, with less technology and less powerful computers, EARL WEAVER BASEBALL had many of BASEBALL PRO '98's features and loads more fun. That's why it's in this magazine's Hall of Fame. FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO '98 is getting better, but it has a long way to go to fill EARL's shoes.

APPEAL: Would-be baseball commissioners and GMs more concerned with minutiae than realism or entertainment.

PROS: Host of options simulate almost every aspect of baseball; many old bugs have been fixed.

CONS: Interface not up to handling a game this size; new bugs have replaced the old; poor fielding AI; can't fully customize leagues; no modem play; game just isn't much fun to play.

CG RATED

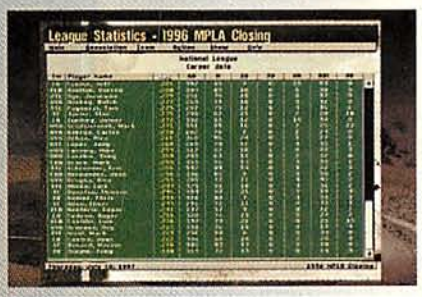


SEW MANY OPTIONS BASEBALL PRO '98 lets you control virtually every aspect of your team, including designing butt-ugly uniforms that negate the need for lights during night games.

Pain by Numbers

While the '98 version of FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL has improved its statistics model by spreading out the numbers, many players still seem to be playing in an alternate, Bizarro World baseball league.

Gamers looking to draft a BASEBALL PRO '98 league should expect the unexpected.



NEW MATH Shortcomings in the statistical model are painfully obvious when looking at future Hall-of-Famer Tony Gwynn's league-worst batting average at midseason.

It's unfathomable how Tony Gwynn, with a .337 average over a 15-year career (highest among active players) and seven batting titles, can be batting .198 at midseason and finish at .221, just one point above light-hitting Rey Ordonez. His 1-for-27 start probably explains how he finished behind Eric Karros' league-leading .353 (.260 last year, .264 over six years). If this ever happens in real life, look for a plague of locusts to follow.

Over in the American League, Albert Belle managed to add almost 100 points to his eight-year average of .295 by making a run at .400 and leading the league at .389. And while Jay Buhner's 185 RBIs (5 short of the all-time record for a season) is remotely conceivable, notoriously free-swinging Ozzie Guillen's 55 walks is not. The man had just 10 in 1996 and has averaged 14.25 over a 10-year career.

BASEBALL PRO '98 doesn't do much better with pitching. While Kevin Brown dropped just a point on his real-life 1.89 ERA, Randy Johnson stayed healthy through a simmed season to post ungodly numbers—a 27–6 record, 1.69 ERA, and a staggering, league-leading 342 strikeouts. Johnson also led the league in leaping tall buildings in a single bound and locomotive racing. BASEBALL PRO '98 just doesn't understand pitchers, making most successful hurlers power pitchers, in spite of real life. Future Hall of Famer and control specialist Greg Maddux led the league with 322 strikeouts and a 1.27 ERA. Not exactly the profile of a man who has averaged 149 strikeouts over an 11-year career and did well with 172 last year.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

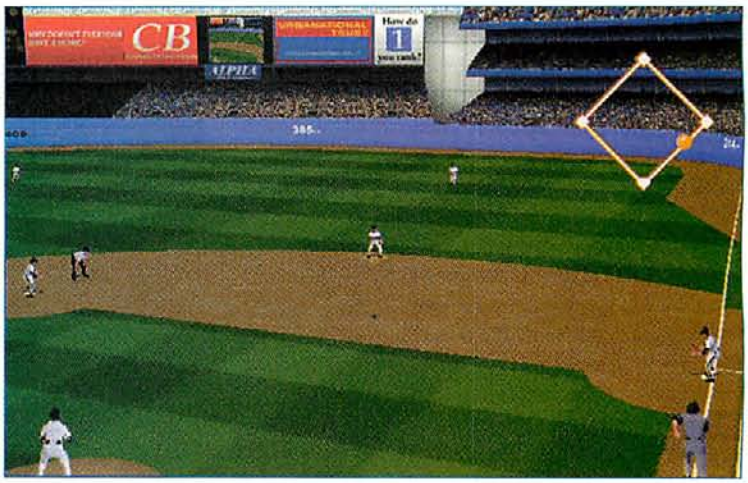
A Real Slam

Any Relation to Baseball Is Purely Coincidental

by Dennis McCauley

Virgin's NHL POWERPLAY '96 turned a few heads last year, which makes it all the more surprising that GRAND SLAM looks so much like a rookie effort. In fact, GRAND SLAM has the look and feel of a console game—and while there's nothing wrong with a good arcade simulation of the national pastime, GRAND SLAM offers none of the sophistication of its ever-growing list of competitors.

The game *is* attractive, especially on systems with 3D acceleration, and graphically shows the different body types among the players. Albert Belle, for example, offers a much stockier silhouette than a Brady Anderson. Batters blow bubbles, call time, or groan at a bad call. Pitchers do their part too, shaking off signals and scooping dirt from the mound. It's a shame that GRAND SLAM's viewing angles aren't more flexible, as I'd enjoy seeing what the rest of the players might be up to in the field. On the downside, the uniforms lack numbers, team names, and logos, and the players are clad in less-than-accurate home and road uniforms.



INFINITE SLUGGER Home runs leave the launch pad in record numbers, regardless of whether you're playing arcade or sim mode.

Price: $45.99
Minimum System Requirements: P90 (P133 recommended), 16MB RAM, 20MB hard-disk space, Windows 95, SVGA graphics with 1MB video RAM (4MB recommended), 4x CD-ROM; supports Windows-compatible sound cards and 3D accelerators.
Multiplayer Support: 2 players, same computer.
Designer: Burst
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment Irvine, CA (800) 874-4607
www.vie.com
Reader Service #: 335

THROWING A SINKER

There are several modes of play, including practice, exhibition, and seasonal (of 13, 52, or 162 games), as well as a home-run derby. GRAND SLAM also simulates games with admirable speed, but it gets nowhere fast. In one 162-game season simmed for this review, 103 batters hit over .300. Another dozen swiped more than 50 bases, and home runs far exceeded even today's record highs. With offense so dominant, pitching stats were equally out of kilter. In the same replay, 21 pitchers lost 20 or more games. In a very strange statistical bug, more than 150 pitchers had N/A listed as their earned run average, despite clearly having a calculable ERA. The game also mixes NL and AL players together, a major league no-no sure to drive baseball purists crazy.

What really soured me on GRAND SLAM, however, was its brain-dead roster AI. Having fought my way through the game's clunky interface, I was ready to do some wheeling and dealing at the trade screen, where you can propose swaps and sift through offers from other clubs. In a lopsided deal, I offered star Yankee CF Bernie Williams to the Phillies for light-hitting backup catcher Mark Parent. Now, any GM worth his cigar would have accepted this deal in a New York minute. GRAND SLAM's Philadelphia team, however, rejected it, asking me to throw in more players! In my next try, I offered ace pitcher Andy Pettite to the Mets for journeyman reliever Toby Borland. The Mets not only declined my offer, but asked me to add a catcher to the deal. Since the Mets already had ace Todd Hundley behind the plate, I was left scratching my head.

GRAND SLAM does have some nice arcade aspects. Pitching uses a power meter, which causes variations in pitch velocity and location. Batting can be challenging, requiring that you time your swing, while moving the bat up, down, or laterally through the strike zone to compensate for pitch location. You can also choose to control fielders and runners, or delegate these chores to the computer. But the bottom line on GRAND SLAM is that it doesn't play anything like real baseball. It could have been a pleasant diversion for casual fans, but the non-intuitive interface and terrible AI deny it even that modest goal. With the great number of baseball games out there, why buy one that gets so many things wrong?

APPEAL: Only for those who must own every computer baseball game.

PROS: Decent player graphics and stadium renditions; MLBPA licensing.

CONS: Looks and feels like a bad console game; awkward interface; weak stat model and presentation; brain-dead trade AI.

CG RATED

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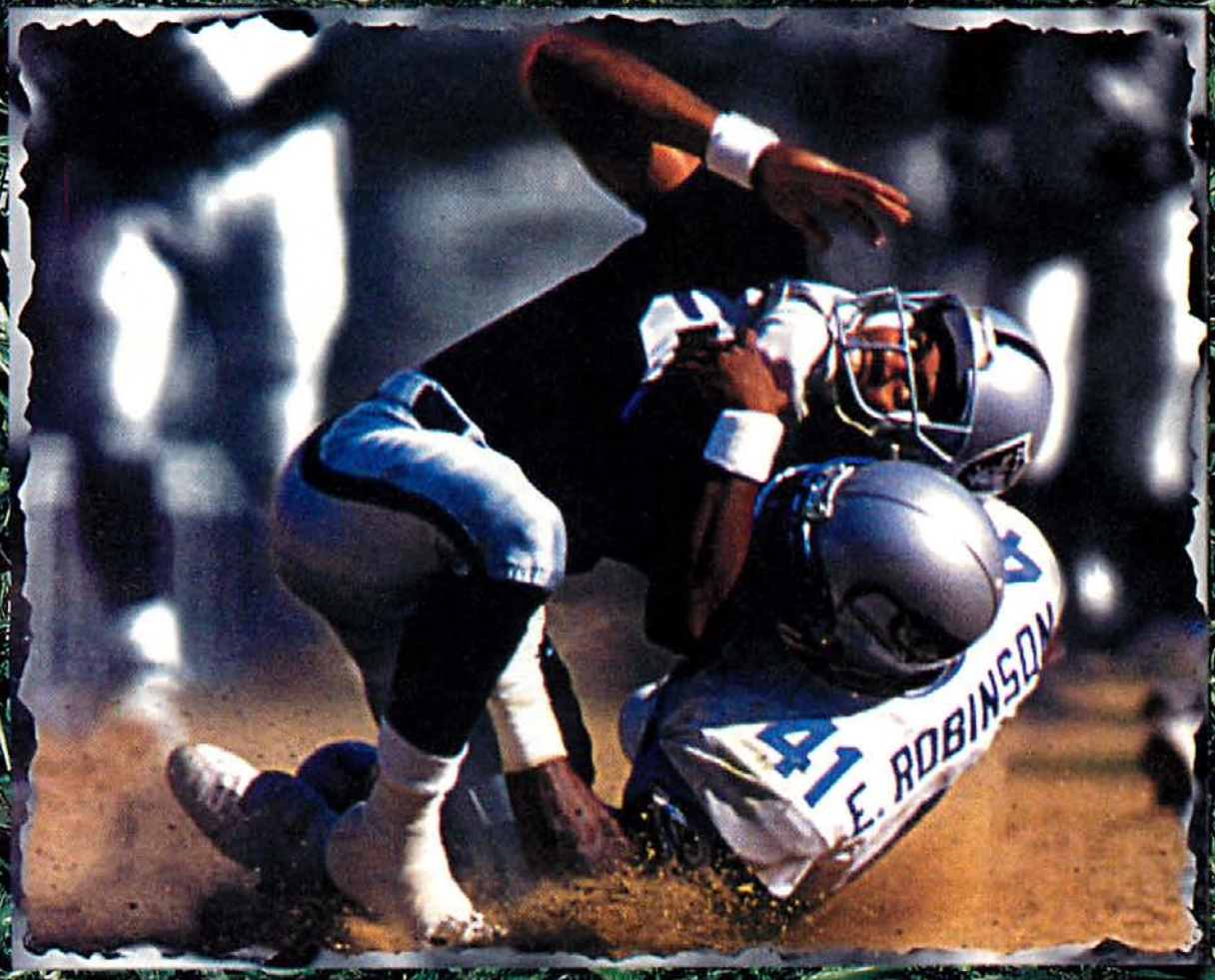
THIS ISN'T A GAME.



"GO FISH" IS A GAME.

MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL '98

This is ABC's Monday Night Football '98™ CD-ROM game, a realistic simulation of what it feels like to suit up and walk onto the field with the strains of Hank Williams Jr. stinging in your ears. (And let's face it, it's the only way you'll ever be on Monday Night Football, pal.) It's crammed with stats, strategy and 36 years of ABC Sports experience. The only things missing are the commercials. Experience the experience of ABC's Monday Night Football '98.

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Developed for Windows® 95

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

G-O-O-A-A-L!!!

Maxis Sports' KickOff 97 Sets a New Standard for PC Soccer Sims

by Scott A. May

FOOTIE CAM Gamers can view the action in KickOff 97 from 36 different camera angles, which should let you see exactly how the game's killer AI just kicked your butt.

Price: $39.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 75 or faster for Windows 95 or 486DX2-66 for DOS, 16MB RAM for Win 95 or 8MB RAM for DOS, SVGA graphics, 60MB hard-disk space for Win 95 or 50MB for DOS, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, joystick; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: Hotseat (1–2 players).
Designer: ANCO Software
Publisher: Maxis Sports
Walnut Creek, CA
(800) 33-MAXIS
www.maxis.com
Reader Service #: 336

Developed in Britain by ANCO Software, KickOff 97 is the second title of the year from Maxis' new sports line, and this one is a beauty. The game has two critical attributes that none of its recent competitors can boast: razor-sharp artificial intelligence and gameplay so intense it will make your head spin and your fingers numb. If you're looking for soccer action at its digital best, you've come to the right place.

Playable from either DOS or Windows 95, KickOff 97 supports resolutions up to 640x480 and a 256-color depth. Although the game makes no use of accelerated hardware, it doesn't need to—you'll experience absolutely manic game speed and fluid animation, even on systems below the recommended minimum requirements. At last, a game that doesn't penalize gamers with limited resources.

TEAM PLAYER

The game's national and international rosters include more than 300 teams, comprised of more than 5,200 players. There's no official license, however, so don't bother looking for your favorite soccer star here. A player editor lets you change names and uniform appearance, but not positions or skill levels. You can also create your own Dream Teams, picking the top players from all available leagues. Game modes include practice, single friendly matches, 30-round league challenge, and national/World Cup playoffs. There's no online multiplayer or LAN support, but the game can be played head-to-head on one computer.

Unlike in many other soccer games, the practice mode isn't just a lame menu option here. KickOff 97's practice mode is a full-blown tutorial of soccer mechanics that includes passing and receiving, dribbling and shooting, penalty kicks, goal keeping, cross-ins, corner kicks, and free kicks. When you think you've mastered them all, you can test your skills in the decathlon-style tournament practice.

And make no mistake—you'll need plenty of practice to face the game's outstanding computer-controlled players. Though artificial intelligence can be a somewhat intangible quality to measure, this game's AI will kick an average player's butt all over the field. With almost no exceptions, the computer-controlled competition is fast, precise, and utterly ruthless in its charge on your goal.

There are no skill levels to speak of, other than the overall quality of the team you're matched against. Arcade mode plays a little loosely, but simulation mode cuts unprepared human players absolutely zero slack.

BUMP AND GRIND

On-field graphics are sparse, but well designed. Players are composed of texture-mapped polygons, motion-captured to a fault. The range of realistic player movements is a sight to behold. Victims of brutal tackles typically languish on the turf for several seconds, as if reeling in pain or at least shaking the stars from their heads. Others may stand up and begin pushing or fighting, joined by other hotheaded players. When the referee issues a yellow or red flag, offending players vehemently argue the penalty. Goalkeepers bemoan each missed block and even appear to point an accusing finger at their teammates. In other words, the animation is fluid and surprisingly diverse.

Player control is tight and responsive using a joystick (digital or analog), keyboard, or mouse. A variety of command combinations lets you perform a host of

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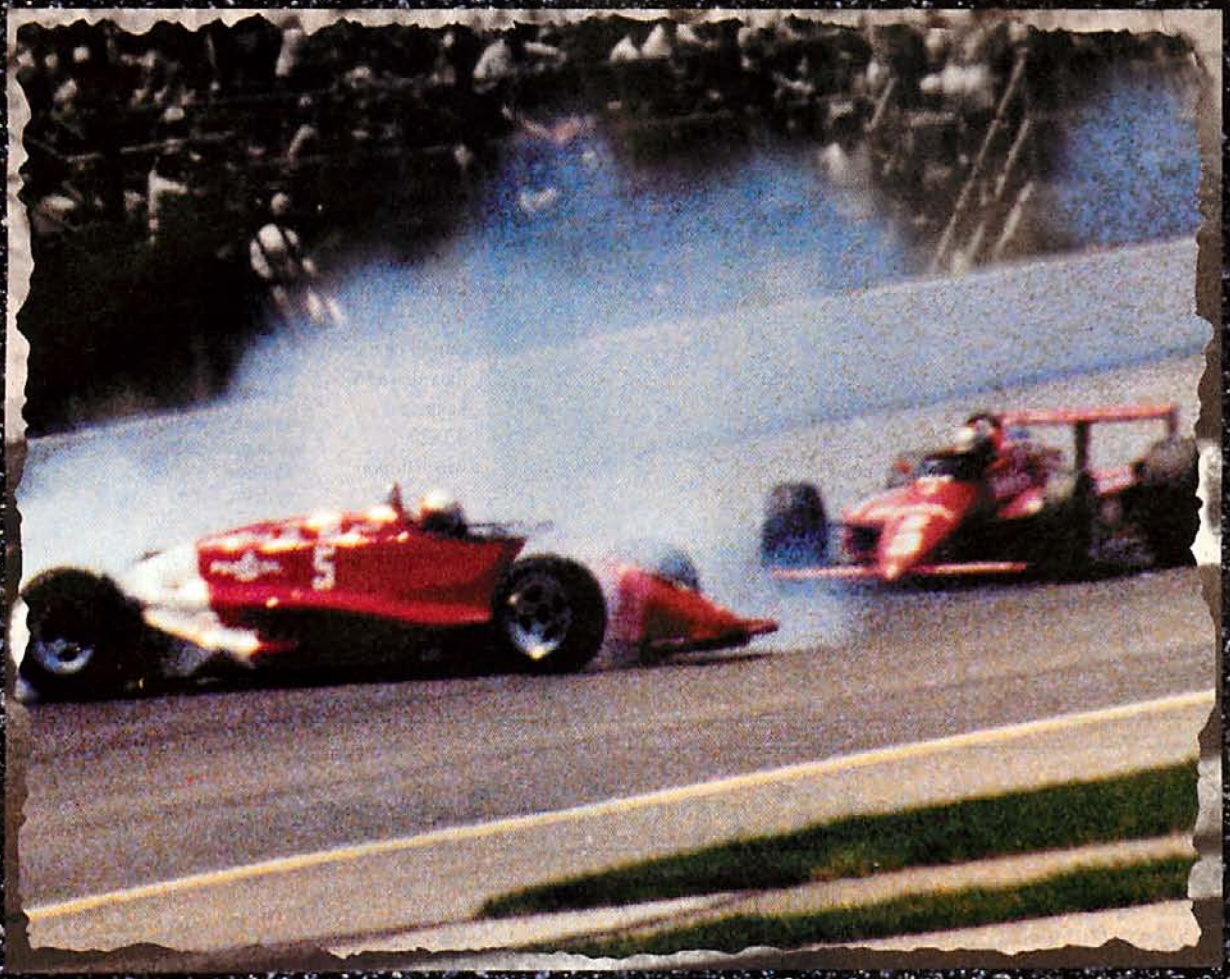
THIS ISN'T A GAME.



"PAT-A-CAKE" IS A GAME.

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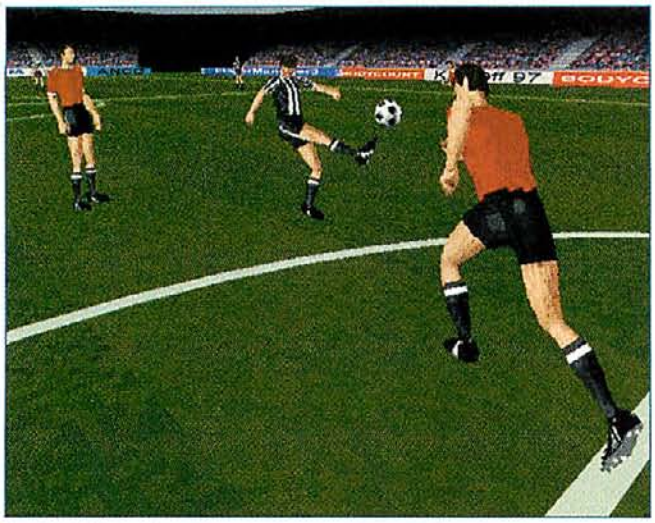
precision offensive and defensive moves, such as overhead (bicycle) kicks, volley passes, diving headers, back heel kicks, bending (banana) shots, spin (forward or reverse), cross-ins, and three types of tackles (short, slide, and dirty). The learning curve is fairly steep, but definitely rewarding when you begin to execute complex moves in the heat of action.

Graphic displays can be set to either isometric 3D or overhead 2D, viewed from a total of 36 hot-key selected camera angles. Don't have a Pentium? No problem: Simply change the video resolution to 320x200, which turbocharges the frame rate, even on a mid-speed 486. In this mode, the visuals may suffer from blockiness, but gameplay smokes and the level of animation detail remains intact. Other goodies include a tactical editor for changing player formations, and the ability to save up to 32 replays to disk.



IN YOUR FACE KICKOFF 97 features some of the most diverse motion-captured animation and intense soccer action in its class.

KICK IN THE HEAD

Overall, KICKOFF 97 is an excellent soccer sim, notable for its blazing action, detailed animation, and deft computer AI. If you've been waiting for a soccer game that's challenging and just plain fun to play, look no further.

APPEAL: Action-oriented footie fans.

PROS: Exceptionally fast and smooth gameplay; challenging AI; runs great even on slower systems.

CONS: No online multiplayer support; limited team/player editor.

CG RATED

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Developed for Windows® 95

HEROES OF THE GRIDIRON

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #249

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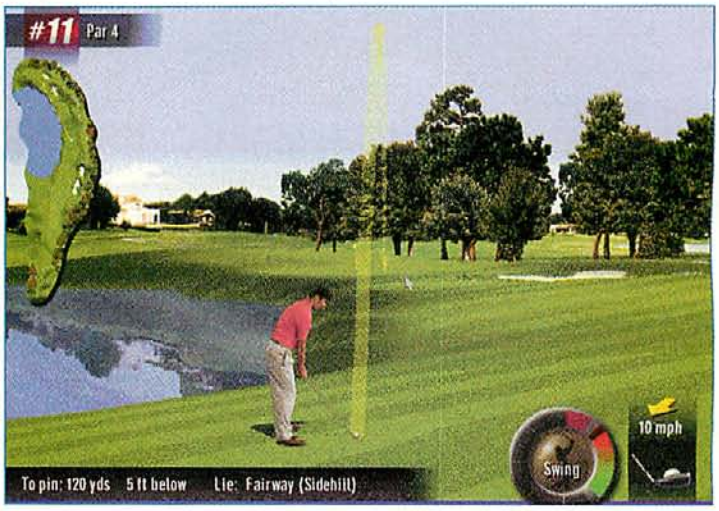
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Hook Shot

EA Sports' Latest Gets No Eagles

by Scott A. May

In case you haven't noticed, it's boom time on the digital greens, as more golf sims than ever vie for space on your computer screen. Yet beyond new graphic engines, improved physics models, and multiplayer capabilities, most publishers prefer to play it safe than to tinker with success. Such is the case with EA Sports' PGA TOUR PRO, a solid, but rather conventional, Win 95 update to the company's venerable golf franchise. In a nutshell, this game will neither disappoint nor inspire.



IN A SQUARE GROOVE Just as SIMGOLF and FRONT PAGE SPORTS: GOLF are trying new swing meters, PGA gives up its unique swing for a standard circular meter.

FAMILIAR SET OF CLUBS

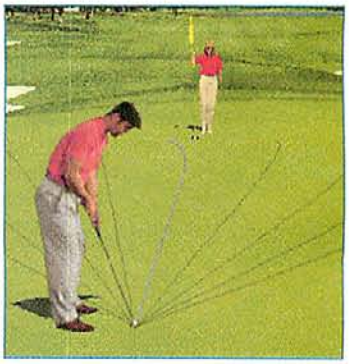
EA Sports may have lost its cutting edge in the football, soccer, and basketball arenas but, as most fans will be happy to find, it's nearly impossible to screw up an already good golf simulation. Aside from a few new graphic flourishes—including a revamped interface and ambient animation—the design team sticks with the boilerplate design that made the previous DOS versions so palatable.

Originally packaged with only two 18-hole courses, TPC of Scottsdale and Bay Hill Club, this version adds the Peach Beach course disk as a bonus. The game is also compatible with older DOS-based courses including TPC at Sawgrass, Spyglass Hill, TPC at Avenel, and Spanish Bay. Game modes include practice, stroke, tournament, skins, and shoot-out, and are playable with up to four people via modem, LAN, or EA's free Internet sports network. As many as 20 foursomes can compete in online tournaments. Logging on to EA Sports Net is a no-brainer; finding available Internet competition, however, proves much more difficult.

Course graphics are suitably photo-realistic. Rendered in realtime, the instant screen updates employ EA's proprietary Flash Draw technology. Motion-captured digital golfers are set against a backdrop of textured polygons and sprite-based graphics, boasting a maximum 800x600 resolution and 16-bit color depth. MMX support is provided, as well as DirectPlay, but otherwise the game requires no special 3D hardware or software acceleration. Overall graphics quality is good, although a low polygon tile count makes the foregrounds appear slightly flat, and thus they lack the illusion of depth.

If you are familiar with the PGA TOUR series, you'll find some new touches to gameplay. You can walk the course in realtime to read the greens. Individual hole fly-bys, augmented with audio commentary, let you map your pending strategies. There's even a special "risk meter" to gauge the difficulty of your upcoming shot. On the downside, EA has changed their once-unique swing overlay to a more traditional circular meter.

If Win 95 online gaming is your prime consideration, PGA TOUR PRO is worth the upgrade. Otherwise, stick with EA's previous DOS-based PGA TOUR titles, which are still among the best in the business.



LAG A LITTLE This shot shows one of PGA TOUR's assets: reading the greens in realtime.

Price: $49.99
Minimum System Requirements: P75 (P133 recommended), Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 60MB free hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, mouse; requires DirectX-compatible sound and video cards; modem.
Multiplayer Support: LAN or Internet (1–4 players).
Design: EA Sports
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(800) 448-8822
www.ea.com
Reader Service #: 337

APPEAL: PC golfers, especially those who enjoyed the earlier PGA TOUR games.

PROS: Smart, clean interface; good course selection; choice of three multiplayer modes.

CONS: Adds little to an overcrowded genre; high system requirements.

CG RATED

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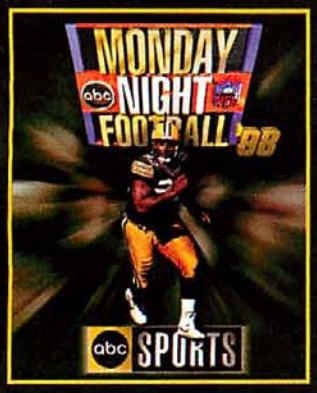

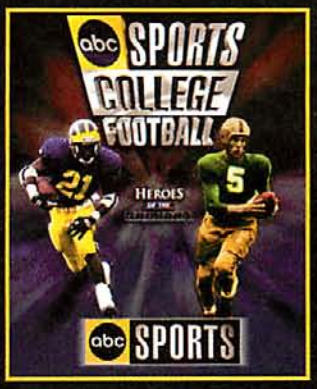

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Developed for Windows® 95

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #250

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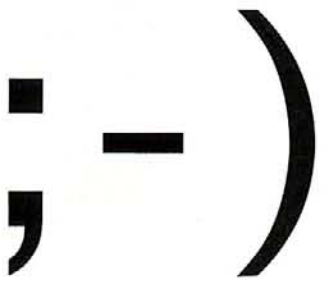

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #084

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

In a Jam

Better Brains Through Puzzle-Solving

by Charlotte Panther

Smart Games broke into the puzzle genre with CHALLENGE #1, a wonderful collection of word, strategy, and perception teasers. They followed with WORD PUZZLES, which was great for wordsmiths, but lacked the variety of CHALLENGE #1. Now, Smart Games is back with STRATAJAMS, another collection of puzzles guaranteed to set your cogs turning.

FINAGLED IN 'FRISCO

STRATAJAMS provides 351 all-new brain-teasers, based on six of CHALLENGE #1's popular strategy puzzles. Top of the list is *Car Jams*, a devilishly addictive 75-level puzzle, which has you playing the part of an anxious valet in a parking lot chock-full of cars, limos, schoolbuses, trucks, and Humvees. The idea is to move a red car through the lot to the exit in as few moves as possible. Each move costs you points; the rate at which you lose points increases every ten moves, and you are penalized for running over obstacles like manholes and traffic cones. With only a couple of vacant spaces in which to maneuver, solving this puzzle is as difficult as finding a parking spot in San Francisco on a Saturday night—but far more fun.

HAPPY HARVESTING While driving your tractor across your land you'll discover the joys and tribulations of farming. The more you reap, the more you score.

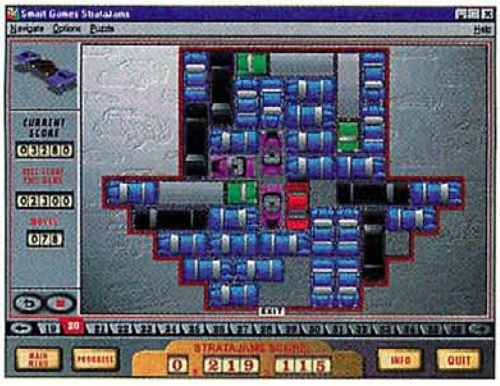
Would-be farmers don your overalls, hop aboard your tractor, and get ready to plow your way through 50 levels of *Cash Crop*. The object is to harvest your crops as you drive your tractor over the land. Each crop reaps a certain monetary value and your task is to earn as much as possible in the allocated farming days. Water and fertilizer raise the monetary value of crops, and gas pick-ups increase the number of farming days available, while swamps, mud, and rocks all hinder you in some way.

Then there's *Traffic*, the puzzle that offers megalomaniacs the opportunity to decide the fate of city streets by controlling the traffic signals and combating gridlock. After studying the flow of traffic, you must set the timing of the lights, taking into account the speed and number of vehicles, so that traffic moves through the intersections and off the screen as quickly as possible.

The other three games are electronic versions of distractions you may remember from childhood, adapted with the usual Smart Games practical, yet stylish flair. There are 50 *Sliding Tile* puzzles and 75 levels of *Marble Jump*, a checkers game. Finally, there's *Warehouse*, a '90s variation of petri-dish puzzles—those little plastic cases containing ball-bearings that you must guide into target holes.

If the strategy puzzles were what you really enjoyed in CHALLENGE #1 and you want more of the same, then STRATAJAMS is for you. (And if you get through these and want even more, Smart Games is offering add-on packs for individual puzzle-types, for under $10.) Keep in mind, though, that anyone wanting the variety of teasers found in CHALLENGE #1 is likely to be disappointed—at least until SMART GAMES CHALLENGE # 2 hits the shelves later this fall.

Price: $29.95
Minimum System Requirements: 386 SX, 4MB RAM, 9MB hard-disk space, Windows 3.1 or higher, 640x480 256-color SVGA graphics, 2x CD ROM, Windows-compatible sound card, mouse.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Smart Games, Inc.
Distributor: Random Soft
New York, NY
(800) 788-8815
www.smartgames.com
Reader Service #: 338



NO PARKING As your attempts to maneuver the red car out of the parking lot fail miserably, your opinion of public transportation will improve dramatically.

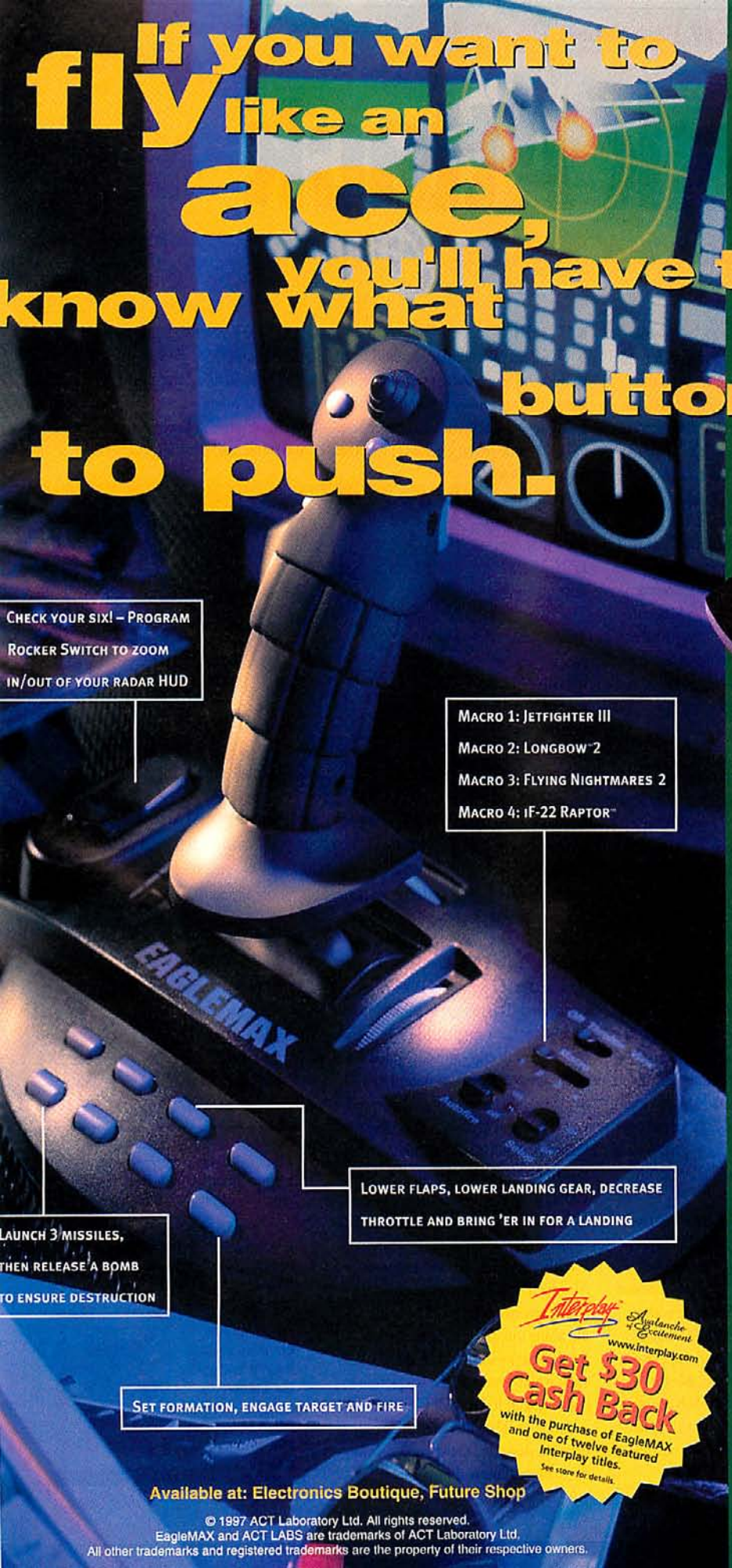
APPEAL: Puzzle lovers with a highly strategic mind and an endless supply of patience.

PROS: Challenging puzzles with a wide range of difficulty levels.

CONS: Merely enhanced versions of the strategy puzzles we saw in CHALLENGE #1, without the variety of puzzles from that game.

CG RATED ★★★★

If you want to fly like an ace, you'll have to know what buttons to push.



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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Flank Attack

The Most Hard-core of Sims Gets Even Harder

by Robin G. Kim

SU-27 FLANKER has a well-deserved reputation for being a flight sim for the truly hard-core. This is due not only to its difficult missions and detailed flight, avionics, and battlefield modeling, but also to what was left out: The lack of pretty graphics and campaign play were generally enough to frighten off all but the most serious sim fans. THE SU-27 FLANKER 1.5 MISSION DISK goes far toward rounding out the original's appeal, and brings more than 150 additional missions and some exciting new capabilities to the table.

EXTENDED PLAY

The most intriguing enhancement to stand-alone play is the ability to fly multiple sorties over the course of a single scenario. After landing you can save the world state, plot a new flight plan for yourself and other aircraft under your control, select ordnance, then hop back into the cockpit for another go. Everything picks up right where it left off, except that any weapons in flight will have disappeared. In support of this extended mission structure, a scenario can now span multiple days, turning a single mission file into a sort of mini-campaign—albeit a predominantly prescripted one. No scenarios this elaborate are included on the CD, but Mindscape promises to make some available on the FLANKER Web site (**www.su27-flanker.com**) by the time you read this.

True branching campaigns are now available, courtesy of Hideo Fukumori's Flanker Campaign Shell. This, Mark Hermonat's Random Mission Generator, and most of the missions in the add-on were actually produced by dedicated members of the FLANKER player community and have been available for some time to anyone with Web access. Even so, the mission disk provides the entire collection neatly organized and cataloged in one place.

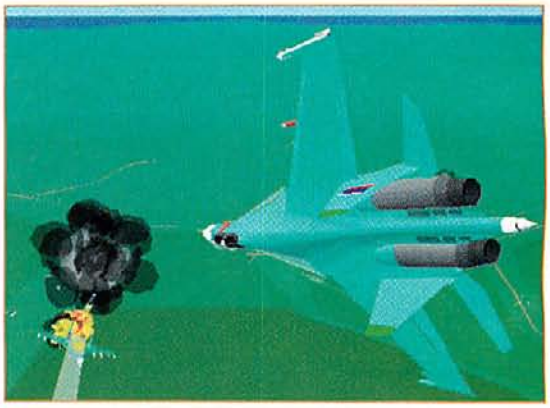
NET GAINS

Devotees of multiplayer action should find much to be excited about in the sim's completely revamped network play. Far surpassing the two-player head-to-head mode of the original game, the add-on allows for up to 16 players in cooperative or team play over a LAN. The introduction of direct TCP/IP support means it is also possible to connect over the Internet without using Kali or Kahn, though latency and bandwidth limitations restrict both the number of players and the mission complexity.

A master/slave architecture lets players on the slave PCs plan their own missions and quickly rejoin if killed or disconnected. The master PC guarantees acceptable performance levels by ruthlessly disconnecting any slaves that do not meet its standards, a system that works well in practice. FLANKER's excellent mission recorder can now tape multiplayer scenarios, letting you figure out exactly how your Net buddy got lucky enough to down you in that last dogfight. Alas, you can't simply ask how he did it, because there's still no chat feature.

Other new features include improved AI, which now demonstrates enough of a self-preservation instinct to evade incoming missiles and maneuver to break radar locks; an overhead AWACS view, which gives you the big picture in realtime; and 16-bit color Gouraud shaded graphics. The latter are visible only in external views and cause such a slowdown on systems without OpenGL hardware accelerators that they are almost worthless.

The mission disk breathes new life into FLANKER, offering a more robust package for those who felt the original game was too sterile, and providing enough new gameplay options to make it a must-have for existing owners. However, SU-27 FLANKER is still a hard-core sim that won't appeal to everyone—especially those who demand eye-popping visuals. Improvements on that front won't come along until FLANKER 2.0, due out around the end of this year.



SLIDE SHOW Gouraud shading enhances the object and terrain graphics, but at a huge cost in frame rate unless you have an OpenGL graphics card. Since it's available exclusively in the exterior views, only sightseers will benefit.

Price: $14.99
Minimum Requirements: 486/66 (P100 recommended), 8MB RAM, 40MB hard-disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, 2MB local bus SVGA-graphics video card, Windows 95 (original SU-27 FLANKER must be installed).
Multiplayer Support: IPX or TCP/IP network (16); Internet (2+)
Designer: Eagle Dynamics
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
(800) 234-3088
www.ssionline.com
Reader Service#: 339

APPEAL: SU-27 FLANKER owners who desire more missions to fly, broader gameplay options, and greatly enhanced network play.

PROS: Multiple-sortie scenarios; excellent multiplayer options; branching campaign support; improved AI; tons of new missions; low price.

CONS: New graphics so slow they're not worth the bother; no multiplayer chat; much of the content available for free on the Net.

CG RATED ★★★★

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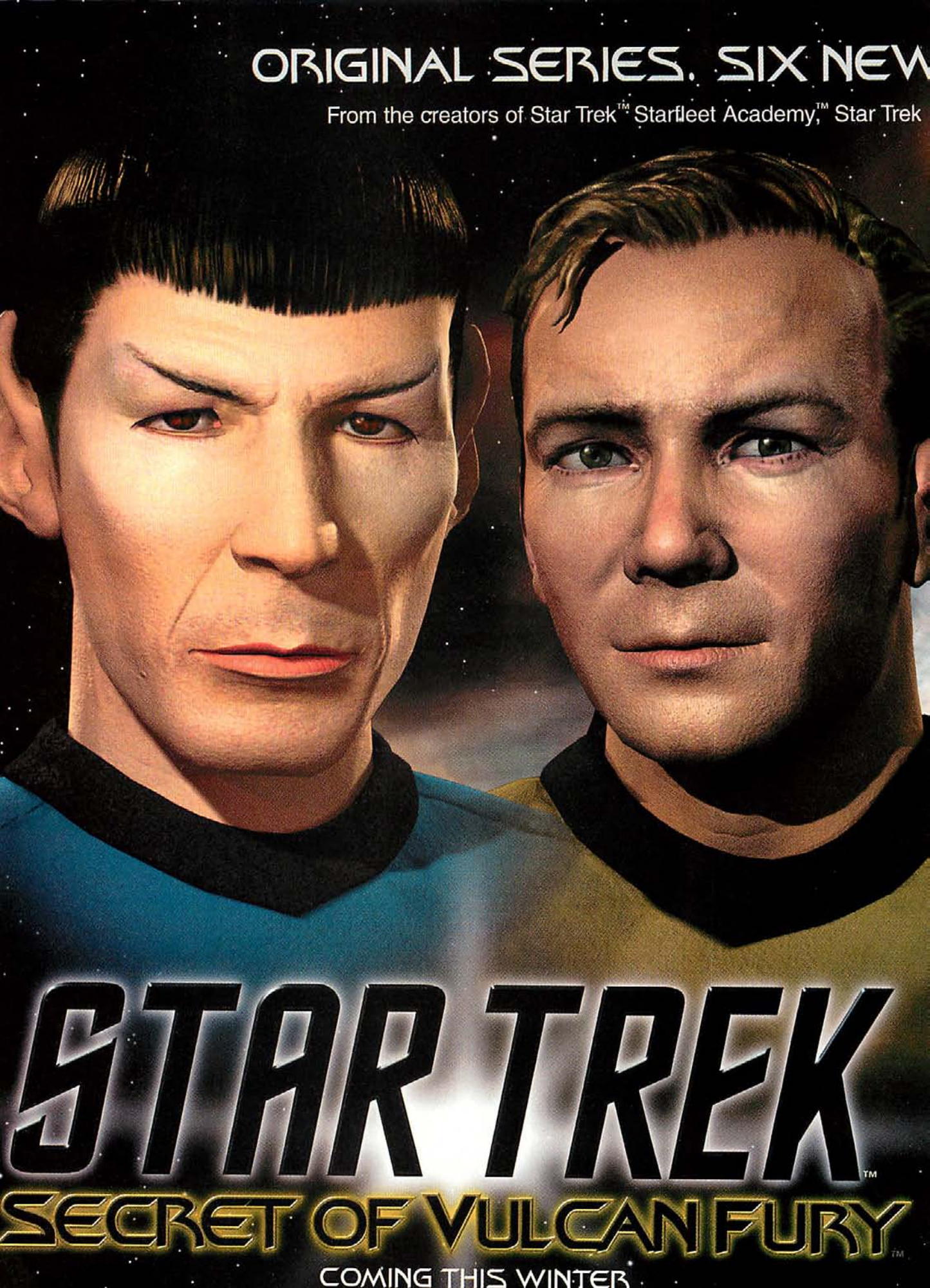
THERE'S LOTS MORE STORIES TO TELL."
- GENE RODDENBERRY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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Deep Sim

CG CHOICE

Jane's Has Ordered Up a Sub With the Works

by Kevin Turner

Submarines are a wonderful combination of technology, experience, and skilled manpower—the likes of which cannot be found anywhere else. Nuclear-powered, with crews of the highest trained seafarers the world has ever known, and carrying levels of destruction unimaginable to the layperson, submarines surreptitiously patrol the waters of the world. When it comes to military might per cubic foot, they have no equal. And now that JANE'S 688(I) HUNTER/KILLER has hit the shelves, these mighty boats are finally getting the recognition they deserve.

SCOPE IT OUT The periscope has low-light capability, a camera, and an excellent field of view. Its ESM indicator can inform you of nearby hostile emissions.

MIL SPEC

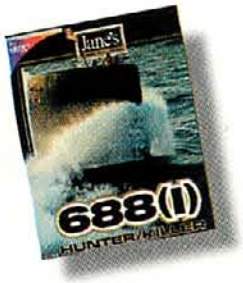
The first time I played this game, I knew it would do for submarine simulations what FALCON 3.0 did for flight sims. There are games that define genres, and 688(I) HUNTER/KILLER is one of those games. After a very long wait, the modern submarine simulation has come of age.

688(I) is a collaborative effort by the game developers of Jane's Combat Simulations and Sonalysts. Sonalysts is a defense contractor and designer of submarine training software for the U.S. Navy and has been conducting modeling and simulations for the Navy for more than 20 years.

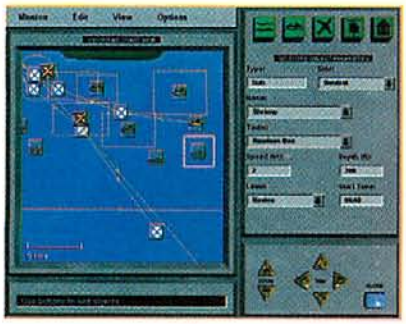
688(I) is modeled accurately after a Los Angeles-class submarine. The performance characteristics are as accurate as I'm willing to admit to in print, especially with the realism patch Jane's has released. The AN-BQQ5 sonar system is extremely well done. Available weapons include the Mark 48 torpedo, Tomahawk and Harpoon missiles, and mines and countermeasures. The weapons parameters are accurate all the way down to the wire guidance and vertical launchers.

As you assume command of your submarine, you'll have the opportunity to take on training missions, single missions, or a campaign. Training missions allow you to play a campaign or single mission without risk of death. The single missions are increasingly challenging and utilize different aspects of submarine operations such as Tomahawk attacks, antisurface and antisubmarine warfare, and rescue missions.

Campaigns start in the Caribbean, then proceed to the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the North Pacific. Each campaign comprises several missions, which must be completed in order.



Price: $59.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90, 16MB RAM, 12MB hard-disk space (plus 100MB for Win 95 swap file), DirectX compatible SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, Windows 95, sound card, mouse.
Multiplayer Support: Modem (1 CD per player for all multiplayer options), Internet (2–8 players), LAN (2–8 players).
Designer: Sonalysts
Publisher: Jane's Combat Simulations
San Mateo, CA
(415) 571-7171
Reader Service #: 340



MISSION FISHIN 688(I) includes a comprehensive mission builder that can cause objects to appear at random locations.

CHEAT VIEW External cameras let you zoom around your boat, look at enemy craft, or ride weapons to their destinations.

STATION IDENTIFICATION

688(I) places you at the center of the sub's control room. You can take an active role in sonar, fire control, or tracking, or you can sit back and prosecute the target as the big cheese—your level of involvement is discretionary. Each of the stations in 688(I) is a composite of several watchstations. For instance, keeping

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depth and course takes four people in reality but is handled by one in the game.

The three main elements of your control-room battle-stations gang are the sonar team, the tracking team, and the fire-control team. Each of these is given an identity and a level of experience. The level of experience increases as you undertake more operations. When first starting out, it's important to be a hands-on skipper, paying close attention and ensuring excellent performance. As the crew's experience increases, this becomes less important. Stations include the Ship's Control Panel, Sonar, Radar, Radio/ESM (Electronic Support Measures), Periscope, and Navigational Charts, among others.

The acid test for me was at the sonar station, which is outstanding. It allows the player to choose between broadband, narrowband, demodulated noise, active intercept, and active sonar modes. Narrowband is used for target identification using frequencies; DEMON, or demodulated noise, is used to establish target speed; active intercept is used to intercept active sonar signals; and active sonar is, well, active sonar. The broadband sonar display uses the waterfall that all submariners know and love. A sonar contact is displayed as a line of brightly colored pixels, which represents the target's bearing. Establishing a range on the target and target speed can be accomplished using the periscope, active sonar, radar, or target-motion analysis.

A MOTION PICTURE

The TMA screen was new to me. In my day, we did it on a huge piece of paper and at two or three different plotting tables. One table plotted bearing rate, while another used the motion of the submarine (making course changes to establish range information based on triangulation) to establish target range. This process is rather simple if the target never changes course. Unfortunately, targets have a nasty habit of changing course (and speed) quite regularly. The TMA screen combines all these stations into one, easy-to-digest blob of information. If you're looking to enhance your crew's performance, this is the best place to start, as this is the most difficult station to operate.

In addition to the accurately modeled stations, you'll find volumes of reference data. The Ship's Information Book contains a wealth of information on your new command, and you should refer to it regularly. The game also includes an abbreviated copy of *Jane's Fighting Ships*, which is a gold mine of data and will help you classify contacts more readily.

A Pentium 90 is considered the minimum for this game, but you'll be better off with a 133MHz machine or better. An external 3D view lets you observe any object in the game from a variety of perspectives—ever wonder what it looks like to ride a torpedo?

The mission builder promises extended play; missions are already popping up on the Internet. Multiplayer play is included, although all gamers captain 688(I)-class boats in this mode.

This game is technologically accurate, intriguing, and contains that elusive balance between reality and entertainment. I've brushed over some of the game's better features, but there are many others. There is one downer: You have to download a patch from www.janes.ea.com to slow turn rates and reload times to a realistic pace.

If you've ever wondered what it's like to be on a submarine but have no desire to forgo fresh food, females, and freedom, then this game is for you. If you're like me and have some experience in the real thing, after playing 688(I) you may find yourself taking readings on the microwave and water heater with a rig-for-red flashlight.

Zeroing in on the Target

Target-motion analysis is a process by which information is gathered on a target's bearing and interpolated into its range, speed, and course. To imagine this, think of yourself as a submarine. If you hear something, then you can establish a bearing for that target, but not its range. If you move to your left, the target will have a new bearing. This bearing is compared to the original and an intersection is provided. Considering the very long ranges and the very small angles being used, with a number of course changes from side to side, you can establish a range. Part of this process also establishes target speed. By knowing the target speed, range, and course, it is possible to launch a weapon at a point where the target will be in a few minutes. Don't forget that the maximum range of a Mk. 48 torpedo is in excess of 20 nautical miles. While a torpedo will actively search for a target once you send it, a small mistake can mean a miss. And a miss means that the target now knows that someone very unfriendly is out there.

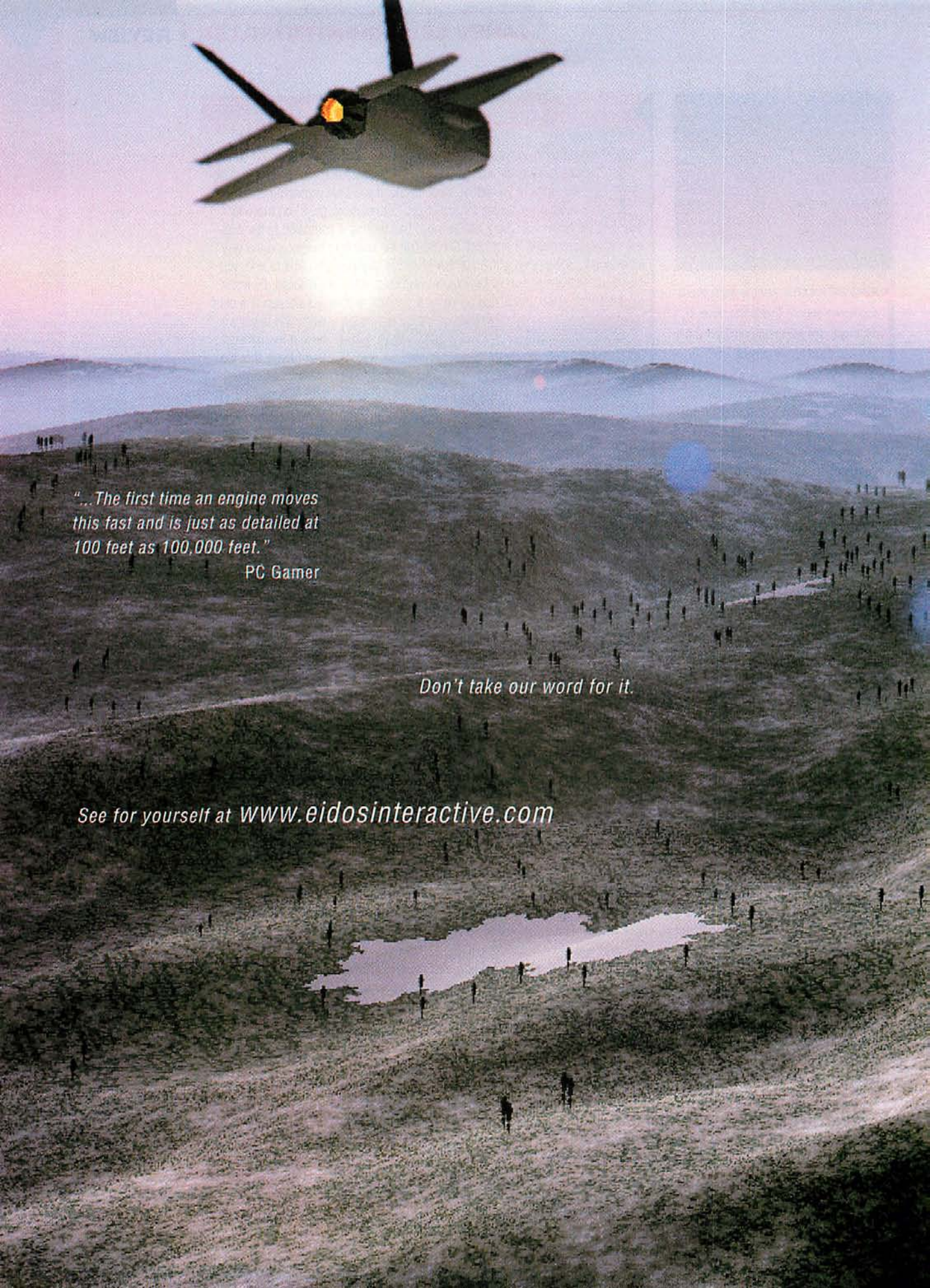
ATTENTION TARGET SHOPPERS The TMA center helps you with the most difficult job in submarining: getting a firing solution based on time-motion analysis.

APPEAL: Simmers looking for a realistic, systems-level simulation of a modern submarine.

PROS: Excellent modeling of sub systems and weaponry; superb reference and tutorial information for beginners; great mission builder.

CONS: You need a patch to slow turn rates and reload times.

CG RATED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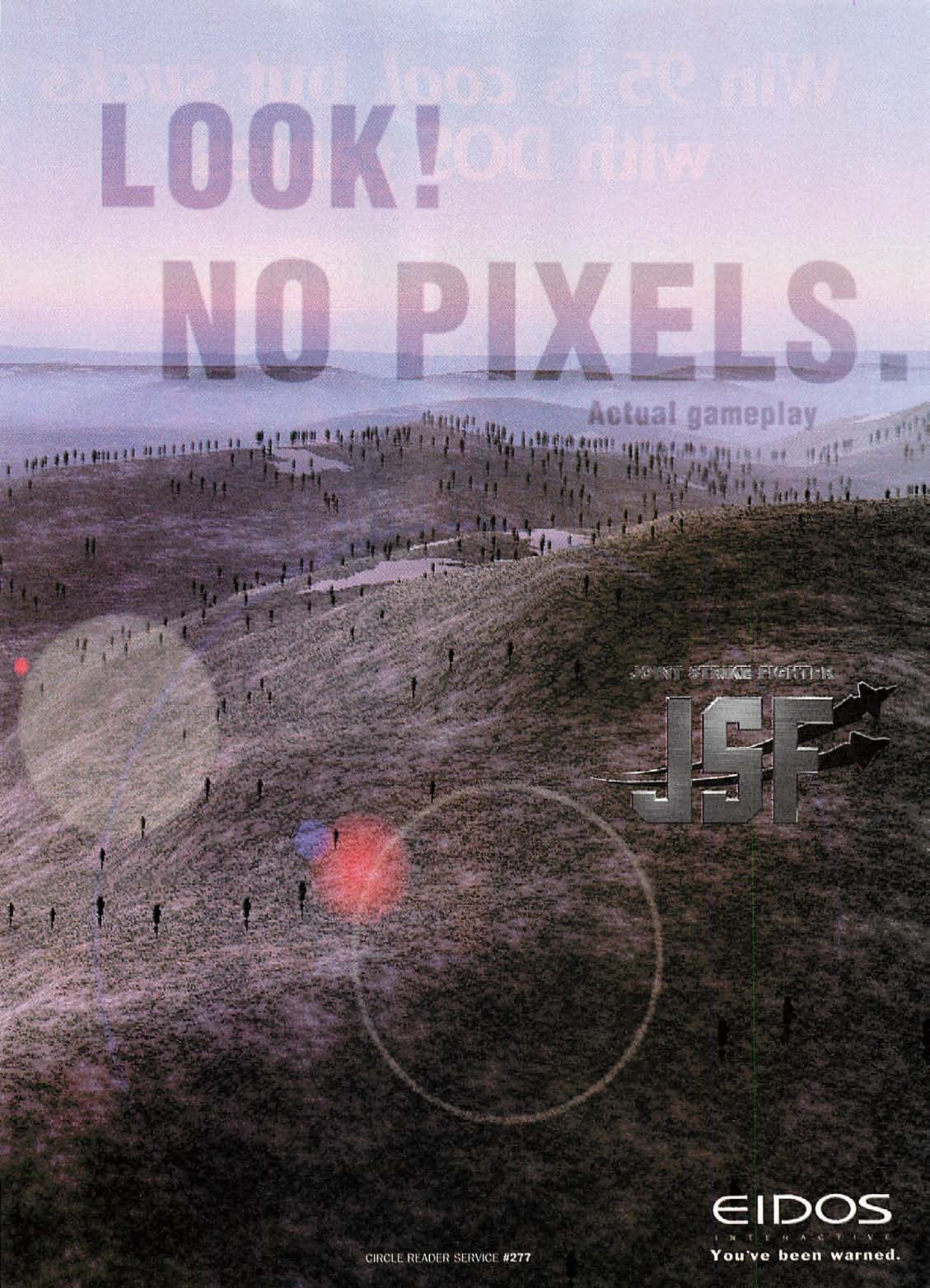

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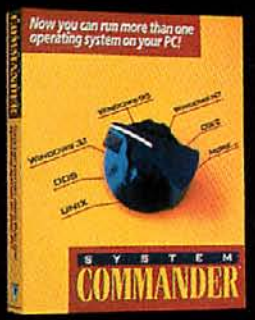

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #384

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Raptor Unwrapped

The Latest F-22 Sim Hides Innovations Beneath a Quirky Surface

by Tom "KC" Basham

The F-22 invasion continues with iF-22, the first simulation developed in-house by Interactive Magic. An admirable first effort, this simulation of the Air Force's "fighter for the 21st century" will please many with its convincing flight model and long-playing dynamic campaign engine, but issues related to the sim's hardware support may confound some gamers.

DYNAMIC PLAY

iF-22's single-player gameplay has four basic modes: instant action, training missions, individual missions, and full-blown campaigns. iF-22 revives the dynamic campaign, which most sims have replaced with pre-scripted missions, so you'll never get that "been there, done that" feeling. After selecting a theater (Bosnia and the Ukraine are included) for single-mission play, the generator populates the world and provides a fairly long list of missions. This list contains a variety of air-to-air and air-to-ground sorties.

The campaign mode bears some similarity to FALCON 3.0's campaign system, as well as to EF2000's Wargen engine. The system generates a world, assigns missions to friendly and enemy forces, and then presents you with a list of assignments for your squadron. You then choose which assignment you want to fly and proceed to the mission planning screen. The mission planning system covers all the basics, providing nearly full control over your flight path and loadouts. It does restrict flight path planning under some circumstances. For example, on escort missions, you can't change any of your pre-assigned waypoints.

You can start on the runway or in the air. Before each mission, the campaign briefing indicates where the allied forces intend to launch offensives and where intelligence believes the enemy will counterattack. After each mission, the debriefing system details where forces gained or lost territory. If you crashed and burned, you can have your pilot miraculously rescued; you can also choose to refly the mission.

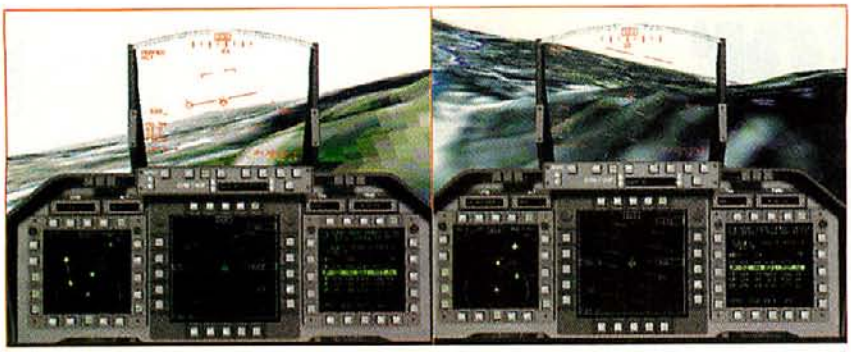
iF-22's multiplayer support includes free-for-

SEEDY 3D iF-22 supports Direct3D, but not very well; frame rate is slower than the top-notch 2D performance, and many potential 3D features, such as transparent smoke, are absent.

Price: $54.99
Minimum System Requirements: P90, 16MB RAM, 90MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics (Direct3D supported), 4x CD-ROM, Windows 95, mouse, sound card; joystick recommended.
Multiplayer Support: modem, Internet (4 players, 1 CD per player), LAN (8 players, 1 CD per player); two CDs included in package.
Designer: I-Magic Labs
Publisher: Interactive Magic
Research Triangle Park, NC
(919) 461-0722
Reader Service #: 341

Instruments of Destruction

iF-22 features a detailed cockpit with mouse-clickable switches. The avionics incorporate many of the whiz-bang, 21st-century features anticipated for the real F-22, such as the ability to incorporate downlinks from AWACS and other F-22s on the threat display. Nine multifunction display (MFD) modes are available. In addition, there are five MFD packages—default setups combinations of the four MFDs. You can select any mode on any MFD, or custom configure the five MFD packages before entering the cockpit through the setup menus. For example, you can configure the Dogfight package to contain the defense, attack, tactical, and status displays, and then simply press the Delete key to set all the MFDs instantly to this configuration.



LOW RIDER The terrain looks fantastic at high altitude, but less so down low; it's blocky in 2D mode, and blurry in 3D.

all dogfights, a team-based capture the flag mode, and cooperative single missions. Disappointingly, there is no way to fly multiplayer campaigns. The simulation supports direct serial, modem, LAN, and TCP/IP connections. Internet play is possible if all players have fast connections.

21ST CENTURY FLIGHT

iF-22 has the most plausible flight model of any F-22 game released to date. Speed bleeds under G-loading, available G-loading decreases as speed drops, and the aircraft can descend in a nose-high attitude at the proper speed and angle of attack (AOA).

The simulated iF-22 will supercruise (achieve supersonic speeds without using afterburners), but not when heavily laden with fuel and ordnance. Performance varies with altitude, although the roll rate remains very fast, even at high altitude. The fly-by-wire flight control system makes the F-22 resistant (but not immune) to stalls and departures. The pilot-selectable AOA limiter restricts the aircraft to a surprisingly low 12 degrees, but with the limiter disengaged the aircraft can exceed 90 degrees AOA. Pitch control is suspect: It takes rather large stick inputs to make the nose move, and then the nose continues to move after you release the stick, often resulting in pilot-induced oscillations.

After losing an engine, the aircraft tends to roll toward the dead engine. The engines include spooling lag, as evidenced by the RPM gauge taking a second or two to reflect large throttle movements. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any way to engage the afterburners using analog throttle; you must press a key.

For the most part, missile behavior is realistic, although air-to-air missile range doesn't vary with altitude. Guns are difficult to use, primarily because of the game's slow frame rate.

WAS AT WORK.

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TEETHING PAINS

The product is very stable, but does suffer from some problems. The redout/blackout model needs work. During a redout, only the outside view (not the cockpit avionics) is blocked; though this only occurs when playing on a non-3Dfx-based system. Blackouts develop in sudden spurts, rather than smoothly progressing through tunnel vision to GLOC (G-induced loss of consciousness). Dogfighting is further hampered by the simulated pilot's poor G-tolerance. Any exposure over 9G results in a blackout. Worse, the blackout doesn't immediately clear upon reduction of Gs. Fortunately, the setup options let you disable redouts and blackouts.

IF-22's padlock view is a perfect example of the *wrong* way to implement a padlock view. The padlock contains numerous "holes," or areas where it is impossible to tell which way you're looking. To resolve this, the HUD display contains a small icon in one of the upper corners that tells you in which direction to fly in order to bring your nose to the target. The icon works, but it's sometimes difficult to see.

Also, you can't padlock a target unless you've first managed a radar lock. You can't padlock an attacking bandit until you've already out-maneuvered him. Finally, instead of smoothing panning and tracking the target, the padlock jumps, as if it were automatically switching between fixed views.

The graphics engine, however, caused the most consternation. Using a Pentium Pro 200 and a 4MB 3D Blaster, I found IF-22 to be very slow. Disabling the 3D accelerator support actually improves frame rate and reduces the number of pauses; however, it caused the terrain graphics to pixelate badly at low altitude. Testing IF-22 on two Pentium 166 systems equipped with 3Dfx cards, however, resulted in extremely smooth frame rates in 2D mode on both systems, even at 800x600 resolution. Running on the 3D card resulted in slower performance on both systems, with one system exhibiting extremely jerky frame rates and pauses at points during flight, especially soon after takeoff.

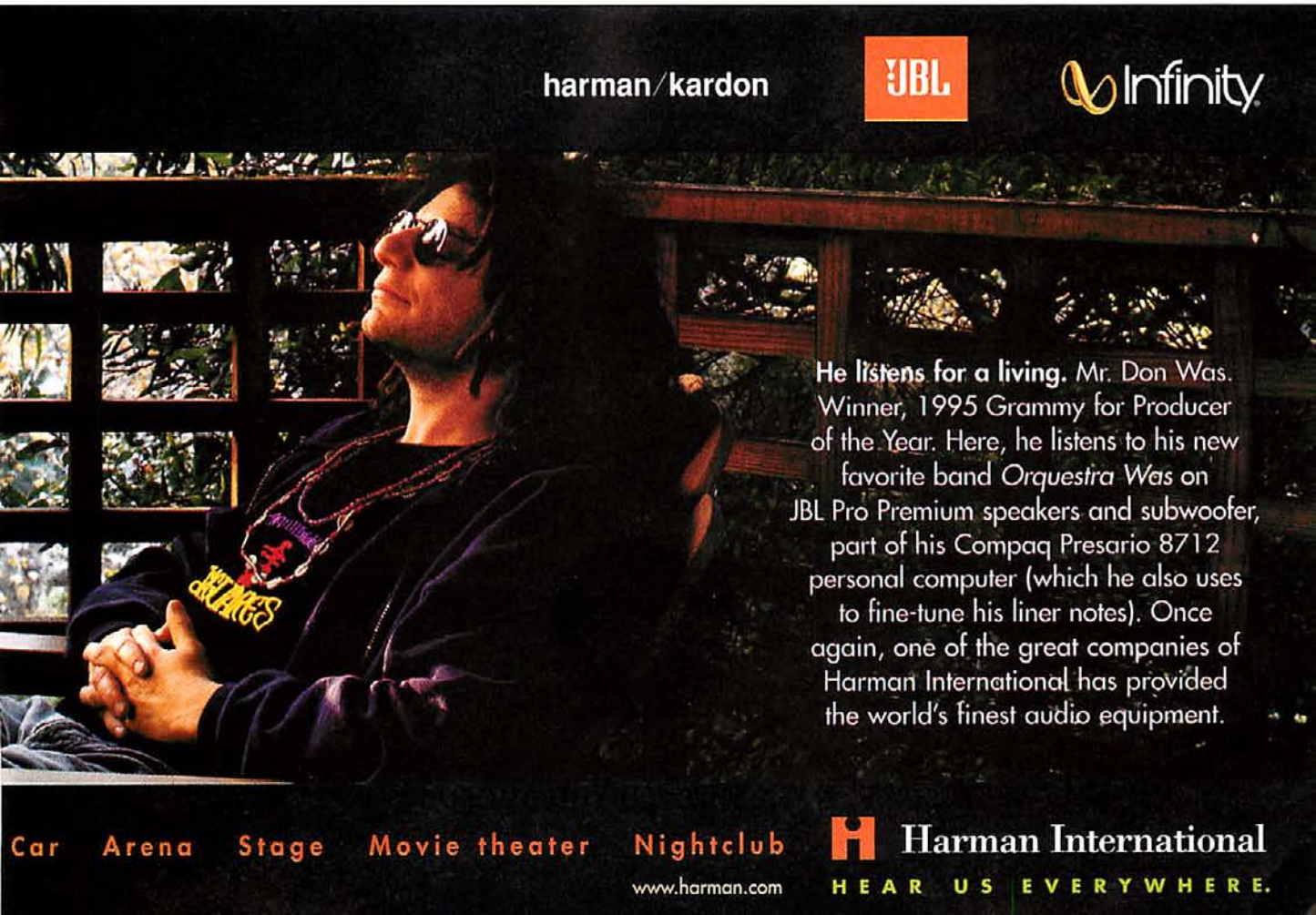
IF-22 has a lot of things going for it, such as the campaign engine, flight modeling, multiplayer support, and a thorough, well-written manual. Unfortunately, for some players, the frame rate problems render the game annoying at best and downright unplayable at worst. If I-Magic can address the frame rate problems and fix the 3D accelerator stutters, IF-22 could prove to be a standout start for Interactive Magic's simulations division.

APPEAL: Sim players looking for a more serious F-22 simulation than previous efforts; fans of dynamic campaign engines.

PROS: The most plausible F-22 flight model yet; superb dynamic campaign engine; accurate terrain modeling.

CONS: Frame rate problems and frequent pauses on some systems; poor Direct3D implementation; inconsistent graphics quality; jerky padlock view.

CG RATED



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RP
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CGW CHOICE

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

War Is Heaven

SSG and Red Orb Team Up for a Fantastic Return to the WARLORDS Universe

by Tim Carter

Tim the Critical enters a dark and mysterious dungeon. He encounters an army of zombie programmers, and is victorious! He finds...a gem. A big fat gem, in fact—one that will keep him happy for, oh, much more time than he has available.

WARLORDS III, brainchild of the crew at SSG and marketed through Broderbund/Red Orb, is a winner from the minute your fingernails hit the cellophane wrap. Based on one of the few strategy game designs that deserves the accolade "classic," WARLORDS III brings vastly improved depth, replayability, and nuance to an already successful and enjoyable game.

WAR IS HELL WARLORDS III is a turn-based fantasy wargame in which combat is resolved on a strategic scale, as in CIV, not in tactical mode, like MOM.

WARLORDS III follows the basic turn-based system of its predecessors for solitaire play, but offers simultaneous turns for those with a hankering for multiplayer mayhem with human opponents. It ran smoothly and rapidly on my Pentium 120 and was fully functional in Windows 95.

REIGN OF HEROES

True to the original, gameplay in WARLORDS III revolves around the control of fortified cities. Individual units have a dizzying variety of attributes and abilities, and up to eight units may be grouped to form an army. Heroes may explore ruins for treasure or magical items, perform quests for similar rewards, and bestow a number of important combat bonuses to armies that march under their banner.

The command structure, which was pretty clean in WARLORDS I and II, remains quite impressive. Moving around the game will be simple even for someone unfamiliar with the interface.

Little, if anything, seemed to have been left out of previous versions, but quite a bit has been added here. For instance, some of your heroes, depending on their class, may now use magic to augment their abilities, which further depend on the race you are playing.

Unlike past versions of WARLORDS, individual cities no longer produce distinct units. Each race now has a pool of set unit types to draw on, consistent with that race's basic characteristics and attitudes. Any given race may have eight regular troop types, three mercenaries, four hero classes, four magical allies, and one boat unit.

The first time I played this system, I felt a tiny twinge of disappointment. The more limited armies tend to be a bit dull after a while, and battles over castles aren't as massive in proportion. But after only a few games, I could clearly see the wisdom of this design decision. By limiting gamers to a consistent and fixed set of troops, the designers have greatly extended WARLORDS III's replay value. A game on the same map but with a different race is, functionally, an entirely different game. Moreover, within each game, each of the different races you fight present a somewhat different threat, based on the strengths and weaknesses of their core units.

WARLORDS CUBED

For those who love to mix and match, the scenario setup screen lets you create your own race using any of the preexisting units. You are limited only by the total number of different unit types per race.

The setup screen offers a huge number of other options that build replay value as well—including a prohibition on razing cities (an important issue when playing against human opponents), an option that allows neutral cities to grow in power if attacked, and random placement of starting cities.

In addition to the twelve preset scenarios, the game comes with a random scenario generator and—surprise—an intricate campaign game.

As just one example of the playing value in WARLORDS III, the classic Illuria map from the original game is included as one of the preset scenarios. This map constituted the entire game in WARLORDS

Price: $49.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 75, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 40MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM, 256-color SVGA graphics, Sound Blaster 16 or 100-percent-compatible 16-bit sound card, 28Kbps or faster Internet connection.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, direct connect (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-6 players).
Designer: SSG
Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment
Novato, CA
(800) 548-1798
www.redorb.com
Reader Service #: 342

MIGHTY TIM Heroes play an important role in WARLORDS III, since they can hunt for treasure, embark on quests, cast spells, and bestow bonuses on your troops.

I, without many of the options and variations available here. Yet, in WARLORDS III it constitutes a tiny fraction of the complete game. Having spent a dozen or so hours on the Illuria map already, I can say with some certainty that gamers will not easily run out of things to do with WARLORDS III.

CALL TO ARMS

What you do in WARLORDS III, of course, is fight. A lot. The core WARLORDS combat system hasn't changed in structure, but a wide range of modifying factors has been added, giving gamers more options when building their armies or taking out the enemy. For instance, individual leaders or units may contribute positive (to your side) or negative (to your opponent's side) modifiers, while many units also have special attributes or abilities such as assassination attacks, archery attacks, poisoning, and disease.

A major asset of past WARLORDS games was the strength of the AI. WARLORDS III is no slouch in this department, although I found the "Psycho" level somewhat easier than I would have expected for the most difficult level. While the computer still fails to manage its heroes properly (not picking up treasure lying on the ground when an enemy hero is killed, and ignoring some ruins), it has become much more adept at knocking off *your* heroes, particularly if you leave them exposed.

I was especially impressed when the AI, during the fifth or sixth scenario of the campaign, made a systematic effort to kill off the heroes I had been carefully nurturing into powerful higher level paladins and mages. The computer will also raid your home territory frequently and is not averse to scorched-earth tactics if it starts to lose.

According to the manual (generally well done and useful for learning the game and for reference), the diplomatic system has been tweaked considerably from earlier versions. I must admit that I didn't find much functional difference in the new routines: The computer players tended to fight amongst themselves until I had become the biggest single power on the map, at which point they ganged up on me.

FRIENDS AND FOES

Along with the campaign game, the greatest addition to WARLORDS III is the multiplayer option. Playing via the Internet or a LAN, up to six players can compete in a real-time/simultaneous turns mix. Chasing down enemy heroes and deciding the order in which to move—and saving reserves to react at the last second—are now key decisions when playing against live opponents.

This game has little to dislike. If the premise doesn't interest you, you may do better shopping elsewhere, but for fan of fantasy and strategy, or just strategy for that matter, WARLORDS III is a winner from the tiniest elven scout to its Selentine elephant shock cavalry.

APPEAL: Anyone who likes strategy games.

PROS: Fun; ultra-clean; tons of replay value; great campaign; multiplayer support.

CONS: We're still looking.

CG RATED

Campaigning for WARLORDS

New to the WARLORDS system, the campaign game strings together a series of scenarios around a plot that has you lead the Selentines against the evil forces of the undead Lord Bane. Bane has at least one primary ally, and even the powers that are supposedly in your union of good are as likely to send their armies against you as against the principal foe.

The campaign allows you to carry your top heroes and a limited number of magical items from one scenario to the next, which becomes useful as your heroes grow in power. Be careful, though, as the computer becomes quite adept at picking off unguarded high-level heroes left floating too near the front lines.

After each scenario you get the option of upgrading some of your core military units. I found this almost as attractive as carrying heroes forward. Being able to give your heavy infantry more movement and a better attack factor constitutes a major bonus over the course of multiple scenarios.

I also found the scenarios in the campaign—which can't be played separately—to be among the more challenging preset games. In many, your enemies get natural advantages from terrain, the placement of neutral cities, or the starting disposition of forces. This makes a nice change of pace from scenarios in which each side starts out equal.

FOR THE SELENTINES A welcome addition is the campaign in WARLORDS III, in which you battle the undead forces of Lord Bane.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #240

CG CHOICE

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Damned If You Do

DUNGEON KEEPER: It Brings Bad Things to Life

by Chris Lombardi

The laws of Karma could have predicted this. Since the beginning of gaming, we've played almost exclusively on the side of Good. We've saved untold thousands of lands from the ravages of Evil and sent legions of hellspawn scurrying back to the pit from which they sprang. It was only a matter of time before Black came back with a score to settle.

But who would have guessed that 20 years of goody-two-shoes gaming could be countered by a single game? DUNGEON KEEPER, a real-time strategy game from Peter Molyneax and his minions at Bullfrog Software, is evil enough to do exactly that. It's evil not only in its high-level premise—the gamer dons the acrid cape of the Dungeon Keeper, a vile lord of an underground domain who is intent on destroying all that is cute and happy in the world—but also in the details of day-to-day deviltry and the dull, workaday elements of rat-bastardry. Torture, ritual sacrifice, environmental disaster, cruelty to animals, wanton slaughter, petty meanness, avarice, and hate are all proudly on parade. Consider our karmic debt paid in full...with interest.

As Dungeon Keeper, your job is to hew a gloriously hideous dungeon from subterranean rock, attract evil creatures to your palace of pain, and use those creatures to either fight off hordes of looting adventurers or destroy a rival dungeon keeper. En route to victory, you must play the control freak of all control freaks, ensuring that your creatures are fed, trained, and paid; dungeon traps are being built and set; spells are being researched; and your own creatures aren't brawling in the barracks. It's like being nanny to a gang of half-ton toddlers with fangs and claws.

IT'S CALLED A PICK-AX, DIG?

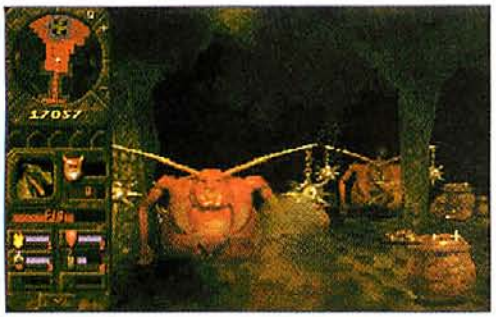
The foundation of the game is dungeon design, which plays out like SIMCITY in Hell. From an overhead isometric perspective that can be freely rotated, zoomed, and panned, you map out a floor plan in the virgin rock. Hordes of Imps, the workhorses of your minions, dig out the rock. They also mine gold, fortify walls, and mop up corpses after battles. Should you wish your Imps to work harder, or should you just feel like a nasty SOB, you can reach down with your bile-colored claw/cursor and give an Imp a good smacking—just one of a dozen twisted, brilliant, and therapeutic design elements.

When the Imps have finished their digging work, it's time to carefully place dungeon rooms for maximum efficiency. There are 14 different room types, which range from the straightforward, functional Lairs, Hatcheries, and Training Rooms to exotic locales such as the Torture Chamber (wherein you wrench info from captured enemies and convert them to your cause) and the Temple (wherein you can sacrifice creatures in hopes of pleasing the gods). Exactly how these rooms work is, like much else in the game, a mystery. The game's manual is loath to give out the most basic of info, presumably leaving the details to experimental players and Bullfrog's self-published strategy guide.

Unlike the manual, the game itself brims with nuance and

MONSTER MASH Inside that cloud of poison farts and ozone rages a huge battle. The mini-combat status screen at the bottom allows the Keeper to monitor his troops.

Price: $49
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90 (P133 recommended), 16MB RAM, 65MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM drive, DOS 6.22 or later, LocalBus or PCI SVGA-graphics video card, Sound Blaster-compatible sound card, mouse.
Multiplayer Support: Modem (2 players), LAN (2–4 players).
Designer: Peter Molyneax & Bullfrog Productions
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(800) 245-4525
www.bullfrog.ea.com
Reader Service #: 343



PRIZED POSSESSIONS The Keeper greedily surveys his Treasure Room through the eyes of Fig, an eighth-level dragon.

CHOW TIME Creatures chow on chickens in the Hatchery before heading off to bed. The window in the upper-left corner shows the entire dungeon layout.

divinely superfluous detail. For instance, every creature that you attract to your dungeon has its own name and 10 individual statistics, from its kill total to its blood type. None of this info matters in the slightest, but it's cool. And it's clear that *cool* was the byword of the Bullfrog team.

REALTIME? TRY NO-TIME

The general pace of the gameplay is totally manic. DUNGEON KEEPER is similar to other real-time games, but with double or triple the workload. It's like a RED ALERT where you not only have to build a Tower of Nod, but also have to ensure that the little men in the tower are working efficiently. It's like a WARCRAFT where you can direct units to a location, but if one unit gets pissy because it's hungry, it starts attacking your troops. It's like a RED ALERT where your Harvesters...well, your Imps are *exactly* like Harvesters: stupid, and requiring constant redirection.

In many of the 20 single-player scenarios, your opponents are roving bands of adventurers who tunnel toward your dungeon. The key here is to choose when and where you will fight, which is a matter of fortifying your dungeon walls so that the adventurers can't tunnel through. At the same time that you're fortifying, you need to expand your dungeon, which opens up weak points to the adventurers' picks. This dynamic creates a deliciously tense siege mentality.

Attacking a rival Keeper is a different, and somewhat odd, story. Here, it's a war of efficiency and attrition, a matter of sheer numerical supremacy. You must attract and train your creatures faster than your opponent can. When it finally comes down to combat, there's little you can do to help your cause tactically, with the exception of casting spells, due to one strange element of the design: You can pick up your creatures and plop them down anywhere on the map that your Imps have "claimed." So, anytime you have contact with the enemy you can instantly drop the entire strength of your army on that spot, at which point a hugely chaotic melee ensues, which often involves 20 or more creatures. The best a Keeper can do is watch an iconic combat dialog, casting a variety of defensive and offensive spells, and pull the wounded out of battle.

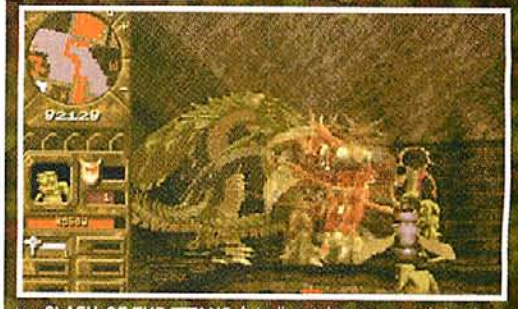
Because of this "creature plopping" there's no concept of a surprise attack, flanking, or any other traditional tactical concern in DUNGEON KEEPER. Battles are won in the training and recruiting of creatures during the preparation period. In most cases, defeating a rival Keeper (by destroying his "dungeon heart") is a matter of breaching his walls, plopping creatures in, and winning a massive battle, which gives your Imps time to claim more territory. And then you repeat the process. This, particularly in multiplayer games, can take a long, long time.

As does the game as a whole. Twenty scenarios doesn't sound like much, but it's plenty. The scenarios are nicely paced, starting out with a few excellent

The Eye of the Beholder

DUNGEON KEEPER offers you something you always wished you had in SIMCITY: the power to come down from your isometric perch and strut around in the world you've created. With the help of the Possess spell, you can drop into the mind of a creature and see your dungeon in all its 3D glory. The 3D engine is no QUAKE (or even DOOM) but the view down there is fascinating because it's yours and it's alive.

In theory, the 3D view is even functional. While possessing a creature, you have access to the creature's unique perspective and most of its abilities and spells. You can use your creatures to explore, fight, and work, but with the exception of a few special situations, it's almost always more practical to stay in the iso-view and orchestrate the show. But, hey, sometimes even a Dungeon Keeper has to stop and smell the rotting viscera.



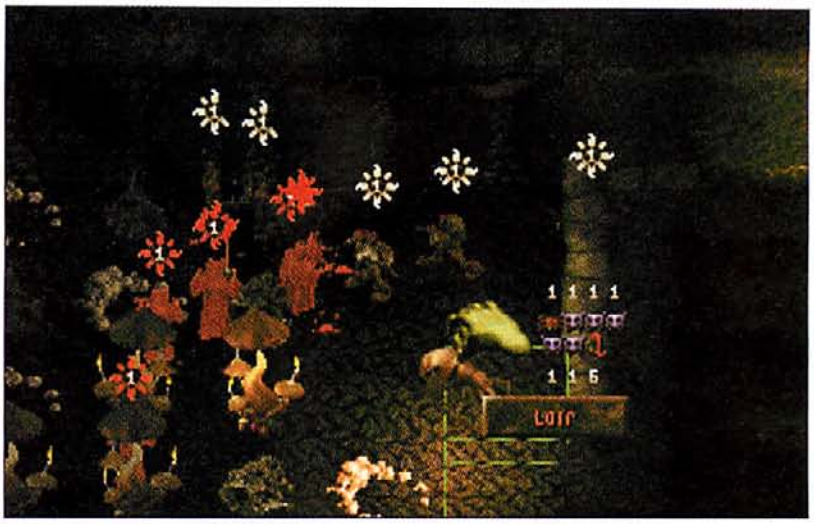
CLASH OF THE TITANS A troll watches as a tenth-level dragon and Horned Reaper get it on. A fly in the foreground thinks twice about jumping in.

tutorials that gradually introduce you to the remarkably easy interface and all the fun toys in the Keeper's toy box. The sense of discovery in the first half-dozen scenarios is truly thrilling.

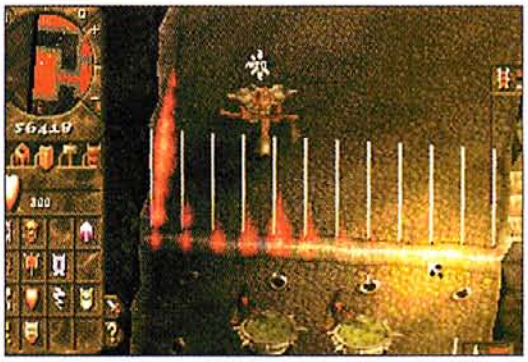
TOUGH AS HELL

Once you get beyond the tutorials, things get a lot tougher, both because the scenarios are larger in scope and because many of them are designed as puzzles. In some scenarios, for instance, the rival Keeper's dungeon is difficult to reach and requires some tricks to destroy. In many others, powerful creatures are hidden in caves that a Keeper might stumble upon. If he does so too soon, he's finished, and the scenario must be started over with a lesson learned. Puzzle scenarios seem to be a common design technique, particularly in real-time strategy games, both as a way of adding variety to what is fundamentally a grinding war of attrition, and to cover up weaknesses in the computer's intelligence.

These days, multiplayer gaming is the common answer to the AI problem, and it's here that we encounter DUNGEON KEEPER's greatest potential success and failing. Multi-human play with a game as deep and complex as DUNGEON KEEPER promises to be extraordinarily rich and subtle. Indeed, after just a few LAN games with some gaming buds, we saw some very clever tactics emerge, which required the development of countertactics and counter-countertactics—a sure sign of a great multiplayer game.



RUDE AWAKENING If adventurers tunnel right into a Lair to take your napping creatures by surprise, you need not worry; you can always plop all your free bad-boys into the melee.



BEHIND BARS The Keeper's minions are more complex than the hordes of WARCRAFT, and some, such as the Horned Reaper, often require "special care."

Unfortunately, the game only supports LAN and modem play, which was the standard—considered progressive, even—three years ago, when Bullfrog began development. But the world has since gone the way of TCP/IP, which isn't supported. Bullfrog has made some noise about a TCP/IP upgrade, but as of press time, there's no sign of it. What's more, the multiplayer play can be very slow, unstable, and has a nasty 5–10 minute resync period. Bullfrog thus faces a double challenge in getting this game on the Net.

But even if they don't, DUNGEON KEEPER will still stand out as a damned fine creation. Its utter uniqueness and sense of style alone are worth the price, especially in these days of recycled inspiration. It's a true gamer's game; tremendously deep, demanding, and open to exploration. Let's just hope that Bullfrog can get this game on the Net, for if they can't, half of this game's potential will lie locked away forever in a dungeon few can reach. And that would be the worst of all the evils this game brings to life.

AIOU1

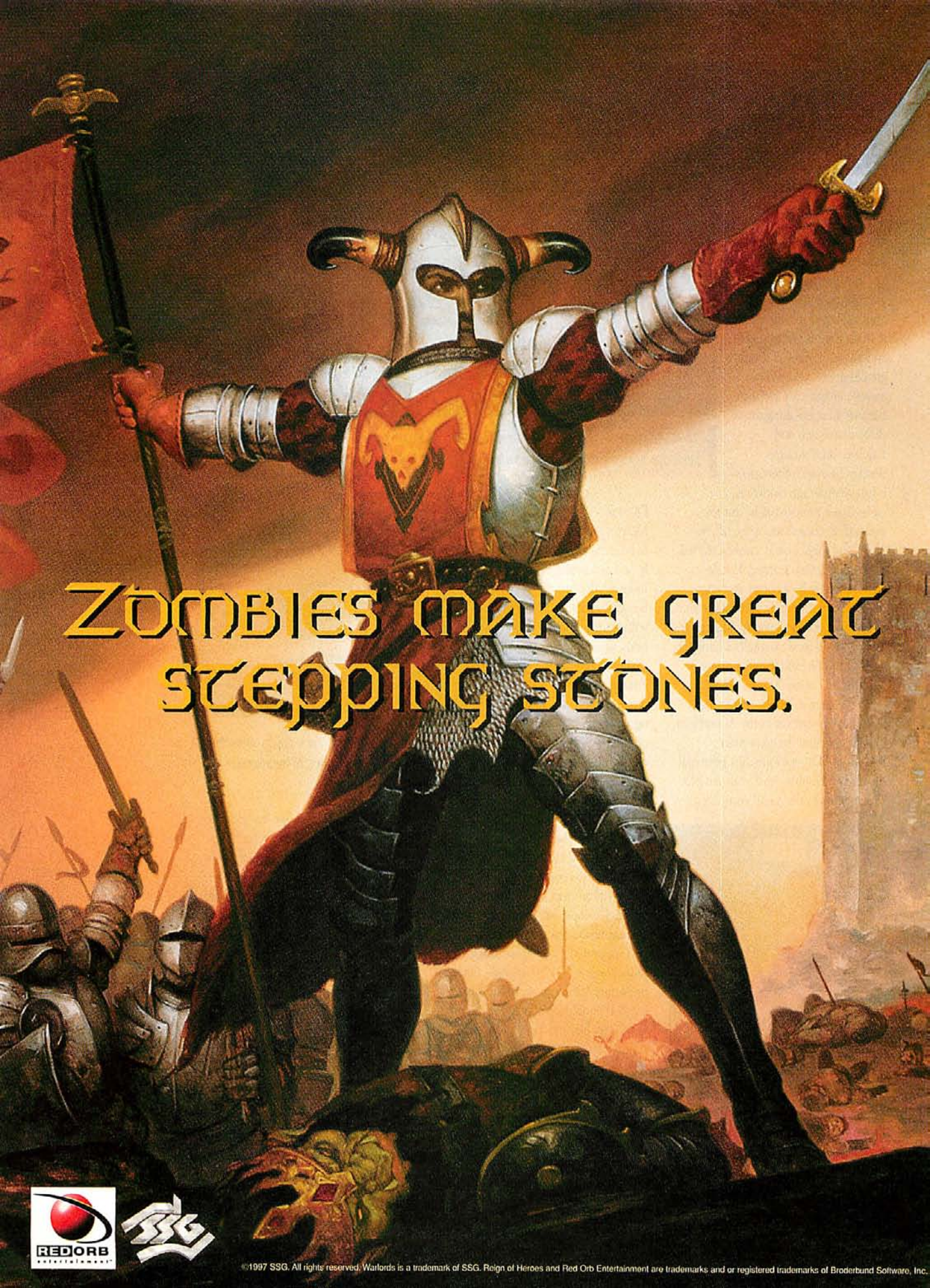
Creating a good AI is notoriously hard in complex, real-time strategy games, and the designers of DUNGEON KEEPER didn't escape that pitfall. As in Bullfrog's MAGIC CARPET, the AI here is supposed to be extremely advanced, learning the player's tendencies and adapting its strategy to him, which is an extremely tough thing to verify. It clearly does some things well—rote, efficiency-oriented things at which computers excel. But it's weak where AIs are always weak—on the attack and in planning broader strategic goals. This is not to say that DUNGEON KEEPER's AI is especially bad, it's just typically bad.

APPEAL: Sociopaths and/or servants of the Dark Lord. Also, strategy fans, particularly fans of realtime, looking for a totally fresh take on the concept.

PROS: The most unique game in years; stylish, multifaceted, and as deep as the pits of Hell.

CONS: Puzzle-oriented scenario design a turn-off for pure strategists; multiplayer play is currently limited and buggy.

CG RATED



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WWW.WARLORDS3.COM

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Little Green Men

The Third X-COM Won't Disappoint the Alien-starved Strategist

by Tim Carter

The little green men are back. Or, at least, they've left the environs of TV and film for the more cerebral terrain of PC strategy games. Specifically, they've returned through X-COM APOCALYPSE, the third in the popular X-COM series. (In case you're wondering, there actually are some little green men in X-COM APOCALYPSE—really, really little, in fact).

X-COM CITY Instead of battling aliens for a world, you're fighting for a domed city, but you'll still need to research tech and fight infiltrating aliens.

The most striking change in APOCALYPSE is its sharp left-turn away from the popular conception of aliens and the alien menace. You won't find any cattle mutilations here—with good reason, as according to the game's plot, Earth doesn't have any cattle left to mutilate.

ALIEN INVASION

X-COM APOCALYPSE posits a futuristic society in which environmental degradation has reduced the population on Earth to a single domed city run by a variety of corporations and criminal organizations. You, as X-COM commander, are responsible for protecting the city and these organizations from an unknown alien threat originating from a completely different dimension, rather than just from another planet.

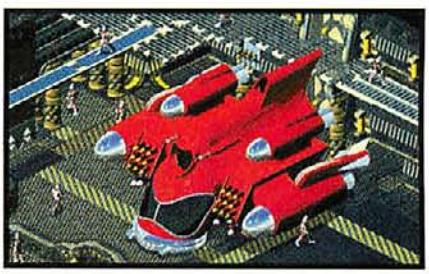
This may be disconcerting for some X-COM fans, as one of the most attractive features of previous games was the battle against some of popular culture's favorite bogeymen. Undoubtedly, defending an abstract city with abstract corporate organizations from unrecognizable aliens will be a letdown for die-hard fans.

Personally, I find that the strengths and strategic depth of the game make up for what it lacks in plot. The story isn't as good, but the gameplay remains slick, fast, and fun.

APOCALYPSE contains a strategic game of fiscal management, research, construction, the general uncovering of yet another nefarious plot, and a tactical small-unit combat engine. In this version, three dozen infantrymen operate across either urban areas or crashed UFOs in search of raiding aliens. (For most missions, a dozen is more manageable and adequate.)

While the tactical maps aren't significantly wider than in past games, they have much more depth, reaching up to nine stories high. Most battles take place indoors, and it seems as if the designers opted to move away from randomized combat locations toward a diverse, but still somewhat limited, set of buildings and UFOs in which to fight. With all the new space, it is almost impossible to cover the entire terrain in a "sweep" format, and gamers will likely find themselves adopting "search and destroy" tactics instead.

Both strategic and tactical interfaces have been given a complete overhaul, although the new product retains the essential skeleton of the original. With a few exceptions (such as keeping track of which soldiers are based where) the new interface works quite well. Also, it seems relatively stable: In more than 60 hours of play the game crashed on me only four times, although it did slow down considerably during raids on the bigger UFOs, and during some very complicated real-time combat sequences.



SEEING RED APOCALYPSE has a different style, with these '50s-style ships, but unfortunately it breaks away from the excellent storyline of X-COM for a strange, new direction.

BATTLE STATIONS

As rumor and sneak previews have already reported, combat in X-COM can be either turn-based or real-time. Deciding which system to play is largely a question of personal preference: I found both to work well, although you do tend to trade control (in turn-based mode) for excitement and speed (in realtime).

The aliens are organic in nature. Many crawl or slither, and they need to get close to your squads to do any real damage. Even though your troops are generally in more danger, playing in real-time gives them a much better chance of taking

Price: $49
Minimum System Requirements: 486DX/100, DOS 5.0, 8MB RAM (16MB in Windows 95), 20MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, Microsoft-compatible mouse; supports most major sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Mythos Game Ltd.
Publisher: MicroProse
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164
www.microprose.com
Reader Service #: 344

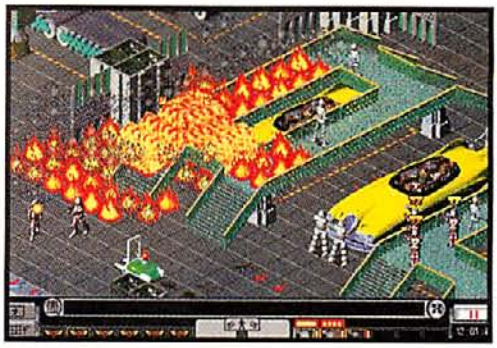
out charging brain suckers, hyperworms, and the like, because your squads can fire continuously as the critters approach. In turn-based mode, you get one turn's worth of fire plus one or two reaction shots, and that's it. If you miss, you're slug bait.

Also, while the AI periodically has its troops doing the "sectoid shuffles," the computer proves a worthy opponent. Well-planned movement and attacks are rewarded with low casualties, while careless advances are sure to be ambushed. Aliens are frequently aggressive, and more than once an alien rushed out from behind cover, switched to auto, and unloaded on my point man. As the aliens infiltrate potential allies, you must keep collateral damage to a minimum. Dead civilians make enemies very quickly, and alien anthropods use civilians for cover. Stow those grenades, boys.

Another reason to go realtime is to speed up gameplay in general. As with its predecessors, X-COM APOCALYPSE requires players to establish and develop bases within the city, research new technology, and build new items based on research. You must also handle the city's political issues and keep the aliens from infiltrating key organizations, such as the guys who make your equipment. Money is scarce, and gamers will find themselves with many financial dilemmas as the game progresses.

As the aliens are very aggressive—even at the medium level of difficulty—you may have to respond to six or seven incursions while you wait for a key technology or funding to appear.

In turn-based mode, each combat could take 1–2 hours, while in realtime they finish in around 20–30 minutes. As the game's plot developed and I was eager to build new ships, gain new equipment, and carry the fight to the enemy, I gravitated toward real-time combat simply because it offered a quicker resolution.



LIGHT BRIGADE Combat, whether it is turn-based or real-time, actually plays very well. All the battles, though, are in bright light, not eerie darkness as in X-COM.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

Eventually, you must take the battle to the aliens, sending your squads into the alien dimension to stop the extradimensional menace. Unlike the original X-COM, in which the mission to Cydonia was a one-shot attack, the alien dimension here consists of multiple buildings (for want of a better term) and a plethora of hostile forces. One flight through alien airspace should cure all X-COM fans of the "Geez, that ending was easy" blues.

X-COM APOCALYPSE is a well-constructed, enjoyable game. There would be little in the way of criticism regarding the game were it not for the superior flair and overall style of the original game. X-COM was a joy to play because of the basic story, which was so compelling. Unfortunately, the same can't be said of X-COM APOCALYPSE's story. But that is APOCALYPSE's only problem, and it's more of a missed opportunity than a genuine flaw. It isn't as good as the original, but it's entertaining and worthy of your time and attention.

APPEAL: X-COM and realtime fans looking to kick some alien butt.

PROS: A great person-to-person combat engine and many of the gimmicks X-COM aficionados are looking for.

CONS: Plot a major swing away from the original; missing much of the flavor and style of the classic.

CG RATED

Realtime vs Turn-Based

First, a confession. As an X-COM aficionado and a realtime skeptic, I was ready and willing to dislike the real-time element of APOCALYPSE. Having played it, I have to confess that it is quite fun and speeds up the game, albeit at the expense of your troops, whose lives are in more danger during real-time play (at least with me at the controls).

Firefights are more gripping in realtime, and flanking maneuvers and reinforcement of the point of contact become quite important. Ammunition supply becomes a greater factor when the clock is running, as your troops tend to blaze away quite freely with little regard for their stocks.

On the other hand, managing large numbers of troops in realtime can be difficult. Your squads tend to bunch up when ordered en masse, and don't always watch their backs very well. This is important, because the aliens are quite adept at flanking maneuvers themselves, and seem quite willing to drop down a floor, race the length of the battlefield and appear via an elevator at your rear—or even in the middle of your forces, for that matter.

Each mode also requires somewhat different tactics and equipment. I sometimes switch modes to suit the ordnance available to my troops. For instance, my favorite weapon under most circumstances is the Megapol Gas Grenade. This handy device sprays a cloud of knockout gas over a wide area, rendering virtually all humans and most aliens within the cloud unconscious for the duration of the battle.

Early in the game, when your troops are inaccurate and slow, gas grenades are critical to your survival—particularly in turn-based battles where each turn offers only a very limited number of shots to each soldier (but more than enough time to throw two or three grenades). The problem is that only so many grenades come on the market each week. In a busy week, I was usually running out by Wednesday or Thursday. By switching to realtime, where projectile weapons are more effective, I could zap intruding aliens without rest.

For more information on game ratings contact the ESRB at 1-800-771-3772. Constructor: TM & ©1997 Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

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"Constructor is fun and challenging on so many levels."

- GameSpot (June '97)

"Constructor takes the Sim game idea to the Nth degree."

- EGM (April '97)

"Constructor grabs you with its humor and keeps you glued to your seat with its well balanced and compelling resource management aspect"

- Computer & Net Player (July '97)

"The humor is sharp, the graphics are well-composed, and the gameplay is intelligent without being dull."

- GameSpot (June '97)

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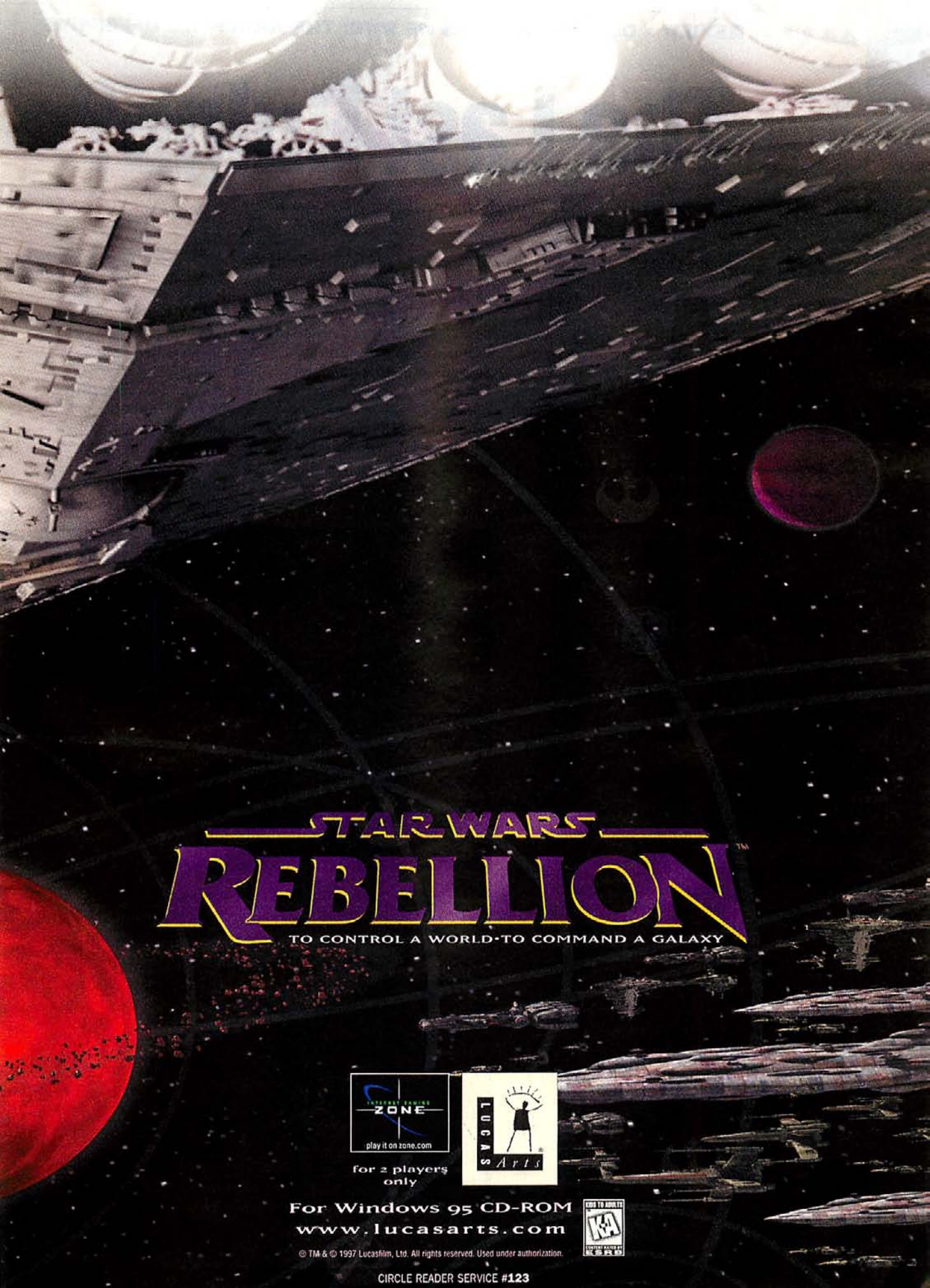


CIRCLE READER SERVICE #123

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

The Last Bulge?

SSG and SSI Join Forces for the Best Bulge Ever

by Jim Cobb

Along with Gettysburg, Waterloo, and Stalingrad, the Battle of the Bulge is a very popular, yet difficult, gaming subject. The Bulge presents designers not only with the problems of comparisons with older games and historical accuracy but also with supply problems and traffic jams. Weaving these mundane aspects into an exciting context is a challenge to serious designers. SSG's THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE, the first in a planned series of the DECISIVE BATTLES OF WWII, is so good that it may be the last word in operational studies of the Bulge.

The graphics aren't stunning, but the maps fit nicely into the regiment/battalion scale and cleanly represent the terrain of Belgium and western Germany. The usual icons for movement and status options exist, as well as a jump map. The regimental units can be displayed with divisional insignia, NATO symbols, or weapon silhouettes.

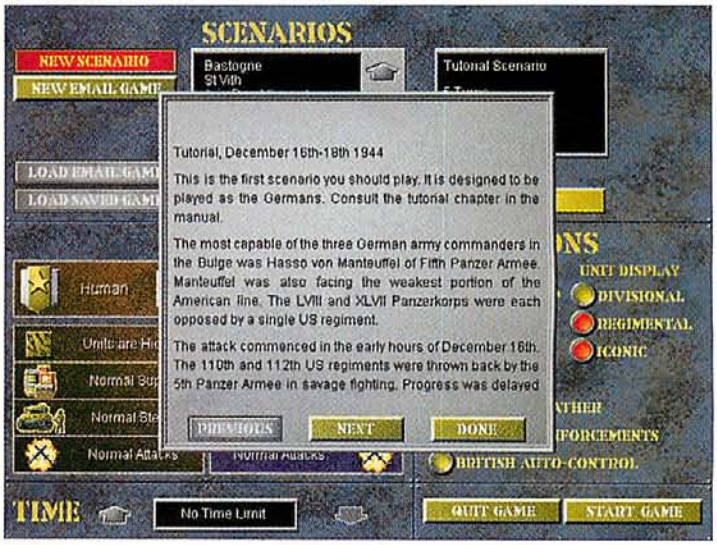
If you're worried that this sounds like another straight boardgame port, just click the right mouse button. Then you'll see the unit's parent organization, its organizational steps, attack and defense strengths per step, supply status, weapons silhouette, and the ever-important operational points (OP). This elegant unit display easily portrays the link between OPs, combat, and supply without the need for constant reference to cumbersome charts and tables. If you've ever wanted to play more serious strategy games, but were thwarted by rules complexity, THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE is a great, accessible place to start.

Price: $59.95
Minimum System Requirements: P90, 12MB RAM, 15MB hard-disk space, Windows 95, SVGA graphics, mouse; supports Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: Network IPX, Internet TCP/IP, modem, and serial-port direct connect (1–2 players).
Developer: SSG
Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Sunnyvale, CA (800) 601-7529
www.ssionline.com
Reader Service #: 345

PERFORM THE OPERATION

Every unit has eight basic OPs, but armor has a higher maximum OP limit than infantry. Maximum OPs can be gained, even doubled, by the actions of units in supply. However, supply is, in itself, a function of OPs, because a unit must be in supply to receive them. Supply is determined by the number of OPs a unit would expend to reach either a supply dump or a mobile supply source. Thus, OPs create an interlocking relationship with movement and terrain, limiting a unit's latitude of action. Factors such as time also figure into supply (see the sidebar).

The Attack and Defense Combat Capabilities (A/DCC) are separate, but still dependent on supply and terrain OPs. A unit expends all ACCs in attack and must be in supply to renew them, although an out-of-supply unit will not lose ACCs until it attacks. As scenarios go on, German supply drops from 100 percent and American supply increases, so ACCs available are a function of overall supply status, and not a constant. A panzer unit with a maximum ACC of 12 will



ARMCHAIR GENERAL ACCESSIBLE Better than most tutorials, ARDENNES' covers the exciting opening days of the Bulge and eases you into the action.

TRAFFIC JAMS Here, you get a good look at what the Germans are up against: Despite rapid early gains, they are running out of roads—and time.

have a replacement of 9 when German supply drops to 75 percent. Through this mixture of OPs, supply, and time, ARDENNES re-creates the German problems of distance and logistics and highlights American transport efficiency.

If you left-click on a stack, you highlight the hexes to which the unit may move, à la PANZER GENERAL. Likewise, if you click on an adjacent enemy unit, you bring up the combat screen: On the right, you view the combat area with all involved units along the top border; on the left, you see attack and defense strengths and bonuses for terrain, entrenchment, and divisional integrity. You receive better odds when you have the tactical advantage, artillery/air support, aggressive leadership, or all of them at once.

NO GIMMICK REQUIRED

The OP structure is much more than a gimmick—the ability to move and fight with your units in any sequence makes combat very fluid. Thus, your infantry can make a hole for armor, then your armor overruns weak units, and finally the first units may move again to mop up. ARDENNES is a veritable smorgasbord of wargaming: Towns and destroyed units become strongpoints to slow advances; air interdiction and German infiltration teams increase enemy OP costs; artillery units lose effectiveness as the front becomes fluid. For replayability, feel free to try out random reinforcements, different supply levels, and even "loaded" dice.

The scenarios cover all phases of the battle, from actions such as St. Vith and Bastogne to the entire December–January campaign. As the American, you must know when to run and delay until reinforcements arrive, while the German player must walk a fine line between grabbing victory hexes and preparing to go over to the defense. Optimizing combat must be balanced against saving ACCs and preparing for follow-up attacks. The AI is good—as we've come to expect from SSG—and unpredictable, which adds a lot to replay value.

ARDENNES has some nice touches unrelated to gameplay, including a selection of unit histories and a robust weapons database. Is the game perfect? No. The most irritating flaws occur in the manual, which does a decent job of teaching mechanics, but is pretty opaque when discussing details of supply and combat. For an operational WWII game, ARDENNES is a bit light on the aspects of command control, which seems to be a design choice to keep things moving along briskly. Lastly, the boardgame-style sequence—you go, then I go—does hurt spontaneity. On the other hand, if you're looking for a realistic, challenging, and enjoyable WWII game, don't let these minor flaws slow you down: ARDENNES is the best computer game *ever* on the Battle of the Bulge.

POLISHED CHROME Whether you're into B-26 bombers or Tiger tanks, you'll find them in the weapons database.

Supply: Do the Math!

To win ARDENNES you need a thorough understanding of supply and operation points—easier said than done. All units have 8 basic operation points, unless they are surprised Americans, whose infantry can have a maximum 12 OPs and armor a maximum of 24. Basic OPs are constant, but max OPs come from supply and activity, as unused additional points accumulate. To be in supply as the Americans, one of your units must be within 30 OPs of a supply truck, which, in turn, must be within 30 OPs of a supply dump; the Germans are similar, except that they must be within 24 OPs.

Germans begin with 100 percent supply and Americans with less. This relationship reverses as the scenario progresses. The supply percentage affects the amount of points toward the max OP, so infantry with 50 percent supply, for example, adds only two OPs to its basic value.

You don't *really* have to do the math; just keep in mind that supply is crucial during play, especially during combat. Any of your units that are out of supply after an attack lose their attack capacity. Defense capacity is normal for the first combat of an out-of-supply unit, but results get worse in subsequent attacks. So make sure that last attack works, and *don't* get isolated!

NO WAY OUT Even if this defender survives the assault, it won't be able to fight its way out. Don't get isolated, and keep reserves handy to rescue units!

APPEAL: Anyone interested in World War II or conventional strategy games.

PROS: An elegant system captures all the important aspects of the Battle of the Bulge in an accessible manner, with plenty of great chrome.

CONS: Incomplete, overly complex documentation; light on WWII command and control aspects.

CG RATED ★★★★

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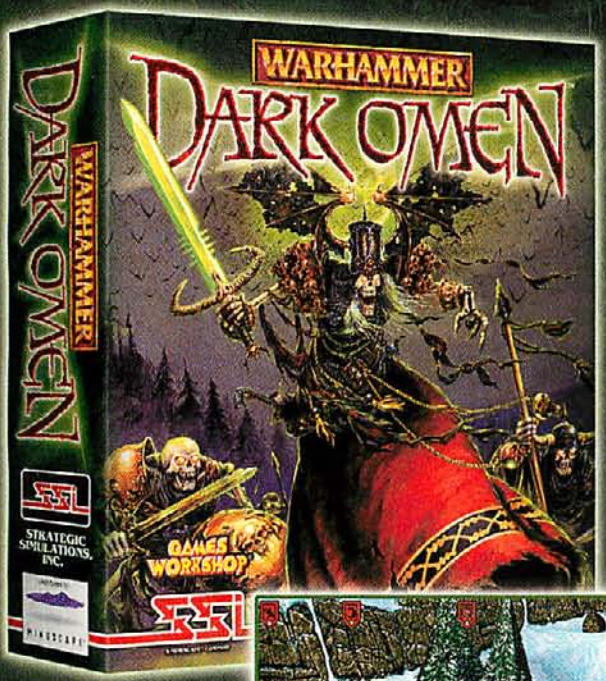

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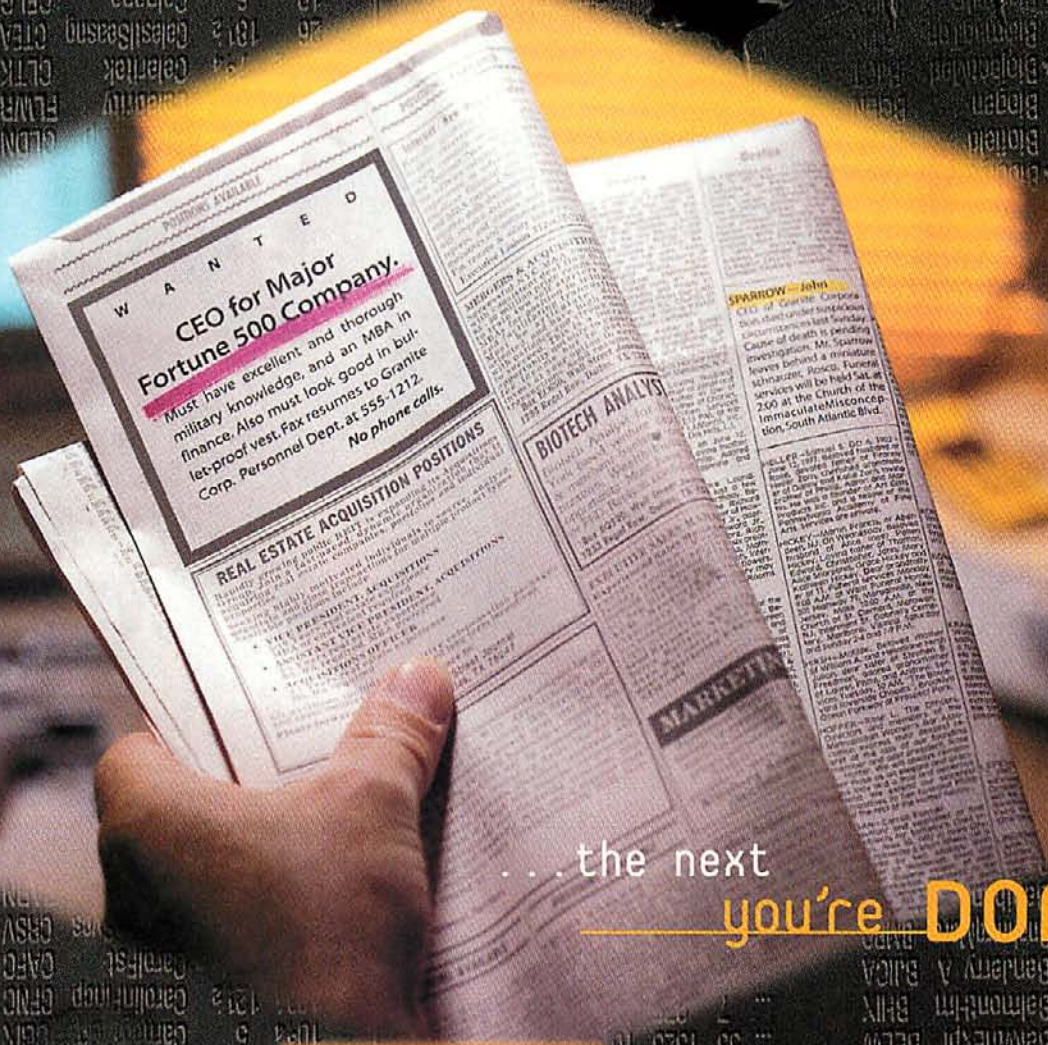

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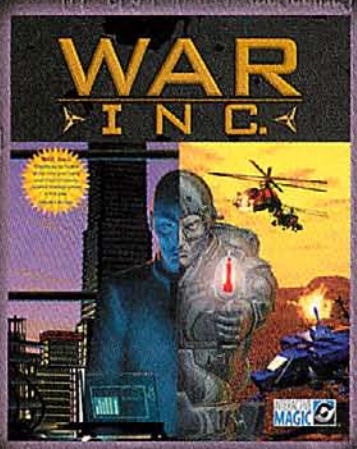

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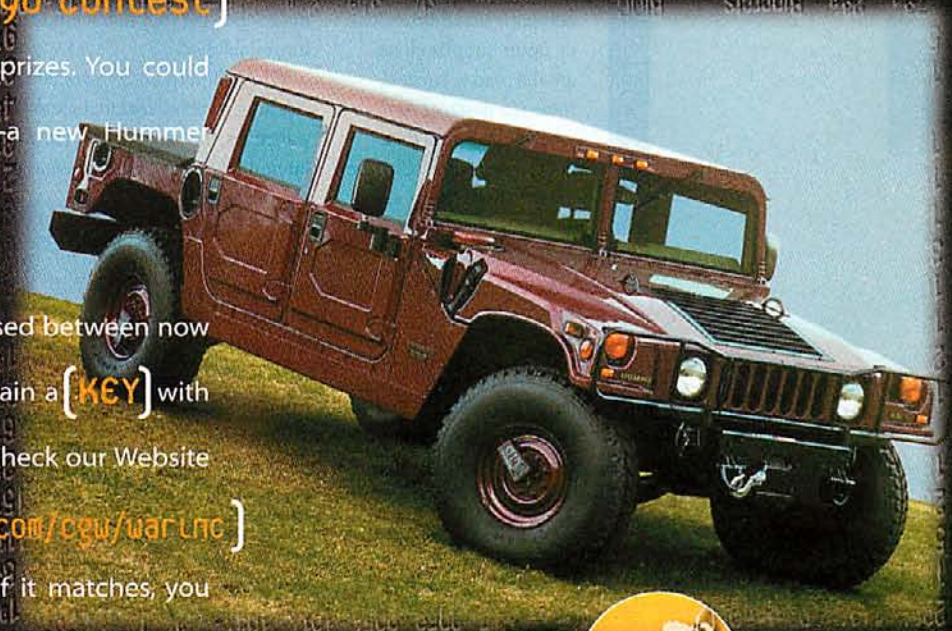

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Limited Vision

Enemy Nations Is Just Another Lukewarm Entrant Into the Real-Time Arena

by Martin E. Cirulis

The nice thing about wargames is that for every company that thinks slicker, faster, simpler clones are the road to success, there is a designer somewhere who thinks that complexity and realism are a better route to a good game. In this case, as other companies rush to make more accessible (simpler) versions of Command & Conquer, Windward Studios, in partnership with publisher Head Games, has created its own C&C-for-grownups title, Enemy Nations, which sticks with the ever-popular real-time format, all the while offering a slightly more complex and realistic resource and combat model. Unfortunately, the increase in detail seems to have come at the expense of the game itself.

Price: $29.99
Minimum System Requirements: 486/80 or better, Windows 95/NT, 8MB RAM, 4MB hard-disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, Windows-compatible sound card and mouse.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, Direct Connect (2 players), LAN, Internet (2–12 players).
Designer: Windward Studios
Publisher: Headgames Interactive
Minneapolis, MN
(612) 321-9470
www.headgames.net
Reader Service #: 346

ANOTHER CROWDED HOUSE

Oddly enough, in the premise department, Enemy Nations bears far less resemblance to C&C than it does to last year's competent sci-fi turn-based wargame, DeadLock. Once again, in a very crowded galaxy, the great races of space, human and otherwise, are forced to battle over a viable world through the use of colonizing skills and sheer force of arms. The last and greatest colony wins the world as the other races just shuffle off admitting defeat.

While we have seen this game before, especially when you consider the resources model and the dependence on raw materials for construction, it is very nice to see it all in a viable, real-time format. The game starts as your mothership touches down and your initial units roll out. Their number depends on the starting level you pick, but will include at least a construction crane and two hauler trucks. Your ship also carries enough raw materials to get your initial infrastructure established.

While all-purpose construction vehicles are a standard feature in real-time wargames, the hauler trucks are an interesting nod to detail. Whereas most resource games assume that once you cut a tree or dig up a mineral it is whisked away to some convenient central storage area, EN makes no such assumption, and thus the trucks are a vital part of your game; they haul resources from harvesting sites to the factories and then to the power plants or refineries, where they are processed. This makes for a whole new level of tactical decisions concerning the placement of facilities. Plus, for the first time in a game of this type, roads are actually relevant.

The trend toward greater realism does not stop with hauling around various raw materials. Players must also build

TIMBER The level of realism here is fairly extensive; you not only have to harvest different resources, but you also need to ship them to refineries and processing plants.

LAND HO The terrain engine and graphics in Enemy Nations are impressive as strategy games go, but they can slow even the fastest systems.

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second-level processing plants that turn coal and iron into vital steel, refineries that turn oil into gas for vehicle movement, and power plants that turn coal and oil into precious power. Even more interesting in longer games is the fact that resource sites will eventually play out, forcing players to range farther afield in search of the stuff war machines are made of. All of this gives a level of detail rarely found in the genre.

BUILD IT Information is sparse in ENEMY NATIONS and the data is conveyed in near-useless icons. You know what you're building, but not why. Thankfully the manual is crammed with info.

A STRANGE MYOPIA

Unfortunately, despite their attempts to distinguish themselves, the designers at Windward Studios seem to have taken a strange path in deciding what is and isn't important to this type of game.

For instance, the terrain graphics engine is beautiful to the point of grinding the best computer systems to a halt. In fact, the design notes seem to gloat that it will take the next generation of PCs to fully exploit what the land has to offer. Unfortunately, while ENEMY NATIONS can easily make it into *Virtual Homes and Gardens*, any gamer expecting the same care and attention to combat effects will be sorely disappointed. In fact, battle sounds and graphics in the game are the weakest I have seen since MicroProse's also-ran, THIS MEANS WAR. While some horticulture fans out there may disagree, I suspect most gamers would trade beautifully rendered trees for a bigger sound and graphics difference between cannon and laser fire.

WHAT'S THAT? ENEMY NATIONS has various viewing options, a rotating camera and several zoom levels for better views of your camps.

Of course, all this might have been forgivable had the proof been in the actual combat pudding. If the spiffy terrain and wide variety of weapons platforms actually translated into a combat system as detailed and interesting as the resource system, things would have been great—but in the end none of it seems to make much difference. Combat modifiers for terrain and movement may be at work here, but combat is so bare-bones that the only difference you're likely to notice is that some units crawl along more slowly over hills and forest. This, coupled with a computer player that must have been the dumber brother of the one found in DEADLOCK, means that hard-core wargamers (at whom this product seems to be aimed) are sure to turn up their noses.

Even when you focus on the stronger points of the game—the resource and construction portions—the designers seem to have left out a few important details. Despite the fact that everything in the game depends on your supply and demand, there isn't a single spreadsheet to be found. Buildings yield information only in the form of next-to-useless icons, and the world map is inadequate to the point of uselessness.

And, sorry, but despite the promising resource and construction angle, I found ENEMY NATIONS to be just plain boring. The aliens races are about as generic as sci-fi gaming gets these days, and the technology research is not much better: Despite coming to this world at FTL speeds, you spend most of the game duplicating the industrial revolution (starships *and* coal-burning electrical plants?). Moreover, the potential of the high-resolution terrain is wasted, since everything looks as if you've landed on TV's *Earth2* (namely, the planet North California!).

This game does have appeal, especially in the multiplayer arena, where human awareness goes far in deepening the shallow ends of this game. But if you are not a connected gamer, you may come away from this game thinking you have paid an awful lot of money for a really good shareware game. Head Games needs a big slap for thinking all a distributor should do with a game is shove it out on the shelves as cheaply as possible. (Holy BC3K, Batman!) Unless you are desperately in need of a deeper real-time wargame fix right now, wait for ENEMY NATIONS 2. Perhaps a little more experience will breed greater success.

APPEAL: Fans of realtime who want more complexity in their titles; DEADLOCK fans.

PROS: A deeper C&C clone; terrain graphics and the resource/construction engine are some of the most detailed found in the genre yet.

CONS: Inferior combat routines; bad release AI; generic props; a dearth of useful gaming information.

CG RATED ★★★★★

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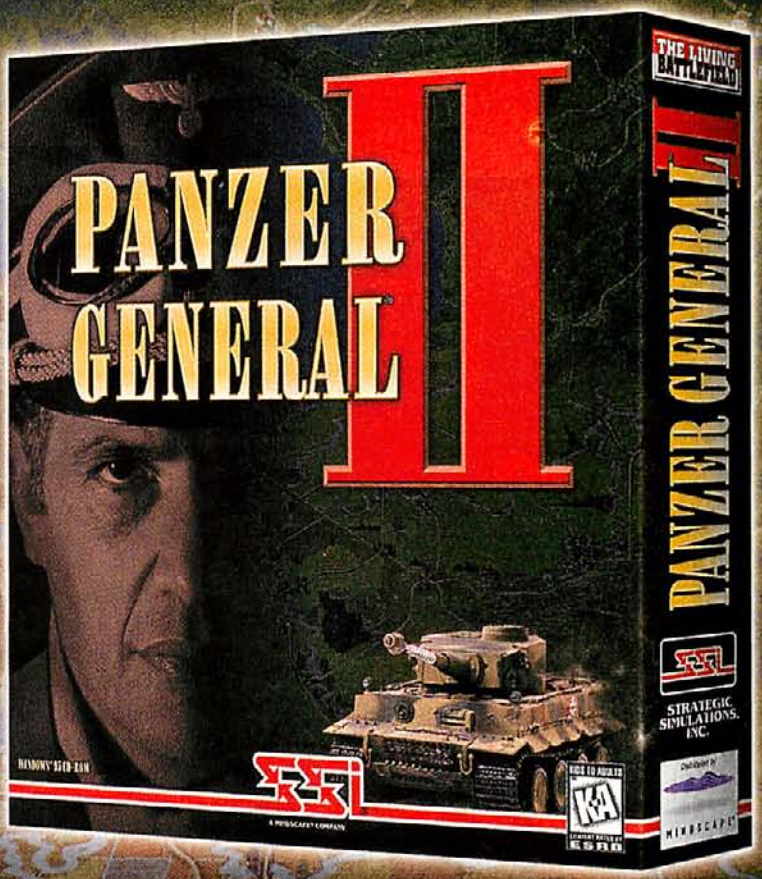

Developed by the SSI Special Projects Group.

KIDS TO ADULTS K-A ESRB

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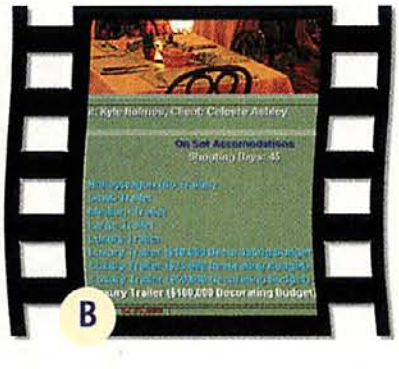
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #236

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

A Splice of Life

Realize Your Dreams on the Big Screen With HOLLYWOOD MOGUL and DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

A



B

C

by Terry Coleman

Price: $39.95
Minimum System Requirements: P90, Windows 95, 8MB RAM, 18MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer support: None.
Designer: Dreamworks Interactive
Distributor: Microsoft Corporation Redmond, WA (206) 882-8080
www.dreamworks-games.com
Reader Service #: 348

As the dog days of August recede to autumn, we leave behind another barrage of summer blockbuster movies. Admit it: You've always thought that if *you* were in charge, you could put out better films than the endless sequels and insipid remakes of 70s TV shows that comprise the Hollywood mainstream.

Well, now you have not one, but two opportunities to realize those celluloid dreams. STEVEN SPIELBERG'S DIRECTOR'S CHAIR (DC) lets you craft movies in the manner of the famed filmmaker, while in Carey DeVuono's HOLLYWOOD MOGUL, you play Executive Producer, running an entire film studio.

REALIZING YOUR VISION

Both games are light on traditional documentation but replete with online help. While both games are accessible, DC is obviously aimed at people who don't normally play games. There's nothing wrong with that, and DC does begin nicely: The feeling that you get when Steven Spielberg walks on screen and talks to you is as warm and fuzzy as watching the video of *ET*. If it's a little sappy, well, the same complaint has often been leveled at many of Spielberg's films.

MOGUL lacks the multimedia splendor of DC, jazzing its text-heavy screens with colorful static backgrounds. There are some similarities, in that both DC and MOGUL utilize an attractive assistant to keep you informed and, it's hoped, out of trouble. But even here, the differences abound. DC gives you singular choices: Every game features the same assistant, the same production studio. MOGUL not only lets you select your assistant, choose from a number of studio-fanfare .WAV files, and design your own studio logo, it also lets you import .BMP files so that your girlfriend, husband, or grandmother can be in the game.

FATHER FIGURE Following in Steven Spielberg's footsteps is fine to a point, but it's so overdone that DIRECTOR'S CHAIR suffers as a game.

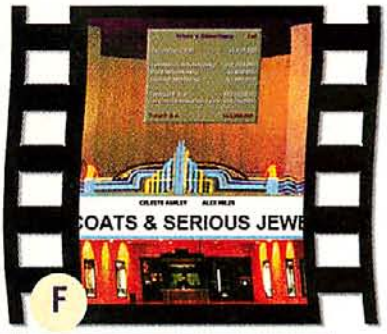
DC concerns itself with the nuts and bolts of filmcraft, while MOGUL gives you the big picture. Each concept is a solid one for a game, but the games differ greatly in how they realize their potential. In DC, you are actually on the set shooting scenes and dealing directly with actors. As director, you aren't allowed to choose your actors— you don't yet command Spielberg's clout. But this also cuts down on your gameplay choices, especially since the acting quality is so uneven.

Jennifer Aniston (from the hit TV show *Friends*) is very photogenic, and delivers about what you'd expect. But why Quentin Tarantino was chosen as one of the "actors" for this game is a mystery, one that ranks right up there with the miscasting of Bruce Willis in *Bonfire of the Vanities*. A superb writer and promising director, Tarantino's idiosyncratic style

DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

- **APPEAL:** For die-hard Spielberg fans only.
- **PROS:** Lush production values; warm and friendly Spielberg; Jennifer Aniston.
- **CONS:** So limited and linear that it ultimately fails as both game and multimedia.

CG RATED ★★★



A: In DIRECTOR'S CHAIR, you film Quentin Tarantino, who has already been chosen for you.
B: In HOLLYWOOD MOGUL, you negotiate to choose your own actors and haggle over what perks they will receive.
C: DIRECTOR'S CHAIR hands you a completed script, and you have only a little leeway in modifying it.
D: HOLLYWOOD MOGUL lets you decide which scripts to buy, and you select writers to polish and rewrite them before any talent is hired.
E & F: After a film is completed, both DC and MOGUL let you see your name in the credits at the local cinema.

rarely comes across properly in his acting—the same is true in DC. At times, he's downright painful to watch.

YOU MAKE THE CALL

In MOGUL, you do everything from buying the script and selecting the location of the film shoot, to choosing the actors, the producer, and the director. And while this process lacks DC's visceral appeal (such as Ms. Aniston's sunbathing), MOGUL puts you right in the middle of the moviemaking game. You may, for example, negotiate with a certain former Austrian bodybuilder to determine whether or not he has casting approval, how many stunts he will personally perform, and if he will he settle for limo service to and from the set or require a 24-hour chauffeur. About the only thing missing is having to remove brown M&Ms from the bowl.

Every actor, producer, and director in MOGUL is rated for a variety of tendencies: star appeal, ego, ability to stay within budget, work ethic, and artistic vision. The best are, of course, the most expensive. From the time the negotiations begin, you have to juggle a lot of factors before your movie can become a hit:

- Should I go for a veteran actor no longer at the top of the box-office heap, hoping that he or she has one more blockbuster left?
- If I spend $30 million on special effects, does my sci-fi movie really need big-name actors?
- How can I keep my tempestuous star from throwing temper tantrums and costing us millions in delays?

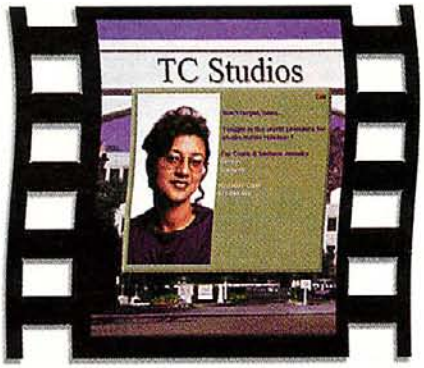
Afterward, you have to choose advertising budgets, set up test screenings, and decide how many theater screens will show your film. You can't rest on your laurels, either. If you want to have a successful studio, you have to keep cranking out the hits. None of this is difficult, but it results in plenty of gameplay decisions, making MOGUL a lot more addictive than the average strategy game.

FILM BREAK

DC, on the other hand, tries too hard to be accessible, telling you where to go, what to do, and when to do it. When it could challenge you with tough decisions, it irritates you instead. For example, when you are ready to shoot your first scene of the day, you are told that everyone partied too late last night, and the actors haven't even shown up for makeup yet. C'mon, guys, even *CGW* editors are ready to go before mid-afternoon!

Some of DC's sequences are interesting. But when you edit film or choose which camera angle to use, you are limited to the decisions Spielberg would make; there are only so many FMV sequences you can include on CD-ROM. So, forget about doing any cool Alfred Hitchcock-style pans. The feeling is roughly equivalent to looking for the hot spots in a linear adventure game; if you're into that at the expense of more rewarding gameplay, you might have some fun.

And whatever pretensions movies might have to being art, they are certainly about having fun—and about storytelling. MOGUL is way out in front of DC on both counts, because it makes you believe that you really *are* a hotshot Hollywood executive making multimillion-dollar decisions. DC, for all its flash, never really puts you inside the head of a big-time director, and it's often tedious to boot. From Spielberg, who crafts timeless films—and who also loves to play computer games—we deserve better. So, whether you're a movie buff, or just want a different, clever strategy game, pass on the fluff of DIRECTOR'S CHAIR and buy a ticket for HOLLYWOOD MOGUL—one of the true sleepers of this gaming year.



MODIFYING MOGUL HOLLYWOOD MOGUL lets you modify everything: your studio facade, your assistant, even the music that plays over the credits.

HOLLYWOOD MOGUL

APPEAL: For anyone who's ever wanted to produce films.

PROS: Clever and unique strategy game; very challenging; ability to edit nearly every game attribute is a nice touch.

CONS: Minimalist production values; no multiplayer mode.

CG RATED ★★★★

Price: $40
Minimum System Requirements: 486/33, Windows 3.1 or better, 8MB RAM, 10MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer support: None.
Designer: Carey DeVuono
Publisher: Hollywood Mogul Co.
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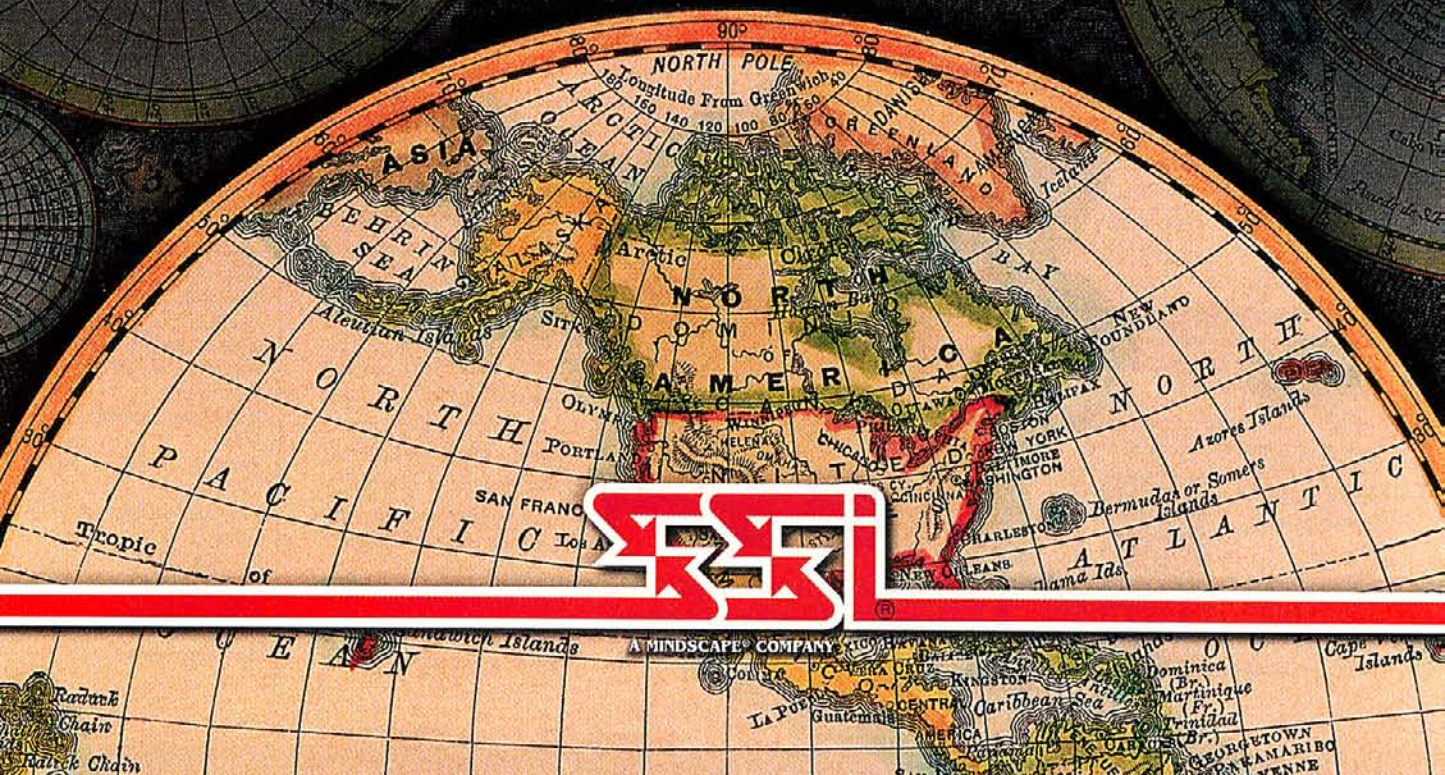

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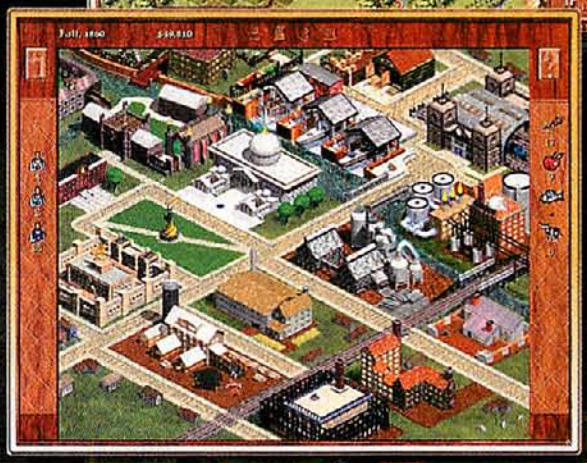

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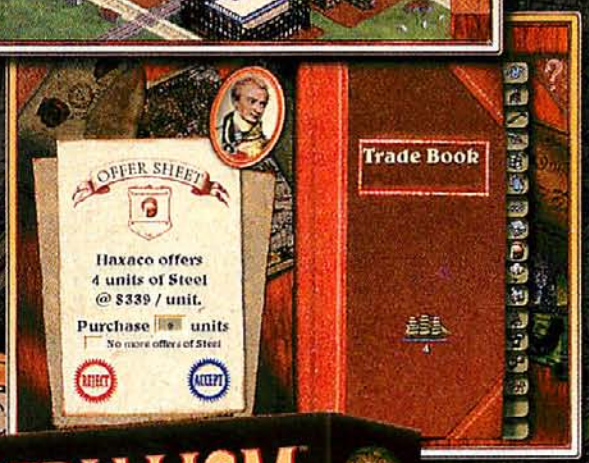

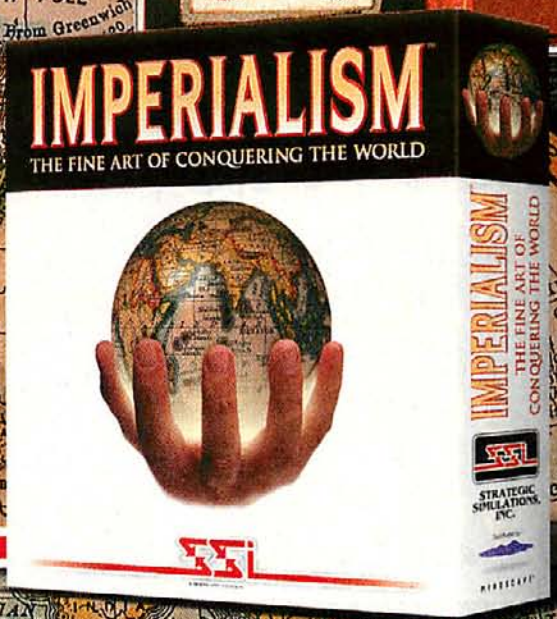

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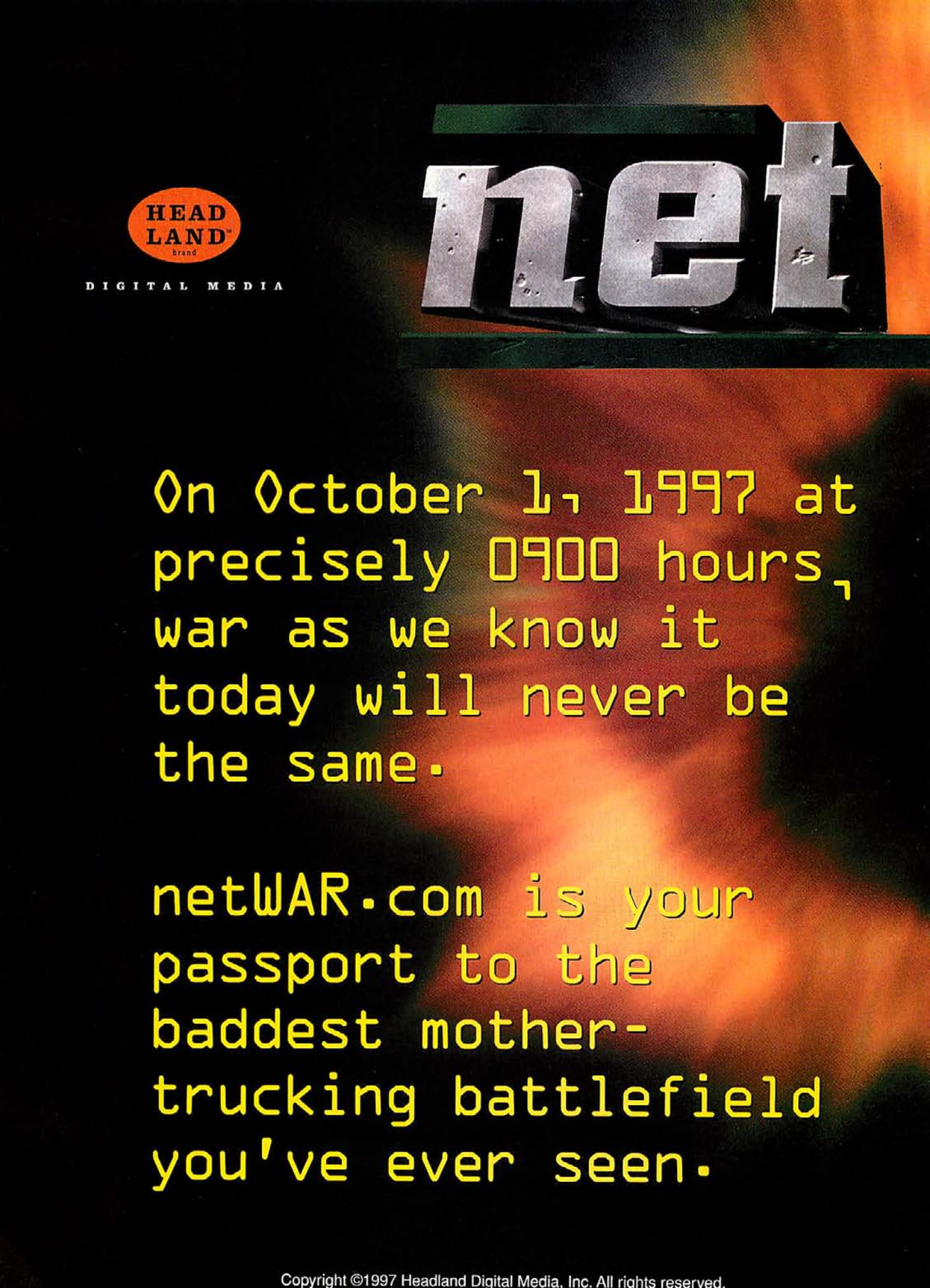

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #124

Hero: Miyamoto

A Tribute to One of the Greatest Game Designers of All Time

This month, READ.ME features a list of *CGW* and Gamespot's Most Influential Game Designers of all time. As our staffs mulled over the list, I brought up the name of a man who has never designed a single PC game: Shigeru Miyamoto. Many of you won't know him, but he is Japan's greatest game designer and Nintendo's ace in the hole in the next-generation-console battle. He probably is the world's best-selling game designer, with literally dozens of games to his credit and combined sales that total more than 100 million units. The reason you don't know him is that as Nintendo's premier designer, he designs console games only.

CONSOLES VS. COMPUTERS

Now, before you old-timers get in an uproar and turn the page, consider this: PC games don't exist in a vacuum, and many PC developers play and love console games. James Phinney, one of STARCRAFT's designers, says, "At Blizzard, console games and arcade games have a big impact on what we think is cool. I've always thought of that as one of our strengths."

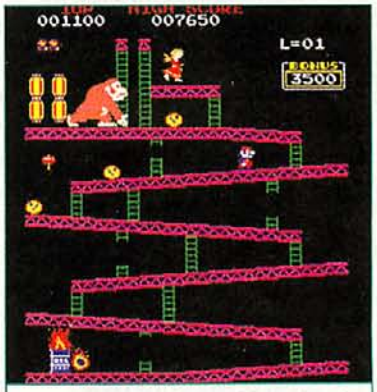
It's no coincidence that the best game designers on the PC have all played video games, especially Shigeru Miyamoto classics such as MARIO 64, LEGEND OF ZELDA, SUPER MARIO BROTHERS, and DONKEY KONG. For someone who has yet to design for the PC, Miyamoto has influenced the PC industry as few other designers have.

A GORILLA NAMED DONKEY KONG

Miyamoto's first game was DONKEY KONG, which was released in 1981, at a time when video games were primitive. In games like ASTEROIDS and SPACE INVADERS, you simply shot at an ever-increasing number of aliens on a never-changing screen. DONKEY KONG, though, created a quiet revolution in the arcades because it gave you a human persona (a plumber named Mario), a leering adversary (Donkey Kong), and a goal (the rescue of your girlfriend).

DONKEY KONG also employed the concept of levels: Once you defeated one level, you moved onto a totally new arena of challenges. The challenges weren't shooting and killing, either, but defensive skills like jumping and dodging. Both Mario and Donkey Kong also had personality: Mario in the way he ran and jumped, and Donkey Kong in his chest-pounding tantrums. It all seems unspectacular now, but in 1981, it was amazing.

The effect on today's designers, who were then just kids or teens in the arcades, is telling. Jordan Mechner—the designer of KARATEKA (1984), PRINCE OF PERSIA (1989), and LAST EXPRESS—didn't play a MARIO game until MARIO 64; nevertheless, he credits Miyamoto with inspiration: "Both [KARATEKA and PRINCE OF PERSIA] relied on a rescue-the-princess storyline, and DONKEY KONG was the first game that had the princess theme." Mechner says that he pumped countless quarters into DONKEY KONG, and that his dream for years "was to create a computer game as good as an arcade game."



GENESIS DONKEY KONG put Nintendo and Miyamoto on the gaming map.

ITS-A ME, MARIO Mario's visage can inspire loathing in some PC enthusiasts, but not the open-minded game designers who try to emulate Miyamoto's innate sense of what is fun.

Miyamoto's early work influenced even the strategy side of PC game design. Brian Reynolds, the designer of CIVILIZATION II, says, "The MARIO games are impressive in their genre for their depth of play and elegance of their system. I grew up playing games like DONKEY KONG. Part of the culture of writing games is remembering classics like that."

THE REST IS HISTORY

Four years after DONKEY KONG appeared, Miyamoto took his plumber and created the 8-bit Nintendo flagship game, SUPER

> **"Shigeru Miyamoto is the one person who could be considered a God of Game Design."**
>
> *–Tom Hall, cofounder of id Software and ION Storm*

MARIO BROTHERS. You all know it as the MARIO platformer. This was in 1985, before PRINCE OF PERSIA, before LODE RUNNER, before THEXDER. Every side-scroller created since then owes something to Miyamoto's SUPER MARIO BROTHERS or DONKEY KONG.

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

The rest is gaming history. Miyamoto soon designed the action RPG LEGEND OF ZELDA, which is still remembered as one of the greatest console RPGs ever. ZELDA also inspired Crystal Dynamics' soon-to-be-released RPG, BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN. Miyamoto has also created racing games like F-ZERO (a precursor to the PlayStation hit WIPEOUT) and the space combat shooter STAR FOX. And he continues to produce such breathtaking titles as SUPER MARIO 64 and STAR FOX 64.

Tom Hall, who helped create COMMANDER KEEN and DOOM when he was at id, and is now designing the RPG ANACHRONOX at ION Storm, says: "Shigeru Miyamoto is the one person who could be considered a God of Game Design. He has a complete and utter grasp of exactly what is 'fun.' He *invented* the side-scrolling platform game. How amazing is that? How seminal a game could SUPER MARIO 64 be? His approach to design, with your constant learning as you go, keeps the experience fresh throughout the game. It's not just more levels — it's whole new experiences that you are introduced to, new ways of doing things, which are then incorporated with your previous knowledge in a kinetic, exciting combination." As for personal influence, Hall says, "He definitely has influenced my games from the start — COMMANDER KEEN was Miyamoto-meets-Chuck Jones. He has been so pervasive an influence and introduced such basic things to all of game design, it's a wonder we're not all paying him royalties!"

Hall's colleague, John Romero, co-designer of WOLF3D, DOOM, and QUAKE, is naming the main character in his upcoming game, DAIKATANA, Hiro Miyamoto, in honor of the man he credits as one of the most influential game designers of all time.

MARIO'S LEGACY

Today, Shigeru Miyamoto oversees game design among the various designers at Nintendo. His newest Nintendo 64 game, STAR FOX 64, is one game in which he took an active design role. The result is an amazing blend of ever-increasing action, cinema and drama, and personality — all hallmarks of a Miyamoto design. In STAR FOX 64, you must battle through six worlds to defeat a final boss on the planet Venom, but you have to choose from 15 total worlds to get to that goal. How's that for replayability?

STAR FOX 64 also has a cinematic quality that rivals that of the WING COMMANDERS. As I played, I felt as if I were part of a movie due to the constant chatter between my wingmen, the seamless cut-scenes composed with the same combat engine, and the incredible pacing of the action.

As for personality, STAR FOX 64 and MARIO 64 brim with it. The way the characters move and talk, combined with their attitudes, makes the game so three-dimensional that you really believe these are characters from an alternate world inside your N64.

The ability to imbue works with these qualities and make them something more than mere video games is what many designers, on both the PC and console side, still strive for. Even when developers don't directly emulate Miyamoto's design, they sometimes use his games as a benchmark for their own design. Frederick Reynal (creator of ALONE IN THE DARK) didn't intentionally put elements of ZELDA and MARIO 64 in TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY, but the similarities began to manifest themselves. "We felt like 'OK, we're on the right track,' because Miyamoto did similar things," he says.

Undoubtedly, Miyamoto has been influenced by other designers. I'm told he plays PC games quite a bit, though his biggest inspiration is the gamer. My colleagues at *EGM* tell me that Miyamoto often says, "When I'm designing a game, I think only of the gamer."

Miyamoto's games are every bit as influential today as they were 15 years ago. He still has a lot of magic to impart on the gaming world, and with luck, we'll see more of it from him and from designers who continue to be inspired by his work. Tom Hall sums it up best: "Everyone has played Miyamoto games. His games are ubiquitous and wonderful, and I wish he'd clone himself so we could have even more. He's the single most influential game designer on this planet."

Special thanks to Electronic Gaming Monthly *and* Video Gamespot *for background information and artwork.*

THE GAMING FOX STAR FOX 64 illustrates the magic Miyamoto touch. With branching gameplay, drama, and personality, it isn't just a fantastic game, it's an experience.

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Incubation is the latest chapter in Blue Byte's successful *Battle Isle* saga. You must lead a squad of marines against the aggressive man-eating Scay'Ger on the planet Scayra. The missions in *Incubation* are quite different from those found in the traditional hex-based games. The battles are not fought in large open fields, but rather in the dark and complex industrial buildings of the colony Scay-Hallwa.

You'll need to rely on your tactical skills rather than strategic planning, as the fast paced action produces constantly changing conditions. For example: during a battle Scay'Ger might start dropping down from the ceiling, jumping out from behind closed doors or even coming up through the floor! In the specially designed multi-player levels, deathmatches against up to three other squads can be fought over the Internet, a LAN or via a play-by-mail system.

Snap decisions are easily put into action with the intuitive user interface. The interface allows you to stay focused on the task at hand instead of digging through the manual in the middle of a fight. Watch your orders being carried-out from almost anywhere you can imagine with a free-floating mouse-controlled camera.

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View the hot action from any angle through a user-controlled camera with complete freedom!

Enjoy amazing real-time 3D animation powered by the technologically advanced Charisma graphics engine!

The wonderfully detailed 3D environment of *Incubation* is refreshingly different from the rather dull, flat terrain of other strategy games. Using the *Extreme Assault* 3D engine, the events in the game and actions of the characters are all fully animated giving them lifelike appearances and mannerisms.

After experiencing *Incubation's* fascinating gameplay and beautiful 3D graphics, I imagine we will see a mass of *Incubation* clones in a year or so. My advice: *Get the original; it's always better.*

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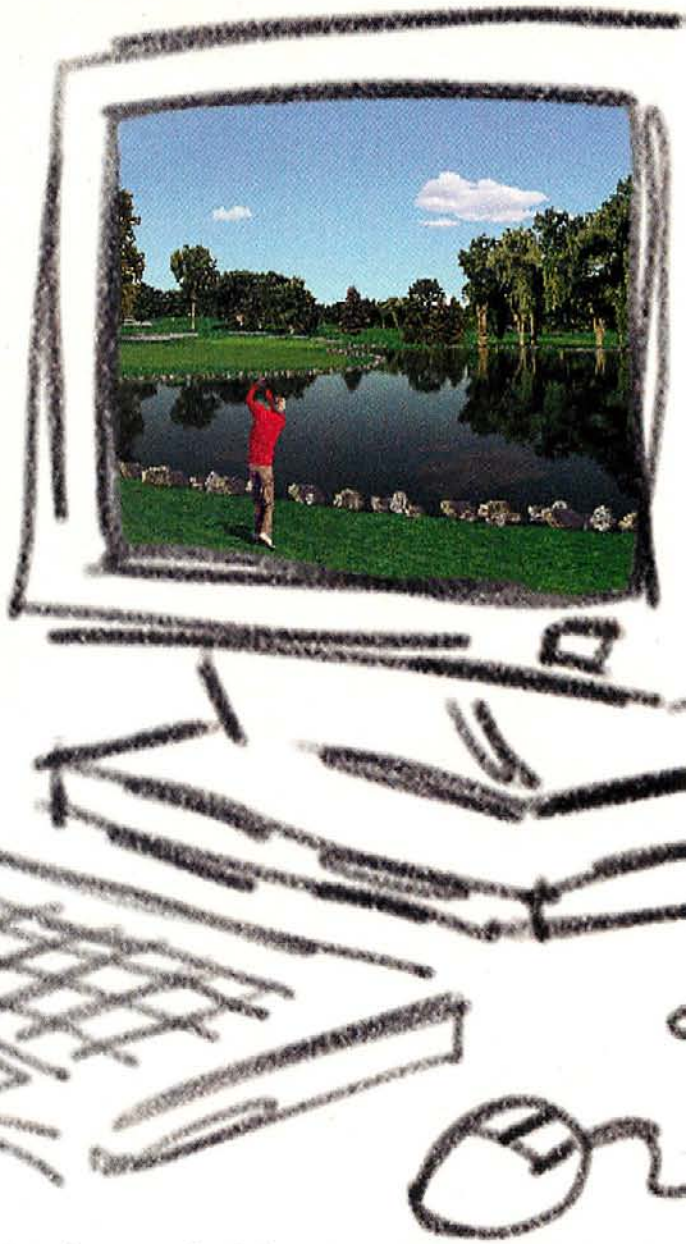
Links LS
1998 Edition

THE ART *and the* SCIENCE of GOLF



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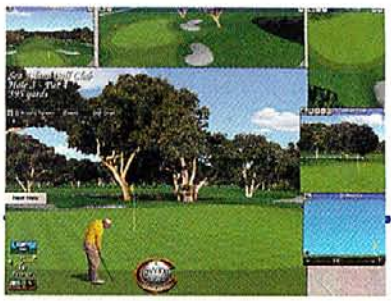
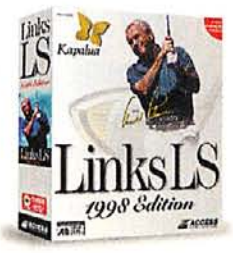


Our course designers have given even more attention to detail including new water reflections, improved textures and enhanced sky backgrounds.



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Making It to the Show

CGW's Roving Sports Columnist Checks Out the Action at E3

The sheer magnitude of E3 can be staggering to the uninitiated (like me). This year's show in Atlanta filled the Georgia Convention Center, the Georgia Dome, and the Inforum. Of course, everybody who's anybody in sports gaming was there, puffing about their latest creations, sometimes behind closed doors for competitive reasons. Don't worry, though. *CGW* penetrated E3's veil of secrecy to bring you all the buzz about what to expect in sports gaming over the next few months.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Accolade privately screened an alpha version of LEGENDS FOOTBALL '98 that looked very hot. Although the player AI had not been fully worked out, the game engine was smooth, and LEGENDS' time warp concept, which allows you to pit teams from different eras (1932, 1950, 1968, 1997) against each other, was just plain cool. For example, when a modern team plays against an old-time club using 1932 rules, the rosters cannot exceed 20 players. Forget the rampant specialization that's so prevalent in today's NFL. Pit Brett Favre's Super Bowl crew against the 1932 Packers, and you're liable to find the MVP QB pulling double-duty as a linebacker. LEGENDS takes rules changes into account as well. There were no hash marks in '32, so if you're tackled near the sideline, that's where the ball is spotted for the next play, forcing you to use an unbalanced line. Your tight end may even wind up snapping the ball! See the Sneak Preview elsewhere in this issue for more on this promising release.

Adding an air of mystery to the proceedings, EA Sports had a pair of gorillas in Brooks Brothers suits providing security at their display on the show floor. A stretch HumVee limo painted in white, red, and blue served as an eye-catching centerpiece. Inside the Hummer, VIPs received secret briefings on MADDEN 98 and NHL 98. In the public display area, EA was showing NCAA FOOTBALL 98, which uses a completely new gridiron engine. Perhaps the most exciting feature of NCAA is the need to recruit new players as graduating seniors move on. EA also demoed ANDRETTI RACING, a Win 95 release slated for this fall.

BUT SERIOUSLY FOLKS EA Sports is looking to win the respect of the more serious football gamer this season with a more accurate statistical model and a play editor.

MADDEN ABOUT YOU

Of all the sports titles I saw at E3, however, it was MADDEN 98 that blew me away. EA is moving MADDEN into sim territory, with more than 100 team and individual stats included. Designer Ric Neil pointed to improvements in AI, enhanced player animations, Net multiplay, and an expanded playbook as features that will help MADDEN challenge Sierra's FRONT PAGE line for the interest of the serious football gamer. A neat feature was the ability to employ a quarterback's peripheral vision to scan whether the defense was in zone or man coverage at the line of scrimmage.

Madden University has also been upgraded from last year's "This is a football" simplicity, into a more advanced tutorial that links to the play editor so gamers can learn formations and tweak plays. Play creation has been simplified with the addition of lines that show defenders' keys in given alignments. Although it won't happen this time around, Neil would like to add a career mode to MADDEN, perhaps even linking it to the NCAA game for a draft. Now *that* would be cool.

ABC Interactive will be back with MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL, as well as

> **"Of all the sports titles I saw at E3, it was MADDEN 98 that blew me away."**

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ICE CAPADES NHL POWERPLAY was one of the surprise hits of last year's sports scene, and this year's model, with full-3D polygonal players, should heat up the war with NHL 98.

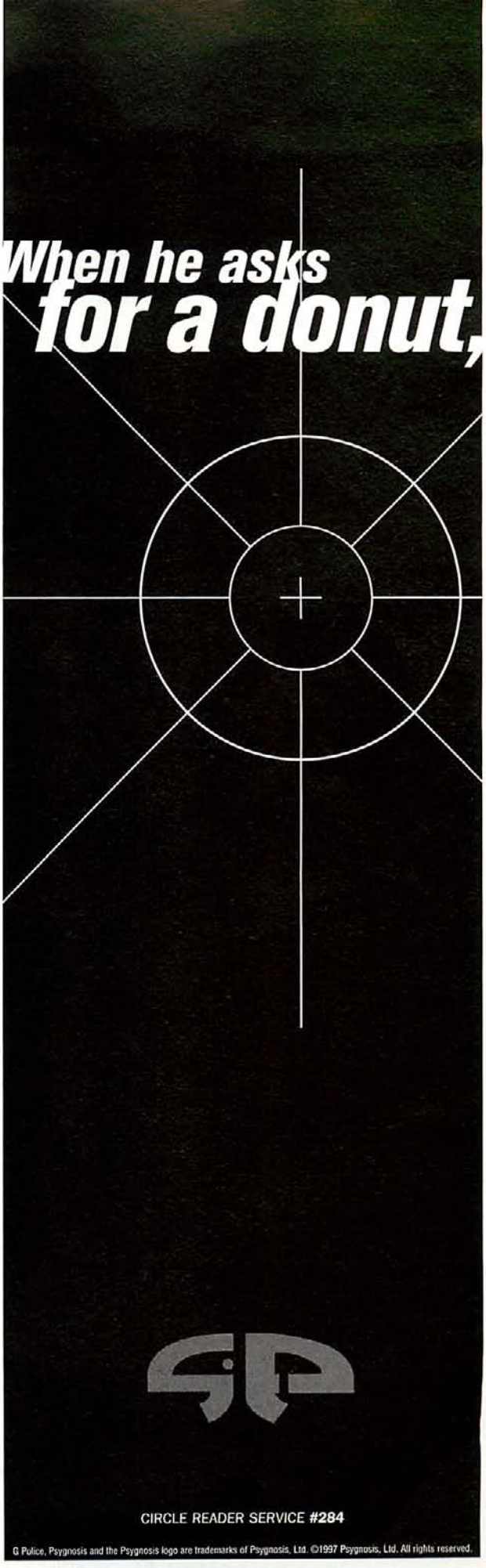
HEROES OF THE GRIDIRON, their college football sim that vapor-locked in 1996. Both games use the MNF engine, which appears to have been enhanced over last year's debut. If ABC can add improved AI to the best play-design interface in the business, these titles could be huge. Their excellent online support will be back, helping gamers find each other for matchups. ABC is also considering adding drafting and league elements to their Web site.

HEROES will appeal to gridiron fans for its use of college all-time teams. Penn State fans, for example, could pair '70s horse John Cappelletti in a backfield with '90s guy Ki-Jana Carter. The MNF engine has also added local two-player action, and I had a chance to watch as Bob Griese and Lynn Swann demoed this feature in a Dolphins-Steelers grudge match that had all the excitement of one of those mid-'70s playoff tilts. Later, I even collected an autograph from the Hall-of-Famers. "Can you make that to my, uh, cousin? His name's Dennis, too. Really!"

NEWS WORTHY

Over at Sierra's massive setup in the Inforum, FRONT PAGE producer Kate Kloos walked me through this year's lineup. It's no secret that FPS: FOOTBALL will get only a minor facelift for '98, as the company retools for a complete football overhaul in the '99 edition. With not much pigskin news, Kloos showed me an early version of FPS: SKI RACING, due for release this fall, which we previewed in our August issue. The physics-based sim offers five different types of races on six world-class ski resorts. Multiplayer options include modem, LAN, and Internet play, and SKI RACING supports 3Dfx and Rendition acceleration.

Sierra was also excited about FPS: TROPHY RIVERS, a fishing sim based on the TROPHY BASS 2 engine that allows fly fishermen and spincasters to drop their lines in the water. One of the coolest features of this game was its support for Microsoft's upcoming Sidewinder Pro Force Feedback joystick. This stick was very much in evidence at E3, and from what I saw (and felt) it could



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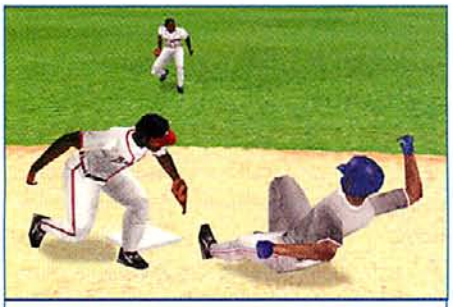
be a major hit. The tug of a fish on your line in TROPHY RIVERS was dead-on.

Speaking of Sierra, one question I'm often asked by gamers is "Will we ever see FPS: BASKETBALL?" As I indicated a few issues back, the answer is yes, it will appear sometime in 1998. A second source at Sierra confirmed this for me at E3, noting that the game company and the NBA were in negotiations that very week. Interestingly enough, the game might not come from Dynamix, which has done the entire FRONT PAGE SPORTS line up until now.

BOTTOM OF THE NINTH

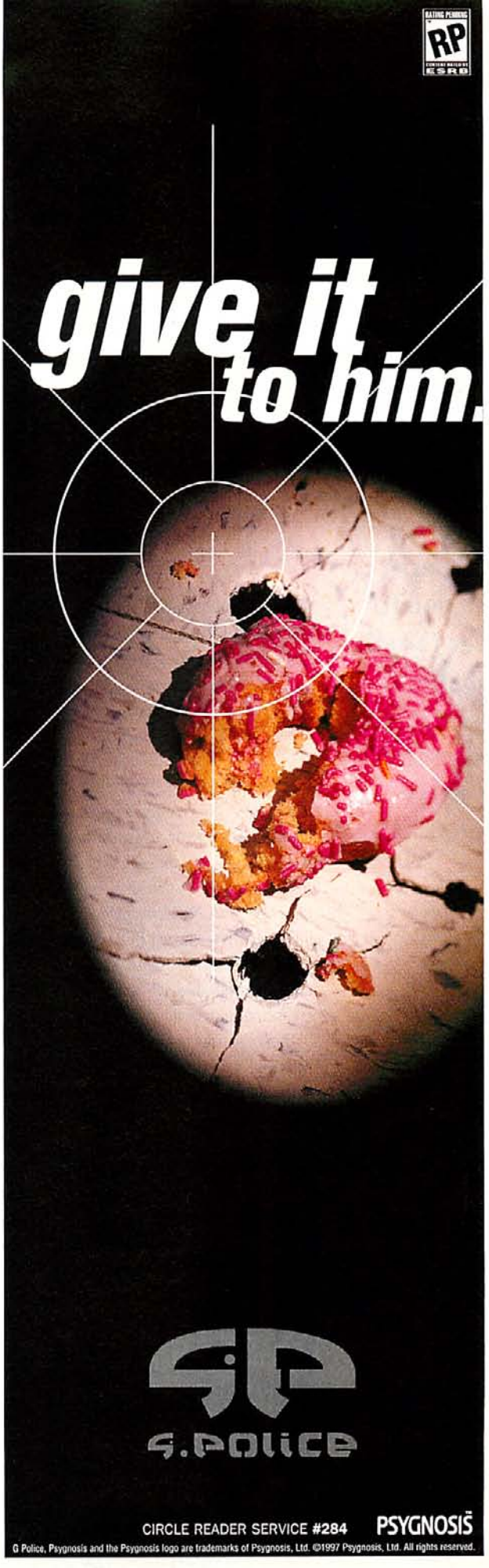
Not all of the news at E3 was as good. Accolade confided that the hotly anticipated HARDBALL 6 was behind schedule and might not ship until next spring. In other baseball sims, MMI showed a near-final version of MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL 6.0. It had the unmistakable look of a Dave Holt design, and in fact uses the stat model from PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL 97. The DOS-based sim will be Net-playable on Kali, and features good-looking rendered stadiums, motion-captured player animations, and variable camera angles.

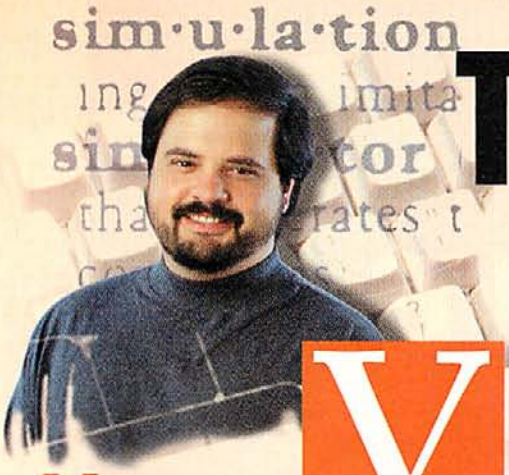


BERRY BERRY GOOD MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D features some truly jaw-dropping 3D graphics. However, you'll need an accelerator card to play.

Microsoft, jumping into gaming with both of Bill Gates' billion-dollar feet, presented its upcoming BASEBALL 3D, the first sports title that will require a 3D accelerator for play. The version I saw at E3 looked great and had some cool features, including actual scans of players' faces attached to the animations. And could there be any truth to the E3 rumor that Microsoft will be marketing its own accelerator card when BASEBALL 3D ships?

Hockey fans can get ready to drop their gloves over NHL 98 and POWERPLAY 98, both of which were being previewed in Atlanta. The pre-alpha NHL 98 had graphics to die for, but I couldn't get hands-on time to play it myself. Meanwhile, POWERPLAY 98 was being screened under Virgin's invitation-only tent, and looked much improved over last year's debut. Look for it to give EA a real skate for its money.





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You're an expert sim pilot. As flight simulations have grown more sophisticated, so have your piloting skills. You're just waiting for the day when you're sitting in the cattle class of a United 737 and the flight attendant comes on the intercom and asks if there's anyone back there who can fly the plane. Finally, your chance to show off your skills!

Of course, there are easier ways to try your hand at the real thing. Many local airport FBOs offer introductory flights for only $35, where you can spend a half-hour or more at the controls of a small plane and get a taste of flying. Check out **www.beapilot.com** for more information and a list of FBOs near you. If you've never flown in a small plane, even a relatively staid ride in a Cessna 152 should prove exciting.

But if you want to dive in headfirst, you can skip the basics and go straight to the air combat. A number of journalists got a chance to do just that at Atlanta-based Sky Warriors (**www.skywarriors.com**) during June's E3 show. Microsoft invited dozens of journalists to try its upcoming multiplayer FIGHTER ACE sim (**www.zone.com**) by participating in a tournament in which the best pilots in the virtual skies would get an opportunity to try their hands at combat in the real skies. When all was said and done, three of the top four slots had gone to *CGW* sim writers, with Tom "Thunk" Basham in first place, Robin "Sandman" Kim in second, and yours truly, Denny "Mitty" Atkin, in fourth. We'd proven we were experts in the simulations realm, but how would we fare at the real thing?

EXPERT ADVICE Denny shakes hands with Ed "Rolex" Britzius after their successful sortie; Rolex is qualified in the T-34, T-33, F-86D, F-102, and F-106.

BRIEFING

We arrived bright and early for our preflight briefing. Our sortie would involve three T-34A Mentor trainers. Thunk had flown the day before, so Sandman and I were joined by Robert "Wings" MacKay of MicroWings. (If you have any interest in civilian sims, be sure to check out this useful organization at **www.microwings.com**.) Our backseat safety pilots, who would take off, land, offer advice, and keep us from doing anything stupid, were Mike "Fins" Finley, an A-10 veteran who flew over Iraq after Desert Storm; Steve "Clipper" Havas, whose 22,000+ flying hours included time in planes ranging from the F-89J to the F-102 to the C130; and Ed "Rolex" Britzius, with over 18,000 flying hours in craft ranging from the F-86D to the F-106.

The experience of veteran pilots like Rolex, who had flown low escort for U-2 spy planes during the Cuban missile crisis, builds confidence in the safety of the Sky Warriors experience. In addition to being briefed on how to handle the aircraft, we were also issued parachutes and versed in basic bailout procedures. Thus far, the Sky Warriors aircraft have performed an equal number of takeoffs and landings; the parachutes, happily, have yet to be needed.

Fins led our combat briefing. Never mind our sim-based knowledge of

▸▸▸Continued on pg 302

ON THE RADAR

A few years back, Electronic Arts released SEAL TEAM, a squad-level combat game based on jungle warfare in Southeast Asia that was so realistic it had to be categorized as a "soldier simulation." Now Jane's Combat Simulations is thinking of doing a modern-technology sequel. Interested gamers can send suggestions on what they'd like to see in a modern version to jharris@ea.com.

Sim vs. Reality

Sky Warriors Brings an Ace PC Pilot Down to Earth

I have been an avid flight sim player for more than 10 years, but until Sky Warriors I had never even been inside the cockpit of a real airplane. Despite this total lack of real-world experience, I was fairly confident I would know exactly what I was doing once I took the controls. Further, I actually harbored fantasies of progressing so rapidly through the exercises that I would be able to move onto scenarios normally reserved for subsequent sessions. To say that my extreme excitement had clouded my judgment would be a laughable understatement.

In the end, after both the T-34 and my high-flying expectations were brought safely back down to earth, I had accomplished no more than any typical Sky Warriors first-timer. Fortunately, this did not stop me from having far more fun than I'd thought possible and, in the process, gaining some insights into the similarities and differences between PC flight simulations and real-world flying.

CONTROL COMPLEX

Although the feel and placement of the flight controls in the Mentor do not match my PC's peripherals, I quickly adapted to them because I knew how they worked. Sims like AIR WARRIOR and FLIGHT UNLIMITED had taught me how to finesse the stick, so straight and level formation flying was a snap.

Maintaining position during a bank proved tougher, but was nonetheless manageable (after a few false starts) once I got a handle on the stick's feedback and its greater sensitivity in pitch than in roll.

Only in hindsight did I realize how close to my expectations the T-34's "flight model" really was. It exhibited the same fluid, well-damped feel I look for in a good PC sim. Even the accelerated stall I accidentally entered while pulling hard for a shot at Denny played out just as I would have expected: My turn rate suddenly dropped to zero as the plane started shaking, but picked up right where it left off once I eased off the stick enough to recover. It was a heartening vindication that the standards I use for judging flight models—which were previously based only on sim experience, readings, films, and talks with pilots—jibed reasonably well with reality.

MIND OVER BODY

Once we got into the mock dogfights, my mind felt right at home, while my body struggled to keep up. As considerations of relative energy states, positional advantage, and lead/lag/pure pursuit curves bounced around in my brain—

> **"Once we got into the mock dogfights, my mind felt right at home, while my body struggled to keep up."**

ENTER SANDMAN Robin "Sandman" Kim checks out the hardware for the most realistic sim he's ever flown.

exactly as if I were playing a WWII flight sim — the rest of me was deluged with unfamiliar stimuli. Actually feeling the hard rolls and Gs was an awesome experience. I was able to avoid blacking out or getting tunnel vision under heavy loads by tensing my leg and abdominal muscles — practicing this while driving my car the week before no longer seemed so silly. Alas, the protestations of my stomach under negative Gs had no corresponding remedy. I will never look at "neggies" in flight sims the same way again!

While the tactics I picked up playing air-combat sims served me well overall, my sim-flying experience did hinder me in a couple of ways. First, I initially had a tendency to focus too much on my instruments (even when I had a bandit on my tail!) since I rely so heavily on them in sims. Steve "Clipper" Havas, the pilot in the back seat, reminded me repeatedly to keep my head out of the cockpit. Second, I frequently underestimated the inertia of the plane in turns, causing me to roll out a few degrees beyond a perfect shot lineup. Clipper kept telling me when to start the roll, but I often waited a bit longer, thinking I knew better than the guy in back who had tens of thousands of flight hours under his belt. Eventually, I learned better. He also identified a flaw in my fighting style that had always plagued me in sim combat: I tend to fly aggressively toward the bandit when I should head for a superior lag position at "the elbow" (directly behind the bandit and within weapons range).

BRIEF INTERLUDE Veteran A-10 pilot Mike "Fins" Finley briefs us on lag pursuit.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

The most surprising thing to me about dogfighting in a real plane was how easy it was to tell what was going on. I always knew exactly which way I was looking, based on head orientation and peripheral vision, and had a better feel for distances, closure rates, and aspect angles than in any sim I have played. Visibility down past the side of the nose during High Yo-Yos was excellent, about on par with WARBIRDS, and superior to most jet sims with their screen-hogging instrument panels. Also, by simply leaning forward a few inches and twisting, I could easily look directly behind me, even with a five-point harness on. Looking around did get more difficult when loading up the Gs in a tight turn, but then my neck muscles could be stronger.

Sky Warriors was an experience I will never forget. As a flight-sim junkie, I was able to take away from it not only some priceless memories, but a newfound appreciation for just how realistic sims have become. And they will only get better.

How Real Can You Get?

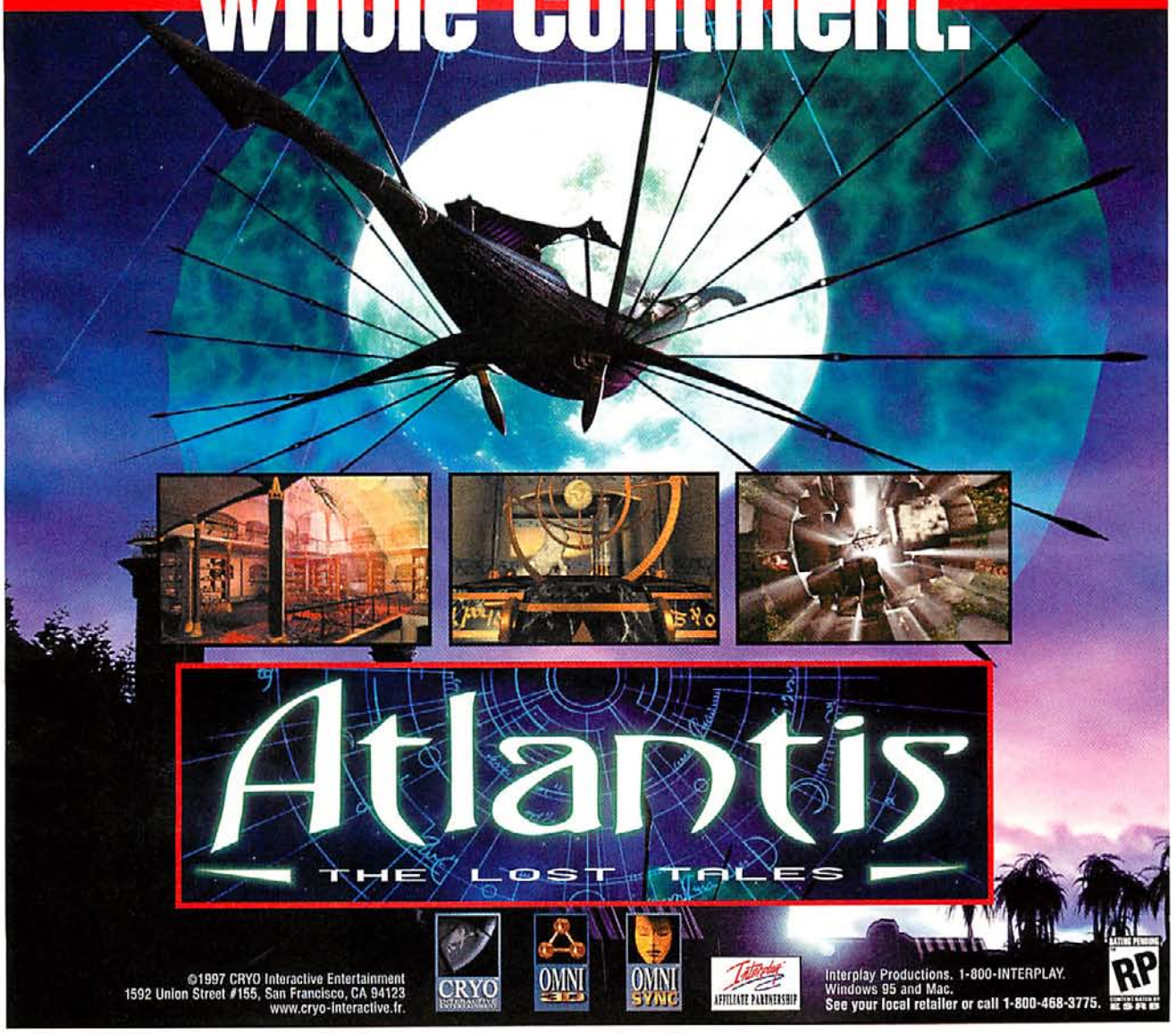
After you finally get a taste of visual range dogfighting and examine how it compares to sims, an obvious question arises: How realistic can PC air-combat sims ultimately become? Flight and systems modeling clearly have the potential to be 100 percent accurate someday, and the feel conveyed by a good force feedback joystick, throttle, and rudder pedal combination can bring you surprisingly close to the real thing. "Seat of the pants" inputs, however, are impossible to simulate on a simple PC. Flying a sim is harder than it should be without this source of information, but most sim pilots eventually learn to use visual cues as substitutes for these physical stimuli. I believe the limits of proficiency for this can approach reality, but only if sim designers help gamers make this translation by providing easy access to key data such as airspeed and aircraft attitude.

The biggest disadvantage of PC flight sims is the comparatively poor situational awareness they provide with their cockpit view systems. SVGA-graphics resolutions degrade visual acuity and peripheral vision, and cost-effective VR headsets are not yet available to do proper head tracking. It's currently impossible to give the kind of situational awareness you get in a real cockpit.

Sim designers (and gamers) seem divided into two camps along a familiar line: form versus function. Those who emphasize a realistic look tend to rely on "virtual cockpit" panning views, while those who focus on giving the gamer a realistic amount of information are willing to accept a more artificial appearance, such as in AIR WARRIOR's large set of overlapping, wide-angle fixed views (shamelessly duplicated in WARBIRDS, FIGHTER SQUADRON, and JANE'S F-15).

The hope is that one day, increasing screen resolutions and continued innovation will bring the two sides together in a system that not only looks real, but also provides a realistic field of view, well-defined images that indicate target facing and closure rates at realistic distances, a means to communicate precisely in which direction you're looking, and a simple and intuitive way to search for and track targets.

Some people lose their car keys. These people lost a whole continent.



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RATING PENDING
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Uncover the mysteries of an advanced civilization in this epic game of adventure. Breathtaking visuals. Exotic locations. Plot twists and intrigue. All to be found in Atlantis.

Continued from pg 298

Immelmans, Split-Ss, and other maneuvers. We were going to start with the basics—High Yo-Yos, lead turns, and lag turns. There were no bruised egos—when Chuck Yeager flew Sky Warriors a few years back, he had to start at the same stage. Besides, even the most experienced sim pilots will find that the physical sensations and situational awareness in a real plane add so much to the equation that things work very differently from sim flying.

THE WILD BLUE

We suited up, headed out to the flight line, and boarded our T-34As. Despite the small size of the ex-military trainers, the cockpits were fairly roomy. The bubble canopies afforded a superb view (canopy frames, so obtrusive in games like WARBIRDS, can easily be looked around). When you fly with Sky Warriors, you control only the stick and rudder; after an expensive incident with a blown engine a few years back, the group decided to allow the safety pilot to handle the throttle.

After takeoff, we made a nontypical run over downtown Atlanta to fly formation with a banner-towing Super Cub. This proved quite challenging for the safety pilots, trying to fly close formation at full flaps while the T-34s hung on a stall so as not to leave the full-throttle Super Cub in our trails. In our later flying, we could maintain formation with very small (0.5 to 1 inch) stick inputs; but during this low-speed maneuver, I could see the control stick moving through a 7- to 8-inch range.

After we broke off and cleaned up the airplane, the safety pilots put us in formation and passed off the sticks to the front-seaters. Because it's not glamorous (unless the Thunderbirds or Blue Angels are doing it), formation flying is neglected in most sims—SABRE ACE being the notable exception. Still, it's extremely challenging and exciting in its own right. Hanging a few feet off the wingtip of another T-34, you keep your eyes locked on your lead plane while making subtle adjustments with the stick. If Rolex wasn't snowing me about the quality of my performance for a first-time formation pilot, apparently I'd learned a bit of joystick finesse in all my years of sim flying. The most surprising thing was how much easier it was to fly in very tight formation than in combat spread.

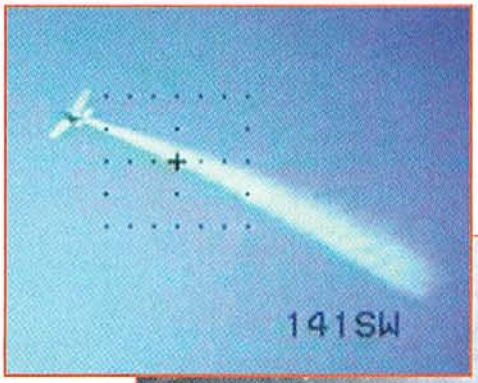
FIGHT'S ON!

Once we reached the exercise area, we flew in a trail formation, taking practice shots. (For less experienced pilots, this guarantees some kill video.) Each T-34 is equipped with a laser and laser-detection devices. Pressing the joystick trigger fires the laser and plays a sampled machine-gun sound. If you hit the other plane, a smoke system triggers and a kill siren plays in the target pilot's headset to let him know he just died.

After the practice, the fight was on. We took turns going one-on-one, sticking primarily to the High and Low Yo-Yos we'd been trained in. There's not much of a vertical element in the first phase of Sky Warriors training, so we never got close to the 3,000 foot hard deck. Even with the gentle beginning sortie, combat was exhilarating. Even the best sim experience can't match the adrenaline rush of pulling Gs as you slide in 600 feet behind another aircraft, press the trigger, and see the satisfying trail of smoke that signifies a kill.

One big difference from sim flight was the use of the body as a cue for staying in the plane's performance envelope. The difference between 3 Gs and 4 Gs was quite pronounced as my body was pressed back into the seat; and a slight tickle in the stick warned of accelerated stalls when I pulled too hard into a turn.

For about $700, you get a military-style briefing in combat tactics, approximately 1.25 hours of flight time, and a video of the experience with external, gunsight, and "hero cam" views. It's an expensive experience, but it's one you'll never forget.



THREE VIEWS TO A KILL
Each Sky Warriors T-34 is equipped with three cameras: a gun camera, the "hero cam," and a forward-looking fisheye camera.

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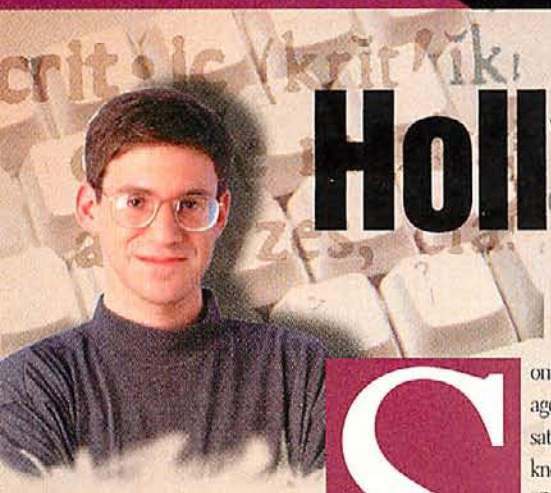

Hollywood Hooey

Why Games Should Not Try To Be Movies

> "The problem with FMV games is that as movies, they are second-rate games, and as games, they are second-rate movies."

Some 15 years ago, my father sat me on his knee and said, "Son, I know how you enjoy those video games of yours, but you ain't seen nothing yet. Think PAC-MAN is really something? One day video games won't be about a big dot eating little dots; they'll have pictures of actual people moving around and doing things. It'll be like a movie." To which I responded, "No! You can't make a game that way! It wouldn't be any good!"

And life being what it is, a thing of ironies and reversals, it has come to pass that we were both right.

TWO THUMBS DOWN

Multimedia games have been with us for several years now. The first one I remember was DAVID WOLF: SECRET AGENT, by Dynamix, which interspersed crude video cut-scenes in the crude action sequences. If you count animated cut-scenes, you can stretch the definition to include the animated interludes between mazes in PAC-MAN (and my comparison of this game to DAVID WOLF irritates some Dynamix folks even today). Ever since then, the quality of the video has been improving—in terms of frames-per-second and the like—but the games in which full-motion video is used are still, by and large, dismal.

For starters, filming video sequences for a game requires that you hire actors, and the best actors generally go where the best money is. Except for a few slumming visionaries who have been willing to participate in a game for the hell of it, the *dramatis personae* featured in games tends to be a Who's Who of has-beens, never-weres, and never-gonna-bes. Sometimes a game surprises you with good casting, but then, sometimes an airplane crash surprises you by yielding survivors. But, the odds against that happening are enormous.

But it's not just the casts' fault. Nor is it the amateurish dialogue, which gamers have trained themselves to ignore, or the wallowing in stereotype and cliché. (God save us from another FMV game featuring a trench coat, a whiskey bottle, a voiceover, and a saxophone.) The thing that really makes FMV games dismal is that, as games, they are either utterly unimproved or actively worsened by the presence of the FMV sequences.

CUT-SCENE Now standard industry lingo for a non-interactive sequence, the term came from LucasArts, which coined it for MANIAC MANSION; but there the cut-scenes were animated, not video.

Into the first category fall all the games that would play exactly the same if you removed the FMV. Hasbro's new versions of BATTLESHIP and OTHELLO, for instance, or the enhanced version of SIMCITY, don't benefit materially from FMV. Gameplay is slower and jerkier, and all for what? So you can see your opponent's OTHELLO disks flipped by some ham dressed up as Leonardo DaVinci?

The second category includes all the games that exist solely as experiments in FMV. The earliest was VOYEUR, which Phillips is still peddling, all these years later, as a PC CD-ROM. Here, you direct your "telescope" to peer into your choice of a few dozen windows in a house across the road. Which video scene plays depends upon which window you choose.

The most recent entry into this category is Any River's A FORK IN THE TALE, in which you have to click on icons superimposed on video scenes to select which plot branch (that is to say, which video scene) to visit next. Inside a given scene, there is no opportunity to interact or, frankly, to do anything at all. It's like pressing Play on a really crummy VCR that contains a lousy, one-minute-long videotape; then doing it again, and again, and again.

THE SLICK AND THE DAD

When I show my father some of the latest games, he never misses a chance to say, "I told you so." And so he did. Games today often contain video sequences, and those sequences are sort of like movies. The problem is that as movies, they are second-rate games, and as games, they are second-rate movies.

There is something to be said for the second-rate, of course, particularly in a medium's early years. No one today compliments the camerawork or the writing in the average silent picture, but we recognize that it was a phase the movie industry had to go through. Gaming will go through this phase and emerge the better for it. But, oh, how I wish it were over! I think even my father would agree that another 15 years is just too long to wait.

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Does Microsoft Know Games?

If You Had Doubts, Take a Look at Its New Strategy Lineup

For years it was easy to deride Microsoft's misguided forays into the gaming field—although it left you feeling strangely guilty, sort of like making fun of the Polish Air Force in WWII. While MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS and MICROSOFT BASKETBALL showed some improvement, clunkers like DEADLY TIDE made you wonder whether the folks from Redmond had learned any lasting lessons.

Of course, Microsoft is as determined as ever to dominate computer entertainment, just as they have productivity software, and they've continued to throw their formidable resources at the problem. One thing's for sure, if anyone can afford to buy a clue in the computer-gaming industry, it's Bill Gates.

HOSTILE TAKEOVER?

Once Windows 95 was established—albeit with a lot of pain—as the new frontier in gaming platforms, the next item on the Microsoft agenda was to break into the lucrative strategy genre. However, instead of using internal development to try to compete with big guns like Westwood, Blizzard, SSI, and MicroProse, Microsoft wisely pursued free agents with a vengeance. Atomic Games, of course, signed first, and CLOSE COMBAT did well enough to sire a sequel. Then Microsoft signed Ensemble Studios, which teamed up with a blast from the past, Bruce Shelley (of RAILROAD TYCOON and SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION fame), to produce AGE OF EMPIRES, due this fall. To complete its three-pronged attack, Microsoft snapped up the rights to distribute SSG's REACH FOR THE STARS II, which updates the spaceploitation classic for modern processors and Windows 95.

Of the three games, the one most likely to release first should be CLOSE COMBAT II, which appears to be on target for November. The irony is that despite the relatively short development time, CLOSE COMBAT II will almost certainly be Atomic's best game since OPERATION CRUSADER (Avalon Hill). Where the WORLD AT WAR system, in retrospect, seemed to be stuck in a holding pattern after CRUSADER, CLOSE COMBAT II vastly improves on the shortcomings of its progenitor.

The Arnhem campaign is much more vividly portrayed here than in Atomic's previous MARKET-GARDEN (360 Pacific). The graphics are nothing short of superb: detailed road nets; multilayered buildings; new, crisp artwork for soldiers and tanks alike. What's impressive is that the pretty pictures don't compromise the authentic feel of the battle. Everything is so perfectly placed that you hardly question the location of the drop zones or the placement of the snipers.

The psychological models for the individual soldiers are back, but with some twists. Heroic feats have been added, and the entire command control system

> "If anyone can afford to buy a clue in the computer gaming industry, it's Bill Gates."

BRIEFINGS

A True Brainstorm? Ever wonder what happened to the guys from QQP? A lot of them have turned up at Brainstorm Entertainment. Rod Olsen is

crafting an alternative to his BATTLES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC, with the working title similar to TOKYO EXPRESS (as far as we know, Avalon Hill still owns the copyright to that one). Andrew Visscher, meanwhile, has nearly completed another epic card game for Windows 95, tentatively titled SOLITAIRE'S EMPIRE—with over 200 solitaire games!

CEO Manny Granillo (designer of DRAGON LORE and LEGIONS) plans to hit the strategy market in a big way. The upcoming PLATOON LEADER covers small-unit WWII conflict in a manner similar to SSI's venerable COMPUTER AMBUSH. It's playable in either traditional turn-based or initiative-based fashion, à la OVER THE REICH. In addition to the psychological modeling that has become de rigueur in squad-level games since the

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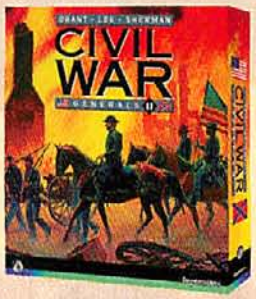

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FROM THE CREATORS OF ROBERT E. LEE: CIVIL WAR GENERAL

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #366

BRIEFINGS

commercial success of CLOSE COMBAT, PLATOON LEADER also has a great deal of its own chrome. If you like Panzerfausts, for instance, you have four types from which to choose—provided that you have enough munitions points to spend.

It's a little too early to tell if the fuzzy logic used for the AI will become the WWII version of BIGGER BLUE or just soggy lint, but at least the design team is trying a different tack. With plenty of famous scenarios (*Remagen* is pretty tense) and a distinct role-playing feel, this one looks like a real sleeper.

Dark Comic Images

Coinciding with the release of MicroProse's GUARDIANS: AGENTS OF JUSTICE, Wildstorm

CLOSE COMBAT II If you think this is just a recap of the first, I've got a nice Arnhem bridge to sell you.

seems more fluid and less predictable than before. The new, improved interface lets you move around more quickly to issue orders. Best of all, there's finally a zoom function, so you can actually see the SVGA-graphics soldiers under your command when your eyes get tired from playing until 3 a.m.

There are many more things I could compliment—not the least of which is the improved line-of-sight and field of fire implementation—but what I like most about CLOSE COMBAT II has little to do with improvements in realism or technical issues.

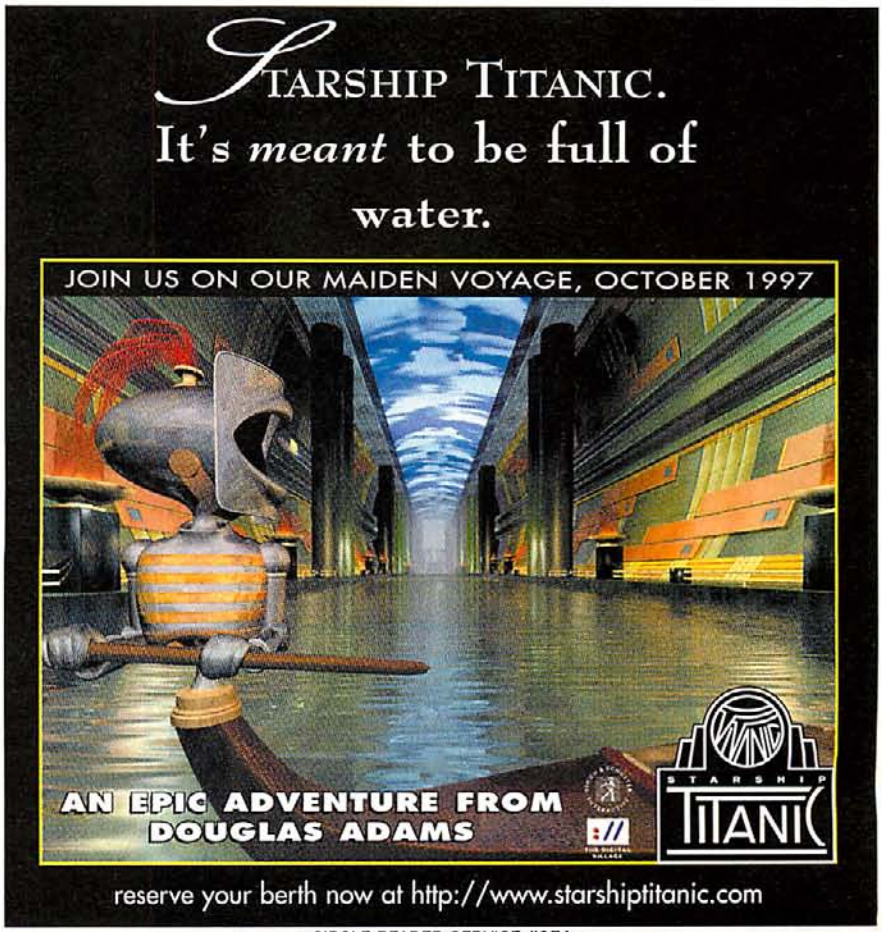
My big problem with the first CLOSE COMBAT was that it wasn't much of a *game*. And even when it's considered a combat simulation, the concept didn't always work. Too often, CLOSE COMBAT ran under its own steam, as it didn't seem to make any difference *what* decisions you made—hardly incentive for replay.

CLOSE COMBAT II, however, has a more interesting historical situation than its predecessor, which translates into better, more engaging scenarios. The AI seems more adaptable, and there's even a "design-your-own" option for online battles. Finally, there is an overarching campaign that allows you to take the role of the paratroopers landing at Arnhem or the Allied forces trying to link up with them from the southwest. Throw in a good mix of historically plausible alternative scenarios, and you have one potentially great wargame.

It's wonderful that Atomic Games has found its creative second wind. As Atomic and Microsoft continue to push each other, gamers will only benefit. My only question is this: When does this system get translated to the North African desert?

RISE AND FALL

As you probably noticed from this month's sneak preview of AGE OF EMPIRES, this game is *not* just CIVILIZATION with a real-time twist. There are some similarities, but AGE OF EMPIRES has its own distinctive style. Focusing on the ancient world—and pulling it off—is a stroke of genius, because all of the other games that have tried to simulate this time period, even



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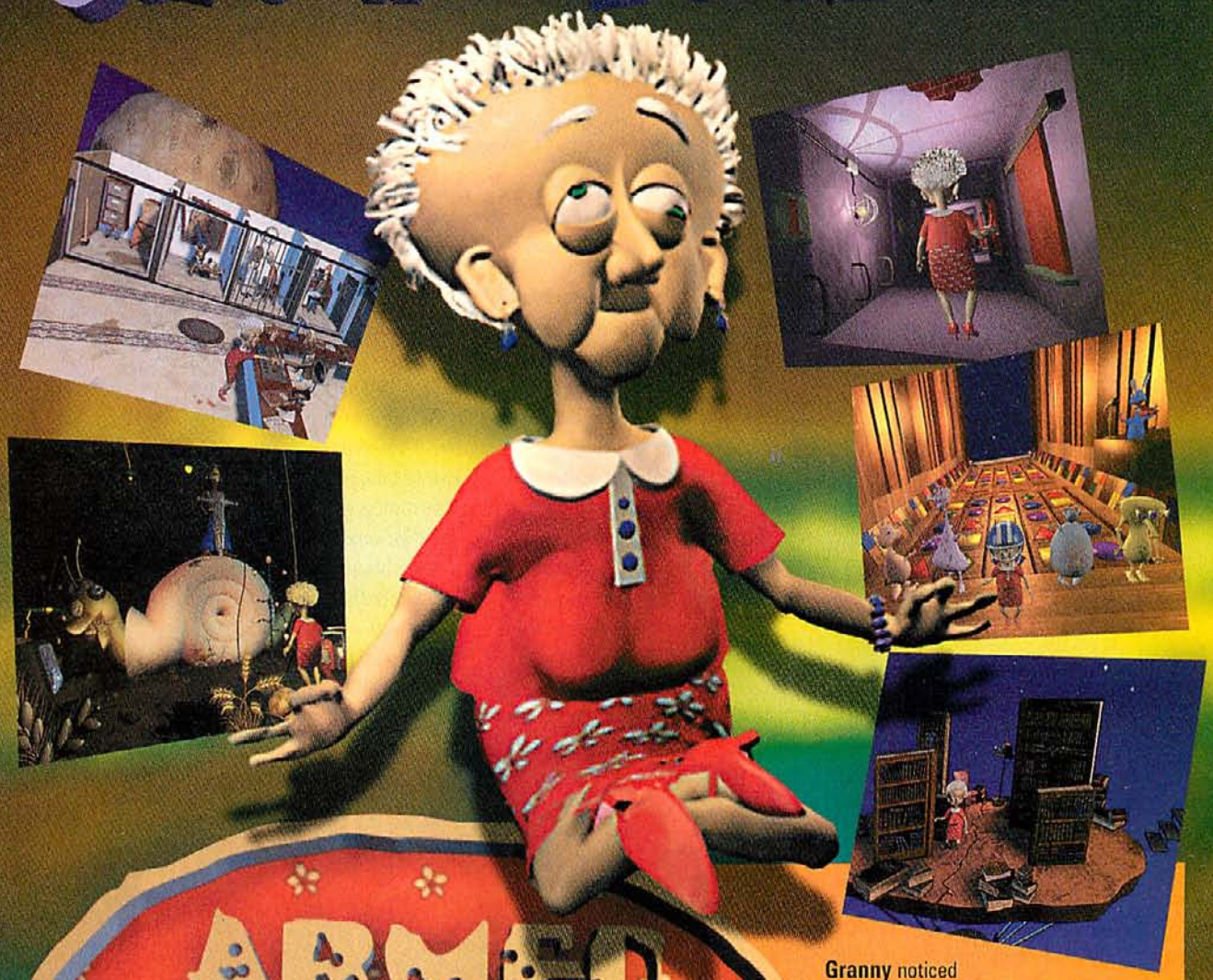

ARMED & Delirious

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #126

BRIEFINGS

Comics will issue a graphic novel featuring characters from the game. It's a natural, given the dark nature of the superhero world that Steve Barcia and company have created. No word yet on whether this will be a solo collector's item or a continuing series, but given

Wildstorm's history—particularly the online comic *Siege*—our bet is that it will be anything but dull.

If you're interested in related gaming/comics items, you should check out *WildStorms: The Expandable Super-Hero Collectible Card Game*, by Aegis Entertainment, a.k.a. Wildstorm. In addition to some clever variations on the timeworn collectible-card theme, you'll find a lot of your favorite superheroes. Susan Storm—the Invisible Girl from the Fantastic 4—

Avalon Hill's ADVANCED CIVILIZATION, have had significant flaws.

There are a lot of nice touches in AGE OF EMPIRES. I particularly like the fact that you can win economically as well as through combat, so that play doesn't degenerate into another C&C clone. It's certainly more suited for a quick game during lunch than is CIV, and the terrain editor is one of the best I've seen this year.

When I first saw AGE OF EMPIRES months ago, I wasn't particularly impressed. But Bruce Shelley and Ensemble Studios kept at it, and they have one of the freshest titles of the year. My main concern is how well the AI will hold up, since most gamers still play the majority of their games solo. If that isn't a problem, and the dynamic differences between the various tribes are fleshed out in the final design, then this will be one of the contenders for best strategy game.

Let me put one rumor to rest, however. Bruce Shelley is *not* the patron saint of turn-based gamers, any more than Sid Meier is. Keep in mind that RAILROAD TYCOON was real-time many years before it was the height of gaming fashion, and count yourselves lucky that Bruce can still put his best design pitch over the plate. So read the sneak preview already (grin)!

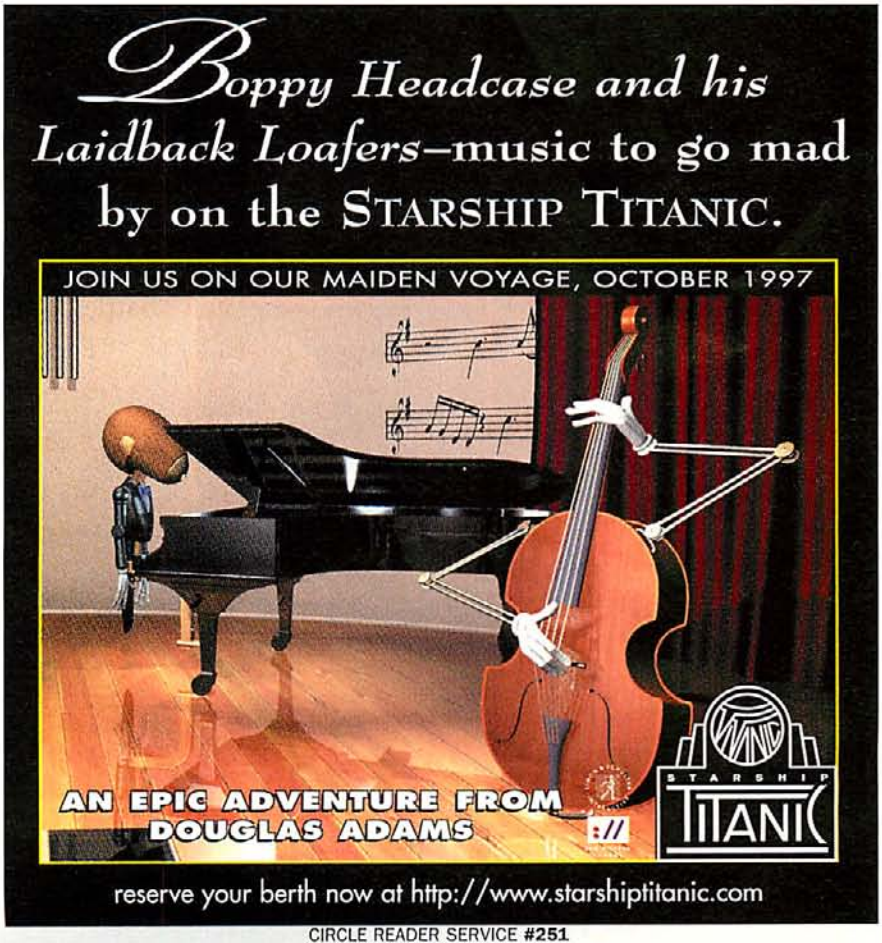
MORE THAN MOO?

Long before MASTER OF ORION was even a twinkle in Steve Barcia's eye, SSG almost single-handedly invented the space exploration/exploitation genre with REACH FOR THE STARS. For years, the fans of this *CGW* Hall of Fame game have clamored for a sequel. It seems likely that REACH FOR THE STARS II will debut on Windows 95 sometime in late spring 1998.

Gameplay looks to be similar to the original, in that you balance economics, diplomacy, military force, and exploration. As with other games of this type, you begin on a single world and branch out through the galaxy as fast as your research (and nerve) can take you. You're probably thinking that you've heard this before. Currently, MOO II rules the gaming galaxy, and PAX IMPERIA looms large for this fall. Yet REACH FOR THE STARS II is probably the closest thing Microsoft has to a sure hit.

AGE OF EMPIRES Now you can execute hostile takeovers of the ancient world.

The reason? Simply that Roger Keating does the best AI in the business. With an extra year to improve on the



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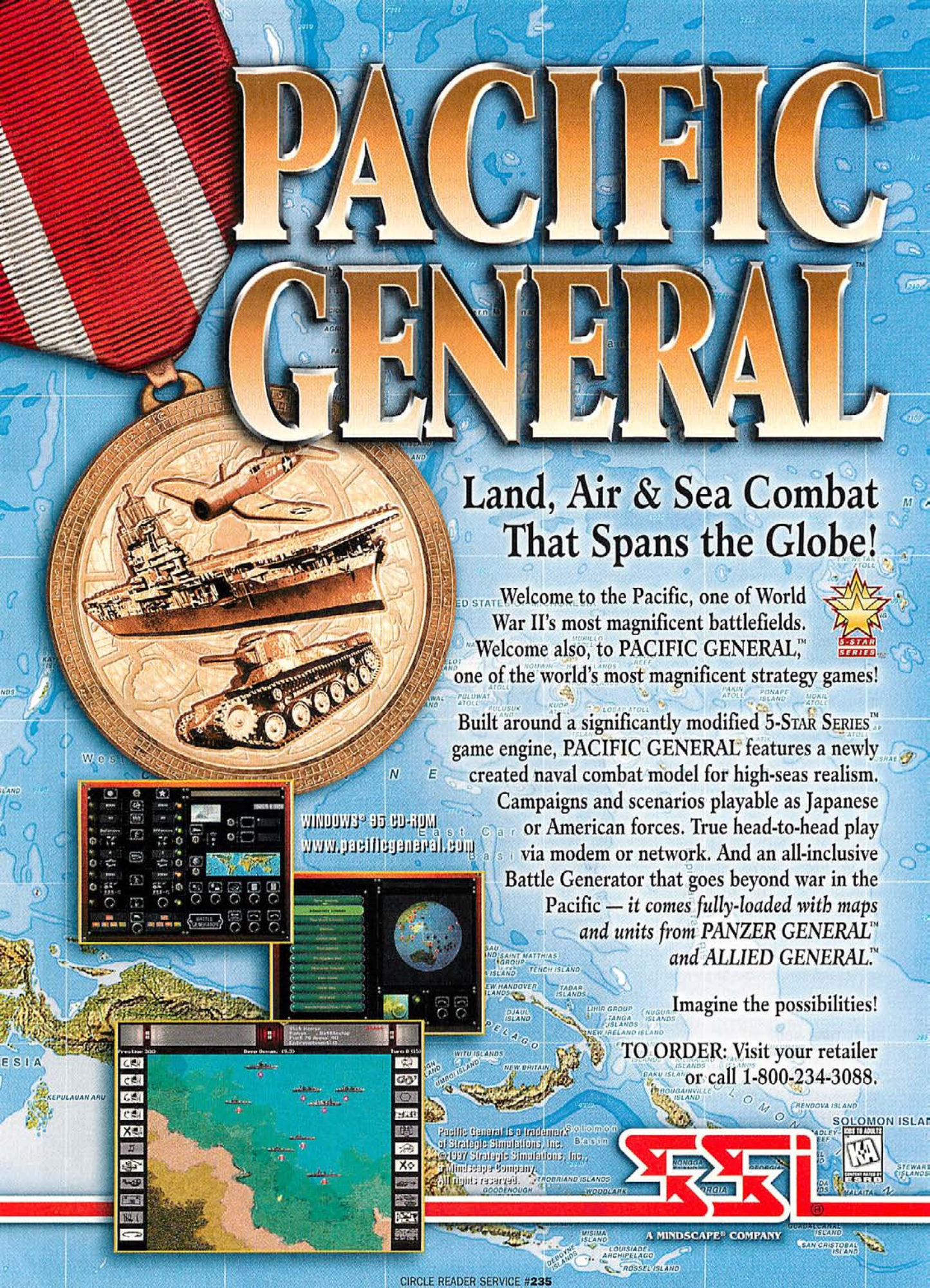
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BRIEFINGS

looks a bit too Kate Moss-like for me, but she's a powerful character in the game nonetheless.

Stormy Weather

Seems the Marines won't be hitting the beaches just yet: Interactive Magic's SEMPER FI will be delayed past fall—perhaps even until February 1998. In addition to the usual interface tweaking that all strategy games go through these days, it seems that the AI is undergoing a complete overhaul to ensure that it can handle the subtleties of combined arms. I wouldn't worry too much, since the developers, Stanley Associates, have shown that they'd rather take the time to do the game right—a policy that proved a major benefit to their last game, WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN (Avalon Hill).

REACH FOR THE STARS II Bill Gates, tired of ruling only Earth, expands his domain to include the entire galaxy.

algorithms, Keating and Co. will almost certainly provide a tougher computer opponent than that of MOO II or PAX IMPERIA II. And if the multiplayer code we've seen in WARLORDS III is any indication, playing REACH FOR THE STARS II over the Internet could make you give up on MOO II's stodgy multiplayer mode forever.

In any case, the space strategy subgenre should be wide open for REACH FOR THE STARS II by the time it releases. If this sequel is half as elegant and enticing as the first, maybe even Charles Ardai will have a science-fiction game he can enjoy.

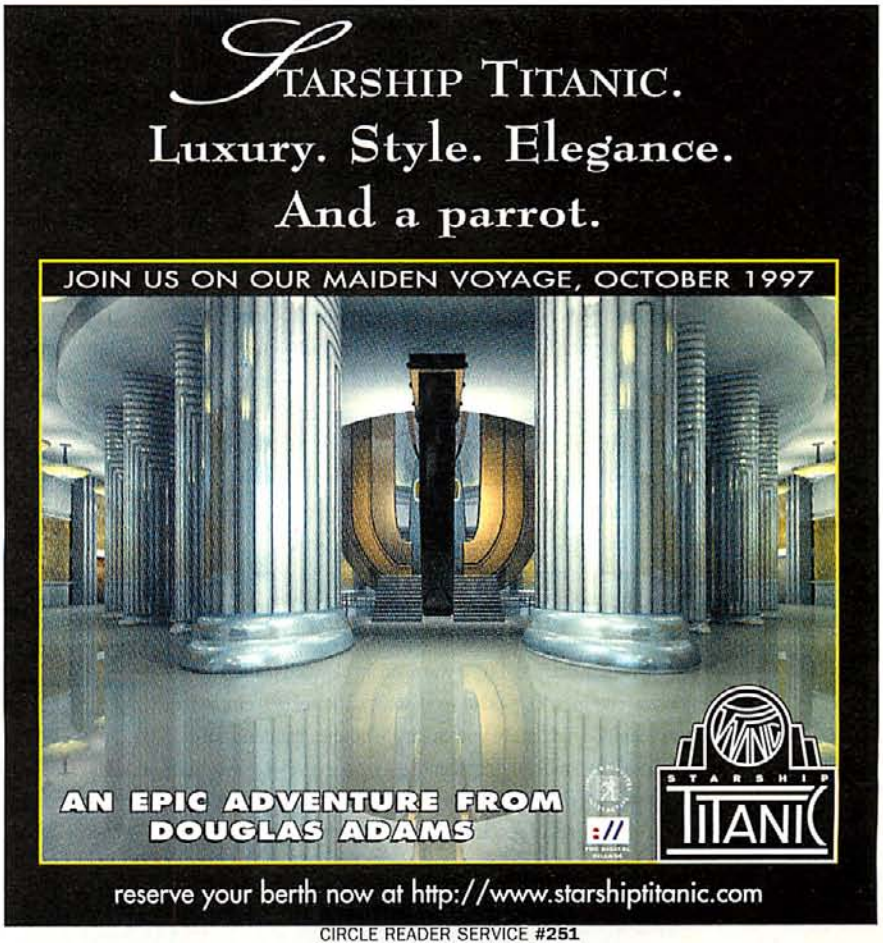
Just to note in passing: SSG continues to pay at least lip service to the Macintosh. Right now, the official comment is that a Mac version of REACH FOR THE STARS II *is* planned. Microsoft had no comment whatsoever on this subject, so draw your own conclusions.

DIVIDE & CONQUER

Like any team wading successfully through the free-agent waters, Microsoft has benefited from a gambler's sense of good timing. REACH FOR THE STARS II was one of three SSG games planned for release within a year. Because Broderbund already had WARLORDS III, and SSI ended up with DECISIVE BATTLES OF WWII: THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE (see the review in this issue), SSG decided it didn't want all its gaming eggs in one basket, and began negotiations with Microsoft. Even though it's committed to real-time strategy games, Microsoft, to the company's credit, quickly signed the real-time classic.

The timing of CLOSE COMBAT II could hardly be better. Its ship date hits around the same time as PANZER GENERAL II. Gamers are likely to buy both, so that they can have a "serious" *and* a "beer & pretzels" wargame. There isn't anything that comes close to AGE OF EMPIRES, so Microsoft has a big marketing edge in a glutted real-time strategy season.

Conspiracy theorists will no doubt liken Microsoft's upcoming gaming success to the advent of fluoridated water, mass hypnosis, and orbital mind-control lasers. But I can't see myself losing sleep over Bill Gates' impending conquest of the strategy gaming genre. Maybe after a few months of playing CLOSE COMBAT II, AGE OF EMPIRES, and REACH FOR THE STARS II until 3 a.m., I'll stop to consider the implications.



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #251

STRATEGY & TIPS

MDK

The World's Most Complete Killing Manual

by Thierry Nguyen

Okay, Kurt, saving the Earth from the Stream Riders is going to be a hard task. To aid you, I've written this document. It includes: details on some weapons not covered in the original manual; intelligence and tips for minecrawlers four and five in particular (since one and two were already covered, and three isn't so hard); detailed methods of killing the drivers of the third, fourth, and fifth minecrawler; and a guide to killing Gunter in the final battle. I didn't cover Gunter's homeworld because it is pretty straightforward, and the hardest part is the actual match with Gunter. Let's start with the weapons.

SURF'S UP During the snowboard sequences, move left and right in order to avoid their fire. Jump on "Groovies" to get rid of the turrets with cow bombs.

WEAPONS EVALUATION

The Whites of Their Eyes

Your basic sniper bullet is quite useful, as it deals decent damage and comes in unlimited quantities. The first upgrade is the homing bullet, which tracks whatever was under the cross hairs when you fired. This is effective for targeting those snipers that stay in one place to aim and then move. Their main disadvantage is their less-than-stellar turning speed, so don't expect them to go around corners every time.

The next upgrade is the sniper grenade. Since it explodes, it's useful for times when you can't get a precise shot; the explosion is sure to hit something. It's also good for tightly packed groups. This also comes in a homing version, making it even more lethal.

Then comes the mortar, which is harder to use because it bounces and employs a timer. It's hard to hit someone directly with it, since the bouncing makes it a bit unpredictable, and the timer means the blast is delayed. But, if you're on an elevated platform overlooking enemies, it's good to send down a shower of them. Since it doesn't explode right away, you can try to bounce it around corners and use it as a makeshift camera.

Finally comes the Bones Airstrike. This is best for saturating immobile groups of enemies or generators. Since Bones takes a while to get there, even slow-moving targets, like tanks, might have moved before he arrives. Save Bones for aliens in trenches or turrets, or for a cluster of generators, and it will cut down on the enemies you have to face.

Up Close and Personal

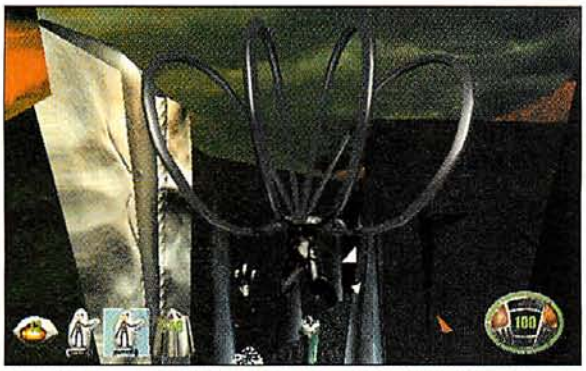
The weapons not covered in depth in the manual are the Thumper and the Twister. The Thumper is a large hammer that causes a small earthquake, which disorients and damages your opponents. But it can damage you as well, so the best advice is to jump around with the parachute once you trigger it.

The Twister is something totally new, and is a great area-effect weapon. It simply creates a tornado of energy that spins out rays in various directions, which in turn damage all enemies in the general area. The grunts will be killed while the larger ones will be badly hurt. Save this weapon for crowded areas, and then pick off any stragglers that survive the onslaught.

LEVEL TRICKS

Snowboards Away!

The hardest part about the fourth minecrawler is the snowboarding sequence. Make sure you weave from side to side and slow down. If



LEAPS AND BOUNDS To reach the high door in level five, jump from the tallest airlift here, in order to get the airtime needed.

you want to get all the red bones for a power-up, just press down to apply the brake and slow yourself so you can weave to the bone. When you need to fight enemies on snowboards, just weave left and right in order to avoid their fire. And whenever you see a higher platform, jump to it. The platforms hold "Groovies," which will drop cows on the enemy turrets to clear your path. If you don't, you won't be able to take out the turrets because your gun isn't up to the task.

Cars and Alarms

The fifth level has three main trouble spots: The area with the enormous door, the tall building with the cars scooting around, and the three lifts near the end. For the gigantic door, you need to snipe, use the Thumper, and be maneuverable. On ground level, proceed to the door on the right to get the World's Smallest Nuclear Explosion. There will be one massive guard at the door; avoid his fire, since one shot takes away twenty hitpoints. Then, from the doorway, snipe headshots at the two sleeping guards. Now, go out and proceed to the left doorway. Stand a ways from it, snipe the alarm bot, and then snipe the sleeping guards (if you don't get the alarm, you'll have to fight awake guard bots). Go up the ramp to the second level, kill the generators near you, jump to the other side, and grab that Thumper. Two giant robots will arrive, and that's when you use the Thumper to severely weaken them. Once they're weakened, dispatch them and jump into the hole, kill two more of those big robots, and use the nuke on the lock at the top of the door.

In the area with the cars, first get rid of all the enemies, their alarms, and the drivers of the cars. The cars themselves will be left behind, and can be moved forward by shooting them. Maneuver a car around until it gives you the height to jump onto a platform. Do some platform hopping until you get onto the rail, then walk around. Don't kill the driver of the lone car on the rail yet. Find where you are supposed to jump to, and wait there for the car. Kill the driver so that the car is near the platform you want to get to, otherwise, you'll have to move it around the entire rail, and then move on.

Finally, let's discuss the three lifts area. Once you've killed everyone in the area, jump from the stairs to the shortest lift (the one on the far right). Then, make your way to the tallest lift (on the left) by using the other two. Once you reach the tallest one, turn around, and parachute your way to the door on the other side. If done right, you will barely make it. The key is to start from the highest lift for more air time.

BOSS BITS

Safe in My Goldfish Bowl

The third minecrawler driver is one of the easiest ones (only the first driver is easier). This driver has heard about your previous exploits and has sealed himself in his own personal aquarium. Below him are four "dog generators," and the lid on his tank has four holes. Basically, you have to open the tank by undoing the four bolts in it. The bolts appear only as the driver spins the lid and charges his guns.

First, dispatch the dogs that come out of the generator. When the four bolts light up and start slowing down, switch to sniper mode (as the dogs should have been taken care of by then). Wait until the lid stops spinning, target one bolt in particular, and shoot. It should come off in a single shot. Then, swap out to normal view and avoid the incoming fire. Just repeat this pattern—kill dogs, aim at bolt, shoot bolt, avoid laserfire—and you will succeed in killing this boss.

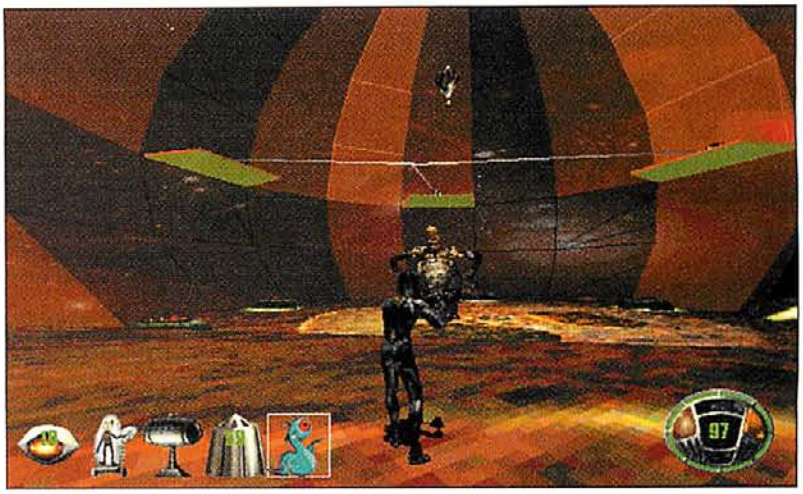
Man the Sub Turrets!

Technically speaking, there is no real driver for the fourth minecrawler. The fourth minecrawler is controlled by some of the smarter

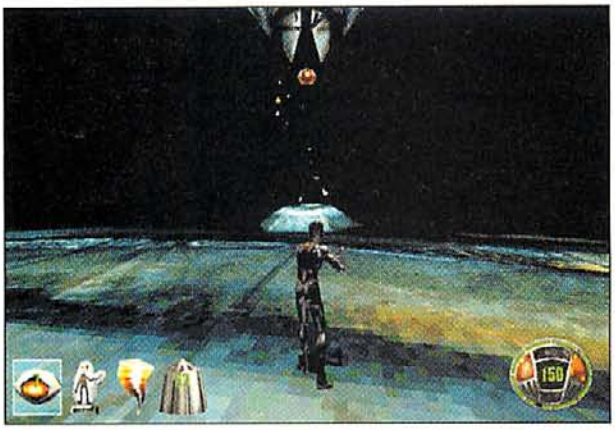
LET'S BOLT Target the bolts quickly when they light up before they fire on you.

aliens inside a submarine, so when you clear out the sub, the minecrawler ceases to exist.

To get into the sub you have to dispatch two annoying "charging snipers" first. Once you get rid of them, the enemy drops a tank on you. After destroying the tank, you'll gain the World's Smallest Nuclear Explosion, which you use to open the sub's hatch door. Then, you'll see one of the machines you have to destroy: a submarine turret. The alien inside is completely encased in armor, so a shot to his head won't work. The only opening is at the bottom of the turret, and the turret floats on top of an airlift. All you have to do is "deliver" some explosives to him. Avoid the explosive balls he chucks at you, and toss grenades into that airlift. They will go into the one hole that is open and injure him. It takes about three or four grenades to kill him. Proceed to the top of the submarine and destroy all the grunts and generators waiting for you. This is where a decoy comes in handy. Finally, follow the snowboarding sequence to the second turret, destroy him as you destroyed the first, and the submarine and minecrawler will be destroyed.



BIG APPETITE Toss the "Gunter Snack" to distract Gunter and grab that nuke behind him.



UPSY-DAISY Toss the grenade into the airlift in order to injure the turret gunners for the fourth minecrawler.

MAN THE CANNONS Shoot these turrets off the dreadnought to get it off your back in the beginning and end of minecrawler five.

Snipe That Dreadnought

You'll see Bones strung up and Gunter relaxing, but this isn't where you face him yet. When you get his attention by taking a pot-shot at him, he closes his chamber and that dreadnought that has been hounding you since the beginning of the level arrives. Just as you will have done earlier in the level, disable the ship by simply shooting off its turrets. The dreadnought will fly by at a distance, which is the perfect time to snipe away, since its shots take a while to reach you. When it passes directly over you, it's time to run and dodge. The dreadnought repeats this pattern of "fire from afar" and "close pass" so just persevere and you will shoot it down, thus destroying the fifth and final minecrawler.

Feed Me!

Your final, mano a mano fight with Gunter isn't a fistfight, it's a game of distraction and dodging. To free Bones, you need to unlock his ropes by using World's Smallest Nuclear Explosions. Yet the nuke is behind Gunter, who is simply too big and powerful for a frontal assault. Instead, jump on the button to conjure a "gunter snack," pick it up and use it near Gunter. He will run to eat it, giving you a chance to slip by, pick up the nuke, and run to a working airlift to unlock a rope. Just repeat this process until Bones is free. Aside from Gunter's one guard alien, the only real worry you have is taking too long (Gunter will attack eventually). Avoid the both of them, free Bones, and then use Bones to finally kill Gunter once and for all. Then, peace will finally be restored.

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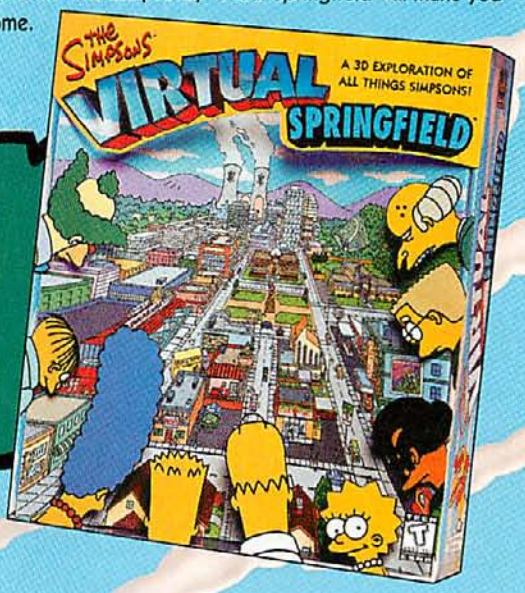

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MATT GROENING

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #358

STRATEGY & TIPS

History of the World

How To Mold History in Your Own Image

by Terry Coleman

Sure, HISTORY OF THE WORLD doesn't quite measure up to the inspired multiplayer dynamics of the boardgame on which it is based—mostly because there are no provisions for LAN or Internet play. Still, it offers strong AI opponents and much faster play. Plus, the computer relieves you of those nagging accounting headaches. With that in mind, here are my Top 10 tips and advice on which empires to play—and which empires to avoid at all costs.

The Victor Writes the History

1. Every game should have six players, even if you have to fill out the ranks with AI empire-builders. Playing with fewer will guarantee a faster finish, but since the computer version plays three to four times faster than cardboard anyway, what's the point?

2. Should you play with seven players? No. Just because something is different on the computer (the boardgame allows for only six players), doesn't make it better. You lose the element of mystery that occurs in those games when no one gets the Mongols—or gets stuck with the Khmers.

3. Use my favorite game bug. One bug in the programming occasionally lets you use the same disaster card twice on an opponent. What a nice problem to have.

4. Stay away from the fortress option. This is important if you want a freewheeling game. Those who desire more defensive-minded games should try RISK!

5. Don't use the silly Preservation of Culture rule. What little historical flavor there is, is thereby lost. Worse, this channels play into too-predictable lines. Besides, you should never become too attached to a monument (see Number 3).

6. Don't fret over lost territory! The game is designed so that empires rise and fall appropriately. You can actually come from behind to win games—even if you end one of the middle turns with *zero* pieces in play—because no one considers you a threat!

7. It's bad to be the front-runner early on. It's often better to pass on the Romans or Persians, so that you get better card picks later.

8. Don't let anyone have a back-to-back turn. For example, sticking someone with Russia the last turn is usually a good bet—unless they just wrapped up the previous turn with Spain or the Mughals. If so, that player would rack up all the points from last turn *plus* the new turn. I once saw a tournament decided this way after five hours of tense play.

9. The game is usually won or lost by how you manage middle empires. This is so true, although it's always tempting to save killer cards for the big empires. The Portuguese are tough with Naval Supremacy and/or Ship Building, and even the Chola benefit from a Treachery or Population Explosion card.

10. Don't underestimate the joys of email play. HISTORY is the perfect game to play a turn before breakfast, or between projects while at work. Be sure that you remember to send diplomatic messages to other players when you send off your saved-game email file to the next opponent. The computer version of HISTORY can't match the boardgame for player interaction, but with an honest effort at back-stabbing, deal-making, and abject whining, it can still be a fun experience.

The Top 10 Empires

1. Britain

Power: 20

The Scoop: This is the one Empire card you never trade away. If you are within 40 of the leader on the last turn and you get Britain, you have a good shot at winning. Having access to every ocean means that you can strike anywhere in the world.

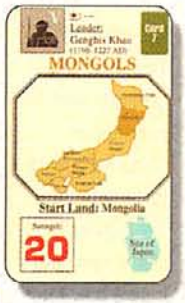
Tips: Keep a Civil Service or Population Explosion card for a couple of extra armies. Don't worry about defense; once you've scored your points, no one can take them away from you.

2. Mongols

Power: 20

The Scoop: While they have fewer pieces in play than the Romans, the Mongols have little quality opposition. These awe-inspiring hordes can strike China, India, Asia, and even Europe, all the while racking up a huge amount of points.

Tips: A Leader or Weaponry card is a must. You should also save a Treachery or Surprise Attack card to remove the Great Wall defense of China.



3. Romans

Power: 25

The Scoop: Why isn't it Number 1? Simple: Rome comes to power too early in the game. Not only do you have potentially tough opposition from the Persians and the Macedonians, if you get this card, you'll also probably be dead last to draw for empires for the rest of the game—a tremendous handicap.

Tips: Double up your best military and technology cards: A Leader combined with Weaponry might bail you out. Do everything to score as many points as possible, otherwise you're doomed.

4. Arabs

Power: 18

The Scoop: By the time the Arabs show up, the Middle East is usually devastated and open for dominance, as is Africa. Shoot for a presence in Europe and India as well, and place fleets carefully (the Red Sea), so that they will last extra turns.

Tips: Be cliché: Revel in a Jihad celebration if you have the card. Otherwise, this versatile empire benefits from almost any event you play.

5. Spain

Power: 15

The Scoop: An oft-underrated empire that can really make hay in the penultimate epoch. Choose your beachheads in the Americas well and you might keep them out of Britain's hands. Stick to the oceans rather than the seas.

Tips: Save a Barbarian card to clear out territory that you can then walk into freely. Fanaticism is appropriate; missionaries historically accompanied Conquistadors.

6. Ottoman Turks

Power: 15

The Scoop: Sort of the poor man's Arabs, this empire benefits from a power vacuum. Go for broke, especially in the Middle East and India. Between Portugal, Spain, and the Mughals, it's likely your empire won't last out the turn.

Tips: A better time for Naval Technology than a Leader card. Use Pestilence; Plague; and, especially, Black Death (only good during this epoch) to soften up your enemies.

7. Macedonia

Power: 15

The Scoop: Only getting 15 pieces makes you appreciate Alexander's genius all the more. Take the traditional route through Asia Minor toward India, but make sure to leave enough of the Persians to slow down the Romans.

Tips: A Leader is obvious, but Elite Troops are even better. The board should also be open enough to get mileage from the Allies card.

8. France

Power: 15

The Scoop:

Though it often gets lost in the British wake, France is a great empire with which to close. Go for presence in several areas overall, and concentrate in one area for dominance, in order to maximize your lesser amount of pieces.

Tips: A Leader solves a lot of your problems. This is one of the few empires that benefits greatly from good defense; use Empires Fortify or any Kingdom card you have.

9. Persia

Power: 15

The Scoop:

Darius gets a bad rep because Alex toasted his empire. In HISTORY, Persia usually scores well, because it's the first big empire. Problem is, getting this empire means that you might pick next-to-last for several turns.

Tips: Since you're stuck with it, stretch as far as possible. Don't waste a Leader; try Ship Building or anything that gives you extra armies.

10. Han Dynasty

Power: 12

The Scoop: The Han Dynasty, the best of a mediocre lot of Chinese Empires, tends to survive for longer than it deserves—a real sleeper. Total control of China is possible with additional armies. Otherwise, make sure to build lots of fleets.

Tips: You can generally keep a presence in China for a while. Build forts, use the Engineering card if you have it, and pray for good dice.

The Worst 5 Empires

1. Khmers

Power: 5

The Scoop: These guys are beyond hopeless: It's tough to make any headway in either India or China; worse, you have to burn a fleet, leaving you with only four armies. Any momentum comes to a halt when you get stuck with this card.

Tips: Try not to be in the lead during Epoch IV, so that someone other than you gets this card—even the Guptas are better.

2. United States

Power: 10

The Scoop: This reflects the fact that before WWI, the U.S. was a hemispheric—not a world—power. The only reason this empire is preferable to the Khmers is that it has enough oomph to dominate North America, but even that's not guaranteed.

Tips: There is very little of use here. Your inability to sail across the oceans puts most goodies out of your reach. Deny points to your opponents through disasters; you're in the spoiler role now.

3. Incas & Aztecs

Power: 2 for each

The Scoop:

Getting this is actually not as bad as in the boardgame, because you can dominate either North or South America.

Tips: Don't waste time with forts; they won't hold up against the Spanish, French, and British. Allies or Civil Service can keep this card from being a total disaster.

4. Aryans

Power: 5

The Scoop: The only Epoch I empire without a capital, it suffers from a relatively high army count as well—without really having enough clout to make a difference.

Tips: Always pass this to your worst enemy. If you have it, don't waste any cards; save them for something better.

5. Hsiung-Nu

Power: 7

The Scoop: With no capital and pinned between the Han Dynasty and the Romans, these guys badly want to be Mongols when they grow up.

Tips: Anything to spread yourself around the map—Kingdom, Crusades, Civil War, Empires Revive—is a good idea, because once the Romans and Sassanids pass through, you'll be dust.

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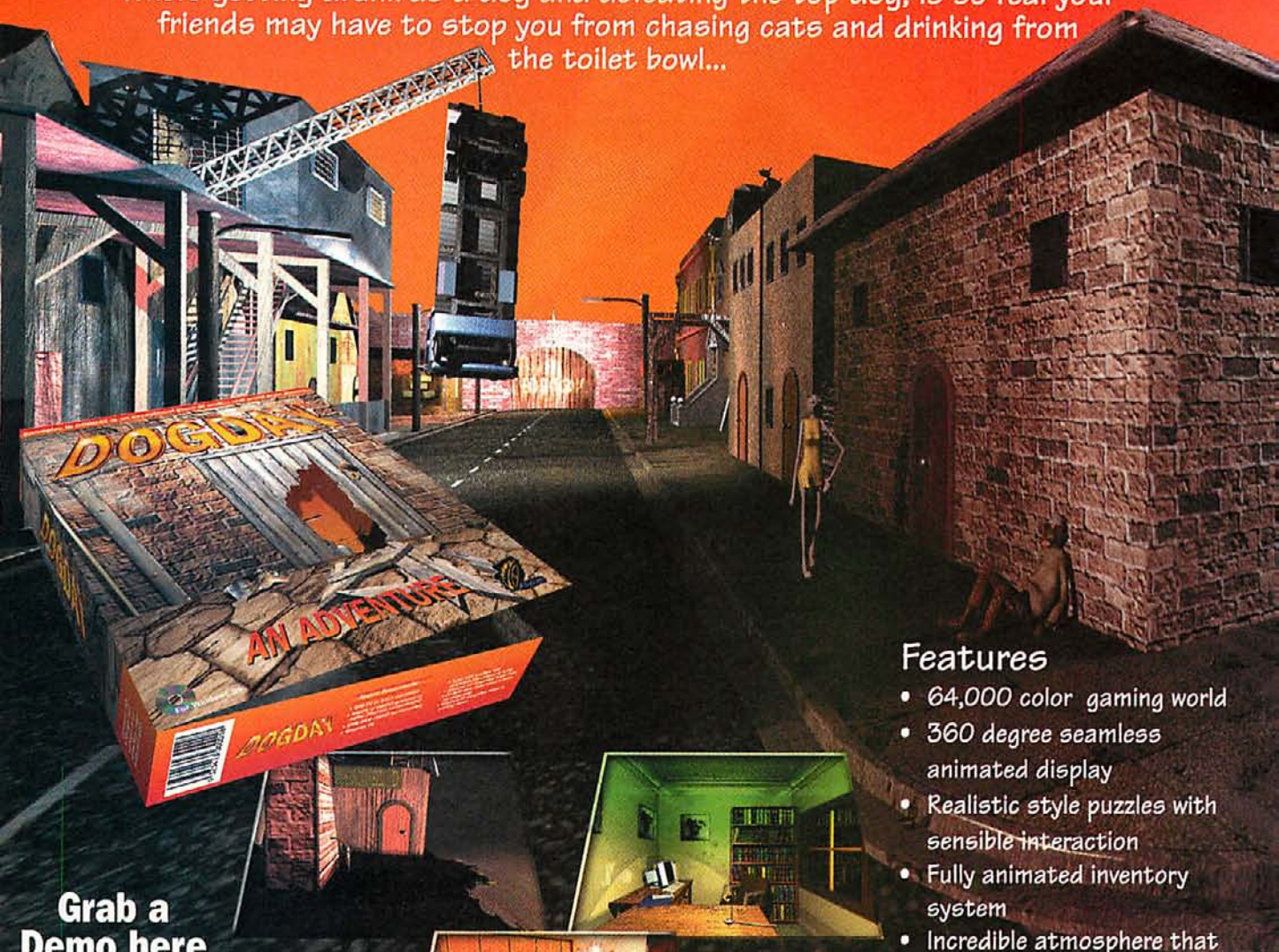

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STRATEGY & TIPS

Shadows Over Riva

Follow Scorpia's Tail As She Makes Her Way Through Sir-Tech's Massive RPG

by Scorpia

SHADOWS OVER RIVA, the third game in Sir-Tech's REALMS OF ARKANIA series, is a long game that should keep you busy for a while. The best way to get through it is with your own party, which you can create or import from STAR TRAIL. Creating your own party takes time, but will give you better results overall than letting the computer do all the work. Always do level gain points yourself, too. You absolutely must have at least two, preferably three, spellcasters with good values in Fulminictus for the final combat. Anything less is likely to mean disaster here, as your fighting characters will be of little use (except as buffers).

BIG BAWDY BROTHEL Yes, you can still take a visit to the local brothel if you're a bit stressed out.

It's My Party

My best team consisted of a magicienne, two fighters, a dwarf, a Green Elf, and a Sylvan Elf. That gave a good combination of hitting power and magic, and elves, with their bows, are deadly shots.

Rogues are mostly useless; their main worth is lock-picking, and a dwarf (a far better fighter) can be brought up in lock-picking just as well. Take a dwarf instead of a rogue to make life easier. None of the other classes seem especially worthwhile, although a couple of druid spells (Evil Eye and Dance) can be useful. However, druids aren't much good in melee combat, and I consider it better (especially if you're not familiar with the ARKANIA system) to have another fighter instead of a druid.

The best spells to have among your mages are Fulminictus, Lightning, Paralysis, Somnigravis, Evil Eye, Horriphobus, Balm of Roond, Pure & Clear, and Rest the Body. Other helpful spells are Destructibo (for destroying evil books), Banish Spirits, Transversalis, Analyze, Penetrating, and Salother.

The important nonfighting skills are Climbing (everyone), Stealth (everyone—one person should be very good at this), Swimming (everyone), Physical & Self Control (everyone), Hide (everyone), Treat Wounds/Disease/Poison (one or two characters in each category), Herb Lore (one person; five is a high enough rating here), Danger Sense & Perception (one person should be very good at these), Haggle (one character with high charisma), Tactics (everyone, especially fighters), and Streetwise (one person, should also have a high Stealth skill).

All characters should have at least one combat skill, and fighters—naturally—should be brought up in several. In the end game, you will have to fight barehanded for a while, so put a point in Hand To Hand each level gain. Also get points into either Edged or Pointed weapons in preparation for the last section (it will be a while before swordlike weapons are found there). For much of RIVA, swords are the best weapons, so be sure your fighters are good in sword skills. Elves, of course, should work on missile weapons. When going up levels, a magician-type should always exchange the spell attempts for extra astral points. When doing the split between life and astral for all spellcasters, put the majority of points in astral, but always get one or two into life.

Since most of the action takes place in and around a city, you don't have to worry much about food. A couple of rations and a waterskin will see you through the entire game; don't fill up on those things. When sleeping to regain hit points and astral points, take the cheapest rooms and sleep as long as necessary. Do several days in a row, then eat something. You get better results with uninterrupted rest. Expensive rooms heal you faster, but with six or seven in the party, your money can disappear quickly. In most cases, you can always take as long as you need to rest up at an inn.

Combat Tips

All combat scenes take a long time to get through, even for a well-equipped, experienced group, so be patient. In many fights, the party

will be outnumbered by the enemy, and delaying tactics are vital to surviving.

Casting Lightning and Somnigravis in the first couple of rounds is important. Elves are especially good with Somnigravis and can (with high skill) keep opponents snoozing through much of the fight. The only difficulty is remembering which ones have been put to sleep; attacking a sleeping opponent will wake it up again. Obviously, this is something to be avoided!

Try to keep your fighters from becoming surrounded. If that happens, knock out one or two enemies with spells as soon as possible. Try to position your spellcasters and elves in the rear, but where they have good diagonal lines for casting spells and using bows (the diagonal doesn't have to be exact, but there must be a clear path to the target). Mages in particular should have their full eight movement points available during combat.

If things are going badly, don't wait for the inevitable. Restore to a previous save and try again, or avoid the combat (if possible) until your party is better equipped or has advanced in level.

Early on, you have the chance to add Thorgrimm to your party as an NPC companion. He is an excellent fighter and can be helpful in many tough combats. The downside is that he shares in the experience awards, thereby giving less to your own people. If you have Thorgrimm with you whenever possible, it will cost you a level gain for your characters. This is something to think about, as you'll only get about a maximum of three levels by the time you're into the endgame.

Exploring Riva

Riva is too big to give a lot of detail in a single article, so the rest of the column just hits some of the main points of the dungeons and areas in the game.

Before you start the main line (triggered by talking to Tarik in the Harbour Maid Tavern), you may want to build up your party a bit, both in experience and equipment. You can do this by avoiding the Tavern for a while, and doing a few other things instead.

First, clean up the cemetery (see the Priestess in the Firun Temple). Under the graveyard, you really only have to fight one golem (easy pickings with the Lightning spell). If the other combats down there are too tough, leave them for later; the undead aren't going anywhere (heh!).

BIG RED FMV It plays whenever you encounter important monsters. In this case, we're about to do combat with a demon.

In the main combat aboveground, against the Heshthot, be aware that ordinary weapons don't affect them. Use Fulminictus spells on the demons and have your fighters go after the Druid when he appears in a round or so.

With that taken care of, you can go out the south gate to visit the tiny wilderness, and help Stipen graduate from the Mages Academy. All riddle answers are in the immediate area; you don't have to leave the outdoors to find the locations to blow the horn. Save first, as Stipen fails after three mistakes.

Dwarven Mines: All fights on Level 1 are optional. Be especially careful of the large Orc group in the dining room. Entry to Level 2 is immediately south of where you enter the mines. On Level 2, you must fight the Orc group in the big room to proceed. Search to the left and right past this room to find a couple of magic swords (the only magic weapons in the game). Level 3 is one long corridor that is full of traps. The character with the best perception should be in the lead; expect to take damage anyway. Examine walls along the way for magic runes your magician can translate. The demon can be hit only by magic weapons and spells (good old Fulminictus again). Manresh and his friends are an easy fight. Destroy the demon book before leaving.

Sewers: Open after speaking to Tarik. Make one trip below to see the ratcatcher and the monster. On your second visit, an NPC briefly joins your party. The sewers are mainly safe, except for one grate area where you (optionally) fight guards. When you go to Level 3 to kill the monster, that will be the only encounter in that area. Whoever opens the chest behind the mirror should eat some antihypnoticum first.

Magician's Tower: Level 1 has only one encounter with bandits. Unfortunately, you must leave someone behind at the elevator for the rest of the tower sequence (do not leave your lock-picker; you will need him). Level 2 contains many fights against undead; you will need their diamond eyes to open doors. Get the four words from the dog statues before destroying them. Level 3 is fairly safe, but be wary of illusionary halls leading to unpleasant

THAT'S WHAT HE SAID Just as in the previous ARKANIA games, important conversations or monologues have their own scene. This one is particularly cool because an interpreter (on the left) is needed to translate the Nix language.

consequences. The only fights here are with the magician and with Pergor the shapeshifter. You can destroy Pergor completely on Level 4 by putting together the magical mosaic (this is the only way to get rid of him).

Pirates: Detach the character with the best Stealth/Streetwise skills. This person should knock on the door and follow the pirate. Once you see where he has gone, rejoin the group and go in there.

Bride of Winds: The object is to get off the ship. You have only one hour to do this. Answering the Sea Fairy's riddles will gain you an extra half hour. Combats and room searches are optional.

Hunted as Murderers: You can travel around via the sewer system to avoid guards. Merchants will still buy and sell with you. A party with good Stealth and Hide skills can usually avoid encounters on the streets.

Fortress: You must free the mages before dawn (go after sunset, get out before sunrise). Go through this area carefully, but try to avoid too many unnecessary combats. Start by going south and around from where you enter to find the torture room, and go up the stairs to trigger the beginning of the rescue (there is, of course, much more to do after that).

Harbor Basin: See the King of the Nix (not basketball players, heh!). Be sure nothing happens to Zorka while she's in the party (she is quite useless, by the way). Walk around different places until you spot a Nix acting in a stealthy manner and follow him. Short blade weapons such as daggers work best against the plant.

Even Star: Take off the lead shoes to float up to the door inside. Use the glow wand and prisms to open the doors. When you get to the water elementals, keep everyone back and send your best fighter to the one at the chest. This is the key critter; killing him disperses all the monsters. After opening the chest, return to the Nix King.

End Game: Nasty, nasty, nasty. You go in naked and unarmed. Get some stones from the pile where you enter for later use. Move around carefully down here. One fight against a single worm gets you an egg; you need this, so take it with you. Some branches elsewhere can be made into slingshots for your Elves to use as missile weapons. That's after you fight the spider (check the walls). You can also find some mushrooms that heal and restore astral points; use them sparingly. There are two main fights on this level; the really big one is at the entrance to Level 2. This (aside from Queenie) is the toughest combat in the hill.

MUCH MORE THAN A SEWER RAT Descend into the sewers and get rid of that big bad water dragon. Again, combat is the same as before.

Two Illusions on Level 2: Detach your most courageous person to cross both the fire wall and the corpse pit, then bring the rest over and join up. Go along very carefully down here to avoid combats (most fights can be avoided). One room has a single worm licking amber; kill him and take some for yourself. This is more healing stuff. The nastiest place on the level is the illusion room, which you must pass through. Whatever you face in here (situations are random), the usual rule is to always do what seems like the wrong or evil thing.

Labyrinth: Just confusing, not dangerous. There are no combats here (whew!). You will have to make a roundabout journey from your starting point to the exit in the southwest corner of the maze. Your automap won't be of much help. Take your time and be patient.

Secret Doors: A flower flute (you'll have to make one) will get you through. After taking out the fake Queen (this is very obvious, as the fight is much too easy), keep going. But go slow. A short way along, you will have to fight mirror images of the party. This can be very tough, as it has to be done quickly. Best bet: Send your magician on alone, and take out the doppelgänger with Paralysis or Salother.

The Queen: Get your fighters up to the front of the group as quickly as possible to face her. They won't do much (or, more likely, any) damage to her, but she will be too distracted to cast her own spells. Let loose with Fulminictus and hope for the best. Good luck!

That's about it for now. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in all the usual ways. Until next time, happy adventuring!

UNDER THE SEA... While the basic engine is the same, at least this time you have cooler locations to go to, such as the sunken ship Even Star, shown here.

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CGW TIPS!

Adventure

The Last Express

Are you enjoying the mystery, but getting a little tired of fistfights? When the fight begins, click the right mouse button to abort the fight and return to the egg clock screen. Then click on the egg clock to restart the fight. After you repeat this procedure five times, your character proceeds as if he has won the fight. Sure, it's a little tedious, but less so than the arcade fighting sequences.

Puzzles/Classics

Marble Drop

With a scarcity of good puzzle games for the summer, this game still attracts a lot of attention with its challenging puzzles. While not as hard as the invisible puzzle, *Thabit Ibn Quarra is* harder to pronounce. In using the following solution, keep in mind that you should follow the sequence *exactly*; and be sure to let each marble drop as far as possible before dropping the next marble in the sequence.

Action

MDK

These cheat codes could be useful in your upcoming battle with Gunter. Make sure you use the right cheat for the right version of your game, and remember that each cheat works only *once* per level, so save that code until you really need it.

Codes for unpatched final North American executable:

makemefull Health
masterblaster Gatt powerup
twistandshout Twister powerup
biggrenade Homing sniper grenade
486willbeslow Lets 486 machines run

Codes for *all* patches:

ineedabiggun Super Chain Gun powerup
holokurtisfun Dummy powerup
nastyshotthanks Homing sniper grenade
tornadoaway Twister powerup
486ok Lets 486 machines run

Carmageddon

No one is going to accuse this game of being a racing simulation, but it does model some automotive aspects surprisingly well. For instance, if you try to use the handbrake as your main brake, you'll trash your car. Instead, use the handbrake for tackling tough corners.

If you hold the handbrake, the wheelspin, a direction key, and accelerate buttons together, then release the handbrake, you can spin your car around in a circle on the spot—rather handy in car-to-car duels.

As far as checkpoints are concerned: You *do* have to hit them in the correct order; you *don't* have to follow the suggested green paths. Drive aggressively!

Marble Drop Solution:

1. Left	steel (or orange)	6. Left	blue
2. Right	orange	7. Right	red
3. Right	red	8. Left	orange
4. Left	yellow	9. Left	violet
5. Left	blue	10. Right	blue
		11. Left	red

Strategy/Wargames

Dungeon Keeper

There are many mysteries in Bullfrog's DUNGEON KEEPER, but few as darkly shrouded as the Temple sacrifice. The fetid waters of the Temple pools accept all offerings, but the gods are a fickle lot, and only certain creatures—and combinations of creatures—will please them. Here's a list of sacrificial combos that are sure to reap rewards...and a few that surely won't.

What You Give	What You Get
Spiders x 3	Demon Spawn
Fly + Spider	Warlock
Beetle + Spider	Mistress
Mistress + Bile Demon + Troll	Horned Reaper
Fly x 2	Current library research instantly completed
Beetle x 2	Current workshop project instantly completed
Imp	$150 off every subsequent Imp purchase (works best in bulk)
Bile Demon x 2	Your creatures become chickens; useful?
Ghost	All chickens in Hatchery are vaporized
Chicken	Same: Bacawwkk!
Vampire	Your creatures become diseased

The Ardennes Offensive

When the computer calculates the combat algorithms, the two most important factors are tactical advantage and divisional integrity. Since any defending unit gets an automatic four-column odds shift, the only way to overcome this advantage is to attack from several hexes. Keep in mind that divisional integrity bonuses vary with each division and are further modified by the number of adjacent units actually attacking. A crack SS division, or the famous U.S. Big Red One, packs a lot more punch than an ad hoc 1944 Wehrmacht formation.

When you attack, remember that the initial odds shown represent only *one* attacking unit. To call in all available support, just hit the MAX button on the tactical display. If you are in an obvious overkill situation, don't waste firepower: "Turn off" units you don't need in this particular attack until you reach optimal odds

Simulations/Space

Privateer 2: The Darkening

Cheat Codes* for space flight:

1. Type **Alt-N** to get to the navigation screen
2. Type **F**
3. Type one of the following codes, then press Enter:

Codes	
NO TALENT	Invincibility
REP ME UP	Repairs weapons, shields
PETY PETY	Refills afterburner fuel
CHILL OUT	Cools down lasers
NAPALM	Unlimited nukes

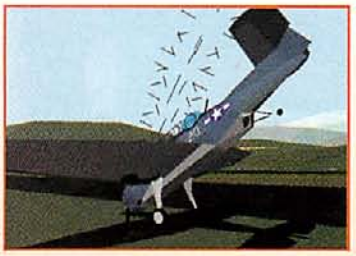
**these codes last until you land again*

Warbirds

Now that I-Magic Online's WARBIRDS, a free download from **www.icigames.com**, supports free head-to-head play, many sim pilots are trying it for the first time. Because its realistic flight modeling can keep some pilots who trained on older sims stuck on the ground, we're including the following primer.

Takeoff: WARBIRDS planes properly model engine torque, and many pilots find themselves careening into the control tower when they try to take off. First, apply engine power slowly. Then, if you find your plane pulling to the left, simply apply right rudder using the keyboard, rudder pedals, or, if you have a Sidewinder joystick, by twisting the stick to the right. If you don't have pedals, you can cheat a bit and use the automatic trim system to straighten the plane's flight path—just hit **X** to engage the automatic trim system and then pull back on the stick to disengage it.

Cruise: In the air, you'll also find your plane doesn't always want to follow a straight path. The following keys will trim your plane for different cruise situations:

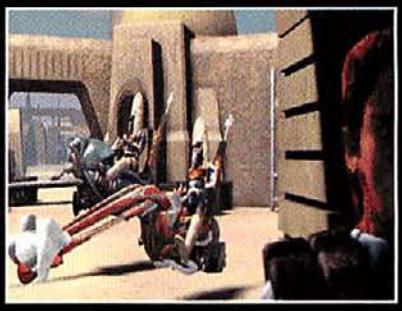


X Set straight-and-level cruise
Ctrl-X Angle trim; keeps the plane at the current climb or dive angle
Alt-X Speed trim; causes the plane to climb or dive to maintain current speed

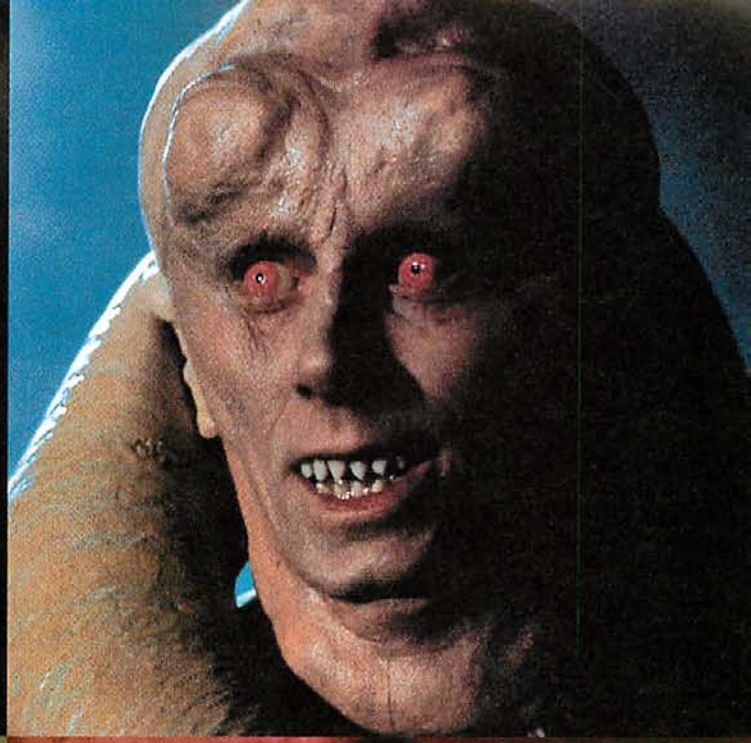
Just as in a real plane, trim is affected by speed. So if you set the trim for straight-and-level cruise at 250 knots and then you firewall the throttle, your plane will pick up speed and start to climb. Simply hit **X** twice to disengage and reengage the trim for the new speed.

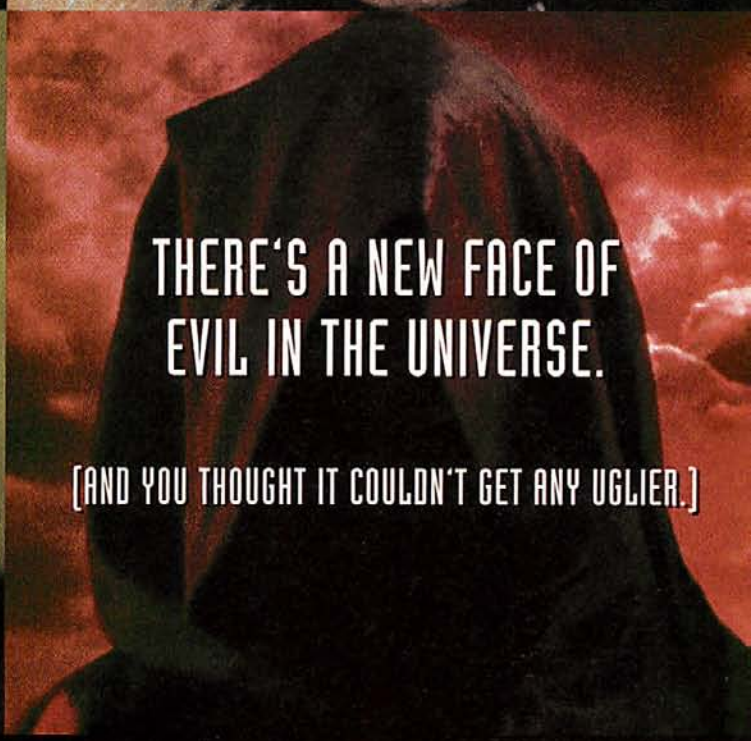
YOU'RE DASH RENDAR - QUICK ON THE TRIGGER OF A BLASTER.

IT'S YOU AND YOUR TINY SNOWSPEEDER VERSUS A GIANT, IMPERIAL AT-AT.



SPEEDER BIKE MODE - FAST-PACED ACTION WITH A KICK START.





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1. What is the highest level of education that you completed? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Some high school or less
02. ☐ Graduated High School
03. ☐ Some College or Technical school
04. ☐ Graduated College
05. ☐ Post Graduate school

2. Computer currently owned is: (Check all that apply)
01. ☐ IBM compatible (Intel standard)
02. ☐ MacIntosh
03. ☐ Amiga
04. ☐ Dedicated game machine
05. ☐ None

3. If Intel, what level? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Power PC
02. ☐ Pentium (586)
03. ☐ 486
04. ☐ 386
05. ☐ 286

4. Do you own (or plan to buy in next 6 months) a CD-ROM? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Own
02. ☐ Plan to buy (6 months)

5. How often do you usually buy computer games? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Once a week
02. ☐ Once every two to three weeks
03. ☐ Once a month
04. ☐ Once every two to three months
05. ☐ Once every four to six months
06. ☐ Once a year

6. Where are you most likely to purchase games? (Check all that apply)
01. ☐ Independent computer store
02. ☐ Consumer electronic store
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05. ☐ Direct from vendor
06. ☐ Mail order

7. What is your (and others in household) favorite type of game? (Check one in each column)

	Yourself	Other 1	Other 2
01. Strategy			
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03. Role Playing			
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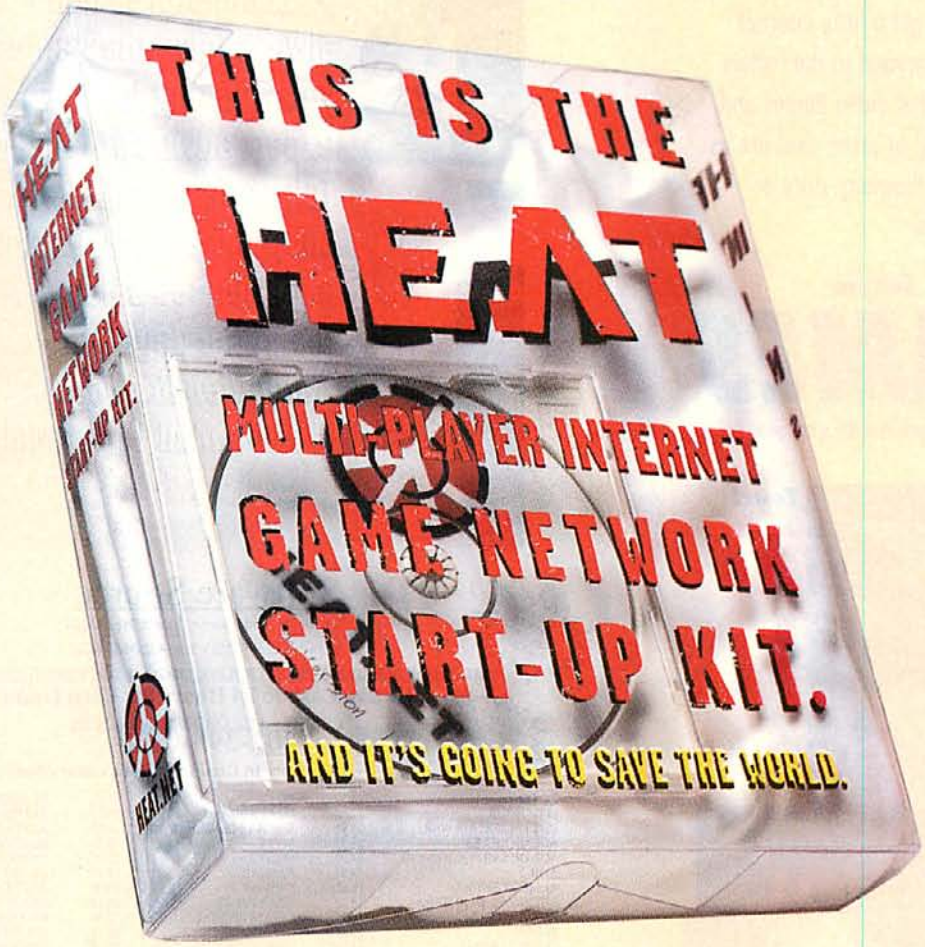

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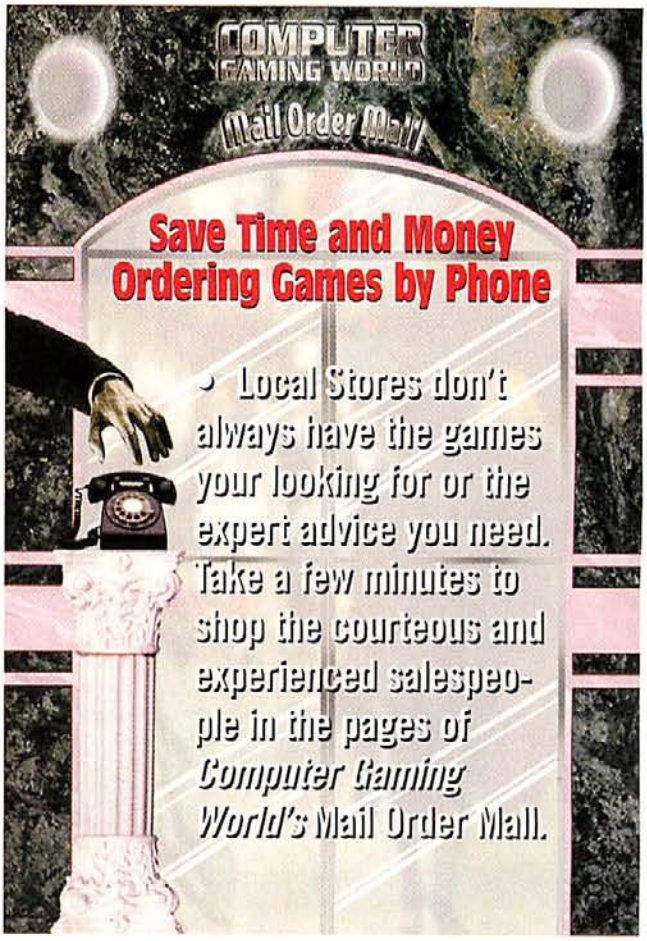

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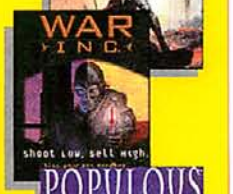

'POPULOUS:THE THIRD COMING' Large strategies can be planned and enacted from fully playable global view. Various terrain varieties(mountains, oceans, aerial views) impose different challenges on your warriors as you lead them into battle.
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'IF16' contains an easy to use quick start mode as well as detailed missions and campaigns. Jump into combat and experience incredible graphics and high energy explosions without ever opening the manual.
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'CIVIL WAR GENERALS' The Battle of the Blue and Grey is bigger, better and bolder. Multiple campaigns covering battles from both the Eastern and Western Theaters are included in this sequel to the highly acclaimed Robert E. Lee:Civil War General. Internet and LAN Support.
Sierra(War)
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'PANZER GENERAL II' contains enhanced multimedia footage and scenario briefings. Also, all new campaigns, play some from the Allied side. New interactive terrain reflects battle damage. Multiplayer support.
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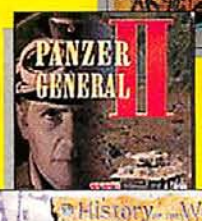

'HISTORY OF THE WORLD' Starting 5,000 years ago with the ancient Sumerains, a succession of 49 empires rise and fall across the globe. Command seven empires in your attempt at conquest.
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Mayfair Games (Boardgame)
Release Date: NOW BG $55

'LANDS OF LORE II' You are Luther, cursed son of the Sorceress of Darkness, exploring treacherous lands in search of ancient magic, a super power that will release you from your vile birthright.
Virgin (Roleplaying)
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'RED BARON II' You will become immersed in World War I and the career of the brave young men who pilot the flying machines in the dangerous dawn of aviation. Engage in deadly dog fights, strafe an enemy aerodrome as you line up your nemesis in your sights.
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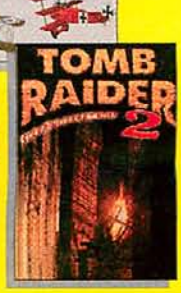

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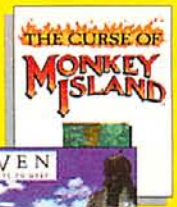

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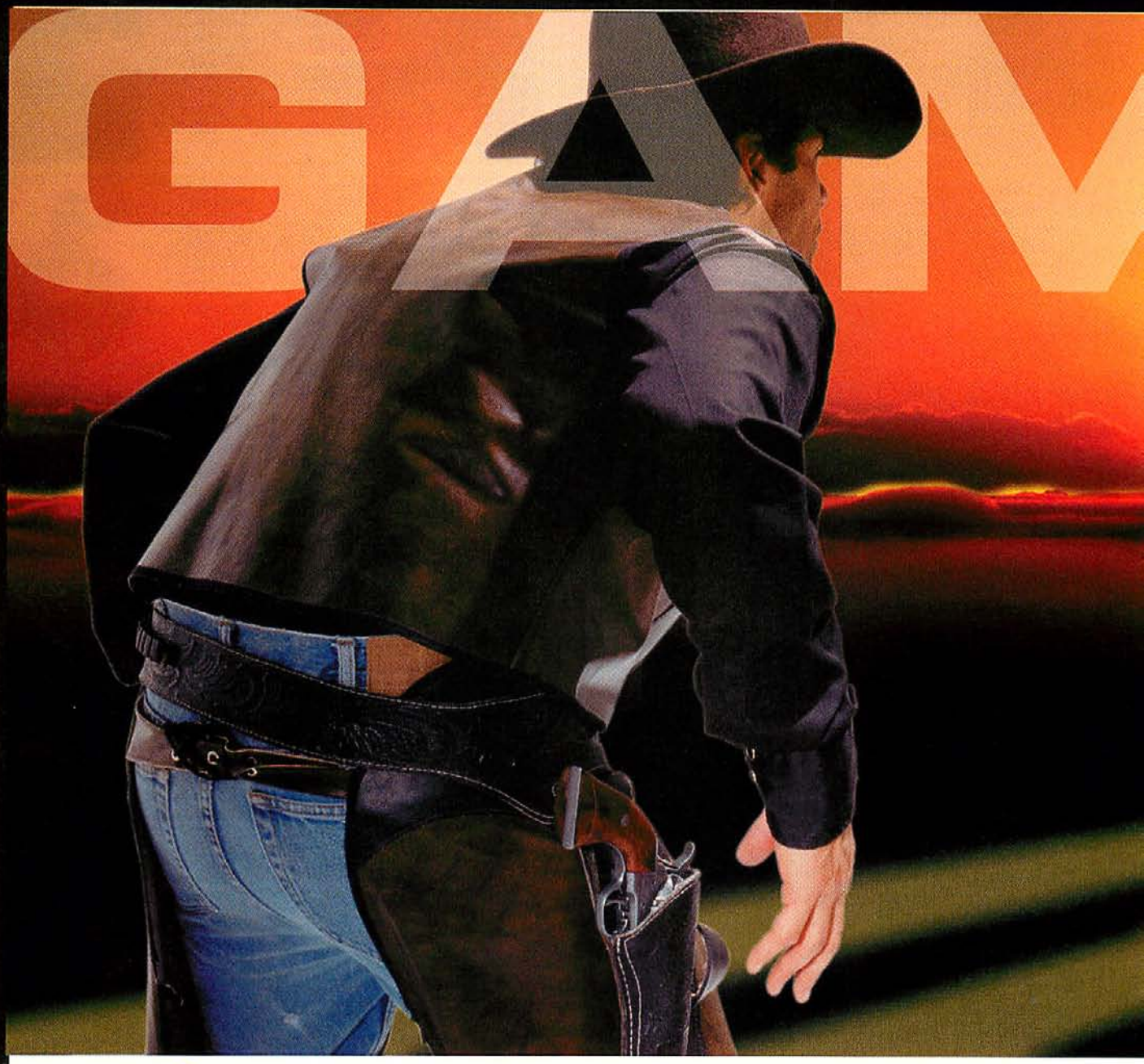

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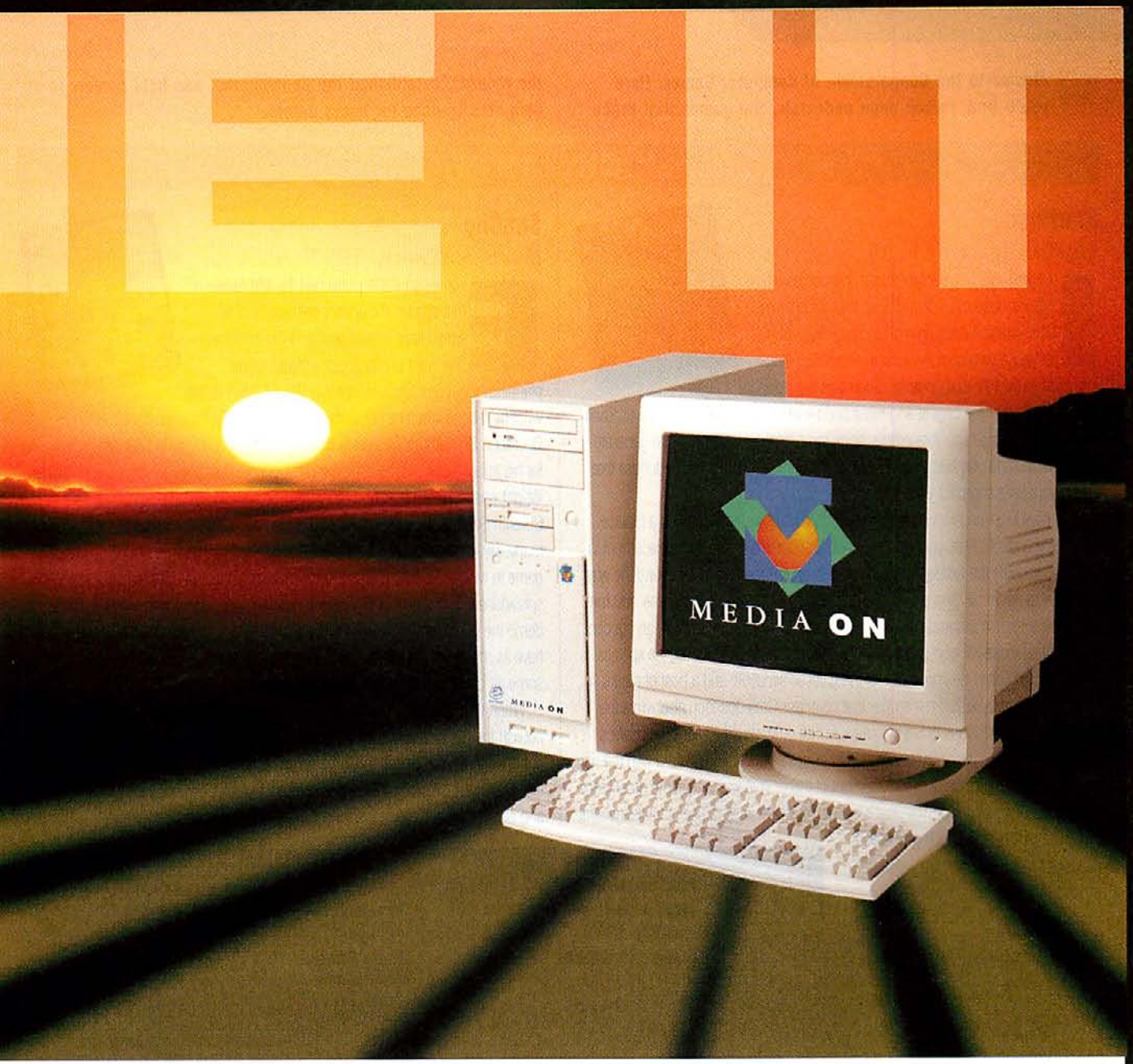

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HIGHLIGHTS

Starflight

Electronic Arts, 1986

Imagine an intergalactic role-playing game with 270 star systems, each with up to eight planets. Now, imagine creating a custom configuration for your interplanetary starship and hiring a custom crew to explore that universe. Such was the setup for STARFLIGHT, one of the largest and most open-ended role-playing games ever. Each planetary landscape was interesting, since the program used fractals to generate unique maps and you had to decide where to mine for the elusive Endurium that fueled your ship and paid your way.

Your goal in STARFLIGHT was to explore the 270 star systems and find a replacement for the planet Arth, your home planet. You needed to find this replacement in order to evacuate the residents of Arth prior to an imminent disaster. Along the way, you ran into the most alien group of aliens ever seen in a computer game. You met the Velox, intergalactic gossips with a superiority complex; the Spemin, an egocentric race that make Klingon propagandists seem humble; the Elowan, the species with the most complete knowledge of the galactic situation; and a host of others. If they all sound bizarre, just remember that coauthor Greg Johnson also wrote the weird alien conversations in STAR CONTROL 2. Not only were the aliens themselves interesting, but you were also challenged to adopt a negotiating posture with them in order to wrangle any useful information out of them. This was one of the most innovative facets of the system. STARFLIGHT's scope, quality of writing, use of fractal-generated planets, and understanding of ethical dilemmas made it one of the watershed products in role-playing history.

SimCity

Maxis Software, 1987

Even when *CGW* published the first review of this classic, the editors believed SIMCITY would have limited appeal. Why would anyone want to play a game about urban planning? Even SIMCITY designer Will Wright didn't realize what he'd done when he combined the terrain editor from his classic RAID ON BUNGELING BAY with his interest in building cities. SIMCITY started out as a playground for his imagination and became the most successful "software toy" ever published. Wright was inspired by a short story from Stanislaw Lem's *The Cyberiad* called "The Seventh Sally," conversations with his MIT urban planning graduate neighbor, and many days of creating cityscapes with his old terrain editor. He ended up creating a game in which you built cities for the benefit of simulated citizens (the underlying spreadsheet mechanics of the game). He then noticed that whenever he would demo the game for focus groups, people would get manic with the bulldozer and have as much fun destroying the cities as building them. He decided to put in some air crashes and natural disasters to make things a little more interesting.

When Wright tried to sell the game to Broderbund, the company opted not to publish the title because it wasn't enough of a game. So, in an attempt to save it, he put in some scenarios with specific victory conditions. Ironically, very few gamers ever played the scenarios. Everyone seemed to prefer creating their own problems and either solving them or invoking Armageddon via natural disasters.

Inductees Prior To 1989

- **BATTLE CHESS** (Interplay Productions, 1988)
- **CHESSMASTER** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
- **DUNGEON MASTER** (FTL SOFTWARE, 1987)
- **EARL WEAVER BASEBALL** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **EMPIRE** (Interstel, 1978)
- **F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER** (MicroProse, 1988)
- **GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT** (SSI, 1986)
- **KAMPFGRUPPE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MECH BRIGADE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MIGHT & MAGIC** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- **SID MEIER'S PIRATES!** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **SIMCITY** (Maxis, 1987)
- **STARFLIGHT** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **THE BARD'S TALE** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- **ULTIMA III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
- **ULTIMA IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
- **WAR IN RUSSIA** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
- **WASTELAND** (Interplay Productions, 1986)
- **WIZARDRY** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- **ZORK** (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

- **ALONE IN THE DARK** (I-Motion, 1992)
- **BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **DAY OF THE TENTACLE** (LucasArts, 1993)
- **DOOM** (id Software, 1993)
- **FALCON 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- **FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **GUNSHIP** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **HARPOON** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
- **KING'S QUEST V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **LEMMINGS** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **LINKS 386 PRO** (Access Software, 1992)
- **M-1 TANK PLATOON** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **MASTER OF MAGIC** (MicroProse, 1994)
- **MASTER OF ORION** (MicroProse, 1993)
- **PANZER GENERAL** (SSI, 1994)
- **RED BARON** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** (MicroProse, 1991)
- **SID MEIER'S RAILROAD TYCOON** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **THEIR FINEST HOUR** (LucasArts, 1989)
- **TIE FIGHTER** (LucasArts, 1994)
- **ULTIMA VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **ULTIMA UNDERWORLD** (Origin Systems, 1992)
- **WING COMMANDER I, II, & III** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
- **WOLFENSTEIN 3-D** (id Software, 1992)
- **X-COM** (MicroProse, 1994)

Computer game programs have grown so massive, and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge, that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common.

Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. New patches are in red.

3D-Ultra Pinball 2—Creep Night V1.1 for Mac: This version corrects the "black quit screen" problem, as well as some sound hiccups.

A-10 Cuba! V1.2: Faster frame rates, better messaging, and better joystick controls are but a few of the improvements to keep you in the air longer. Beware: This works only if you have the previous 1.01 patch installed!

AH-64D Longbow Gold V1.04: Fixes movie player and garbled speech problem for the gold version of this Jane's combat sim only.

Archimedean Dynasty V1.120: View clips from the game with the new movie player, and use the Transparency effect from the Vectorgraphic menu to see through explosions and other environmental effects. Added Z-buffering allows for more accurate targeting as well.

ATF Sounds: Better explosions through optional digital sounds for NATO FIGHTERS or ATF GOLD.

Broken Alliance V1.02: Latest upgrade for HPS Simulations' add-on to PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS.

Civilization II Scenarios V1.1: Mostly tweaking to balance scenarios and to stiffen the challenge of this commendable add-on pack.

Command & Conquer for Mac V1.71: Note: If you fail to trash your old C&C version (and empty the trash can), when you play an Internet game, Mac WCHAT will detect the old version (even if it's in the trash can) and prompt you for an update (even though you've already updated).

Daggerfall Saved Game Patch: This magic bullet allows you to use older saved games with the latest DAGGERFALL patches. It's not foolproof, but it helps.

Dawn Patrol V1.7: New wings for Empire's veteran WWI flight sim.

Diablo V1.04: This amulet of patch protection prevents invalid packets from crashing multiplayer games, fixes the Hidden Shrine freeze-up, and prevents the Black Death crash.

Dragons in the Mist V1.01: Patch in the Pacific, WWII.

Flying Corps V1.00a: Additional hotkeys for camera and cockpit views add even more visceral excitement to Empire's acclaimed WWI flight sim.

Harpoon Classic '97 V1.63d: The latest Win 95 executable to make your favorite fleet more seaworthy.

Interstate '76 V1.06: More than a dozen fixes make this the hippest, baddest multi-melee around—especially since the host no longer gets double kills, and "partial deaths" are no more.

Jack Nicklaus 4: Slice, hook, and putt much faster over the Net, even when using machines with only the minimum system requirements.

Magic The Gathering V1.1: Better AI, sound, and animation are but a few of the fixes in MicroProse's version of the Wizards of the Coast classic.

MechWarrior Mercenaries V1.06: Regardless of clan affiliation, all will benefit from this latest upgrade, which repairs more 'mech deficiencies.

MDK Sound Fix: Eliminates the hang-up bug that occurs when you toss the World's Smallest Nuclear Explosion. Warning: for DOS version of MDK only!

MDK Video Patches: If you thought the mayhem was merry before, wait until you see the SVGA-graphics carnage with these patches for 3DfX and Rendition-based cards!

Outlaws V1.1: 3DfX support makes this faster on the draw than Jesse James.

Settlers 2 V1.51: Midi and mouse problems are cleaned up, but this patch makes your current saved games unplayable. Finish any current maps, then start on the next map after installing the update.

US Navy Fighters '97 V1.3: You'll fly faster with fewer 3D complaints. This also enables dogfights over TCP/IP.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter V1.10: Your fighters now handle better than a wet womprat in an ice storm on Hoth during multiplayer games.

▶ Check for new patches on the demo disc.

Patches can usually be downloaded from online networks (such as CompuServe and ZDNet), from *CGW*'s Web site (**www.computergaming.com**), or from the individual software publisher's Web site (see listing below).

Publisher Web Sites

Many patches are available from the publishers at the following sites:

Accolade: www.accolade.com
Activision: www.activision.com
Apogee/3d Realms: www.apogee1.com
Avalon Hill: www.avalonhill.com
Bethesda: www.bethsoft.com
Big Time Software: www.bigtimesoftware.com
Blizzard: www.blizzard.com
Eidos: www.eidos.com
EA: www.ea.com
Epic MegaGames: www.epicgames.com
HPS Simulations: www.hpssims.com
Id Software: www.idsoftware.com
Interactive Magic: www.imagicgames.com
Interplay: www.interplay.com
Jane's Combat Simulations: www.janes.ea.com
LucasArts: www.lucasarts.com
MicroProse/Spectrum HoloByte: www.microprose.com
Microsoft: www.microsoft.com
New World Computing: www.nwcomputing.com
Origin: www.origin.ea.com
Papyrus: www.sierra.com/papyrus
Sierra On-Line: www.sierra.com
SSI: www.ssionline.com
Talonsoft: www.talonsoft.com
Virgin: www.vie.com

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TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armagon	id/Hipnotic	9.19
2	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution of Eternity	id/Rogue	9.11
3	Tomb Raider	Eidos	8.38
	Duke Nukem 3D	Apogee/3DRealms	8.38
5	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	8.14
6	The Need for Speed SE	EA	8.10
7	Quake	id Software	8.03
8	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	7.86
9	Interstate '76	Activision	7.82
10	The Need for Speed	EA	7.54

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Pandora Directive	Access	8.31
2	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	8.29
3	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	8.08
4	Rama	Sierra	7.79
5	The Neverhood	Dreamworks	7.66
6	Spycraft	Activision	7.56
7	Circle of Blood	Virgin	7.53
8	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.52
9	Leisure Suit Larry 7	Sierra	7.46
10	Lighthouse	Sierra	7.44

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	8.36
2	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	8.19
3	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	8.14
4	Power Chess	Sierra	7.25
5	Incredible Toons	Sierra	7.24
6	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	7.05
7	Mind Grind	Microforum	7.00
8	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	6.89
9	Baku Baku	Sega	5.95
10	—		

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8.40
2	MechWarrior 2	Activision	8.17
3	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	8.14
4	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	8.11
5	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.89
	Silent Hunter	SSI	7.89
7	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	7.86
8	EF2000	Ocean	7.68
9	Flying Corps	Empire	7.67
10	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	7.59

TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links LS	Access	8.69
2	Nascar 2	Sierra	8.29
3	NBA Live '97	EA Sports	8.26
4	NHL '97	EA Sports	8.25
5	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	8.09
6	Tripleplay '97	EA Sports	7.63
7	Nascar Racing	Sierra	7.62
8	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	7.57
9	NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	7.53
10	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	7.49

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Warcraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	8.89
2	Warcraft II	Blizzard	8.81
3	Heroes II	New World Computing	8.79
	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	8.79
5	Civilization II	MicroProse	8.76
6	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.31
7	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8.29
8	Civilization 2: Scenarios	MicroProse	8.22
9	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	8.20
10	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	7.90

TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Diablo	Blizzard	8.78
2	Daggerfall	Bethesda	7.45
3	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	7.17
4	Albion	Blue Byte	6.09
5	—		
6	—		
7	—		
8	—		
9	—		
10	—		

TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	9.00
2	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	8.69
3	Steel Panthers II	SSI	8.48
4	Steel Panthers	SSI	8.42
5	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	8.09
6	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	8.07
7	Tigers on the Prowl II	HPS	7.91
8	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	7.72
9	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	7.53
10	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	7.34

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armagon	id Software/Hipnotic	AC	9.19
2	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution/Eternity	id Software/Rogue	AC	9.11
★ 3	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	9.00
★ 4	Warcraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	ST	8.89
5	Warcraft II	Blizzard	ST	8.81
6	Heroes II	New World Computing	ST	8.79
	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.79
★ 8	Diablo	Blizzard	RP	8.78
9	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.76
★ 10	Links LS	Access	SP	8.69
	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.69
12	Steel Panthers II	SSI	WG	8.48
13	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	8.42
★ 14	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.40
15	Tomb Raider	Eidos	AC	8.38
	Duke Nukem 3D	Apogee/3DRealms	AC	8.38
★ 17	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.36
★ 18	Pandora Directive	Access	AD	8.31
	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.31
20	Nascar 2	Sierra	SP	8.29
	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.29
	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.29
23	NBA Live '97	EA Sports	SP	8.26
24	NHL '97	EA Sports	SP	8.25
25	Civilization 2: Scenarios	MicroProse	ST	8.22
26	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.20
27	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.19
28	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.17
29	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.14
	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	SI	8.14
	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.14
32	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.11
33	The Need for Speed SE	EA	AC	8.10
34	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	SP	8.09
	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	WG	8.09
36	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	AD	8.08
37	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	WG	8.07
38	Quake	id Software	AC	8.03
39	Tigers on the Prowl II	HPS	WG	7.91
40	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	7.90
41	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.89
	Silent Hunter	SSI	SI	7.89
43	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	AC	7.86
	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	7.86
45	Interstate '76	Activision	AC	7.82
46	Rama	Sierra	AD	7.79
47	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.72
48	EF2000	Ocean	SI	7.68
49	Flying Corps	Empire	SI	7.67
50	The Neverhood	Dreamworks	AD	7.66

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
51	Theme Hospital	EA/Bullfrog	ST	7.64
52	Tripleplay '97	EA Sports	SP	7.63
	Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Sir-Tech	ST	7.63
54	Nascar Racing	Sierra	SP	7.62
55	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.59
56	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	SP	7.57
	Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	ST	7.57
58	Spycraft	Activision	AD	7.56
59	The Need for Speed	EA	AC	7.54
60	Circle of Blood	Virgin	AD	7.53
	NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	SP	7.53
	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	WG	7.53
63	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.52
64	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	SI	7.50
65	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	SP	7.49
66	Fantasy General	SSI	ST	7.48
	Warbirds	Interactive Magic	SI	7.48
68	Leisure Suit Larry 7	Sierra	AD	7.46
	FPS Football Pro '96	Sierra	SP	7.46
70	Daggerfall	Bethesda	RP	7.45
71	F-22 Lightning II	NovaLogic	SI	7.44
	Lighthouse	Sierra	AD	7.44
	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	7.44
74	Privateer 2	EA/Origin	SI	7.43
75	MDK	Playmates	AC	7.41
76	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.40
77	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accolade	SP	7.37
	Tony LaRussa 3 '96	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.37
79	FIFA 97	EA Sports	SP	7.35
80	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	WG	7.34
81	Pro Pinball	Empire	AC	7.32
82	Outlaws	LucasArts	AC	7.31
83	Magic The Gathering	MicroProse	ST	7.26
84	Power Chess	Sierra	CP	7.25
85	M.A.X.	Interplay	ST	7.24
	Incredible Toons	Sierra	CP	7.24
87	Zork Nemesis	Activision	AD	7.23
88	System Shock	EA/Origin	AC	7.21
	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.21
90	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.19
	Road Rash	EA	AC	7.19
92	Toonstruck	Virgin	AD	7.18
	Missionforce Cyberstorm	Sierra	ST	7.18
94	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	7.17
	Syndicate Wars	EA/Bullfrog	AC	7.17
96	Jetfighter III	Mission Studios	SI	7.16
97	Age of Rifles Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	7.11
98	The Need for Speed II	EA	AC	7.10
	Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri	Looking Glass	AC	7.10
100	Hexen	Raven/id	AC	7.09

Games on unnumbered lines are tied with game on line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing, SI = Simulation/Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

What's the Deal with...Ethics?

Nearly a year ago I started a minor newsgroup brushfire when I made a fairly oblique reference to a dubious moment in game-reviewing history. This minor debate eventually came to a head with a thought-provoking letter, published in this magazine. In it, the reviewer I made reference to—Mr. Trotter—very graciously explained the bad situation he had found himself in, and the resulting state of mind that led him to overrate a game that he was reviewing (for a competing magazine), after having written a strategy book for the selfsame game. Mr. Trotter's eloquent explanation certainly dispelled my lingering resentment over the incident, and almost made me feel bad about bringing it up at all. I say "almost" because I think anything that leads to healthy debate in the industry is a good thing, regardless of how awkward it can be.

Unfortunately, one aspect of the online squabble lingers on. We still haven't settled the issue of ethical behavior on the part of a game reviewer, and to be honest, some of the stuff I'm hearing out there is starting to bug me again.

Recently, some professionals have begun to express an almost imperial arrogance toward the consumer. It goes something like this: "If only you poor slobs had the slightest inkling of the true machinations of publishing, you would realize the simple truth: We Gods-amongst-gamers make so little in the way of royalties from the sale of these strategy books that only a moron would believe we'd risk our credibility by purposely giving a bad game a good review just to sell a few more books."

> **"Readers must be able to believe not only in the magazine they read, but also in the individual writers who write for it."**

Now to a certain extent, this point is valid. If you readers could look over the average strat book contract, you would indeed see that no one is going to get rich from royalties earned in this business. On the other hand, don't let anyone fool you into thinking that there's no difference in your next advance if your last guide was for QUAKE instead of THIS MEANS WAR. Anyone who does a strat guide wants it to be for a Top 10 game.

But be that as it may, the technical reality of how much a reviewer stands to gain financially is actually irrelevant, compared to how such situations appear to the average reader. To mangle a phrase from this decade's favorite fantasy hero, "Impropriety is as Impropriety does."

Who cares what we "in the know" really know? What matters is what readers think when they see the same name on a review that they saw on a $20 strat guide. Do they sagely nod and say, "The realities of professional publishing make it unlikely that we're the victims of a scam"? Somehow I suspect the more likely scenario is that the magazine that publishes that review loses another customer forever. Even in cases where the game, the review, and the strat guide are all of high quality, it does the business little good if a writer is responsible for a big money guide book and then pens the review of that same game. If we lived in a world where reviews were written first, and strat books second, it might be different—but we can all remember seeing guides that have beaten the game to the shelves.

It just doesn't look good, and it's a practice that should stop, if for no other reason than the fact that the amount of money to be made from the review is paltry compared to the money made from the strat guide. Why give even the appearance of impropriety for a paltry few hundred dollars when the book has already earned you a few Gs of cool, hard cash? Let somebody else do the review, so that people have one less reason to believe that all gaming journalists are "on the take."

All computer game magazines exist on the fine edge of reader trust. (Okay, reader trust and the desire to see cool screenshots of games that are going to be vaporware for at least another two years.) Readers must be able to believe not only in the magazine they read, but also in the individual writers who write for it, or logically, they're wasting their money. While I am thrilled that some of you out there will stick with the Fourth Estate through thick and thin, *I'm* not going to be the one explaining, "Gee—sure I wrote a great review of that game, but it had nothing to do with the company flying me down to see their late beta for an all-expenses-paid week...."

You folks out there don't have months of design notes, long personal talks with the designers, or pleasant tours through spiffy offices to help you get the most out of a game...and neither should we. If we are in a position to know so much about a game then we obviously are a little too close for an impartial judgment. We should leave that particular review to someone else. Period.

Absolute impartiality, both in reality and appearance, should be the only real ethic in this business...everything else is just sophistry and smoke.

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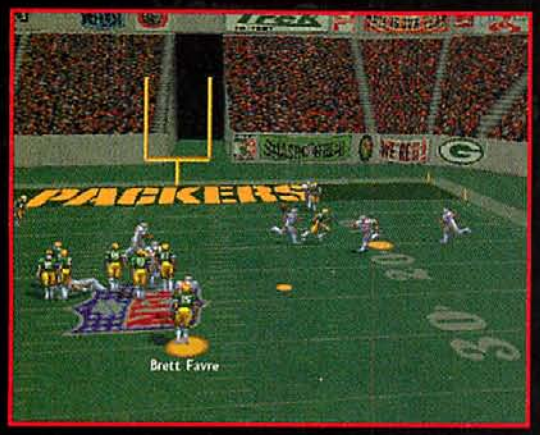

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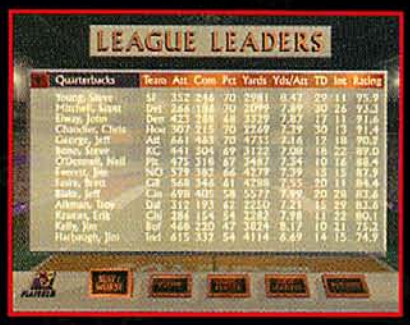

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1950

- Rules favor the running game.
- Goal posts were placed in the front of the end zone. The "Post" pattern was commonly used to run defenders into the posts for an easy touch-down reception.

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