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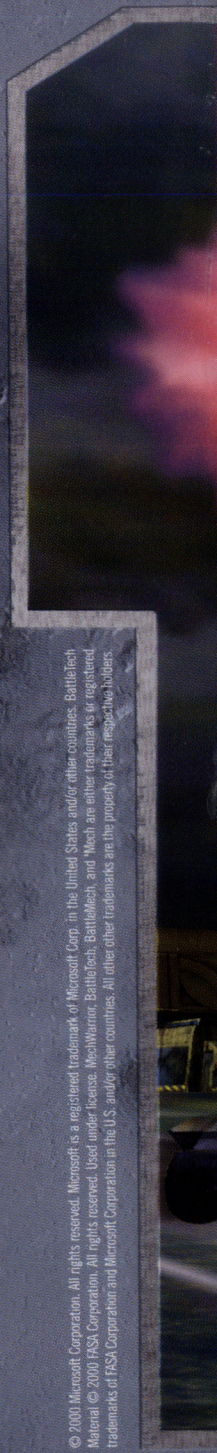
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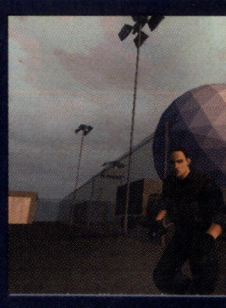
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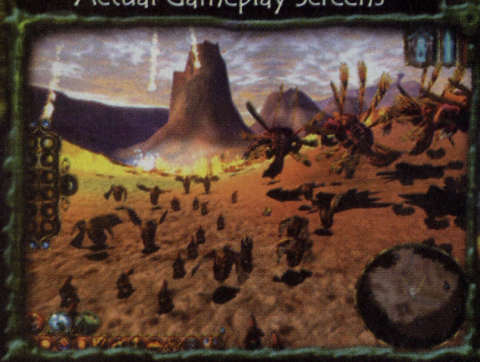
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Actual Gameplay Screens







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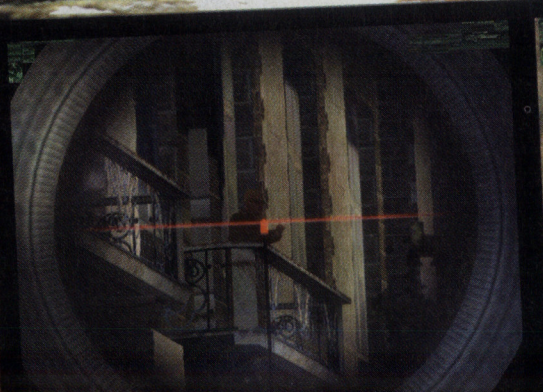
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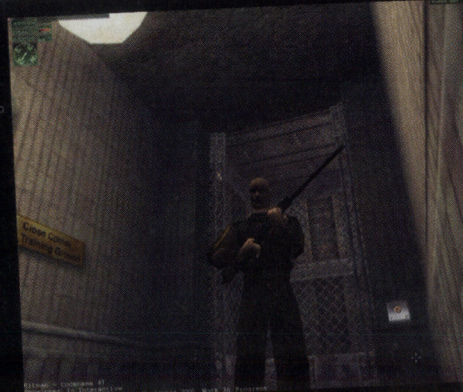
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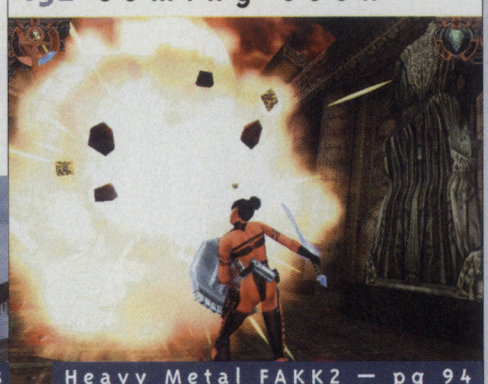
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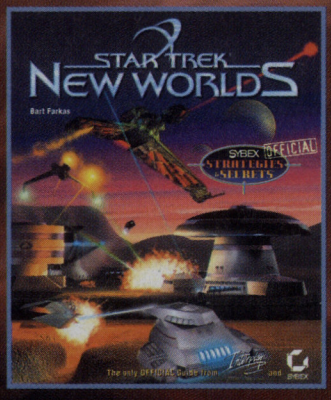


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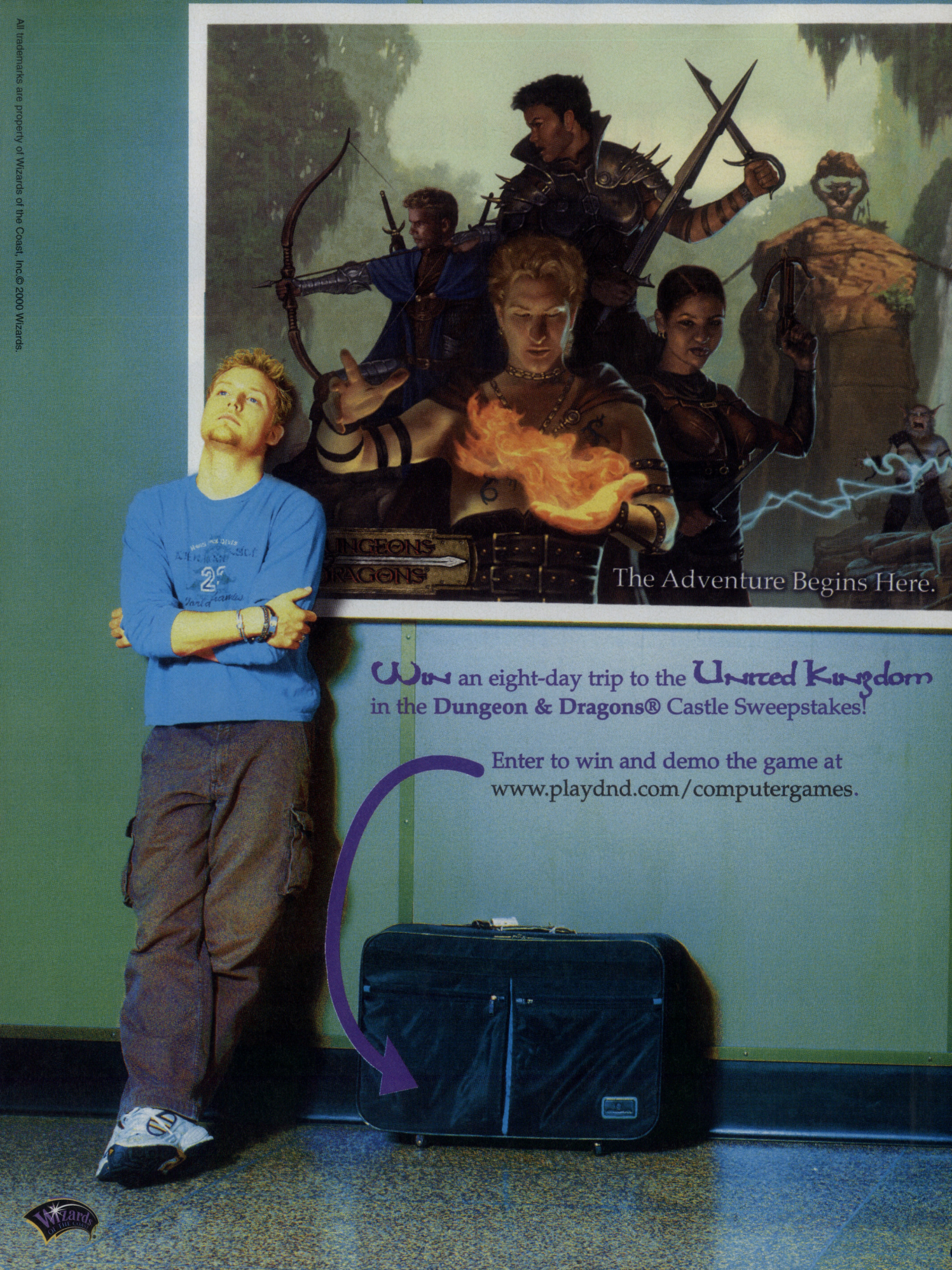
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Blow out the candles and hide the cutlery; we're 10 years old

by Steve Bauman

Welcome to our 120th issue, which represents our 10th year of existence. (Technically we may be a month late with this article, but over the span of 10 years we've managed to skip a month somewhere, had one issue mysteriously disappear and produced two with the same issue number; somehow, it all balances out.) Now that we're officially a decade old, does this mean we finally qualify as grizzled veterans? Can we collect gamer social security? Should we start dying our graying hair? Should we buy embarrassingly inappropriate vehicles?

In all seriousness, as you get older you tend to view the past with a certain amount of revisionist romanticism. You tend to selectively remember only the best bits of the past, somehow forgetting all of the, well, forgettable parts. This applies to everything, from movies and music to computer games and magazines.

In celebration of our 10th Anniversary, we've created an enormous retrospective on page 56 that looks back on the last decade of gaming we covered, whether we were called *Strategy Plus*, *Computer Games Strategy Plus* or *Computer Games Magazine*. We poured over all of those old, ancient, moldy, issues of the magazine looking for... well, we weren't entirely sure what we were looking for. Maybe we wanted to see if games (and perhaps the coverage of same) were indeed better in those days than they are today, as many readers (and occasionally editors) are inclined to say.

In compiling the article, one thing became clear: We tend to only remember the really amazing and terrific games of these early eras—the *Civilizations*, the *DOOMs*, the *X-COMs*, the *TIE Fighters*, the *Falcon 3.0s*—somehow blocking out the memory of a thousand *Corridor 7s*, *BATs*, *Catfights* or *Pizza Tycoons*. Anyone remember the hell that was playing through something like *Who's Fat Lou*? It's easy to forget that there were actually a lot more games released back then than the great ones we recall, and while the early days of the magazine had too few pages to even cover a third of the business, the mid-years saw us reviewing a lot of... dreck. Page after page of dreck. Hundreds of awful games.

While this type of article is admittedly a bit egotistical, we tried to focus not only what we were saying about games but also to capture what you were saying and thinking about this wild and wacky industry.

In magazine terms, it's amazing to see our evolution from a bare-bones operation into the high-powered industry powerhouse we are today (quit laughing). But seriously, the magazine has shown amazing growth over the decade, both in quality and readership. Those early issues of this magazine were full of interesting (albeit rather short) articles that were often not as well written or thought out as their modern counterparts. And there was a stretch in the mid-90s where we became suddenly enamored with truly horrible metaphors... some of these things just make you scratch your head while others make you laugh.

But we're not here to bury the past but to celebrate it, and while looking at those issues does have some comedic value, the truth is that there were a lot of really terrific articles in every issue, and we were often ahead of the times in covering things like online gaming and hardware. We've always covered the genres to which other publications seem to give short shrift or abandon outright; we stuck with role-playing games when everyone else said they were dead, and we remain committed to covering classic adventure games.

While this type of article is admittedly a bit egotistical, we tried to focus not only what we were saying about games but also to capture what you were saying and thinking about this wild and wacky industry. Our readers have always had strong and passionate opinions about everything gaming (and non-gaming as well), and what's been particularly fascinating is how little the feedback has changed over the years. You've always felt there were too many clones, you hate the always-escalating cost of upgrading your hardware to play the latest games, and you've always wondered if graphics come at the cost of gameplay.

While gamers may not have fundamentally changed, we've managed to broaden our coverage over the years without altering or losing our focus. We're not trying to convince you that gaming is cool, or that you're cool, or that we're cool. We're not making some desperate attempt at appearing hip or trendy (lord help us) and we're not trying to be a lifestyle magazine. We're just covering games, as we've always done. And plan on doing for a while longer.

So wow, 10 years. Yeah. Wow. That's, um, like, pretty old. Here's to a few more. ■

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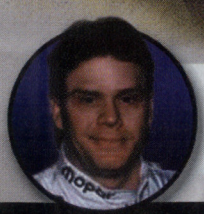
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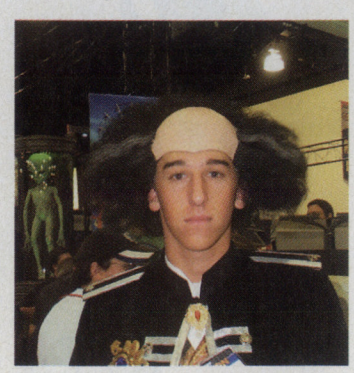


[above] Pools of Radiance display. But the boxes are empty. The boy in the back is obviously DINNER.

GenCon Madness

AD&D Third Edition hits the streets, black-haired people follow

EN ROUTE TO MILWAUKEE, THE BLACK-HAIRED YOUNG MAN DASHED by with gleaming eagle eyes and birdlike mannerisms, and twittered over to sit with his companions, The GenCon people-watch was on. This birdman was part of one of dozens of clusters of mostly male, mostly twenty-something folks, which for the lack of a classier term you might refer to as "obvious game geeks."



Some makeup on the rubber head of our Game Master might have helped, eh?

You may be one, and certainly all of us here are, but you might have smiled to realize that of the group of passengers en route to Milwaukee, one could actually hand pick the ones that were going to attend the convention. Not that they were playing *Dungeons & Dragons* at the gate or anything—OK some of them were—but they just exuded that persona that shouted, "I'm a half-elf wizard, man, lawful-good." And of course there were the tattoos and the black T-shirts.

For the uninitiated, GenCon is an annual fan convention for Role-playing and Strategy gamers to get together and do everything from inspect new products and purchase game related items to attending lectures, seminars and demonstrations, to dressing up as their favorite characters, to staying up all night playing their favorite board or card game.

The first conference took place in 1976 with the first *Dungeons & Dragons* Open tournament. *D&D* evolved from the hobby of wargamers whose tabletop games, military miniatures, model soldiers and scale terrain eventually grew to include the fantasy world that is now almost a household word. (The olden day wargamers are still there, by the way, out in force, and most of them are *not* sporting tattoos and black T-shirts.) Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, wargame enthusiasts of the 1960s, are the creators of the *D&D* game, which began a movement so expansive that the efforts to convene its hobbyists outgrew several locations and is currently taking place at the large Midwest Express Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While the show does include computer games, it is far more devoted to classic *D&D* and innumerable other tabletop games that include such esoteric titles as *20th Century Artillery Part 2, Dominion Tank Police, Doomtown CCG, Gas, Bugs and Nukes Part 2, Stargrunt 2, Plasma Ambush*, and...*Fairy Meat*.

Purchased last year by Hasbro, Wizards of the Coast is the host company for the convention, and a huge castle structure dominated the main show floor and housed all of its properties such as the entire gamut of *D&D* games and paraphenalia, as well as *Magic: The Gathering, WCW Nitro!, X-Men*, and the ever popular *Pokémon* trading cards. Wizards is also undergoing a heavy recruitment effort, so if you're interested in becoming a part of its team, it has positions open in many areas in several locations throughout the US.

Dungeons & Dragons: The Next Generation

Probably the biggest highlight of the convention, and the topic about which most seminars, lectures

and discussion groups were centered was the release of the *D&D* Third Edition ruleset. Just about everyone in the place was toting and avidly devouring the new *D&D Player's Handbook*, and two lucky winners each day went home with a pre-release copy of the highly awaited *Dungeon Master's Guidebook*.

When Wizards of the Coast acquired TSR (the original holder of the *D&D* properties), its first order of the day was to revamp the old set of rules. It's taken over three years to complete the overhaul, and the result has been a set of streamlined, flexible rules with more character options. Creator Gary Gygax highly approves of the changes, and provided much input throughout the development process.

It was barely possible to squeeze into most of the Third Edition seminars, an SRO situation—or LRO, for those who preferred sprawling on the floor—and a more focused and intense discussion is unlikely to be seen anywhere else. In a group devoted to min-maxing your character under the Third Edition rules, participants beat the topic of Race/Class combinations into the ground, as well as pursuing a lively debate about critical hits. "I love criticals," beamed the seminar leader, when the topic came up. "I could talk about criticals forever. I could show you my *math charts* on criticals." All of this caused great delight among the participants, and it was a sorry bunch that had to leave when the two-hour seminar came to an end before their questions hit the floor.

A 72 hour date with your dice

After a day or so at the event, it became evident why the following appeared in the gamer's survival guide from the comprehensive show program:

"Eat, sleep and, uh, bathe—frequently. Or at least regularly. When you put this many bodies together in one place for four days, things are bound to get a bit sweaty and, unless you're a newborn baby, sweat isn't sweet. Be considerate enough to make sure you are not offensive to the person sitting next to you at the gaming table. The game you may be playing may be set in medieval times, but you are not living there..."

Unfortunately, not enough people complied and the atmosphere throughout the convention was, to say the least, a bit ripe. Perhaps too many people who had worn armor the day before stayed up all night gaming when all of a sudden their Ban deodorant sticks collectively failed.



Our hosts, Wizards of the Coast.

What's up at THQ

THQ had an impressive display at GenCon, with *Summoner* and *Evil Dead* as two of the highlights. If any of you have not had the pleasure of seeing the little RPG *Summoner* Geeks movie, it is a total hoot and you must go visit www.summoner.com/downloads.cfm for a glimpse of the *Summoner* characters engaged in a typical evening of *D&D* and Cheetos.

Summoner is brought to us by Volition, creators of the *Descent* and *Freespace* series, and is a third-person RPG in full 3D. You control up to five characters in a quest-based system with real-time combat in a story inspired by literature, folklore and mythology. To save your kingdom from annihilation, you must journey to the lost empire of Ikaemos, the island monastery of Iona, and the forest labyrinth of Liangshan, questing for the Summoners' rings. You wil also be able to summon powerful creatures to add to your party.

Summoner was running on the PS2 only at the show, and the PC graphics should look even better. The character animation is reminiscent of the slick look of *Vampire: The Masquerade*, and the magical



Dragon skeletons are out in force.



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briefs

Diablo II expands—Just in at press time is the announcement of (surprise) an expansion for Blizzard's zillion-selling *Diablo II*. It will include two new character classes (the Assassin and the Druid), one new act set in the Barbarian Highlands, new monster types, bosses and a ton of new weapons and armor. Look for a full story next month....**A Thief goes home at last**—What homecoming could be sweeter than that which is totally unexpected? As Looking Glass closed up shop and the developers drifted away in sorrow, fans of the *Thief* series of games could see no hope for their favorite anti-hero. In classic form, however, light-fingered Garrett seems to have stolen the biggest prize of all—continued existence and a return to the watchful care of series creator Warren Spector....**Endangered Species**—Due to lack of funds and publisher disinterest, Wombat Games, a developer composed of team members from *Ultima Online* and *Klingon Academy*, had to close their doors. Also killed was their massively-multiplayer role-playing game *Dark Zion*. Perhaps naming your company after a vanishing marsupial is not the best of omens....**Pop goes the Zombie**—Videogame tie-in marketing is a strange and unpredictable little world. Lara Croft action figures, *Myst* hardback novels, *Starcraft* superdeformed keychains—you never know what's going to pop up next. Independent developer Zombie, however, has taken that notion a bit literally. Their unannounced title, *Super Bubble Pop* features a pink-haired dancer who fires colored bubbles at an oncoming wall in time to whatever music CD you care to put in. So what's the marketing tie-in? Seattle-based hair salon Vain, which caters to the punk and alternative communities, is creating a hair care product in conjunction with the game. Their Super Bubble Pop will be a styling gel, which looks, feels, and smells like pink bubblegum, but rinses out with shampoo. Odd to be certain, but potentially a lot more fun than another action figure or screensaver. ■



Thief



Blue football players unite.

and summoning effects are awesome.

Evil Dead: Hail to the King is based on the popular *Evil Dead* film trilogy. You play Ash, the hero from the film (voiced by Bruce Campbell who starred in the series) who is drawn back to the infamous cabin in the woods to face once again the evil forces that have crossed over into our world. You'll don a chainsaw and slice and dice carnivorous Kandarian demons, vicious deadites and other juicy uglies that have been spawned by the Book of the Dead.

In this third person 3D shooter, er chainsaw-er, adventure game, you'll face over 20 types of enemies and will be able to use multiple weapons at the same time, including an axe, rifle, shotgun and of course, the legendary chainsaw.

In the demo, there was a chainsaw bug that provided almost never-ending chainsaw sound effects—a bit annoying but it didn't detract from the wonderfully gory combat sequences in which blood literally gushed from the evil spirits as they fell, and dripped from the saw of our hero as he walked away. Half-dismembered spirits and hillbilly zombies provided quite a challenge as the demonstrator was killed over and over again, dispersing a fair number of them as well in his wake. You can look for this product in early November.

Also-rans at THQ are *Red Faction*, a first person shooter due in the first half of 2001, *Skateboarding featuring Andy McDonald*, any second now, and the online *WWF With Authority!*, an online turn-based WWF simulation where you are the manager of your favorite WWF superstar. *WWF* will be available this fall.

More software sans dice

Again, GenCon is hugely dedicated to the classic board and tabletop gamer, but there were a number of computer related games as well.

Conspicuously absent at the affair were Bioware and Interplay. With *Baldur's Gate 2* and *Neverwinter Nights* in progress, it was quite a shock not to see the Canadian-based developers prominently featured. Rumors flew about various reasons for their non-participation, including stories of the financial collapse of both Interplay and Bioware, but representatives of both companies called this nonsense. "We got rather a late start and that, in addition to other minor logistical problems including the imminent release of *Baldur's Gate II*, contributed to our inability to attend," said Ray Muzyka of Bioware.

Not at all unhappy with the absence of Bioware were SSI and Mattel whose new *Pools of Radiance* game became one of the PC highlights of the show. Since it has been the first game to incorporate the Third Edition ruleset in a software product, SSI has had a lot of insight into the GM and Monster aspects of the new *D&D*. Producer John Kromrey was pleased as punch to demo the game to the masses and said, "It's so much easier to demo here than it is at E3. The people are so into it and are just easier to talk to."

Sierra shone brightly with the much anticipated *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magicka Obscura* and *Throne of Darkness*.

Microsoft brought *Mech Commander 2*, due to release next Spring, *Crimson Skies*, due in September and *Conquest Frontier Wars* in November. Activision is *still* showing *Wizards and Warriors*, which should be with us late September, and Ripcord was there with *Gorka Morka*, slated for Second Quarter 2001, and *Legends of the Blademasters*, pushed back once more to late November.

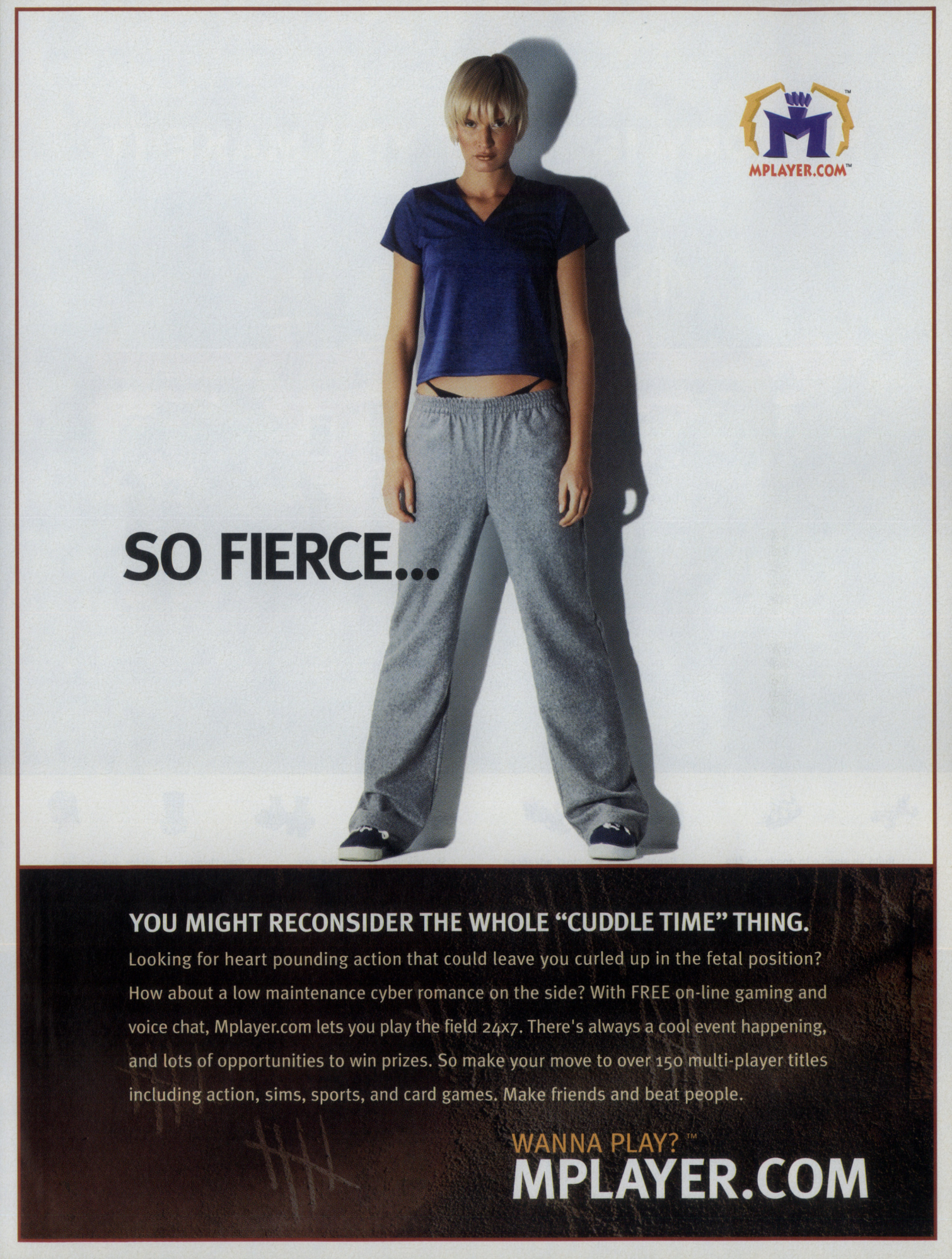
The parade of characters

On Saturday, August 12, Milwaukee was treated to quite a spectacle as the truly diehard conventioneers donned their favorite costumes and paraded from the Midwest Center to a nearby hotel and then participated in a costume contest. There were lords and ladies of all shapes sizes and descriptions, and some folks were wearing outfits that were rather, shall we say "unsuitable to their physical characteristics?" There were Orcs, Trolls, Scotsmen, Darth Mauls and Princess Amidalas, birds and fairies, punk rockers and leather queens, wizards and knights, and all manner of Star Trek wannabes.

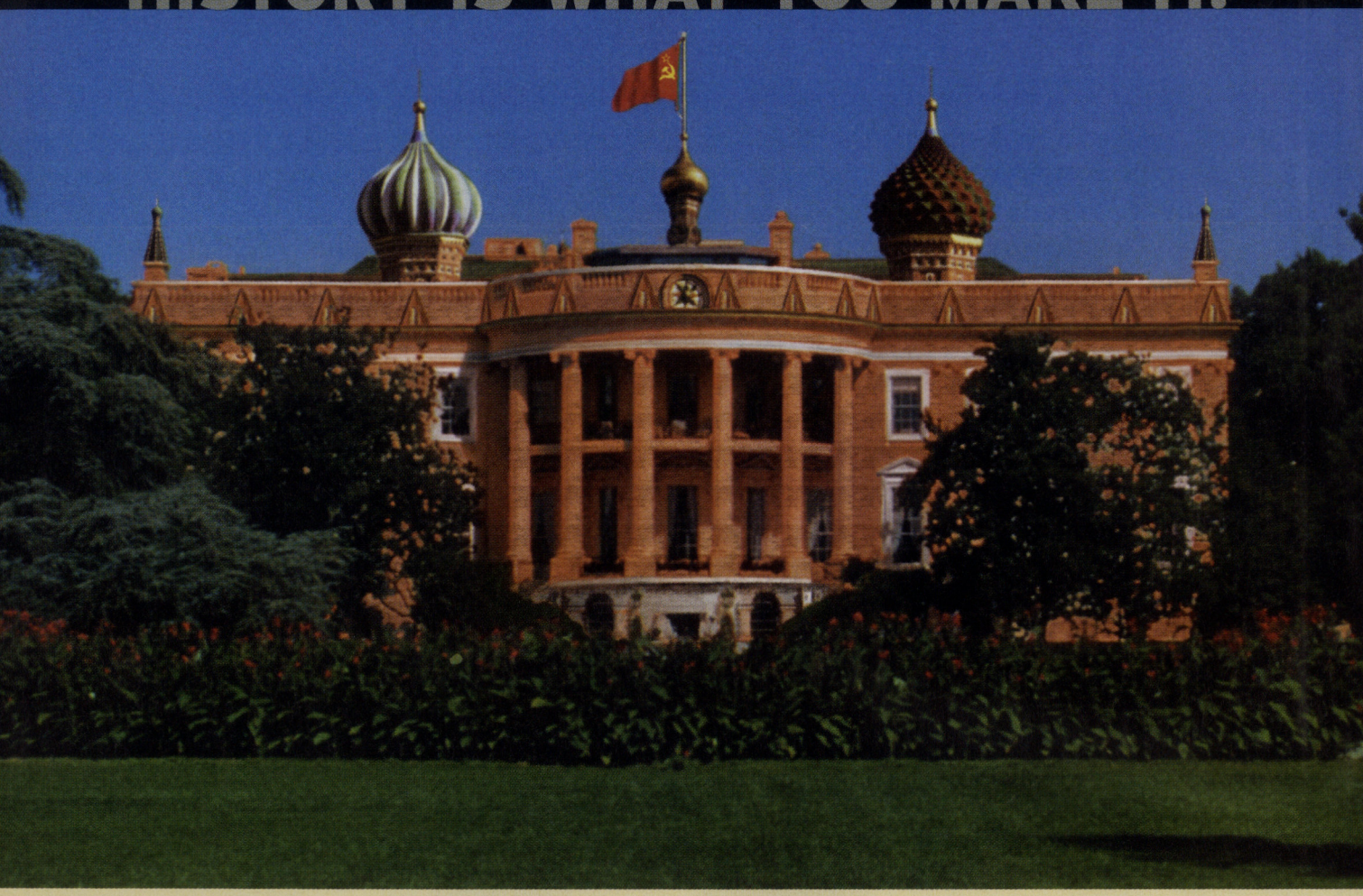
Gary Gygax himself led the parade, and turned out to be quite an affable gentleman, enduring with good grace the last minute request that he don a wizard costume to placate the local media. He entered the pressroom where his choice of costumes was stored and saying, "Hmmm, I'm not really anxious about this. Right..." he disappeared behind a curtain looking for the life of him like an only slightly disgruntled mix of Jerry Garcia and Jack Kerouac. He chose a brown wizard's robe, but alas, had no hat and told us not to worry, that he had a floppy hat with him that he used in a sweeping bow to Queen Elizabeth who seemed to have demanded an audience. It was hard to tell whether or not he was kidding.

Finally, it's hard to walk away from a costume-ridden, fantasy medieval event without mentioning one of the greatest supporters of *non*-game-related role-playing, namely the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), an international not-for-profit educational organization devoted to the study and re-creation of pre-17th century European and Middle Eastern cultures. Its members study medieval martial arts, costuming, armor making, leather work, archery, heraldry metalwork, vintning and brewing (quite a preoccupation in the Milwaukee chapter), cooking, dancing, calligraphy and manuscript illumination, needlecrafts, music and a whole lot more. They offer feasts, tournaments, dances, guilds and classes throughout the world and there are currently 13 geographic regions or "kingdoms" involved. The Milwaukee group is Caer Anterth Mawr, and their representatives were absolutely delightful—too much time on their hands? Nah.

While the convention began with a blast, the final day ended in a fizzle as tired wargamers and RPGers took their boards and dice and flocked back to from whence they came. Wizards of the Coast are calling this the very heyday of their GenCon conferences, with attendance up over 20%, over 90% of their events sold out, and well over 20,000 happy attendees on their way back home to shower. Time to visit the tattoo shop and scrounge up some black T-shirts for next year. —*Cindy Yans*


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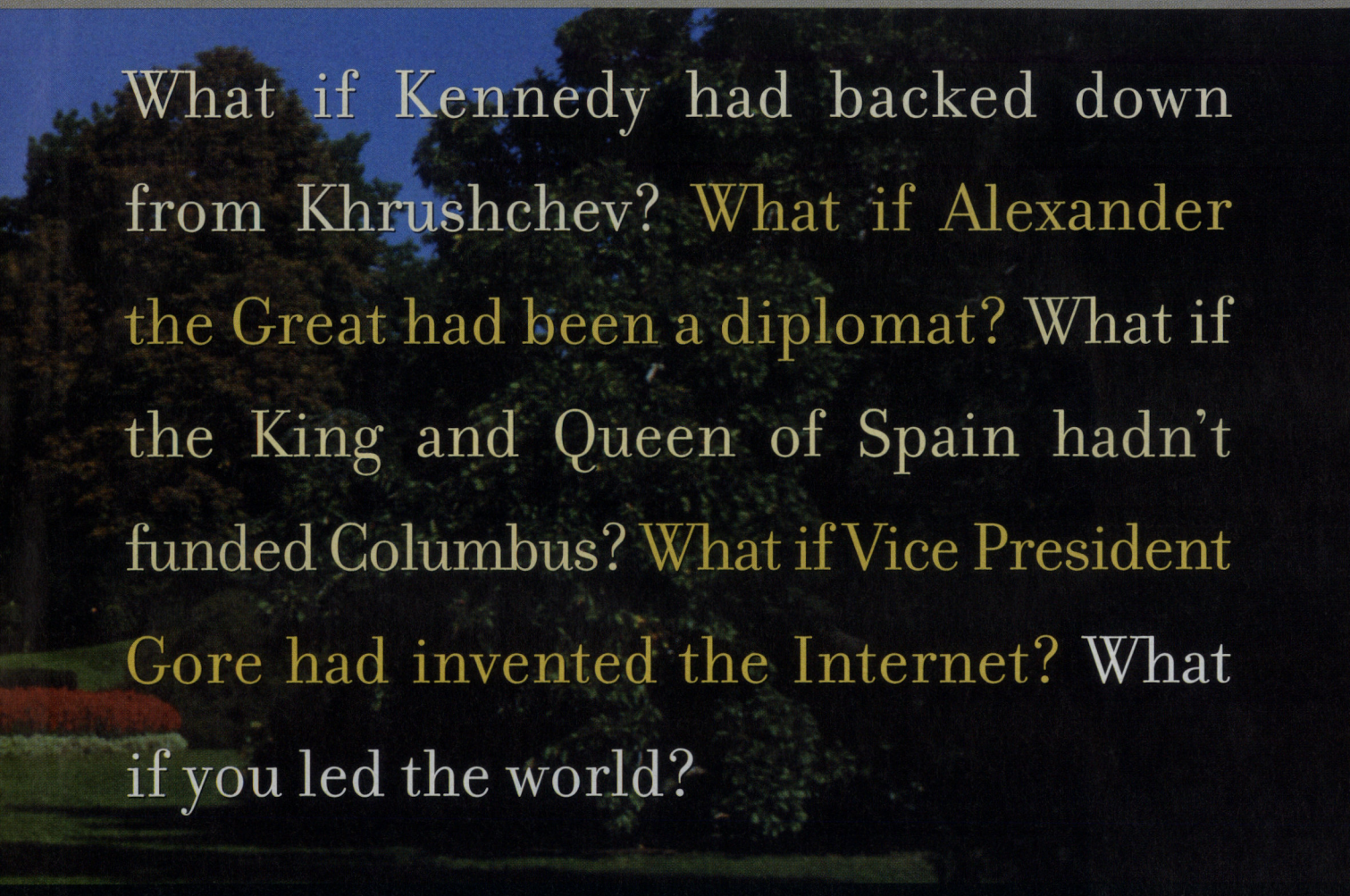






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The Mechs Come Home

With MechWarrior 4: Vengeance, Microsoft reunites the MechWarrior series with the BattleTech license



by Tom Chick

What do you get when an 80-ton 'mech license meets an 800-pound software-publishing gorilla? The next *MechWarrior* title, developed by the founders of the license and published by Microsoft—*MechWarrior 4: Vengeance*. Lead designer David McCoy is sitting in the Microsoft headquarters comparing a mock up of the box cover to the cover of Hasbro's *MechWarrior 3*. An astute *BattleTech* fan might realize that the two 'mechs on this cover are new and won't be found in any of the source material. For this latest title, the word "MechWarrior" is featured prominently across the top fifth of the box, noticeably bigger than it was on the *MechWarrior 3* box. The "4" is almost hidden inside the letter "o" and the word "vengeance" is sprawled bright and bold beneath the title. The idea is to downplay the number and punch up the fact that it's a story-driven game, to make it seem less like yet another installment of a wandering game license in search of a home. The contents of this box should be a little different from the other *MechWarrior* games you've played.





"It's a big space opera," explains Jordan Weisman, the man who invented *BattleTech*, "It's characters' lusts and passions and conflicts. Like any soap opera, that's what brings you in. It's a war, but it's not a war driven by economics. It's driven by 'my cousin killed my father and is sitting on the throne'. I'm going to do something about that—me personally.

McCoy has just returned to Washington from a video shoot in Los Angeles for *MechWarrior 4's* cinematics. He's one of the leads here working on the game with developers drawn largely from FASA Interactive, the computer game division of the company that created the BattleTech universe where the MechWarrior titles are set. Microsoft bought this division last year, moving the employees from Chicago to Washington and immediately putting them to work on *MechWarrior 4*. Many of them are guys who've been involved in the FASA's BattleTech Virtual World Centers, a chain of locations with networked "pods" that people pay to sit in and play for ten-minute matches. FASA created these centers before LAN and Internet gaming was common.

MechWarrior 4 marks the first Windows-based development for many of these guys. It's clear they've been champing at the bit for years to make a *MechWarrior* game for the PC, but for one reason or another, they've been continually thwarted... until now. You know you've done something right if you want to make a PC game and suddenly you're part of the world's biggest software publisher.

HollywoodTech

McCoy is the main author of the game's story and it's his job to get it told without being upstaged by giant robots shooting big guns at each other. "We wanted to get a number of things out of the story," he explains slowly. He's either very tired or very methodical; probably a little of both. "We wanted that social interaction, that sense that you're operating in context and people are reacting to what you're doing. These are all supporting characters," he waves at one wall of his office covered with photographs of the actors they hired. A handful of bad guys are skulking off to one side, while the dozen or so good guys are clustered together, grinning triumphantly with white L.A. actor teeth. There's a dead ringer for David Hasselhoff at the far end. "One of the goals of the player is to win these characters' trust. We wanted that whole sense of social immersion. If I play the game without that, you know, multiplayer rocks, single missions are okay, it's a good game. But then if I add all these voices and these characters and I start to feel like I'm not alone, like I'm not just playing a game, but that I'm operating inside an environment... well, that's one aspect that gives you that sense of immersion, to give that sense of context."

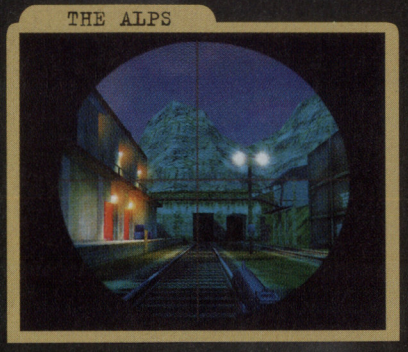
McCoy says he hasn't been happy with the way the player in the latest *MechWarrior* games is just another cog in the machinery of war, following orders and earning ranks and medals in the pursuit of someone else's cause. "*BattleTech* is very much about a sense of power. You not only have an important role, but you have something important to do. A lot of us don't feel important, like the universe doesn't really grant me an opportunity to exercise my 'special-ness', if you will. And so here we go, 'look, there is an important thing for you to accom-

Concept art of the Uziel, one of the seven new mech designs in MechWarrior 4.

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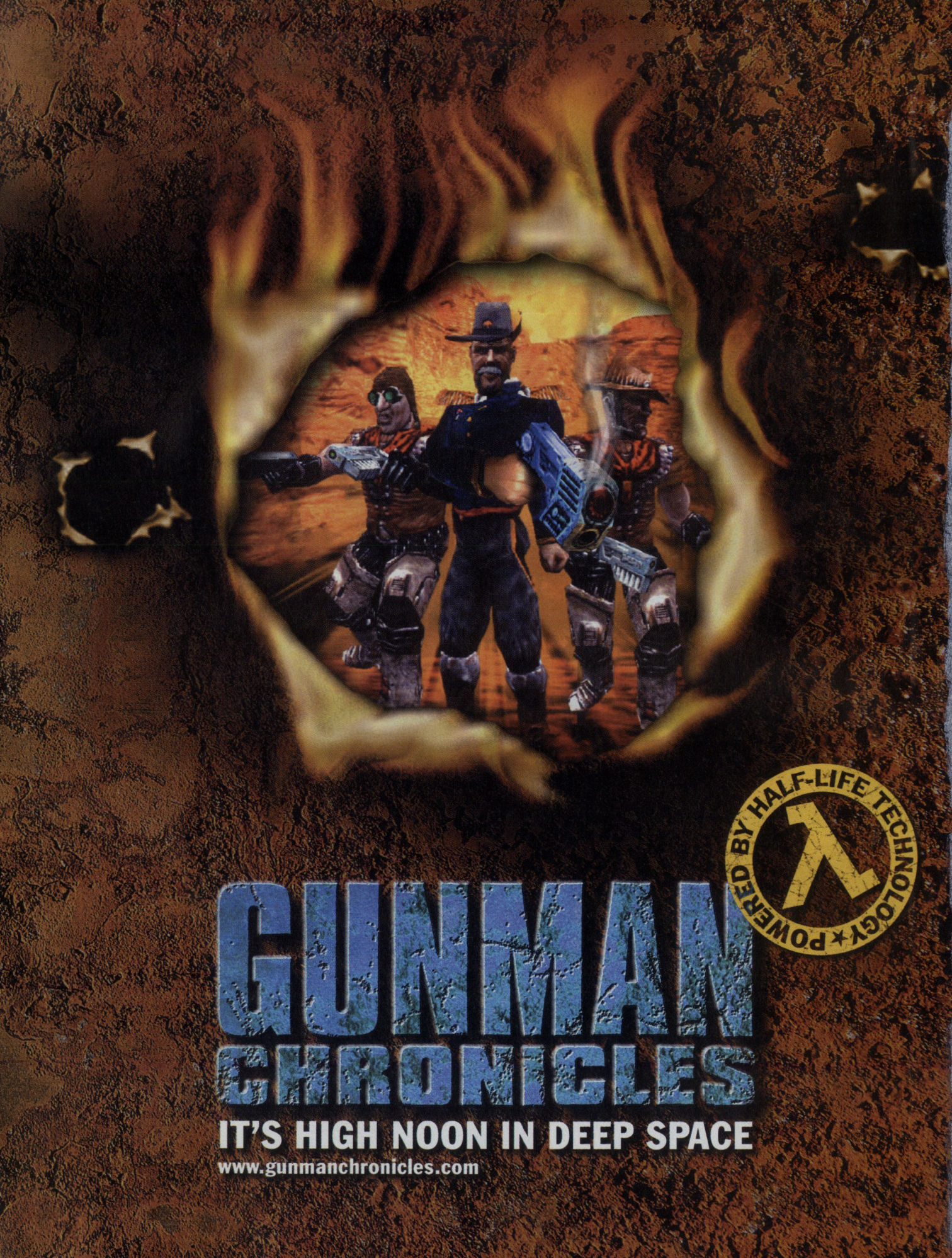
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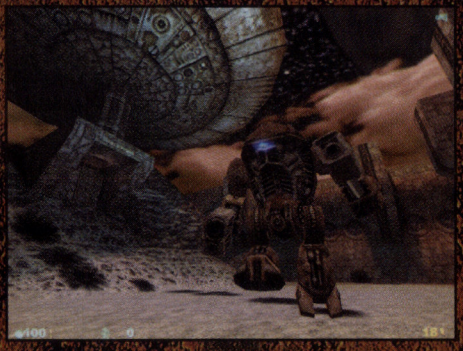
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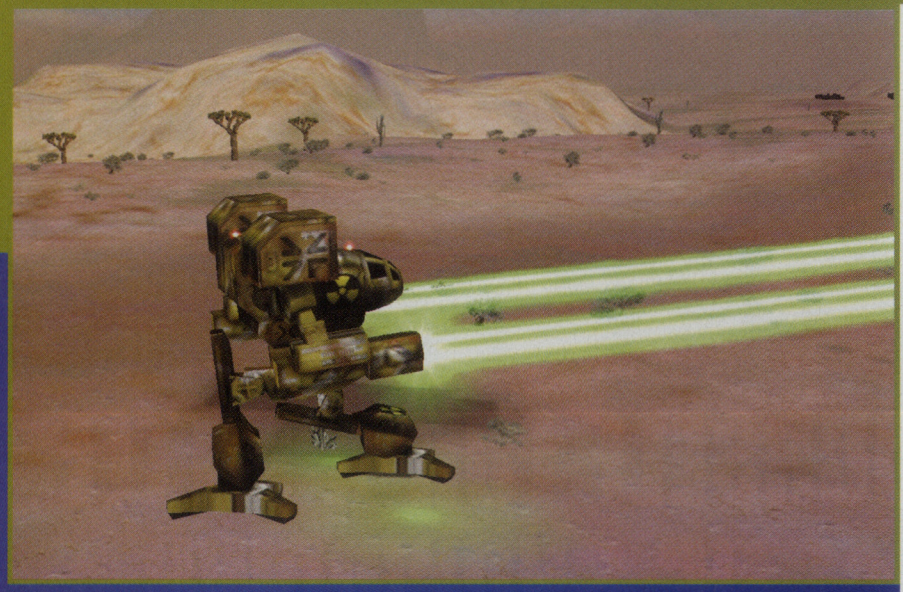
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The easily recognizable Mad Cat is the signature 'mech design for the series.

plish.'" This all ties in with the way the pen-and-paper game that inspired the series is set in a universe driven by people rather than politics.

"It's a big space opera," explains Jordan Weisman, the man who invented *BattleTech*, "It's characters' lusts and passions and conflicts. Like any soap opera, that's what brings you in. It's a war, but it's not a war driven by economics. It's driven by 'my cousin killed my father and is sitting on the throne'. I'm going to do something about that—me personally. That's what the whole nobility structure allows us to do. You have an extended family going across these kingdoms and their passions drive armies to war. It's not just, you know, something like trade routes."

"Hello. My name is Player Character. You killed my father."

MechWarrior 4: Vengeance casts you as the banished son of one of the ruling lords of House Davion. After years spent in exile away from your home planet, you get word that your family has been killed in an uprising. Your uncle calls you home as the sole surviving heir to a usurped throne. McCoy says this is a perfect plot device to lend significance to an unfamiliar location: it's the home you were banished from many years ago that you must fight to recover. Your opponents are the members of House Steiner, some of whom are actually your relatives and most of whom you'll meet in contexts other than the battlefield.

"I always like James Bond films because Bond would have dinner with the bad guy and try to get to know him rather that 'a-guy-shows-up-and-he-shoots-him, end-of-story,'" says McCoy. "This isn't like that. All these characters you'll kind of get to know before you encounter them in a combat environment, so we hope it'll make it a little more significant."

When asked whether he's going to stick with the *Wing Commander* format—cut scene, mission, cut scene, mission, repeat ad nauseum—McCoy says they have a different paradigm in mind. Most of the video McCoy shot is talking head stuff. There are a few scenes shot as actual cinematics, but the bulk of the character appearances is like video email, where an actor is speaking into the camera addressing the player directly. "People are calling you up to tell you things," McCoy says, explaining how the game will tell the story. "They do that while you're planning all the other things. So you get a little pop up window with a little video of a guy. You could be planning a mission, deciding what you're going to do, you can be configuring a mech and along some guys comes up and goes 'hey, I wanted to tell you this' and it's just treated like a phone conversation. Now if you don't want to talk to him, you can shut him down and go back and review these messages later. Basically like a voice mail system." Apparently ICQ is alive and well in the 31st Century. There are also cut scenes before every mission that use the game engine to give you a little background on the upcoming mission.

Pruning the campaign tree

Earlier *MechWarrior 4* announcements hinted at a semi-dynamic branching campaign. The team had used the word "nodal" to describe the idea of being able to choose different missions from a variety of hubs, or nodes. "We had a nodal campaign and it worked story-wise, but it wasn't working gameplay wise, because it was too difficult to balance and we weren't getting the right learning curve," says McCoy. "So right now we're fiddling around with 'okay, are we just going go to a series of operations with things in there being linear with a few popup missions that are optional?'" McCoy also mentions the amount of work that has to go into each mission and how they hated the idea that the player would miss many of them. They also didn't want to put the player on a losing path. "There aren't any routes that allow you to lose. Basically now, there are really only about three missions that it's possible a player would miss."

Although they're moving away from branching, the campaign is still divided into chunks called operations. "We set the operations up so there's always something you're trying to achieve in each area," says McCoy, "and then the missions are preparatory to doing whatever that is. Once you've accomplished it, you move on to the next operation."

McCoy says there will be some randomness in each mission, such as how enemies are deployed. "Usually what we do is we pick three or four possibilities then we just roll a die to see if it's A, B, or C. If the player replays a mission that was A, it might be B this time." Some missions will allow you to choose from one of a few entry points. With variable enemy locations, this should offer more replayability than the standard-issue canned mission structure. If you get hung up trying to finish a particularly difficult mission, however, you'll be able to skip it after three attempts. Some of the longer missions will have save points so you won't have to



An Uziel wearing stylish urban camouflage.


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Effects like fire and sparking will be visible indicators of damaged 'mechs.

replay the entire mission if you fail. There will be repair facilities in every mission, although you won't have to baby-sit MFBs (mobile field bases) as you did in *MechWarrior 3*.

Your wingmen, called lancemates in the BattleTech universe, are also a big part of the game's randomness. *MechWarriors* are rated for about twenty skills, such as stealth, sensor ops, gunnery, piloting, long range sniping and night fighting. Right now, project manager TJ Wagner feels there are too many skills—he plans to distill them down to a smaller set. The player will be rated in each of the skills as a way of grading his effectiveness in each area. But more importantly, these skills will differentiate and evolve your lancemates—the more a pilot uses a skill, the more experience he gains, and the better his skill gets. Losing a skilled lancemate will be costly.

"I'm going in!"

However, just because a 'mech is destroyed doesn't mean you lose the pilot. When a lancemate's mech is destroyed he ejects, at which point any number of things can happen. The pilot might be rescued, he might be lost, or he might just be missing for several missions. McCoy says this will add another element of randomness to the game.

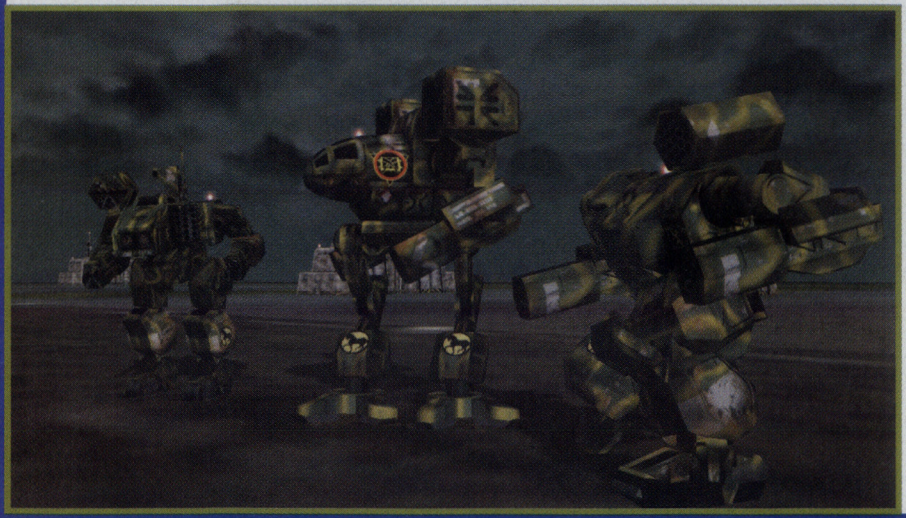
McCoy says they like to think of 'mechs as capital ships in a sci-fi navy, like aircraft carriers with extensive support groups wherever they go—evacuation personnel, salvage personnel, mechanics, forward observers, and mobile field bases, all chatting with each other as you play a mission. Although various friendly elements will be present, it looks like the player's interaction will be limited to his three lancemates, who can be given fairly broad commands like "follow me" and "attack my target." However, Wagner says there will be an interactive tactical map that lets you give waypoints to your lancemates.

Wagner came to FASA Interactive from a chain of music retailers that was swallowed up by Blockbuster. With a really long ponytail and an easy-going grin, he looks like the kind of laid-back guy who would work in a record store. He confesses he was never much of a gamer until he joined FASA; before then his experience was limited to the Sega Genesis. You'd never guess that he's one of the hardest of the hardcore *BattleTech* players, a sort of driving force for making the game more of a sim and less of a first-person action shooter. He routinely played the pod games in full sim mode: "You spent more time managing your 'mech than firing your weapon," he recalls. He frequents fan sites and hangs out on the message boards with die-hard players who've seen the game grow from a pen-and-paper title to a computer franchise, and he clearly agonizes over details to include, what to leave out, and what to make optional. Most things have ended up in the latter category. "We probably have one of the most heinous options screens for setting up multiplayer games," he beams.

Should we expect *MechWarrior 4* to be more complex than its predecessors? "I wouldn't say more complex," he says, "I'd say more realistic. The things that we changed, or made more like the pods are stuff that the earlier titles glossed over or didn't handle the way we were always handling them in the pods. Like jump jets, for instance, which will probably be a big controversy when we release. The jump jet in *MechWarrior 3* made you pretty much a hovercraft. You could rise up, go left, right, forward, back and it was really mellow. It wasn't all that exciting. But in the *BattleTech* universe, these are basically rocket boosters strapped to your 'mech. What we did in *MechWarrior 4* is made them like they were originally intended to be—you fire them and it's a rocket boost. You have a little bit of control which direction you're going, but it's basically the longer you fire, the higher you're going, the farther you can go, and the more chance you have of taking damage when you come down. You get that sense of being slightly out of control."

ChevyChaseTech

Similarly, the 'mechs seem more prone to falling over if you're not careful. 'Mechs can trip stomping on objects, getting hit really hard, landing after a fall, trying to walk up steep slopes, or maneuvering on ice or in the rain. As with the jump jets, the idea isn't to take control from the player, but to make it more



A Mad Cat and his lancemates in swamp camouflage.



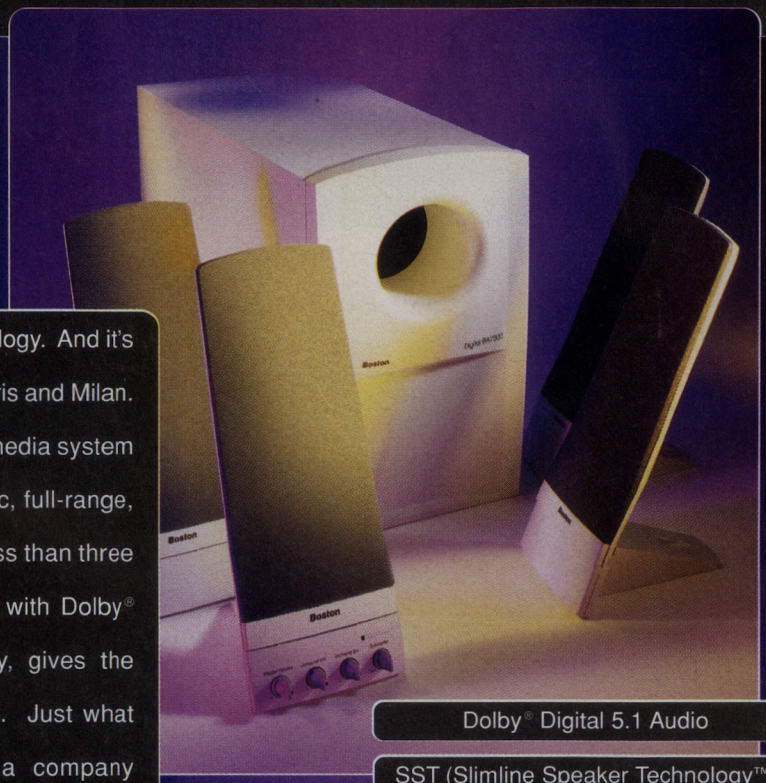
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Boston



Jump jetting in *MechWarrior 4* will be riskier than it was in previous games.



Your base will have repair gantries to patch you up during battles.

challenging.

The basic physics engine builds on work FASA has done with the pod games. "All the simulation code tracking mech movement and physics," answers Wagner when asked what was carried over, "A 'mech is a lot more complicated than your typical first person shooter. They have subsystems, armor systems, weapons systems, electronic packages, jump jets. They all have to be tracked. We already had all the base libraries for that so we optimized them."

Laid over this is a whole new graphics engine. Sure, it's pretty, but it doesn't look like a dramatic leap the last game made. There's less of the "wow" factor you got from *MechWarrior 3's* graphics and its excellent sense of piloting a heavy mech lumbering across the countryside. Many of the terrain types in *MechWarrior 4* are typical and familiar: a desert, an arctic area, a moon, and a swamp. There is, however, an impressive nighttime cityscape that could rival some of the urban arenas in *Shogo* or *Slave Zero* once the details have been filled in. If you look closely, you'll see some fine work done with the animations. A lot of effort went into making the 'mechs move convincingly across sloping surfaces. When a 'mech falls on an incline, his polygons fall along the angle of the incline rather than clipping into the ground or sticking out horizontally. It's a subtle but impressive accomplishment that obviously took a lot of man-hours.

On the ball

"We wanted to open up the range of expression in the design to make it more fluid and more graceful in the animation," explains art lead Heinz Schuller, "One of things you'll notice on a lot of the new 'mechs and on a lot of the redesigns of the old ones is that there's a ball joint at the hip, which basically lets us gyrate and move on multiple axes and really give it a lot more believable motion than if you were just doing that Robbie the Robot *Fantastic Voyage* move." Schuller demonstrates by cocking his arms at the elbow and stiffly waving them. "Using the ball joints is something we did early on, especially with the arms and the legs to open up the movement more."

Schuller was one of the artists for *MechWarrior 3* for the brief time that FASA Interactive was developing it. He was obviously disappointed when the job was turned over to Zipper, but there's a calm glee in his voice as he talks about the work he's doing for *MechWarrior 4*, which has included creating some entirely new 'mechs. "It's kind of like the Enterprise D did with the original Enterprise. We wanted to take some old 'mechs and revamp them. So we basically redesigned some existing designs and pushed them as far as Jordan would let us go before he screamed in agony," he says. Schuller says they even modified some of the old 'mechs. "We can't put a new arm on a 'mech, but what we can do is take the theme of an old mech and just sort of punch it into the style we're going for. My overall concept for the art was 'let's get more hardcore and military looking about our vehicles and less fantasy and stylized'. I want something that extrapolates from the conventional military that we know, like a Desert Storm military taken into *BattleTech*. I want to keep it greasy and unsafe looking. *BattleTech* isn't a safe universe like *Star Trek*. In the *BattleTech* universe you could walk by something and cut a gash in your arm. It's not rounded, it's not ergonomic. This is a universe that's been at war for hundreds of years. They're strictly about function."

The new 'mechs include a Mk. II version of the famed Mad Cat with angled missile launchers for lobbing long-range missiles over obstacles, a squat mean-looking Uziel with rounded shoulders, and a Thanatos with "a big honking missile launcher on the end of his arm." Of course, many casual players who don't understand how closely FASA has guarded the canon may not appreciate the significance of the new 'mechs.

This could be a problem with *MechWarrior 4* as a whole: a lot of the changes are subtle and might be invisible to your average *MechWarrior* fan. On the surface, it's many of the same 'mechs, weapons, and environments. The graphics look as good as you'd expect. Although the missions seem a bit more open than your average canned scenarios, it's a campaign structure similar to many combat sims. Will video email storytelling and the "rightful heir" storyline draw players in? Will the options for more realism appeal to gamers at a time when gaming tends to lean towards "dumbed down?" Will the as-yet-undetermined special multiplayer game types be enough to give the game legs beyond its single player campaign and obligatory skirmish modes? And will Microsoft be able to lift the giant robot genre from the disappointing sales that afflicted games like Activision's *Heavy Gear*, Infogrames' *Slave Zero*, and even Hasbro's *MechWarrior 3*? We won't know until the game is released this holiday season, but if anything can revive the sagging giant robot genre, it will be the teamwork of Microsoft's marketing muscle and *BattleTech's* founding fathers. ■

THE GOODS

GENRE Big Robot Sim

PUBLISHER Microsoft

RELEASE DATE Christmas 2000



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Icy Floes and Gnollish Igloos

The expanding world of EverQuest's Scars of Velious

by Mark Asher



There are stacks of monitors in the reception area waiting to be delivered to cubes and hooked up. There are employees working on tables pressed against walls because there aren't enough cubes. There are comings and goings and an undercurrent of chatter and general busyness all about. Life imitates the games they make at Verant Interactive's San Diego headquarters. The bustling world of *EverQuest*, which quickly vaulted into the number one slot as the most popular of the addictive massively multiplayer online roleplaying games, is mirrored inside Verant's offices. Sony purchased Verant several months ago, and it's now a part of Sony Online Entertainment, and there's just not enough space to contain the energy and bodies present. The symmetry is complete when *EverQuest* Producer Jeff Butler points to a building across the parking lot and tells me that they're leasing another three floors and expanding their offices. So too with *EverQuest*, which is growing yet again with its own expansion onto a lost continent. *The Scars of Velious* is slated for a December release.

Butler, who is also the producer for the *Velious* expansion, soon has me ensconced in his office. He smiles when he begins to discuss the expansion, but there's a seriousness hidden there too. He knows that Verant has captured some lightning in a silicon bottle with *EverQuest*, and like the soothsayers of old, every word he utters will be weighed and measured by the fans of the game, who are legion.

The story thus far...

Some players eat up this kind of fictional backdrop, and to others it's just that bit of parsley that no one ever touches. But for those who devour the garnish: Veeshan, the great Crystalline Dragon, scarred the continent of Velious with a swipe of her foreclaw. These "Scars of Velious" that were created became the icy mountains and valleys you'll see in the expansion, as well as some jungle areas that are the result of Veeshan's claw unearthing lava deep below the surface. Veeshan also blasted Velious with her breath, encasing it in eternal ice and creating a barrier of ice flows and stormy weather. Ages passed as the Velious Dragons lived in the icy wastes.

Then, during the Elder Age, Ogres, Giants and Goblins had conquered much of Norrath during this Elder Age. This evil assault by the minions of Rallos Zek found retribution from The Rathe in the form of a great curse against all of Rallos Zek's creations. The once green plains of Everfrost were frozen and giants caught in the center of the curse were transformed creatures of living ice. Others Giants farther away became lesser creatures in mind and body than they had been. Not all were afflicted, though. Some powerful Giants, the Kromzek, managed to escape and passed through the Frigid Barrier to land upon the Icy Fingers in Velious. Sometime after, the Coldain Dwarves were forced to establish a Velious colony when their ship was wrecked and they were stranded.

Thus the stage is set for *EverQuest* players. After ages again passed, those tinkerers of Ak'anon, the Gnomes, designed an icebreaking sea vessel. Now the way to Velious has been opened up again.

Something new with Velious

"We're trying to do some new things with *Velious*. It's linear, in the form of a dungeon," Butler says, referring to the new continent. "In other words, there is an entrance, and you're supposed to 'win through' to the goal. You have to reach certain goals and certain points

They Came from Beyond the Floe

Throughout the newly discovered continent of Velious you'll see many new creatures who are embroiled in complex alliances and racial hatreds with one another. There will be over 35 new creatures in Velious. Here are some of the chief actors on the scene.

Dragons

You'll find the dragons in Velious to be a different breed than in the rest of Norrath. These dragons have mastered magic and have formed a society of sorts, which includes a hereditary ruling council known as the Claws of Veeshan. They are the bitter enemies of the Storm Giants, whom they see as usurpers in their ancient lands of Velious. As a player, you can raise faction with the dragons by killing giants and possibly walk among them unharmed. You'll see many shrines and temples dedicated to Veeshan throughout Velious.

Frost Giants

The Kromrif managed to avoid the curse of The Rathe that afflicted all of Rallos Zek's creatures in Everfrost. You can think of them as overgrown barbarians who are more intelligent than the twisted giants elsewhere in Norrath that *were* effected by The Rathe's curse. The Frost Giants serve as mercenaries in the employ of the Storm Giants. You'll find their huge ice and log huts in the foothills of the mountains in the Eastern Wastes. They are also encamped outside of the Frost Giant city.

Storm Giants

The Kromrif also managed to escape the curse of The Rathe by fleeing to Velious. These highly civilized giants are the most powerful of all Rallos Zek's children and have erected a fortress city in the Eastern Great Scar. You'll see their warriors fully decked out in plate mail. There's even a Storm Giant magic user, so beware. The Storm Giants are constantly at war with both the Dragons and the Coldain Dwarves, so you can raise faction with them by vanquishing their enemies.

Coldain

These Ice Dwarves are the descendants of a lost clan of adventuresome dwarves who were shipwrecked and stranded on Velious ages ago. Their fortress city of Thurgadin is one of the initial zones you'll have to pass through to get to the Giants and Dragons. Their city is built in a hidden pass of the Great Divide and is beautifully constructed with velium ice. You'll see translucent ice bridges and pathways of ice throughout.

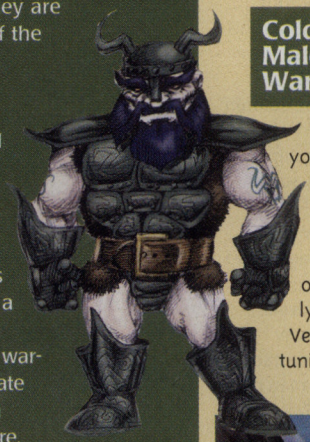


›› Siegfried and Roy are nowhere to be seen. ››

before you can move forward and explore the rest of the continent."

Velious is being designed for players of level 30 and above. One of the first goals you will face to "win through" will be the Coldain Dwarves. These dwarves have long been out of touch with their ancestors who live in the rest of Norrath. As such, don't expect them to be friendly to dwarven player characters. Thurgadin is the Coldain fortress city. It's a maze of twists and turns that lead to bridges ingeniously suspended by ice or snowy ramparts or large open rooms where the dwarven king and his retinue will await.

After the Coldain Dwarves, you will eventually work your way into the zones that contain the Frost and Storm Giants. These Giants are the enemies of the Dwarves, so may be able to raise your faction with the Giants (i.e. make them like you better) by killing Dwarves (or Dragons). Ultimately, you may be able to bind yourself to the city of the Storm Giants so that you'll be able to return from death to this point.



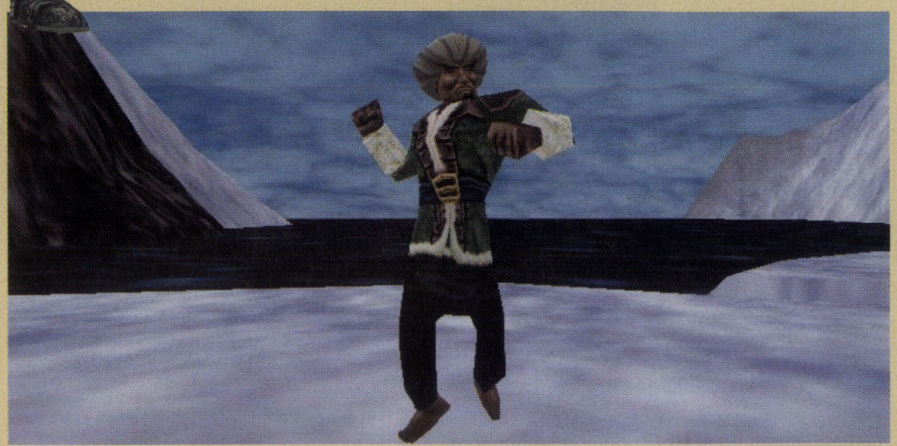
Coldain Male Warrior

From the Giants you will continue on to face the Dragons. These are likely to be the mightiest creatures in Velious, but again you have the opportunity to raise faction with the Dragons by killing Giants, so the potential to walk unscathed among the mighty serpents does exist. There are of course many other zones on Velious populated with other creatures dire and dangerous, but the Dwarves, Giants, and Dragons are the main players in the power struggle for Velious.



›› Davy Crockett has nothing on this little fellow. ››

Could the dungeon-like layout of the game's more than sixteen new zones be problematic to high-level players who want to cut to the chase and tangle with the Velious Dragons as soon as possible? "Higher

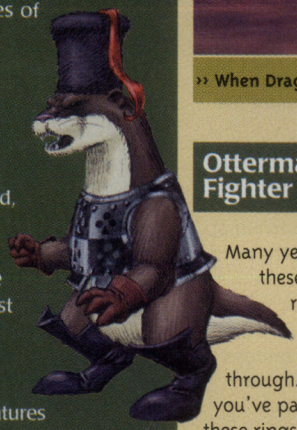


›› Heeeeere, Aladdin, here boy! ››

Sirens
Found in the appropriately named Siren Grotto, these evil creatures will attack anyone they consider to be an invader, though evil adventurers may be allowed safe passage. You'll find these wicked beauties basking in the sun on the rocks or ice floes near their home.

Walrusmen
The Ulthork live in clans throughout the Eastern Wastes, though they are sometimes sighted beyond those boundaries. These worshippers of Prexus, the Ocean Lord, are the mortal enemies of the Snowfang Gnolls.

Ottermen
The Othmir are a peaceful people found near the coastal areas of the wastes. They will fight when pressed, however, and are formidable. They dislike the Kromrif and Ulthork but are otherwise indifferent to most races.



Otterman Fighter

Undead Dragons
You'll find these undead creatures in the Dragon Necropolis, where the Ghost of Jeled-Dar dwells.

The Ry'gorr Clan Snow Orcs
A clan similar to the ones found in Everfrost, you'll find these orcs near the tundra region of the Eastern Wastes. Once populated by Gnolls and Yeti, the Ry'gorr have hunted them mercilessly and driven them to other regions.

Snowfang Gnolls
These gnolls pray to Tarrew Marr since their everyday life revolves around the hunting of fish, seals, sea lions, and whales. These gnolls generally keep to themselves, but are deadly fighters when they take up arms. They have a legend of the Vengeful Winter, which they say is the result of one of their great hunters slaying a Storm Giant noble, with the Storm Giants then taking vengeance by cursing the gnolls with a terrible winter.

Other Creatures
Other creatures you'll encounter in Velious include sea dragons, wyverns, wendigo, snow apes, wooly centaurs, and more. "We tried to take creatures that looked like they could survive frost and dressed them appropriately," Butler said. ■



Dire Wolf



›› When Dragons roamed the earth. ››

level players may be able to pass through some zones quickly," Butler says. "And we also have dragon rings. Many years ago, the dragons constructed these rings. They are used just like druid rings are now and their purpose is to take you back, at least as far into Velious as you have already won through. The continent is linear, and once you've passed a certain goal, you can use these rings to bring you forward to the furthest point you reached before."

Interactivity is the key
Besides the linear layout of the Velious zones, there's another new element that Butler and his team are working into the *EverQuest* clay. "We're making the game more interactive in Velious," Butler says. "For example, the Coldain are at war with the Storm Giants. They were nearly killed by the giants after being shipwrecked in Velious thousands of years ago. They fled to this hidden pass and built this fortress." Butler is getting excited now. "If players manage to kill the dwarven king, called the Dain—and that won't be easy to do—then a cry will go up among the Storm Giant seers. 'We have seen a vision! Our mortal enemy the Dain has been slain. Now is the time to attack Thurgadin!' and the Storm Giants will march out of their city to attack the Coldain."

Another example Butler gives of the expansion's interactive nature is a certain statue of Rallos Zek in the city of the Storm Giants. "The statue can come to life. Players can battle it and if they defeat it, Rallos Zek himself will appear to battle the players." Butler grins. "It will be very difficult for players to survive this battle."

One of the ways that you distinguish yourself in *EverQuest* is through the collection of items and armor. There's a lot of stylin' going on in Norrath. The *Velious* expansion is adding all new armor, and what Butler showed looks great, especially the new platemail modeled by a giant ogress. "Everyone gets the opportunity to obtain armor as treasure that is not only one level better, but there are two choices—medium and super-fancy," Bulter says. "There are two new sets of every armor type available in the Velious expansion and a total of 156 new textures. One type is aimed at players level 35 and higher, with the other rarer armor aimed at level 55-60 characters."

A new interface
The third and last new twist in the *Velious* expansion will be a revised user interface. Verant is still working on this and wasn't ready to show anything yet, but they do have an idea of the features it will likely have. "We're going to update the GUI. It's still in the design and planning stages, but our goals are to make it fully 3D, user-configurable, and to get rid of the graphic overlays," Butler says. The size and the shape and the overall feel are still up in the air."

One of the nifty new features of the new interface will provide is a way for you to tie an emote and text message to an action, such as casting a spell. For example, your druid could cast a snare spell upon an enemy and the emote and message you could have him perform might be to wave at the ensnared creature and say, "I'll be running along now. Catch me if you can!" This should allow you to personalize many aspects of your characters. Of course, the possibility of players tying comments like "Dudez!" (and other such highbrow things) to actions is a bit daunting.

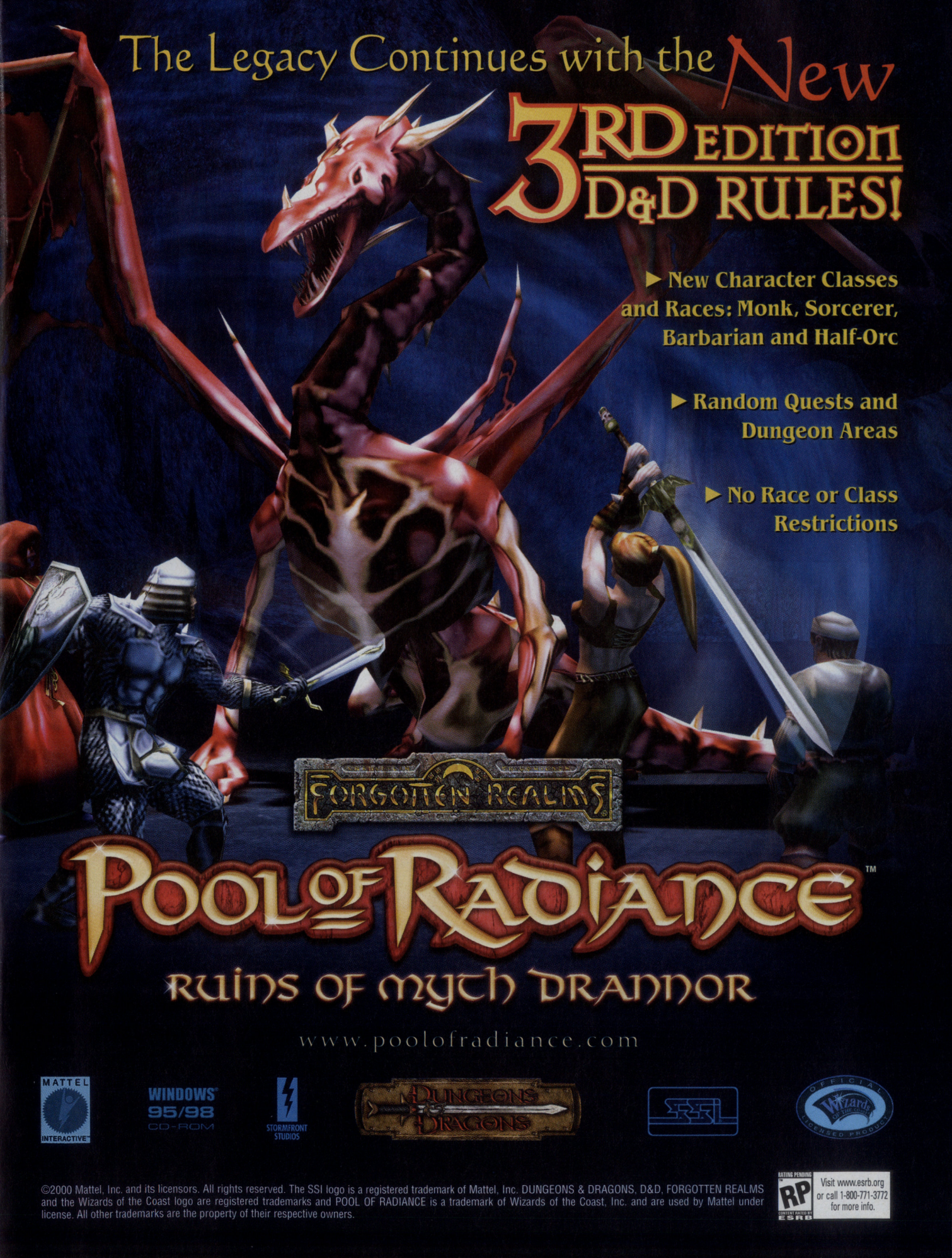
From what Verant was able to reveal, the *Velious* expansion looks like it's right on target to deliver what *EverQuest* fans seem to love. It's just stuffed full of more—more creatures, more zones to play in, more spells, and so on. From the Storm Giants massive city, which is a sight to behold, with huge walls that are impossible to scale, to the mysterious cities of the ancient Velious Dragons, *The Scars of Velious* should have even more players signing up. Also, Verant Interactive may find that they need a new continent to house all their employees. ■

THE GOODS

GENRE Online Role-playing

PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment

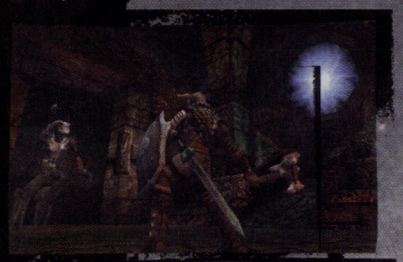
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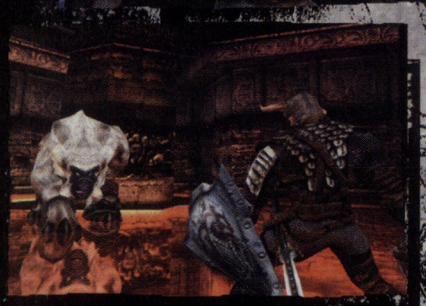
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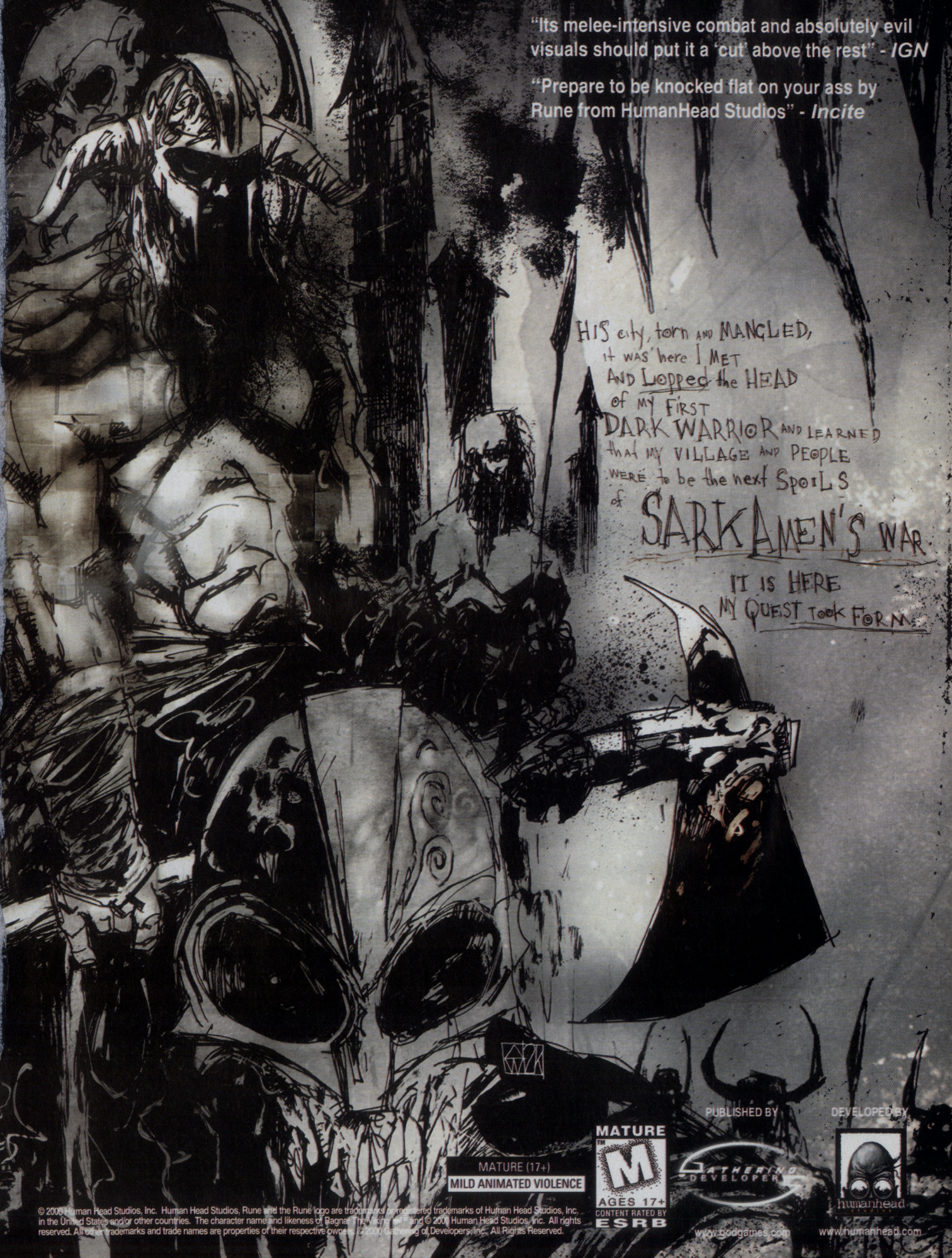


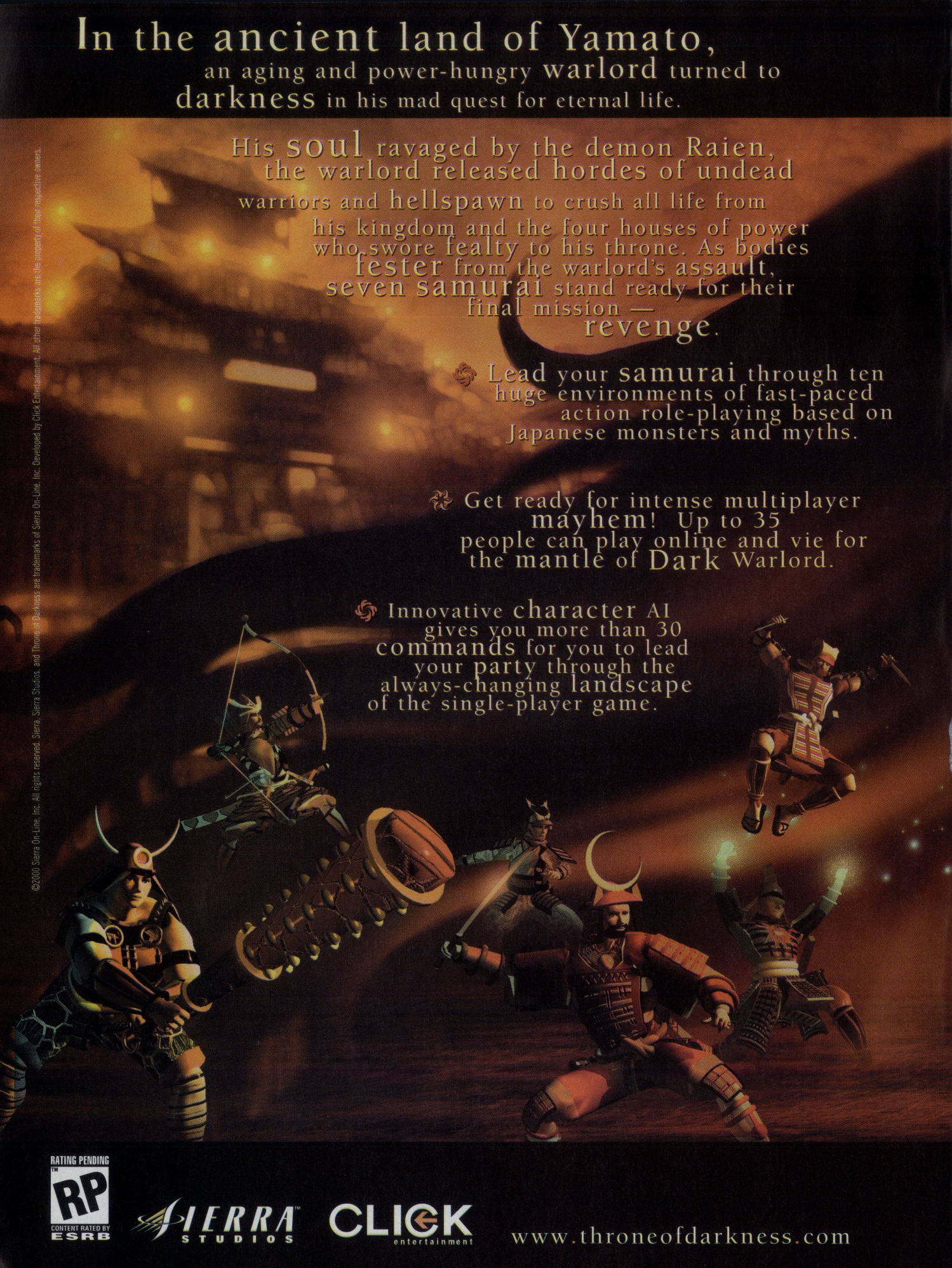


It is I, RAGNAR the mighty
wielder of battle-AXE,
SHIVER of sword, and MANIFester
of MAGIC.
It has been WANT of light
AND DECADENCE RAGING
SINCE I last FIRED thee WELL
THE VIKING LANDS have been
ripped open like A SCAB!
THE MARROW FLOWING,
DARK SHADOWS EXCOMMUNICATED
FROM the NetherWORLD
by the
BESTIAL SARK AMEN.

WHEN FIRST I BORE ON AND SAW
the pillage AND LOOTING
by those bound in EVIL,
I, RAGNAR the MIGHTY
hit my KNEES IN
the MOST VIOLENT of retches
after surveying the SIGHTS of
three-day spoils left
lying stretched AND MAIMED
in the FIELD of BATTLE.

AS I EMERGED,
UNHURT AND UNSCATHED
FROM the UNDERWORLD
I FOUND, IT WAS HE,
CONRACK the CONQUEROR,
WHO SCAPEGOATED
the BLAME AND BANE, OF SARK AMEN'S
ATTACKS.


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"Prepare to be knocked flat on your ass by Rune from HumanHead Studios" - Incite
HIS city, torn AND MANGLED, it was here I MET AND Lopped the HEAD of MY FIRST DARK WARRIOR AND LEARNED that MY VILLAGE AND PEOPLE WERE to be the next SPOILS of SARKAMEN'S WAR
IT IS HERE MY QUEST TOOK FORM
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MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE
MATURE
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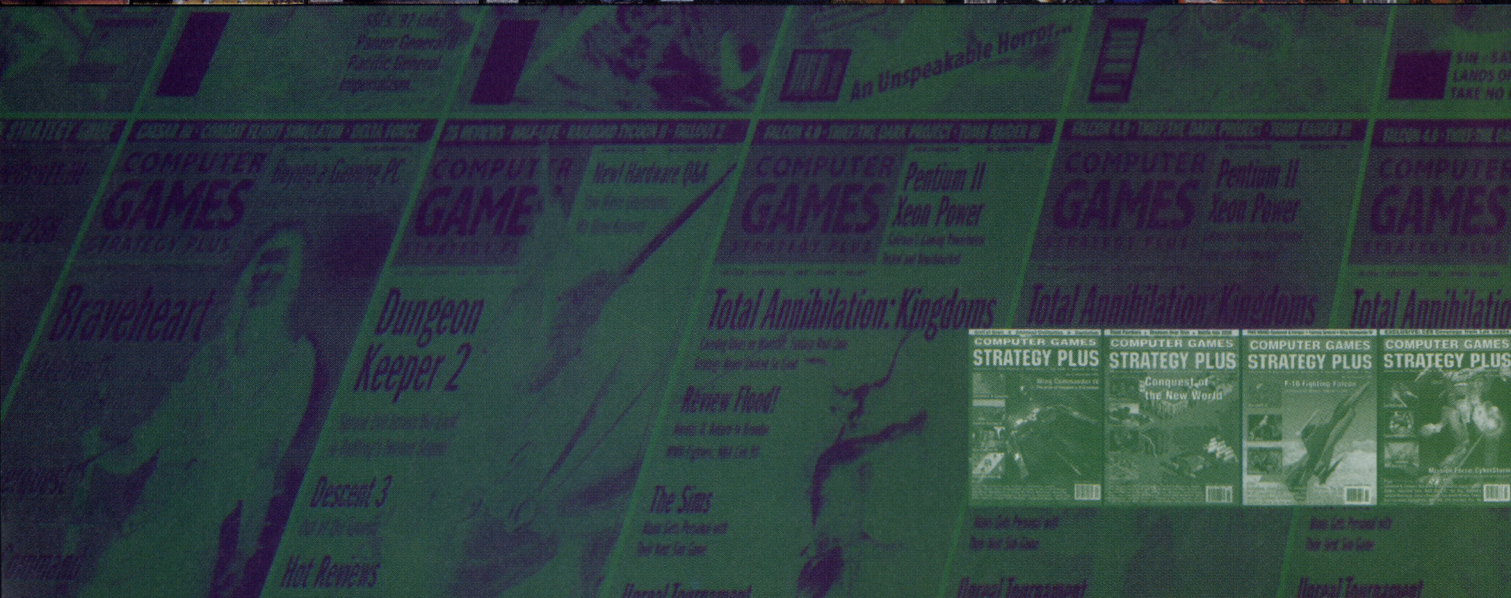

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celebrating 10 YEARS

It's hard to believe the very magazine you're holding in your hands has been around for 10 years. While we do try to avoid being overly sentimental about the "good old days of gaming™", we couldn't resist putting together one of these enormous (and frankly rather self-involved) retrospectives. We resisted the urge to create all sorts of "Best Games of All-Time" lists (it was tempting), but we figured that by looking at what and how we covered in computer gaming over the last 10 years, it also illustrates how gaming has evolved over the same period.

But first, a little of our history. The magazine's initial roots can be found in *Games International*, a magazine devoted to board games and started in England in the late 1980s. As the board game market stagnated, the publication decided to focus on computer games, folding the original magazine and launching the first issue of *Strategy Plus* in November of

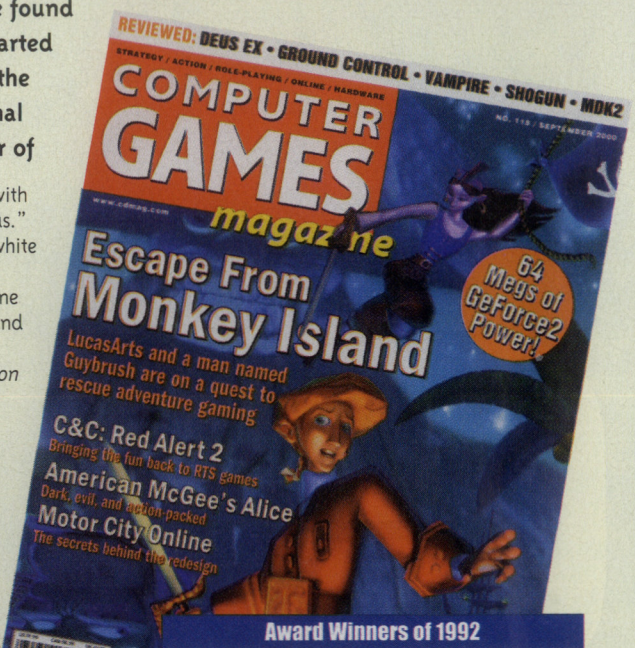
1990. The response to the change was uniformly... well, consistent. "The first issue is with us and I have to say it is rather lame," said one fan, while others called it "Travesty Plus." Others were upset about the lack of board game coverage. "[The magazine] feels the white socks and bimbos field of computer games is more its niche."

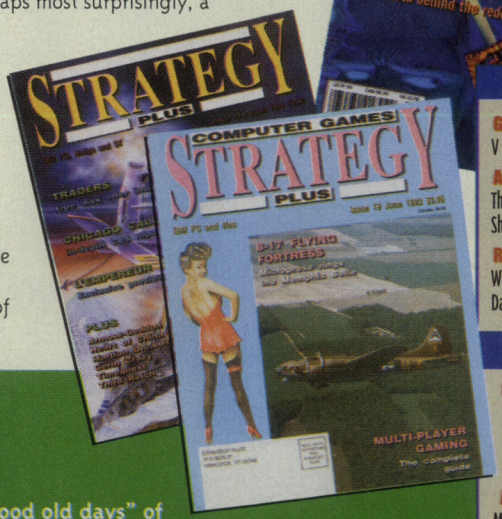
Ouch. It really wasn't quite that bad, but we are talking about a barebones magazine essentially put together by one person (Brian Walker), one with a rather nasty streak and a strange love of turning every game into an indecipherable acronym. (For example, *Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant* became WVII:CotDS or *Wargame Construction Set II: Tanks!* became WCSII:T... and you thought RTS was bad.)

While the first 10 issues of the magazine are apparently being squirreled away somewhere in England (we have no copies; if you have any of them, drop us a line), about 18 months after launching the magazine moved its base of operations to scenic Vermont in the good old US of A. In terms of balancing the coverage, the early days saw few action games being covered (and produced), lots of wargames and simulations (my how the times have changed), and perhaps most surprisingly, a wealth of adventure and sports game coverage.

Over time, the reviews (and reviewers) became better focused, the feature articles became more interesting, and our readership increased from a few thousand in the early days to about 130,000 in the middle of the decade to our circulation of over 400,000 serious gamers today.

Looking back on all of this, one thing is clear. Over the 10 years we've been covering gaming, the games have changed but the gamers have not; there's just a lot more of you. So here's a decade of gaming. Enjoy.





1990-1994 THE EARLY YEARS

For those who remember these as the "good old days" of the magazine well.... Contrary to some public opinion, the early issues didn't have deeper articles. The first few dozen typically averaged about 60 pages in total. Most of the articles were one-page long, with an occasional two-page review or preview (even the cover stories were often a single page). The layouts were austere to the point of being boring and the copy-editing was non-existent (there was a mixture of English and American writers, and no one bothered to normalize the spellings to one country). More damning, the rating-free reviews were intermingled with previews in such a manner you couldn't tell which was which (and the reviews were extremely non-committal about whether a game was good or not). On the plus side, there were a lot more feature stories related to the games being played.

The games being covered were primarily simulations, strategy, war, and role-playing games. We had some surprise adventure game covers (*Search for the King? Martian Memorandum? Magnetic Scrolls Collection?*), but eventually we would settle into a mandated focus: sims on the cover, strategy in the name. And it seemed like every other issue had a MicroProse game on the cover.

While those early years were rough, late 1993 and 1994 saw the magazine really start to focus. The coverage started to broaden as the computer market did the same.

Award Winners of 1992

GAME OF THE YEAR
V for Victory

ADVENTURE
The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes

ROLE-PLAYING
Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant

SIMULATION
Comanche: Maximum Overkill

SPORTS
Links 386 Pro

STRATEGY
Civilization

WARGAME
V for Victory

Award Winners of 1993

GAME OF THE YEAR
Betrayal at Krondor

ADVENTURE
Return to Zork

ARCADE
Microsoft Arcade

FLIGHT SIMULATION
Tornado

GENERAL SIMULATION
X-Wing

ROLE-PLAYING
Betrayal at Krondor

SPORTS
Front Page Sports Football Pro

STRATEGY
Master of Orion

WARGAME
Warlords II

Award Winners of 1994

GAME OF THE YEAR
TIE Fighter

ACTION
DOOM II

ADVENTURE
Sam and Max Hit the Road

ARCADE
Lode Runner

COMBAT SIMULATION
EarthSiege

HARDWARE
Formula TI

FANTASY SIMULATION
TIE Fighter

FLIGHT SIMULATION
1942: Pacific Air War

CINEMA-GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
Under a Killing Moon

MULTI-CHARACTER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
Star Trail

SINGLE-CHARACTER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
System Shock

SPORTS
Front Page Sports Baseball

STRATEGY
X-COM

WARGAME
Wargame Construction Set II: Tanks!

Random Game Comments

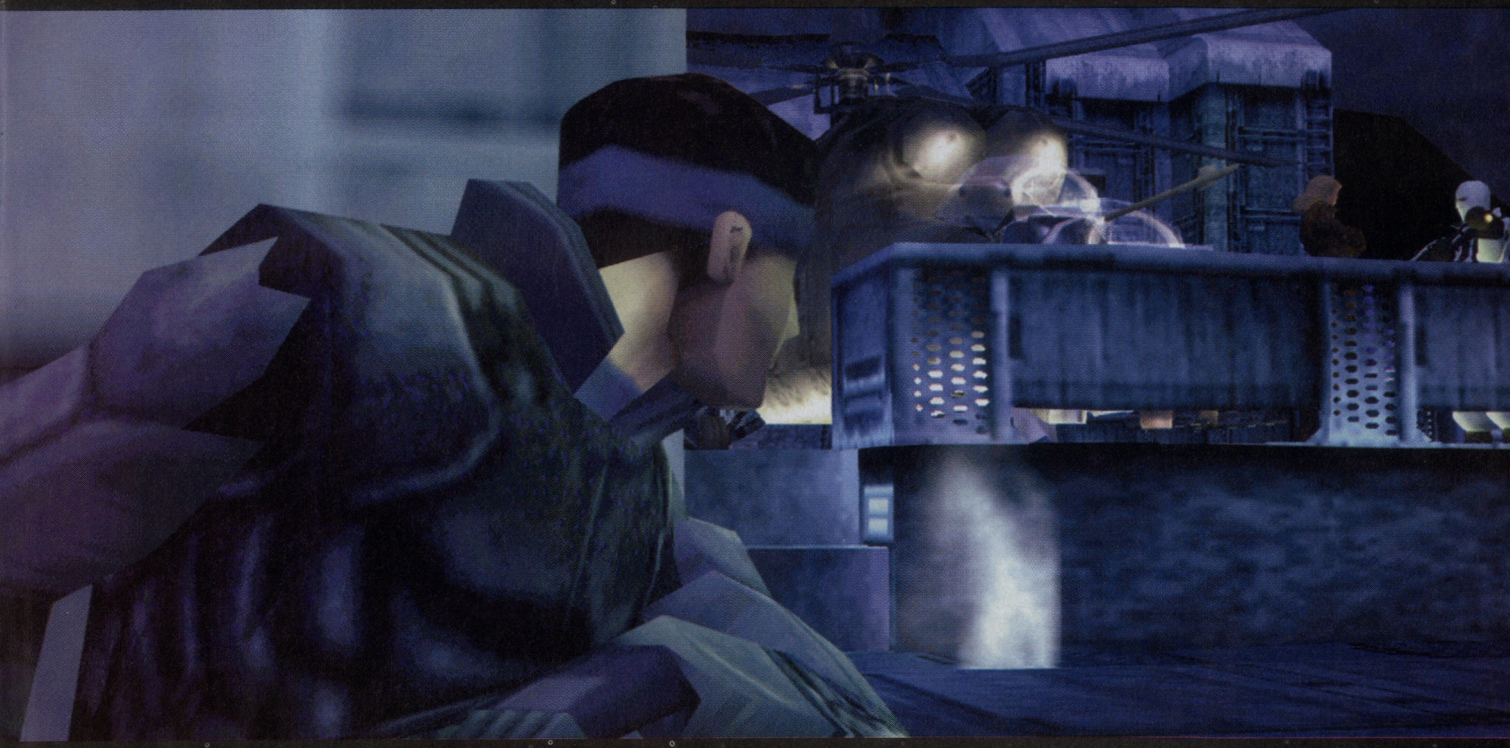
1942: The Pacific War: We said, "Everyone is going to be playing catch-up with this one for some time to come." And they were.

AD&D Forgotten Realms Unlimited Adventures: Before *Neverwinter Nights* appears next year, remember this was the original dungeon creation kit. No multiplayer, though, as the review says, "[it] offers players the opportunity to extend the series and create many hours of gameplay, but for whom? What joy is there in playing an adventure you have designed?"

Alone in the Dark: We're prophets. "I have seen the shapes of things to come," we said in our review of this legendary action/adventure, "and it's polygonal."

A TRANQUIL ALASKAN NIGHT.

SO QUIET, YOU CAN BARELY HEAR A NECK SNAP.





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MATURE M Animated Violence Animated Blood and Gore Mature Sexual Themes ESRB

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Briefs— Big Games Chris Roberts, creator of *Wing Commander* and the upcoming *Freelancer*, on *Strike Commander*: "It's going to use up a lot of disk real estate, that's for sure... anywhere up to 15MB... but you've never before seen anything like this, an interactive movie on a personal computer." We also said Origin was "leading the field in the race to produce the first game that will require a Cray Supercomputer to run it."...**Term of Endearment** In previewing *Dune* in Issue 12, the magazine's then editor Brian Walker made this amazing revelation: "French games have a reputation for stunning graphics, and *Dune* is no exception. Unfortunately, it is not only a cliché but a truism to say that French games also have a reputation for crap gameplay."...**Console Coverage?** In our Issue 10 we ran a feature story on the Nintendo Gameboy, with a sidebar covering its competitors, the Atari Lynx, Sega Game Gear and NEC Turbo Express. In April of 1993 we also covered the 3DO. We though the implications of the 3DO as a serious ›››



CHUCK YEAGER AIR COMBAT: Widely considered a classic, our reviewer saw it differently; "[it] has pretensions toward realism, all of which fail miserably." Ouch.

Battlecruiser 3000AD: Yes, we previewed this infamous game in 1992 and called it "one of the most startling looking games seen for some time." Despite our assurance it would be out later that year, it finally appeared five years later in a complete shambles. It has subsequently gone through a number of revisions and been the source of innumerable Usenet flame wars.

Betrayal at Krondor: "Has pretenses toward being not only a role-playing game but a work of interactive literature... hyperbole aside, it accomplishes what it intended."

Civilization: "A must buy for brainy friends." Wow, what a ringing endorsement of what is widely considered the best strategy game ever made.

Cobra Mission: The review of this Anime-styled "sexy" game had perhaps our finest headline of all-time: "Land of the rising nipple."

Darklands: "Clearly one of the most innovative, dynamic and narratively complex role-playing games yet, and nothing short of revolutionary rethinking of what [the genre] should be all about." But no mention of its revolutionary number of bugs... hmm.

Day of the Tentacle: It "succeeds admirably" but "ends way too soon." Bah! Man, reviews in those days focused so much on the minutia of gaming, ignoring the big picture... however short this game may have been, what was there was brilliant. We still fall prey to this problem (see *Full Throttle*).

DOOM II: "Those of you waiting for a new 3D engine from id will have to hold onto your hats until *Quake* arrives." Later in the year we quoted John Romero as saying there were no plans for a *DOOM III*; instead he mentioned *Quake* would be a "fantasy-based first-person game utilizing next generation six-degrees of freedom and speech recognition technology." Um, yeah.

Dune II: Westwood Studios produced this game, which is widely considered one of the very first real-time strategy games (much of its interface and terminology can be found in *Command & Conquer*). Our assessment? "[It's] a solid game with an elegant interface... it fails to achieve blockbuster status because too many scenarios end with a grind rather than a bang."

F-15 Strike Eagle III: "There's simply not enough room to even begin to describe [the game]... this simulation will go the extra mile, and then some."

Falcon 3.0: "[It] represents a radical evolution in air combat software design and will be the standard for years to come."

Gabriel Knight: We liked Jane Jensen's first adventure starring her brooding New Orleans ghostbuster. "Room must be made for intelligent, literate games that dare to be original,"

Top Sellers of 1993

1. Flight Simulator
2. X-Wing
3. SimCity Classic
4. Wolfenstein 3D
5. The 7th Guest
6. Front Page Sports Football
7. Links 386 Pro
8. X-Wing Mission Disk: Imperial Pursuit
9. Wing Commander
10. Strike Commander
11. Comanche: Maximum Overkill
12. Tony LaRussa Baseball II
13. X-Wing Mission Disk: Tour of Duty
14. Hardball III
15. Alone In The Dark
16. Wolfpack
17. New Family Feud
18. Beat The House
19. Aces Over Europe
20. Privateer

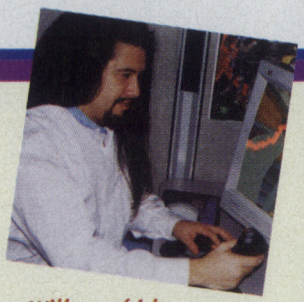
Top Sellers of 1994

1. Doom Shareware
2. Myst
3. SimCity 2000
4. 5 Ft 10 Pack Vol 1
5. SimCity Classic
6. Doom II
7. Flight Simulator
8. TIE Fighter
9. The 7th Guest
10. Myst
11. Doom II
12. Casino
13. 5 Ft 10 Pack Vol 2
14. Links 386 Pro
15. Blake Stone
16. 80 Shareware MegaHits
17. X-Wing
18. Raptor
19. Entertainment Pack
20. Wing Commander 3



DOOM: In a truly bad sports metaphor, we said of this game, "[It's] not only re-entered id Software into the biathlon but shot them through the sound barrier as well." Um, yeah. We went on to say, "DOOM is every bit the technological leap into first-person perspective gameplay that its forefather Wolfenstein 3D was, only done on a much grander scale."

Quotables

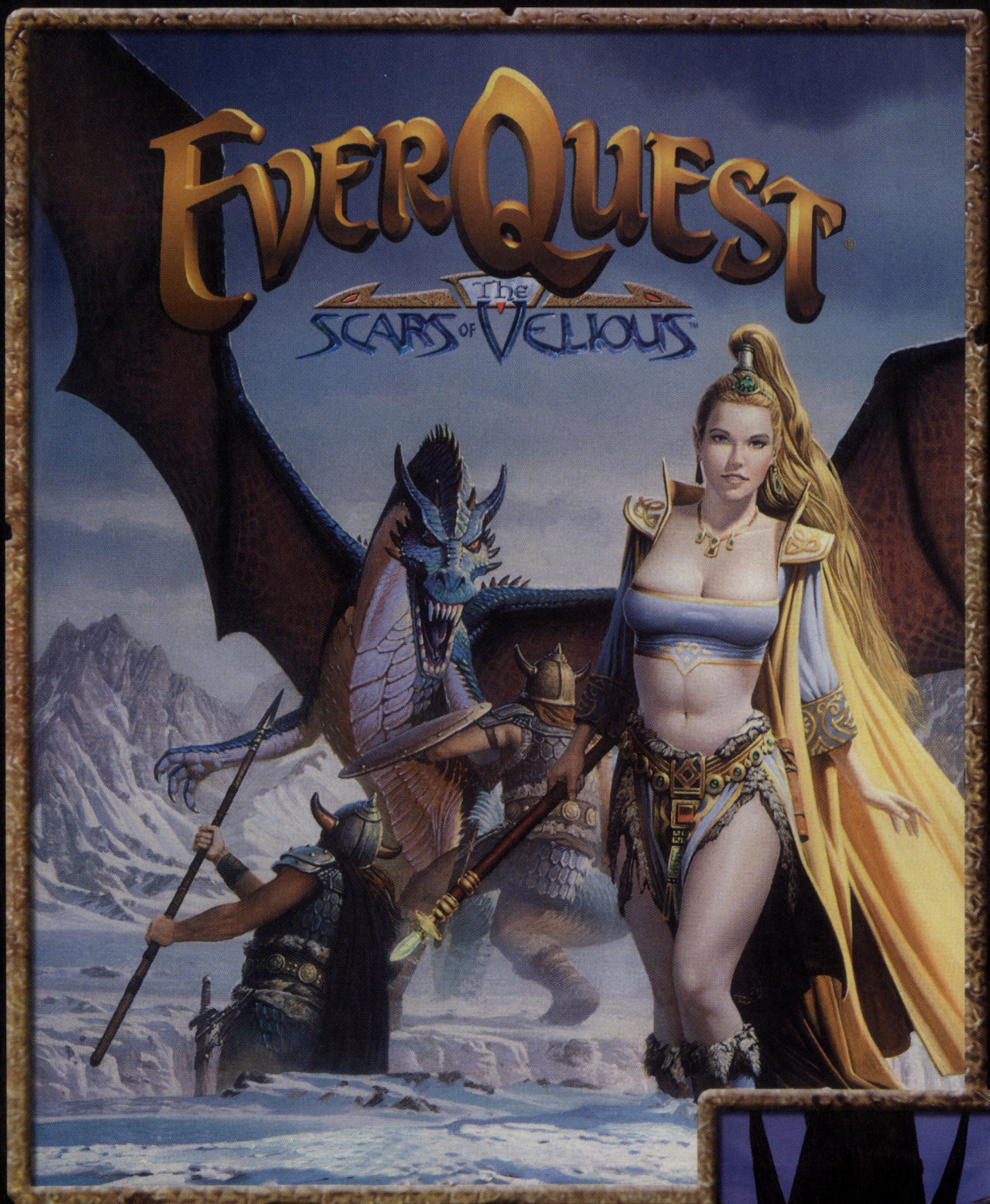


"Characters in role-playing games have as much relationship to real characters as inflatable dolls have to sex. But for many people, that's enough." —Chris Crawford, 1992

"I've been accused of being too fun-oriented." —Sid Meier, 1992

"I don't like wasting space on a CD-ROM." —John Romero in 1993, who'd just finished up his work on the seminal DOOM. ›››

"Do not send a fax requesting license information on the DOOM technology. It's not available!" —Jay Wilbur of id Software in 1993. It eventually was quite available.





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game machine were "enormous." We also said, "So far, 3DO has made all the right moves... it would be nice if [stereos, remotes] could be replaced by one black box, one that could play movies, records, games and make the coffee. ...3DO could have the solution." Or at least Sony thinks they do with PSX2...Sheep? In issue 12, we ran a curious article called "Sheep May Safely Graze", which was a complete game design for a sheep rescue helicopter simulation (?) offered to the public domain; amazingly, there were no takers...Report of their Death Were Greatly Exaggerated A news report in issue 22 had this choice tidbit: "The lack of any LucasArts presence at the show seems to confirm that they are history... it's possible they will publish games from outside contractors, but I wouldn't bet money on it."...Repent! The End Is Near! In issue 20, guest editorialist Chris Crawford foretold the death of computer games, explaining the contributing factors were: Creeping senility (a decline in creative energy from designers), big budget ›››

we said. "In an era where so many games are little more than eye candy, what a pleasure it is to feed the brain as well."

IndyCar Racing: Our current editor was rather wowed by this game, even in alpha. "It's the best-looking, best-driving, best-handling, best sounding and, well, just best driving simulation I've ever seen on a personal computer."

Master of Orion: "It's not *Civilization* in space... it's an engaging and thoroughly enjoyable game in its own right. It may not be the first of its genre, but it's arguably the most entertaining."

Myst: We got swept up in the frenzy. "If there was a 'dictionary of superlatives', all of its words could apply... it's a delight for the senses... with a subtlety of style that is extremely complementary to the virtual reality feeling of the game." So there, *Myst* detractors.

Neuromancer: William Gibson's cyberpunk classic was a fantastic adventure game, with a score by Devo that played through your PC speaker. Yes, that was as frightening as it sounds.

Outpost: Designer Bruce Balfour says of Sierra's legendary failure, and first strategy game, "we have the added pressure of proving to consumers, and our own management, that we can produce great strategy games which are fun and addictive." The final product fell far short of gamers' expectations, which were fed by a rabid press.

Pacific Strike: A terrific game, but it needed a faster machine. "Like its predecessor [*Strike Commander*], it may be slightly ahead of its time, and may only find its true market when Pentium processors are the norm and not the exception."

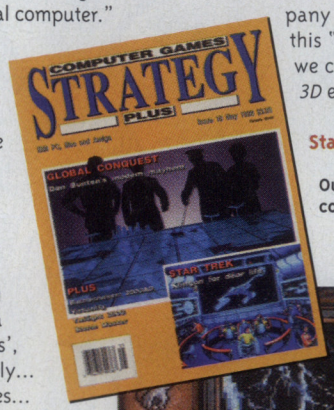
Return to Zork: "A monumental adventure game, destined to quickly become as much a classic as the original *Zork* trilogy." All anyone remembers of this game is, "Want some rye? Course ya do."

Sam & Max Hit the Road: Some of us consider this the best adventure game ever made. Our reviewer was positive, but not overly so, saying it's "one of the funniest and most intelligent games." But he was concerned about its excessive rabbit nudity.

Shadowcaster: Origin teamed up with a company called Raven Software to produce this "*Underworld* lite" action game, as we called it. It used id's *Wolfenstein 3D* engine.

Star Control II: "An exceedingly well-produced, fast-paced and entertaining space adventure and action game... it represents the current state of the art."

Strike Commander: Many years late and requiring the most cutting edge system seen in gaming yet (oh dear, 50MB of hard drive! a 486DX2/66! 8MB RAM!), our review says... well, not much. Is it even a review? Ugh.



Our first multiplayer game on the cover



ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: "The simple addition of real-time motion throughout the gameworld proves as intriguingly influential on gameplay as it is on the quality of the visuals accompanying the play... it not only demonstrates what more advanced technology can do but proves there are people with wit, intelligence and artistic skill at Blue Sky Productions. What a relief to see such great leaps in design!" Blue Sky eventually changed their name to Looking Glass Productions. Remember, folks, this game appeared before DOOM created first-person gaming. About the sequel, we said, "Origin and Looking Glass have outdone the rest of the world...."

Syndicate: We loved the game, but wondered about game that "promotes drugs and violence as paving the road to success."

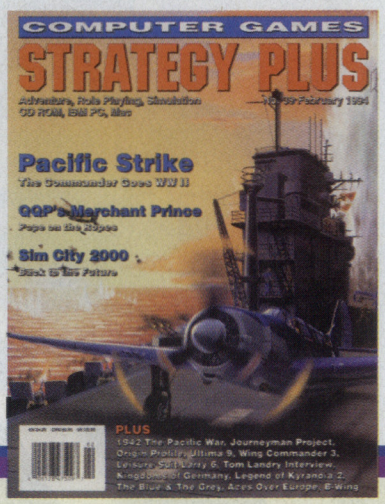
System Shock: "If gamers do not just dismiss it as another clone, [it] proves to be the '*DOOM* with depth' everyone talks about but no one has delivered."

TFX: Continuing our string of obvious (and bad) metaphors, we said, "[It] lies several cards short of *Falcon*'s flight deck... standing on its own afterburners, pilots could check six and do far worse." We have no idea what that means either.

TIE Fighter: While we weren't as hot on *X-Wing* as others, the sequel knocked us out. "Imagine a game like *X-Wing* with all of its frustrations are removed... with better graphics and sound, more instruments, more ship, more targets, more fun..."

Ultima IX: Ascension: We had multiple mentions of this game, talking about how it would wrap up the Avatar trilogy. In November, we sat down with Richard Garriott and Warren Spector, who delved into some of its details, like how it will be CD-ROM only (gasp!), require Windows 3.1 (gasp!) have a full MIDI score (gasp!) and have a party of adventurers instead of a single character. Oh well.

Ultima VIII: Pagan: The game's co-designer Andrew Morris said, "[it]



Stage II of the incredible morphing logo

Quotables

"The magazine is printed on high quality paper; your comments are a waste of it," was how we responded to a letter in one of the earliest issues criticizing "awful" paper quality. Wow, we were nasty back then....



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MATURE M ESRB — Animated Blood and Gore, Animated Violence

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productions ($500,000 for game!) and game aficionados sending reams of contradictory messages to developers (they want the complexity that turns off the beginning gamers the industry needs to survive)...**Play With Each Other** Our June 1991 issue had a 13-page feature story about online gaming, with reviews (*Global Conquest*, the original *Neverwinter Nights*), modem tuning guides (you needed them in those days) and a complete list of modem-enabled games...**Bold Predictions** Using the game *Power Politics*, we ran a simulation of the 1992 presidential election. The results: Clinton 39.4%, Bush 31.8%, Perot 28.7%. Real result? Clinton 43%, Bush 38%, Perot 19%...**Buggy Games, 1993 Edition** The editorial in the January issue started out with, "One of the least welcome trends of 1992 has been a sudden proliferation of bugs... of course this is an appalling state of affairs and one that must cease if the market for games is to be maintained, let alone increased."...**Dig It** The semi-famous adventure game *The Dig* made its first ›››

will appeal to players of all types of games—adventure, role-playing and arcade!" Well... in retrospect it managed to alienate all three. When it came time to review it, like the rest of the world, we didn't like it. "It has neither the scope nor the depth of its predecessor, and all too often seems like a joke being played on the avid *Ultima* fan."

Warcraft: Orcs and Humans: An early look at this game by recently renamed developer Blizzard Entertainment had this quote about the game. "[It] combines the best elements of *SimCity* (city management and economics), *Civilization* (exploration and evolution of technologies) and *Dune II* (tactical real-time combat), with the most popular genre of computer entertainment, the fantasy genre." Even then they had their sites set at number one. "Almost without exception," she said, "this combination consistently yields top ten titles, and usually #1 smash hits."

Wing Commander: From the review: "[It's] extraordinarily big... in all, I loaded up 19 720K disks." A preview of the big-budget *Wing Commander III* a couple of years later had more terrible metaphors: "Like the fabled Icarus, Origin stands atop a precipice of uncertainty, preparing to venture where few companies have dared to leap."

X-COM: We liked it. "It's a delight," we said. "[It] gets my full-hearted recommendation." Hmm, in those days nothing excited us.

Rebound Follies

Thomas Crehan was more of a dreamer than our editor. "I'd like to see a computer network run on an engine very similar to *Ultima Underworld*, with over 100,000 people participating, each controlling their own character. Do you think such a simulation is possible, or am I dreaming?", he asked in 1992. Our editor's response? "You're dreaming." *Everquest* anyone?

From the "the reasons never change" file comes justification #2 for software piracy. Henry Pappengelou in the January issue says, "If the software makers are going to charge so much for software, the everyday working man won't be able to afford it. Result? Piracy!" Of course game prices have gone down, and piracy is even more rampant.

Jim Corbin chimed in with a problem that's been going on throughout gaming's history. "Everyone in the industry needs to realize that pressuring publishers to achieve greater and greater levels of realism may sound chivalric enough," he wrote, "but there's a price that is now being paid in the form of thousands of players who cannot afford to continuously upgrade their hardware to meet the demands of burgeoning high-end products."

1995-1998: OF PHONEBOOKS AND METAPHORS

The game industry continued to grow and so did the magazine, both figuratively and literally. We instituted a policy to clearly distinguish between previews and reviews and to only review final copies of games. We also focused on more types of games (though our covers remained primarily simulations and strategy games) and the overall writing improved. (An exception would be a sudden attempt at using terrible metaphors in nearly every article. We're not sure what was going on there.)

The game industry was exploding in popularity, and the magazines were as well. But as the magazines all swelled up to phonebook sizes, we also all started to focus more on preview after preview after preview. Looking back, bigger isn't necessarily better; there's really a finite limit to the amount of *quality* game coverage you can have in a month. And the levels of hype being pumped out per month... some of it is downright embarrassing.

We also tried some experiments; a few were terrible (putting together voice-acted reviews and text articles on our CD with short summary reviews in print) while others were successful (de-emphasizing "Strategy Plus", because we feel games are about more than specific genres).

Oh, and the games, let's talk about the games. These were truly the glory years for certain types of games, as you can see. But those metaphors, ouch...

Award Winners of 1995

GAME OF THE YEAR
Command & Conquer

ACTION
Crusader: No Remorse

ADVENTURE
Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within

ARCADE
Earthworm Jim

FIRST-PERSON ACTION
Hexen: Beyond Heretic

FLIGHT-SIM [TIE]
Apache
Flight Unlimited

RACING SIMULATION
IndyCar Racing II

REAL-TIME STRATEGY
Command & Conquer

ROLE-PLAYING
Stonekeep

SCI-FI /FANTASY SIM
MechWarrior 2

SPORTS
NHL 96

TURN-BASED STRATEGY [TIE]
Heroes of Might and Magic
Jagged Alliance

WARGAME
Steel Panthers

Award Winners of 1996

GAME OF THE YEAR
Tomb Raider

3D ACTION
Tomb Raider

ACTION
Syndicate Wars

ADVENTURE
The Neverhood

HARDWARE
3Dfx Chipset

ONLINE GAME
Warbirds

ONLINE SERVICE
Kali

RACING SIMULATION
NASCAR Racing 2

REAL-TIME STRATEGY
Command & Conquer: Red Alert

ROLE-PLAYING
Diablo

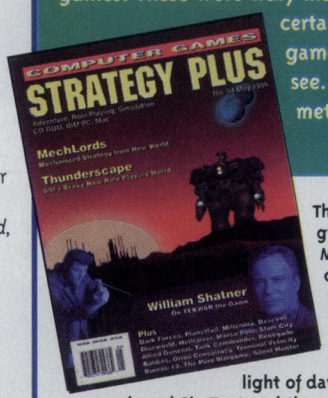
SCI-FI SIMULATION
Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri

SIMULATION
AH-64D Longbow

SPORTS
Links LS

TURN-BASED STRATEGY
Civilization II

WARGAME
Battleground Series



This big-robot strategy game from Master of Orion developer SimTex was to be published by New World Computing but never saw the light of day; MicroProse purchased SimText and the project died. One of our worst covers ever, with the disembodied head of William Shatner floating in the corner (plus BJ of "BJ and the Bear"). It was our publisher's idea, not ours.

Random Game Comments

Alley Cats: The first (and only) strip bowling game. We loved the particularly impressive dialog: "2-4-6-8, big boobs make you play great."

Battlecruiser 3000AD: Three years after our first preview we said, "If it all comes together as planned, hardcore gamers are going to swoon when they see this one." Hmm... a couple of years yet later it finally appeared, and we said it had, "more bugs than an Ozark camping trip." We also summarized the game's development thusly: "The saga is still far more interesting than the game itself."

Beavis and Butt-head in Virtual Stupidity: This is one of the best adventure games of all time; really. The review was a mock psychiatric evaluation. "You have Butt-head, an existentialist who is often misunderstood as a misogynist idiot... Beavis, who represents the submissive side of our personality."

Catfight: This was one of the worst games ever made by a porn company trying to masquer-

FORGOTTEN REALMS

Baldur's Gate™ II

Shadows of Amn™

"If you loved Baldur's Gate, then... Baldur's Gate 2 is bigger, more ambitious, and just a flat-out better game. BioWare and Black Isle have said they want this to be the only RPG you'll need this year — and, frighteningly, they may be right." - Computer Gaming World

"This sequel features fantastic locales, more spectacular monsters, and more character classes. It promises to be the most ambitious second edition D&D® game ever." - Gamespot

"... Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn will be one of most important RPG's ever released. It is a beautiful epic, bringing to the field a new level of polish, detail, and design. And, it's going to change everything." - IGN

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appearance in 1993, with designer Brian Moriarity (*Enchanter, Loom*) in charge and the production headed by a "very famous film director," who was later revealed to be Steven Spielberg...**The Pentium Makes an Appearance** A new chip from Intel appears in 93, and we determine its impact on games as "non existent." We predicted that it would take 2-3 years before the costs would come down to reasonable levels for gamers...**Elitism** In an editorial, editor Steve Wartofsky had this to offer. "The widespread success of something like *DOOM* is particularly disturbing to this player because it seems to herald the advent of a time when flash will supercede gameplay, and the general audience won't give a damn (or even notice)."...**Say What?** Now here's a great rumor. We actually printed this in our little news briefs: "Rumors abound surrounding id Software's ventures after *DOOM* and the upcoming sequel, *DOOM II: Hell on Earth.*" Wow, what insightful reporting...**There Once Were Flight Simulations** Our schizophrenia with regard to ›››

ade as a legitimate software publisher. The best part of this all-female fighting game was, according to our review, "Removing the shortcut from the Start menu."

Civilization II: "As good as the original *Civilization* is, this is significantly better... it may very well be the best strategy game ever created."



DUKE NUKEM 3D: "Truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy and gory with lead-thrashing action." Can someone explain why it would be a good thing to have "gory" supermodels? A few months later, we finally reviewed the game. We typically like to overshoot the perceived target audience of games by putting things like this in reviews. "Kurt Vonnegut once said that if fascism ever comes to America, it'll come wrapped in the American flag... if 3D interactivity ever arrives in computer gaming, it'll come wrapped in a haze of sleazy sex, violence and over-the-top exaggerated machismo." But really, we liked the game, saying it's "wildly entertaining" even if it plays things too safe.

Command & Conquer: Designer Eydie Laramore said this about the game, which is a philosophy many have criticized Westwood Studios for: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The *Dune II* formula worked, we aren't going to mess around with harvest-build-fight." In the review published in November, we said everything about it "shouts quality."

Award Winners of 1997

GAME OF THE YEAR
Myth: The Fallen Lords

3D ACTION
Jedi Knight

ACTION
Uprising

ADVENTURE
Curse of Monkey Island

HARDWARE
Pure 3D

ONLINE
Chessmaster Live

RACING
Carmageddon

REAL-TIME STRATEGY
Myth: The Fallen Lords

ROLE-PLAYING
Fallout

SCI-FI SIMULATION
Wing Commander Prophecy

SIMULATION
Longbow 2

SPORTS
FIFA: Road to the WorldCup 98

TRADITIONAL
Pro Pinball: Timeshock

TURN-BASED STRATEGY
Warlords III

WARGAME
Sid Meier's Gettysburg

Award Winners of 1998

GAME OF THE YEAR
Baldur's Gate

ACTION
Half-Life

ADD-ON
The Rise of Rome

ADVENTURE
Grim Fandango

CLASSIC
Centipede

HARDWARE
Voodoo2

ONLINE
Starsiege Tribes

RACING
Motocross Madness

REAL-TIME STRATEGY
StarCraft

ROLE-PLAYING
Baldur's Gate

SCI-FI SIMULATION
Independence War

SIMULATION
European Air War

SPORTS
Grand Prix Legends

STRATEGY
Railroad Tycoon II

WARGAME
The Operational Art of War

The Curse of Monkey Island: "An absolute must for adventure gamers... it makes us clamor for another sequel." They listened!

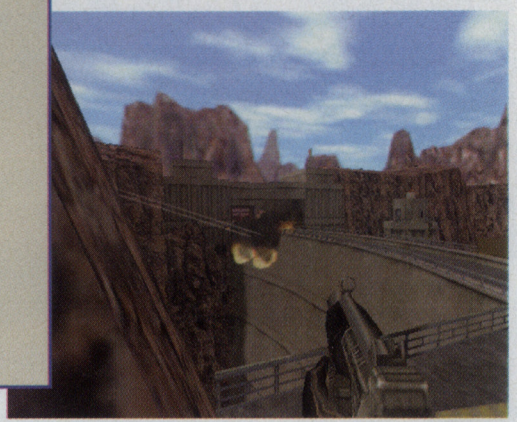
Dark Forces: A truly wretched review of this game was done entirely from the perspective of Darth Vader. Oh dear.

Descent to Undermountain: This is the reason we weren't sure about *Baldur's Gate.* "Something foul is lurking beneath the city of Waterdeep, and it's the people who green-lighted the release of this execrable mess of a game."

DOOM II: We dubbed the pre-release hysteria over this game, "the most hype ever associated with any computer game in history." One quote stands out as applying to all games from id: "[They] know they've got a winning property here, and they are not going to tamper with success."

The Dig: "Without question the most uneven project LucasArts has ever done... [it's] a mess, as you might expect of a game that has passed hands from designers to designer and featured multiple restarts from scratch."

Dungeon Keeper: A look at the game in our November issue had us already proclaiming it a "revolutionary design that may redefine the role-playing genre." Hmm... the review later said, "Probably the best thing to do is judge [the game] for what it is, not what it could have been."



HALF-LIFE: Our first article on this game was somewhat skeptical of its description of being, "a revolutionary leap in 3D first-person games." We had one prescient comment: "We'll see if it has a life when it's released in November (presumably of 1997)." Or 1998, as it turned out. But we were wrong. It was as good as they said it would be. "[It's] the most consistent, sophisticated and polished first-person action game on the market" that makes its competitors look "sloppy and unfinished."

Fallout: "For anyone interested in a complex, combat-heavy, lovingly produced role-playing

Quotables



"In acting there's a saying: 'If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage." —William Shatner, *who allegedly is also an actor, talking about the game version of TEKWAR.* ›››

Microsoft's Bill Gates assured the journalists assembled at "Judgment Day" that "Windows will be the premium platform for all future games."

"...a semi-deranged parrot [is] being played by Terry Gilliam of Monty Python and it was, I think, the part he was born to play." —Douglas Adams, *author of Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, talking about his game Starship Titanic.*

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flight simulations was evidenced by January's six-page story on the history and present of the genre. The summation: "Perhaps some flight simulation and air combat designers will stop for a moment to realize what's missing in their planned approaches for new designs, and resurrect some of the issues of core accuracy so crucial to the legitimacy of reality-based simulations." Of course that quest for absolute accuracy (both in performance and visual quality) is part of what led the designs into becoming overly complex and bug-infested. Beware of what you ask for; you may get it...That's Anime? In a review of *Knights of Xentar* in our March issue, this is how we described Anime. "It has quite the following among adolescent males here in the US. Its distinguishing features are a simplicity of form and style, coupled with odd hair colors, big eyes and women with gravity defying breasts with eternally erect nipples."...Technological Creep Our editorial in the April issue offered this prediction: "Technology is moving ›››

game, [this] is a must buy."

Flight Unlimited: We were initially skeptical, assuming Looking Glass was focusing too much on visual pizzazz. We were wrong. "The sensation of flight is incredible!" we raved.

Full Throttle: Woah, if we could take one review back... we said of this game, "[it's] a huge disappointment, a fabulous idea subverted by brevity and inappropriate arcade segments." A few issues later, we said, "It's an amazing piece of work but not a great adventure game."

Heretic: Metaphor hell! "Raven received id's kickoff without so much as a fair catch signal and ran the coveted license back with nary a scratch to show for it. Touchdown!"

Heroes of Might and Magic: We called this the most enjoyable strategy and role-playing game of the year.

Top Sellers of 1995

1. Myst
2. Heretic Shareware
3. Dark Forces
4. Doom II
5. Flight Simulator w/Scenery Pack
6. Ultimate Doom: Thy Flesh Consumed
7. NASCAR Racing
8. MechWarrior II
9. DIZone Collector's Edition
10. Phantasmagoria
11. Flight Simulator
12. Doom Shareware
13. Myst
14. Entertainment Pack
15. Star Trek The Next Generation "Final Unity"
16. Descent
17. X-Wing Collector's CD
18. U.S. Navy Fighters
19. SimCity 2000
20. SimCity 2000

Top Sellers of 1996

1. Myst
2. Duke Nukem
3. Warcraft II
4. Barbie Fashion Designer
5. Civilization II
6. Quake Shareware
7. Return of Arcade
8. Command & Conquer: Red Alert
9. Flight Simulator
10. Monopoly
11. Command & Conquer
12. Flight Simulator w/Scenery Pack
13. Madden NFL 97
14. Rebel Assault II
15. Warcraft II: Expansion Pack
16. Duke Nukem 3D Jewel Case
17. Rise Of The Triad
18. MechWarrior II Mercenaries
19. Ultimate Doom Thy Flesh Consumed
20. Quake

Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II: We finally caught a glimpse of LucasArts *Quake*-killer and we were suitably impressed. "It really immerses the player in the *Star Wars* mythology, more so than *Dark Forces.*" And the review? "Immerse yourself in the incredible environments," we said. "You may never want to come back."

Journeyman Project 3: Current *Myst III* developer Presto Studios delivered their masterpiece. Our review delved into the world of metaphors and came up with, "a premiere delicacy served to adventure gamers on a glistening silver tray by a prolific team of master chefs."

The Last Express: We described the game as "a new and better way of telling an interactive story," and we expected it to "provide a role model for the gaming industry." Well, it managed to bankrupt a company. Why didn't people buy this game?

Longbow 2: It was early in the year, but we called it "The best simulation of any kind this year." And we were right.

Magic Carpet: More horrible metaphors. "*Magic Carpet* is one rug that tugs the player into a whimsical world of fantasy and adventure and keeps players dangling thread by thread." Is that a good thing? "Soar above the ground with virtual wings—no strings attached." Ugh. Please make us stop.

Magic the Gathering: Also known as the version of the card game that sucked less than *Battlemage* (see below).

Magic the Gathering: Battlemage: The first of dueling *Magic* games was the worst. "One can only fathom where the game would be if the designers had cast 'Circle of Protection: Dumbass' to ward off the person who finalized the design elements that damned it." This is the only known use of the word "dumbass" in the magazine.

Meridian 59: We praised this 3D precursor to *EverQuest* for, "taking a much-need (though obvious) technological step forward in online gaming."

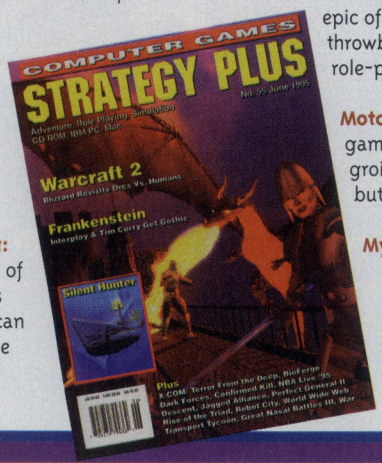


PHANTASMAGORIA: We called this hotly-anticipated game "overblown, unintentionally hilarious and incredibly dull," labeling it a "disaster."

Might and Magic VI: "Real role-playing makes a triumphant return" was our headline for the review, and despite the game's primitive 3D technology, it delivered "a sprawling epic of non-linear gameplay and a throwback to the days of yore when role-playing games ruled the roost."

Motocross Madness: We said this game was, "more fun than a painful groin injury." That meant we liked it, but still... ouch.

Myth: The Fallen Lords: Our review



At the time, we considered this a risky cover. But some in the office were raving about this little game called WarCraft so we thought, "What the hell?"

Quotables

"We want to educate the gaming public of the possibilities of a computer product. System Shock showed that people are so used to products without interaction that they don't even realize they can look up and down, crouch, peer around corners and throw things... we're still trying to establish these conventions so that gamers will know what to expect, while at the same time simulating cool things they don't expect. We're giving you a world that you can play in, you'll have fun and it all works." —Doug Church of Looking Glass

along quite briskly, to the point where it's likely that in a couple of years a 120MHz P5 or P6 with active matrix color, massive storage and full multimedia support will all fit into a three-pound laptop for nine hundred bucks or so." ...Road to Cows? From the May "Road to Nowhere" column: "I think more games should feature cows in starring or supporting roles. Designers should realize that all things bovine are inherently interesting and entertaining. Perhaps someone will release a *Far Side* RPG, where you could control a party of cows, deer and chickens as they roam the range dispatching evil farmers and arresting illegal chicken herders while discovering the Salt Lick of ›››

gushed, "[it's] the greatest innovator in the real-time strategy genre in year; it clearly proves there is still room for growth in a genre fallen pretty to a myriad of clones."

Outlaws: Still the only Western-themed 3D shooter... ah, if only it had a better engine, people would speak of it reverently in the hushed tones reserved for the "big-boys" of 3D action gaming. We said, "Every 3D game should show this much thought in level and multiplayer design."

Quake: "Let the *Duke* fans shoot toilets to their hearts' content," we said in our review. "The environments of *Quake* are intense, not cartoony." You may disagree with that sentiment, but it's hard to argue with our summary: "Will it have the same impact as *DOOM*: Nope, it will be greater, influencing every future online and multiplayer game. With lord knows how many *Quake* servers spawning across the globe, this game should stay in the public's eye for years to come."

Quake II: We found this sequel a quality product but certainly an evolutionary leap as opposed to the revolutionary one that was the original *Quake*. "It doesn't break any new ground, but it still shows that nobody does id better."

Rainbow Six: File under, "Yeah, we got this one wrong." This beloved game got a mediocre review based on its "less than good" execution. We didn't test multiplayer enough, which was the game's saving grace and probably would have been good for a more ringing endorsement.

Red Baron II: After the classic original, the disappointment that greeted the sequel was telling. "A masterpiece takes patience, devotion, talent, careful consideration and time; apparently, Sierra has some, but not all of these qualities," we wrote. "In the case of [this game], their shortcomings are tantamount to vandalism." Ouch.

Rise of the Triad: More metaphors! "[It] could be called a 3D truffle; the outer coating of pre-*DOOM* technology is nothing special, but inside lies an original 'sweet' and highly addictive game."

Riven: The Sequel to Myst: We're not snobs, dismissing this game as a mere clickfest with pretty pictures (you could describe almost any adventure game in this manner). "It doesn't fit the mold of what a computer game's supposed to be," we said. "It sucks you into its world even more effectively than *Myst*, fleshing it out with more story, better integrated puzzles and a visual splendor that must be experienced to believe."

Shadow Warrior: "Looks to be a brilliant panoply of samurais and swords, anchored in mystical gameplay and greasy gore." Who writes this stuff? Who edits it? Ugh.

Shattered Steel: Some company named BioWare created this decent big-robot action game. They later went on to make something called *Baldur's Gate*.

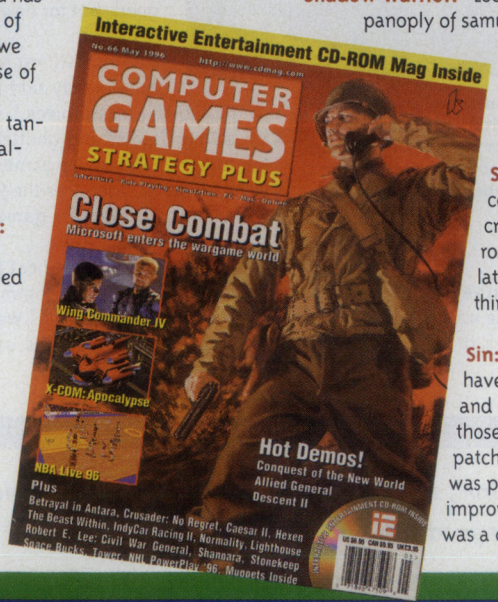
Sin: This game didn't quite have the polish of *Half-Life*, and we said it was one of those "just wait until it gets patched" kinds of games. It was patched, and greatly improved because of it, but it was a case of too little too late.

Top Sellers of 1997

1. Riven: The Sequel to Myst
2. Myst
3. Flight Simulator
4. Diablo
5. Monopoly
6. Barbie Fashion Designer
7. NASCAR 2
8. Command & Conquer Red Alert
9. Barbie Magic Hair Styler
10. Lego Island
11. Return of Arcade
12. X-Wing Versus TIE Fighter
13. Tomb Raider
14. Quake
15. Warcraft Battle Chest
16. Tonka Construction
17. Deer Hunter
18. Scrabble
19. Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II
20. Quake II

Top Sellers of 1998

1. StarCraft
2. Deer Hunter
3. Myst
4. Flight Simulator
5. Deer Hunter II 3D
6. Titanic: Adventure Out of Time
7. Lego Island
8. Frogger
9. Diablo
10. Age of Empires
11. Riven: The Sequel to Myst
12. Cabela's Big Game Hunter
13. Monopoly
14. Unreal
15. Barbie Riding Club
16. Quake II
17. Scrabble
18. Return of Arcade
19. Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter
20. Barbie Nail Designer



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the Gods."...**Early 3D** Yamaha announced a 3D chipset, the YGV611 Rendering Polygon Accelerator, which did, short vector drawing, video capture, gouraud shaded texture mapping and it would handle resolutions up to 1280x1024 at 256 colors. It would also retail for less than $300. Wow...**Windows 95** We were fairly convinced Windows 95 would finally take over gaming. We actually saw the first demonstration of DirectDraw in action! Games could actually run nearly as fast in Windows as in DOS. *DOOM II* ran in a window! Wow! Later that year, we said, "What you will see from Windows 95 games is better graphics, easy connectivity (for multiplayer games), high-fidelity sound and improved gaming performance." After this article, we were then accused of receiving money/favors/free rides in Bill Gate's Lexus in exchange for such a "wrong" article. Windows replace DOS? No way!...**Romero Leaves id** John Romero left id Software in something of a huff, forming a company called Dream Design (later renamed ›››

Speedboat Attack: Yeah, no one remembers this game, but the review did feature this amazing quote: "Playing bad games is a great way to exercise your vocabulary. After enduring [this game], you can use words like soggy, water-logged, all wet, all washed up, sunk, floundered and run aground. But there are less painful ways to flex your adjectives: listen to Yoko Ono's greatest hits, sit through the WB's Thursday night line-up, take a cheese grater to your calves or see how long you can hold an ice cube against your testicles."



TOMB RAIDER: In our preview of the first of this series, we mentioned it look like it has "H.I.T. written all over it," and that it looks like it would, "stand out, and above, many of the other action games this holiday season." The review was headlined, "Hail to the queen, baby." We said, "without the lure of multiplayer compensation for sloppy or uninspired design, it focuses on what has always made games great: gameplay that delivers a roller-coaster ride of thrills, spills and chills."

Star Trek Starfleet Academy: The review of this mediocre game featured one of our finer subtitles: "Make it so-so." (Our *Trek* minded readers were quick to point out this was from the wrong *Star Trek*, but c'mon... it was still funny.)

StarCraft: Blizzard's game made its debut in 1996 and failed to impress; it looked exactly like the "Orcs in Space" evolution of *WarCraft II* they insisted it was not. The graphics received a major overhaul before it shipped two years later, and it turned out to be worth the wait. It was (and still is) a game that "excels in execution, polish and overall playability."

Thief: The Dark Project: Our love of all things Looking Glass continued unabated. "It appeals to the mischievous fifth grader in us all," we said. We marveled at the way the game made you paranoid and hold your breath as a guard walked by... ah, what a game.



The superhero curse strikes. Guardians never shipped.

Total Annihilation: We found this game a major evolution of the entire real-time strategy genre. "By building on the strengths of its predecessors in almost every respect while simultaneously addressing their weaknesses, it manages to achieve a distinct character."

Ultima Online: This vaunted online game launched somewhat disastrously. "The 'undoubted future of interactive entertainment'," we asked. "God forbid. At best, it might eventually grow into a solid, mature game that delivers the good, but for now, *caveat emptor*."

Under a Killing Moon: We breathlessly said this game was, "a multimedia masterpiece," summing it up by saying, "ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the future of adventure games." Unfortunately we were right; video *was* the future, and nearly the end, of adventure games....

Unreal: We took a lot of heat for our mediocre review, but most of the comments were "when they fix the multiplayer..." Well, it took them a couple of years to do this, so we think we



TRESPASSER: Dubbed "the finest box stacking simulator ever created," this disastrous Jurassic Park game was more of a physics thesis than a game. We summarized it as "the most gratuitous example of technological masturbation fostered upon the gaming community."

Quotables

Why is John Grisham a great storyteller? While reading 'The Firm', I told my wife, 'This bastard just had me turning pages sweaty-palmed reading about a guy Xeroxing.' That is good writing."—Krondor author Raymond E. Feist

ION Storm) with Tom Hall. His new company would allow him to, "focus on different types of games in addition to the first-person action genre." id Software's John Carmack hinted that Romero's tendency toward hyperbole was a problem. "There will be no more grandiose statements about our future projects." We also noted that Richard Gray, AKA Levelord, left 3D Realms to for Hipnotic Interactive, later renamed Ritual Entertainment...Role-playing Games are Dead In a four-page feature in the March issue, we wrote up the "Last of a Dying Breed," as role-playing games were few and far between. "By all accounts, the RPG fell out of favor with the generally ›››

were pretty spot-on when we said, "for a game this delayed, released in mid-1998, such a lapse is unacceptable."

WarCraft II: Tides of Darkness: "[It's] gone far beyond its predecessor. ...the new features make the game play an order of magnitude better."

Wing Commander IV: "Yes, it could have been made better with a bit more attention to film basics and story and less to hiring name actors and building fancy sets, but it remains a must-have for anyone interested in state of the art gaming experiences."

Rebound Follies

Here's a letter that started a million incoherent responses. "You suck. Your short but shitty review of *Art of Fly Fishing* sucks. Get a life bubble ass. Maybe you [sic] get off your damn computer bubble ass and actually try doing something with your piece of shit life." Thank you "Angry Angler"

Mr. Sarcasm wrote in with this pearl of wisdom: "I read your magazine for the captions." Who doesn't?

Though it would take a couple of years to really ramp up, the incoherence started in the July issue. "I don't know why you gave [*Command & Conquer*] game of the year," so says the legendary MONKEYDAMN. "You can SPANK ME!" Indeed.

Mark this issue: November 1998. The first incoherent rant! Or at least the first we called an "Incoherent Rant of the Month." "GET YOURSELVES SORTED OUT AND STOP WRITING CRAP!" said Paul Buissert. Thank you Paul, we are forever in your debt. You started our trend toward incoherence in Rebound and more importantly, we took your advice and indeed stopped writing crap.

Our incoherent rants led to this sort of letter, a variant of which appeared in every issue for the next, oh, six months or so. "You should have pics of *Tomb Raider III* all over your next issue," Allen Tai said. "Make Lara horny and sexy. Send me the horny pics too. Pleeeeeeeeeease. If you don't, I won't subscribe again." Oh, what hath we wrought?

Brian Libbey pointed out one of our more surreal errors. "I read with astonishment that [the character's] 'bosoms' strain against leather. Ms. Yans should know (better than I do) that a woman has two breasts but only one 'bosom.'" Cindy Yans responded with, "I stand humbly corrected, but double breasted."

Sedur Sellakumar was so excited he received a poster with his January issue that he, "jumped so hard for joy I almost hurt myself in the hardest of places." Um, yeah. We told him he should always use proper protection when reading the magazine.

Oops, another game that never shipped. Origin canceled the game just as the issue was going to the printers...

Award Winners of 1999

GAME OF THE YEAR
System Shock 2

ACTION
Unreal Tournament

REAL-TIME STRATEGY
Age of Empires II

ADD-ON
Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade

ADVENTURE
Gabriel Knight III

CLASSIC
Star Wars Pit Droids

HARDWARE
AMD Athlon

ONLINE
EverQuest

RACING
Dirt Track Racing

ROLE-PLAYING
Planescape Torment

SCI-FI SIMULATION
Freespace 2

SIMULATION
MiG Alley

SPORTS
High Heat 2000

STRATEGY
RollerCoaster Tycoon

WARGAME
Panzer Campaigns I: Smolensk '41

Top Sellers of 1999

1. RollerCoaster Tycoon
2. SimCity 3000
3. Who Wants To Be A Millionaire
4. Age Of Empires II: Age of Kings
5. StarCraft
6. Half-Life
7. Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun
8. Flight Simulator
9. Frogger
10. Baldur's Gate
11. Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2
12. Wheel of Fortune
13. Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Gold Edition
14. Starcraft Expansion: Brood Wars
15. Need For Speed III
16. Monopoly
17. Deer Hunter III
18. Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace
19. Combat Flight Simulator
20. Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear



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public," we wrote. "Or did the publishers, in their never-ending quest for bigger an bigger hits decide the nice of role-playing wasn't big enough." The article focused on three games, *Shadows Over Riva*, *Daggerfall* and a little action/RPG from an up and coming game company named Blizzard called *Diablo*...**A Monster of a 3D Card** The Diamond Monster 3D, powered by the 3dfx chipset, debuted. "This is a killer piece of hardware," we wrote, pointing out that it pushed the PC beyond the Saturn, PlayStation or Nintendo 64 in 3D performance...**The Multiplayer Fallacy** The August editorial talked about whether or not multiplayer gaming would ever fly. "Are there enough people actually interested in online gaming to make all of this work?" We wondered if people would be willing to spend $10 every ››› month to play a game (hah!), and how the press has (falsely) promoted online play because we have access to high-speed net connections. We also pointed out that multiplayer gamers tend to give more feedback than

1999-PRESENT: THE MODERN AGE

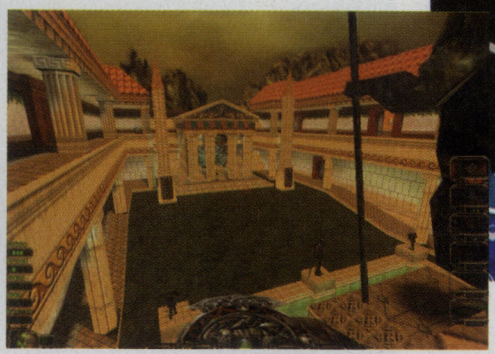
Things have finally settled down in the last couple of years of the magazine. Long gone are the short reviews and other weirdness. The writing is now better, the layouts more interesting, and as we move into the 21st century as *Computer Games Magazine*, there's a new emphasis on generating high-quality articles that are interesting, opinionated and focused on topics that aren't necessarily being covered elsewhere. We'll still have the reviews and previews, but as we learn how to coexist with our own online publication, we need to figure out our strengths and weaknesses (depth versus timeliness is a good example).

Thanks for coming along for the ride. Here's to another decade of gaming.

Random Game comments

Age of Empires II: Unlike Hollywood, game sequels often surpass the original, as was the case with Ensemble's epic real-time strategy game. "[It] keeps the fun stuff from the first game and adds new stuff without making the game more complicated."

Baldur's Gate: It finally came out, and it was good. "It captures the spirit of *AD&D* better than any of its predecessors and is as good as it gets into the role-playing genre."



DAIKATANA: After years of delays it finally appeared, and most people were suitably unimpressed. Our review said, "It may be a labor of love for its creators, but for players it's merely laborious... it is a spectacular failure."

Deus Ex: This "tremendously entertaining game" (as we dubbed it) dazzled with its multiple solutions gameplay. "If *Daikatana* has you laughing at ION Storm," we said, "take a look at *Deus Ex*."



THE SIMS: Where SimCity 3000 was more of the same (but in a good way), The Sims was/is weird. Very weird. Our review spoke of the game's embrace of all forms of sexuality and its tendency to value possessions over spirituality, but how many games even raise these sorts of issues? Amazing.

Diablo II: Though seemingly eternally delayed and suffering through some early problems not unlike the ones encountered by massively multiplayer games, Blizzard somehow managed to put the fun in dungeon (eh, never-mind). "Simply one of the most potent drugs of the year 2000."

EverQuest: "This is basically just hack and slash 101... yet it's so much more fun than *Ultima Online*, so much more... immersive."

Falcon 4.0: Eternally delayed, MicroProse's breathtakingly detailed simulation finally appeared and we described it as having "the greatest unrealized potential of any combat simulation ever made."

Heroes of Might and Magic III: Contained this interesting metaphor: "if you're looking for a game which will charm you, baffle you and devour your personal life like a barbecued cocktail weenie, this is the game to do it."

Icewind Dale: Though having the misfortune of shipping simultaneously with *Diablo II*, Interplay similar hack-and-slash

Quotables

The ION Storm stories continued in May, with this prescient quote from John Romero about Daikatana. "When we went around to all the different companies to say I want start ION Storm, they wanted to know what game I was going to do. And I was like, 'I don't know, it's just going to be a cool shooter.' So when we started the company and we started working, it was like, okay, we gotta come up with a game. It wasn't like the dream game I always wanted to make." Guess what, Mr. Romero... it showed.

those who prefer solo games. "Don't let the minority dictate the future of gaming," we said. Most of the people responding agreed... but history has told us that online gaming is "where it's at."...**GOD is Born** Gathering of Developers opened up shop, and head angel Mike Wilson pointed out they were doing business in a different way, "a better way" as he put it. While the idea was right, Take 2 eventually purchased GOD two years later...**WarCraft Adventures is Dead** Blizzard killed off *WarCraft Adventures*, say that technology had passed them by and they'd been delayed too long [hmm, that didn't seem to hurt *Diablo II*]. "We don't want to release a game sometime ›››



GRIM FANDANGO: Ah, there's nothing like Mexican noir. "It's a game that has all of its elements so tightly threaded into a brilliant whole that it becomes difficult to separate them."

game still impressed. "Don't dismiss it as a clone," we said.

MechWarrior 3: There's nothing like giant mecha. "[It] has all the right touches in all the right places,"

we said. "It's almost a compliment to say that it ends too soon."

Rogue Spear: While we sorta missed mark on *Rainbow Six*, we did think its sequel was aces, calling it a "tour de force."

Planescape Torment: We praised this game for being one of the few where the ultimate goal is to die.

Quake III Arena: id didn't really deliver much of a solo game with this multiplayer-focused game. Fans of deathmatch can't go wrong, as it's still "polished and fun."

System Shock 2: Of our "Game of the Year" for 1999, we said, "If all PC games were this good, we reviewers would be out of business." Erm, yeah.

Ultima IX: Ascension: Bugs and a staggering slow 3D engine made playing Origin's final solo-*Ultima* a chore. An ignoble ending for a legendary series.

Unreal Tournament: While similar in concept to *Quake III Arena*, Epic surpassed id with this game, offering more... stuff (maps, game types, better AI).



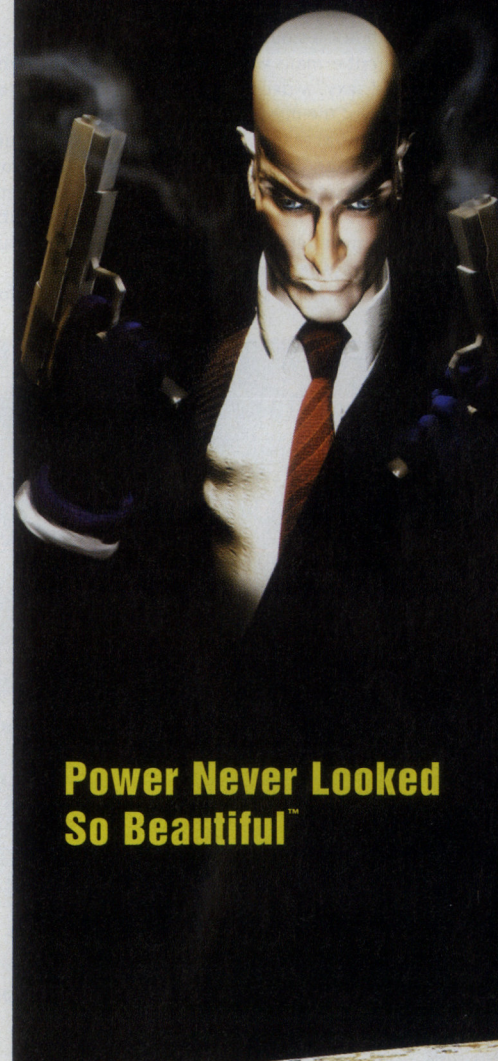
Rebound Follies

Haroldo wrote in talking about "rappid" monkeys and flying elephants. We're still not sure what he's talking

We did four different covers representing the game's four races. No one noticed. It was for our 100th issue, also the smallest since the earliest days of the magazine. People did notice that.

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next year and have people say, 'this would have been a great game a year ago,' they said...Eye on Dallas—10 employees left ION Storm in November, casting a shadow on John Romero's *Daikatana*. Romero tried to put positive spin on it, stating that "most of the levels [of *Daikatana*] are in their final state, much of the coding has been completed for most of the game..." Despite this (or due to this), the game ended up shipping over a year and a half later. A month later, the Dallas Observer printed a story called "Stormy Weather" which took a microscope to the inner workings and petty infighting that was tearing the company apart... The People Versus Ultima Online—Gamers sued Origin over the state of *Ultima Online*, a lawsuit that was eventually settled out of court...Babylon 5 Brouhaha—In September, Sierra canceled their *Babylon 5* game, spurring a large-scale protest from fans of the series. Sierra President David Grenewetzki told us the game could never hope to recover its development costs. "Sometimes [these decisions] are borderline; in this case, it's not a close call." ■

about, but his final sentence, "I live in Limerick, PA. There is a huge power plant there," beautifully sums up the entire incoherent Rebound experience.

Thanks to a reader named Andy, our June issue started us officially bashing on people with AOL accounts. He sent 10 consecutive incoherent e-mails with requests for various "horny and sexy" videogame characters, but admitted he sent the messages solely, "So I can be famous at school." Mission accomplished. Our response? "Wouldn't you know, this came from an AOL account?" It got even more overt later that year. "I only wrote this so you would publish my letter and I would become really popular," says Jarret Garneau.

Since we've shown a certain predilection for PIMPS & HOS).

Andy F. was looking for love advice in May. "You're an editor and, so be honest, how do I get women?" he wondered. As if we know.

Doug R. Wood offered the foolproof way to increase the magazine's readership. "You need more pictures of half-naked women."

Tom Vessel is really into interesting things. "I like to read your magazine when I am bored," he wrote in. "I also like Taco Bell, *Dragon Ball Z* and porn." Too much information, Tom. Too much information....

The Cackling Klaknak (try saying that five times fast) was appalled at our literate reviews. After reading one passage, he said, "I felt my brain starting to work and had to counter immediately with beer and blunt force trauma."

An anonymous writer wrote in who was scared of the magazine. "There is certain literature I do not allow in my home," she wrote. "It can induce unwanted demon visits." Are there actually "wanted" demon visits? We officially fear our readers. ■

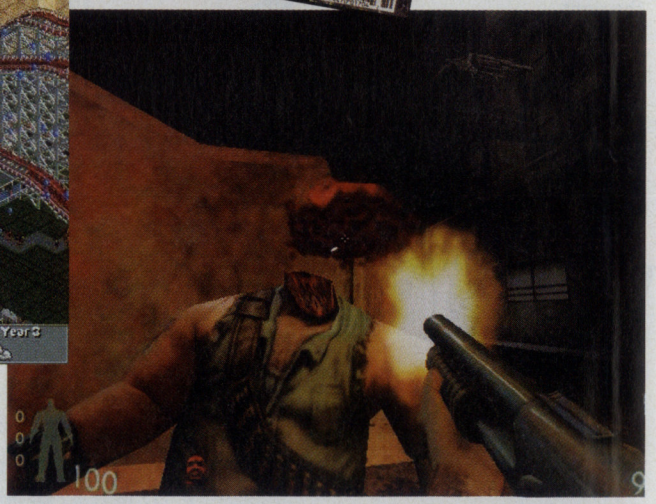


This article was compiled and written by Steve Bauman, editor-in-chief of Computer Games Magazine. Thanks to the many other writers and their contributions over the past decade of gaming.

Strategy Plus is dead. We're now Computer Games Magazine.



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON: Released in March, this game has been a fixture of the Top 10 list for nearly two years. Why? "It's the most purely entertaining game in ages." We also wished more games had vomit playing a significant role.



KINGPIN: Our review of this "gangsta's paradise" used a certain naughty word (one that rhymes with "duck") 31 times in one paragraph. Ouch.

changing our name, reader Dave Lipinski offered this lovely alternative, which foreshadows a future where PC and consoles will become irrelevant: Platform Independent MultiPlayer Simulations & Host Oriented Simulations (or

Quotables

Jacob H— A pointed out a fallacy in a preview of Planescape Torment where we commented that you could cut off your own leg and use it for a weapon. "Wouldn't it make more sense to use whatever he cut off his leg with," he wondered. Good advice for all.

Michael (Chris) Keane wrote in with our favorite magazine slogan, calling us, "the computer gaming magazine that doesn't suck."



Bye-Bye-Buzz. Who should be our next mascot?

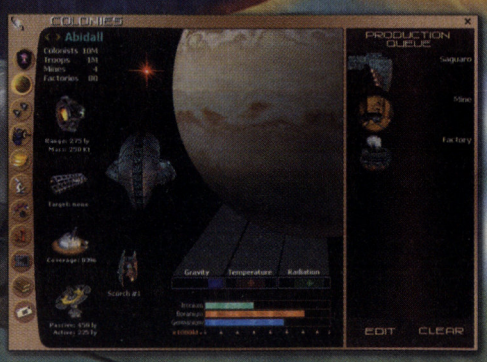
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FAQs

Machinima

by Jason Cross

It's really not surprising that we're seeing quite a rise in the use of in-engine cut scenes in games. All other things being equal, showing cut scenes from within the game is more immersive than playing back video of either live actors (*Command & Conquer*) or CGI (everything else). There's even a growing community of budding film producers making shorts with game engines—they call in-engine filmmaking "machinima," and the name is fitting

whether it's a stand-alone film made with the *Quake II* engine or a cinematic sequence that's part of a game. Now, I'm one of those people who are easily distracted by flashing lights and loud noises. I should really love any game cinematic that stays within the game engine. But they fail to satisfy me. In fact, they usually make me grind my teeth in frustration. What is wrong with machinima?

One of the greater problems with in-engine cut scenes is the dialogue. It's almost always completely unnatural, and even when it's written well it seems amateurish. A character will always finish what he says, and then there is a brief pause, and then the reply. In life—even in "TV and movie life" —people talk over each other. They interrupt each other. They give little "yeahs" or "uh-huhs" while someone else is orating. Currently, the reason games don't have this sort of overlapping dialogue is largely technical. Each spoken line has to be recorded separate from all the others, and loaded individually, with the end of each line triggering the start of the next. This is because the variety of computer hardware makes it difficult to know *exactly* how long a scene will take to play out, and other methods of playing back a scene might throw it out of sync. To make matters worse, the pause between lines is only lengthened by the need for the entire sound file to be loaded before it plays back in order for the lip-synching code to work properly. If you're wondering why two people talk and each one delivers their lines like they don't know what the other person is saying—that's not just bad acting (though bad acting is *far* too common)—it's a practical limitation of recording game dialogue. When a movie with voice-over work (animated films primarily) is recorded, the actors do their scenes together, so they can properly react to the manner in which their co-actors are speaking. But most games that feature extensive cut scenes have much more dialogue than a movie, and it's simply not practical to have each possible scenario acted out in groups.

Then there's the camera work—"machinimatography" if you will. Some developers have gone to really great lengths to provide powerful camera manipulation features in their tools, and it shows. It shows *too much*. When working in a game engine or even making a CGI movie, the directors have an unlimited number of cameras to work with and never have to worry about such real-world problems as cameras being reflected in mirrors or seeing other cameras. They can also move them or change the field of view at will at no expense. In the hands of a skilled director this could result in some powerful virtual filmmaking, but directors aren't the ones making game cut scenes. Often it's the level designer who scripts an in-game cut scene. These guys may be great at their jobs, but they don't know anything about making films. They don't know about establishing shots, how to pan to follow action properly, how to create tension by *not* showing something, how to film a dialogue, etc. The result is the hideous overblown camera movement we see in almost every game—where the camera is always revolving, zooming, or changing to a different dramatic angle with every line spoken. My advice to game developers? Hire someone who knows how to film a scene. Find a film school graduate student to contract. Hire a film artist to storyboard out all your scenes before you even begin the project. I'm sure the last thing publishers want to hear is that they need to spend more money for more staff and contractors, so here's a good rule of thumb to use in a pinch: *just cool it with the camera already!*

As bad as most in-engine cut scenes are these days, we should cut game developers a little slack. They have certain technical limitations that prevent the use of standard filmmaking techniques. Character models and the animation that supports them aren't quite yet sophisticated enough to show emotion very well, so a close-up of someone's face, typically a dramatic highlight in film, ends up being very boring. 3D technology is closing in on good facial expression, but we're a couple years away from duplicating Harrison Ford's defiant and aggravated stare. In addition, subtle movements don't come off too well on a computer screen just yet, mostly because creating such detailed and minute animations is difficult and time-consuming (motion capture techniques don't pick up subtlety too well). Lack of facial expression or subtle movement forces all meaning has to be conveyed with dramatic (often *melodramatic*) gestures for the time being. If this is the case, maybe some good play directors could help game developers, as they work under the same constraints.

Right now, most in-game cut scenes suck. They're "cool" in a geek sort of way, but they're just bad filmmaking. Nobody can seem to nail the right combination of good writing, good voice acting, good character animation, and good camera work. Some of these problems require some technical innovations to overcome, but some others are purely artistic and could be solved immediately. One thing is for sure—the age of machinima is almost upon us. As game budgets increase, characters become more lifelike, and player expectations rise, the best-looking games won't necessarily be the ones with the slickest 3D engine or best camera tools. They'll be the ones where real writers, actors, and directors were hired to make cut scenes produced with the game engine fun to watch—entertainment in their own right. ■

Q: I have a PIII 750 and an Alpha PEP66u cooler. The voltage spec for my CPU is 1.65, and the thermal spec is 80 degrees C. I can get up to 1 GHZ if I bump the voltage to 2.0 v, and the Alpha does a great job of cooling—my CPU never gets above 48 C. I'm worried about the voltage—can it directly harm my CPU, or is the recommended specification just there to prevent overheating? Since I can run my CPU cool enough, is it safe to use that much voltage?

Ian C.

A: Overclocking your CPU (or anything else) is tricky business. The truth is that there are no real hard-and-fast rules about exactly what is safe and what isn't. Some chips are designed to operate well at higher temperatures than others. Some will take excessive voltage more readily. There's really no exact way to know, except to try it and see if it breaks. Then, of course, it's too late, and breaking your chip by overclocking it voids the warranty. To make matters worse, the effects of overclocking aren't always readily apparent. Your CPU could work fine in an overclocked state for weeks or months, but die a year later from prolonged excessive heat or voltage. Many of the people who are "successfully" running their systems or video cards above spec are actually drastically reducing their life span.

My professional advice is not to overclock your system if you're not willing to lose your investment in it. I have an overclocked Celeron processor in my machine at home, but for the cost of the chip, I'm willing to break it. I wouldn't do the same thing to an $800 1GHz Pentium III chip.

Q: Is there any compelling reason to choose a computer with a Pentium III processor over one with an Athlon processor, or vice-versa?

Keith W.

A: This is largely a matter of personal opinion, but I would say no. Obviously there are other factors involved, like the price and features of the accompanying motherboards, RAM, etc. But purely in a processor-to-processor comparison, the Pentium III and Athlons are now so close in performance and compatibility that there's no compelling reason to choose one over the other. An 800MHz Athlon these days is about the same speed as an 800MHz Pentium III (ever since the "Coppermine" Pentium IIIs were introduced, and the "Thunderbird" Athlons). Depending on the application, RAM type, motherboard, and so on, one could outpace the other by 10-15%. It's often a toss-up, though. Your best bet is to get the most MHz for the least money.

The situation is a little different on other Intel and AMD chips. The Duron, AMD's low-cost chip, is significantly faster than Intel's Celeron. At least, that's the case until the next revision of the Celeron comes out, at which time the lead could switch again.

Q: Does Geforce2 support Glide? Someone tried to play Diablo II on his Geforce DDR and he had problems. It was because Geforce DDR doesn't support Glide. I'm worried because if I get Diablo II and a Geforce2, I wont be able to play it.

Wee S.

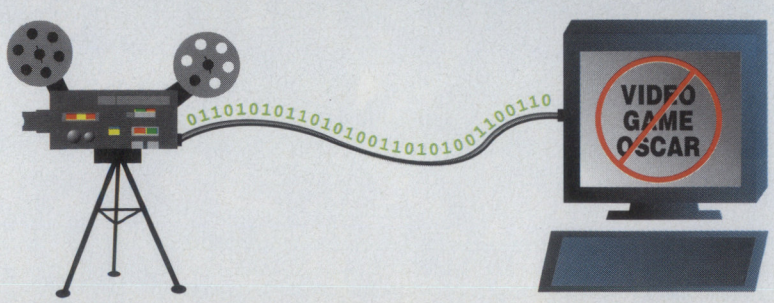
A: The GeForce2 does not support Glide. Only 3dfx brand video cards do. However, you shouldn't really have any problem playing Diablo 2. That game runs just fine in Direct3D, Glide, or standard "no 3D acceleration" mode. 3D acceleration in that game is only used to smooth out some of the special effects a bit. Even if you had to play without 3D acceleration, you wouldn't be missing much. As for your friend who had problems running the game with his GeForce DDR—this is a pretty common problem. Users who don't have the very latest drivers often have problems with NVIDIA-based cards and Diablo II (it's not clear whether it's NVIDIA's fault of the game's, but newer drivers seem to fix it).

Q: I've read that it is best to clean up the Windows cache, but the only real way to do it is by restarting Windows itself. Is there software that I'm not aware of that would do the job without restarting the O/S? Restarting windows with a network card and a full registry is a pain.

Hans V.

A: Most of the time, you really shouldn't have to clear the Windows cache while running your machine. Well-written programs won't leave things in memory after you stop running them, and temporary stuff stored in the disk cache will be overwritten as needed. Having said that, not all programs are well behaved and there are some good utilities out there that will clear all unnecessary stuff from RAM and your cache.

Some utilities you might want to check out include WinRAM-Booster by Total Idea (www.totalidea.de), FreeMem by Meikel Weber (www.meikel.com), Memory Trax II by Garrett Hylltun (www.freewarehome.com /software/mem-trax.html), or WinRAM Turbo by Dale Robbins (www.scselp.com /winramturbo/). If you search around for memory optimizers at any decent search engine, you'll likely turn up several more useful programs.



BJM

Gizmopolis

AGP 8x On the Way— Intel recently began talking about a proposed AGP 8x specification. The new AGP spec will still use a 32-bit bus as AGP 4x does, but at twice the frequency—533 MHz. This will effectively provide 2.1 GB per second of bandwidth, twice what is available in AGP 4x. Matrox and NVIDIA have announced plans to support the bus as early as possible and even help Intel define the specification. There is no word yet on exactly when motherboards with AGP 8x support will hit the market, or when video cards supporting the standard will go on sale.

GeForce 2 Ultra Coming— NVIDIA recently announced the GeForce 2 Ultra, a high-end version of its GeForce 2 product aimed at the "speed at all costs" enthusiast. It's basically a GeForce 2 clocked at 250 MHz instead of 200 Mhz, yielding speeds of 1,000 dual-textured pixels per second with improved transformation and lighting speed. Memory bandwidth is improved through the use of 230 MHz DDR RAM, instead of the 166 MHz DDR RAM in standard GeForce 2 cards. Several manufacturers, including Creative Labs and Hercules, will release GeForce 2 Ultra based video cards this fall.

AMD Releases x86-64 Spec— AMD publicly released the x86-64 Architecture Programmers Overview—the instruction manual the software development community can use to begin incorporating x86-64 technology support in their operating systems, applications, drivers, and development tools. AMD's x86-64 technology will first be supported in the family of processors codenamed *Hammer*, scheduled to be released at the end of 2001. According to AMD, "The x86-64 technology is designed to enable platform suppliers, developers, and corporations to transition to 64-bit environments while continuing to have leading performance on the vast installed base of existing 32-bit applications. 64-bit computing is ideal for memory hungry applications such as large databases, CAD tools, and simulation engines that are currently limited by the 4GB addressing limitation."

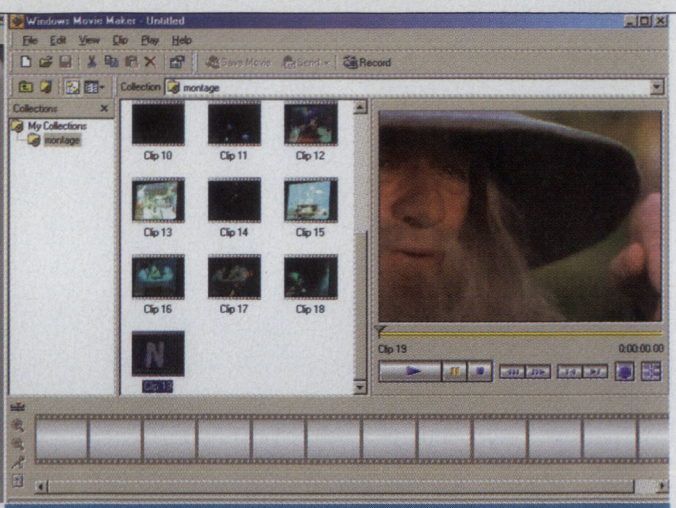
Logitech's Vibrating Mouse— Logitech recently unveiled optical wheel mice with the ability to "feel" events within Windows applications and on the Web. The way the device works is simple—as the mouse cursor travels over icons and menus, command bars, folders, tool bars, web buttons, and hyperlinks it will provide tactile feedback to the mouse. The IFeel mice are optical, which means they offer a high degree of precision while requiring no cleaning. Logitech's new vibrating optical mouse is loosely based on the MouseMan Wheel Mouse design. The *IFeel Mouseman* will retail for around $60, and a more moderately priced version will also be available later this year. ■



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[left] The new Media Player does just about everything imaginable.

[above] Movie Maker automatically breaks your movies into clips for easy editing.

Windows Me, Baby

Are you ready to be "Windowsed"?

by Jason Cross

Every fall, Microsoft releases a new version of its home operating system. The anti-Microsoft say it's a ploy for the company to charge everyone $100 for bug fixes that should have been given away for free. A more forgiving view is that Microsoft is committed to maintaining a current product line with the features it feels users want. Regardless of where your opinions lie, you're forced with the same decision every back-to-school season—do I upgrade my current Windows to the new version? Windows Millennium Edition (given the oh-so-friendly moniker "Windows Me" by Microsoft) offers a bit more than last year's upgrade, but as with previous versions, it's still the same beast underneath. You'll not need to upgrade if you want to continue to use current software, but some of Windows Me's features are so nice you'll likely want to move up to the new version.

Many Windows 98 users skipped Windows 98 Second Edition entirely, and it's easy to see why. With the exception of the Internet Connection Sharing utility, all the improvements in SE were available as free downloads. That's not the case with Windows Me. You can grab Internet Explorer 5.5 and the new Media Player—both standard in Windows Me—from the Internet, but this year's update offers a host of core improvements you'll have to buy it to get. These fall into three main categories: making your PC more reliable and easier to fix, streamlining the user interface and making the operating system easier to use, and digital media tools and applications.

PC Health

Perhaps the most welcome change is the focus on making sure your PC "just works." In our tests, Windows Me was definitely more stable and reliable than Windows 98, but there's only so much an operating system can do about poorly behaved programs. Some will argue that we'll never have systems that "just work," but it's great to see features like System File Protection and System Restore anyway. System File Protection prevents unauthorized applications from writing over critical system files (.DLLs, .VXDs, .INFs, and so on). This should help avoid cases where installing an application forces a system file to be overwritten with an older version.

The System Restore feature is a great idea whose time is long overdue. At regular intervals, backups of critical system files are made and stored in what are called "restore points." You can manually create your own at any time, if you so choose. If your system gets corrupted or the neighbor's visiting kid manages to foul up your entire desktop, simply use the System Restore feature to return system files to a previous state. It's not like a complete backup solution—most applications and the data for them are not saved when creating a restore point (nor are they changed or deleted when restoring to one)—but it's a great feature nonetheless.

If you like to keep your hard drive speedy by frequently defragmenting it, you'll be glad to know the Defrag utility has been slightly sped up. Of course, when all your best intentions fail and there's nowhere left to look but the Help menu, it might actually prove useful now. Help topics have been almost completely rewritten, and are now easier to understand with more examples. Many features are accompanied by "troubleshooting" help sections that take you step-by-step through sorting out exactly why, for instance, your printer isn't working properly. Sure, previous versions of *Windows* had this stuff, but it's been greatly overhauled and expanded.

Streamlining

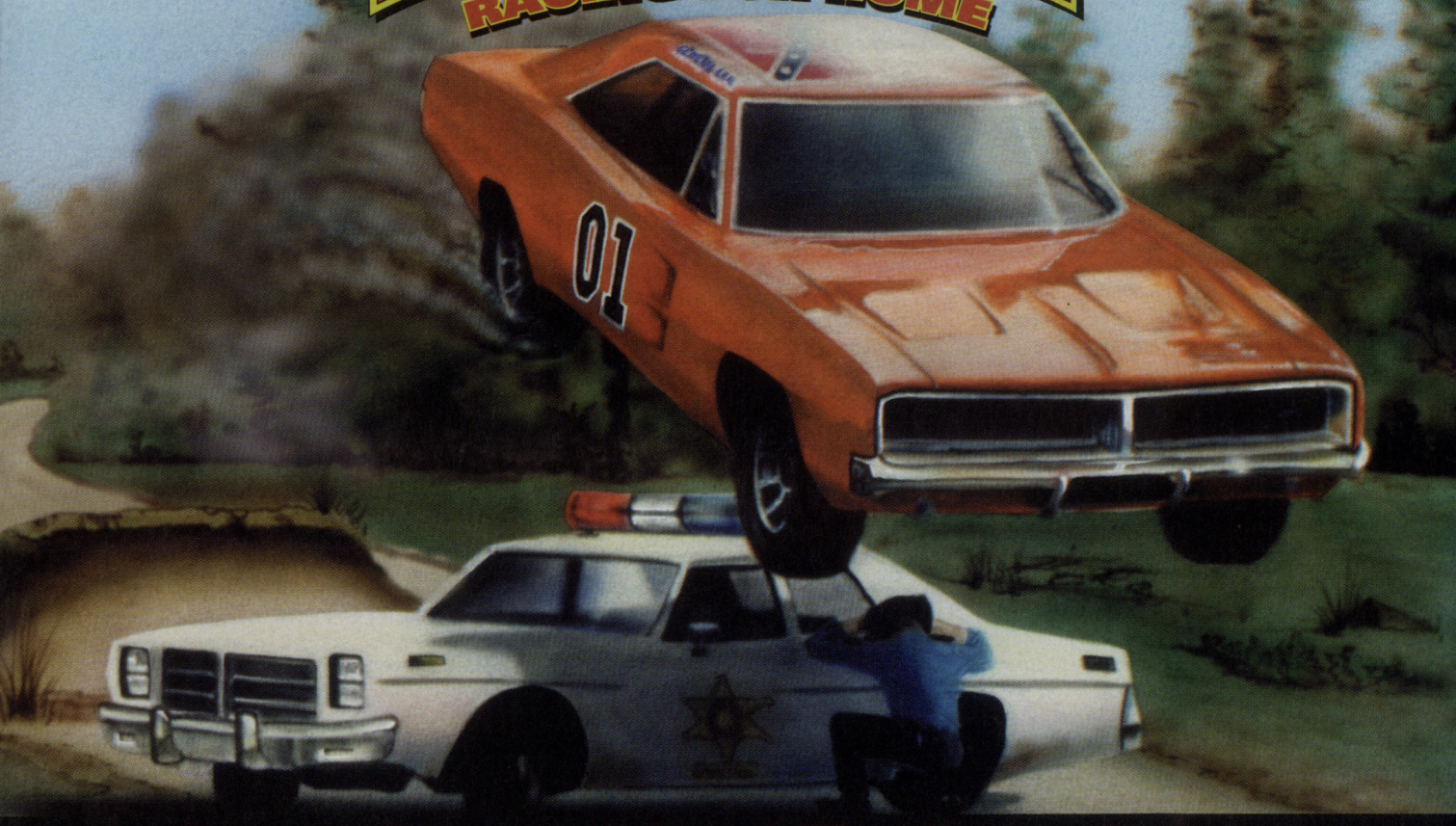
Part of making sure your system keeps working properly is making it more streamlined—the less fooling around you do, the less likely you are to break something. The most interesting instance of streamlining in Windows Me is the removal of the Real Mode DOS code. You cannot boot directly to a command prompt anymore, and those nasty DOS startup files are all but ignored. This could cause a few incompatibilities with certain DOS programs, so you might want to test any DOS programs you use before upgrading. If you can launch the DOS program from within Windows, it should work fine with Windows Me, and most DOS games should work fine this way. This compatibility inconvenience is worth the decrease in boot-up time alone. Windows Me boots a lot faster than earlier versions. Everyone's system is different, but don't be surprised if your boot-up time is cut nearly in half. In the long run, removing Real Mode DOS should improve reliability, as conflicts between items that run in Real Mode

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WINDOWS® 95/98 CD-ROM

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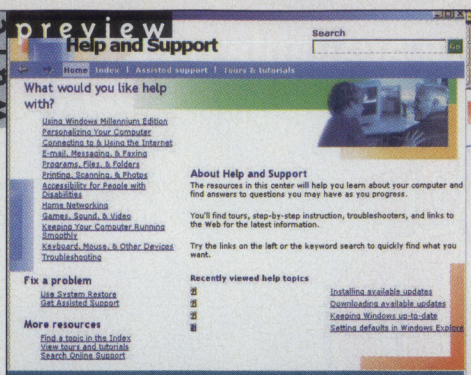
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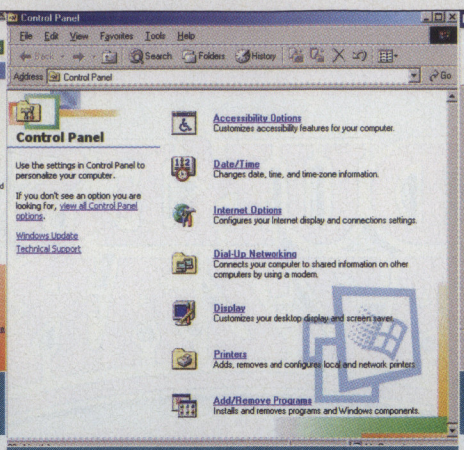
EVERYONE

Mild Animated Violence
Use of Tobacco & Alcohol

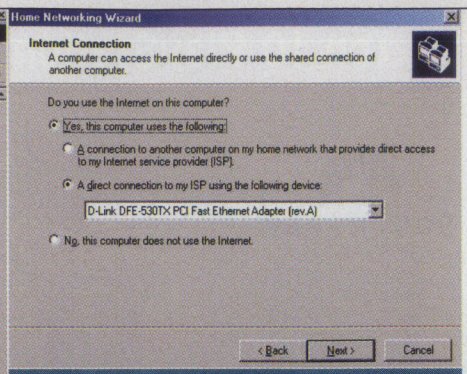
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



The new Help screen—cleaner, simpler, and easier to understand.



By default, Windows Me displays a simplified control panel.



The Home Networking Wizard will hopefully make linking your computers together a breeze.

and Protected Mode are a common source of system instability.

The latest Windows release brings quite a few enhancements to the standard user interface as well, most of it borrowed from Windows 2000. You'll notice the same new icon for the Recycle Bin, the same "personalized menus" that show only those things you use most often, and you can even choose to expand menus like the Control Panel or Printers in the Start Menu. Explorer now includes a "thumbnails" view option that shows small pictures for all the files in a folder, which can be handy for those large image directories. There's even built-in support for .zip files (called "compressed folders") so you don't need to download a zip utility to uncompress all that stuff you grab off the web anymore. The Control Panel defaults to showing only the seven most commonly used options, like Add/Remove Programs, Display, and Date/Time, though you're one click away from the old-style full display.

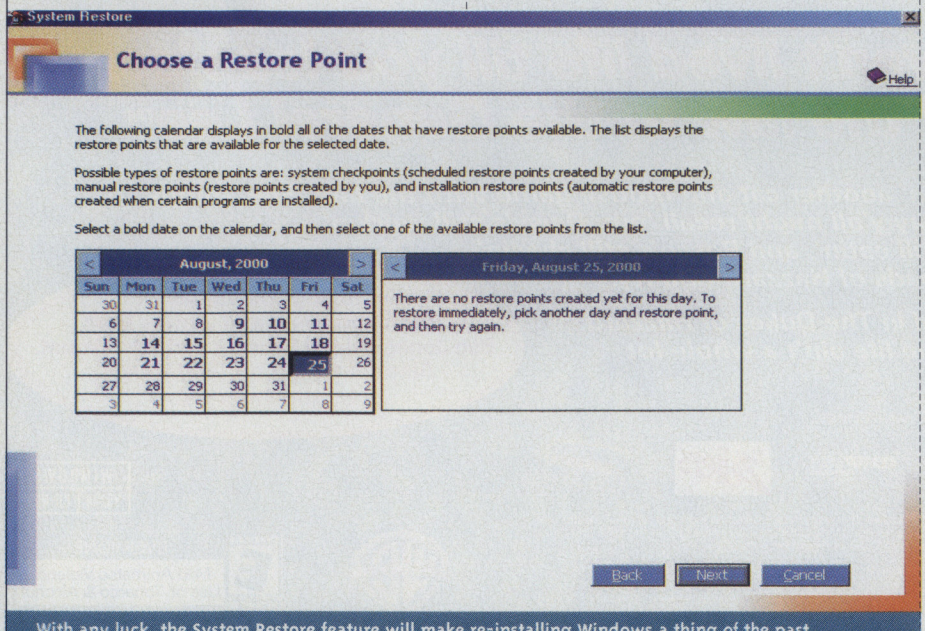
The new AutoUpdate feature uses those moments when you're online but not actually doing anything important to check for and download any critical Windows updates. This is done only very unobtrusively, with only a notification when an update is completely downloaded that asks if you wish to install it. You can, of course, reconfigure AutoUpdate or disable it altogether.

End-users aren't going to have a very streamlined experience if their hardware and accessories don't work, of course. Windows Me has been enhanced with the same TCP/IP stack found in Windows 2000, which is more robust than the one in Windows 98. Again taking a cue from Windows 2000, USB support is improved. In an effort to make activities like setting up a home network, getting online for the first time, setting up an e-mail account, and so on easier for the average computer user, Windows Me comes with a whole host of Wizards. There are even Wizards for things like hooking up a digital camera or scanner.

Multimedia

It's been some time since we called all our sound and video files multimedia, hasn't it? That was the buzzword in the early days of the CD-ROM, and digital media has since replaced it. Whatever you want to call it, Windows Me takes the notion of using your computer for video and music pretty seriously. The most noticeable change is the new Media Player, which users of earlier Windows versions can download from www.windowsmedia.com. The Media Player has undergone a tremendous change, and is now a one-stop shop for just about everything music or video related. It plays every music file format imaginable (except RealAudio) and every video file format under the sun (except RealVideo and new Quicktime movies). It can convert your CDs into the new MP3-like WMA format, which Microsoft boasts sounds better and uses less disk space. It catalogues and sorts all the music and movies on your hard drive, organizes play lists, and so on. It transfers these files to your portable music players. It links to the web so you can watch streaming video clips and music videos. Internet Radio? Covered. There are, of course, plenty of new skins to customize its look. The downside to all this functionality is that the player is a bit more clunky and less organized than before, and takes a little longer to load. Opinions about the new player are mixed—most seem to like the new abilities, but not the new interface.

Also new is an application called Movie Maker, which unlike the new Media Player, isn't freely available to users of previous Windows versions. Taking a cue from the iMac DV, this software lets you create and edit movies on your PC. It's not going to replace Adobe Premiere, but it certainly does a good job with general home movie editing.



With any luck, the System Restore feature will make re-installing Windows a thing of the past.

Time to Upgrade?

If you're using Windows 98, there's certainly no pressing need to upgrade to Millennium Edition. There shouldn't be any games released that will require the OS, and it doesn't offer any performance benefits. The same drivers for things like video and sound cards are used between Windows 98 and Windows Me, so there should be no concerns there. If you use old DOS programs that will only work in raw native DOS Real Mode, you'll probably want to actively avoid upgrading.

Though not a necessary upgrade, there are definitely enough benefits to the new Windows to make an upgrade worthwhile. It's a bigger change from previous versions than last year's introduction of Windows 98 SE, though it's still essentially the same under the hood. For many users, the increased reliability, problem correcting, and slightly friendlier interface, combined with substantially improved boot-up time, will make the purchase worthwhile. If you're still running Windows 95, this would be a good time to jump in and play catch up, and if you're running Windows 98, there's enough new stuff in Millennium Edition to keep it from being just a bugfix update. Whether or not these improvements justify the price is probably a matter of personal taste. ■

3dfx gives hope for those without AGP

Voodoo5 5500 PCI

COMPUTER GAMES STAMP OF APPROVAL

We get mail all the time from readers who want to know what PCI video card to buy. Either they don't know whether they have an AGP slot or not, or they have an older machine (or cheap machine with integrated video) that has no AGP slot. Sadly, many of the sub-$800 computers sold these days have integrated AGP video but no AGP slot. For these people, upgrading to a decent video card has been tough. The latest and greatest cards are usually AGP-only, and finding a PCI card often means looking for old technology or "budget" versions of popular cards. 3dfx thinks the market for PCI video cards is still important, and that's good news—the Voodoo5 5500 PCI version is functionally identical to its AGP brother.

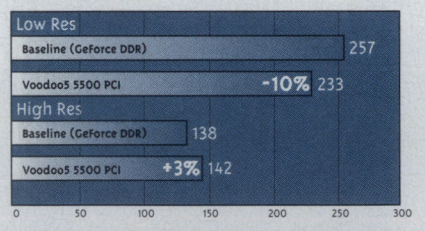
If you're not familiar with the Voodoo5 5500, here's a sum of it's features: it has two of 3dfx's new VSA-100 chips on the same card, each with 32MB of memory. It supports 32-bit color, large textures, and texture compression. There's no hardware T&L or advanced bump mapping, but the Voodoo5's claim to fame is full screen anti-aliasing, or FSAA. This makes games that run at lower resolutions look less "jagged" and removes some visual artifacts from "noisy textures" and such. It's really pretty great, especially for those who play games that run at fixed resolutions or have monitors that won't display high resolutions very well.

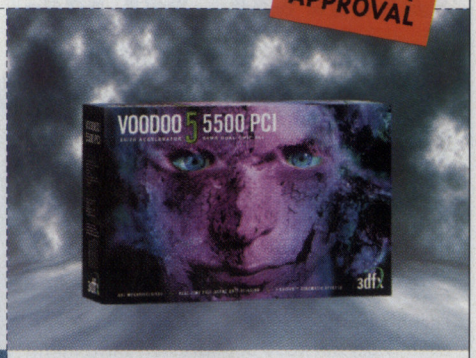
The PCI version of the Voodoo5 5500 is about 5% slower on average than the AGP version, making it a little slower than a GeForce with DDR memory at low resolutions and a little faster at high resolutions. It's still not as fast as a GeForce2, but frame rates in popular games are still quite high, and it's easily the fastest PCI video card you can buy. This makes it the clear choice for those with reasonably fast processors (500 MHz or more) that don't have an AGP slot.

—Jason Cross

CG VidMark:

We ran benchmarks on an 800Mhz Athlon with 128MB running Windows 98 SE. The Baseline card was a GeForce DDR with NVIDIA reference 3.68 drivers. For full information about CG Vidmark, head to www.cdmag.com/information/cgvidmark.html.





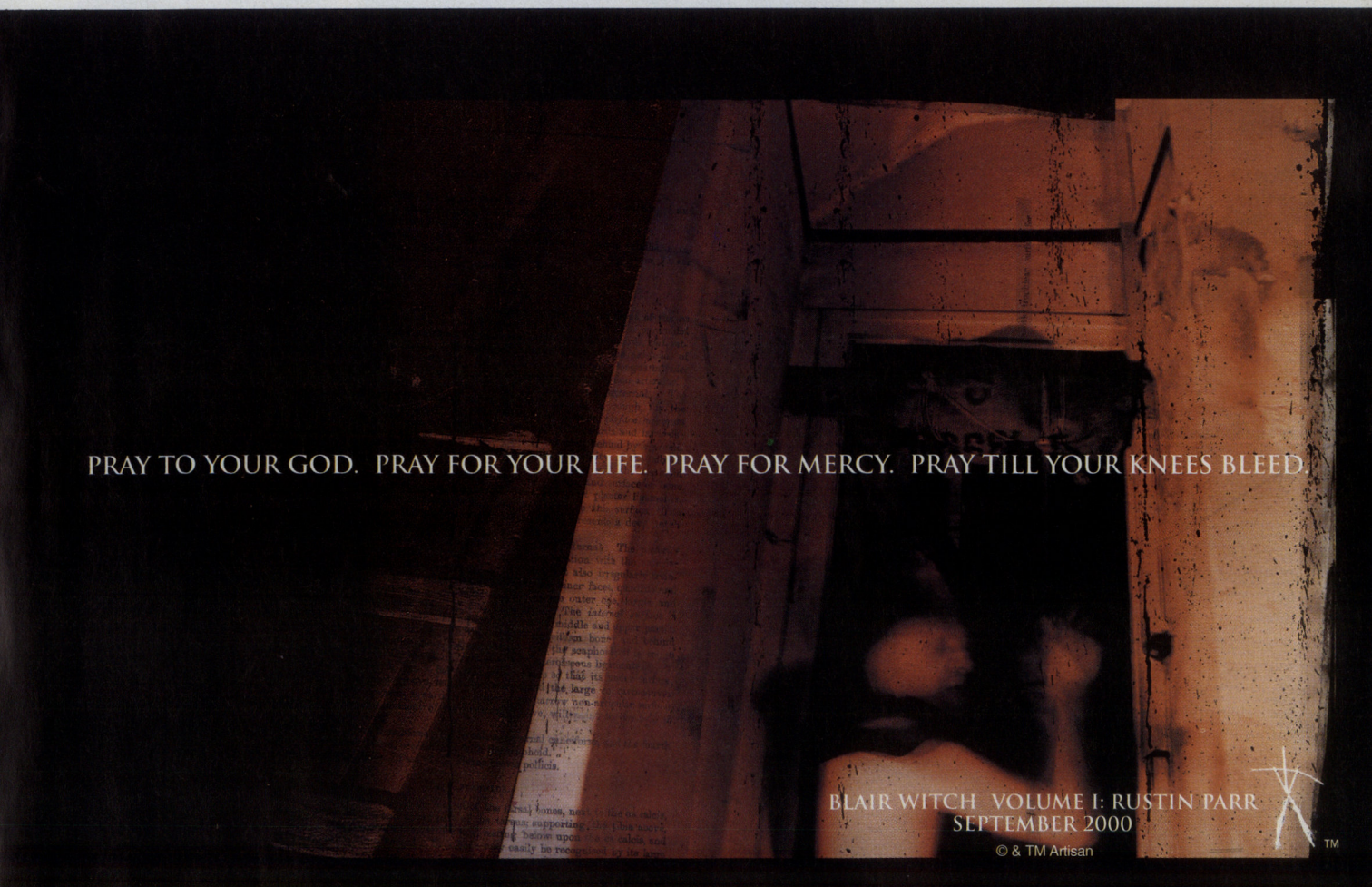
Just like the AGP version, but a purple box instead of red.

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER 3dfx

MSRP $299

RATING ★★★★½



Santa Cruz

An alternative to Creative Labs?

Until recently, the hands-down best sound cards for a gaming PC were the Sound Blaster Live! and anything based off Aureal's Vortex 2 chip. Aureal went bankrupt earlier this year, though, leaving gamers with only two options—get a Sound Blaster Live! card, or get a cheap card fewer features and without good 3D sound. Turtle Beach's Santa Cruz, powered by Cirrus Logic's *Crystal 4630 SoundFusion* chip, might be the first good alternative.

The modest-sized PCI card is host to a plethora of connection options. There are internal analog connections for modem/phone audio, CD-ROM, and auxiliary devices, as well as a digital S/PDIF input. You'll find an expansion header for an external S/PDIF connection board and a standard MIDI daughter-card header. All this is fairly standard, but the external jacks on the card hold a unique surprise. As with most sound cards, you'll 1/8" jacks for a front stereo connection, rear stereo connection, line level input, and microphone input. What makes the Santa Cruz special is a sixth jack, called the "VersaJack." This little wonder is software-selectable to be an output for the center channel and subwoofer in a Dolby 5.1 speaker setup, or a second stereo line level input, or a headphones output. Naturally, it wouldn't be a decent modern soundcard without a MIDI/Joystick port as well.

The overall sound quality produced by the Crystal SoundFusion chip is pretty good, though not stellar. Thanks to high quality digital to analog and analog to digital converters, sound is very clean. In fact, the signal to noise ratio for analog sound playback is greater than 96 dB, and digital playback is better than 90 dB. Most game soundtracks and sound effects sound just as they should, with no noticeable hiss or distortion. The slight disappointment in sound quality comes from the 3D sound implementation. The Crystal SoundFusion chip is a programmable digital signal processor that can handle A3D 1.0, EAX 1.0 and 2.0, I3DL2, DirectSound 3D, and just about any other major 3D sound API you can think of. Note that it won't do A3D 2.0, however. Games that use EAX or A3D did produce good 3D sound, but the quality wasn't quite as high as with native Sound Blaster or Aureal cards. In addition, some of the best 3D sound in games today uses the more advanced A3D 2.0 standard, so while you might get 3D sound, you might not get all you could. If you play games that use MIDI, you'll probably prefer the music that comes out of a Sound Blaster Live!, as the quality of the default MIDI patch set included with the Santa Cruz leaves much to be desired.

Using a programmable DSP for a sound processor has some other interesting benefits, though. The DSP that powers the Santa Cruz is capable of re-configuring itself on the fly to aid in MP3 decoding, MP3 *encoding*, 3D audio playback, MIDI playback, etc. As with most new sound cards you can apply a host of reverb/chorus/echo effects to the playback—two at once from a list of 19 effects, in fact. These can be applied not only to wave audio playback, but to all sound sources such as CDs or MP3s, so you can listen to the Brian Setzer Orchestra in a virtual auditorium (or bathroom) if you so desire. These nifty DSP effects aren't really of much use for gaming—the processor doesn't handle EAX or A3D much faster or slower than a device that can't reconfigure itself—but we all use our computers for more than just games and things like hardware-assisted MP3 encoding and decoding could be useful for Napster addicts.



That yellow jack up top is the all-powerful VersaJack

The Santa Cruz is definitely a quality sound card, priced competitively with former Aureal cards and the current Sound Blaster Live! line. It's got a few good tricks up its sleeve, like the VersaJack and re-configurable DSP, which help it stand out from the crowd. Still, 3D sound quality and MIDI playback aren't stellar. If you're looking for a good all-around sound card, the Santa Cruz is a good buy. If you're really concerned mostly about the sound quality of the games you play, you'd be just as well off getting an SB Live!. —*Jason Cross*

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Turtle Beach

MSRP $99.95

RATING ★★★★☆

Massive THX power at a reasonable price

ProMedia v.2-400

COMPUTER GAMES STAMP OF APPROVAL

Really good speakers are an important part of the overall gaming experience. Many games have incredibly rich sound environments and professional music scores so good that those tinny 50-watt speakers that came "free" with your computer just can't do them justice. For those that want to spend a little extra for some serious sound, Klipsch offers the ProMedia v.2-400.

The Klipsch name should be familiar to audiophiles. Its high-end home stereo equipment has been lauded for its exceptional quality. Now Klipsch brings that high-fidelity expertise to the PC market with a set of 4.1 speakers that is truly one of the best we've heard. The breadbox-sized subwoofer sports a dual-speaker setup that delivers 160 watts of power, while each of the four satellites pushes out 60 watts (which they look far too small to do). While 400 watts sounds very impressive, it's not a good indication of the real power of a speaker system. More telling is the peak sound level these speakers can achieve—110 dB at average computer listening distance.

We've encountered plenty of speaker sets whose subjective listening tests didn't live up to the promised specs, but the ProMedias do. You can go far past "uncomfortably loud" before distorting the sound, and frequency response was excellent with even the most demanding games and DVDs. It's a true quad-speaker set designed for use with sound cards that have both front and rear speaker outputs, and it's probably overkill for those with regular "stereo only" soundcards. The only accessory we really feel is missing is the possible inclusion of a headphone jack on the front-right speaker, something far too few high-end PC speaker systems offer.

This is the kind of speaker system that is about as good as you can get. It's 400 watts of power so clean that it's THX-certified. It's sounds better and offers more power than anything else in its price range. You could spend a lot more on PC speakers and not get something that sounds this good. —*Jason Cross*



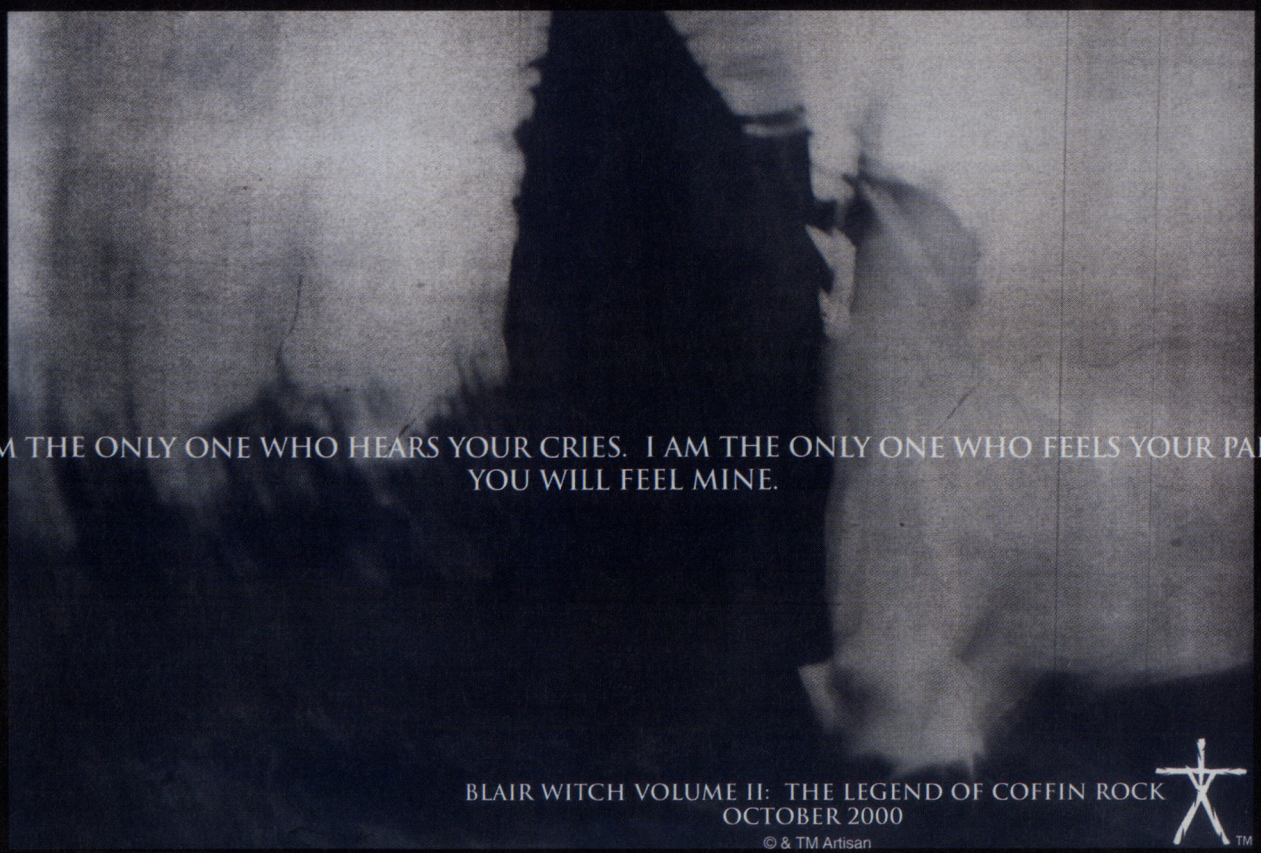
Stylish enough to look good on your desk, and way too powerful for its size.

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Klipsch

MSRP $249

RATING ★★★★★



DI-701 Residential Gateway

Inexpensive online protection for low-ping bastards

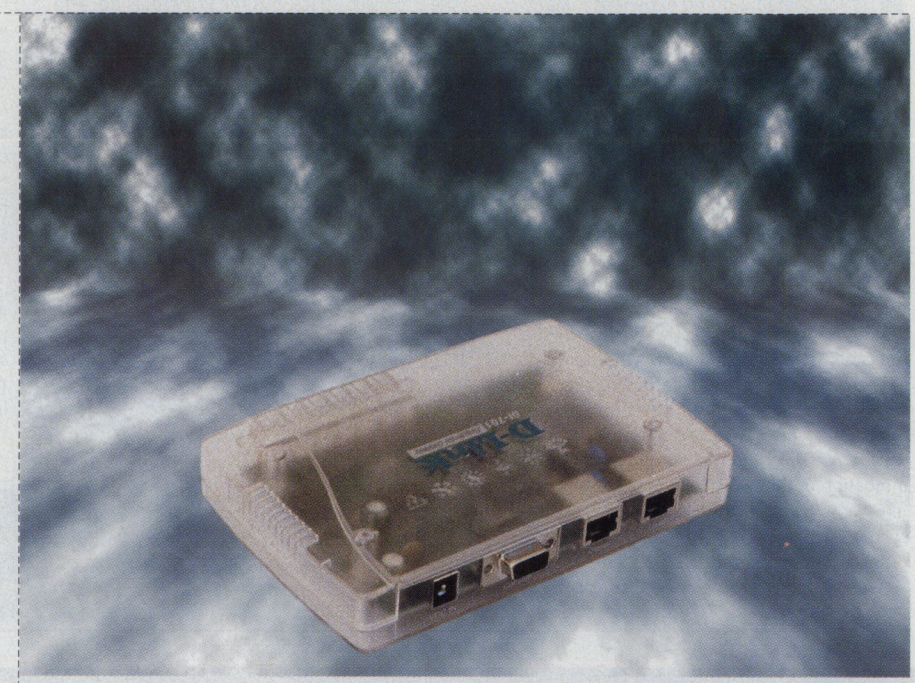
With more and more gamers gravitating toward home networks and broadband Internet connections (cable modems or DSL) the issue of security becomes more and more important. Or at least it should be; Windows itself only provides basic protection against attacks if you're connected to the Internet for extended periods of time. While the media often overstates these threats, it's not something that should be entirely ignored.

D-Link's DI-701 Residential Gateway provides a first line of defense in case of an Internet attack. You plug your cable or DSL modem into the translucent plastic unit and it becomes your main connection to the Internet, much like an expensive firewall/router. It also has a LAN port to connect to your network; unfortunately it lacks a built-in hub, which means that you'll have to invest in another box if you have, or wish to set up, a local network.

In addition to serving as a defense against unwanted intrusions the DI-701 provides Network Address Translation (NAT) services that allow you to share a single Internet connection with multiple machines on a network, much like the Internet Connection Sharing component of Windows 98SE. (This may violate the terms of service of some ISPs, so you may want to check in advance.) The setup is simple, and includes both a Windows configuration program and a text-based one accessible via Telnet through a serial connection (a cable is included, and the same connection is used to upgrade the unit's firmware; if you purchase the unit, immediately go to D-Link's website, www.dlink.com, and get the latest update).

Using Steve Gibson's superb "Shields Up" test at http://grc.com, the unit essentially makes your home computer, or the computers on your network, invisible to anyone on the Internet. If someone does a port scan on your IP address (your ID to the Internet), it will take an extremely long time as each scan times out, and in all likelihood the intruder will move on to a more attractive target. Strangely enough, if your computer is under attack from an outside source, the DI-701 locks up (necessitating turning it off and on), making it one of the few products that hangs when *working*.

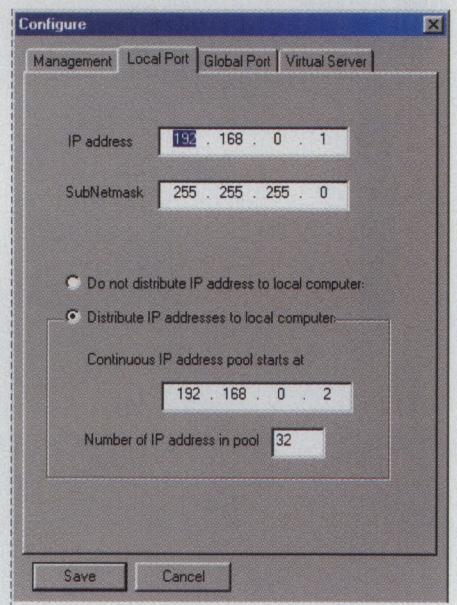
The downside of having a firewall like the DI-701 is that it can be a problem for many Internet games and programs like ICQ. Chances are you'll need to open ports on the unit in order to play online games, but the utility provided for doing this is quite simple (and you can often find instructions buried in a game's README on what ports need to be opened; Microsoft itself has instructions for games that use DirectPlay). Unfortunately, many online games require ranges of ports opened; the DI-701 only allows you to open up individual ports, and you're limited a total of 12. During our testing, there were problems getting the device to work with Microsoft's Game Voice (which requires ports 2300-2400 open) and GameSpy 3D (which uses 26000-28000).



Ooh, it's clear. How hi-tech looking. Thanks Apple.

While organizations that sell products like the DI-701 would like you to believe you're at an extreme level of risk *right now*, the odds of you personally having your system hacked are pretty slight. Whether or not you feel you need such protection is a matter of personal choice. If you're not interested in spending money, there are even free software firewalls that offer similar protection (check out Zone Alarm at www.zonelabs.com) and are slightly more flexible when it comes to working with games. However, some people are somewhat squeamish about using software-only solutions because the traffic is still reaching your PC as opposed to some other piece of hardware.

The simple truth is the more you expose your IP address online, particularly when it's static (as is often the case with DSL or cable), the greater the chance someone with a grudge or just looking to mess around can try to break into your system. While nothing is foolproof, the DI-701 is an inexpensive way to get some measure of security. But if online multiplayer gaming is your passion, you may need to look for other solutions. —*Steve Bauman*



This is the hi-tech configuration utility. It's all very basic and simple.

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER D-Link

MSRP $99

RATING ★★★½☆

COMPUTER GAMES STAMP OF APPROVAL

The magic feel of flight

Wingman Force 3D

Flight sim and action game fans looking for a good, all-in-one joystick with a little extra oomph should definitely check out Logitech's Wingman Force 3D. With a comfortable design, incredibly versatile driver software, and a relatively compact footprint, it knocks Microsoft's first-generation Force Feedback stick off the desk.

This USB device sports a trigger, six programmable buttons, a throttle and a view hat. The stick itself twists as well as moving right and left, so it can also function as a rudder control. (And for those of you end up flying sideways with such sticks, you can disable the rudder axis in software or with a physical lock.)

The stick looks and feels almost identical to the earlier Wingman Extreme Digital 3D joystick—until you play a game that supports force feedback. Then the stick starts vibrating, fighting your movements, and otherwise giving physical feedback to match what's going on in your game. Force strength is adjustable, globally or by individual game, and is noticeable without being overbearing at "full power." The only complaint is that the stick itself can make rather loud rattling sounds with some effects.

The eight-way view hat is a big improvement over earlier sticks, with a wider design that's easier to grip with your thumb. The slider throttle has an odd u-shaped grip that's also geared to thumb use. One nice touch is that the stick buttons are labeled with their number—no more trying to remember which one is "button 6." In addition, the driver software lets you print a reference chart with each button's definition. The driver software includes setups for numerous games, and if you want to create your own configs, the stick's programmability is unmatched. It handles multiple simultaneous key presses, button presses, and even programmed stick movements.

In fact, the only major fault is the huge wall-wart power supply, which will block at least two sockets even on the largest power strips. Otherwise, this is a superb stick for the price.
—Denny Atkin



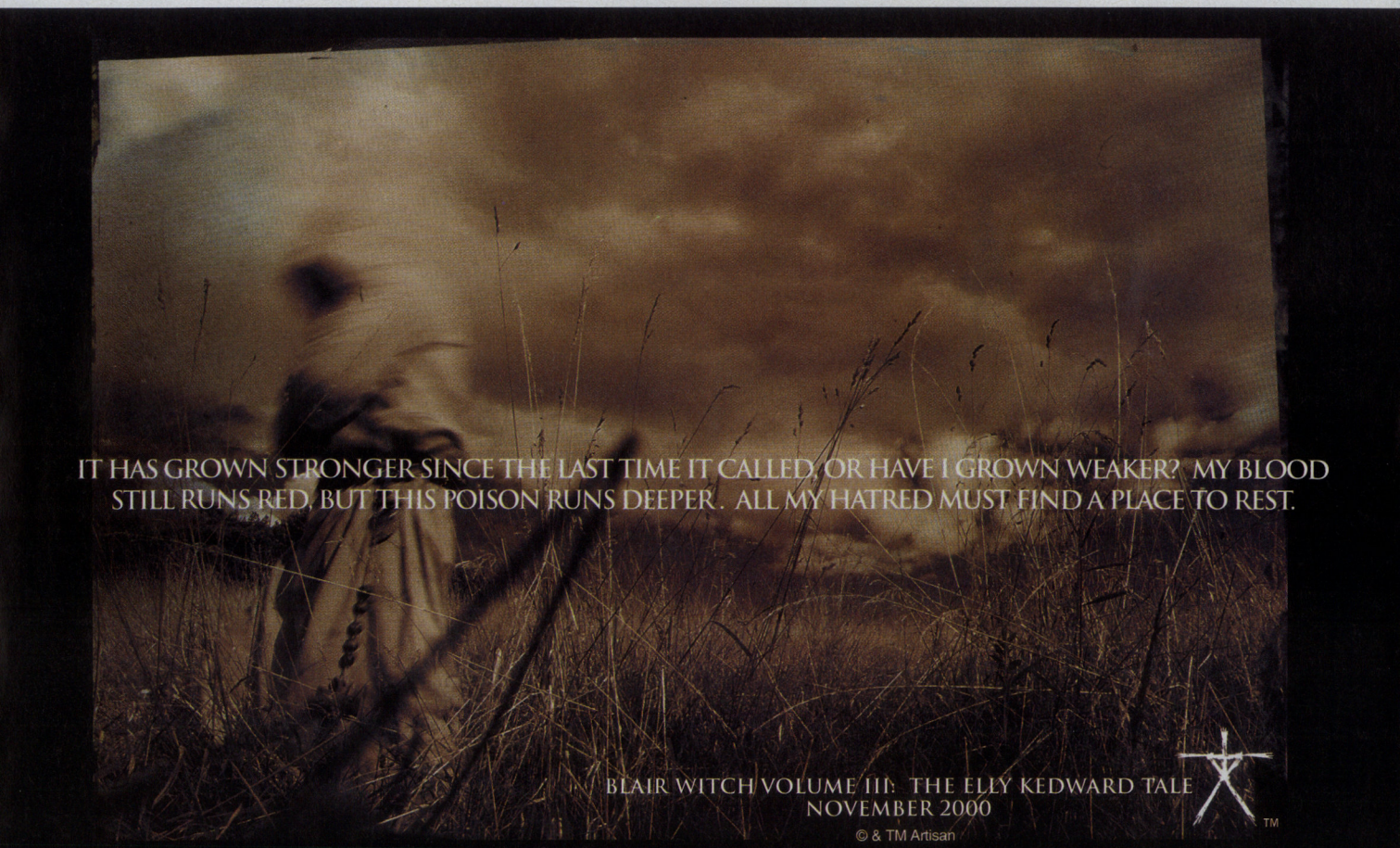
It certainly is a lot smaller than Logitech's previous FF joystick.

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Logitech

MSRP $59.95

RATING ★★★★★



FORGOTTEN REALMS

ICEWIND DALE™



"It would be a damn shame if you spent your $60 for the month of July on Diablo II and let Icewind Dale pass you by. " ~ Daily Radar

"(Icewind Dale) is well suited for fans of Black Isle Studios' previous games, fans of classic hack-and-slash AD&D computer games, and anyone looking for an action-packed role-playing game with a lot of depth." ~ GameSpot

"Action, action, and more action. This is an AD&D dungeon crawler's dream come true." ~ IGN

www.interplay.com/icewind

REQUIRED Windows 95/98 REQUIRED

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BIOWARE INFINITY ENGINE

BLACK ISLE studios™

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Wizards of the Coast

T TEEN ESRB Animated Blood Mild Language Use of Alcohol

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Use the force, puke

Wingman Force Rumblepad

There's now one less thing for your PlayStation-fan buddies to brag about. The Logitech Wingman RumblePad clearly takes its inspiration from the PlayStation Dual Shock controller, but has all the enhancements you'd desire from a PC product.

This USB gamepad features an eight-direction digital pad, two analog "thumbstick" controllers, nine programmable buttons, and a throttle slider. Inside, of course, it packs "rumble." If you've used force feedback steering wheels or joysticks, don't set your expectations too high for the rumble feature. Where those controllers can pull to the sides and adjust tension, the RumblePad basically just does two things: vibrates and jerks. Now, it does do an admirable job of vibrating and jerking, but because most PC games that support force feedback are designed for joysticks or wheels, these effects don't come off as well as they do in console games, which are usually designed with vibration effects in mind.

A dedicated button lets you disable rumble effects, while another lets you swap between controlling with the directional pad and analog sticks. The directional pad is best for sports games like *High Heat*, where you need to hit certain directions exactly to make selections. The analog sticks are a better choice when you're playing a game like *Midtown Madness*, where it helps to be able to change direction in degrees.



The influence of the Playstation dual-shock pad is obvious, but Logitech's sports more buttons and a throttle slider.

Six buttons are laid out in two rows of three, similar to Microsoft's gamepads, while a seventh sits next to the directional pad. There are also two trigger-buttons on the front of the controller, which are comfortable but very small and oddly shaped—they look like Chicklets that didn't pass quality control. The included software is absolutely superb. You can not only define the buttons as combinations of key or button presses (so you can pre-program combos, complete with timing), but you can also redefine the axes of any of the controllers. If you want the set the throttle slider to take over your X axis for a driving game, you can do it.

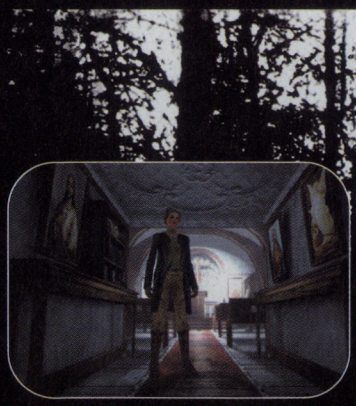
Connection is a snap—the pad is powered off the USB port, so there are no batteries or power cords to worry about. While the rumble effects honestly aren't that impressive, the RumblePad itself is a fine controller in both analog and digital modes. —*Denny Atkin*

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Logitech

MSRP $29.95

RATING ★★★★☆



Blair Witch Volume I: Rustin Parr
Rustin Parr combines traditional adventure elements such as research, exploration and puzzle-solving with a healthy dose of heart-pounding action to create a frighteningly cerebral gaming experience.



Blair Witch Volume II: The Legend of Coffin Rock
Human Head Studios infuses the power of Nocturne™ technology with Resident Evil-style game play, making The Legend of Coffin Rock a uniquely satisfying romp through hell on Earth.



Blair Witch Volume III: The Elly Kedward Tale
The Elly Kedward Tale focuses on action and will feature a spell-based combat system.

BLAIR WITCH™

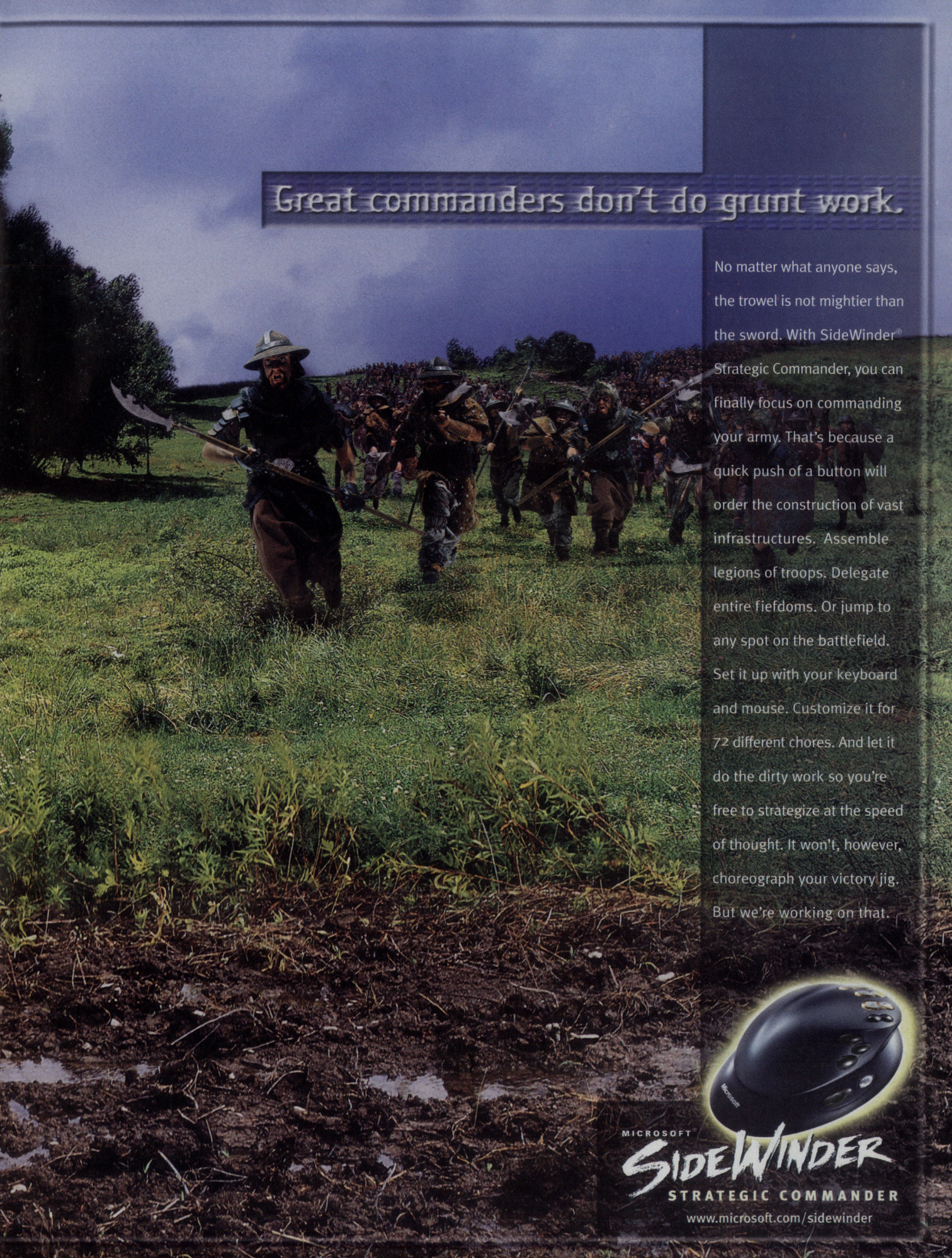
Gathering of Developers proudly announces a three-game series based on the rich mythology behind the blockbuster film, ***The Blair Witch Project***™. Haxan Films has granted unprecedented access to its wealth of intricate folklore, providing developers Terminal Reality, Human Head Studios and Ritual Entertainment with ample fodder for detailed and compelling storylines. These chilling narratives are powered by the awe-inspiring Nocturne™ engine, creating infinite opportunities for masterful suspense and blood-curdling realism.

TERMINAL REALITY™ humanhead™ ritual™ entertainment RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS™

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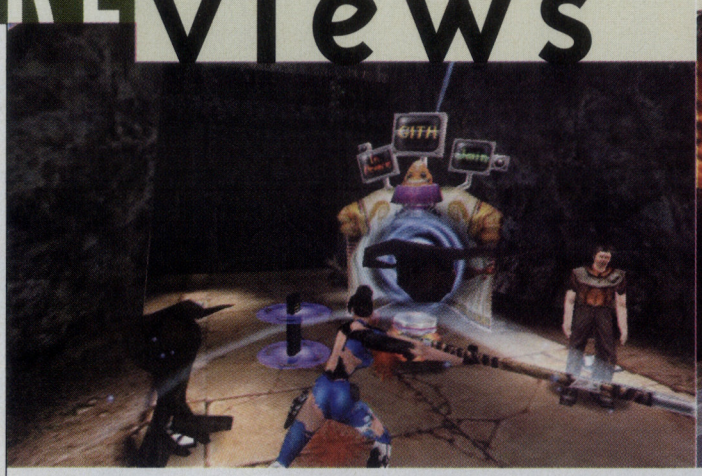


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UPSIDE
Incredibly beautiful and original environments, entertaining combat

DOWNSIDE
A bit on the short side, cheesy story





[left] The Recruiter can't be killed, so don't bother trying.

"I don't think we're in Kansas any more..."

Heavy Metal FAKK 2

Ritual's adolescent fantasy is pretty weird and weirdly pretty

THE ORIGINAL *HEAVY METAL* MOVIE WAS BIZARRE, attractive and somewhat inane. It played a bit like a male teen drug fantasy, chock full of scantily clad women of unlikely proportions, a great heavy metal soundtrack and beautifully surreal landscapes that Lewis Carrol might have imagined in a fever dream. It also had a story to match, and while the acting was corny and the plot didn't make much sense, it was still a lot of fun.

If points were awarded for staying true to the subject matter, then Ritual Entertainment's *Heavy Metal FAKK2* would be a five star game. It's the most visually stunning action romp that you are likely to see this year, and while you probably won't kindle fond memories of its profound story or Academy Award-winning performances, by the time you have completed the first few levels you probably won't care. The story is utterly forgettable—after killing the god Tyler in the last *Heavy Metal* flick (which you might have seen, if you spend a lot of time watching the STARZ! Network), the protagonist (who is supposed to be some sort of heroic fictional version of B-movie actress Julie Strain) settles down on an Eden-like planet called... well... Eden. The world is brimming with some kind of magical water that keeps everyone from aging, and although Julie and her hippie friends have surrounded the entire planet with an impenetrable force field, an insane godlike being called Gith penetrates it anyway and proceeds to rip apart both Eden and a sizeable portion of Julie's clothing.

She was hired for her voice?

Julie Strain provides the voice talent for her own character, of course, and she's actually one of the game's high points as far as acting goes (the actor who plays Gruff is another). The rest of the voice performances are about on par with the writing and the camerawork in most of the cut scenes—they will make you wince from time to time, but you get over it. The story actually gets a little better as the game progresses... or at least it gets weirder. Sometimes it's tough to make the distinction.

It doesn't really matter, however, because the game is more a visual journey than a narrative one. Artistic design is the poor abused stepchild of the computer game realm; critics tend to dismiss it as fluff, and gamers are embarrassed to admit that they like something for its looks. It's a peculiar prejudice, considering that the media is an overwhelmingly visual one. *Heavy Metal FAKK2* is an immensely attractive game, and the visual appeal makes the game more fun. It's okay to admit it—the Gods of Computer Gaming won't strike you down for blasphemy. Even in the midst of the most heated battle, you will find yourself gawking at the colorful vistas. Often you will want to play through just one more level—not merely because the gameplay is that addictive (although it is), but because you can't wait to see the next twisted landscape or the next wacky creature.

The creatures *are* wacky, too. Gith's minions are all psychotic, in a happy and friendly sort of way. The Recruiter is a bit like an upbeat televangelist, spouting cheerful propaganda as he summons hordes of Happy Masks through his extra-dimensional gate. The Soul Harvesters laugh and gibber (in a chilling fashion) as they caper about, and the Happy Masks themselves look undeniably happy... unless you happen to knock their masks off. Eden's native wildlife is equally deadly, if not quite as friendly. Apparently all that Water of Youth makes beasts hunger for human flesh.

Blown away

The first time you play the game, you might assume that Ritual has blown most of their artistic efforts on the first few levels just to hook you in. That's actually quite a compliment, because nothing



The character models are very detailed.

THE GOODS

GENRE Hallucinatory Action

PUBLISHER GOD

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 64 MB RAM, 3D accelerator

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★★☆

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



Now that's gonna hurt in the morning...



The Ghost of Buxom Women Past...

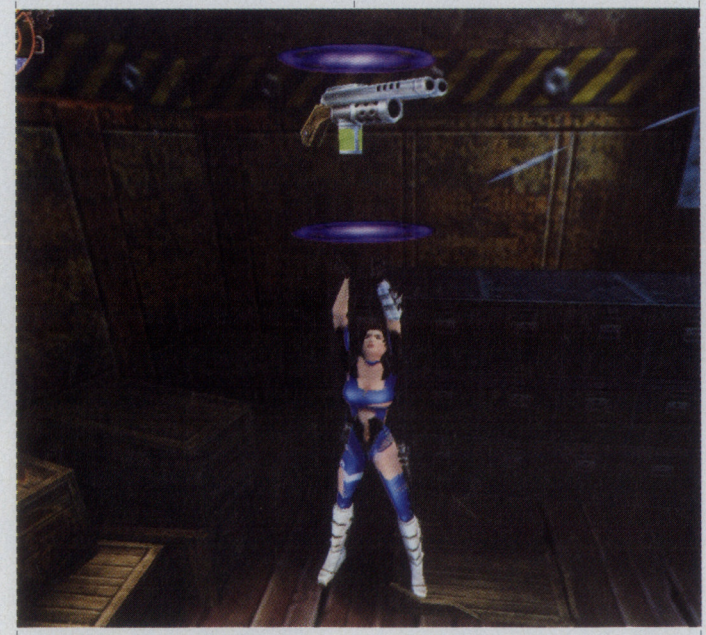
could be further from the truth. The environments keep on getting better—and weirder—right up to the very end of the game. They play remarkably well too; the level design is solid throughout the game, and the only real complaint is that there are not enough levels to play. It's a great ride that ends a bit too quickly—if you are an experienced player, you might finish the game in a couple days of hard playing, and there is no multiplayer mode to add replay value. It's a hell of a lot of fun while it lasts, but it would be nice if it lasted a little longer.

The game is not really a shooter, at least not in the *Quake* sense of the word. Sure, there are plenty of projectile weapons lying around, but shooting only comprises a small portion of the action in the game, and a lot of the combat actually involves melee weapons. There is quite a bit of exploration and puzzle solving as well (most of the puzzles are fairly simple to solve, however). Ritual has cooked up an interesting and remarkably flexible combat interface that you will still be exploring the ins and outs of when the game comes to an end (which is either a compliment on the interface, a criticism on the length of the game, or perhaps a mix of the two).

The basic premise of the combat controls is simple—the left mouse button controls your left hand, and the right mouse button controls your right hand. As you play the game you will find a variety of weapons and items. Some of them can only be equipped in a specific hand (such as swords, which must be wielded in your right hand, or shields, which must be wielded in your left hand). Other items require both hands to wield (such as the gigantic FAKK Axe, or the flame-thrower). Aside from those few restrictions you are free to mix and match your equipment however you wish, however, leading to a wide variety of combat styles. Perhaps you like to fight with sword and shield—that way you can hit the right mouse button to slash out and the right mouse button to block.

Alternately you could compliment the sword with an Uzi in your left hand (how an Israeli submachine gun ended up on Eden is never adequately explained). Once you find a second Uzi you can wield one in each hand, John Woo-style. It's all pretty intuitive, and while selecting two-handed weapon configurations in the midst of combat can be a bit cumbersome, with a little forethought it all works quite well.

Aiming is largely dependent on the weapon that you are using. Melee weapons hit anything that is in their path when you swing them. Some projectile weapons provide automatic aiming assistance, *Tomb Raider*-style (you target the creature closest to the center of the screen; a colored circle appears on the ground beneath that creature so that you can keep track of who you are firing at). Other weapons, such as the rocket launcher, are blind fire weapons—a reticule appears on the ground to tell you where the projectile will hit, and you have to line it up with your target manually. The system is pretty slick in action, providing enough control to make you feel like your input matters, but keeping things simple enough to give you time to think about tactics.

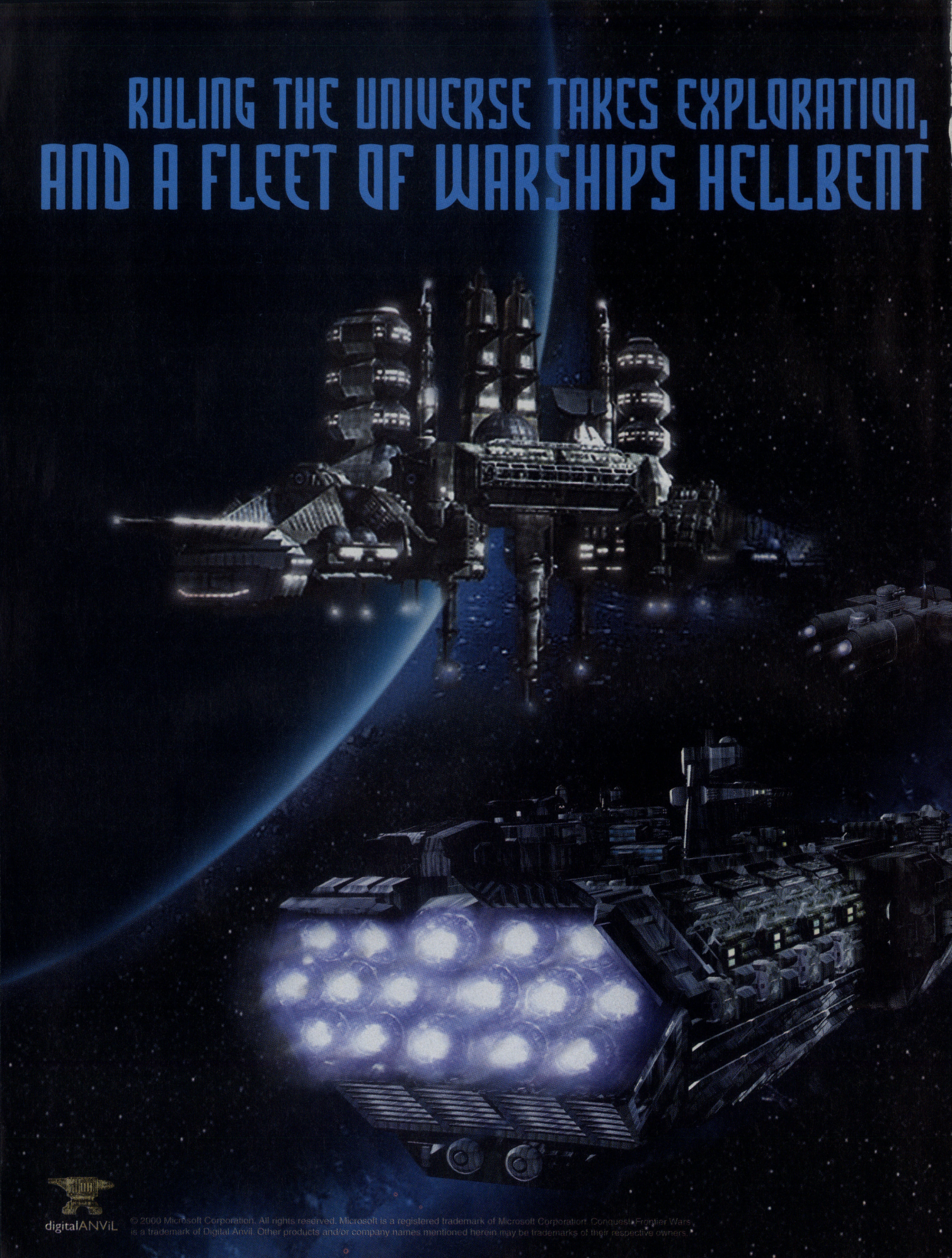


Over and under attack shotgun, complete with bottle of green goo.

Combat combo

It gets even more interesting when you start to play with combos. When you fight with a sword (you will collect four different swords before the game is over) you have the option to perform combo attacks. Hold down the right mouse button and Julie will slash left and then right. If you press the right mouse button just as she is starting her right swing, she will instead perform a combo maneuver that generally involves some extra swinging and stabbing and does a lot more damage. The specific combo that Julie performs depends on what you have equipped in your left hand. With a shield she swings, spins, blocks and stabs. With an Uzi she swings and spins and fires off a few rounds before she finishes the maneuver. Enemies can interrupt your combo if they hit you before you start your right slash, so a bit of tactical timing is involved, but it is incredibly satisfying to pull off a successful combo.

The game is fun to play and fun to look at, and if the high point of its narrative charm is the fact that Julie's outfits get skimpier and skimpier as the game progresses... well, you can always avert your eyes if it offends you. It's a guilty pleasure, but a pleasure nonetheless, and as action-adventures go you could certainly do worse. Just turn off your brain, turn on your stupid grin, and start practicing those sword combos. *—Benjamin E. Sones*



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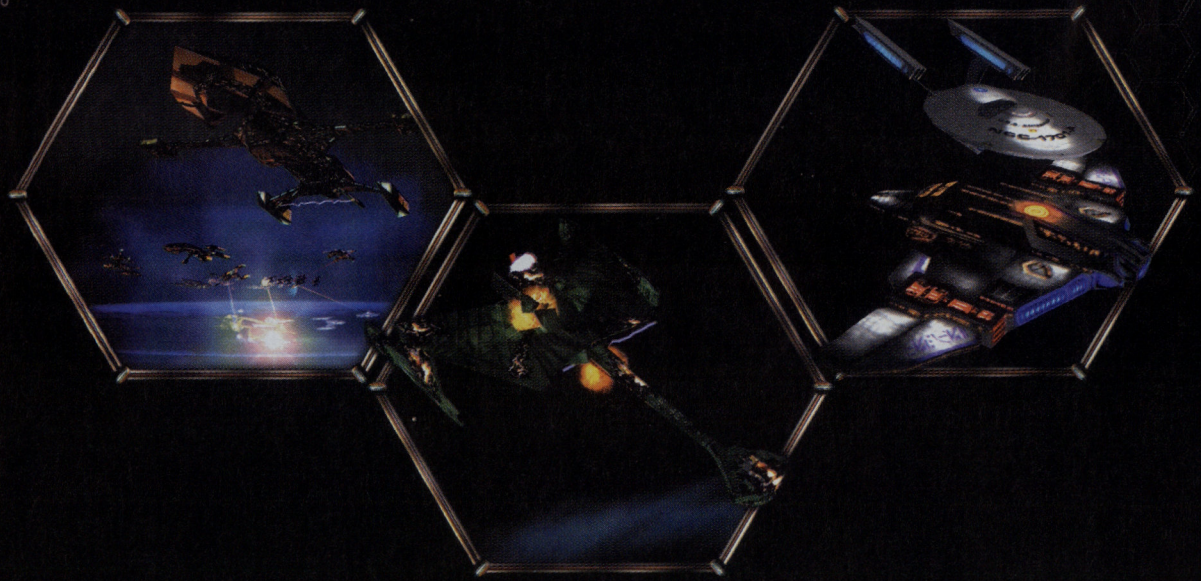
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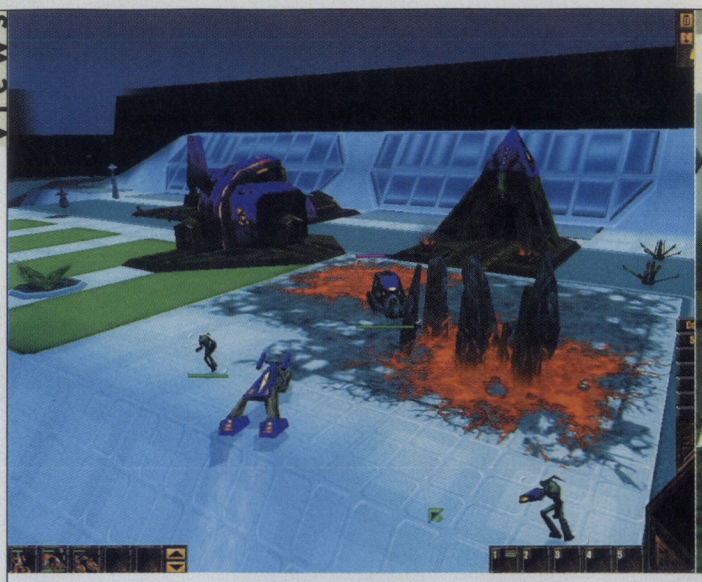
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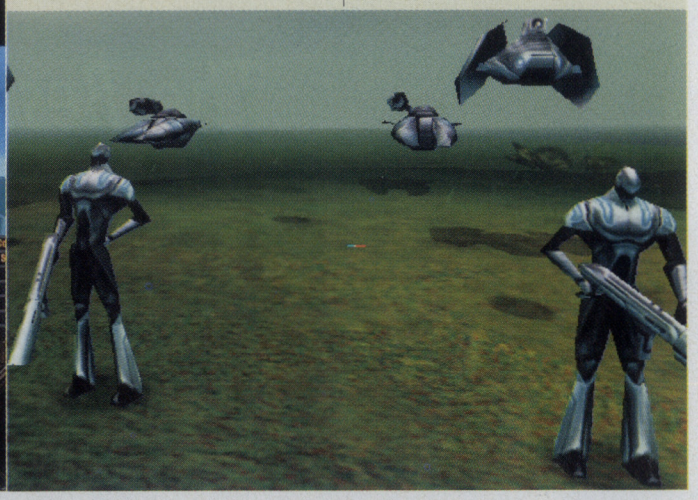
You couldn't ask for a better location to fortify in a multiplayer game.

UPSIDE

Solid RTS gameplay, 3D graphics from heaven

DOWNSIDE

Pathfinding, or the lack thereof



Hmmm, do these guys belong to the JDA or the NRA?

Dark Reign 2

Traditional real-time strategy at its finest

Does a game have to be original to be good? While there's certainly no shortage of tiresome clones on store shelves, a number of recent titles prove that you can have fun with even the most formulaic concepts. *Deus Ex*, *Icewind Dale*, *Shogun: Total War*, and (of course) *Diablo II* are all highly derivative, yet are still on the must-play lists of self-respecting gamers.

You can now add Pandemic Studios' *Dark Reign 2* to that list. Though the long-awaited sequel to Activision's 1997 real-time hit doesn't provide much in the way of real innovation, it does offer compelling gameplay, challenging missions, an intuitive interface and one of the best 3D engines to grace a strategy game. In short, this game is a hell of a lot of fun, regardless of whether it's all been done before. Dismissing it as just another product of the assembly line is akin to characterizing *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as a run-of-the-mill children's book.

A prequel without Jar Jar Binks?

The plot of *Dark Reign 2* serves as a prequel to the original game. You control the Jovian Detention Authority (JDA) or the Sprawlers (precursors of the first game's Imperium and Freedom Guard, respectively) as they battle for control of a dying Earth in the 26th century. The fascist JDA has sucked the planet dry of all its resources, ravaging the environment from the safety of domed cities constructed for the elite. Said domes won't do much good when terra firma falls to pieces, however, so the game opens with JDA President Edward Dalen searching for lost technology that will help him evacuate the chosen ones. Standing in his way are the Sprawlers, lower class citizens exiled to the wasteland of the Sprawls. These plucky little outcasts aren't happy about their lot and plan to give the prez and his soldiers a hard time whenever they venture outside the protection of their domes.

Two 10-mission campaigns allow you to play through this storyline from the viewpoint of each combatant. Gameplay is traditional RTS in style, meaning that you'll try to defeat your opposite number by gathering resources, erecting buildings, and cranking out troops, tanks, and other devices of military mayhem. The intuitive interface lets you keep an eye on your energy supply, survey the battlefield via a map in the lower right corner, and even check on the time of day. It also handles the standard military commands that group your units into squads, give them specific orders, send them to waypoints, and so on.

Almost every episode opens with a handful of units and a nearby source of glowing Taelon, the all-powerful mineral that must be mined and refined into energy which serves as the basis of all structures in the game. Fortunately, this is about the only thing that the missions share. Each new assignment takes place in a completely new environment. These include desolate urban areas filled with flashing propaganda signage, lush green fields dotted by lakes and waterfalls, arctic tundra accented by falling snow, and so on. In addition to serving as effective atmospheric backdrops, each setting presents a different tactical challenge. Urban maps require you to creep forward and prepare for an ambush at the end of every block. Wintry ones tend to feature a lot of narrow valleys which can be readily fortified. Those with a number of rivers and lakes give you the option of building an army or navy. The terrain is often worked into the mission goals. You might have to construct flying units to scout out a secluded valley, or build and fortify a base in just the right location to survive



Get these Scorpions to the high ground and you'll put a hurt on the JDA.

THE GOODS

GENRE Real-time Strategy

PUBLISHER Activision

REQUIREMENTS P233, 64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2–32 players; Internet, LAN, modem

RATING ★★★★½

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



A few missions even take place indoors, occasionally in areas previously trod by Indiana Jones.



Winged Enforcers look a lot like metal dragonflies from a distance.

an onslaught of enemy troops.

Another major strength of *Dark Reign 2* is the wide variety of unit types. Each side boasts at least 20 markedly different units, along with 17 building types. This assortment lets you design just about any sort of strategic plan desired. If you want the JDA to go with heavy armor, upgrade your motor pool and start rolling out Growler and Bulldog tanks. Or you could go completely in the other direction and fashion an air force complete with Blackstars, Strikers, and Sky Fortresses. You could even James Bond your opponent with infiltration units such as the Shadowhand.

Complements all around

The two sides complement each other nicely while remaining distinct enough to provide different styles of gameplay. The JDA tends to be more mechanized, featuring a lot of high-tech machinery and heavy armor, while the Sprawlers are rough and ready, with more of a focus on heavily armed infantrymen. Both allow quick construction of base fortifications, rendering the tried-and-true "tank rush" early in the game ineffective at best and suicidal at worst.

All of this livens up both the solo campaigns and skirmish play (called Instant Action here), as well as the seven different multiplayer modes. These include standards like King of the Hill and Deathmatch along with more intriguing variations like Control Freak, Assault!, Bloodbath, Gluttony, and Protect HQ. Internet multiplayer is hosted by WON.net and is surprisingly lag-free, even when limited to a 56K connection in games with over a dozen players participating.

Of course, *Dark Reign 2* isn't without its flaws. Pathfinding is the most obvious problem. Units always try to walk to their objectives in a straight line, resulting in a lot of collisions when you're attempting to maneuver a large force. This has the unfortunate effect of slowing down a column of units moving together, as each stops for a moment whenever it bumps into one of its fellows. While they always get where they're supposed to be going, it takes longer than it should. You can almost smell the wood burning as the little guys pause to think about which way they should move. Thankfully, this isn't too much of a detriment to gameplay—though it can be pretty frustrating to watch retreating troops decimated one-by-one because they decided to withdraw in a nice, orderly queue.

Another oversight is the lack of a button to control game speed and allow you to pause the action to give orders. This isn't a big deal in the simple early campaign missions, but by the time you reach the latter stages you'll often be fighting on two or three fronts simultaneously. Unless you've got the reflexes of a chimp hopped up on *Jolt*, expect a lot of the end-game tension to be drained by an excess of frenetic action. Obvious scripting also removes some of that tension. A number of missions feature enemy troops that spawn in out of nowhere, sometimes from off the edges of the map. They usually show up back at your base if things seem to be going too well up at the front lines. Nothing slows down a charge to victory like having to put out a few fires at home.



Sprawler Rumblers are just as ugly as you'd expect.

Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong

In terms of visual impact, few games match *Dark Reign 2*. All of the units feature exquisite detail, from the huge treads on the Sprawlers' Thunder Cannon to the tight buns boasted by the JDA's helpful female Psitechs. Weapon effects are just as nicely rendered. Nearly every unit in the game deals out damage courtesy of colorful, laser-like blasts as pretty as they are deadly. Heavy artillery units such as the Thunder Cannon launch gorgeous comets of destruction that can keep an opponent spellbound while he should be scrambling his troops out of the way. This beauty is nicely matched up with a camera system that lets you freely pan around the battlefield and zoom in or out with the press of a button. It isn't quite as, um, wieldy as that seen in, say, Sierra's *Ground Control*, but it's awfully close.

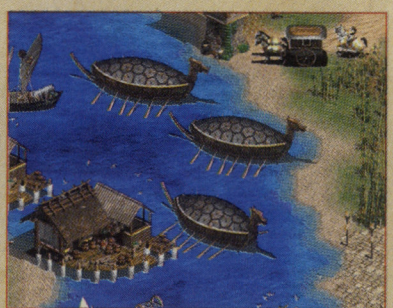
In-game sound effects are also excellent, thanks mainly to little touches like the high-pitched whine of sentry turrets and the "Fire in the hole!" shouts from the crew of JDA's Big Bertha wannabe, the Mastiff. Voice-acting, while limited to mission briefings and the occasional cut-scene interruption, is good as well, if perhaps a little too NPR for a combat zone. The musical score is one of the best to ever grace a computer game. Tunes vary from spooky techno to an atmospheric Eastern-influenced piece that emphasizes the surreal nature of battling on a dying world.

Dark Reign 2 is one of the most compulsively playable titles to hit stores this summer. It's arguably the best traditional real-time strategy game released in over a year, and indisputably one of the most attractive. While it could be criticized for not bringing anything new to the table, neither did *StarCraft* or *Age of Empires II*. Pandemic may be working with a formula, but it's a tried and true one that they've mixed to near-perfection. —*Brett Todd*

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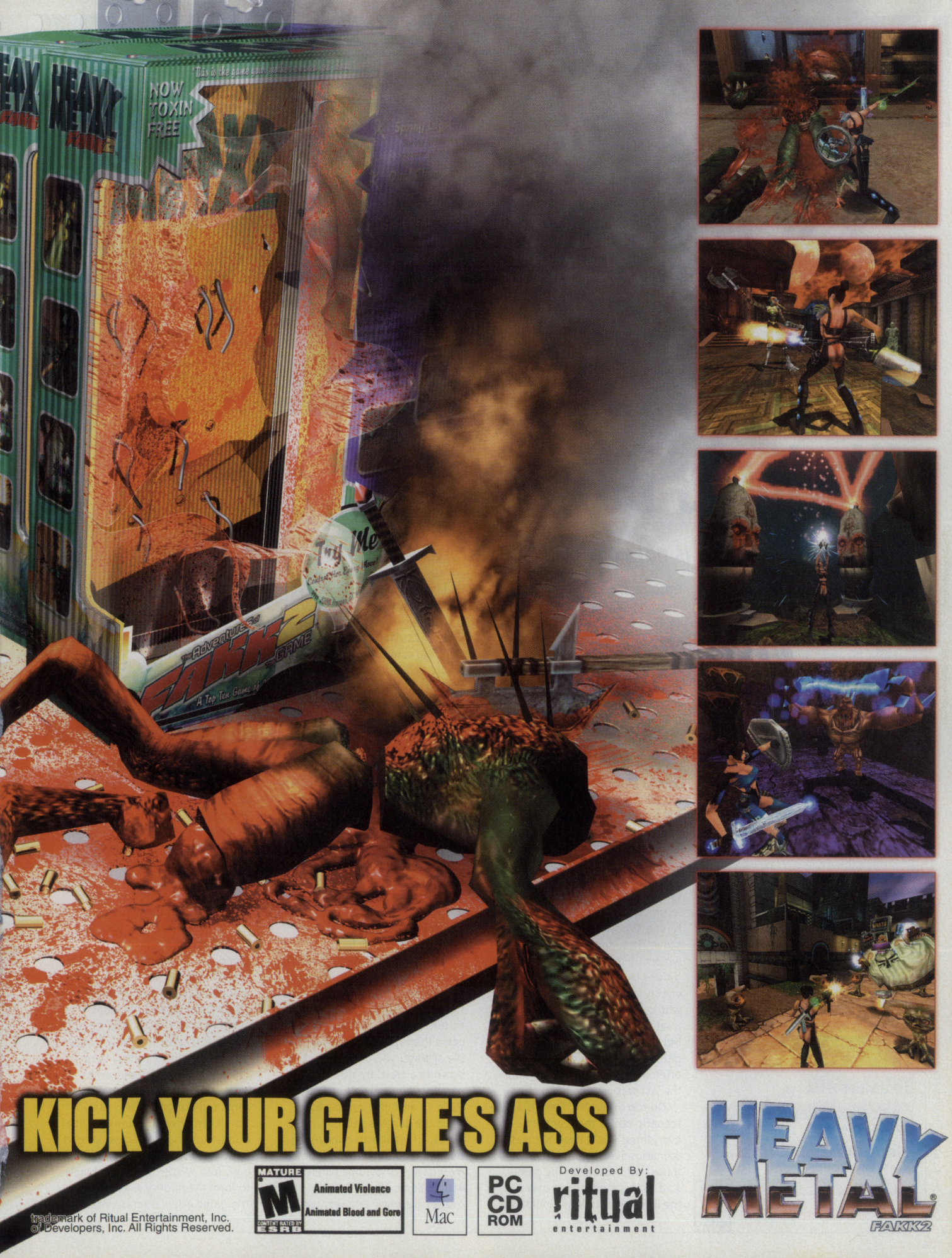
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Violence
Animated Blood

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

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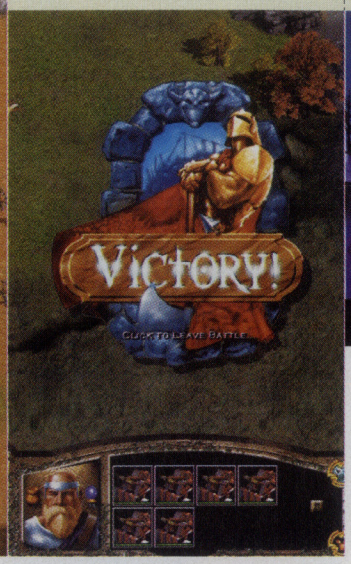


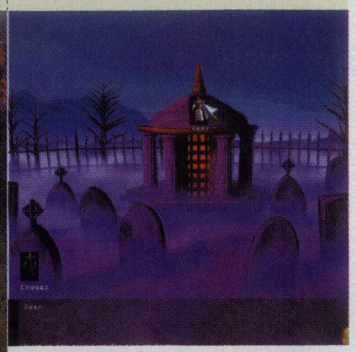
UPSIDE

Great design that builds and expands on the Warlords tradition

DOWNSIDE

Steep learning curve





[clockwise] Spell effects are dazzling and unique.

The last enemy structure is defeated!

Fallen comrades are placed in a position of honor.

A potent ally, the Minotaur King also does disco!

Warlords Battlecry

COMPUTER GAMES STAMP OF APPROVAL

SSG's real-time game is not your father's Warlords

The end has come! Pestilence stalks the streets, fire rains from the skies and the moon has turned to blood! The filthy beast walks the earth and his name is not 666 but real-time strategy!"

This somewhat describes the mood of parts of the strategy game community when it was announced that the next installment in the venerable *Warlords* game series would be real-time rather than turn-based. The series has been one of the oldest and best in the turn-based strategy genre, and the last two iterations have steadfastly held to that less-fashionable style of play.

After many derivative real-time clones, the moment is perfect for a well-designed, creative entry into the genre—*Warlords Battlecry* is just what the healer ordered. While similar to many like-minding games in recent years, its value lies not in how it is similar but in how it differs from the others in its clan.

THE GOODS

GENRE Real-time Strategy

PUBLISHER SSI

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-4 players, LAN, Internet

RATING ★★★★½

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Epic campaign

The campaign game, subtitled *The Tears Of Dawn,* includes several chapters, each of which in turn consists of several missions called episodes. Dialog during scenarios and cut scenes between episodes tell a story that deals with a struggle to control powerful magic forces in the lands of Etheria. Midway through the campaign, you must make a choice to follow the path of light or darkness (giving any truly hardcore player reason to play the full campaign at least twice).

Alternately, the skirmish mode creates an infinite variation of random scenarios. Almost everything about a scenario can be customized, including opponent AI level, terrain and, most importantly, the 12 possible victory conditions. These range from the typical wipe-out-everything war to conditions like who can raze the most enemy buildings in a half hour or who can be the first to accumulate a set number of resources. In playing some of the time-based games, you'll find that victory often hangs in the balance until the last second.

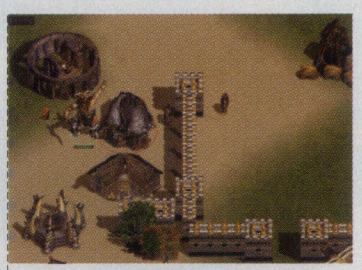
On top of all this, there is a full scenario editor that contains everything you'll need to create scenarios every bit as good as those that come with the game. Add to this multiplayer play over the Internet, a LAN or a modem and you have great value for your gaming dollar.

Get in control

Units are controlled with both the mouse and keyboard. In general, the interface does what it is supposed to do but the learning curve is steep due to the sheer number and variety of keyboard commands. Some of those commands are needlessly complex and it would be nice if they could be remapped. Fortunately, learning the interface is made easier by some of the best tutorial missions in any game. It uses the game interface, actual units and small popup explanations to give you a good self-paced overview.

Like all real-time games, the player is at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to trying to do many things at the same time. This becomes especially bad when attacks come from different directions at the same time. Fortunately, you're helped to overcome this task overload in a couple of ways: you can slow events down to a crawl by slowing the game speed, and you can scroll the map and give commands while the game is paused.

Also of great help is the use of building and command queues. Most gamers should be familiar with building queues but command queues are a new and very useful

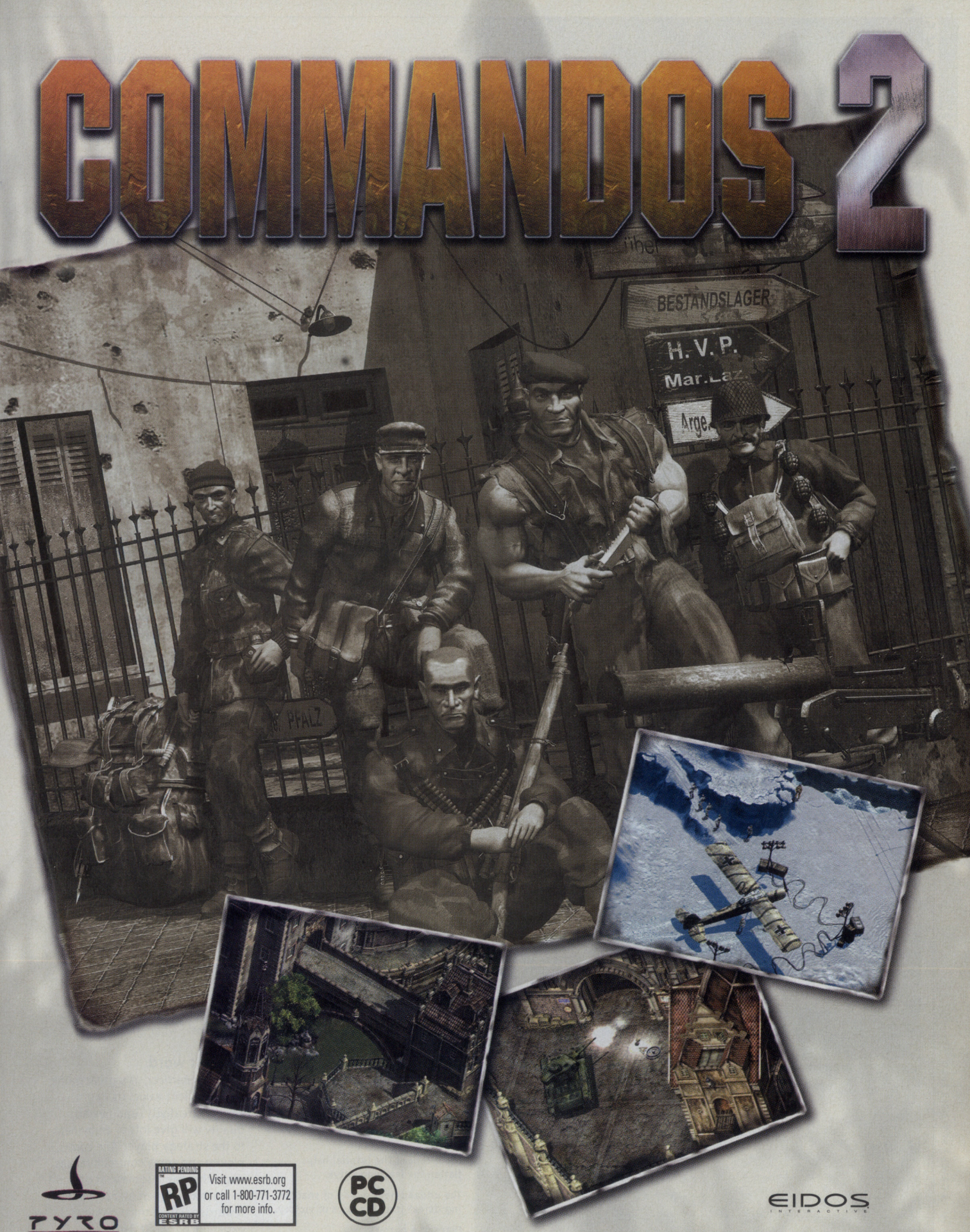


tool. They go way beyond just setting waypoints; you can program a unit to move, convert a building, attack a group of enemies and then to return to a safe spot, all with just a few shift-clicks of the mouse. Unfortunately, wall construction is plagued by difficulty in placing some sections, especially around forests, making them porous.

Combative

Combat is very familiar to all real-time strategy fans You can set formations to align your groups with attackers or spread them out to avoid missile attacks. You can also set the attitude of friendly forces to avoid enemies, pursue them to the death, or to stay put. Units have a lot of variety and there are some truly original ideas such as the Eleven Wisp. This insubstantial builder unit has a magical ranged attack and with the right technology, four Wisps can be combined to form the mighty Ancient Wisp. The game offers infantry, missile

COMMANDOS 2



RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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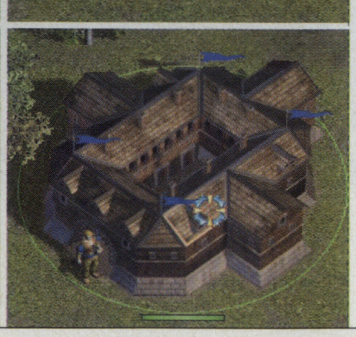
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[top to bottom] **The tutorial helps flatten the learning curve.**

The undead have a way of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

Diary of a barracks.

units, siege weapons, cavalry, ships, air units and race unique units—a total of 90 in all.

Siege weapons are useful in breaking stalemates, but the ultimate weapon is the Dragon. Dragons combine speed and firepower with great defense; they are the self-propelled artillery of the fantasy world. The game's 80 spells provide the greatest variety and difference in combat. Spellcasting units have a limited amount of mana that regenerates over time. This mystical energy can be spent on simple attack spells that use fire or lightening, protection spells, healing spells, and a host of others.

The past, the present

Warlords Battlecry stays true to its turn-based roots in many ways, particularly in its extension of the hero concept. You'll select your race, profession, and specialty and watch as your alter ego gains levels. Leveling provides a few ability points that can be distributed to gain new spells and skills. For example, a paladin can expend six ability points to gain Spell Mastery, enhancing all his spells with a stronger effect. All heroes can convert (capture) enemy buildings and give nearby friendly forces combat bonuses. They can also go on quests, a strange idea that often seems out of place in the confusion and task overload of a real-time strategy game. Quests have a time limit and successful completion is rewarded with strong allies or a magical item. Items are worn or carried by the hero and offer some improvement to movement, combat bonuses, defense, or spellcasting.

Putting your hero in harm's way is encouraged by the game, because if they are killed, they will appear in the next scenario no worse for the wear. Armies also gain experience and levels as in other *Warlords* games. The best units can be chosen to proceed to other scenarios with the hero as part of her retinue.

One flaw with the game is the speed of conversion at high hero levels. This creates a strategy exploit that makes it possible to place a hero near enemy structures, quickly convert them, and then destroy them with a keystroke. This can be done easily very early in a game with a sufficiently powerful hero. Another annoyance is the fact that certain races can only have either male or female heroes. Why can't there be a female Dwarf or a male Elf? Is there something about fantasy genetics that we have missed?

The game economy consists of gathering gold, ore, stone, and crystals and expending these resources for specific units or some of the 40 unique buildings. Some races are more dependent on some resources than others (such as Elves and crystals).

Diplomacy exists, although it only serves to provide a mechanism to exchange goods between sides. This is useful in the multiplayer game but doesn't serve much, if any, purpose in the single player game. As in *Age Of Kings*, there is a unit cap; however, in this case the cap is determined by the number of buildings you own and your hero's command capability. Constructing or capturing more buildings will allow you to make more troops and this helps during a stalemate or endgame to decide the issue.

Graphics and artwork are cartoonish but convey the fantasy theme more than adequately. Unit animations are great and it is especially entertaining to watch idle units. Make sure and keep an eye on that Barbarian Thrall... and don't let him cook. The music is good, not a source of annoyance as it is in so many other games. The sounds are useful as well—your units will let you know when something is happening by speaking some keyword or phrase. The more you play, the more you learn to use this audible input to improve your strategy.

Incidentally, pressing the space bar always goes to the site of the last important event. So if you hear "your buildings are under attack," one press of the spacebar will take you to the site of the attack. Units all have unique things to say; a favorite is the Daemon unit whose deep, resonating voice states "I leave nothing but dust and darkness!" or "Into the abyss!" when given orders.

The last word

Warlords Battlecry is a great game with excellent value. Its depth, variety, creativity, and overall quality will give lots of enjoyment to the strategy player. The complexity and some control nuances make this game somewhat difficult to master, but persistence will be rewarded with a great gaming experience. —*Brett Berger*

FEEL LIKE *a kid again.*

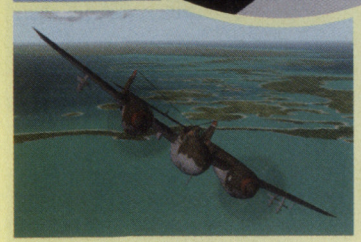


A KID, PILOTING A *Hellcat* OVER THE PACIFIC, TRYING TO WIN A WORLD WAR.

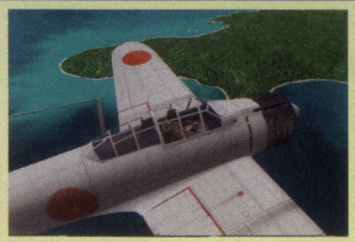
GET BEHIND THE CONTROLS OF ONE OF SEVEN WWII AIRCRAFT, THEN FLY A CAMPAIGN IN THE PACIFIC, WHERE YOUR MISSIONS ARE BASED ON YOUR PERFORMANCE. YOU'LL FEEL LIKE YOU'RE RIGHT IN THE ACTION WITH EXQUISITELY DETAILED AIRCRAFT RIGHT DOWN TO THE COCKPIT. SPECTACULAR DAMAGE EFFECTS AND REALISTIC WEATHER OPTIONS ADD TO THE REALISM. AND CARRIER LAUNCHES AND LANDINGS ADD TO THE CHALLENGE. WITH IMPROVED 3-D SCENERY AND A.I., IT'S AN AERIAL COMBAT EXPERIENCE LIKE YOU'VE NEVER HAD BEFORE. SO GET UP THERE AND HOLD ON.



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EVERYONE E Animated Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Zone.com Microsoft



UPSIDE

Incredible combot animations, detailed unit building, part salvaging

DOWNSIDE

Poor unit AI leads to frustration and excessively long missions. Could use more multiplayer options to increase replayability



[left] High ground and steep ridges make excellent defensive positions...

...But combots can always make a wall when you don't like your position.

Metal Fatigue

Giant robot mayhem

For whatever reason, giant robots are cool. Nothing can really compare to the image of massive mecha smashing tanks like puny Matchbox cars and making buildings look like miniscule plastic models. In a game, though, this doesn't mean squat unless it's done right. Since you're reading this review, you'd probably agree, and thus will be genuinely pleased to hear that *Metal Fatigue* does an excellent job of capturing the appeal of giant robots.

Unlike FASA's *MechCommander*, Psygnosis' "combot" game takes a more conventional real-time strategy approach, similar to *Total Annihilation*, throwing mecha into the mix to spice it up. The most integral difference between the popular *Battletech* universe and *Metal Fatigue* is simple: melee combat. There are plenty of ranged weapons at your disposal, but heated combot battles inevitably end up as hand-to-hand confrontations, and the results are impressive. Combots are beautifully animated, with extremely fluid movement. Watching a melee battle unfold between two combots is just plain fun—they cross swords, knock each other back, and even hack off an arm on occasion. While the game's graphics are standard fare otherwise, the detailed combots are unrivaled by their RTS counterparts.

If you've played any *Command & Conquer* styled real-time strategy game, you know what to expect from the rest of *Metal Fatigue*. Explore, research, build, fortify, attack. Once again, however, the mecha element sets this game apart, adding an intriguing level of complexity. Each combot has four parts (two arms, legs, torso) and a crew. No standard 'bots are available—you must build the individual parts and piece them together. Destroyed combots will often leave salvagable parts, which can be carted off to your base for research and production. Arm parts can even be immediately attached to one of your combots. A battlefield is still a combat zone even after the real fight is over, as each side will send hover vehicles scurrying to the site in a frantic attempt to recover enemy technology. In fact, researching technology is often critical to success. Every weapon does two types of damage—kinetic and energy, in varying amounts—while different parts deflect damage. An edge in either offense or defense could easily swing the battle in your favor.

Metal Fatigue offers three playable sides, each with its own spin. Rimtech serves as the beginner campaign, a semi-balanced side that has both kinetic and energy abilities for offense and defense. MilAgro is focused on high-powered kinetic weaponry, while Neuropa's technology is energy-based. Neuropa also tends to be a bit frail, as they rely on the special abilities of their equipment, such as cloaking and automatic repairs. While each side can survive with only its own technology, capturing enemy parts will enhance the effectiveness of anyone's 'bots. Trendy marketing tool or not, the combots are more than just a cool gimmick—they can easily change the dynamics of a mission.

Each campaign follows the story of one of three brothers, Jonus, Diego, and Stephan. Initially, they work for Rimtech until things go awry—they encounter an alien combot during a mission and Jonus manages to steal one of its arms. He wants to sell the technology to Neuropa, but his lust for profit enrages Diego. A brief battle follows when a squad of bombers lays waste to the area, and the three are split up. Diego returns to Rimtech to search for his brothers, while Jonus defects and joins Neuropa. Stephan is, unfortunately, discovered by the MilAgro army, who recondition his mind to force him to serve in their ranks. It may not be an epic, but it is a pretty good plot compared to the usual strategy game fare. The stories tie together, and there's a nice little reward for anyone who finishes all three campaigns.

Unfortunately, combots have a major Achilles' heel. Apparently their crews suffer communication problems, as they have a tendency to ignore orders and behave in an irrational, often idiotic manner. Unless you can field an overwhelming force that does not need to worry about losses, it is necessary to micromanage every little battle to ensure that your carefully constructed troops don't get themselves killed. This leads to excessively long missions and general frustration.

Metal Fatigue is fun to watch and play, but with its questionable AI, it's really only a game for big fans of mecha or of real-time strategy games. —*David Ryan Hunt*



Bomber squads swarm a powerful combot to soften him up for the kill.

THE GOODS

GENRE Strategy

PUBLISHER TalonSoft

REQUIREMENTS P200, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 players, Internet, LAN

RATING ★★★½☆

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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DEVELOPED BY
ULTIMATION
QuickTime
*Source: PC Data, Aug. 2000

UNPARALLELED MILITARY ACCURACY

Over 1000 real ships, subs, aircraft, weapons and sensors — all painstakingly modeled based on recently declassified data.



EASY-TO-USE

Intuitive interface enables instant playability for beginning and seasoned gamers. Issuing orders and attacking enemy units are just a click-and-drag away.



EXCITING STORY

Features exclusive campaign by New York Times bestselling author Larry Bond. Take charge in an epic Cold War conflict that will determine the fate of the free world!



FEEL THE POWER OF commanding the world's modern naval forces—Destroyers, Submarines, Aircraft and entire Carrier Battle groups will be at your fingertips.

LARRY BOND'S™ HARPOON 4 is one of the most epic and graphically compelling modern battle games ever created for the PC. While accurately simulating the complexities of naval warfare, its interface and gameplay are accessible to players of all skill levels.

From all-out Cold War confrontation to the skirmishes of the new world order, LARRY BOND'S HARPOON 4 takes you on the ultimate power trip.



WINDOWS® 95/98 CD-ROM

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UPSIDE

Gorgeous graphics, easy to get into, non stop action

DOWNSIDE

Zero replay value, forced to replay missions over and over again, repetitive gameplay



The graphics are disgustingly good.

The Phase Shift Cannon is the only weapon that can destroy the Gauntlet.

Bang! Gunship Elite

Bang! You're dead. Repeat until frustrated

What do you get when you combine awe-inspiring graphics, fast-paced space combat, linear missions and highly repetitive gameplay wrapped up in a 3D shooter-like interface? You get Red Storm Entertainment's new graphics extravaganza: *Bang! Gunship Elite.*

The game's title may sound a tad bit strange, but it's also very fitting, as it's an action game through and through. Simply put, this is no space combat simulator in the same vein as *Starlancer*, *Independence War* or even *Wing Commander.* It's essentially a first-person shooter set in space. You hop in the cockpit and point-and-shoot. Bad guys zip around you at intense speeds while you hit the afterburners to get them in your sights. You shoot—they die. Rinse and repeat.

The storyline is fairly straightforward. There are good guys and bad guys. You play the hero, a member of the Alliance, who is set out to kill all of the bad guys before they do the same to you. It seems as if the Alliance has put all of its eggs in one basket (that would be you), and in several missions you are flying solo against an entire armada of baddies. There are missions where help is provided but you cannot talk to your wingmen, ask for cover fire, or anything of that nature. Your fellow Alliance brethren tell you when they get hit, are in trouble, and when they generally need some assistance, however.

But the game breaks several cardinal rules of game design. That's not always a bad thing, but in this case it makes the game tedious and repetitious. You cannot save your game during a mission, for instance. Some of the missions can take a while to complete and if you buy the farm, you must restart the mission from the beginning.

Additionally, the game's incredibly difficult right from the start. There is very little time to get your feet wet as you are thrown to the wolves in the first few missions (there are a total of 19 missions in the game). For example, the second mission demands that you fight your way through a hornet's nest of fighters, wait for a ship to dock to a much larger ship, kill the docked ship with a special weapon, pick up a new weapon from the now demised vessel, blow up the well camouflaged turrets on the large ship with the new weapon, and finally kill the entire floating fortress. This is the *second mission* of the game. While it may sound refreshing to be in the heat of a serious fight right off the bat, it's terribly frustrating, especially when you die trying to blow up the final ship and must replay the entire mission all over again. Not every mission is like this, but there are enough aggravating scenarios in the game to make it more a chore than a good time.

The power ups that you find during missions are also annoying. Things like shields, bonus life, extra ammo, new weapons and the like can be found floating around in the vacuum of space during a battle, but you need to blow up an enemy fighter in order to get them—but it's very easy to miss the powerup in the explosion. You are doing yourself a disservice if you simply blast a bad guy and move on—you need to investigate the wreckage of each ship, probing for bonuses, wasting a few precious seconds in the process. It is possible to back track and find the device floating in space, but surely there could be a better formula for acquiring these items?

There is fun to be had with the game; at times it plays just as it was designed, a fun space shoot 'em up that lets you put your brain on auto pilot while you gun down everything that moves. But the repetitiveness of the gameplay and a few questionable design decisions negatively affects the overall experience, making it another example of a game that sports graphics that make you want to stand up and cheer and gameplay that induces hair loss due to nerve-bending frustration.

—William Abner

THE GOODS

GENRE Spacey Action

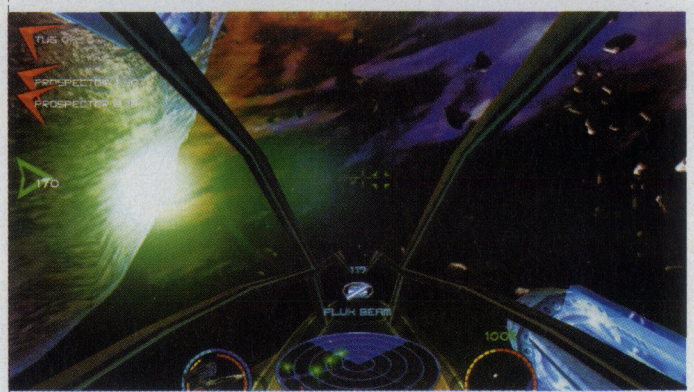
PUBLISHER Red Storm

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 266, 32MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 players, Internet, LAN

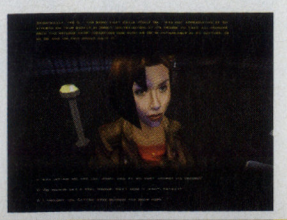
RATING ★★½☆☆

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



Flying around a huge asteroid—the bad guys love to hide behind these.

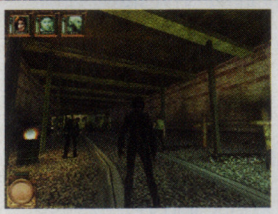
An Avenging Angel











RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Red Storm ENTERTAINMENT

The alien Catteni forces have crushed Earth. Humanity has been enslaved. All hope is lost, until a defiant Angel Sanchez and her band of rebels appear on the scene to exact revenge and take back the planet. Join Angel in the fight to restore FREEDOM – at any price!

3rd PERSON ACTION/ADVENTURE – Fight to free the planet using tactics of secrecy and ambush!

STEALTH – Hide in the shadows unseen, but prepare for action when you step into the light!

TEAM-BASED GAMEPLAY – Control up to three characters per mission. Lead a unified force or take your chances going solo!

FULLY-VOICED DIALOGUE – Connect with other characters and immerse yourself in the story!

EASY-TO-USE INTERFACE – Whether you're a first-time gamer or a true veteran, jump right into the action!

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HITMAN

WHO IS HE(IT)?



The Hitman is a clone. A result of laboratory experiments, conducted by a former military physician. Surreptitiously created in a secret lab as a first prototype. He was raised within the confines of a mental hospital in Romania. His genes were sampled and carefully selected from a group of five men driven by the same desire to control, possess and live forever. These five men were highly specialized professional soldiers, and the Hitman received only the best genes from each one of them, creating a superhuman far superior than the sum of his parts. He was brought up and trained in this remote and unfriendly environment by his creator. The training facilities in the basement under the hospital were the ideal place to shape this clone to his profession. Over the years he became the best assassin of his time, and he turned into a perfect instrument destined to fulfill the monstrous dreams of the physician that created him. He is extremely fast, very intelligent and highly skilled, and eminently performs his tasks with remarkable precision and zero remorse. He carries nothing to cloud his mind during his assignments...

YOUR MISSION:

As the enigmatic Hitman, you must use stealth and tactical problem solving to enter, execute and exit your assignment with minimum attention and maximum effect. You have an arsenal of black market weapons and tools at your disposal; however, choosing the right weapon is critical – attracting attention could lead to early retirement. Learn your environment, plan your moves carefully and make every attack count. Remember: Death can strike anyone. For the right price.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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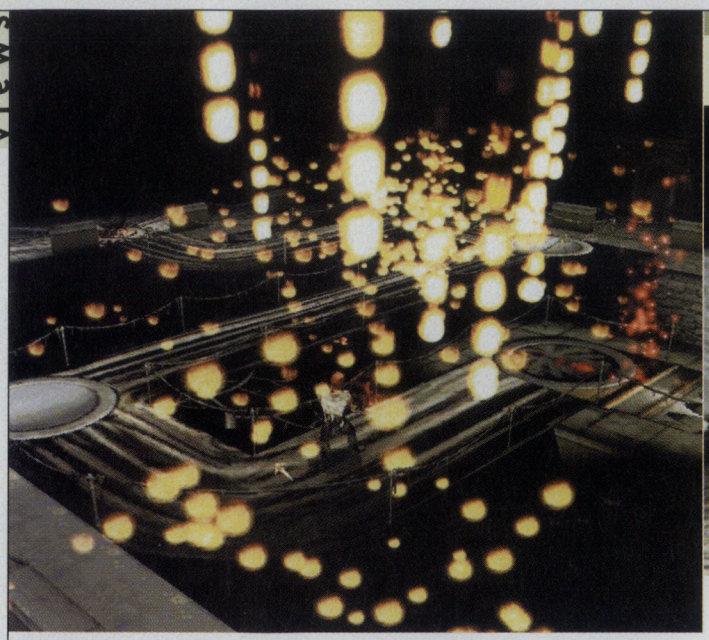
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UPSIDE

Lots of things to find, good character development and combat

DOWNSIDE

Poor controls, movement and camera, music is rare yet repetitive, no automap





[clockwise from left] A wealthy mage decides to build up his fire affinity.

An unfortunate fledgling hero encounters a demon Raal.

Warlocks spend more time speaking with the dead than the living.

Soulbringer

Classic role-playing, modern frustrations

Ages hence, six demon Revenants reigned over the mortal world, and the lives of men bled dry in the clutches of their tyrannical fist. Harbinger, a warlock of unequalled power, faced and destroyed the Revenants. Many thousands of years have passed since then, yet Harbinger's solution now proves itself to be a temporary one, as the Revenants had survived. You are changed with the task of succeeding Harbinger and defeating the Revenants. We've seen *Soulbringer's* premise plenty of times before, but it's not all that bad this time around. But on the other hand, the actual plot progression is usually flat and uninteresting, and the endings are pitiful (the epilogue is ok, though). Several events are often in motion simultaneously, but they aren't tied together in a way that creates a compelling story. Instead, they generally serve as strength-building tasks for your character.

THE GOODS

GENRE Role-playing

PUBLISHER Interplay

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 32MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER N/A

RATING ★★★½☆

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Bodybuilding 101

Coincidentally, the fun of character development really overcomes the weaknesses. Rather than choosing a class, you shape your character by distributing six points per level amongst the five stats (strength, speed, combat, health and magic), up to a maximum of 41 levels.

All four stats are important, and it is easy to see how they affect your abilities when they are increased. Typically, most characters will become warrior-mages, specializing in combat and using spells to complement their abilities. You might want to play through the game a second time before playing a mage character, as there is neither any mana regeneration nor a way to rest. Potions are the only stable way to refill your mana, and they can be quite expensive. Knowing how much gold you can spare on potions makes playing a mage much easier, so it's probably best to avoid mages unless you plan to play twice.

Alongside the statistical increases is a steady income of new weapons and armor. Magical weapons are rare, as most standard weapons offer a significant improvement when you first find them. There are plenty of trinkets and things to find, but shops are poorly stocked after the start of the game.

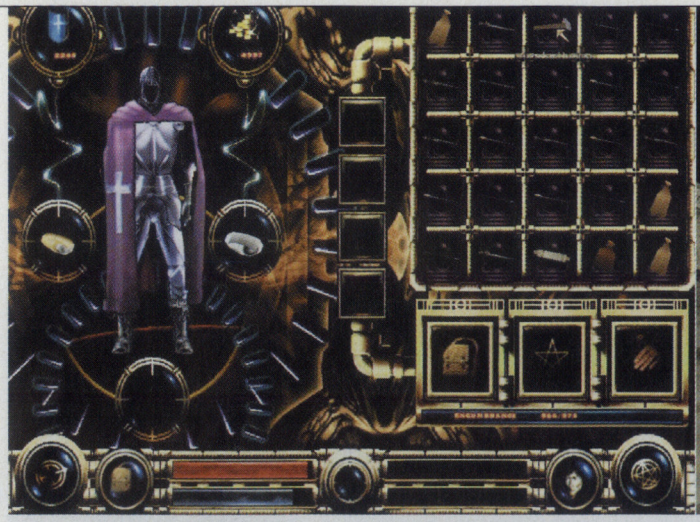
Swordplay: a ticket to fun

Combat is the other area where *Soulbringer* succeeds. Weapons have up to five different attacks available, varying from thrusts and lunges to overhead smashes. Damage comes in three flavors—piercing, slashing, and crushing, and the weapon's damage type often defines the attacks available. In order to access a weapon's higher-level attacks, you must have sufficient combat skill. First level attacks tend to be worthless, so increasing your skills has a major effect. Piercing and crushing damage tend to dominate, as piercing bypasses armor and crushing is used on creatures resistant to piercing. Slashing tends to get the short end of the stick, although it can be useful on occasion. Some weapons offer both piercing and slashing attacks, so increasing your combat to gain those piercing attacks is always important.

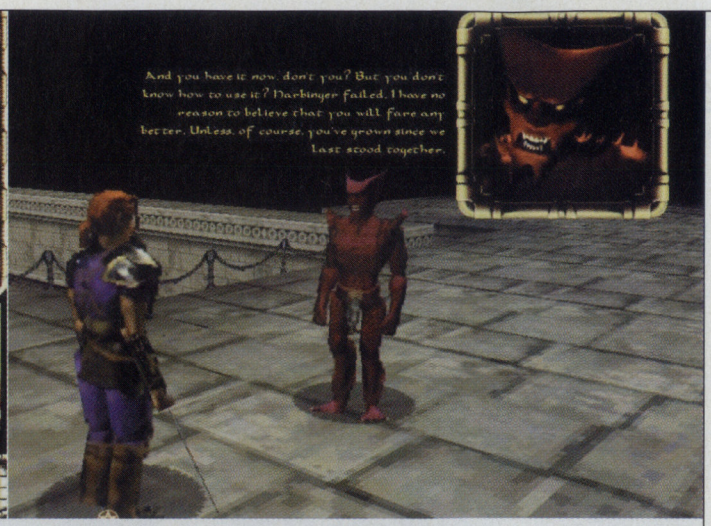
Weapon variety is a definite plus. Scimitars, halberds, war hammers—they're all here. Various strengths and weaknesses in your opponents require you to employ multiple weapons, so it's always wise to carry around a few good arms. Throw in a variety of automatic parry and dodge moves and watching battles unfold can be quite enjoyable. At the start of the game you have ten empty combo slots that you can customize to link various attacks. Technically, there is no limit to what you can do—the limitations are all based upon what's feasible in combat. For instance, combos allow you to switch weapons, but the time required to sheathe your sword and pull out a club overshadows any other benefits, especially since your defenses are lowered for the duration. Furthermore, weapons almost always have a single attack that is far superior to the rest, so the other four tend to go unused. This isn't necessarily the fifth level attack, as they're often too slow or unwieldy to be used on a regular basis.

Slashing attacks may be weak, but ranged weapons are nearly worthless—unless you enjoy running around in circles. In the time required to cast a spell or shoot an arrow, the enemy will already be upon you, preparing to engage. Combine that with the mediocre damage and loss of parry abilities, and archers are not an option.

Limitations considered, combat is still usually a thoroughly enjoyable event. There are a handful of annoyances, however. First, you don't truly control your movement when attacking and the AI doesn't seem to calculate distances properly. It's not uncommon to give the attack command and watch as you approach an unmoving or frozen target and begin to repeatedly attack and miss because it didn't move close enough. That's part of a bigger problem, however...



No, I don't really need to carry 20 weapons, but I get tired of going back to town to repair them!



What would an RPG be without a red demon to kill?

A dark and dreary night

Have you ever played a game that has several easily corrected flaws that drastically decrease the overall quality of the product? In the case of Soulbringer, implementing convenience options would surely be beneficial... but alas, several basic functions are nowhere to be seen. No one can dispute the usefulness of automaps and customizable controls, so whatever were they thinking to have left these out of the game? Exploration becomes tedious without the automap, as it becomes necessary to "comb" (move straight up/down) areas to make sure you don't miss anything. Do you want to wander around looking for something when you can't even tell if they've you've explored the place already? Different areas are visually distinct, but it is difficult to keep track of where you are within a single area, as every screen within the area looks pretty much the same. Also, the compass is another inconvenience, as it does not function perfectly. Finally, the journal lacks necessary details, such as specifics about where to go for a quest.

Customizable controls are also mysteriously absent. Woe to the gamer, indeed. *Soulbringer's* control setup requires three or even four hands. The mouse handles movement, attacks are on the left side of the keyboard, the arrow keys control targeting, and the numpad takes care of the camera angle. You can perform some of these functions with the mouse, but the keyboard handles them much better.

Finally, and most importantly, the navigation scheme is incredibly annoying. The core of the problem is the inability to smoothly transition from standing to running. It's no difficult task to come up with an explanation for why they chose this movement system, but it's all moot. Stuttering movement is a constant impediment and poor pathfinding intensifies the problem. In fact, it is by no means an exaggeration to say that you'll waste several hours as the small movement hiccups compound. Your character demonstrates the agility of a toddler (or a drunken sailor) as he stumbles about, stopping several times to perform even simple maneuvers. Later in the game you'll learn how to keep moving as often as possible, but the problem never goes away entirely.

A good game tainted by flaws

Amidst a throng of recently released big name role-playing games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Icewind Dale* and *Diablo II*, a few lower profile titles attempt to stand and snatch up their share of the gaming public's time and money. *Soulbringer* is one of these titles, and despite (or even *because of*) its complete lack of similarity to the aforementioned action-role-playing games, it must compete very hard for attention.

Add customizable controls and an automap, fix the movement, improve the camera control, add some good music and *Soulbringer* would be a much better game that warrants a strong recommendation. As it is, fans who are weary of the frenzied pace of recent games will enjoy a good chunk of the game—it's still quite an entertaining, if slightly forgettable game

—David Ryan Hunt



"I know you guys are trying to help, but you'll just get yourselves killed—let me slay all the vampires alone."



No hero is complete without an oversized warhammer.



Environments are varied and beautiful...

UPSIDE

Excellent control with fluid, beautiful graphics

DOWNSIDE

EDDI and the menus and buttons around him; sound is uninspired



The list on the left goes four screens deep!

Breakneck

Great racing behind the interface from hell

Breakneck lives up to its name, delivering action-packed racing on a large number of tracks with varying weather conditions and surfaces. It also contains a wide variety of vehicles you can equip with an equally wide variety of weapon systems. Unfortunately, this is hidden behind a convoluted interface that makes racing almost secondary to figuring out how to manipulate the screens. You can basically shut your brain off while you are racing, so it makes no sense to have to throw it in overdrive before you even start.

The game is broken down into two modes. Arcade mode offers instant gratification, but also gets tiresome quickly because there are few rewards for success. The meat of the game is in Expert mode. That's where the trouble begins.

An artificial personality named EDDI serves as your designated guide in the Expert game. You will hate EDDI. He offers useless advice between races and cracks stupid jokes when all you want to do is load the damn game. Thankfully, there is an option to turn EDDI off, which puts a stop to some of his nonsense. Even that does not keep him from making wisecracks in the menu screen, however.

EDDI is surrounded by what must be the single most obtuse and overdeveloped interface in the history of racing games. There are somewhat unintuitive lists of options that slide out, Start Menu-style, from both sides of the screen, giving you access to critical functions such as the "start race" button. Littered haphazardly about the main screen are buttons and muddled click-able lists. Half the time you won't have any idea whether or not you can click something until you try it. Rollover text appears on some objects, but when the whole interface is animated even that gets lost.

Fortunately the racing is a lot of fun. The developers of *Breakneck* apparently learned a thing or two from some of the better console driving games. As with Sony's *Gran Turismo*, you start with a wad of cash that you will have to use to buy a car. There are several main classes of vehicle that include modern and classic sports cars and small compacts, as well as special classes like go-karts and monster trucks. The car designs all resemble real models (but without the official licenses), physics and control feel good, and there are a load of options available throughout the mammoth beast of an interface that allow you to customize your experience. You need to win to buy upgrades and weapons, pay for travel, and rent cars for special races. *Breakneck* does a great job of balancing management with a lot of on track racing time. Unfortunately its most unique feature—the weapons—is not well realized in the larger game. Combat feels as if it was tacked on as an afterthought, and the game is mostly about the racing.

Track graphics are excellent. Judicious use of sprites and polygons keeps framerates high and gives you a marvelous sense of speed. The textures are colorful and the visuals offer lots of variety while maintaining consistent themes. Tight turns, sweeping bends, long straights, narrow roads, and varying elevation combine to create some difficult hazards without becoming too difficult to enjoy. There are over 20 tracks that can be played in standard, mirrored, backwards, and backwards-mirrored configuration. The cars are nice to look at with interiors and drivers visible through transparent glass. Differences in performance and control are noticeable in different models or with upgrades. *Breakneck* stumbles a bit on sound, however, with weak motor noise and average background music.

Multiplayer requires a fast connection, and even then it's rudimentary at best. There is no chat interface, and while the game advertises Heat.net support, it doesn't seem to actually exist as of the time of this writing. That pretty much kills it, since there's absolutely no place to find players online.

Some games suck you in from the moment they hit your hard drive but don't sustain the fun through repeated play, becoming stale and boring. *Breakneck* does exactly the opposite. The first time you start it up, you'll be ready to break the neck of the developers for making it incredibly difficult to get into one stinking race. If, by an act of God, you manage to find your way onto the track within the first 10 minutes, you'll find a very entertaining arcade-style racing game. *—David J. Long*

THE GOODS

GENRE Arcade Racing

PUBLISHER Southpeak Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 4MB Video Card

MULTIPLAYER 2-4 Players, Internet, LAN

RATING ★★★½☆

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



Speaking of breaking necks...

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Traitors Gate

Spying in the sewers of England

There's a traitor posing as a highly established member of the Pentagon, and he's planning on using classified information to steal the British Crown Jewels. Ever incompetent, the Pentagon elite can't do anything themselves to fix the problem. Instead they'll send Agent Raven (you) alone on a nearly impossible mission. You're to steal the Jewels and replace them with exact replicas equipped with sophisticated tracking devices in order to locate the traitor. Now you know the beginning, middle, and ending of *Traitors Gate*, as there really isn't more than a scrap of plot beyond the introduction.

Upon arrival at the drop-off point, your first objective is to retrieve your equipment. All sorts of nifty spy gadgets are at your disposal, but the majority of the items you need are found scattered about. Oftentimes, you'll have choices available in how to approach the situation, but it tends to boil down to a single path, despite the non-linear nature of the game. Don't believe the box's claim about over 100 hours of gameplay; there's a twelve-hour time limit, so you'd have to replay the thing almost ten times. Maybe you could spend 100 hours if you started over every time you went down the wrong path and became automatically lost. Either that or you could spend a lifetime wandering the sewers.

Ahh, the sewers. Replace them with a better navigation system and *Traitors Gate* would miraculously become a much better game. A sort of labyrinth, the sewer system is an area in which your handy automap fails to function properly. Almost all travel requires taking a trip through the sewers, so that means it is necessary for *you* to make a map—a time-consuming investment indeed. Aside from the occasional white tags that act as navigational buoys, every room looks nearly identical. Scrolling video accompanies every step you take, so it isn't possible to quickly navigate the area.

Although some players may not consider the maze itself to be a fault, the roots of the problem lie deeper. Nothing is more important than becoming immersed in the setting, and it is difficult to maintain interest when you have to make long treks from location A to B. Same goes for the non-linear aspects of the game. Oftentimes, it means you must wander around trying to find your next objective. If you're impatient or have a short-attention span, this is a potential game-killer. On the other hand, some die-hard adventure gamers may be able to look beyond this problem.

Logical puzzles are all-important in adventure games, and fortunately, *Traitors Gate* (with a few notable exceptions) presents some well-thought-out conundrums. You will arrive at most of the solutions by spending a little time thinking about them, yet there are still some pretty insidious stumbling blocks. While the answers are generally logical, arriving at them is not always easy. But then, if there was no challenge, there would hardly be a point in having puzzles, would there?

Aural ambience is crucial in a spy game, and *Traitors Gate* is often completely silent. Whether that is a plus or minus is a matter of taste. Overall, the visual atmosphere well presented. Everything is appropriately dark, and you get to make use of a variety of tools, such as a grappling crossbow to travel between towers. More guards would be nice, as the area seems too sparsely defended.

Considering the relative rarity of spy games, it can be a refreshing breeze. There simply aren't enough games that let you play cloak and dagger style, and as such some people may find it is worth enduring some problems for the opportunity to play a spy.

THE GOODS

GENRE Adventure

PUBLISHER DreamCatcher

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 100, 32MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★☆☆

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

UPSIDE

Many logical puzzles, areas linked together several ways, good atmosphere

DOWNSIDE

Boring in places, short, blurry graphics, big interface, some ill-conceived puzzles



Cutting this lock with a blowtorch is one way to proceed, but then you leave a trace of your presence.

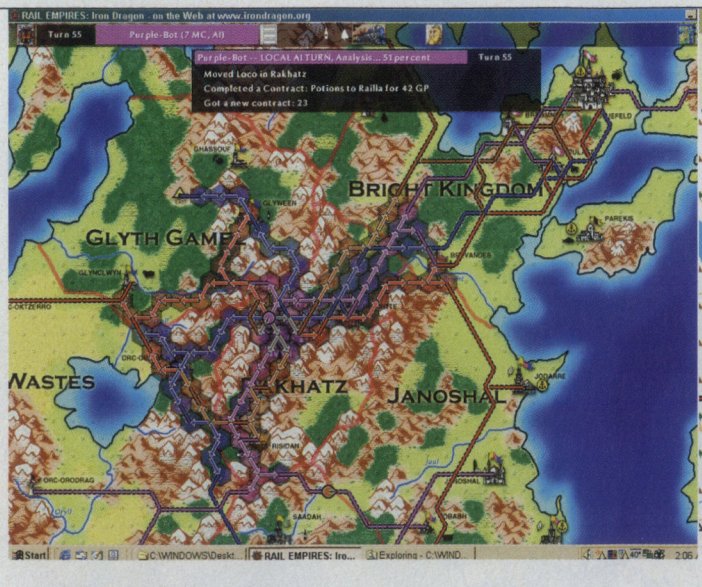


Why try to sneak past security systems when you can deactivate them?



Highly trained security guards...

Simply put, this is a game for hardcore adventure gamers. There's a lot to like in the way the world is built with everything inter-connecting, and the tools you must make use of in order to proceed. If it were as simple as that, a strong recommendation would be in order; however, due to the aforementioned faults, it's not worthy of such an endorsement. You're not likely to be disappointed with *Traitors Gate*, but then again the entire experience isn't something to cherish, either.
—David Ryan Hunt



UPSIDE

Engrossing multiplayer. The board game playable on the PC



DOWNSIDE

AI seems unfinished, making single player nearly useless. Shaky match-making server



[left to right] The AI considers its next move.

Hey, that's my neighbor and his dog!

Aaaaaaaa! Flood!

Rail Empires: Iron Dragon

Trains, rails, gold and... elves and orcs? Oh my!

Rail Empires: Iron Dragon has a unique premise, to say the least. Where else would you be tasked with building a rail empire connecting cities in a fantasy world? Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs populate this game's Provinces, along with other fantasy races. The "trains" are actually mystical combinations of Dragon and machine, hence the catchy title. This fantasy setting allows the game to enforce rules in a fashion that would be unacceptable in a historic rail-building game, and adds a lot to its appeal. It has just the right combination of believability and fantasy to make the experience entirely enticing.

You begin with three contract "cards," each with three demands on them. You have a choice of which contract to pursue, with the completion value based on distance to the city and the load needed to complete the contract. Rails are built through the varied terrain by using your initial bankroll or earning gold by meeting contract demands. The board game uses a crayon to draw rails directly on the board and this is replicated nicely on the computer with a hex-style grid that appears as you build links. You move your one upgradeable train from city to city, picking up and delivering loads. Once you've completed one of your three contracts, that card is discarded and another is drawn. As you meet demands, you build a more complex rail system, hoping eventually to connect seven major cities and earn 250 gold pieces before your opponents do. Random events are your only obstacle when drawn before a new contract.

Play is fast and simple and the game does a good job of hiding depth underneath this simplicity. Completing longer runs may gain you more gold, but the time spent traveling could cost you in the endgame. Price and location influence track placement. One nice fantasy-world touch is the racial advantages—you can build track cheaper by hiring a foreman from one of the game's alternate races. Elves, for example, may make a long forest build reasonable, while Catmen will provide a bonus in Jungle terrain. These foremen can be fired and replaced throughout the game, though you always retain exactly one. Understanding all of *Iron Dragon*'s disparate elements makes the learning curve fairly steep at first, but it levels out quickly once you're past the first few hours.

It's a shame that such a good conversion would have one glaring flaw. Thanks to what can only be described as terrible artificial intelligence, *Iron Dragon* simply isn't fun as a single-player game. While it may provide the novice player with a challenge the first three or four games, it quickly becomes a bore. On top of that, an opponent AI may sometimes get "stuck" and simply stop moving. It may have plenty of gold to complete a contract, but instead goes through the thinking process and just sits there. If there are three or more AIs playing, you might get lucky and have two complete the game. If they all get stuck, you can either start over or continue solitaire. Eden knows about the problem and has patched it once already (with more patching scheduled), but the single-player game is simply not usable in its current state.

This means that multiplayer is the way to go. Internet match-making is provided through Eden Studios' Connection Zone. This head-to-head competition is where the game excels, allowing you to enjoy thoughtful competition while chatting with other players about whatever you choose. The chat window is nicely designed, with a minimum of fuss necessary to toggle between it and the main screen of play. In fact, the entire interface is nicely laid out, with only a few minor problems. Hotkeys are numerous and well-documented, making the mouse necessary only for train movement and rail building. The problem with online play, however, is that players aren't always around when you're up for a game. The time commitment for a single session is around two hours and the server is unavailable often enough to make it inconvenient. Hotseat play is a more viable option, however, and if you can get enough people around the monitor, it's a great alternative.

Iron Dragon's graphics are very good for a game sold through the Internet. For traditionalists, a decent replica of the board game is offered; other players might also enjoy the enhanced version of the map and cards. Sound effects are quirky but entertaining, with someone actually saying "ding ding ding!" when it's your turn. The music recalls the *SimCity* games—with only two tracks, however, you'll probably quickly mute it.

Part of the unique appeal of board gaming is being able to socialize while having a common point of reference to break the ice and inject some fun into the meeting. Eden Studios has created a great digital translation of this board game while retaining the entertaining, social game experience. But on the PC, where solitary gamers are still found in large numbers, the broken AI means *Iron Dragon* may not appeal to you. —*David Long*

THE GOODS

GENRE Turn-based Strategy

PUBLISHER Eden Studios

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 60, 16MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-6; Internet, same machine

RATING ★★★☆☆

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Love that demo

Thanks for including the *Combat Mission* demo on your most recent issue. I've played the heck out of it, sent in my money for the full game, and have quit everything else of worth in my life. (Well, I still read the magazine...)

Seriously, for this long-in-the-tooth gamer, it is just what the doctor ordered.

Alan Kenworthy (Aloid)

Wanker again

Hello again... I just received the September issue, which printed a comment I wrote [Rebound, "Tasty or tasteless?"] In the response the editor asked if that was my legitimate name... the answer is yes, I am Randy Wanker. I don't understand why my name is so funny. Anyway, I just thought I'd let you know.

Randy Wanker

Moment of incoherence

I used to know a guy named Ernie Flounders. One day he came to my house and said he needed three wax candles, a bicycle pump, and something the color yellow. So, I found what he needed and gave it to him. About an hour later, I noticed that my fence had been moved into my living room, covered with printer's ink.

Then Ernie Flounders came in and said, "If you're wondering what I was doing, please don't ask. It's a very long story. So here's that package you ordered." Then I said, "But I didn't order any package." He handed me an unopened package that was post dated July 19th 1978 and then Ernie ran off. So I opened it up, and I saw three wax candles, a bicycle pump, and something the color yellow. Why is that?

Morton "Fingers" Malone

You like us

I realize you guys don't print many letters of praise, so let me just say that at the end of my letter, I have some very angry comments. But you are doing something that I want to see more of: In the preview section of the September issue, you did a profile of American McGee that I really enjoyed [CGM 118, "The Curiouser Action Game"]. While it is fun to read about the new games in development, it is even more fun to read about the sometimes-twisted personalities behind these games. I got some genuine chuckles reading some of McGee's comments, and while I wasn't all that interested in the game before, I am more tempted to buy it now that I have some inkling of the personality behind the game.

Most game previews concentrate on the game mechanics and overall style, but it's the added focus on the designer that gives the article another vital and fascinating layer of depth. I think a designer's personality can't help but come through in his creation, and getting to know the people only enhances the game experience. Maybe in the future you could have more articles of a few of the various individual personalities working on various aspects of one featured game per issue.

Anyway, the rest of the magazine is great too. In my mind, you now have a perfectly balanced magazine, and should not change anything from this point forward.

Now, it seems to me that I was going to say something else at the end here, but it couldn't have been too important, because it escapes me now.

Mark Lahren

We be smart

Other magazines use only common words and seem to be staffed by surfer-like characters that truly do nothing but play games all day, but I'm glad that the people working in your magazine have good educations. In the preview of *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2* [CGM 118] I must of found 14, post-college level words like, ameliorate. Do any of the people reading this know what this word means? [*Actually, some of us on staff don't know what that means. –ed*]

Some people think that gamers are nothing but idiots that have no lives and do nothing but play games all day. You folks actually prove that theory wrong by using college level words that show your staff is full of intelligent people.

Keep up the good work.

Hyun Lee

Taking a stand on tofu

I am glad to see that people in the gaming industry are finally speaking out against tofu ["High Jinx in the Caribbean", Page 42]. I have long been very opposed to tofu, particularly it's inclusion in games. I believe that gamers need not be exposed to this vile substance, nor reminded how it is collected. Whenever I see tofu in a game, I can't help but think of those poor children, forced to work the tofu mines, being slowly poisoned by the pure, but toxic, tofu. I hope to see more anti tofu articles in issues to come!

Don't try and give me that song and dance about tofu being "bean curd." Tofu supporters have tried that on me before, and I can tell you it did not work.

Samuel Atwood

Thundervette

I saw you had an article on *Motor City Online* in your September issue, so being the car nut that I am, I went right to that page. I read the articles and looked at the pictures and I noticed a problem with the caption that goes with the picture on page 65 in the upper right hand corner it says "Little silver Corvette". But as I looked closely at the picture, I noticed that it's actually one of my all time favorite cars, not a Corvette. It's a mid-50's Ford Thunderbird. Just thought I would let you know, I think that you guys put out a great magazine.

Jimmy Crum

Since we're paid so very little money, we can only afford to drive illegally imported Russian and Eastern European cars, hence the mistake. We regret the error.

Letters reprinted verbatim

I WANT TO LEARN HOW TO PLAY THIS GAME, BUT I'M NOT SURE HOW? I ALSO PUT MY PASS WORD IN AND IT SAID IT WASN'T IT? CAN YOU PLEASE HELP ME? THANKS.

MICHELLE S.

Please consult our detailed strategy guide on "this game" next month.

HI. I WHAT TO KMOW WHO DOET YOU HAVE CODES FOR CP???????? E-MAIL MY BACK.

RANDY

E-mail your back? Are you some sort of cannibal? Is CP some sort of cannibal game?

Appalling

I received your magazine in the mail the other day and was appalled by its content. After glancing at your magazine and seeing its content I now know why the youth today is the way it is. Thank you.

Buffie Fox

You're welcome, um, Buffie. Wouldn't you know this came from an AOL account?–ed

ERRATA: In the preview of *Escape From Monkey Island*, we incorrectly identified Jonathan Ackley as Jonathan Ackerman. We regret the error.

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'ONI' is a 3rd person 3D action/adventure that emphasizes hand-to-hand combat & gunplay. Set in the year 2032, you play Konoko, an elite agent on a quest to infiltrate & destroy a ruthless crime syndicate. Complete missions through stealth or brawn. Oni supports huge, multi-elevation indoor/ outdoor environments, radiosity lighting, a preconditioned, constrained neural net AI that works together and exhibits emergent behavior, motion blur, gunplay, hand-to-hand combat, and more.



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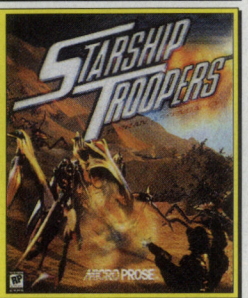
Bungie (Action)
Release:11/00
PC CD

'HITMAN: CODENAME 47' casts you as a hired assassin and chronicles your progress through a series of contracts. Includes some 27 levels that cover five actual hits, as well as the preparations necessary to make those hits - accumulating equipment, information, and the like. Most missions are comprised of about 80% planning and 20% action.



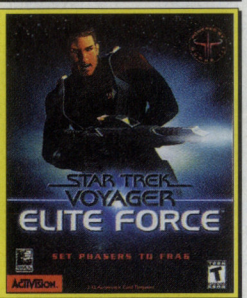
Eidos (Action)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$34.95

'STARSHIP TROOPERS' puts you in battle armor in the middle of a 3D game played from a chase perspective. While in the command ship, you move around without armor. You can eventually gain control over your entire squad if you wish. Spaceship interiors, bug tunnels, buildings, wide open landscapes, & swarms of bugs attacking simultaneously are all a part of the game.



Microprose (Action)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$38.95

'STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE' This 1st game based on Star Trek Voyager pits players against a multitude of Star Trek enemies, including the relentless Borg and never-before-seen aliens, in intense single-player and multiplayer combat missions.



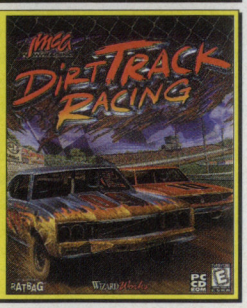
Activision (Action)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$39.95

'B-17 FLYING FORTRESS 2: THE MIGHTY 8TH' Command the supreme daylight bomber of World War II. Master each of the 10 crew member roles. Navigate accurately across Europe. Locate and bomb strategic targets, and defend the plane from furious enemy attacks. Breathtaking air combat sequences through photorealistic terrain makes it all feel incredibly real.



Microprose (Simulation)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$39.95

'DIRT TRACK RACING' 12 series on 30 tracks (Oval, D-Oval, Tri-Oval & Figure 8)- practice, qualifying, heats & main events. 18 cars: Pure Stock-Entry level cars with no modifications, Production Stock-500 Hp modified stock cars, & Late Models-Professional, highly modified 800 Hp cars with glass bodies.

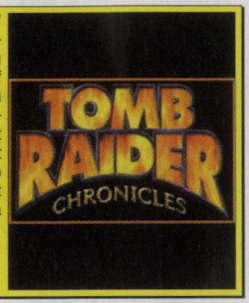


GT (Simulation)
Release: NOW
PC CD
$19.95

COMPUTER GAMES: ACTION

Title	Release	Price
Abomination	10/99	$26.95
Alien Vs Predator	06/99	$24.95
Alien vs. Predator Gmrs Ed	04/00	$28.95
Bang! - Gunship Elite	08/00	$34.95
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Battlezone 2	12/99	$24.95
Battlezone Gold	09/99	$22.95
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Carmageddon TDR 2000	10/00	$39.95
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Dark Forces	03/95	$18.95
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Descent 4	08/00	$42.95
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'TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES' reveals 4 newly discovered, & previously untold adventures, taking you on a journey from the ruins of Rome, to the bowels of a Russian submarine, to the rooftops of a hi-tech city in a search of 4 ancient artifacts. In light of Lara's recent disappearance, those closest to her gather together at the Croft Estate on a gray, rainy day for a memorial service in her honor.

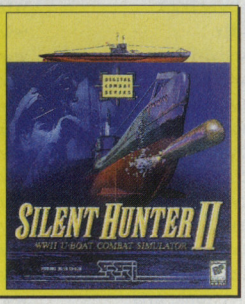


Eidos (Action)
Release: 11/00
PC CD
$38.95

COMPUTER GAMES: SIMULATION

Title	Release	Price
1943 Euro Air War	11/98	$18.95
3D Railroad Master	10/98	$49.99
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MechWarrior 3 Exp Pk	12/99	$22.95
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X-Wng v Tie W Binc Pwr	10/98	$18.95

'SILENT HUNTER II' recreates the battles between Hitler's U-boat force & Allied convoys. Multiplayer mode for hot action & cooperative play over the Internet or LAN. Multiple difficulty levels & enhanced dynamic campaign complete a very detailed & realistic environment.



Mindscape (Simulation)
Release: 12/00
PC CD
$44.95

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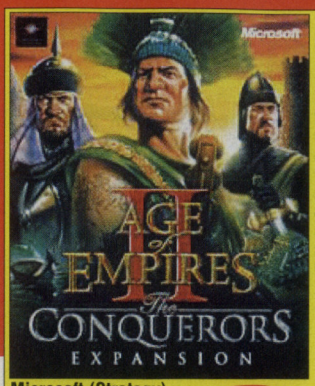
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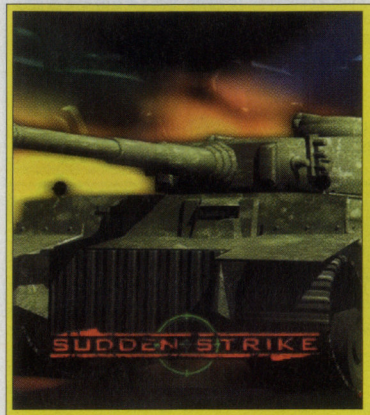


'AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS EXPANSION PACK' Focusing on legendary leaders, The Conquerors will challenge veterans and novices to wage war on an epic scale with all-new civilizations, unique units and technologies, and campaigns based on infamous conquerors such as Attila the Hun, El Cid and Montezuma.

Microsoft (Strategy)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$29.95

COMPUTER GAMES: STRATEGY

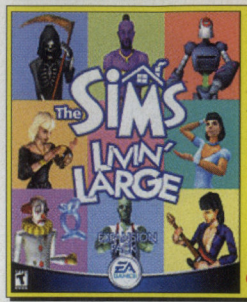
Title	Release	Price
1602 AD	02/00	$28.95
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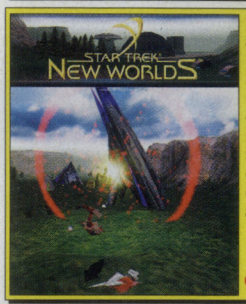
'SUDDEN STRIKE' is a real-time strategy and tactical simulation game. Set in WWII, with Russian, German, French, American & British missions focusing on tactical fighting. Up to 1.000 units per scenario, giant maps, realistic gun simulations complete with "real" explosions, units gain experience and make it from one mission to the next, multi player mode: up to 12 players and 4 teams.

Eidos (Strategy)
Release: 11/00
PC CD
$39.95



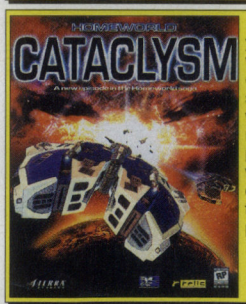
'THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE' expansion pack lets you take your Sims to new extremes. Help your Sims deal with everything from roach infestations to alien abductions. Give them the opportunity to become a rock star, a talk show host, even a UFO investigator. Choose from over 100 new items for your Sims to use.

EA (Strategy)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$29.95



'STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS' Play as the Federation, Klingons or the Romulans in the year 2292. Each race offers a new style of gameplay, race behaviors and a view of the games story arc from 3 different perspectives. Features a variety of single player and up to 6 multi-player mission objectives. You have complete control over the 3D world and its inhabitants.

Interplay (Strategy)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$39.95



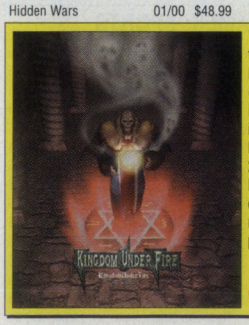
'HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM' takes you back to the Homeworld universe roughly 15 years after the original game. Command new ships with new technologies & weaponry in 17 new single player missions. Multiplayer system supports up to 8. Features such as waypoints & sensor screen attack commands add a new dimension to the revolutionary combat & play pioneered in Homeworld.

Sierra (Strategy)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$34.95



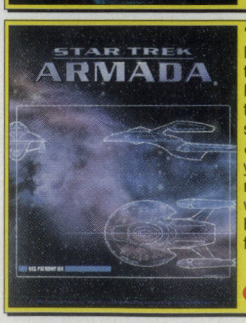
'REACH FOR THE STARS' Turn-based strategy of galactic exploration, colonization & conquest. Dive into the immense range of player controlled game parameters or simply focus on galactic exploration and enemy destruction. Features more than 30 preset scenarios, 16 unique species, a diplomatic system, network play, a powerful scenario editor and tactical combat.

Mindscape (Strategy)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$38.95



'KINGDOM UNDER FIRE' details the epic battles on the continent of Bersiah, where the Race of Light (Humans & Elves) & the Race of Darkness (Orcs & Ogres) coexist in a brooding cloud of suspicion & hostility. Features 70 characters, 20 missions each for Human & Devil races, 7 story missions for each Hero character, RPG elements, & different types of multi-player games.

GOD (Strategy)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$38.95



'STAR TREK: ARMADA' The Borg have returned! You are in charge of the fleets of the Federation, Klingon, Romulan & Borg ships that will wage this epic battle. Build starships, construct space stations, & research special weapons to lead your side to victory. Along the journey you will survive a Klingon civil war, Romulan subterfuge and the Borg's search for perfection. The future is in your command.

Activision (Strategy)
Release: NOW
PC CD
$38.95

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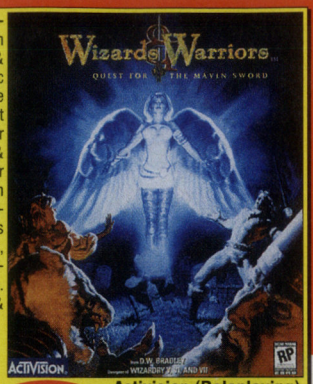
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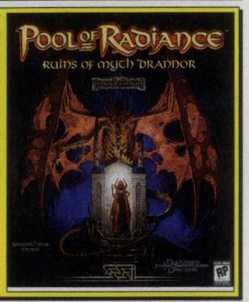
Activision (Roleplaying)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$39.95

'ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGIC' The shift from magic to technology has created an explosive situation in Arcanum. Customize your character, 8 basic stats, more than 12 derived stats, 16 primary skills, 80 spells in 16 colleges, & 56 technological degrees in 8 disciplines. Take on ogres in real-time, or plan your strategy through turn-based combat. Take the adventure online cooperatively or competitively over the Net or LAN.



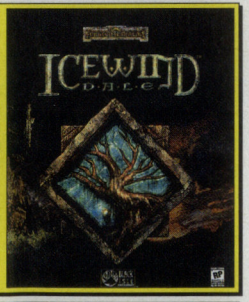
Sierra (Roleplaying)
Release: 11/00
PC CD
$39.95

'POOL OF RADIANCE 2: RUIS OF MYTH DRANNOR' A new Pool of Radiance has been discovered in the ruined city of Myth Drannor. Features the new 3rd Edition Dungeon & Dragons Rules, 3D character & monster models, interactive environments, action-based combat system, multiplay & singleplay dungeons, non-linear quests, over 100 spells, and new D&D monsters and items.



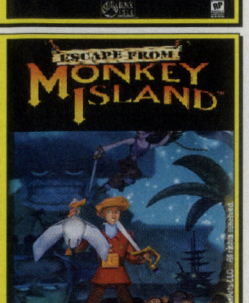
Mindscape (Roleplaying)
Release: 12/00
PC CD
$42.95

'ICEWIND DALE' A single, or multiplayer, RPG set in the Forgotten Realms. The game focuses more on classic dungeon adventuring than on an overland quest. Features AD&D second edition rules, more than ten new, major, areas as well as several smaller locations to explore, and over 50 dungeon levels. Explore ice-filled mountain passes, geothermal cave systems, haunted Elven ruins, & more.



Interplay (Roleplaying)
Release: NOW
PC CD
$42.95

'ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND' finds series hero, perennial pirate-wannabe Guybrush Threepwood, returning to face sociopathic parrots, freakishly deformed buccaneers, and an insult flinging original villain with a sinister agenda. So begins the next captivating chapter in the long-running Monkey Island series. Buccaneers, hoist the yardarms, batten down the hatches, and let the insults fly!



Lucas Arts (Adventure)
Release: 10/00
PC CD
$39.95

'SYDNEY 2000' The most comprehensive event listing ever- 100m Sprint, 110m Hurdles, Hammer, Javelin, Triple Jump, High Jump, 100m Freestyle Swimming, Olympic Sprint Cycling, Skeet Shooting, Super Heavyweight Weight Lifting, 10m Platform Diving & Kayak K1 Slalom. Single player progressive Olympic, points based Arcade & Coaching modes. Multiplayer mode for up to 8.

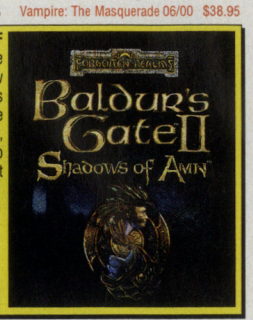


Eidos (Sports)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$28.95

COMPUTER GAMES: ROLE PLAYING

Title	Release	Price	Title	Release	Price	Title	Release	Price	Title	Release	Price
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Anachronox	10/00	$33.95	Forgottn Rlms Arcvs 2	08/99	$9.95	Septerra Core	11/99	$14.95	Ultima Online: Renaissance	05/00	$18.95
Arcanum:	10/00	$39.95	Forgttn Rlms Silver Ed	08/99	$24.95	Silver	11/99	$32.95	Ultima Wrlds Onln Orgn	09/00	$42.95
Asheron's Call	11/99	$29.95	Icarus: Sanctuary Gods	11/98	$12.95	SoulBringer	07/00	$38.95	Vampire: The Masquerade	06/00	$38.95
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Baldur's Gate	12/98	$24.95	Lands of Lore	01/94	$12.95						
Baldur's Gate 2	09/00	$42.95	Lands of Lore 3	04/99	$17.95						
Clans	09/99	$19.95	Legacy of Kain 2	09/99	$28.95						
Crusaders Mght&Magic	12/99	$14.95	Legend of Blade Masters	09/00	$38.95						
CyberJudas	07/96	$6.95	Legends of Might & Magic	09/00	$39.95						
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Deus Ex	06/00	$28.95	Might & Magic 8	03/00	$32.95						
Diablo	01/97	$9.95	Might & Magic Compilation	11/98	$27.95						
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Final Fantasy VIII	01/00	$38.95	Realms Arkania Tril	10/97	$8.95						

'BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOW OF AMN' The newest title in the Baldur's Gate series adds new classes, spells, and items and uses an isometric, top-down view. The game is real-time but is pauseable, and actions may be assigned to characters in your party at that time.



Interplay (Roleplaying)
Release: 9/00
PC CD
$42.95

Title	Release	Price
Star Trek ConQuest	06/00	$24.95
Star Trk Final Unity	07/95	$9.99
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7th Guest 2 11th Hour	11/95	$8.95	Gruesome Castle	07/00	$47.99	Nightlong	02/00	$19.95	Shadow Man	09/99	$19.95
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Atlantis	09/97	$27.95	Kingdom II:Shadoan	09/00	$39.95	Quest for Glory 5	12/98	$19.95	Star Trk Str Flt Acad	09/97	$12.95
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Blade Runner	11/97	$17.95	Last Express	04/97	$12.95	Riddle Master Lu	10/95	$3.95	Tender Loving Care	06/99	$24.99
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Curse of Monkey Isle	11/97	$9.95							Twinsen's Odyssey	07/97	$12.95
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Escape from Monkey Isle	10/00	$39.95							Under Killing Moon	11/94	$8.95
F13	01/00	$22.95							Under Kllng Moon w/Book	11/94	$8.95
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Fallout 2	11/98	$18.95							Wolf Hunt Be Hunted	09/94	$10.99
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Gabriel Knight 3	11/99	$29.95							Zork:Nemesis	04/96	$9.95

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Eidos (Action)
Release: 11/00
PC CD
$34.95

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Myst 2 w/Hint Book	08/99	$12.95	Safecracker	05/00	$19.95						
Myst 2: Riven	11/97	$24.95	Sanitarium	05/98	$14.95						
Myst Mstrpce Edition	09/99	$28.95	Scooby-Doo:Myst Fun Pk	10/99	$18.95						
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COMPUTER GAMES: SPORTS

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Amercn Deer Hntr 2000	08/99	$14.95	F1 2000	03/00	$37.95	Links LS 2001	09/00	$44.95	NHL Hockey 2000	09/99	$18.95
Backyard Baseball	08/00	$34.95	F1 World Gran Prix 99	06/00	$22.95	Links LS 99	11/98	$26.95	NHL Hockey 2001	09/00	$39.95
Backyard Soccer 2001	09/00	$19.95	FIFA Soccer 2000	11/99	$18.95	Madden NFL 2000	09/99	$17.95	PBA Bowling 2	02/00	$19.95
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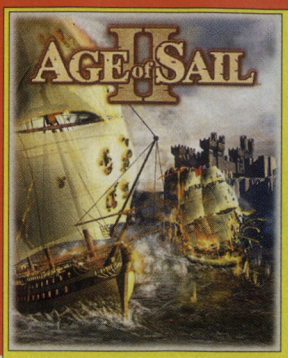
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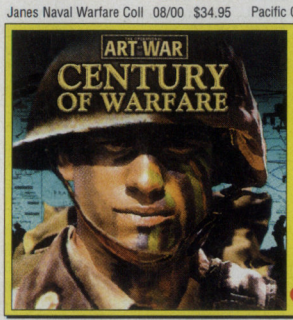
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Talonsoft (War)
Release: 11/00
PC CD

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COMPUTER GAMES: WAR

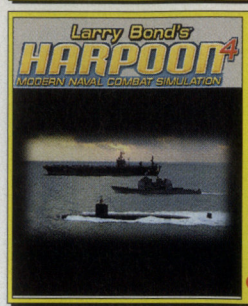
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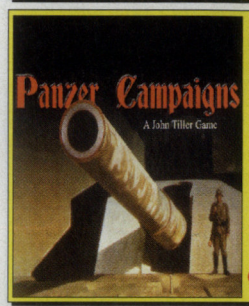
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Mindscape (War)
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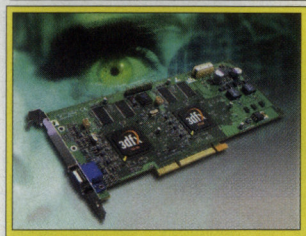
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Release: NOW
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CH Products (Hardware)
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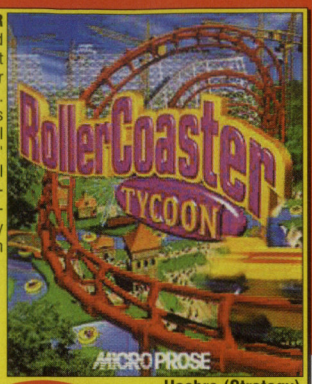
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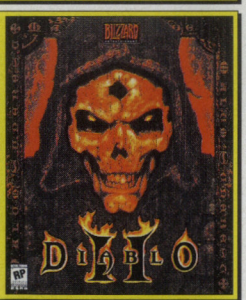
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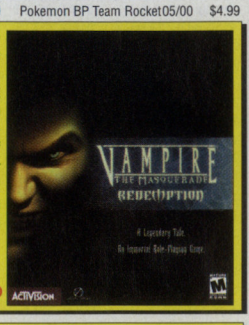
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Activision (Roleplaying)
Release: NOW
PC CD
$38.95

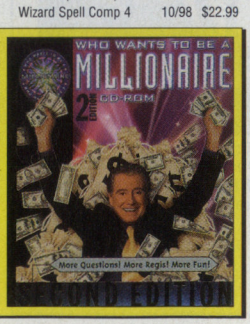
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Buena Vista (Traditional)
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$19.95

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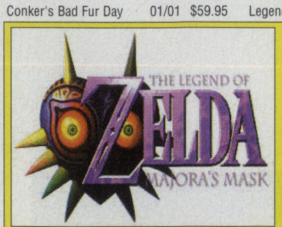


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Working Designs (Roleplaying)
Release: 10/00
PSX
$62.95

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Nintendo (Adventure)
Release: 11/00
N64
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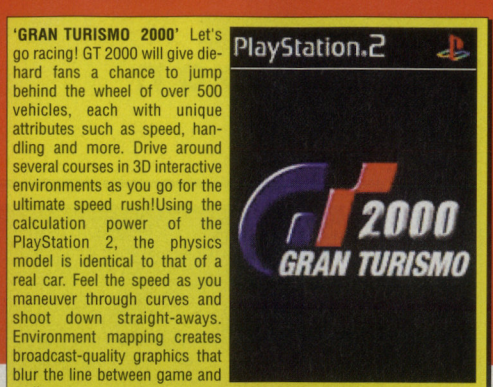
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Sony (Simulation)
Release: 11/00
PSX2
$48.95



'TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT' features more than 30 characters who have appeared throughout the Tekken series since the first arcade game. Pick your favorites and join the fight as you use the unique strengths of each combatant to annihilate your opponents. A special tag-team mode creates new combinations of attacking never before possible. Sophisticated and highly detailed backgrounds.

Sony (Simulation)
Release: 11/00
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EA (Roleplaying)
Release: 11/00
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EA (Roleplaying)
Release: NOW
PSX
$39.95



'QUAKE 3' Place yourself in 1 of 26 futuristic arenas where the goal is simple: kill or be killed. True Net play to waste Dreamcast & PC users around the world. Over 30 characters on 26 levels; & up to 4 can battle in split-screen modes. Single, Death Match, Team Death Match, Capture the Flag, &Tournament modes.

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Nintendo (Adventure)
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Release: 10/00

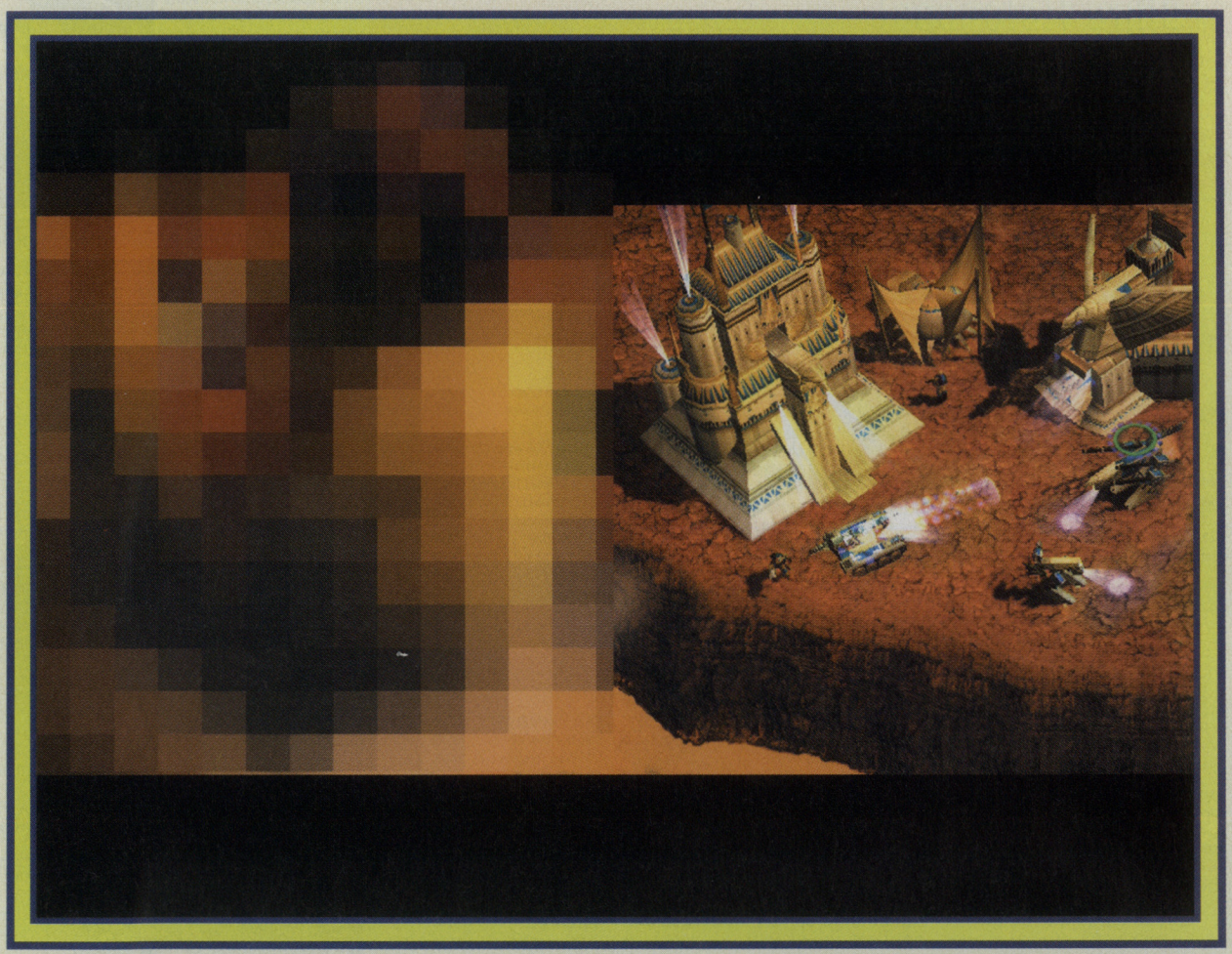
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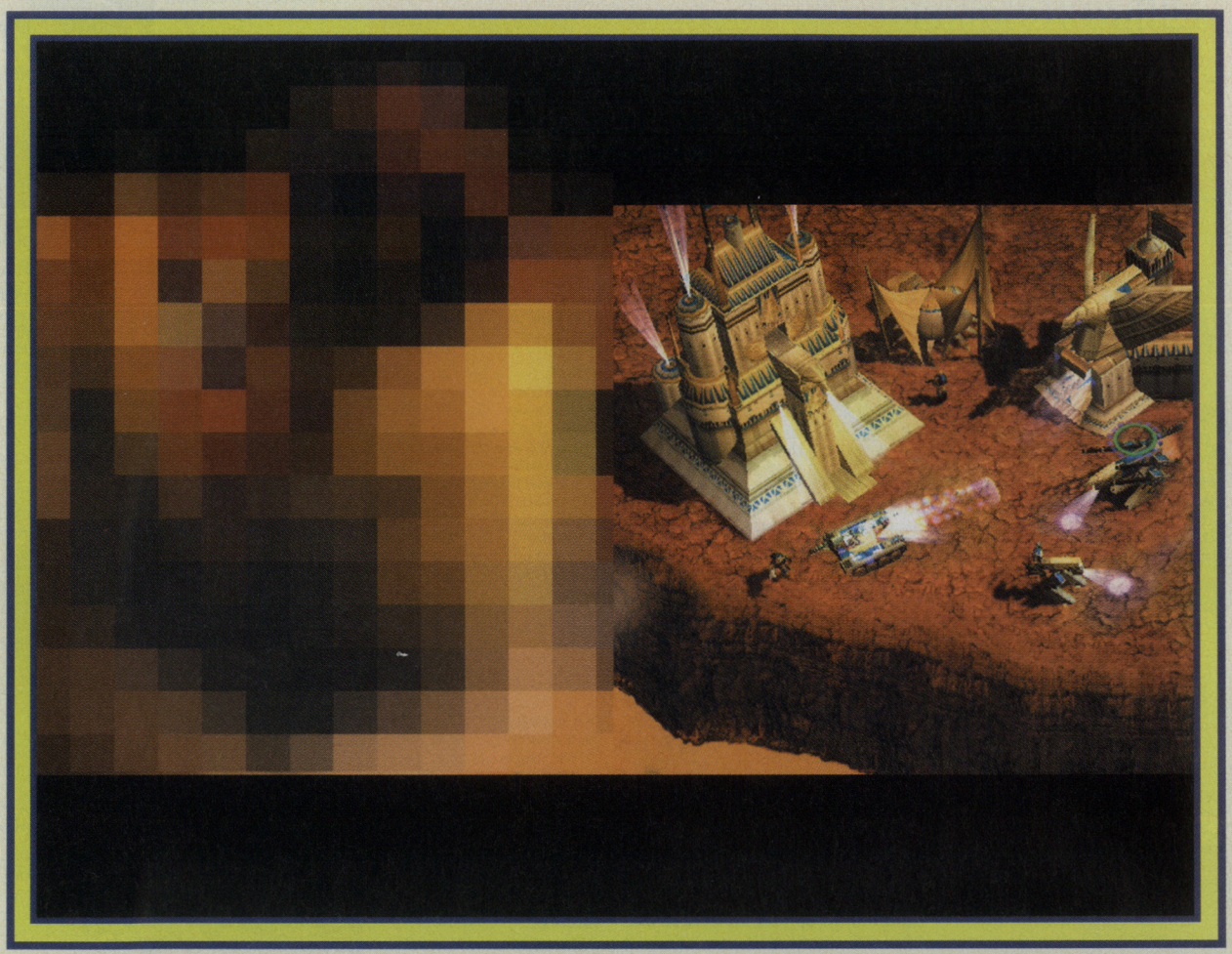
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