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AUGUST 2000 #9

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The First Review—The Inside Story

DIABLO II

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What Blizzard Doesn't Want You to Know!

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Blizzard Explains Why It Changed the Design

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Diablo

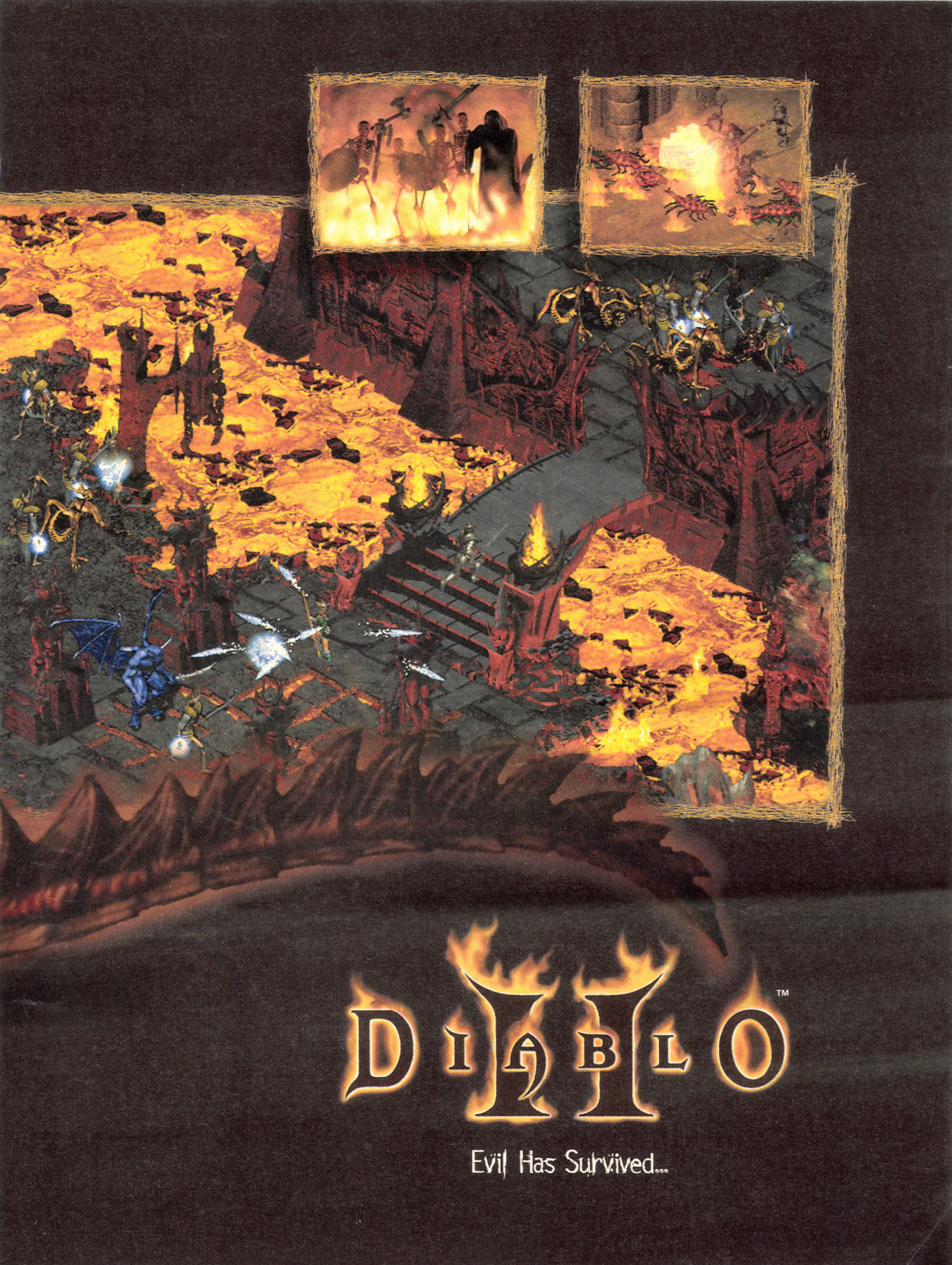
Often using nightmares to weaken and corrupt those who can best serve his dark purposes, Diablo employs illusion and fear as his greatest weapons in the tireless battle against Order.

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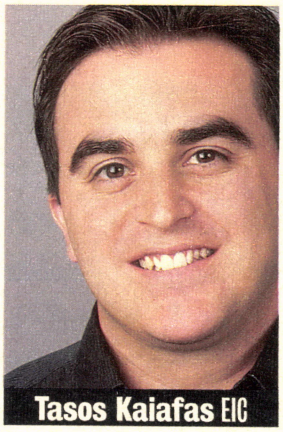
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DIABLO II™
Evil Has Survived...

Team Talk

Comments, suggestions? Send any feedback to ipcgletters@incite.com
fax: 415 865 5201

Blizzard is one of the few, if not the only, PC game developer to never have made a bad game.


Tasos Kaiafas EIC

Psst... I'll let you in on a little secret. *Diablo II* is out! So if you're finding the streets empty lately, you should know that not everyone's on a $399 British Airways flight to London. They're on a $50 trip to *Diablo II* land, and they won't be coming back anytime soon – the game world in this sequel is a whole lot bigger than the first.

Okay, so I'm exaggerating a bit (but not about the game world). What really impresses me more than the popularity of *Diablo II* is how Blizzard Entertainment can consistently make great games. Say "*WarCraft*," "*StarCraft*," and "*Diablo*" in gaming circles and it's like saying "*Star Wars*," "*Star Trek*," and "*Alien*" in the movie biz. But, unlike some of the sequels to these movies (I'll spare you the Jar Jar jokes), fans have never been disappointed by any Blizzard game.

Blizzard is one of the few, if not the only, PC game developer to never have made a stinker. What makes this more impressive is that many well-respected game developers have at least one skeleton in their closets. Westwood has *Lands of Lore II* and *III;* LucasArts has *Indiana Jones' Desktop Adventures* and *Star Wars: Yoda Stories;* Maxis has *SimCopter*. Blizzard came close with *WarCraft Adventures* but it wisely killed the ill-conceived game, keeping its track record clean.

Diablo II won't disappoint you, either. Darren Gladstone's review in this issue says it all: five stars and our Golden-i award. But you don't really care what we think about it, do you? You're probably already playing your preordered copy or are about to start. So for you *Diablo* freaks, we had our good friends at Brady Games provide you with an excerpt from the official *Diablo II* guide book to help you get started.

As I write this, we've just gotten back from the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), and for our show report we cut through all the hoopla to bring you the latest info on the games you want to know about. There are some fantastic titles coming, and I can't wait to get my hands on them.

But for now, my sorcerer is dangerously low on mana and the Burning Dead are coming after me, so I'll sign off.

Meet the Editorial Team

Joe Vallina



Deputy EIC

Joe can't stop making music with the *MTV Music Generator*, and he's undaunted by his co-workers' incessant complaints about the noise. His new album is aptly entitled *Bite Me*.

Gary Eng Walk



Senior Editor

Gary had the unenviable job of plowing through thousands of E3 press releases to put together this month's "Last Word." He could've just read one and saved himself the trouble.

John Gaudiosi



Senior Editor

We welcome John to our staff from our cohorts at Web site MCV Now. Now he'll be able to afford shirts other than the hockey jerseys he seems to wear every day. Welcome aboard!

Darren Gladstone



Senior Editor

Darren graced us with his presence this month just long enough to turn in his *Diablo II* review and announce that he was now ON VACATION. Little did he know that we DIDN'T CARE.

Steve Klett



Senior Editor

Steve was beaten about the head and neck after he gave *Diakatana* a three. The offending editors didn't take kindly to his messing up their preconceived notions with his objectiveness.

William O'Neal



Senior Editor

No, dear readers, that black thing hanging down the side of Wil's face is not, contrary to popular belief, a leech. Nor is it a spliff. Nor a huge scar to rival Dave's. It is a solitary dreadlock.

Dave Rees



Multimedia Editor

Dave's new penchant for exotic adventure is troubling many of his co-workers. C'mon, Dave, kayaking in the Pacific is one thing, but do you really have to do naked crocodile riding?

Paul Semel



Entertainment Editor

Paul was on a mission at this year's E3: to avoid other *incite PC Gaming* editors at all costs. This wasn't too difficult, as he was the only one not too drunk to get to the show floor.

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it RULETH



"It's the perfect real-time strategy game...one of the most important new RTS games in a long time."

- Gamecenter.com
Rating: 8 out of 10



"...it's the perfect title for jaded RTS fans that need a breath of fresh air!"

- PC.IGN.com
Rating: 8.4 out of 10

"...oozes innovative ideas and gamplay... gamers will appreciate this rare treat"

- Games Domain
Rating: Silver Medal

"...Majesty is a fascinating and fun romp full of originality..."

– CGW
Rating: Four Stars



"If Majesty helps set a trend, then 2000 might go down in history as the year in which gaming changed forever."

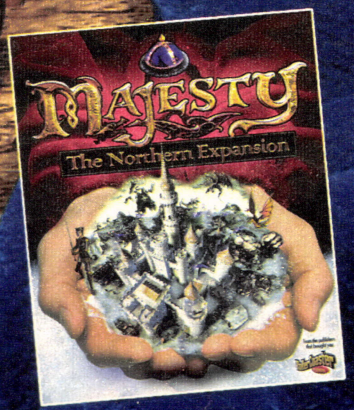
– Gamespot.com
Rating: 8.8 out of 10

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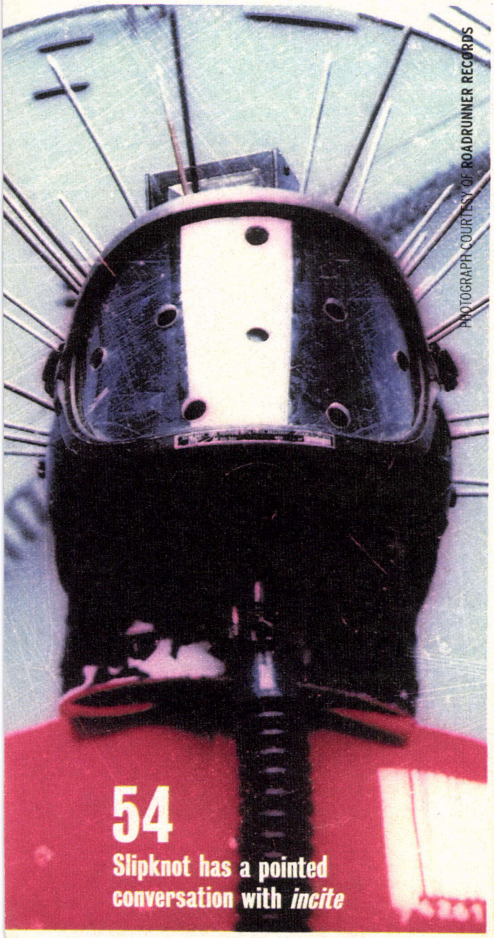
It's one of the hottest bands around – and the group's members are rabid computer gamers.

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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF **ROADRUNNER RECORDS**

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PHOTOGRAPH BY **RAJAT GHOSH**

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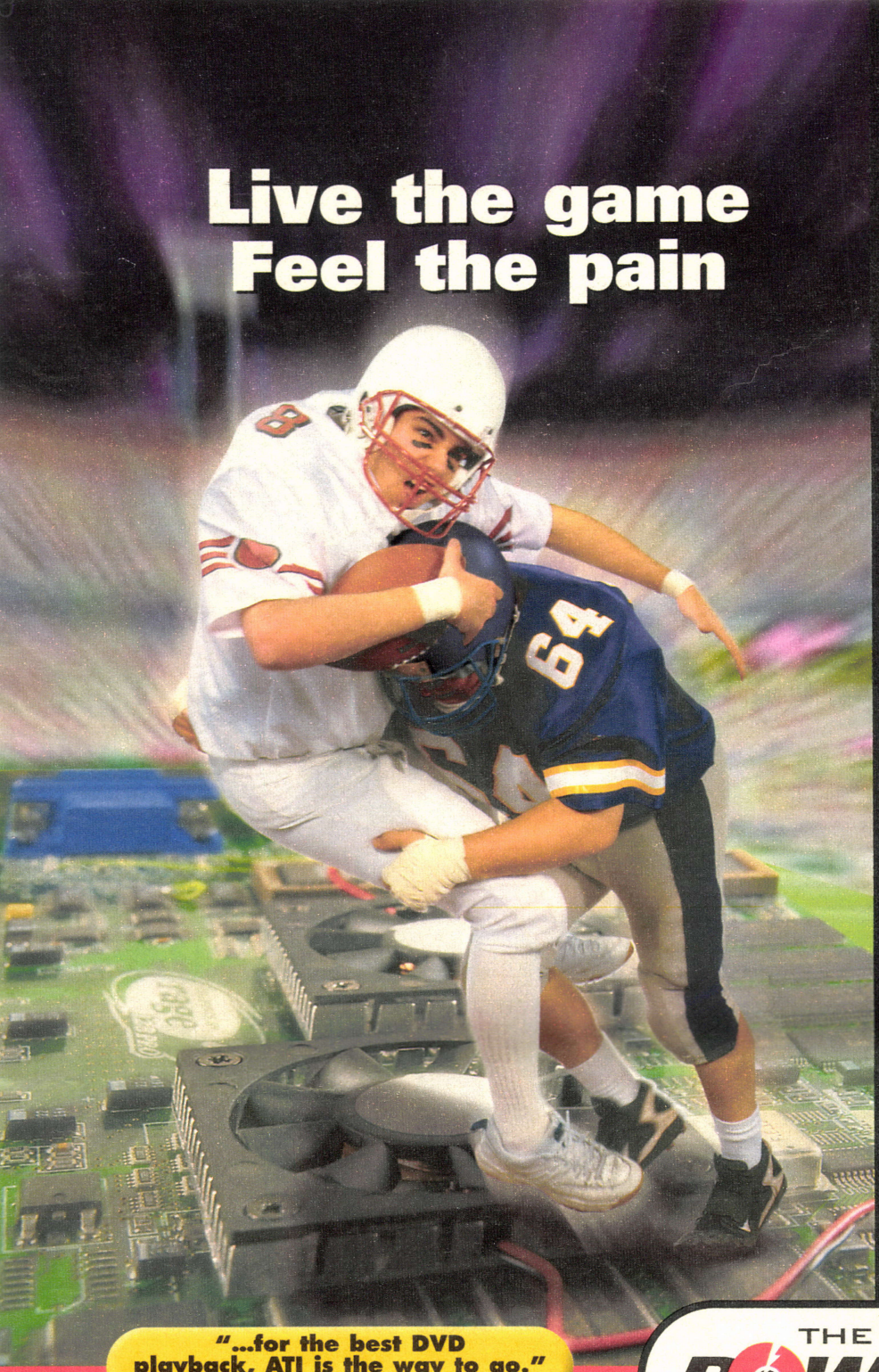
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Stewie takes over the world in *Risk II*



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Somethin' For The People lets loose about gaming for the people

Live the game
Feel the pain



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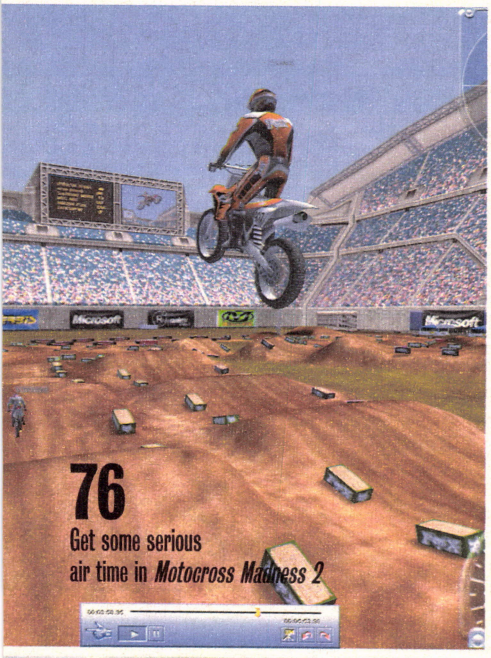
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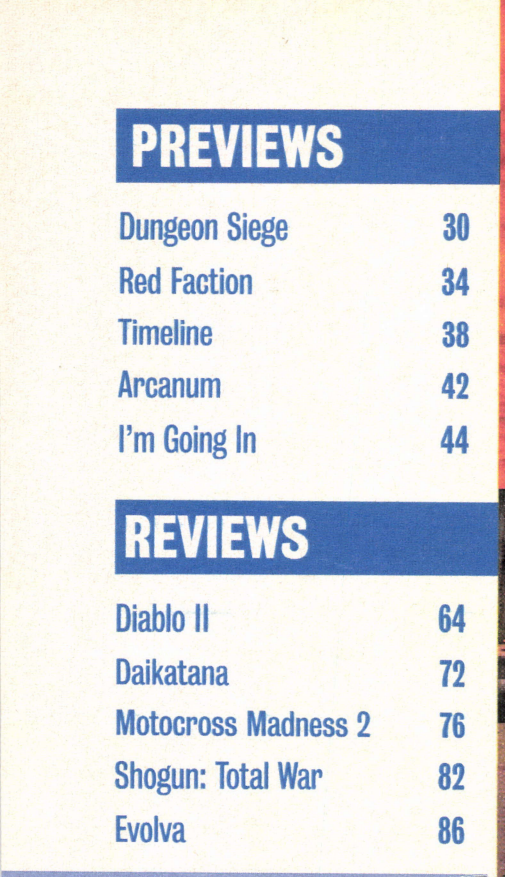
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ON THE incite CD-ROM



Welcome to the August edition of the *incite PC Gaming* CD-ROM. Our big demo this month is none other than Ion Storm's three-years-in-the-making *Daikatana*. Was the superlong wait for John Romero's magnum opus worth it? Play the demo now and judge for yourself. And make sure you check out this month's *inciteTV*, which features some hot video trailers of *Black & White*, *MechWarrior 4*, *Heavy Metal*, *WarCraft III* and an all-new episode of *Electric Playground*.

To get the disc out of the cover, first peel back the access flap located on the inside of the front cover. Then carefully slide the disc out, and plop it in your disc drive.



Ground Control



Warlords Battlecry

VIDEOS

Heavy Metal

This beautiful trailer shows just how far this game has come since we last saw it a few months ago. To say that *Heavy Metal* is a good-looking game is a gross understatement. This was easily the most colorful game at E3, we think you'll agree.

MechWarrior 4

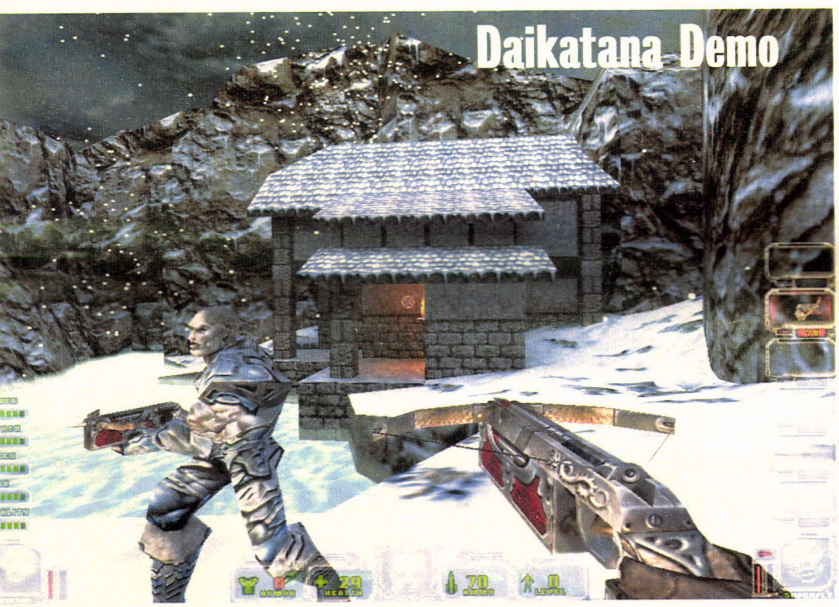
Those huge stomping mechanical beasts are back for another visit. This time they look even better than ever. But why take our word for it? Check out the video for yourself.

Black & White

Peter Molyneux's latest creation was one of the most innovative games at E3. Have a peep at this trailer.

WarCraft III

Nobody holds a candle to the quality work displayed in this magnificent new video. We're talking Oscar quality.



PLAYABLE DEMOS

Daikatana

So you thought it would never be finished? Think again. Not only do we have a huge review of *Daikatana*, but we also have the playable demo.

Ground Control

A surprisingly hip 3D strategy game with a focus on squad-based warfare.

Gunship!

Time to take to the skies in one bad-ass whirlybird.

Warlords Battlecry

The *Warlords* legacy gets another face-lift and goes real-time.

Lemmings Revolution

Once again, those little lemmings are on a crash course with mass suicide. Save them before it's too late!

TOOLBOX

Tweaks

Okay, gamers, we know you've been playing *Soldier of Fortune* to death. We hope it runs to your liking, but if it runs like molasses on your system, you can use our tweak to speed things up. We've also got a killer cheat guide. Plus, we brought back our classic *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena* tweak guides for your fragging pleasure. Try not to hurt yourself, okay?

Drivers, Patches, Gamespy

We have all the drivers and patches for the games you're playing now. We also bring to you, once again, our exclusive version of 3DMark 2000. Use it to test your system.

CD SUPPORT

Having problems with your CD-ROM? Let us know, and we'll help you fix it or replace it free. Email us at **cdsupport@incitepcgaming.com** or send a letter along to *incite PC Gaming*, 650 Townsend St., Suite 305, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Spill Yer Guts!

Got a burning question you need answered? Want a gaming matter cleared up once and for all? Need to vent some bile? We'll accept any and all of your thoughts. This, your letters forum, is the place to shout. Send all *intelligent* missives to **incite PC Gaming, 650 Townsend St., Suite 305, San Francisco, CA 94103 USA**. Alternatively, put finger to keyboard, and type to us via email at **letters@ipcg.com.**

LETTERS FROM READERS

"This is another example of teaching blatant racism to younger PC gamers, and I will not be a party to it."

We Knew It Was Coming

It is with great dismay that I write this letter to you. I am a 32-year-old, white, Jewish male who takes great insult at the racial stereotyping presented in your June 2000 issue. *(Ed. note: Order back issues at www.incite.com.)*

In that issue, on pages 86-88, you have a review of Electronic Arts' new game *Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed.* On page 87, there is a sidebar with the caption "Save your letters – it was the black guy's idea." It shows pictures of a young, black male being encouraged to steal his boss' Porsche Boxster.

The captions under the pictures are racist. This assumes that all young black males are willing to steal instead of work hard and be successful. Also, with the caption of "Free Mumia!" under one of the pictures, this assumes that all young, black males are supportive of a vicious cop killer. Needless to say, this is another example of teaching blatant racism to younger PC gamers, and I will not be a party to it. I am canceling my subscription.

Jason I. Block
Brooklyn, NY

Jason, what part of "Save your letters" didn't you understand?

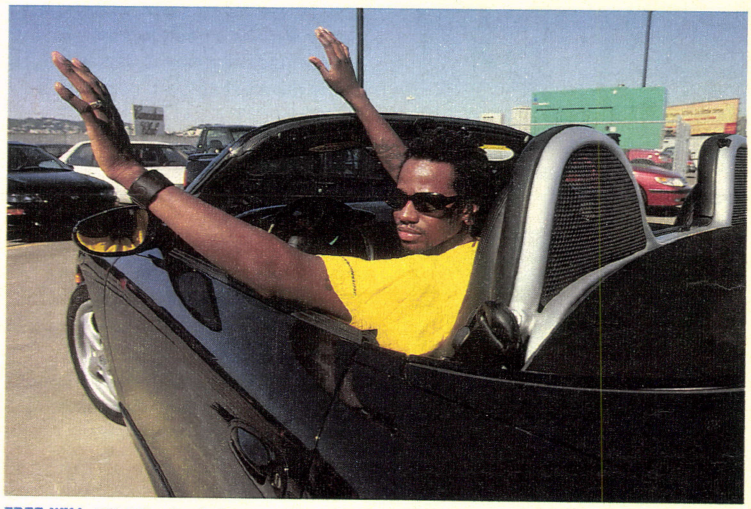
incite Ebonics Lesson

My name is Jeffrey Fihe and after reading your speakers review in the June 2000 "Wringer" section, I was inspired. I conducted my own experiment like this. I took my headphones and I did the "Angry Neighbor Test." The neighbors never came over to my house to tell me to turn it down. Well, I will keep trying. Anyway, do you think that you could print something I write in *incite* every month or so? I think it would kick ass. Even better, I could talk like a rapper. Here is what I would be like:

Yo, diz be MetalDoggF. I be playin' my PC gamez ova da weekend. I be reckognizin' that people don't be buyin' games, just 'cauze they be havin' bad graphikz. They be trippin'! They be some phat-ass games out there. Peace out!

Jeffrey "MetalDoggF" Fihe
Via the Internet

Props. Dats cool; we be kickin' it hood-style wit all the chill scribes we can handle fo' now....We got the fire.



FREE WIL! **Wil O'Neal – is he a mere magazine editor or stereotypical representation of the entire African-American race? You be the judge at letters@ipcg.com.**

Another Satisfied Customer

I'm a first-time reader of *incite PC Gaming.* (I actually bought the magazine because of Trent Reznor being on the cover.) I'm a huge NIN fan and I love PC gaming. I must say that you guys do make reviews pretty fun. Keep up the good work.

Jake Dalphond
St.-Laurent,
Quebec, Canada

Prozac Candidates "R" Us

I quote: "Like seeing *Episode One* – a serious letdown," (June 2000, page 96). I have seen the new *Star Wars* movie and can't find what it is that is so offensive about the movie. I am tired of all these wannabe s—heads deciding what is or isn't good. I got a message for you crackheads: Until you come up with something better, SHUT THE HELL UP!

Mike
Via the Internet

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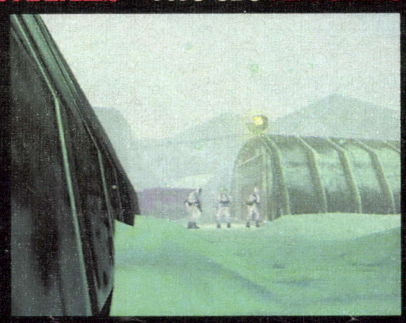
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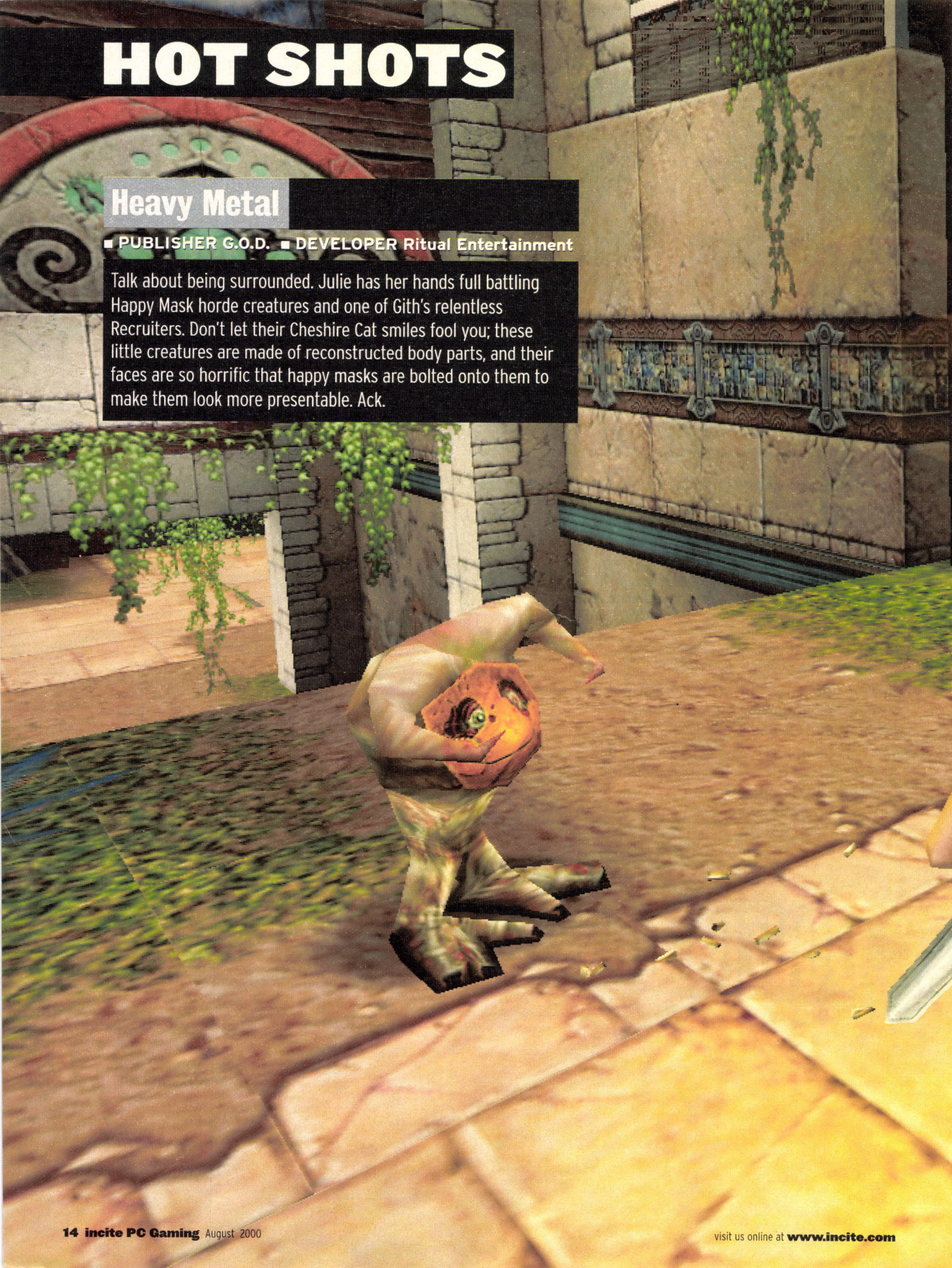
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HOT SHOTS



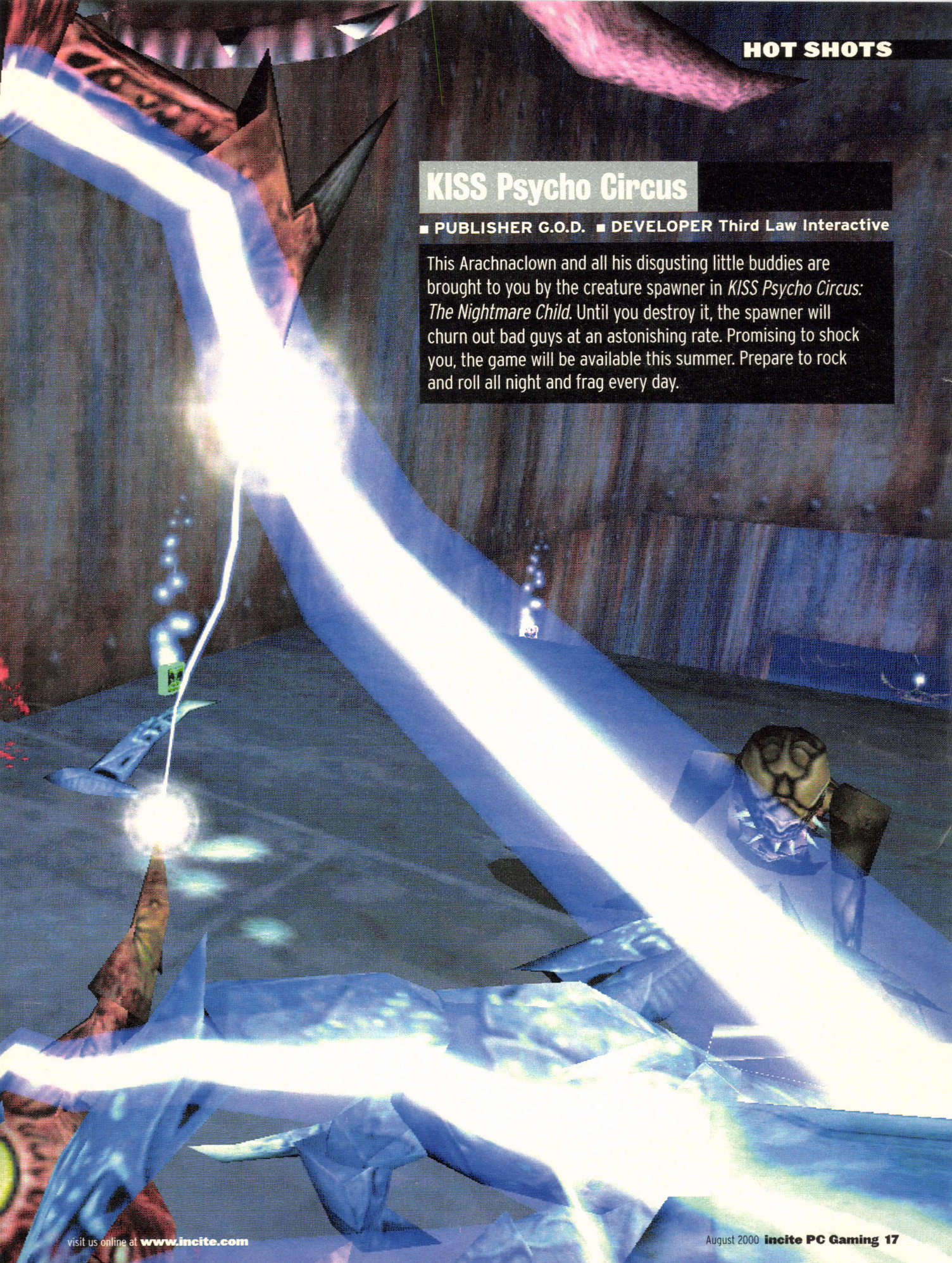
Heavy Metal

■ PUBLISHER G.O.D. ■ DEVELOPER Ritual Entertainment

Talk about being surrounded. Julie has her hands full battling Happy Mask horde creatures and one of Gith's relentless Recruiters. Don't let their Cheshire Cat smiles fool you; these little creatures are made of reconstructed body parts, and their faces are so horrific that happy masks are bolted onto them to make them look more presentable. Ack.


WANTS
In Peace

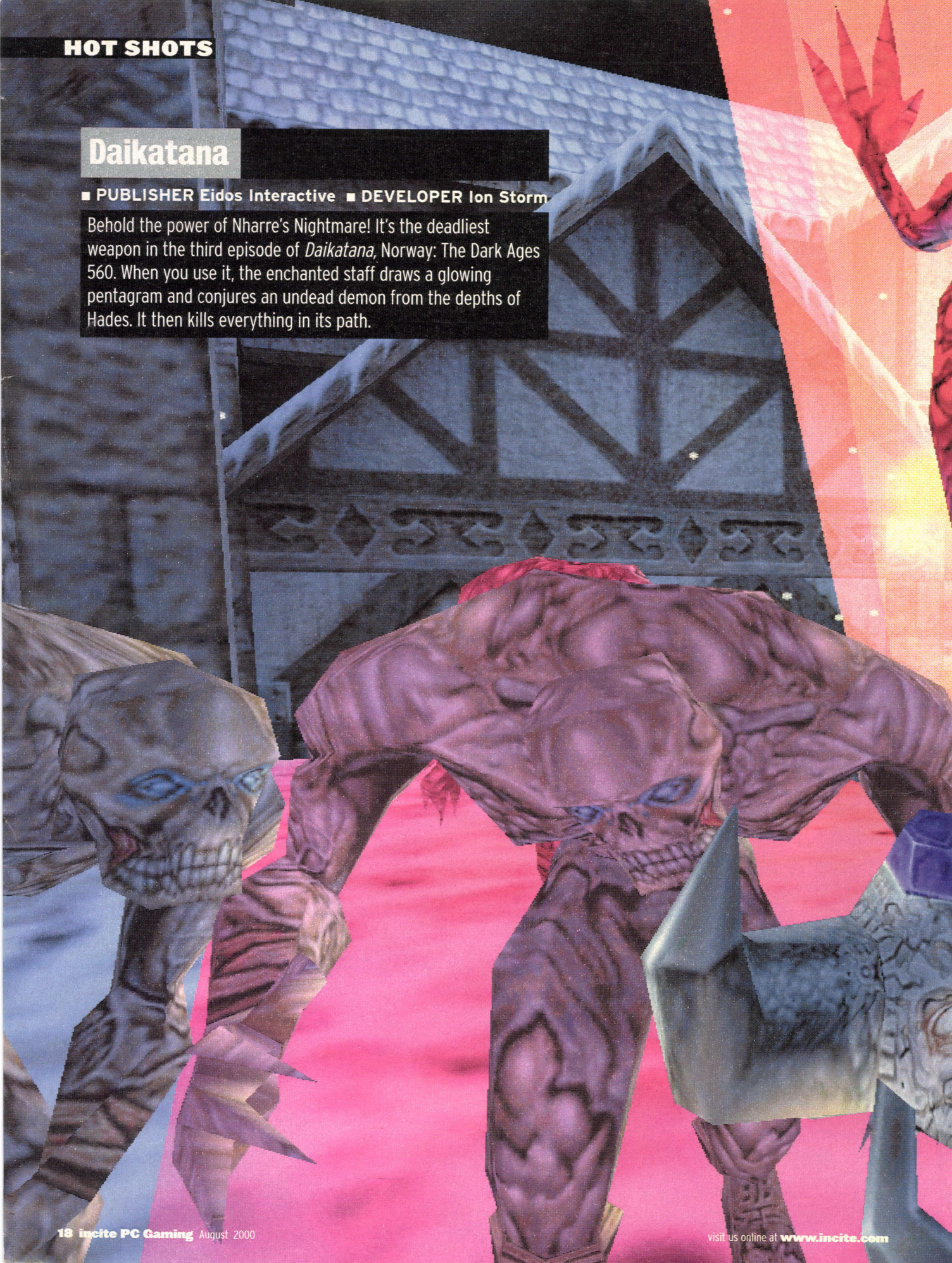




KISS Psycho Circus

■ PUBLISHER G.O.D. ■ DEVELOPER Third Law Interactive

This Arachnaclown and all his disgusting little buddies are brought to you by the creature spawner in *KISS Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child.* Until you destroy it, the spawner will churn out bad guys at an astonishing rate. Promising to shock you, the game will be available this summer. Prepare to rock and roll all night and frag every day.



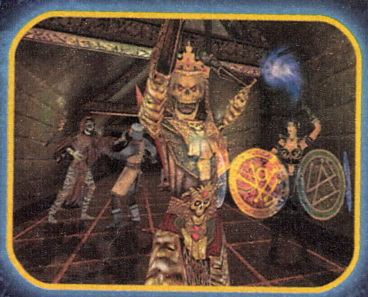
Daikatana

■ PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive ■ DEVELOPER Ion Storm

Behold the power of Nharre's Nightmare! It's the deadliest weapon in the third episode of *Daikatana*, Norway: The Dark Ages 560. When you use it, the enchanted staff draws a glowing pentagram and conjures an undead demon from the depths of Hades. It then kills everything in its path.



THE COURAGE OF LEGENDS IS







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Now, for the first time, you can summon allies over the Internet as you prepare for the ultimate battle. Face sinister monsters, devious traps and cunning enemies. The power is in your hands, the outcome is uncertain. Do you have what it takes to become a Legend?

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LEGENDS of Might and Magic™

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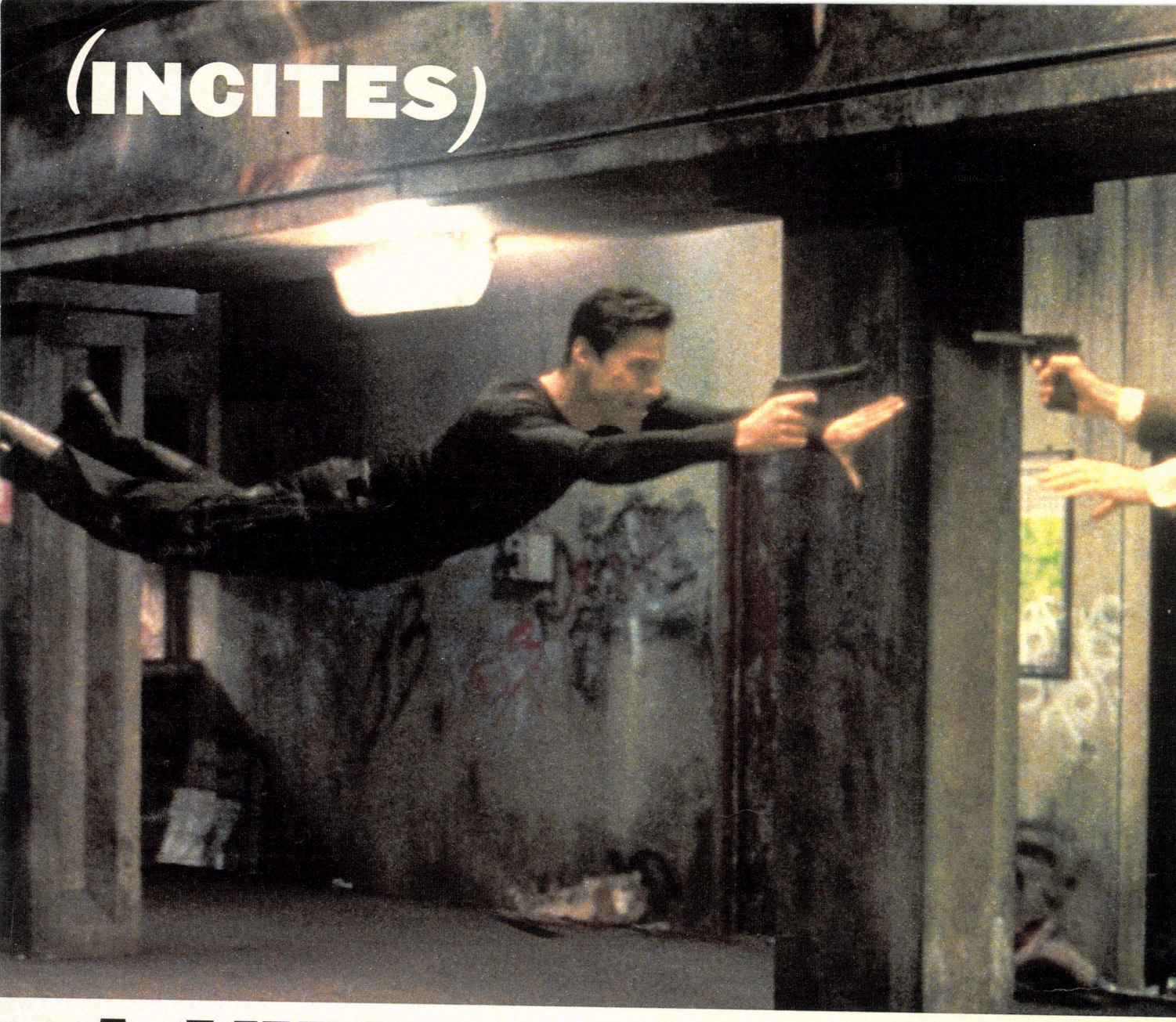
CREATIVE EAX

3dfx

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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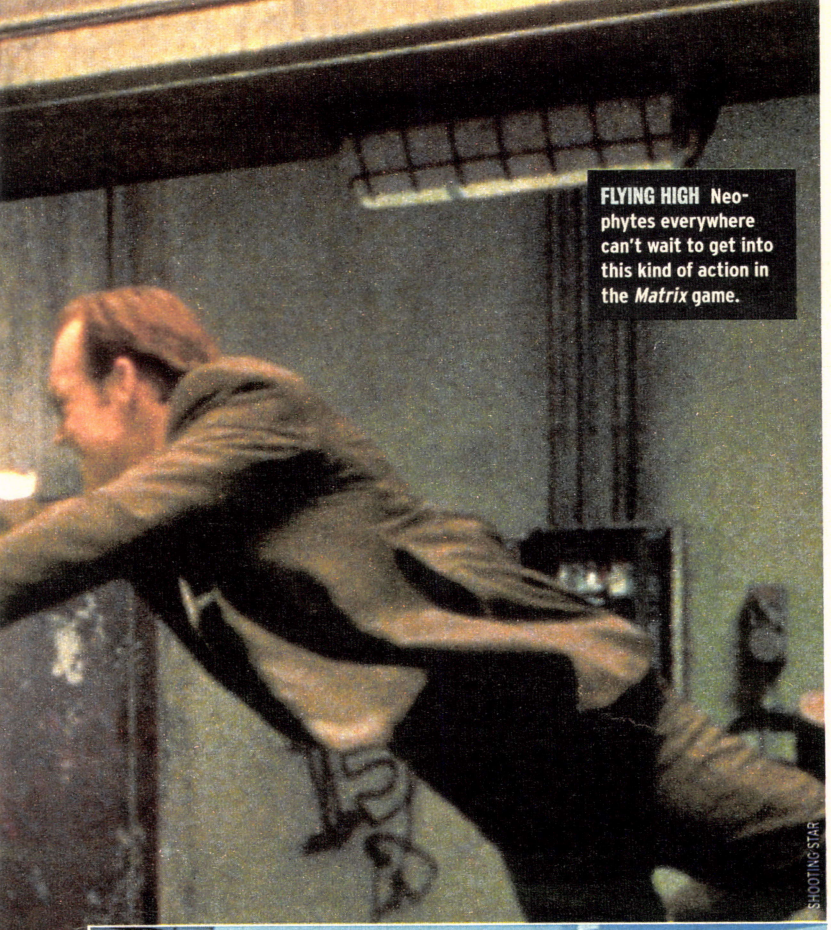
A VIRTUAL REALITY

A *Matrix* game is a sure thing, but when will someone make an official announcement about who's gonna make it?

Ever since Warner Bros. asked, "What Is the Matrix?" last year, video game fans have been waiting for the studio to officially announce the winner of the most coveted sci-fi movie license since *Star Wars*.

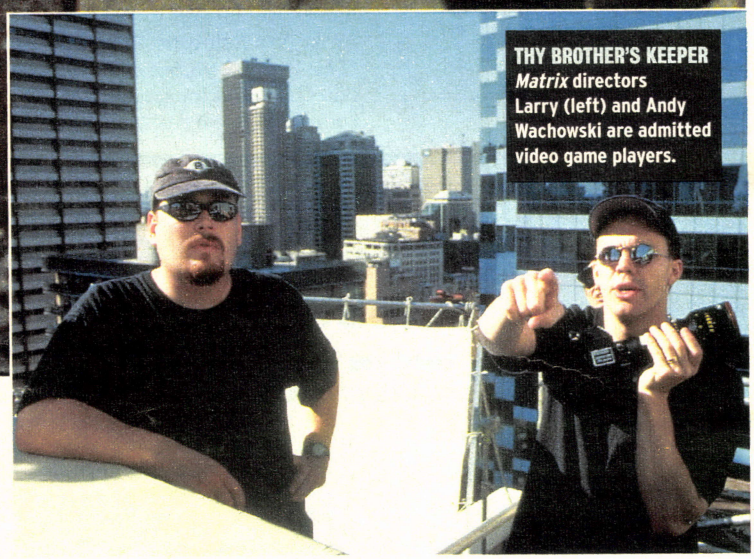
So, who's doing the *Matrix* video game? There's still no official word, but our sources say Interplay will publish the PlayStation 2 and PC game for Shiny Entertainment in time for the sequel's 2002 theatrical release. A source who formerly worked with Shiny told *incite PC Gaming* that Andy and Larry Wachowski – the directors and guardians of the *Matrix* franchise – visited Shiny's Laguna Beach, California, studios last year and were impressed with *Messiah*. That game's versatile and lusty engine is the front-runner in powering any kind of *Matrix* game Shiny would develop.

By all accounts, the Wachowski brothers are gung-ho about the project. "Andy and Larry love playing games, and they know what they want to do," Shiny President Dave Perry was reported as saying last year. "They really care. And they want total control over it. I was actually offered the chance to make a *Matrix* game about two years ago, but I was too busy with *Messiah*. I've spoken with them again since the movie came out, but now there are lots of people in the running. I'd love to make it. But deals in Hollywood take a long time to



FLYING HIGH Neophytes everywhere can't wait to get into this kind of action in the *Matrix* game.

SHOOTING STAR



THY BROTHER'S KEEPER *Matrix* directors Larry (left) and Andy Wachowski are admitted video game players.

complete, and it'll be a long time before any of this gets settled."

In an online chat on the official *Matrix* Web site last year, the Wachowskis revealed their thoughts on the future game. "If things work out the way we want them to, the video game will be released when the next movie comes out, and it will actually have something to do with the movie."

Since then, Perry, Shiny, and Warner Bros. have been conspicuously silent about the status of the *Matrix* games. When we contacted Perry last month, he said he couldn't comment on the rumored deal.

A Warner Bros. licensing representative also would not comment on this story, but said the movie studio would like the video game announcement to come sooner rather than later. Many thought this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo was going to be the moment *Matrix* fans have been waiting for, but E3 came and went without a peep from the usual suspects. It's likely that by the time you read this, official word will be out in the open. A source at Manex Entertainment who worked on the special effects for the film told *incite PC Gaming* that the formal video game announcement will be made at this year's SIGGRAPH Convention (the FX industry's version of E3), held in New Orleans, July 23-28. Manex is in a position to know this because in addition to working on the movie sequels, it's also helping out with the production of the game.

Assuming Shiny is the mystery developer, can it turn around the game in time for the film's 2002 release?

Assuming Shiny is indeed the mystery developer, can it turn around the game in time for the film's 2002 release? After all, both *Messiah* and *MDK 2*, Shiny's two most recent releases, shipped late. Not to worry: Even if the Shiny folks work in "bullet time," they should have no problems meeting the deadline, especially considering any developer who's in charge of making the game would have already gotten a significant head start by the time Warner Bros. makes its official announcement.

CAN'T WAIT?

Play a *Matrix* Game — Right Now!



You can get your temporary *Matrix* gaming fix with some hot new — and free — game mods. As of this writing, the mods are available for *Half-Life* and *Quake II*, but possibly by the time you read this, *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena* mods will be on the Web as well.

There are two promising *Matrix* mods for *Half-Life:* MatrixHL and HLMatrix. The former focuses on multiplayer, and the latter concentrates primarily on single-player. You should have the best of both worlds by the time you play through both of them. In addition, there's the MatrixQ2 mod for *Quake II*.

Each of these mods tries to recreate — in different ways — all the hot action and special effects from the film. Just a few of the cool things you can do are "Matrix jumping," freezing bullets, dodging bullets, wall jumping, and firing twin pistols and machine guns John Woo-style. To get more information on the mods, including where to get them on the Web, follow the white rabbit... or go to www.incite.com.

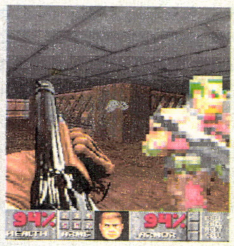
▸▸Game BRIEFS

Buzz and miscellany from the trenches

The demise of **Looking Glass Studios** was shocking for a number of reasons. The developer seemed to have a steady stream of strong titles – *Thief: The Dark Project, Flight Unlimited, System Shock* – not to mention publishing deals with heavy hitters like Eidos and Electronic Arts. "A series of events and some bad luck led to this closing," says Paul Neurath, Looking Glass' former president. "We were undercapitalized and got caught in a platform transition. We didn't close because our games weren't selling, although a blockbuster hit like *Half-Life* would have certainly helped us. This is a very sad time for us." Unfinished projects such as *Thief III* and *Jane's Attack Squadron* have all been cancelled.... **Ubi Soft** is making the most of its **Batman** cartoon-series license. *Batman Vehicle Adventure* puts you behind the wheel of the Batmobile and the Batcycle in 40 episode-based missions. Up to eight players will able to partake in multiplayer battles. A PC version of the game should ship at the same Bat time, same Bat-hour as the PlayStation game in October.... According to a source at **Disney Interactive,** the company could enter the profitable amusement park sim genre and go up against Hasbro Interactive's **RollerCoaster Tycoon** and Electronic Arts' **Sim Theme Park** by leveraging its Disneyland or Disney World brands. It could have the game ready as early as 2001.... *Playboy* published an interview with South Park co-creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone in its June issue. When asked about the merchandising of the show, Parker responds: "Comedy Central owns *South Park*, we don't. Comedy Central can do whatever the f—they want with these characters. And they've made all this s—and these video games that we



LORD OF THE RINGS



DOOM

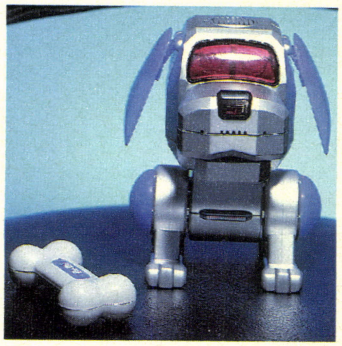


THIEF

f—ing hate, and that's been another thorn in our side."... Don't fret too much about the rumors that **Peter Molyneux** is abandoning PC development and moving toward making games solely for video game consoles. Electronic Arts, which is publishing the star designer's next game, **Black & White,** assures us Molyneux hasn't soured on the PC platform.... EA, meanwhile, has officially pulled the plug on its series of **Jane's combat sims**.... E.T. phoned home in '82, but expect a resurgence in popularity for the candy-munching alien when the movie is rereleased in theaters soon. Industrial Light & Magic is working on the special edition (as it did with the *Star Wars Trilogy* rerelease). NewKidCo, meanwhile, has bought the rights to publish **E.T. The Extra Terrestrial** games for the PC and consoles.... The most confusing part of the fallout from **Infogrames'** purchase of **GT Interactive** is Infogrames' decision to completely abandon the GT brand. There was no sign of the GT name in Infogrames' booth at May's E3, underscoring the fact that all GT games – yes, even **Unreal** – from now on will simply bear the Infogrames logo. Any gamer will tell you that GT Interactive, not Infogrames, is the stronger brand name.... First **Wolfenstein,** now **Doom.** The classic first-person shooter is the latest id Software game to get a makeover. **John Carmack** is leading the effort to bring us *Doom III*. "We are working on a new *Doom* game, focusing on the single-player game experience, and using brand-new technology in almost every aspect of it," he said in his plan file. Bad idea? Carmack doesn't think so. He and his id crew feel so strongly about pursuing development of the game that they told Kevin Cloud and Adrian Carmack – the company's controlling partners – that they would resign if the project didn't get the green light.... EA, Infogrames, and Hasbro Interactive are all rumored to be in the running for the hot game license for the movie based on ***The Lord of the Rings.*** If one of these companies snags the rights, consumers may have a pair of competing games to choose from when the first film, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* hits theaters during Christmas 2001. Sierra is already developing a massively multiplayer Middle Earth game.

Cyber Canine

This little guy's all bark *and* all byte



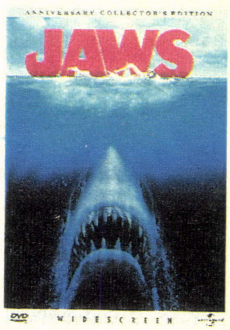
THROW HIM A FRICKIN' BONE
Is that a Tamagotchi in his pocket or is he just happy to see you?

Even if you could afford to buy Sony's $2,500 Aibo, you're out of luck: The supply of robodogs has dried up because their "adoption program" has officially ended. There's still hope if you're looking to add a little puppy love to your life, though. Tiger Electronics is throwing you a bone with its far more cost-conscious cyberpet. The $30 Poo-Chi reacts to the sound of your voice and would make David Letterman proud with its arsenal of Stupid Pet Tricks. Poo-Chi's repertoire includes singing, playing games, and dancing on its tiptoes. Its LED eyes can be a little freaky (in a *Battlestar Galactica*/Cylon kind of way), but otherwise, Poo-Chi is a worthy follow-up to Furby, Tiger's last flashy e-critter.

DVD OF THE MONTH

Monster Hit

Just when you thought it was safe to power up your DVD player



Quick: Name Hollywood's first summer blockbuster. Hint: It tastes just like chicken. It's been 25 years since the most infamous great white shark first made us afraid to go into the water. Universal is celebrating the milestone with *Jaws: Anniversary Edition* ($26.98). This deluxe DVD contains deleted scenes, outtakes, and original storyboard drawings. Better still, a "Making of Jaws" featurette – complete with a Steven Spielberg retrospective and behind-the-scenes footage – will have fans champing at the bit (or chomping at the swimmer, as it were). The anniversary edition washes up onto shore July 11.



SICK AS HE EVER WAS Tony Hawk is a living legend in skateboarding circles, and now he's coming to your PC.



Shred Again

Tony proves PC skateboarding is not a crime

The *Tony Hawk* games are proving to be a huge moneymaker for Activision.

PC gamers who have watched their console counterparts handle the half-pipes in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* needn't be jealous anymore. In addition to PlayStation, Dreamcast, and Game Boy flavors, Activision plans to release a PC version of the popular game's sequel.

Due later this summer, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater2* will have the same intuitive control that made the original such an addictive game, plus a new skatepark editor and more vertigo-inducing tricks that you definitely should not be trying in real life. There are also more star skaters, including Steve Caballero, Eric Koston, and Rodney Mullen.

The *Tony Hawk* games are proving to be a huge moneymaker for Activision. The original PlayStation game has sold well over 1 million copies, and the more recently released Nintendo 64 version is on track to sell just as many. We'll see how it does on PC.

YEAH, WHATEVER!

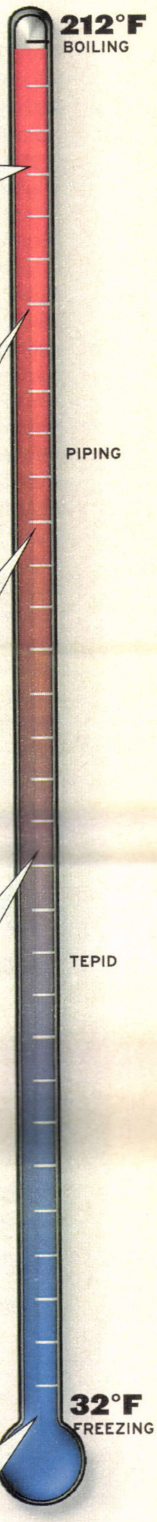
HAS IT COME TO THIS?



Daikatana fanatics who bought Prima's official strategy guide were treated to a racy centerfold pinup of its author, Stevie Case, a.k.a. **KILLCREEK**, whose claim to fame is beating John Romero in a one-on-one *Quake* deathmatch. (She was also a level designer for *Daikatana*.) While we're not quite sure how this helps you play *Daikatana*, it sure beats a glossy pictorial of Bill Gates in *Windows 2000 for Dummies*, doesn't it?

Hot and Cold

Time to bring out the thermometer to gauge the latest happenings in the game industry



Doom III

John Carmack of id software announces plans for another *Doom* game.

Voodoo5

After a minor weeklong delay, 3dfx Interactive's 5500 AGP starts showing up in stores. Look, ma, no glitches!

Vivid's Interactive Mind Teazzer

The porn... uh, adult-entertainment company released this interactive DVD in which you match up the heads, breasts, and crotches of their actresses. Sure beats Tetris.

Acclaim

The game giant appealed NASDAQ's decision to remove its listing from the stock exchange. We hear there's an opening on Brazil's Sao Paulo Bovespa index.

Jar Jar Binks in *Obi-Wan*

The most hated creature since the Ewok makes a cameo in LucasArts' upcoming *Star Wars* game. This is bad news – unless, of course, you can slice the blathering idiot in half with a lightsaber.

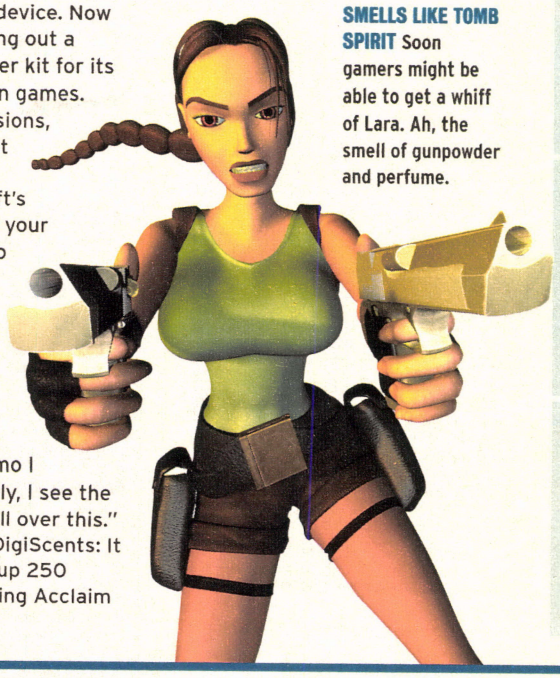
Get Your Odor Running

Look out, world — smelly games are on the way

There are plenty of games out there that stink. Soon, though, games using a new technology from DigiScents will make them literally reek. When DigiScents first opened its doors last year, it promised the ability to deliver smells right to your nostrils through a USB or COMM port-based device. Now DigiScents is farming out a ScentWare developer kit for its iSmell technology in games.

Imagine explosions, flowers, gunfire, salt water, burning rubber, or Lara Croft's perfume assaulting your senses as you try to fight off some undead hordes. Is this really necessary? Rob Dyer, President of Eidos Interactive, seems to think so. "Once I saw the demo I was sold.... Basically, I see the gaming [industry] all over this." So far, so good for DigiScents: It has already signed up 250 developers – including Acclaim and Ubi Soft.

Developers are now able to encode most scents into games, even create new, exciting offending odors. iSmell-enabled games should be trickling in by Christmastime.



SMELLS LIKE TOMB SPIRIT Soon gamers might be able to get a whiff of Lara. Ah, the smell of gunpowder and perfume.

CAMPAIGN ROAD SHOW

Every month our readers scrutinize the print and TV media for inventive, humorous, or off-the-wall adverts. Here are this month's picks.

TOP PRINT ADS FOR MAY

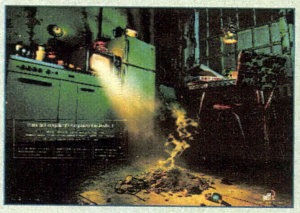
1 RED STORM
RAINBOW SIX COVERT OPS

Talk about bold messages. This ad proclaims, "A Soldier Isn't Born. He's Made." Throw us some camo and ammo; We're ready to enlist right now.



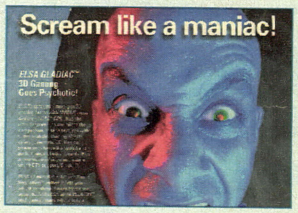
2 3DFX
VOODOO5

The ad shows a Voodoo5-powered microwave reducing a poor lad into a pile of ashes. That's what he deserves for trying to install a state-of-the-art card into a kitchen appliance.



3 ELSA
GLADIAC

Elsa's new Gladiac card has an nVidia GeFoce2 on board, so we understand wholeheartedly why this guy wants to scream in triumph. We can't explain the glowing green eyes, though.



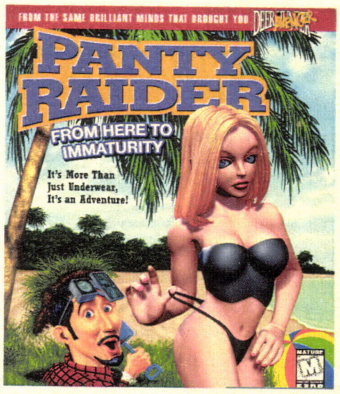
BIG BROTHER BEGINS THE CRACKDOWN

Politicians try to get retailers to quit selling Mature-rated video games to persons younger than 17 years old

Uncle Sam's assault on video games continues. Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan and nine U.S. senators mailed a letter to the heads of K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and Target, urging them either to pull all Mature-rated games from their shelves or to stop selling them to anyone younger than 17 years old. So far, however, the retailers aren't electing to stop selling these controversial games.

Senator Joseph Lieberman (D.-Connecticut), a longtime opponent of wicked games, sent out a second letter to retailers in May that reiterated the importance of not letting the likes of *Panty Raider* and *Driver* fall into the wrong hands. "There is a significant core of increasingly graphic, gruesome, and perverse games that, despite being rated for adults, are commonly played by children," wrote Lieberman. The senator also cited last year's Senate hearing in which game publishers reluctantly admitted that much of their marketing efforts for M-rated games were aimed at kids. Lieberman is critical of the ESRB system itself, saying that parents still don't realize the differences between an E- and an M-rated game. He wants to pass a bill that requires all companies in the entertainment industry – including movie and gaming firms – to adopt the same ratings. The industry, not surprisingly, gives such a bill an "I" for inane.

Lieberman is critical of the ESRB system itself.



QUOTES+QUIPS

GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE GAMES YOU PLAY

WE ASKED GAME DEVELOPERS:

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST PC GAME PET PEEVE?

Dan Connors, LucasArts *(SW: Episode I – Obi Wan)*



I hate when you are winning a single-player sports game and all of a sudden the artificial intelligence starts cheating in order to get the win. Shaq misses three straight dunks, Chris Carter drops two TD passes in row, **PEDRO MARTINEZ** gives up back-to-back home runs. I would even buy the excuse "That's just the way the ball bounces" if it didn't seem to happen every single time!

Zach Young, Reflexive *(Star Trek Away Team)*

My biggest PC game pet peeve is the ever-so-popular **"HOPPY-JUMPY" PUZZLE.** You know what I'm talking about: the ones that make you time your jump to the millisecond and punish you with an arduous walk-through of the entire level to retry the jump. This peeve is most commonly found in the slew of first-person-shooter games that have arrived in the past few years.

Mary DeMarle, Presto Studios *(Myst III: Exile)*



Not enough PC games come out for the Macintosh! My home computer is a **'63 POWERBOOK,** so every time I want to play a new PC game I have to stay at the office even later than usual.

Virginia Ellen McArthur, Maxis *(The Sims: Livin' Large)*

That's easy: **POOR USER INTERFACE DESIGN** and implementation drives me nuts. Awesome graphics are not enough to keep a user intimate with a game environment. Intuitive, nonintrusive interface elements are key to making a game experience a good experience.

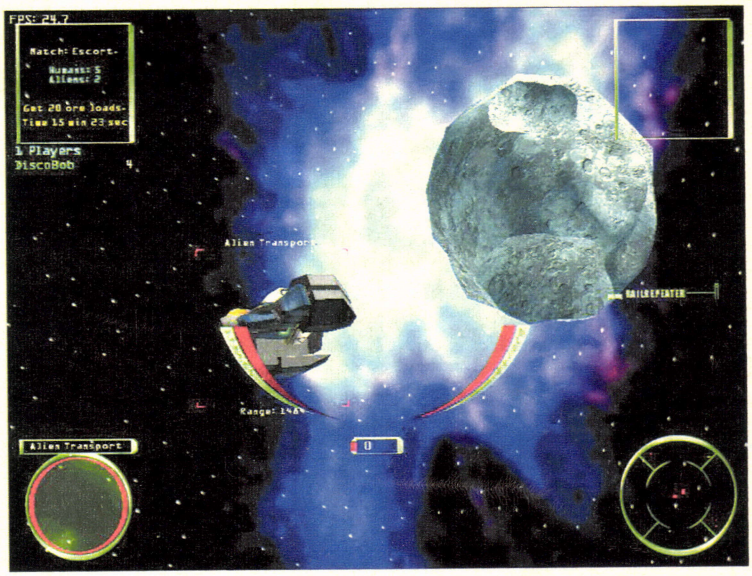
John Rodman, Microsoft *(Midtown Madness 2)*

Not being able to **CLICK THROUGH LEAGUE-LICENSE SCREENS** in sports games.

Teresa "Terry" Chubet, Hasbro Interactive



The prevalence of women with enormous **GAZONGAS.** Where are the men with the bulging swanstuckers? (Pronunciation available by viewing *Young Frankenstein.*)



Celebrate Your Independence

ID4 Online blasts off — only on the Net

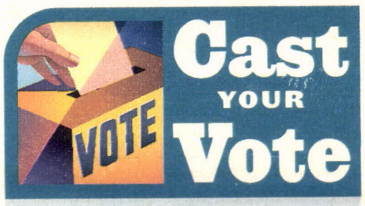
Producer Dean Devlin *(The Patriot, Independence Day)* enlisted the help of developer Mythic Entertainment *(Aliens Online, Godzilla Online)* to create an online, persistent-world PC game set in the *Independence Day* universe. *ID4 Online* launched June 30 at www.mothership.com. Consumers who buy the *Independence Day: Special Edition* DVD ($29.95) receive a free one-month trial of the game. The service costs $9.95 per month.

"There are very few movie licenses that translate to good video games," says Devlin. "*ID4 Online* really captures the feeling of the movie's air battles. There are thousands of swarming alien ships in space and exciting first-person-perspective space combat."

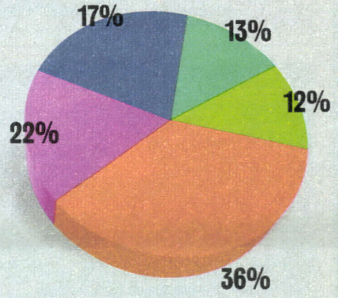
The game incorporates 3D-accelerated graphics and rendered ships and offers players the choice of fighting for the human or alien race.

"We focused on creating an online game that was easy for anyone to jump right into and as far away from the previous (Fox Interactive) *ID4* game (PC and PSX) as possible," adds Mark Jacobs, president of Mythic Entertainment. "We don't want people to have to play for weeks before they feel like they can have fun. This game throws players right into the heat of battle."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF ZELEVANSKY/A.P. PHOTO



Which of the following games has the best chance of living up to the hype surrounding its release?



Source: www.incitegames.com poll (May 22, 2000). Visit our Web site and cast your vote now!

When Good Disasters Go Bad

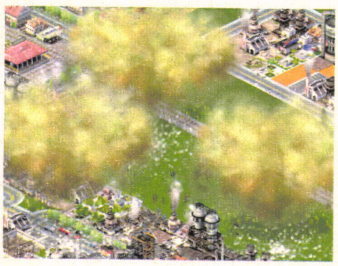
How to handle *SimCity*'s latest catastrophes

Unless you're talking about last year's Sandra Bullock-Ben Affleck movie, forces of nature are no laughing matter. To wit: the four new natural disasters you can unleash on unsuspecting Lilliputian metropolises in *SimCity Unlimited.* In an effort to reach out to the poor souls victimized in the game, we offer this survival guide, as outlined by FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency). We've also added our smart-ass comments to include a "devil's advocate" kind of element to the mix.



>> WHIRLPOOL

1. Stay away from the beach. *(If you need to be told to stay away from the beach during a whirlpool, you have more problems than just the disaster at hand.)*
2. If you can see the wave, you are too close to escape it. *(Translation: "Kiss your scrawny ass goodbye." We'd rather know some useful info, like, oh, maybe how to* swim out *of a whirlpool.)*



>> TOXIC CLOUDS

1. Move away from the accident scene and help keep others away. *(Duh.)*
2. Try not to inhale gases, fumes, and smoke. *(Kinda tough if you still like to breathe air.)*
3. If possible, cover mouth with a cloth while leaving the area. *(Double duh.)*
4. Stay away from accident victims until the hazardous material has been identified. *(Let 'em burn, baby, burn.)*



>> FALLING SPACE JUNK

While FEMA doesn't cover this kind of calamity, it does offer instructions in the event of a collapsing building (caused by, say, a rainstorm of extra-terrestrial debris).

1. Stay low to the floor and exit the building as quickly as possible.
2. If you get trapped, stay in your area so that you don't kick up dust.
3. Tap on a pipe or wall.



>> LOCUSTS

FEMA offers no advice on how to handle an incoming swarm of crop-destroying insects, but according to the Australian Plague Locust Commission (the folks who brought you Crocodile Hunter*), the principal method of control is to aerially spray swarms with the organophosphorous insecticide fenitrothion (good luck finding some, though).*



No Helmet Required

This bicycle sim will make you sweat

PC gaming may be a sedentary hobby, but thanks to CycleFX, at least one game can work off those Krispy Kreme love handles. The Los Angeles-based fitness company is... uh, peddling a $190 device that turns any stationary exercise bike into an interactive PC game experience. If you already have a bike, you're halfway there. Just attach the widget's wires and install the software on your PC. You can race solo against computer opponents or, even better, against up to four other people via LAN and the Internet. You have four bike paths from which to choose: Arizona, the Olympic Velodrome, Atlanta, and for all of the mountain bikers out there, an off-road course. Go to www.cyclefx.com.

NICERACK

An Internet DJ invades *The Sims* and makes some big noise

Here's a trend worth keeping an eye on: celebrity downloads for *The Sims.* "The Rack," a brash DJ for the Internet radio station **KNAC.com,** now has a SimRack available for her fans to download free.



TOP 20

In association with The NPD Group, here are the best-selling PC games for April.

1 ▲2
The Sims
• Electronic Arts • Simulation
Those wily Sims are back on top. For the second month in a row, *The Sims* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* swapped places on the chart. Things will start to get real interesting in the next few months, when *Millionaire*'s second edition and the *Sims* expansion pack hit the charts.



2 ▼1
Who Wants to Be a Millionaire
• Disney Interactive • Lifestyle
Overexposure is becoming a real risk. The show will air four nights a week soon.



3 —3
RollerCoaster Tycoon
• Hasbro • Strategy
Rule No. 1 at an amusement park: If anyone gets lost, meet at the large fountain in the front.



4 ▲6
Lego Island
• Mindscape • Strategy
Who would have thought people would have so much fun playing with virtual plastic blocks?



5 N
Rainbow Six: Urban Operations
• Red Storm • Simulation
As if you needed more distractions while playing, this add-on thows innocent bystanders into the mix.



6 N
Soldier of Fortune
• Activision • Shooter
Virtual grunts are reveling in this game's over-the-top gore factor. Splatterfest action.



7 ▼5
RCT: Corkscrew Follies
• Hasbro • Strategy
RollerCoaster Tycoon and this expansion pack appear to be permanent fixtures in the Top 10.



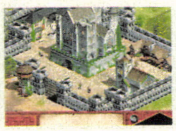
8 ▲11
Star Trek Armada
• Activision • Strategy
Activision deserves a pat on the back for having two Top 10 titles, but where's *Quake III?*



9 ▲17
Family 3 Pack
• Hasbro Interactive • Lifestyle
Senator Joseph Lieberman wants to see more E-rated fare like this on the charts.



10 ▼8
Age of Empires II
• Microsoft • Simulation
Age of Empires II will get its second wind once the *Conquerors* add-on pack arrives in the fall.



11 ▲18
SimMania Pack
• Electronic Arts • Strategy
SimMania is a gold mine of past classics like *SimTower, SimCopter,* and *SimSafari.*

12 ▲20
SimCity 3000
• Electronic Arts • Strategy
This game is obsolete now that the deluxe version, *SimCity 3000 Unlimited,* is out.

13 ▼9
Unreal Tournament
• Infogrames • Shooter
Unreal Tournament has to be the biggest reason Infogrames bought GT Interactive.

14 ▼7
Star Wars Force Commander
• LucasArts • Strategy
Tough luck if you don't like the latest *Star Wars* game: Obi-Wan doesn't come out till the holidays.

15 N
EverQuest: Ruins of Kunark
• 989 Studios • RPG
EQ's new continent opened up to rave reviews. Some players, we're sure, haven't left since then.

16 ▼4
C&C: Tiberian Sun Firestorm
• Electronic Arts • Strategy
More *C&C* (the game, not the Music Factory) is on the way with *Red Alert 2* and *Renegade.*

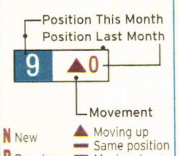
17 ▼15
Millennium Gamepak
• Valusoft • Lifestyle
With 50 kinds of casino, board, and arcade games, this game might never leave the charts.

18 N
Slots
• Masque • Lifestyle
Try your hand at the virtual one-armed bandit. Watch out for those lurkers.

19 ▼10
Half-Life
• Havas • Shooter
Mods are responsible for keeping this first-person shooter on the charts.

20 ▼12
Rainbow Six Gold Pack
• Red Storm • Simulation
Last year's best-selling game is finally losing steam as newer fare enters the fray.

CHART LEGEND



RANK RULES

Chart information on this page was provided by The NPD Group (NPD TRSTS Interactive Entertainment Service).

THE NPD GROUP, INC.

TOP 10 Racing

1	▲4	**Need for Speed: High Stakes** • EA
2	▼1	**Dirt Track Racing** • WizardWorks
3	—3	**Midtown Madness** • Microsoft
4	▲12	**Star Wars: Racer** • LucasArts
5	—5	**All American NASCAR 2** • Sierra
6	—6	**Harley Davidson** • WizardWorks
7	▼2	**NASCAR Racing 3** • Sierra
8	▼7	**Hard Trucks:...Victory** • Sierra
9	▼8	**Driver** • Infogrames
10	▲13	**Re-Volt** • Acclaim

Sierra, with its NASCAR-heavy lineup, takes the checkered flag this month and laps its competition easily.

TOP 10 Simulation

1	▲12	**Fly!** • Gathering of Developers
2	▲5	**Flight Simulator** • Microsoft
3	▼2	**MechWarrior 3** • Hasbro Int.
4	▼1	**Flight Simulator 2000** • Microsoft
5	▼3	**Flight Simulator Pro** • Microsoft
6	▼4	**Fighter's Anthology** • EA
7	▼6	**USAF** • EA
8	▼7	**Starfleet Command** • Interplay
9	▲10	**Battlezone 2** • Activision
10	▼8	**Armored Fist 3** • Novalogic

Upset of the month: The Gathering's flight simulator, *Fly!*, beats out Microsoft's offering, the Goliath of flight sims.

TOP 10 Strategy/RPG

1	—1	**R. Coaster Tycoon** • Hasbro Int.
2	—2	**R. Coaster Corkscrew** • Hasbro Int.
3	—3	**Age of Empires II** • Microsoft
4	▲5	**SimCity 3000** • EA
5	▼4	**Rainbow Six Gold** • Red Storm
6	—6	**C&C Tiberian Sun** • EA
7	N	**Emergency Room** • Legacy Int.
8	▼7	**R. Six Rogue Spear** • Red Storm
9	▲12	**Sim Theme Park** • EA
10	▲N	**Crystal Key** • Dreamcatcher

This month's biggest surprise is how the low-budget *Emergency Room* game beat out the likes of *Rogue Spear.*

Diablo Under Siege

DUNGEON SIEGE is what you get when you mix *Total Annihilation* with *Diablo* in a 3D-driven world

■ PUBLISHER Microsoft ■ DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games ■ GENRE Role-playing game ■ PLAYERS 1-10 ■ RELEASE DATE Q1 2001

INSIGHT

Q. Is it true that Chris Taylor handed out bags of cocaine at E3?

A. We didn't see any. He did say he would give some to members of the press who didn't mention his hangover-induced blunders during his presentation, but we think he was kidding.

Q. Is this a *Diablo II* rip-off?

A. Nope, plenty of features make *Dungeon Seige* different.

If you think *Diablo II* is the be-all and end-all of computer RPGs, think again. Chris Taylor, the founder and president of Gas Powered Games, has something new for you: an RPG that makes the most of his experience as a game designer on everything from baseball to real-time strategy.

By Dave Rees

You look down on a vast green valley nestled between two huge mountain ranges. Your two characters, an ax-wielding warrior and a spell-casting sorcerer, have just crossed the valley and are entering a cave entrance located at a tower ruin. Ahead lies a narrow, torch-lit stone passage lined with cobwebs. This sounds like *Diablo II* or any of the other computer RPGs currently in development, right? Not by a long shot – it's an action-packed fantasy role-playing game called *Dungeon Siege* that will push the limits of almost every aspect of the role-playing genre.

But notice we said "almost." The plot of the single-player game is unfortunately trite. You begin the game as an average guy chopping wood outside of his cottage for a cozy evening in front of the fireplace. Out of nowhere, an evil army attacks you. While you fight off the beasts with your ax outside, some of them manage to get inside your home to search for an unknown object, setting the place ablaze, and flee without a trace. You're left standing there out of house and home wondering what sort of evil force is leading this army and what they came for in the first place. At that moment, you realize your life will never be the same, and you vow to descend into the beasts' "foul lair deep in the bowels of the world" and dethrone the "lord of all darkness."

Wow. Pretty uninspiring. But what *Dungeon Siege* lacks



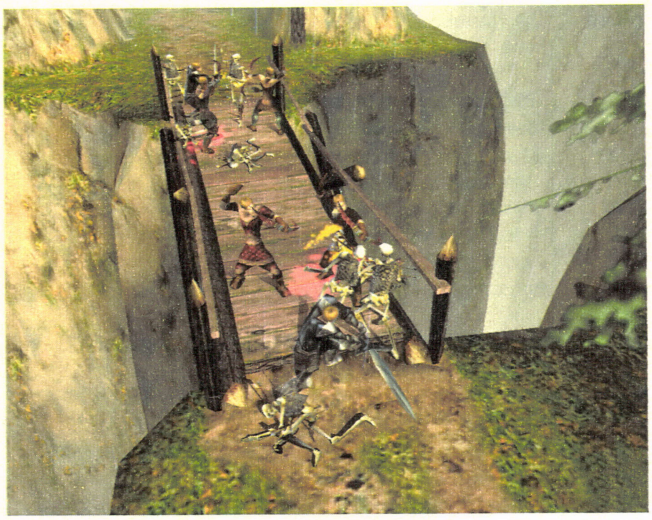
EN GARDE! *Dungeon Siege*'s AI will allow plenty of players to zoom in on the action and just watch the battles transpire.



CROP DUSTERS Damn! And that corn was just about ripe for the pickin', too. You'll have to give these ghouls the back of your farm hand.



ABOMINABLE GOLEM This hulking beast will end up as a pile of rocks before he reaches the other side.



A BRIDGE TOO FAR There's nowhere in this world you can't go, including the bottom of this chasm, though you might want to take the long way down.



KEEP IT TO YOURSELF The world in *Dungeon Siege* is massive, and you'll encounter many structures and dungeons along the way.

in an original plot it makes up for in gameplay and character development. Trust us. If you're into RPGs, we think you're going to love everything else about this game.

Class Distinction

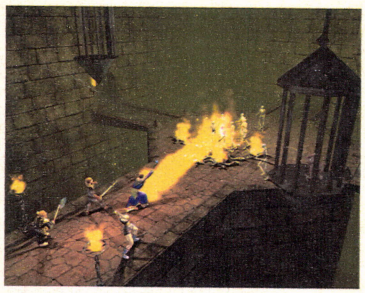
For one, your character starts the game without any specific strengths, abilities, or even a class designation. Forget about simulated dice rolls and applying numeric values to your prechosen half-elf Necromancer's strength, dexterity, and intelligence attributes. Instead, you learn skills as you play the game. "Our game allows the player to develop any skill at any time," explains Taylor. "You can have a character that is specialized in only one skill, or you can make a jack-of-all-trades character. We like it because the player isn't forced to make a decision at the start of the game before he even understands how the game works."

For example, if you choose to go through the first part of the game wielding your trusty ax, you'll develop you're melee skills and start to resemble a fighter- or barbarian-class character. But later in the game, if you decide to make more use of the spells you found along the way, you start to transform into more of a fighter/magic user, developing a multiclass character in the process.

Of course, *Dungeon Siege* will include plenty of traditional RPG elements, such as NPCs (nonplayer characters) who will help you along the way. Some of the more skilled local yokels can even join your party and help you fight. Similar to *Diablo II*, you'll have a choice to add them to your party and immediately diversify your abilities, strengthening your overall chances of survival in the process.

"The player isn't forced to make a decision at the start of the game before he even understands how the game works."

One feature that mimics *Baldur's Gate* is the ability to instantly switch your focus to any character regardless of where that character is in the world. But in *Baldur's Gate*, everything is rendered with 2D graphics, which makes it tough to switch your perspective without long load times. Furthermore, your party is limited to a mere six members in *Baldur's Gate* compared with *Dungeon Siege*'s 10.



CAN YOU FEEL THE HEAT? Anyone want toasted skeleton for dinner?

Dungeon Annihilation

Ten characters are certainly a force to be reckoned with, but it could get really confusing really fast. That's where Taylor's past experience with *Total Annihilation* comes into play. "When you have this many characters to control, you need advanced control mechanisms," he points out. "Real-time-strategy games have gone a long way in figuring out how to control a lot of units at once. Our goal is to not only keep this interface clean and simple, but keep it out of the player's way."

In traditional RPGs, inventory capacity has always been limited to a maximum amount each character can carry, but in *Dungeon Siege* you can bring along pack mules to carry extra goods that would normally just weigh you down. Like portable storage bins with a higher capacity than any normal man could handle, these jackasses serve to keep your mind focused away from inventory management and closer on the action and exploration at hand.

Visually, *Dungeon Siege* has much more potential than even *Diablo II*. While the view of the world is from above, it can be rotated and zoomed in and out. While exploring the expansive wildernesses, a wide view of the world will often make more tactical sense, as creatures can attack from all directions. But in tighter quarters, where traps are always a threat and items are strewn everywhere, subtle graphical details can make a difference, and a closer view is sometimes beneficial.

For the People

This well-designed 3D engine also brings about countless other possibilities, not the least of which is a full-featured world editor, called the Siege Editor, that will ship with the game. This beefy extra will empower fanatical gamers with the ability to create original landscapes, dungeons, characters, and even spells. Then players can exchange what they made on the Web. Taylor explains, "We have exposed almost every aspect of *Dungeon Siege* to our GAS system, a text-based data format, called Skrit, that allows editing of the game with a simple text editor. We learned a lot of lessons in the past about what players are looking for in the way of customizability, and are really

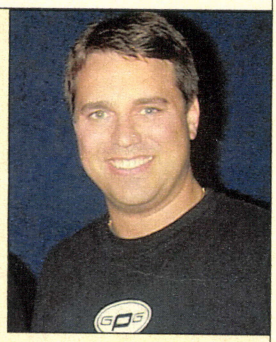


BUGGER ME! We're sick of giant spiders, but this one is the biggest one we've ever seen. Anyone got a rocket launcher handy? We sure could use it now.

HE'S NOT REALLY A COKE DEALER

TAYLOR-MADE

Why does **Chris Taylor** want to make an RPG?



From baseball games to real-time-strategy games and now to role-playing games. What's up with that?

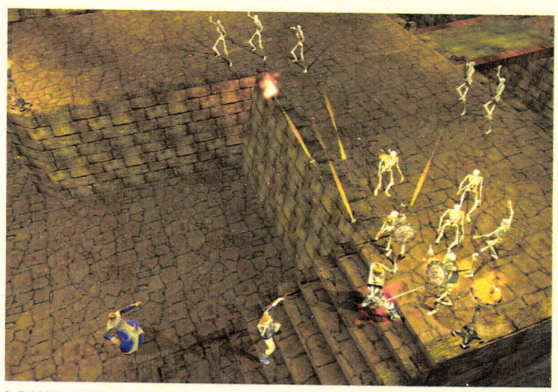
I've always wanted to make games with tons of action. *Total Annihilation* was the ultimate expression of that. I love RPGs, but making one is a huge undertaking. I finally felt like I could pull it off – with the help of supertalented people, of course. If I could, I would like to do games from other genres, but with it taking two and a half years per game, you have to pick the ones that you can pour yourself into. It's been a long road from baseball to *Dungeon Siege*, but in this business, sometimes you have to take it one step at a time.

What inspired you to form Gas Powered Games and develop *Dungeon Siege*?

I have always wanted to start my own company and do great games with the best people. An RPG was ambitious, but we all agreed that it was a good choice for us. Most everyone at GPG loves RPG games, and most all of us feel that we can bring something new to the genre. It's important that everyone is fully invested in the game and believes in the vision.

How will *Dungeon Siege* differ from other games of its type, like *Diablo*?

We are pushing almost every aspect of the genre. [The game will have] large parties, gigantic continuous 3D worlds – no loading screens – easy-to-learn gameplay, helpers and pack mules, and a real-time-strategy-game interface for easy control of characters. *Dungeon Siege* also pushes the action over the top...things catch fire and explode; arrows stick in walls and monsters. We use all the latest state-of-the-art rendering technology that fully utilizes the latest 3D cards. [The game] runs in any resolution and supports 16- and 32-bit color. We supply the Siege Editor so that players can build their own worlds and adventures and share them with their friends on the Internet.



I DON'T LIKE THESE ODDS No matter how you slice it, three on 11 isn't a fair fight. This might be a good time to flee.



THIS FARM IS MY FARM! As the game opens, you must attempt to save your home at all costs.

working to deliver a game that meets those expectations."

Taylor and his team have also put a lot of customization options into the hands of players. "The multiplayer game is fully configurable for literally thousands of different experiences and is fully parameterizable," says Taylor. "We have a game timer, difficulty settings, maps of various sizes, monster and treasure-placement configurations, scoring systems, different victory conditions, etc."

With its interesting mix of role playing, strategy, and action elements, *Dungeon Siege* will inevitably be compared with *Diablo II* when it's released next year. But even if you love *Diablo II*, don't automatically count this game out. We know we'll be watching it closely in the months to come.

The well-designed 3D engine brings about countless possibilities.



DESCENDING INTO HELL It looks so nice and peaceful outside, so why would you want to go inside this dark, dank dungeon? Treasure and revenge, of course!

Getting Out Above Ground

RED FACTION, the game formerly known as *Descent 4,* takes Volition in a drastic new direction

■ PUBLISHER **THQ** ■ DEVELOPER **Volition** ■ GENRE **Action** ■ PLAYERS **1-8** ■ RELEASE DATE **Q2 2001**

INSIGHT

Q. Will I be able to lay waste to my mining friends in epic deathmatches?

A. *Red Faction* will support multiplay over LAN, TCP/IP, and the Internet.

What was once referred to as *Descent 4* is now being called *Red Faction.* And the design team at Volition, made up the guys behind the *Descent* series, has something entirely new on its hands.

By William O'Neal

When Volition started work on the next game in the popular *Descent* series, it had a lot of great ideas to implement. Namely, it wanted to blow the hell out of conventional first-person shooters with truly interactive environments. But Volition quickly realized that instead of a *Descent* sequel, it was creating an entirely new game – from the ground up.

Volition had a few basic goals: to create a character-based game, to simplify the controls so they would be easily accessible, to write a deep storyline, and to create a game world you could truly interact with.

The designers soon realized that locking the player into the cockpit of a *Descent*-style game wasn't the way to go. If you've got a fully interactive environment, you should be able to hop out of the ship and into the action. Then again, if you did, it wouldn't be *Descent* anymore, would it? And so *Red Faction* was born.

Red Faction is designed around Volition's new Geo-Mod engine, a technology that's been cryptically

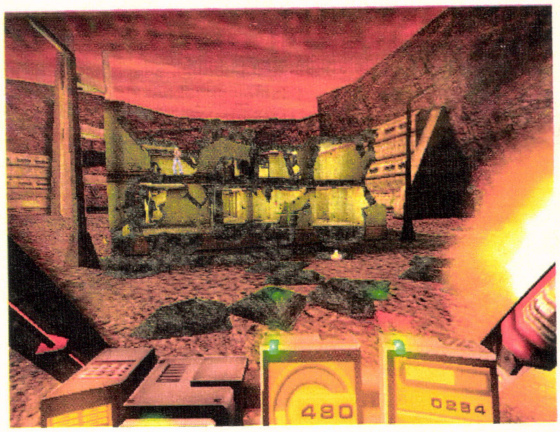


MANNING THE TURRET You won't get motion sick here. Feet are firmly planted on the ground in *Red Faction.*

coined "real-time, arbitrary geometry modification." In real-world terms, that means you can blow the crap out of and otherwise interact with almost everything in the game world. Hop in cars, fly aircraft, shoot a rocket through a building – the sky is literally the limit. Philip Holt, Volition's director of product development, believes this technology will change the way people look at first-person shooters. "A modifiable environment was the origin of this game," he says.

You play as Parker, working at a mining colony on Mars where a violent insurrection is taking place. Much of the game's objectives will involve blasting holes in buildings and felling structures. According to Alan Lawrence, the game's lead designer, "*Red Faction* is bringing a lot of new things to the first-person-shooter genre – Geo-Mods is obviously a big one, [and also] being able to blow holes in walls and collapse structures."

Red Faction boasts lots of spacecraft, many of which you will be able to control. "You'll be able to commandeer a variety of ground-based, water-based, and flight-based vehicles," Holt elaborates. "That, combined with the Geo-Mod technology, is going to make for one very cool first-person shooter."



KA-BLAM! **Sure the enemy is hiding inside that building? No problem, just blow up the entire side of it and waste him.**

As far as the tools of the trade you'll be using, Holt explains that they won't be too out-of-this-world. "In terms of vehicle design or weapon design, we wanted something that was science-fiction-oriented, but we didn't want it to be all kooky lasers and energy weapons – things that people can't relate to. Nobody's ever seen an energy weapon, so it's hard to know what that's going to do to a body. But people know what guns are, and they know what rounds do to human flesh." Hence, *Red Faction* will boast a location-based damage system: Shoot an enemy between the legs and he'll be singing soprano.

Volition realized that instead of a *Descent* sequel, it was creating an entirely new game.

A first-person shooter is new territory for a team so accustomed to vehicle-based combat. It will be interesting to see what gameplay attributes Volition can bring over from the space-flight realm.

The company hopes *Red Faction*'s interactive environment and simplified controls will have a broad appeal. And from the looks of the game and the response it received at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, it seems destined for success.

And what's to be of the real *Descent 4?* No one at Interplay will confirm the possibility of a true *Descent* sequel, but we'd be surprised if Interplay could forever walk away from such a lucritive franchise.



THERE USED TO BE A WALL THERE ***Red Faction*'s main claim to fame is that its engine lets you interact with – and blow up – almost anything in the game world. Here's hoping they make a Kathy Lee Gifford level.**

GAMING HISTORY 101

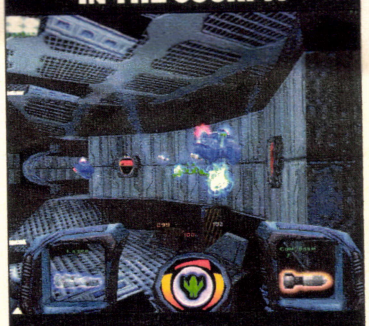
WHAT'S DESCENT?

New to computer gaming? We'll tell you **what this *Descent* thing's all about.**

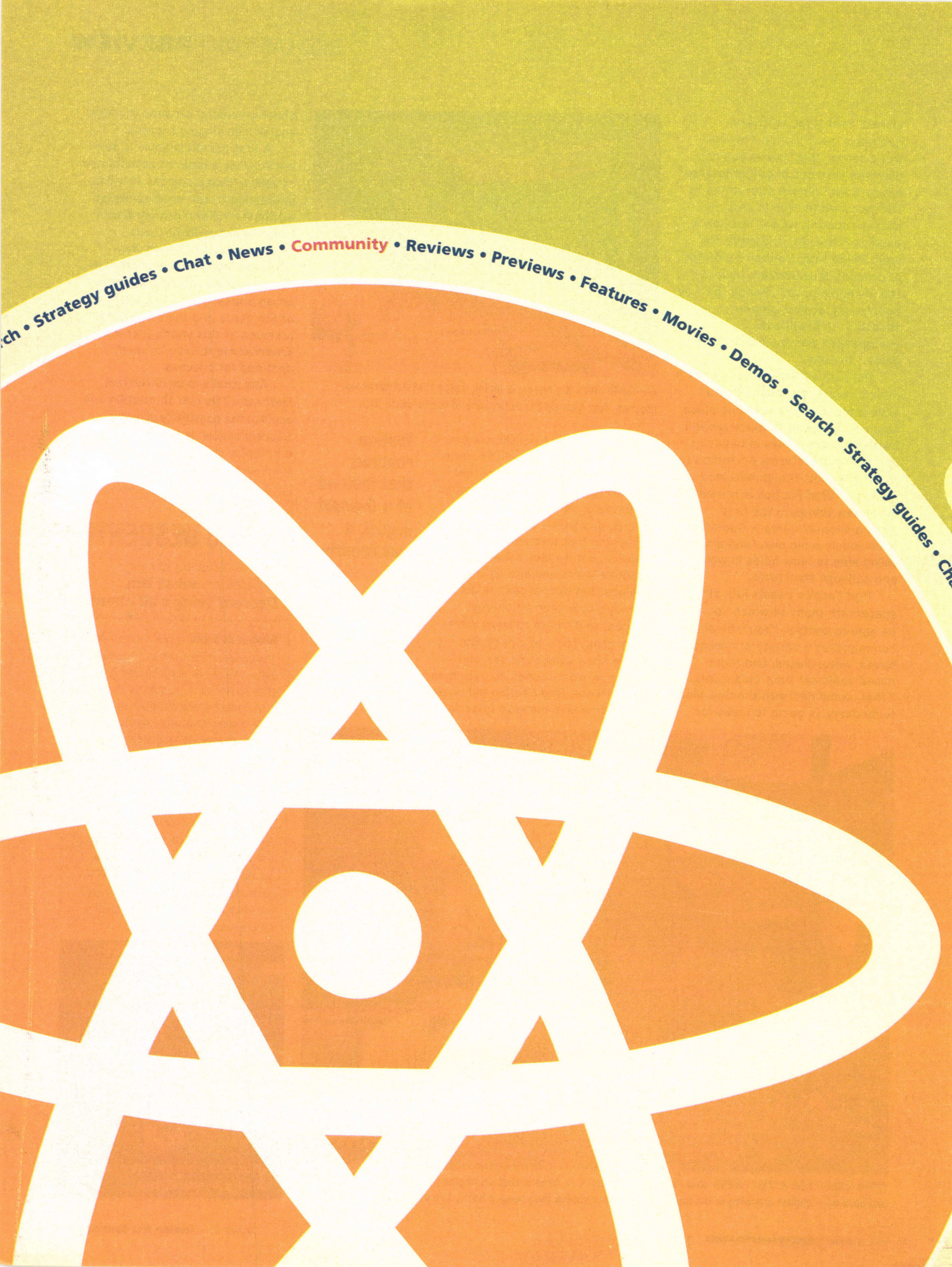
When it debuted in 1994, *Descent* broke new ground in the game industry by getting rid of that damn horizon line once and for all. In the fully 3D game, you piloted a spacecraft that explored underground mines and caverns while blowing enemies to smithereens, and it didn't matter one bit which way was up.

This new shifting perspective sent many gamers scrambling for their barf bags, but many more quickly became addicted to the hot gameplay and swooping underground dogfights. After two sequels the series was still going strong, when Volition decided this year to go in a different direction, taking you out of the ship and into the world of first-person shooters.

IN THE COCKPIT



***Descent 3* was the last in the series – for now, at least.**


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Just don't show up and try to get into our game room.



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Ancient History in the Making

TIMELINE could make Michael Crichton the king of all entertainment media — games, books, TV, and movies

■ PUBLISHER **Timeline Studios** ■ DEVELOPER **Timeline Studios** ■ GENRE **Adventure** ■ PLAYERS **1** ■ RELEASE DATE **Q3 2000**

INSIGHT

Q. This game takes place in France. Do I have to know French to play this game?
A. Don't worry, *mon frère. Timeline parle Anglais.*
Q. Tom Clancy, Stephen King, and now Michael Crichton. Who's going to be the next best-selling author to work on a PC game?
A. As long as it's not Tony Robbins, we'll be happy.
Q. Is time travel possible in real life?
A. In theory, yes, but remember, you need to get the DeLorean up to 88mph in order to activate the flux capacitor, McFly.

Timing is everything for most people, but if you're Michael Crichton, author of novels such as *Jurassic Park* and *The Andromeda Strain*, *Timeline* is everything. It's the name of the gaming company he founded two years ago, the title of his 11th novel and accompanying screenplay, and his new PC game.

By John Gaudiosi

The game component of the *Timeline* franchise plays a very large role in Crichton's plans. The single-player, first-person-perspective game will put you in the lead role of Chris Hughes, a graduate student who's transported back to medieval times through a quantum physics time machine. (Although Hughes is a male character in the book, the game's protagonist is left open-ended so you can play as either male or female, as you wish.)

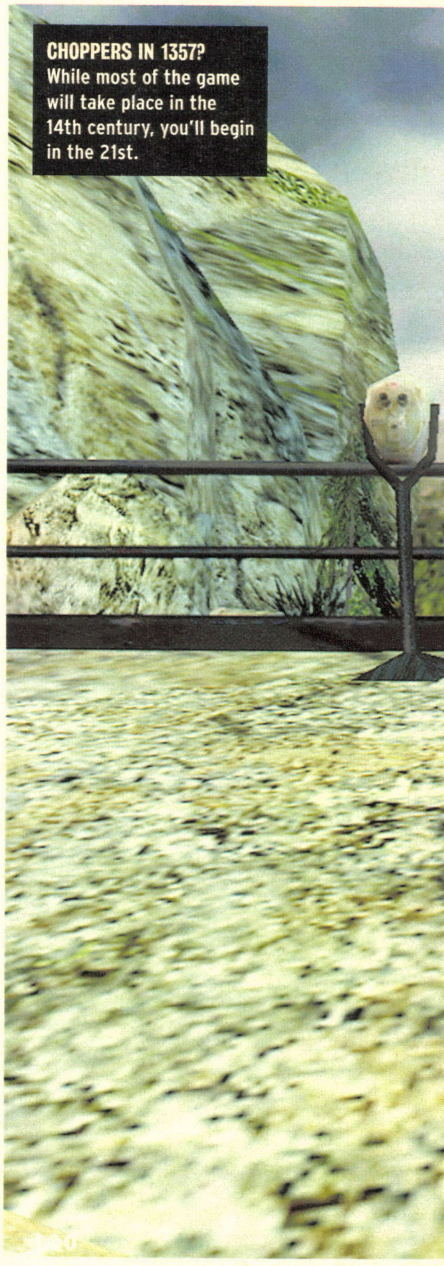
The game will be divided into 20 levels that take place in both present-day France and France circa 1357. Much of the action will unfold along the Dordogne River during the Hundred Years' War, during which the towns and castles of Castelgard and La Roque became conquests of French and English knights.

Surely You Joust

A flaw in the time machine strands you in 14th-century France, where you must rescue your professor from certain doom. To make matters worse, you'll have only a small time window to return to the present: If you don't rescue the professor before time runs out, you'll end up stuck in the medieval world for the rest of your life.

En route to rescuing the prof, you'll fight armies of knights, participate in a joust, and try to ensure that history is not changed in the process. While exploring ornate 3D environments, you'll wield a sword and bow and arrows, as well as at least one nonlethal weapon (possibly a stun gun).

Although the medieval age was one of the most violent times in the history of man, the game will use PG-13-style violence to make its point. "Michael was very adamant about not making this game violent," explains Rick Towson, Timeline's vice president of engineering. "There will



CHOPPERS IN 1357? While most of the game will take place in the 14th century, you'll begin in the 21st.



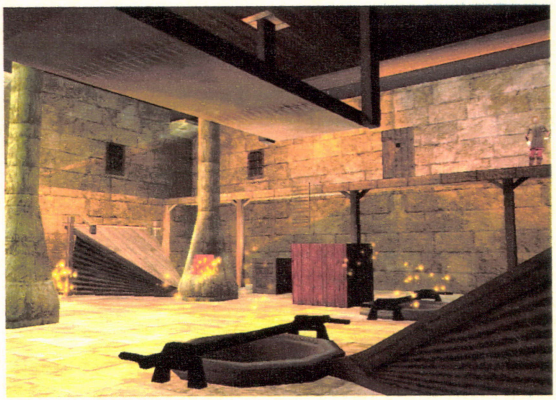
FRENCH FORTRESS Crichton and company have made every effort to incorporate unmatched realism into *Timeline*'s environments. The results are at times astounding.

be sword fighting and jousting, but the game has a 1930s Errol Flynn mentality when it comes to violence. There is no blood or gore. Players have a choice of lethal or nonlethal weapons, and violence is only rewarded when the enemies are coming after you. Stealth is an important part of certain levels as well. Using your sword first is not always the best way to play this game. In fact, if you run around killing innocent people, there will be repercussions."

The Plot Thickens

The game will follow the plot of its namesake novel for the most part, but reading it isn't a prerequisite: The design team will use creative license to ensure exciting interactive entertainment. The castles and towns from the book, as well as the monastery and flour mill, will be there for exploring, and most of the characters from the book will be involved in the game's plot. The only difference is that you're the protagonist.

"We think of this game as a ride through a world that's been historically researched and accurately recreated in 3D," says Bob Griswold, Timeline's vice



FORGING AHEAD The developers' Alchemist development tool will allow them to make *Timeline* and future games in less time.



president of production.

Crichton himself insisted that the game retain the historical realism of the novel, from the dank castle dungeons to the cog rooms of the flour mill.

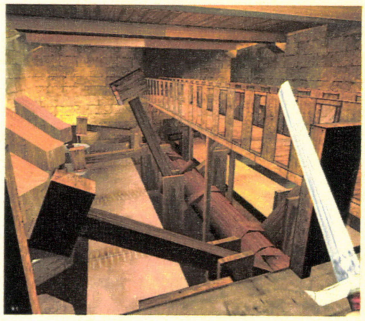
"Michael is a very hands-on guy," explains Timeline CEO and President David Smith. "He's the director/designer of the game. He has a strong sense of what he wants to accomplish. He flies down from New York twice a month and is in contact with us via phone or video conference almost every day. He'll play through the levels and tell us to move doors, change the colors of things. He has a vision of what this game should look like."

Crichton used his Hollywood background to take a new approach to video game development.

From Amazon to Alchemist

Crichton used his Hollywood background to take a new approach to video game development. "I made a game in the early '80s for Apple II called *Amazon*," he explains. "It was clear to me at that time that the technology was inadequate. Games were put into code, and no one could touch it. To make a good game, we needed the flexibility of writing a book or making a movie. About two years ago we began putting this concept in code with a quick, flexible authoring system."

In order to cut down on the traditional 18-month development cycle, Crichton's engineers created Alchemist, an intuitive authoring tool that allows games to be scripted much like a movie. In fact, the programmers began using Hollywood movie terms, rather than traditional programming lingo, when describing different elements of production.



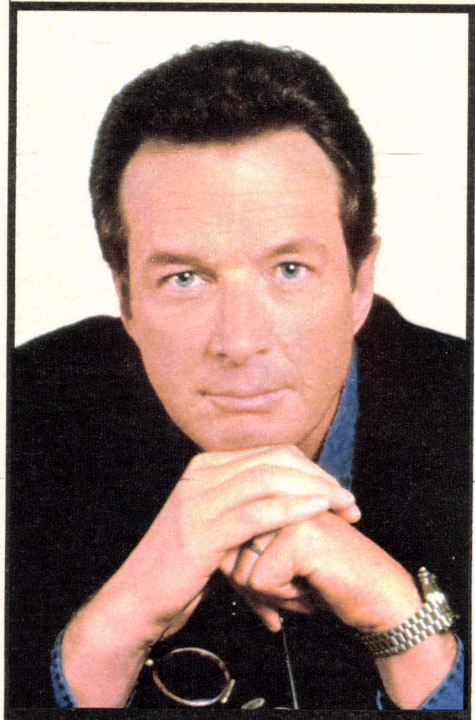
INNER WORKINGS The environments will feature complex physical puzzles.

"Alchemist allows us to create entire blocked levels in three to five days," says Griswold. "That's something that could take an entire month using traditional development tools. Running on the OpenSpace 3D engine, Alchemist works much like a movie set, allowing us to script

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN BOOKS, APPARENTLY

A LOT OF TIME ON HIS HANDS

He's a hotshot in Hollywood and has a medical degree from Harvard, but that doesn't mean **Michael Crichton** doesn't like to take a break to play computer games every now and then. We sat down with the author extraordinaire for a chat



Crichton has also penned a screenplay for the *Timeline* movie, which Paramount Pictures will release in May 2001.

What do you hope to accomplish with the *Timeline* game?
My experience with adventure games in the past has been to buy the game, then buy the hint book, and sit down with the book to help me through all the game's roadblocks. That was a weird experience. You don't need a hint book to watch a movie or ride an amusement park ride. I want to make a game that's accessible to a lot of people – people who don't normally play games.

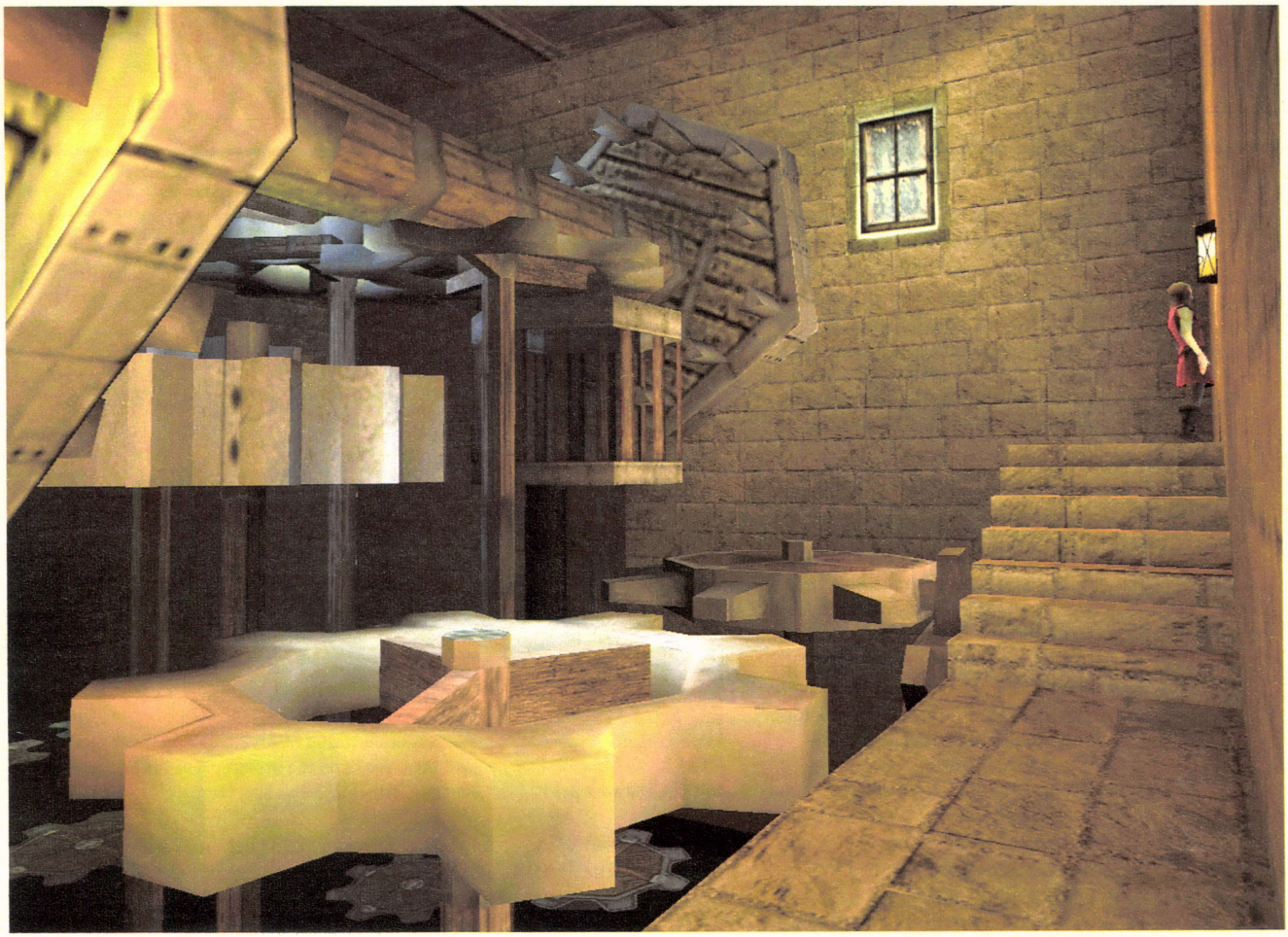
What kind of games do you play when you're not writing novels or Hollywood scripts?
I like the simpler games. I don't want to build an empire. With books, movies, and games, I tend to like the stuff that everyone else does. I enjoy the *Quake* games, *Half-Life*, *Unreal Tournament*. I think running around killing people in video games can be very relaxing. At the same time, I didn't want to have violence in my game. Although I've had violence in my work before – *Jurassic Park* was very violent – I've tried to limit the idea of gun violence [in my films]. I think to reach a mass market there needs to be more sensitivity. From working on movies, I've learned what not to show.

With the interactive entertainment industry outgrossing traditional Hollywood entertainment, do you see a digital future?
I don't think there's any question that interactive media is going to bypass old media. I'm not sure if the present form of video games will be the form of the future. No one knows for sure what that will be. We're all trying to experiment with different things. I think something's going to happen about the idea of storytelling. I don't think the future of interactive entertainment will be choosing your own ending. It will not exactly be a game and not exactly a movie, but somewhere in between.

Beyond James Bond, games based on movies have not sold well, including the games based on *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*.
The experience I've had with past games based on movies is that they come out very late. Traditionally, games have been an afterthought by the movie industry. They're rushed in an effort to get them out quickly. Aside from James Bond, which is an eternal franchise, historically, there have been shoddy movie video game tie-ins across the board. We started the *Timeline* game before I wrote the book, because it takes a long time to make a game.

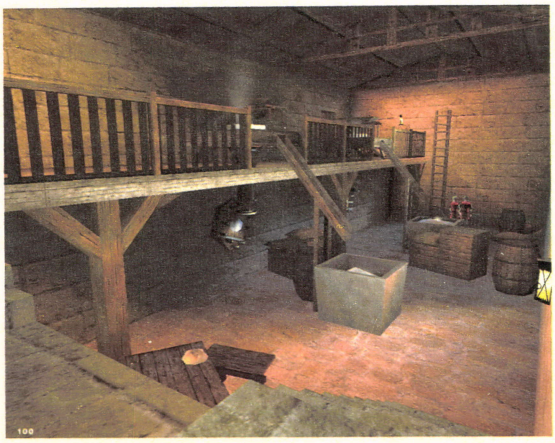
How has your experience with film, television, and books helped you with the *Timeline* game?
With *Timeline*, I'm trying to bring a movie way of thinking to the development of the game. I'm not an experienced game designer, which helps in a way, because we're doing something new. One of the things that made *ER* so successful was that it broke a lot of rules. I don't think we know what the limits of gameplay are. The key is to discover what gets people caught up in a game.

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WELCOME TO THE MACHINE In *Timeline* you'll have to figure out the best way to advance through the complex levels – without using unnecessary force. Looks like members of the L.A.P.D.'s rampart division will have a hard time finishing the game.

characters and objects right on the screen. It puts the control of game development where it should be: in the hands of artists and level designers." Another plus, he says, is that "we're able to work on different parts of the game at the same time, avoiding the last-minute crunch time that plagues most game developers."



INSIDE VIEW There will be plenty of places to hide as you use stealth and wits to finish the game.

The Future of Timeline

Now that the engine has been created, Timeline will be able to develop future games much quicker. The end result is more control over the creation of the game's levels and characters. Ultimately, Timeline Computer Entertainment would like to create three mainstream games per year on multiple platforms.

"We're trying to broaden the scope of accessibility with this game by bringing Michael's sensibilities to interactive entertainment," explains Smith. "It's an experiment. No one else has done this. Forty percent of the consumers who bought *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* on PC were new users, and that was a complex game. We're making *Timeline* so that anyone can turn on the game and enjoy the experience."

The developers are keeping the first-person gameplay simple to learn but difficult to master. While the casual gamer will find the game challenging, hardcore gamers should be entertained while exploring *Timeline*'s medieval world.

"A lot of times, people don't finish games. This game's 20 levels provide a beginning, middle, and end," says Griswold. "Each level has a half-hour to an hour of gameplay, which is the same amount of time you'd spend watching a typical television show. Like the page-turning suspense of the book, there's a pull to get players to achieve the game's goals. We want gamers to get to the end."

"We're trying to deliver more realistic environments," concludes Crichton. "We're trying to make something that is like a real medieval place. I'm having a great time. I hope this will be fun for people to play."

Taking RPGs out of the Dark Ages

The creator of *Fallout* is at it again with **ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA**

■ PUBLISHER **Sierra Studios** ■ DEVELOPER **Troika Games** ■ GENRE **RPG** ■ PLAYERS **1-8** ■ RELEASE DATE **Q4 2000**

INSIGHT

Q. I like to whack my homeyz. Will *Arcanum* have any multiplayer capabilities?

A. It sure will. According to the game's designers, it'll sport *Diablo*-style multiplayer for up to eight people over a LAN or the Internet.

Q. You say *Arcanum* will be a different kind of RPG, but are there any giant spiders in the game?

A. Come on. It *is* an RPG. *Arcanum* will boast the occasional spider. The thing is, though, being an industrial-age game, the spiders are mechanical instead of the creepy-crawlies we're used to.

Are you sick of all the clichés in nearly every RPG on the market? You know what they are – elves, knights, dragons, and the like. If you answered a wholehearted "yes," then you're not alone. The folks at Troika Games, like you, are ready for something new when it comes to RPGs. Enter *Arcanum*.

By William O'Neal

While *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura* sports a name that makes you think, "Here we go again," the game tries to freshen up a genre that's beginning to reek of a crusty old knight's skanky armor. We hooked up with Tim Cain, the game's lead designer, and picked his brain about the latest project of his company, *Arcanum*'s design house.

"[*Arcanum* has] a lot more depth than most of the other RPGs out there," says Cain. "On the message boards, when somebody says, 'I wish you could do this in a game,' we usually respond by telling them that 'you can do that in *Arcanum*.'"

For instance, steering away from RPG convention, *Arcanum* won't have any of the über character classes that mire most RPGs in that designer's-way-or-the-highway mediocrity. According to Cain, many people have been saying they "don't want any one class that overshadows all the others." To that end, Troika has worked hard to create an offering in which you can play as a fighter, mage, technologist, or thief, and in which each class can stand alone.



POINT OF NO RETURN **Hey, buddy, I think you're on the wrong side of the bridge. Cross this line and your ass is mine. Ummm... okay, cross *this* line, then.**

"Regardless of which character class you play," elaborates Cain, "the game will not only be viable, but you can play it from start to finish – and be able to survive – as that character."

Another design decision that makes *Arcanum* stand out is its time period – the game will take place in its own world but will have the feel of 19th-century Europe.

"A lot of people who play RPGs have gotten tired of the standard elves and knights and dragons that are in a lot of fantasy RPGs," Cain explains. "Placing the game in the 19th-century has opened up a lot of new ideas to play around with in a fantasy world."

Arcanum wouldn't be a true RPG, however, if it didn't have a robust character-creation system, and it's definitely no slouch in that regard. "There are some race and gender combinations that aren't available in the game," says Cain, "and these limitations aren't technological, but rather they're part of the storyline." For instance, you won't find any half-ogre females in the *Arcanum* world. To ensure you understand the reason, the storyline will explain this limitation as you play through the game.

Character creation will take on a huge role, as every attribute chosen will affect the character's other strengths and weaknesses and how other characters will react to him or her. But the real difference is that the stats will be based on human standards.

"If you get a bonus of three strength and an extra 10 percent damage resistance, you may lose a point of beauty and three IQ points



LAYIN' THE SMACK DOWN, SCANNERS-STYLE **Come within 12 feet of me and your head's gonna explode. So bring it on, bad boys....**



BURNIN' UP WITH FEVER? **I don't care what your character class is; that's *got* to hurt.**



Arcanum **tries to freshen up a genre beginning to reek of a crusty old knight's skanky armor.**

– which means you can take this character, but don't expect him to master any skills or do things that are IQ-based," says Cain.

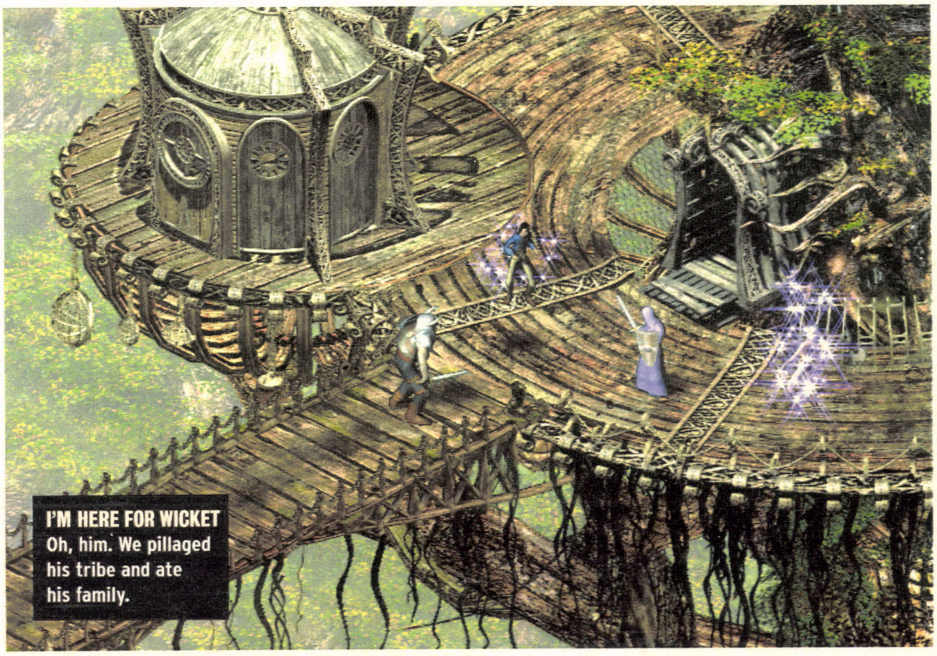
Arcanum's character-creation system also allows for choosing character backgrounds, and these backgrounds, while they add to the overall storyline, will also have a tangible effect on your character.

"The backgrounds will further modify your character," Cain notes. "For instance, there's a character background in the game that says that snake handlers raised them. This gives your character a bonus in poison resistance, but they'll lose beauty because of all these bite marks all over them."

Altering your basic stats changes other aspects of your character. The stronger you are, the higher your carry weight and damage bonuses will be, for example. "There's nothing in the character editor that you can change that won't have an effect somewhere [else] in the game," advises Cain. "We want people to be aware that nothing's free here. Beauty will control how people initially react to you. So if you are very ugly, people will react to you poorly."

With *Arcanum*, Troika is hoping to reinvent the role-playing game. Cain concludes, "When we made *Fallout*, the reason it was put in a nonfantasy genre is that we didn't want to compete with the umpteen million fantasy RPGs that are out there. And when I decided that I wanted to try my hand at a fantasy RPG, the idea of doing another 14th-century RPG just wasn't appealing."

From here, it looks as if an extra five centuries are just what gamers needed to make RPGs fresh again. We'll find out for sure when *Arcanum* releases in the fall.



Put on Your Thinking Cap

Eidos puts its money on **I'M GOING IN,** a thinking man's shooter

■ PUBLISHER **Eidos** ■ DEVELOPER **Innerloop** ■ GENRE **Arcade Fighting** ■ PLAYERS **First-person shooter** ■ RELEASE DATE **Q4 2000**

INSIGHT

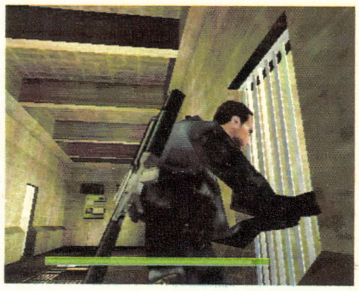
Q. I heard a rumor you could shoot at reindeer in this.
A. No. The developers are based in Norway, but Rudolf is safe.

Q. *I'm Going In* is by the same company behind *Daikatana*. Will this one ever come out?
A. It should be out by October, but hey, you never know....

We asked Andrew Wensley, producer of *I'm Going In*, to give us the lowdown on Innerloop's upcoming thinking man's shooter.

By Joe Vallina

Realism in games is a hot trend. How have games such as *Rogue Spear* and *SWAT 3* affected the way you and your team are developing *I'm Going In*?
We looked long and hard at those two – looking for what features we liked. For example, the tense pressure of them both. We also looked at what features could have been executed better and drew lessons from those. *Delta Force, Hidden & Dangerous,* and *Counter Strike* featured in our research too. We love the realistic feel of them all – it's where it's at for us: playable realism. It's gotta look real, and the world must behave in a real manner, but it must play well. The balance between gameplay and realism must be just right. We always keep reminding ourselves it's a game, and we have to make sure it's still fun to play.



HURRY UP! **Picking locks isn't instantaneous; you have to work for it.**



DON'T MAKE ME USE THIS **Violence isn't your best option – on the way in, that is.**

How will *I'm Going In* break away from the first-person-shooter mold? There's a lot of competition out there these days.
Two words: thinker shooter. You think your way in and shoot your way out.

What are your main influences in designing this game?
We all played a lot of *GoldenEye*. It's still an awesome game – there's a lot of respect due to Rare for that one. And we're all first-person-shooter fans. We play a lot of *Unreal* and *Quake*. You can't make a first-person shooter without keeping those games in mind. Outside of games, our research drove many game elements. Some weapon-fire modes are taken from real-world weapons, and the AI responses were based initially on design discussions with ex-U.K. special-forces soldiers, as were the vehicle-damage systems. Internally, the technology drove many design decisions: Our ability to zoom in on a target many kilometers away gave rise to the spy satellites, which in turn drove the battlefield PDA, which in turn helped develop the hacking and infiltration gameplay.

What is the biggest challenge your team faces in making *I'm Going In*?
Keeping to the philosophy of thinker shooter. That means maintaining the fine balance between tense, tight gameplay based around observation, movement, and cover, and the pure adrenaline rush of gunplay against overwhelming odds.



TOO TOUGH TO HANDLE **When all you've got is a light machine gun, you're better off waiting for the tank to pass before you make a break for it. Just like in real combat, the tank always wins these battles.**



CHECK THE ROOFTOPS Be sure to check for snipers before climbing into the open.

What is the funniest story you have from the design and programming phases?
Hmmm, well, the biggest laugh was the one the team got when I had to grow a beard because my bathroom was so cold. We're based in Norway, and in the winter my old flat wasn't too warm. I walked into the office after being away on research for a week looking like an extra from *Doctor Zhivago* – not a good time!

What is the wildest idea that didn't make it into the game?
Some of the initial plans on interrogating enemy personnel were a bit extreme – being able to kneecap enemy characters in order to get better information from them and the like. We had to take a reality check on those plans.

You did a lot of research in Finland that involved shooting actual guns. Which guns did you test?
Everything from .22 handguns to .44 "Dirty Harry" Magnums, Uzi 9mms, AK47s, M16 assault rifles, Berretas, a Sterling (a British silenced submachine gun) – *that* was scary. We also shot a range of Russian World War II belt-fed guns and a Maxim – a heavy caliber machine gun from the '20s; it was brutal! We looked at the firing modes and recoils of the different weapons. We've tried to model that carefully into the game so the players will need to double tap [firing short bursts in rapid succession]. We also looked into how different ammunition types penetrate different materials.

Did you eat reindeer?
Yep! Red nose and all – lovely with a drop of cranberry sauce.

ONLY TWO COULD ADVANCE TO THE LIGHTNING ROUND...WHICH WOULD IT BE?

GANG OF FOUR



MEET THE CAST Characters in *I'm Going In* include our hero Jones (far left), AK-47-equipped guards, Jones' accomplice Anya, and sleazy arms dealers like the guy on the far right. Where are the requisite terrorists?

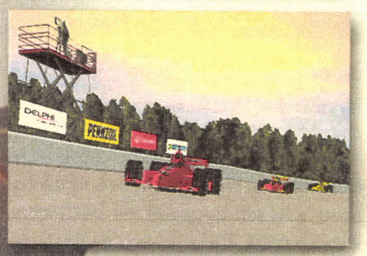
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RACE WITH THE PROS

E3 2000

A Complete Insider's Report

If a tree falls in the middle of the **ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO,** the gaming industry's annual festival of upcoming products and games, does it make a sound? We suppose it does, but who would hear it among the din of **62,000 fired-up people, 2,400 games,** and **countless sense-shattering audio/visual presentations?** Somehow we managed to survive the chaotic cacophony to give you this blow-by-blow, company-by-company account of the highlights and lowlights of the show **BY GARY ENG WALK**



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RAJAT GHOSH**



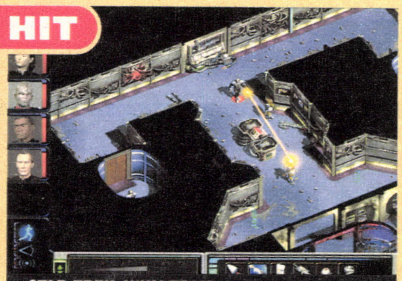







HITS + MISSES

HIT



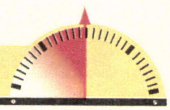
STAR TREK AWAY TEAM

MISS



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

ACTIVISION



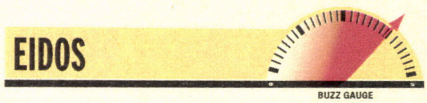
Unlike its more diverse console lineup, Activision's PC offerings were very *Star Trek* heavy, so its success on this platform clearly rests on the shoulders of Captain Picard and his space-hopping buddies. Good thing for Activision that, unlike other companies, it's actually very skilled at making *Trek* games.

HITS: **Star Trek Bridge Commander** puts you in control of your very own starship and features voice-overs from the cast of *The Next Generation*. (You'd think Patrick Stewart would be sick of saying, "Make it so" by now.) For more action-minded players there's **Star Trek Away Team,** featuring specialized task forces whom you direct on various missions. Non-*Trek* offerings you'll pine for are **Quake III Team Arena,** id Software's first official *Quake III Arena* mission pack, and the oft-delayed **Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption.**

MISSES: The biggest disappointment was **Return to Castle Wolfenstein.** The ultrasharp graphics have more bite than five-alarm holzfellerschnitzel, but we hoped it would be more like the classic *Castle Wolfenstein* and less like the "shoot first, shoot more later" *Wolfenstein 3D.* The game looks pretty, but we'd gladly sacrifice graphics for some old-fashioned *Castle Wolfenstein* elements, such as sneaking around disguised as a Nazi and being discovered by a nasty SS trooper. Elsewhere in the booth, **Wizard and Warriors** is destined to irk role-playing-game fans with its flat 2D graphics and lack of multiplayer capability.

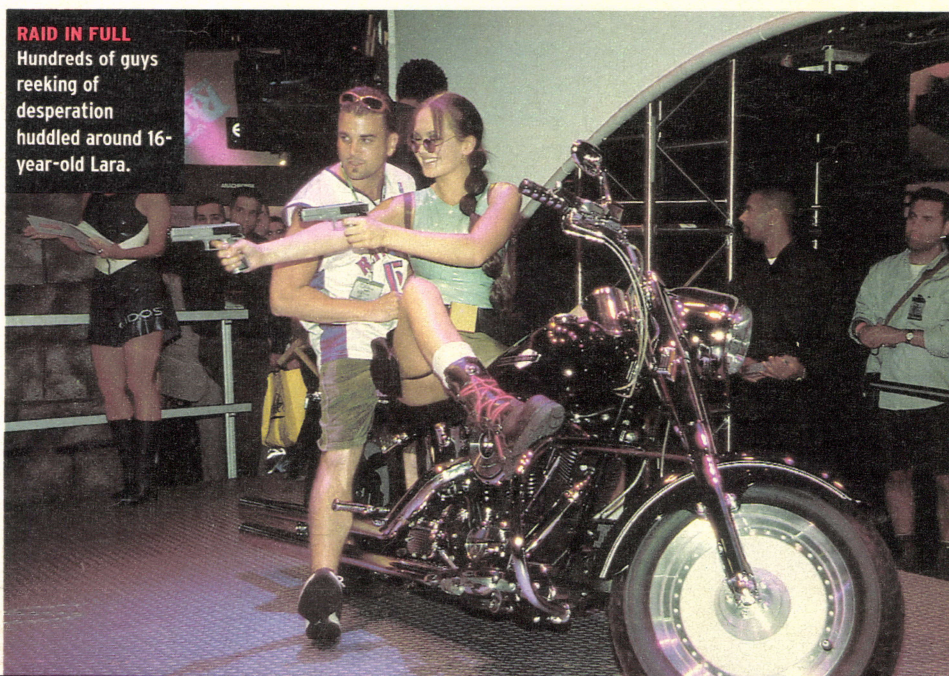
CROWD FAVORITE: Players couldn't get enough of the deathmatch mode in **Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force.**

EIDOS



Eidos Interactive was on unfamiliar turf this year: It had no new **Tomb Raider** games to exhibit. Even so, a good number of its non-Lara Croft offerings are potential hits. The *Tomb Raider* vacuum didn't stop Eidos from parading around a new Lara Croft, however. No, not Angelina Jolie — this year's E3 edition quickly became known as "Jailbait Lara," for at the time of the show, the model was a nubile 16 years old. Is the game called *Tomb Raider* or *Cradle Robber?*

HITS: **Commandos 2,** which features postcard-beautiful graphics, is a mission-



RAID IN FULL Hundreds of guys reeking of desperation huddled around 16-year-old Lara.

"Sooner rather than later, video and computer game **software sales** will surpass the motion picture box office numbers."

-IDSA President Douglas Lowenstein at the E3 keynote address



CAN'T DRIVE 55 Attendees race to the finish.

based war game that will serve fans of the genre well. **Project Eden,** a strike team game in which you control four characters at a time, is also worth a close look. Another one to watch is **Republic: The Revolution**, a political strategy game with a high-detail graphics engine created by a former *Black & White* lead programmer. **Hitman: Codename 47,** the controversial assassin sim, and **Deus Ex,** a first-person action/adventure that gives you the option of using either stealth or in-your-face brawn, are both also inevitable best-sellers.

MISSES: Even if it goes by the slightly more hip *I.G.I.* moniker, **I'm Going In** gets the award for "Most Inane Game Title." The actual game doesn't look much better and is weak by most people's standards. *incite PC Gaming* editors also found it difficult to get excited about **Startopia,** Eidos' foray into space-based strategy games.

CROWD FAVORITES: A tie between **Deus Ex** and Jailbait Lara frolicking all over Eidos' stage.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

BUZZ GAUGE

EA's booth had much more substance and far fewer gimmicks than last year (when the booth featured a full-size WCW wrestling ring). The software behemoth used E3 to formally unveil its new branding strategy. All of its games now fall under the EA Games, EA Sports, or EA.Com labels. This includes games from all of the companies it has acquired over the years, such as Westwood and Maxis. On the show floor it was plain to see EA is going full-bore with next-generation-console development. But not even the booming, repeating video sequence that trumpeted EA's newest PlayStation 2 offerings could drown out the excitement stirred up by its PC lineup, which was one of the strongest at the show.

HITS: Though some say it's blasphemous to Lewis Carroll's original work, **American McGee's Alice,** which is a darker, grittier take on *Alice in Wonderland* (Alice, for instance, is a knife-wielding brunette) was distinctive and impressive. **The Sims: Livin' Large** is the best-seller's first expansion pack and features new furniture, houses, and some bizarre characters, including zombie Sims and a wish-granting genie. **The World Is Not Enough,** EA's first James Bond game on the PC, is still a ways off from a finished product, but its *Quake III* engine-powered visuals had players drooling all over their convention badges. **Madden NFL 2001** for the PC looks as good as the PlayStation 2 version (still, no PC college sports games from EA Sports). **Need for Speed: Motor City** is now an online-only racing title. (You need to log on even if you just want to practice racing on a particular track.) But the concept is still as sound as ever: a persistent online world like that of *Ultima Online* that features cars instead of level-20 Bards. Speaking of *Ultima,* **Ultima Online 2** is on the way and looks every bit like an *EverQuest* killer.

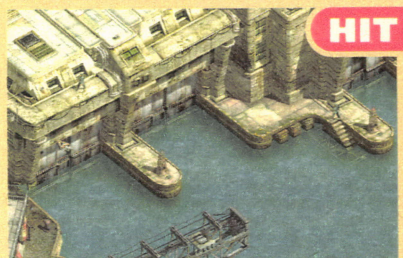
MISSES: **Simsville** had perhaps the greatest potential of any game on the show floor, but it had many limitations. Even at such an early stage in development, it's obvious Maxis is still far from realizing its ultimate goal: a huge virtual world that combines the macroscopic building management of *SimCity* with the microscopic people/personality-simulating prowess of *The Sims.* Clive Barker's **Undying** ironically already looks like it's dead on arrival.

CROWD FAVORITE: **Black & White** looks like Peter Molyneux's next hit in waiting. There wasn't a moment during the entire event when a throng of admirers wasn't gawking at the game demonstration. In the game, you play one of several divine powers on a world called Eden. You create your own monsters, attract worshippers, and clash with other deities for the title Supreme God.

HITS + MISSES

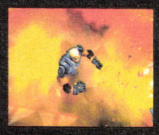
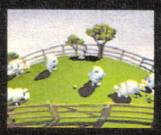














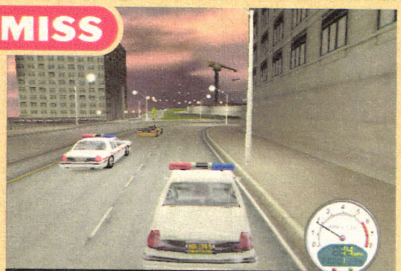
HITS + MISSES

HIT



HEAVY METAL

MISS



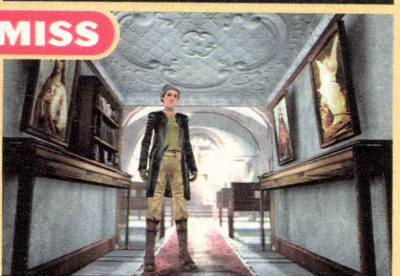
WORLD'S SCARIEST POLICE CHASES

HIT



BALDUR'S GATE II

MISS

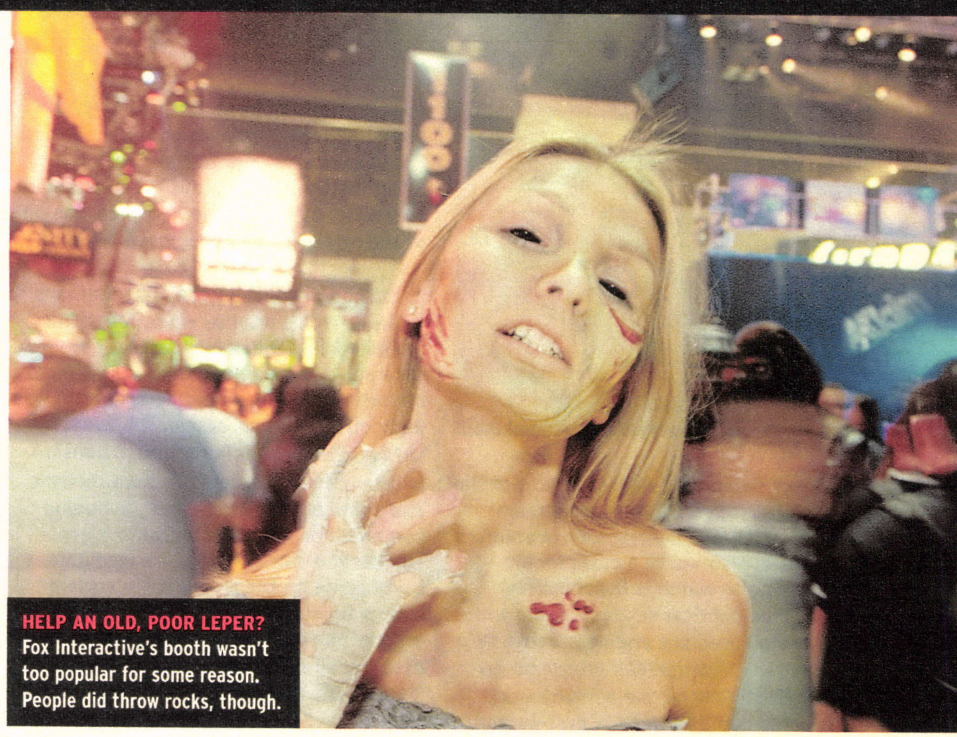


BLAIR WITCH VOLS. 1–3

HIT

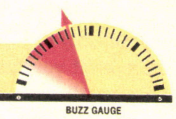


NO ONE LIVES FOREVER



HELP AN OLD, POOR LEPER? Fox Interactive's booth wasn't too popular for some reason. People did throw rocks, though.

FOX INTERACTIVE



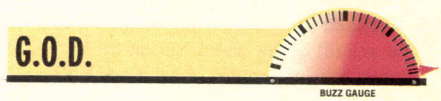
Fox Interactive has always been an underachiever with its games. Consider the powerhouse roster of franchises at its disposal – *Die Hard, Alien, The Simpsons, The X-Files,* etc. – then try to count the number of memorable games based on these properties. (We'll help you out: The answer is zero). The company appears to be heading in the right direction, though. Judging from the gallery of games Fox Interactive was showing at E3, this could be the year it actually gets PC games right and sells a few.

HITS: **No One Lives Forever,** a spy spoof that doesn't totally consume itself with Austin Powers-esque slapstick, is Fox's secret weapon. Even at its early stage, **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** looks like it won't suck. **Planet of the Apes,** an epic starring those lovable superintelligent apes, will be a joy to play for anyone with opposable thumbs.

MISSES: **World's Scariest Police Chases** is an accident waiting to happen.

CROWD FAVORITES: Gamers seemed pleasantly surprised with the **Buffy** game and went ga-ga over the **No One Lives Forever** go-go dancers, who strutted to '60s-style music from within a cage conveniently positioned atop a riser to give the crowd an ample view of the dancers' panties.

G.O.D.



Despite getting bought out by Take-Two Interactive – thereby relinquishing its vaunted independence (see our exposé in the July issue) – Gathering of Developers still managed to be upbeat. The company's founders were also able to demonstrate they could still be every bit the mavericks they were when they first started the company. The Gathering again chose to exhibit its titles not in the air-conditioned halls where every other company was, but in a parking lot across the street. Dubbed "The Promised Lot II," the makeshift trailer park was complete with kegs of beer and sideshow attractions anchored by a full army of costumed little people. Despite the diversions, games were still the focal point of this gaming bacchanal, and in fact, The Gathering presented the most rousing group of games at the show.

HITS: **Max Payne** features a plot straight out of a Steven Segal movie – you play as

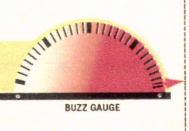


Max, a wrongfully accused New York City cop who takes on the gang members who killed his family – and some frenetic cinematics that would color John Woo proud, making this game a hit at the show. It also features killer visuals, the likes of which have never graced a computer monitor: *Max Payne*'s graphics will run at an unheard-of 1024x1024 resolution, enough to see every bit of Gotham grit. If *Max Payne* is the most stylish, then **Heavy Metal** is the most colorful, and shows that not all games powered by the *Quake III* engine need to take place in dingy, earth-toned landscapes. **Shadowbane,** a massively multiplayer online game that gets away from the pixie-dust factor in favor of medieval warfare, looks great as well.

MISSES: **The Blair Witch** series of games – three titles being simultaneously developed by Terminal Reality, Human Head, and Ritual Entertainment – are looking almost as ill conceived as the movie sequels. If there was a difference between **Kingdom Under Fire** and the other umpteen real-time-strategy games at the show, we couldn't see it.

CROWD FAVORITE: **Max Payne** – have we mentioned how cool this game is?

HAVAS



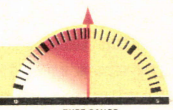
There was a chill in the air, but luckily for Sierra and parent company Havas Interactive, it was all courtesy of Blizzard. Between **Diablo II** and **WarCraft III,** Blizzard supplied all the firepower Sierra needed for its 2000 E3 to be a success.

HITS: **Diablo II,** natch, is a biggie, and it's finally out in stores. **Homeworld Cataclysm** looks like a worthy successor to the original sleeper hit. Many gamers picked **Tribes 2** as the best-looking PC game at the show. It's a safer bet than treasury bonds, but we'll wager that **WarCraft III** is going to be at least as successful as *Diablo II*.

MISSES: Just when you thought Sierra had retired the crusty *Caesar* engine, it rehashed it again, this time in **Zeus.** The gameplay could prove to be godlike, but it's going to be a Herculean task for gamers to get past those antiquated graphics. **Throne of Darkness** and **Empire Earth** both rip off established hits – *Diablo* and *Age of Empires,* respectively – and were unanimous duds in our eyes. The conspicuous absence of **Team Fortress 2,** which was shown as a running demo at last year's E3, was disappointing. This hotly anticipated game was nowhere to be found, and it already has the dubious honor of being called "The Next *Daikatana*" for its habitual delays. If Valve doesn't at least show some progress to the fans, excitement about the game could wither on the vine before long. People were also expecting a **Half-Life 2** announcement, which wasn't made.

CROWD FAVORITE: Movie-style trailers for games were a big-time trend at this year's E3, and Konami's presentation of *Metal Gear Solid* for the PlayStation 2 notwithstanding, the trailer for **WarCraft III** (which can be seen on this month's *incite PC Gaming* CD-ROM) was the most dramatic and drew many spectators. The game looks frickin' awesome to boot.

INTERPLAY



Though Interplay had a robust showing, it was clearly a bit lopsided in its choice of genres. It has a vice grip on the real-time-strategy and role-playing categories, but doesn't have much in the way of anything else, namely racing or action/adventure. What's more, Interplay still failed to prove it can make a *Star Trek* game that fans can get excited about.

HITS: The Dungeon and Dragons-based **Neverwinter Nights** looks very much like the revolutionary RPG that BioWare and Black Isle Studios are making it out to be. Not to be outdone, **Baldur's Gate II** cast a

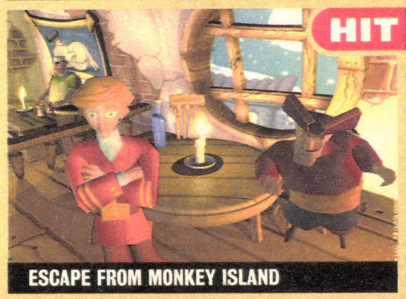
HITS+ MISSES



MAX PAYNE



KINGDOM UNDER FIRE



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND



THRONE OF DARKNESS

At E3 this year 400 companies showed off 2,400 games. Of them, 63 percent were targeted at the casual-gaming audience.

—From an IDSA report







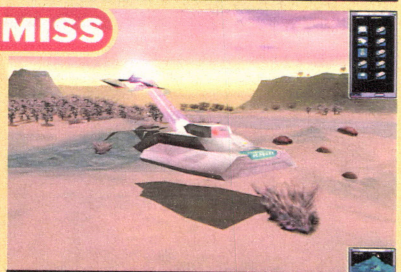

HITS+ MISSES

HIT



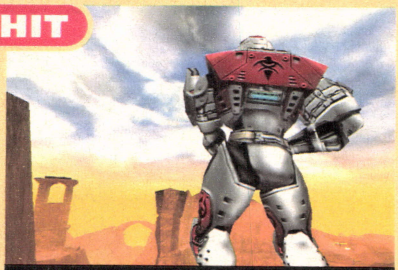
EVIL TWIN—CYPRIEN'S CHRONICLES

MISS



STAR TREK NEW WORLDS

HIT



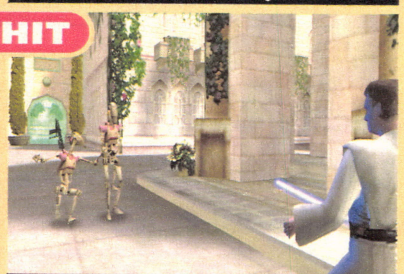
TRIBES 2

MISS



AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS

HIT



STAR WARS: EPISODE I —OBI-WAN



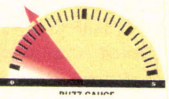
SHAKE IT Girls in cages were a big attraction.

spell on RPG addicts. **Sacrifice** will be the real-time-strategy game to beat this fall.

MISSES: Interplay's *Star Trek* offerings continue to indicate the company is more clueless than the Ferengi. Instead of taking chances with different game genres (as Activision has been doing with its *Star Trek* license), Interplay is going with far more perfunctory offerings: **Starfleet Command 2** and **Star Trek New Worlds.** Set your phasers for "numb."

CROWD FAVORITE: Featuring tons of action and strategy elements, the peculiar **Giants: Citizen Kabuto** pits three species of monsters against each other on a soon-to-be ravaged island. Multiplayer bouts seemed to please onlookers the most.

LUCASARTS



What a difference a year makes: At last year's E3, the imminent release of *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* had everyone in an explosive tizzy, one that made LucasArts a must-see on everyone's list. Much to the public relations staff's delight, this year's showing was significantly more subdued. Better still, one of LucasArts' most promising games had absolutely nothing to do with the Force.

HITS: **Escape from Monkey Island** resurrects LucasArts' forgotten adventure series and is completely 3D for the first time. Expect some seriously funny moments, thanks to the same talented team that created the classic *Sam and Max Hit the Road.* **Star Wars: Episode One —Obi-Wan** continues to look sharp. There was visual confirmation of Jar Jar Binks in the game, however, so we-sa thinks this could be trouble.

MISSES: Besides the aforementioned Jar Jar sighting, **Star Wars Super Bombad Racing,** a kart-style racing game starring big-headed *Star Wars* characters, is a dud out of the starting gate.

CROWD FAVORITE: It isn't a PC game, but people seemed to get a charge out of seeing Boba Fett in **Star Wars Demolition.**

MICROSOFT



The general consensus is that this is the first year Microsoft really came across as a true game developer with titles worth playing. The Xbox had a flashy exhibit and an informative technology demo behind closed doors (one that featured an impressive demonstration of the console system's dynamic music sound effect feature), but Microsoft kept it mainly in the background, giving its PC games their well-deserved place in the spotlight.

HITS: The space-age **Freelancer** was the best game of the show, with graphics so detailed that you would swear you were watching a big-screen blockbuster. We can't wait to play this game. Also sizzling is Alex Garden's **Sigma,** which allows you to do your very own genetic splicing on a menagerie of creatures. If that doesn't strike your fancy, Microsoft had plenty more excellent games running on the show floor. **MechWarrior 4,** revamped and fully 3D for the first time, is hot. So are **Crimson Skies,** a nostalgic alternate-reality, airplane-combat game, and **Dungeon Siege,** which will surely draw favorable comparisons to *Diablo II,* thanks to a full-blown level editor.

MISSES: We expected more from **Age of Empires II: The Conquerors,** which features few real improvements. Digital Anvil's **Conquest** is no different than any other real-time-strategy game. Ho-hum reaction to the new **Links** golf game underscored the fact that Microsoft's sports label is in dire straits.

CROWD FAVORITES: **Freelancer** and **Dungeon Siege** provided showgoers with their favorite double feature.



OTHER HITS

BUZZ GAUGE

There were plenty more gems on display from a wealth of companies too numerous to mention individually. Here are the ones to keep an eye on:

Halo, from Bungie Software, stirred up lots of buzz for the second E3 in a row. This year Bungie showed a video of in-game footage with stunning results. Hey, Bungie, finish up this game, already!

Ubi Soft's high-profile **V.I.P.** game has the sex appeal, but **Evil Twin — Cyprien's Chronicles,** a stylish console-style action adventure starring a puckish boy and his twisted doppelganger, is the company's true A title.

You've never heard of Kinnesoft, but two inaugural games from the fledgling game company should put it on the map. **MageLords** is a sword-and-sorcery game featuring abundant supplies of eye candy, not to mention giants, hellhounds, and other garish monsters. **Crimson Order** is a futuristic, top-down-perspective task force game that features plenty of bullets and mayhem for the hellion in all of us.

Blue Byte laid a goose egg with *Stephen King's F13,* but it should turn things around with **Dragon's Lair 3D,** a remake of the classic arcade game.

Mattel Interactive has a diverse handful of games worth waiting for, including **Billabong Pro Surfer,** developed by Australian-based Krome Studios, and **Myst III: Exile,** which made an appearance and will try to recapture the magic – and sales figures – of the first two games in the series.

Empire Interactive's puzzle game, **Sheep,** puts you in the role of a shepherd. It's sure to be a hit among Welsh gamers everywhere.

Hasbro Interactive's latest classic arcade games to get 21st-century makeovers include **Breakout** and **Galaga.**

Once it finally gets it out the door, Simon & Schuster Interactive will have a smash on its hands with **Deep Space Nine: The Fallen.** Now reaching the home stretch, this *Star Trek* game will finally be released in the fall.

Red Storm's best title adapts the work of a best-selling author, but it has nothing to do with Tom Clancy – for once. **Freedom: First Resistance** brings Anne McCaffrey's series of Freedom novels to the gaming world.

Going into E3, PC gamers were afraid that the three superconsoles – the PlayStation 2, Dreamcast, and Xbox – would overshadow the PC platform. Expectations were low for PC games, but much to everyone's surprise, a huge crop of games were superb. More, not less, blockbuster PC games are on the way.

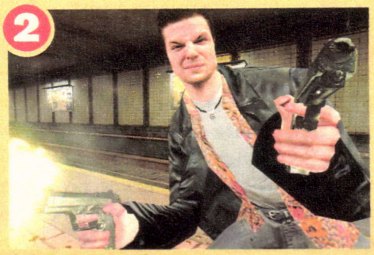


TAKE ME TO YOUR READERS
One *X-Com* anal probe coming right up!

TOP 5 GAMES



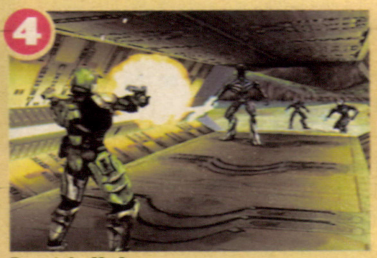
1 Microsoft's **Freelancer**



2 G.O.D.'s **Max Payne**



3 Blizzard's **WarCraft III**



4 Bungie's **Halo**



5 Eidos' **Commandos 2**

QUAKE-ING ALL OVER

BY PAUL SEMEL

When not pounding the keyboard for **Slipknot,** 5 (née Craig Jones) pounds his bandmates in games of *Quake III*

There are some people who you'd never in a million years expect to be into video games. And then there are some people – say, those in hard-rock bands who wear scary masks – who'd surprise you if they didn't admit to being hardcore gamers. As explained by the band's sample manager, 5 (Craig Jones), – that's him in the spiked mask below – the guys in Slipknot are just as attached to such games as *Quake III* and *Duke Nukem 3D* as they are to their PCs.

Which came first, your love of keyboards or your love of computer games?
Probably games. I've been playing games ever since PCs came out, like, 20 years ago. That got me into computers, and the rest just kind of fell into place.

Do you bring a computer on the road with you?
Oh, definitely, yeah. I don't think I could go a day without my computer. I also maintain our Web site, www.slipknot1.com, so I've got to have one with me.

Do you play online much?
Yeah, though not so much anymore – I just don't have the time. Plus, phone lines just don't cut it. When I'm at home I have a cable modem, which makes it a lot easier.

Do you guys ever play online together?
Not the whole band, but a couple of the other guys have laptops as well, so once in a while we'll network them together and play *Quake III* or *Duke Nukem 3D* on the bus. We even have skins of ourselves for *Quake* that a friend of ours made, so when we play, our characters look like ourselves.

Who's the best gamer in the band?
Actually, we're all about the same.

Do things ever get ugly?
Oh, yeah. When we used to play over the modem, you could feel the tension. You'd call 'em up on the phone: "You pissed?" "Yeah."

Do you go by names or numbers in-game?
We have our own little *Quake* clan going, the ZZ clan. So when we play my name is ZZ 5, the clown [percussionist 6 (Shawn Crahan)] goes by the name ZZ Clown, stuff like that.

So is it difficult to play games while you're wearing your mask?
Y'know, I've never done it with my mask on – though when I used to use my laptop on stage for doing my samples, it was tough to see the laptop screen though my mask.

Has the band been approached to do the music for any games yet?
I've been pushing for it. There was some talk of it a while back, and lately we've been trying to get something on the new *Duke Nukem* game.

Do you think playing games on a keyboard has made you better at playing music on a keyboard, or vice versa?
Yeah, maybe a little bit – though I've never really thought about it before.

Lastly, your band recently went through some verbal sparring with Fred Durst of rival metal band Limp Bizkit. If you took him on in a *Quake III Arena* deathmatch, how long would it take to frag him into oblivion?
It probably wouldn't take much time at all.

Slipnot's self-titled debut is out now. For more info on the band, visit incite.com.

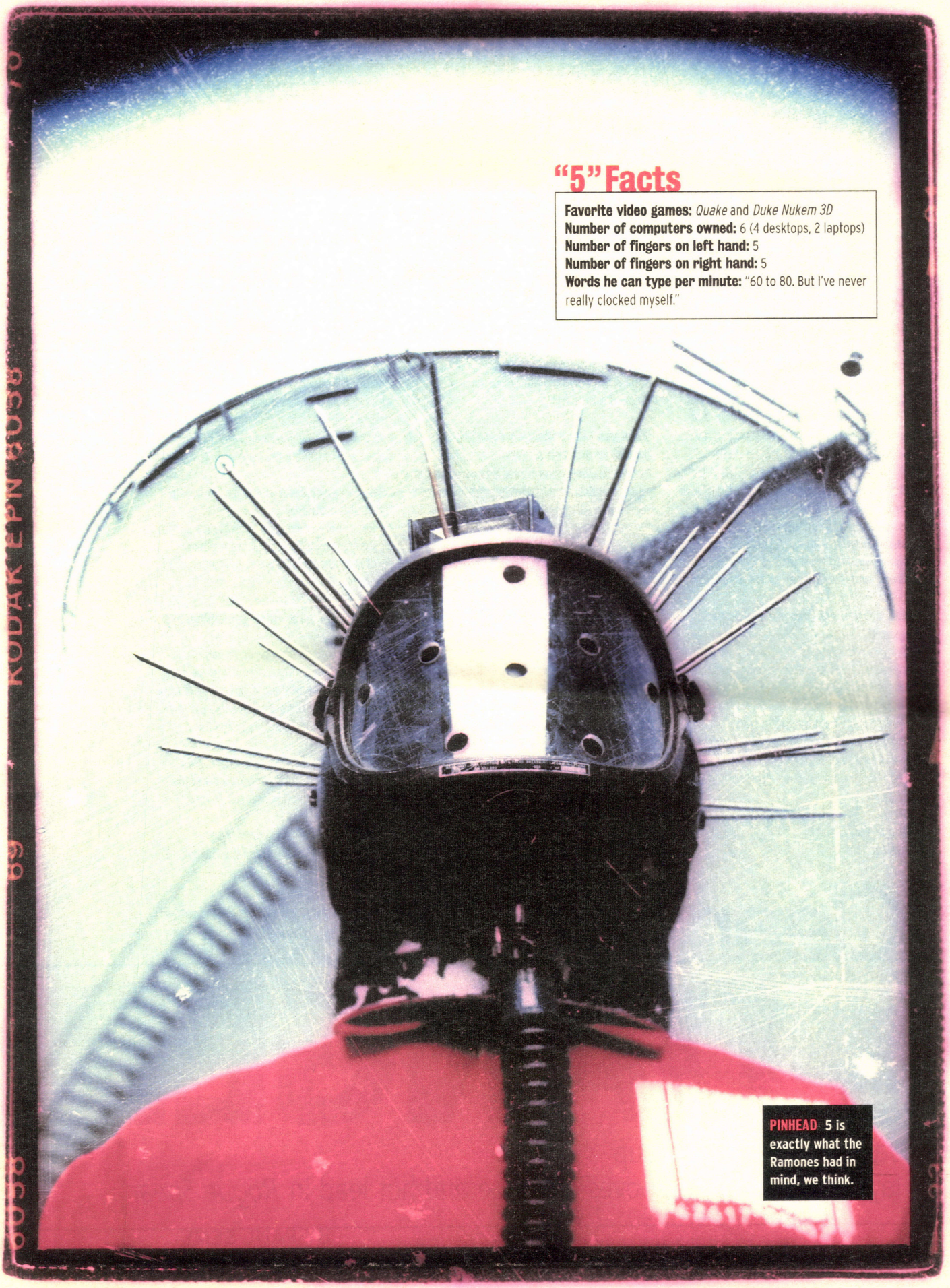
"We've been trying to get something on the new *Duke Nukem* game."



HALLOWEEN ALREADY? That's our boy 5 in the back with the spiked 'do. Two words: fugly.

"5" Facts

Favorite video games: *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D*
Number of computers owned: 6 (4 desktops, 2 laptops)
Number of fingers on left hand: 5
Number of fingers on right hand: 5
Words he can type per minute: "60 to 80. But I've never really clocked myself."



PINHEAD 5 is exactly what the Ramones had in mind, we think.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF **ROADRUNNER RECORDS**

Clear and Present DANGER

Sauce, of the R&B group **Somethin' For The People,** lays down smooth grooves on stage and hot lead in *Rogue Spear*

BY PAUL SEMEL

Unless you have been horribly scarred by a crazed maniac wielding a bowl of hollandaise, the name Sauce probably doesn't make you want to run away screaming. But if you ever come across him in an online deathmatch of *Rogue Spear*, fleeing the scene is probably your best option. That's because Sauce – who makes up the R&B band Somethin' For The People along with his equally unthreateningly nicknamed pals Cat Daddy and Fuzzy – is an avid *Rogue Spear* warrior. Though his group is known for producing such smooth, romantic hits as Will Smith's "Just the Two of Us," Eric Benét's "Georgy Porgy," and their own "My Love Is the Shhh!," Sauce is a fearsome, bloodthirsty, unrelenting video game player capable of defeating any enemy. Well, except for his little brother.

How did you get into playing *Rogue Spear*?
My cousin told me about it, how him and his friends play online. I had bought a computer recently and gotten one for my family for Christmas – they live in Oakland – so my brother and I went and got a copy, and we played it a lot during the holidays. Then when I got back to L.A., which is where I live, I bought one, and now my brother and I play online.

Who usually wins?
Him. [*Laughs.*]

What is it about *Rogue Spear* that you like so much?
It's just different than your regular shoot-'em-up. It has a lot of different missions, and it's not just something you can beat right away; it's challenging.

Besides the deathmatch mode, the game has single-player missions as well. Have you beaten the game yet?
Yeah, that's what we started off playing. Then, when I came home, he played his and I played mine. And he finished before I did, of course. [*Laughs.*] But I was having problems with mine; my computer would always lock up. So I went back up there a couple months later, and he had almost beaten it, so we just finished it together.

When you play online, do you play as Sauce, or do have a more menacing name? Because the name Sauce doesn't really strike fear in the hearts of men.
Yeah, right. [*Laughs.*] My on-screen name is "Whoshotya."

When you go on tour, do you bring a computer with you?
No [*mournfully*]. We're actually on tour now, and it's killing me. I'm looking to get one while I'm out.

Were you a big fan of Tom Clancy before you started playing *Rogue Spear*?
Y'know what? I actually never heard of him until I saw the games *Rogue Spear* and *Rainbow Six*. But I'm starting to get into him.

Your new album has a number of guests on it, including Xzibit, Luke, and Eric Benét. Did you get to play any games with them?
Eric used to play something with us. I can't remember what game it was, but he's not that good. [*Laughs.*]

You've also written and produced songs for a lot of people. Do you ever get to play games with them, or is it just strictly business?
Well, Will Smith's a big *Knockout Kings* player, so we played that a couple times. He's supposed to be the s—playing that; it's his thing, and he whooped Cat Daddy once, but he hasn't beaten me.

Is there anyone you've worked with who you were surprised to learn was a video game addict?
Will Smith, for one. Actually, a lot of people who've come to interview us have been like, "Hey, let me play." They come to talk to us, and the next thing you know we're playing games and not doing the interview. [*Laughs.*]

Have you guys been asked to do music for a video game?
We were approached once, a few years ago, to do something for EA Sports, but it never developed. But we'd be really into doing stuff like that.

So, who's the best video game player in the band?
Y'know, it changes from game to game. Like, the female dancers that are out with us, they play too, and one of them is good at *NBA Live*. I keep her on my team whenever we play two on two, and nobody on the bus can beat us.

Besides your dancers, are the ladies impressed with your video game skills?
No, they really couldn't care less. [*Laughs.*]

If you find one who is, marry her.
Exactly. [*Laughs.*] I'm always on the lookout.

"*Rogue Spear* is not something you can just beat right away; it's challenging."

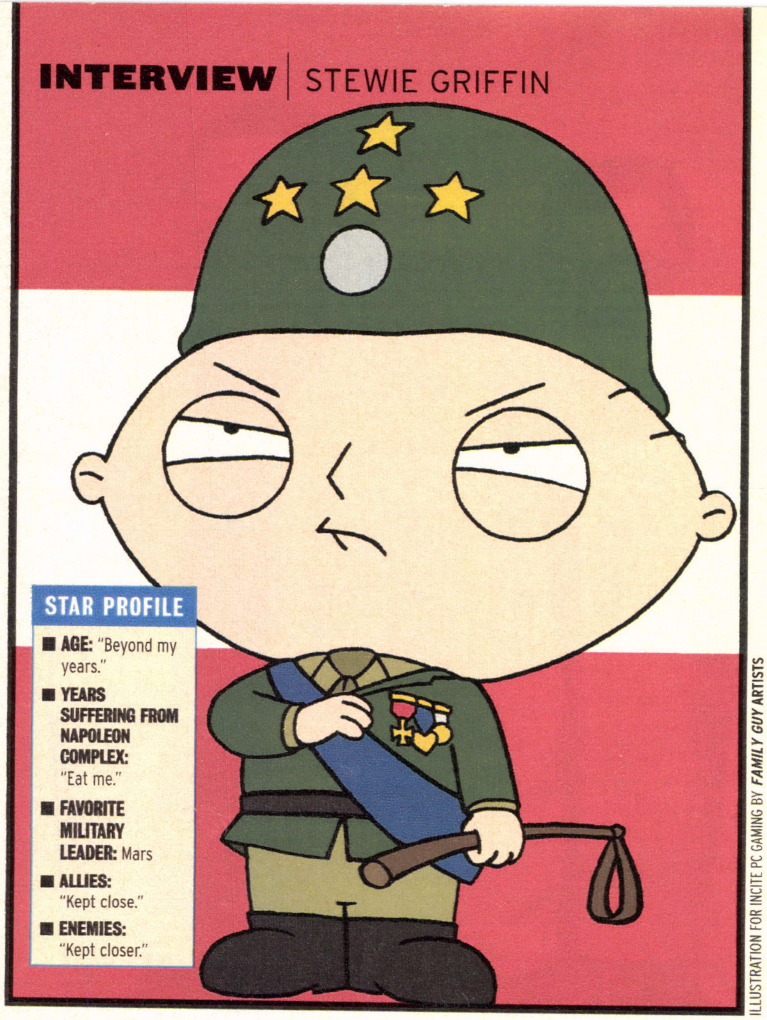


Somethin' For The People is (left to right): Fuzzy, Sauce, and Cat Daddy

Sauce Facts

Years as a gamer: 18
Favorite Tom Clancy book: "I haven't read any of the books."
Favorite Tom Clancy movie: *Clear and Present Danger*
Favorite Tom Clancy game: *Rogue Spear*
Smoothest video game character: "Afro Thunder, the boxer from Ready to Rumble."
Somethin' For The People's new album is called *Issues*. It's available everywhere.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LUMUMBA**, COURTESY OF **WARNER BROS. RECORDS**



STAR PROFILE

- **AGE:** "Beyond my years."
- **YEARS SUFFERING FROM NAPOLEON COMPLEX:** "Eat me."
- **FAVORITE MILITARY LEADER:** Mars
- **ALLIES:** "Kept close."
- **ENEMIES:** "Kept closer."

ILLUSTRATION FOR INCITE PC GAMING BY *FAMILY GUY* ARTISTS

Risk-y Business

Stewie of *Family Guy* wants to rule the world. We let him in **Risk II**

BY PAUL SEMEL

Great leaders are not born, they're made – and sometimes they're drawn with colored inks. Such is the case with despot-in-training Stewie Griffin. Within that oblong-shaped head lies the mind of an evil genius who's hell-bent on ruling the world. We sent Stewie a copy *Risk II* to see how he'd do in a trial run.

Did you have fun playing this game?
If you're asking whether I enjoyed conquering foreign lands by running my bayonet through the spleens of some enemies while shooting others in the face at a stone's throw, then yes, yes I did.

How well did you do?
Take a look at your currency. Go on, look at it! If it doesn't have my face on it, it's because you're still carrying the old stuff.

Did the graphics make you feel like you were actually controlling an army?
The graphics were suitable, I suppose. Though I did miss the smells of war. You know, the stench of unwashed men, festering wounds, and the occasional man-love scent one smells wafting from the tent of two privates who either don't believe they'll be rejoined with their girls back home or no longer care.

How about control? Was it easy for you to make your minions do your bidding?
Yes, of course! I am their general, after all. And I find fear is always the most reliable motivator of men.

Do you think someone who doesn't have any interest in ruling the world would still have fun playing this game?
Look, if you don't want to dance, then don't go to the prom. Next question.

Did you get the chance to play this with anyone in your family?
It's funny you ask that. I did convince my father to join forces with me in overtaking the Ukraine. But after our victory, when he went to shake my hand, I stabbed him!

Who would win if you played against Lisa Simpson, The Brain, and Cartman?
I would, of course. I won't be outstrategized by a mere gerbil or some "big-boned" child. The Simpson girl could pose more of a threat, however, especially if she gets her brother involved. That tenacious ragamuffin is not to be underestimated.

What strategy would you use?
Well, Sun Tzu, the great Chinese military tactician, contends that "to capture an enemy's army is better than to destroy it." Let's just say we don't agree.

How much research into military strategy have you done?
I have a thorough working knowledge of the Napoleonic Wars, Genghis Khan's Mongol cavalry, which ravaged medieval Europe, and Brandon Tartikoff, the television president who masterminded the original NBC Thursday-night lineup in the mid-'80s. It's still unbeatable. Trust me, I know.

When you do take over the world, what are you going to do?
I'm going to Disneyland. And once there, I shall wipe Frontierland and everything in it off the face of the earth, for that is a boring and useless land. Except the Bear Jamboree. They shall be my minstrels.

"I shall wipe Frontierland off the face of the earth... except the Bear Jamboree. They shall be my minstrels."

The Verdict — Risk II

GRAPHICS: "More blood! I want to be able to see my reflection in it, dammit!" **4**

SOUND: "One should hear the voices of the winning generals gloating over their victories." **3**

CONTROL: "They were quite easy to operate, giving me the ability to focus on my ruthless strategy." **5**

PROS: "It has reinvigorated my plans for actual world domination."

CONS: "The ending. After playing a game for hours and finally winning, it just ends with some soldiers walking down a street. I want to see my enemies burn."

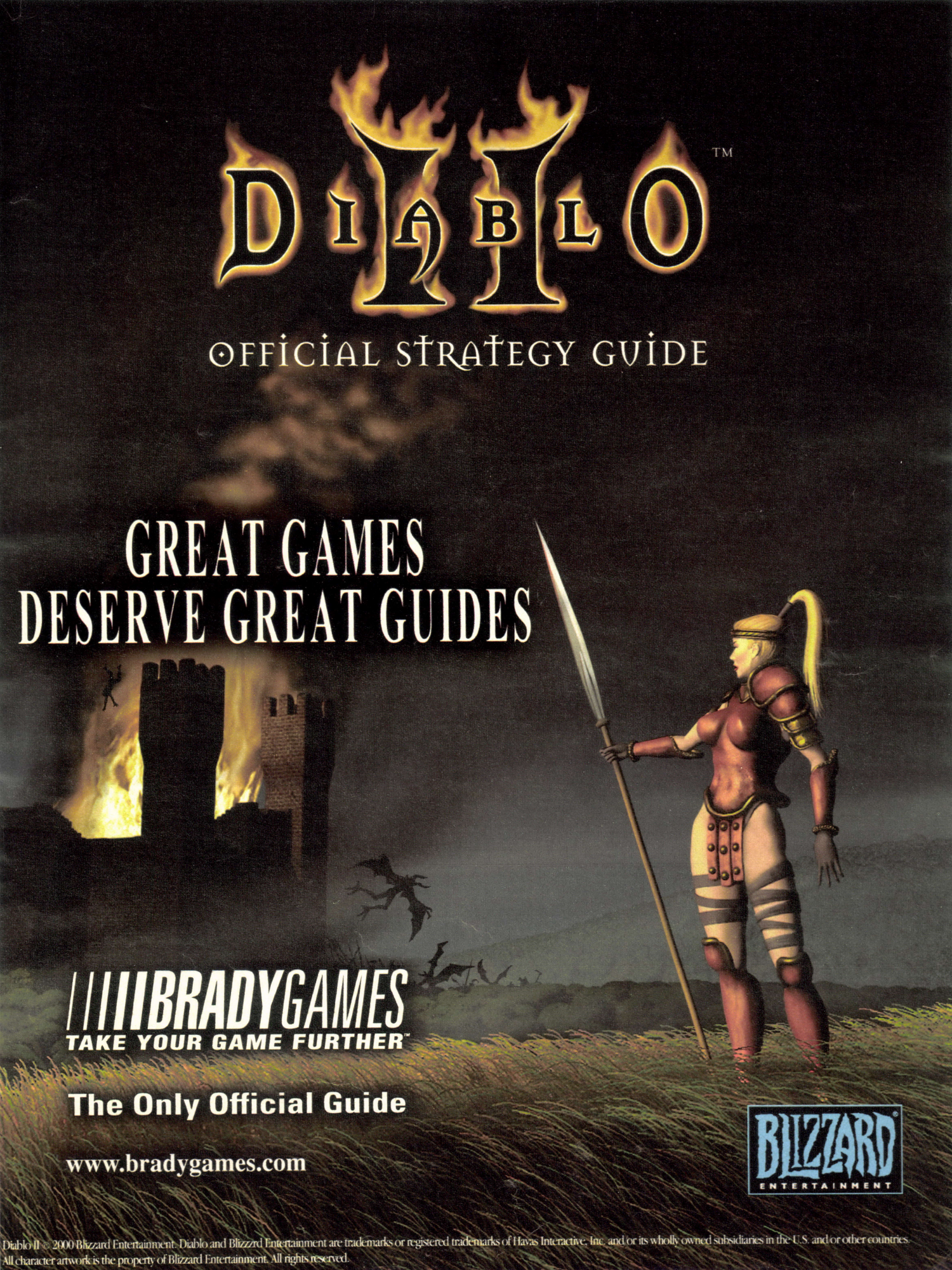
OVERALL **4** OUT OF 5

"Even without any real blood or guts, I rather enjoyed myself. Now, on to Frontierland."

★ ★ ★ ★

DIABLO II™

OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE



GREAT GAMES
DESERVE GREAT GUIDES

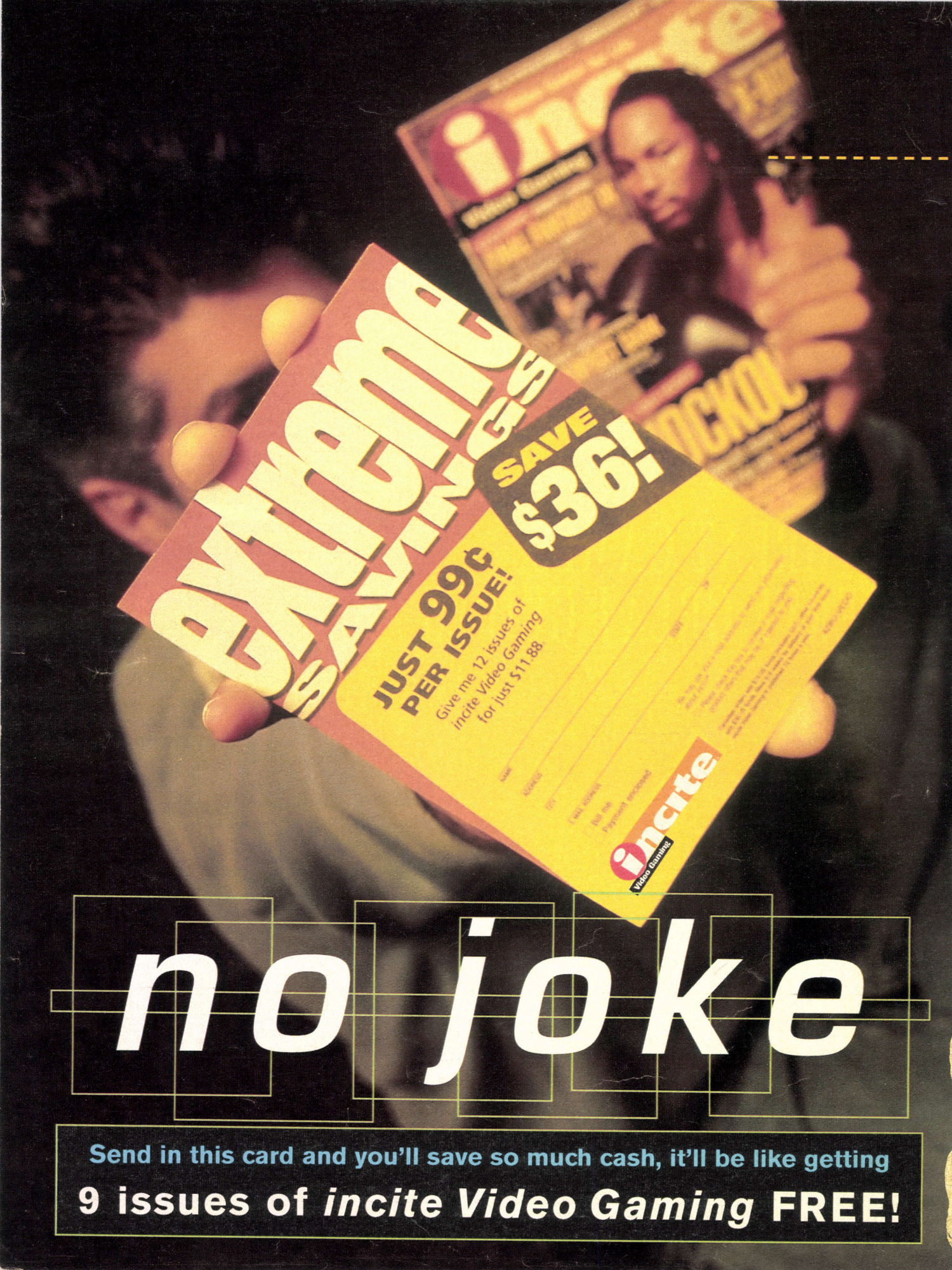
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why not? **A**

- ⊘ **$2.49** per issue subscription price
- ⊘ Covers consist of illustrations and screenshots
- ⊘ Covers one platform

why not? **B**

- ⊘ **$1.66** per issue subscription price
- ⊘ Their WWF feature: **3 pages**.
  (***incite Video Gaming***'s WWF feature: **14 pages plus** interview with **Chris Jericho**)

why not? **C**

- ⊘ **$1.67** per issue subscription price
- ⊘ No strategy guides
- ⊘ Reads like a catalog
- ⊘ Inconsistent reviews

why not? **D**

- ⊘ **$5.99** per issue on the newsstand

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Review Nuts & Bolts

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? | Here's the Rosetta stone of our game reviews

We test our games on 240 system configurations. Yours is guaranteed to be one of them.

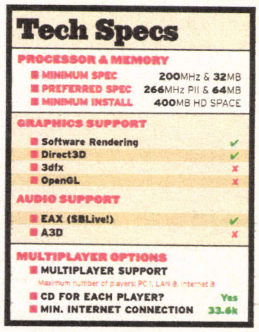
Sure, that supercool new 3D action/adventure might get five stars on a Pentium III/500MHz screamer, but what good does that do your Pentium/166MHz-using ass? Now you'll get that important little piece of info before you buy. What a concept!

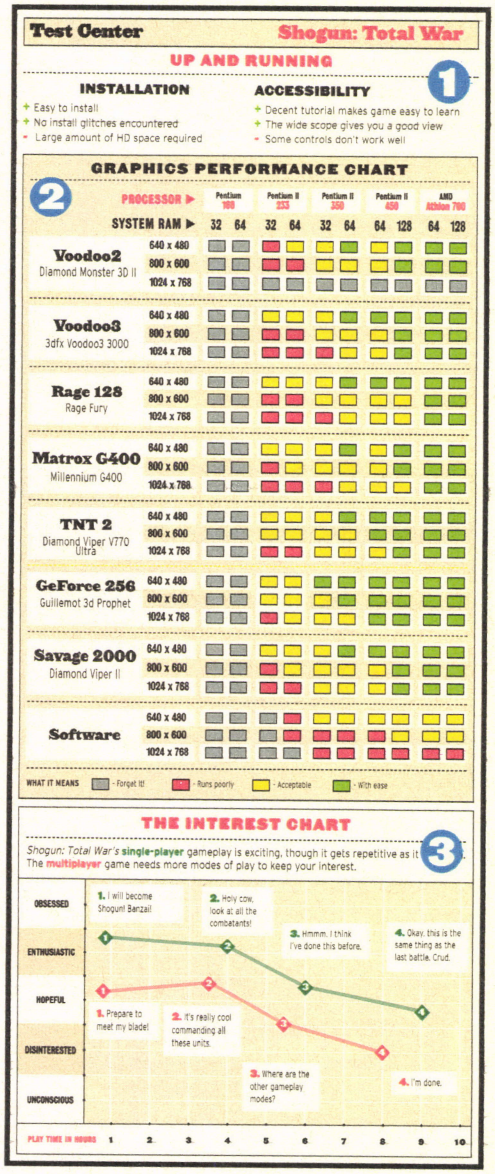
Golden Award

So, what if a game is the ultimate in its genre – a true classic? Then it gets the *incite* Golden Award, the most coveted award in PC gaming. Only the best can get one. When you see it, you know the game is good.

Tech Specs

This is the game's requirements in an at-a-glance boxout. Here we outline the minimum processor and memory needs, CPU compatibilities, audio and graphics support, and multiplayer options. Do all players need to have a copy of the game to play multiplayer? You'll find out here.





1 Up and Running

Finally, an easy-to-understand pros-versus-cons listing of what makes a game a breeze (or utter hell) to install and play. Say goodbye to those "Why won't this damn thing install?" blues.

2 Graphics Performance

This is the meat and potatoes of the Test Center. Here's where you find out if your system will run that hot new game we've been raving about for months. Simply cross-reference your processor and RAM configuration with the graphics card you're using. You'll then be able to see how the game will play at three different resolutions on your computer.

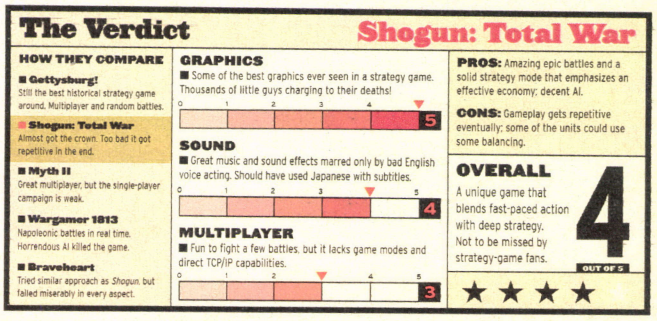
If your preferred-settings box is gray, you haven't got a chance in hell. If it's red, you'll likely be watching a slide show. If it's yellow, the game will run fast enough to be enjoyable, although you might see some jitters. If you're in the green, you're golden. The game will run as smooth as silk, and you will be one happy gamer.

3 The Interest Chart

Ever play a game that's a blast at the beginning and then about four hours in starts to feel about as fun as a third-world prison camp? So have we. That's why we devised this nifty little chart to tip you off to the point at which our interest level took a nosedive (if it ever did). We even break this up into two sections: solo play and multiplayer. Why do we do all this? Because we care.

The Verdict

This is where we tell you what we think about the game. First we show you how the game being reviewed stacks up against other similar games in the genre. We then score how the game's graphics look, how its sounds sound, and how its multiplayer option plays. We also give you all the game's pros and cons and an overall score from one to five stars. This overall score is not an average of the graphics, sound, and multiplayer scores. Rather, its how the entire package performs when taken as a whole. Our score is honest and fair, and since it's coming from *incite PC Gaming*, you can take it as gospel!



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WICKED OBSESSION

BY DARREN GLADSTONE

ILLUSTRATION FOR INCITE PC GAMING BY **TODD SHERIDAN** AND **JARED TULOCK/GLYPHX INC.**

Blizzard's long-awaited *Diablo II* finally rises from the depths to give you one devil of a good time

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
Havas Int.

DEVELOPER
Blizzard

GENRE
Adventure/RPG

PLAYERS
1-8

ESRB RATING:
Mature

PRICE
$49.95

It's 2:00 in the morning on a Friday sometime in 1997. You get back from a night of drunken revelry, and what is the first thought on your mind? "Play *Diablo*." The next 40 hours melt away in a bleary-eyed haze. The original *Diablo* was that damn addictive, but we gave the Devil his due. Now he's back in *Diablo II*... and he's pissed. The sequel is bigger, better, and it's going to steal your soul – and free time – all over again.



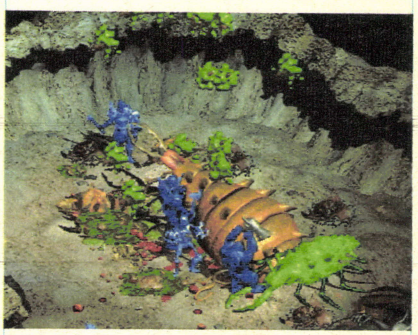
HAVE YOU SEEN ME? Lost: one big, red mean demon with gem in forehead. Answers to "big fella," and "horny bastard."

Why did *Diablo* become a million-unit-selling phenomenon back in 1997? It was partly due to the beautiful game world, but mostly because it was just damn fun – the frenetic hack-and-slash gameplay was truly addictive. Also, it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the game. In fact, you could get into it without even looking at an instruction booklet, the game's rich backstory and role-playing elements notwithstanding.

We're happy to report that with *Diablo II*, developer Blizzard Entertainment has come up with an even deeper story with a huge world to conquer. In fact, *Diablo II* features four separate villages to explore (each one as large as the original *Diablo's* single town of Tristram). However, we're even happier to report that Blizzard didn't screw with the original game's addictive gameplay.

Diablo II is split up among four acts spanning four CDs. According to the folks at Blizzard, roughly 60 percent of the game takes place in the great outdoors – whereas in the original you spent 90 percent of your time in dungeons. In the epic journey to smack Diablo down once again, you'll travel diverse environments such as forests, swamps, and deserts. Of course, you'll also have the usual variety of dungeons to trek through, castles to clean out, and tombs to raid. (Sorry, Lara, you're not welcome on this trip.)

The number of folks you'll interact with in this huge world is astounding. Within each act you'll find an abundance of people to talk to and side quests to complete. Kill a rogue priestess, find a relic, clear out a village... you get the idea. Trust us, you'll get a whole lotta gameplay for your gaming buck. You'll have six quests to complete per act, and while you don't need to complete every single one,



KIND OF BLUE Creatures in *Diablo II* are even more varied than those in the original game.

you'll only be robbing yourself of backstory and valuable loot if you skip some.

In fact, *Diablo II* should provide at least 50 hours of obsessive gamplay, and there's potential for countless more when you consider the replay factor the unique character classes and their branching skills offer.

Another element that kept people coming back in the original game was the totally random dungeon maps. Each time you went down into the depths, you had to start over from scratch. In *Diablo II*, although you'll use teleporting waypoints to get to some beautifully rendered landscapes, about 90 percent of the game map is randomized, which will provide you with many different paths to travel.

Split Personalities

In the original game, addictive as it was, there wasn't much in the way of traditional

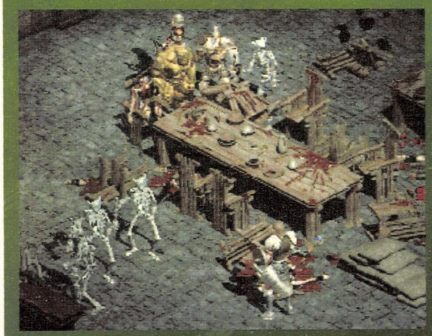
THE NUMBER OF FOLKS YOU'LL INTERACT WITH IN THIS HUGE WORLD IS ASTOUNDING.



LOTS OF ROOM Many of the new adventures will take place in large, open areas.



A BONE TO PICK The requisite skeletons are back for more hardcore combat action.

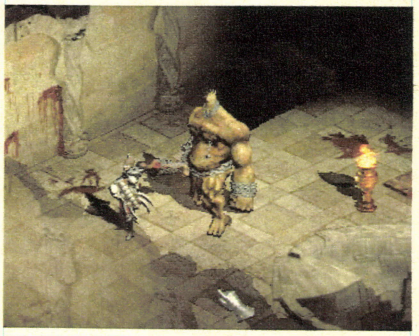


DIABLO OF FORTUNE? The game world is not for the weak of stomach. Things get a little gory.



BRIDGE TO NOWHERE When the Ghoul Lord Corpse comes calling, there's gonna be trouble.

YOU'RE NEVER ALONE IN *DIABLO II.* SUMMON SOME FRIENDS TO JOIN YOUR NECROMANCER. OR BE LIKE A FRAT BOY AND BUY YOUR FRIENDS.



WRASSLEMANIA Okay, so this match between "The Crusher" and Mort may be a little lopsided.

role playing. Basically, you picked one of three character classes – Warrior, Rogue, or Mage – and then simply acquired new gear and gained levels as you progressed with them through the game.

In *Diablo II* you've got five character classes from which to choose: the Barbarian, who likes to stare death in the face; the Amazon, who shoots enemies from afar; the Sorceress, who relies upon her powerful spells; the Necromancer, who summons dead soldiers to do his dirty work; and the Paladin, who likes to fight the good fight and is the most well rounded character in the bunch.

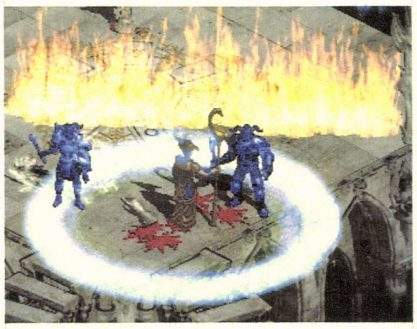
But here's where it gets interesting: The characters have skill-development branches. Here's how it works: When you complete certain quests and gain levels, you earn skill points. How you allocate those points creates a unique experience for how you'll play.



CLICK INTO BATTLE *Diablo II*'s battles can revert into clickfests. Not that that's a bad thing...



PARTNERS IN CRIME Summoning skeletons from the corpses of fallen foes is a Necro specialty.



SPELL-TASTIC The new 3D spells in *Diablo II* look incredible. And they work even better.

To illustrate the branching skills, let's say that two people begin with identical level-one Necromancers. In time, one could be a master summoner, learning how to call up Golems and Magi to do his bidding. Meanwhile, the other could focus on fighting skills and casting curses to ward off attackers on his own. By the end of the game, the characters, although they are both still Necromancers, will be quite different from one another.

Even while hacking through the single-player game, you're never alone in *Diablo II*. Summon some friends (and we don't mean multiplayer...yet) to join your Necromancer. Or be like a frat boy and buy your friends. That's right, you can hire mercenaries who will loyally follow you in your travels. Mercenaries' artificial intelligence is a little sketchy at times, but they do a decent job of acting independently and covering your ass. Of course, the more money you're willing to shell out, the better the help will be. As in life, you get what you pay for. But if you can keep them alive long enough, they will grow along with your character.

And what of multiplayer? Remember how we mentioned that every character could be distinctive? *Diablo II* will feature large, varied parties. For example, you may have three Barbarians and three Sorceresses, each with his or her own specialties. Throw in a couple of summoned creatures and mercs, and suddenly you've got a small army on your side. Up to eight players can join a single game, so things can get pretty hairy. And you can either slice up your teammates or work together toward a common goal.

Hella Pretty

To maintain a lavishly detailed landscape that will still work well on most low-end

WHAT THE HELL TOOK SO LONG?

***Diablo II*'s designers toiled long and hard in hopes of a Christmas 1999 release, but obviously that didn't happen. The result? *Diablo* fanatics around the globe were left waiting for six excruciating months as the game inched toward completion. Rumors are flying everywhere about why the game was so late, but we spoke with Matt Householder, its producer, to find out what really held things up.**

SO, WHY WAS IT SO LATE?

There were obvious quality-assurance issues that needed to be thoroughly checked. But the main holdup was that we needed to put a lot of new features into Battle.net [for multiplayer], such as the new realm system that keeps characters from being hacked. That took a long time.

PLAYERS HACKING INTO THE GAME CODE WAS A PROBLEM?

Software hacks for *Diablo* were available online – even sold in stores – that allowed people to cheat and create unbeatable characters. And that was a major complaint among players who ventured through the game world only to get trounced by someone with a hack program.

HOW WILL THE REALM SYSTEM WORK TO PREVENT CHEATING?

When you play *Diablo II* online, your characters are stored at Battle.net within a realm, as opposed to your own computer. Your character's information will be downloaded from whichever server he was created on, and it will be available from any computer with *Diablo II* on it.

ARE THERE OTHER CHANGES TO BATTLE.NET OR THE GAME THAT AFFECTED THE RELEASE DATE?

In the chat rooms, you are now listed as your character's name rather than your Battle.net ID. It may sound like nothing, but it was a big deal for users in test groups. Another issue to take into account is that unlike other massively multiplayer games, we don't levy a monthly charge over Battle.net. As a result, we have to make certain that everything is very efficient, and that it won't bog down the computer. That by itself took a long time.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU OVERCAME?

The sheer size of the game was a problem...not that we had to add too much, but too little. The trick is always knowing when to stop working on a game. The larger the game, the more elements you feel inclined to add. We're still reeling from the fact that we're actually done.

[WARCRAFT III: AN UPDATE FROM BLIZZARD]

Back in issue 1, we talked about how *WarCraft III* would feature beautifully rendered 3D landscapes and hybrid role-playing/strategy gameplay. That all changed at this year's E3 in Los Angeles, when Blizzard announced it was changing the game's camera perspective and gameplay focus. We caught up with Rob Pardo, producer and lead designer on *WarCraft III*, to find out why the changes were being made.





VIEWMASTER The old camera angle (above) was more suited to a role-playing game. When Blizzard decided to focus on *WarCraft III*'s strategy elements, it raised the camera to a more traditional top-down view (left).

WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT THESE CHANGES?

Originally, we were trying to bridge the gap between strategy games and role-playing games. As it turns out, both elements were starting to clash, and we had to decide which was going to be the primary thrust of the game. We chose strategy. As for the camera angles, we decided that [the side-view camera angle] would overly complicate the game.

WILL THERE BE ANY RPG ELEMENTS?

The entire storyline is going to be more RPG-like, with a seamless world of consecutive missions and quests. We also want to put people in control of heroes that are persistent from mission to mission.

But overall, we want to encourage strategic exploration. At its core, *WarCraft III* is going to be a strategy game with many role-playing-game elements.

WHEN IS IT DUE OUT?

We've got approximately 25 people working on the game at the moment, and we're shooting for a release date in the first half of next year. But, of course, we won't release the game until we think it's ready.



WE'VE GOT YOU SURROUNDED Sometimes escape is not an option; all that's left to do is battle it out. At least you have something cool to look at. Can you believe this is a 640x480 game?

computers, *Diablo II* has a maximum resolution of 640x480... but you'll never notice. The game looks crisp and vivid, and the ornate landscapes are at times nothing short of glorious. The 3D spell effects are also amazing. Speaking of 3D, you won't need a 3D card to play the game, but if you have one, the game's environments will really pop. How did they do it? Blizzard added a new technology that distorts the background so that it scrolls at a slightly different speed than the foreground, thus creating the illusion of depth.

The environments can be gruesome at times. For example, while walking through one dungeon, we saw a broken counter with a corpse seated at the head of the table. With all the wounded and disemboweled bodies and ghastly scenery of people drawn and quartered, the game's Mature rating is justified.

Infernal Issues

Diablo II does have a few minor problems that bear mentioning.

For instance, some of the Necromancer's summoned troops often



FLASHY Thanks to careful programming, the effects look great even on slower PCs.

need help navigating obstacles. Many times we were blocked into corners once we had more than four cronies. It's too bad you can't shove some of them out of the way like you're carving through the lunchtime crowds on the sidewalks of New York City.

One problem that does carry over from the original game is that not everything is easy to see around. Some objects don't turn fully transparent, which leaves you blindly pointing and clicking.

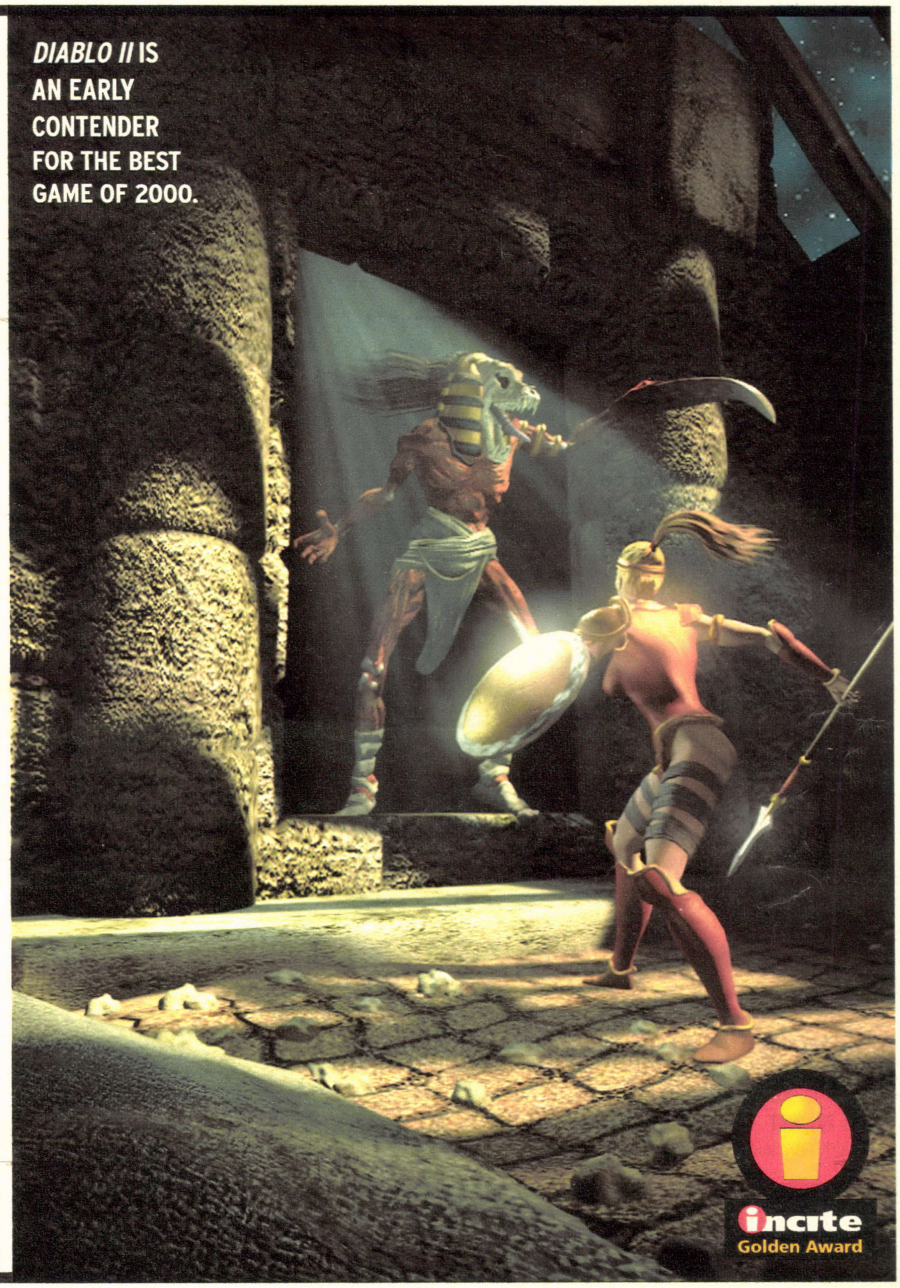
To Blazes With This Review

But let's stop picking nits and cut to the chase. Is *Diablo II* worth the three-year wait? Without a doubt, the answer is, "Hell yes!" Despite a few niggling points, we have little trouble saying it's an early contender for being the best game of 2000. But consider yourself warned: You might want to say goodbye to your significant other now. Your free time is about to go up in flames.

CHECK IT OUT!

We've teamed up with Brady Games to bring you a hot, 20-page *Diablo II* strategy guide. It starts on page 96.

DIABLO II IS AN EARLY CONTENDER FOR THE BEST GAME OF 2000.



incite Golden Award

Tech Specs

PROCESSOR & MEMORY

MINIMUM SPEC	233MHz & 32MB
PREFERRED SPEC	333MHz PII & 64MB
MINIMUM INSTALL	650MB HD SPACE

GRAPHICS SUPPORT

Software Rendering	✔
Direct3D	✔
3dfx	✔
OpenGL	✔

AUDIO SUPPORT

EAX (SBLive!)	✔
A3D	✔

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT	
Maximum number of players: PC 8, LAN 8, INTERNET 8	
CD FOR EACH PLAYER?	YES
MIN. INTERNET CONNECTION	56k

The Verdict

Diablo II

HOW THEY COMPARE

Diablo II
Blizzard reclaims the title of most addictive game out there.

Nox
The best clone of the original *Diablo*, with some truly unique character classes.

Darkstone
A fully 3D engine with unique tag-team action and random puzzles to solve.

Diablo
The game that started and perfected the current trend of hack-and-slash games.

Revenant
We couldn't figure out what was worse here, the game or the voice acting.

GRAPHICS

Beautiful, rich scenery weaves a truly spectacular tapestry. We're amazed a 640x480 game can look this good.

0 1 2 3 4 **5**

SOUND

Captivating sound effects and background music do a fantastic job of capturing the overall mood.

0 1 2 3 5 **4**

MULTIPLAYER

The infrequent lag was enough to get us killed once or twice, but not enough to hurt the game. Terrific co-op.

0 1 2 3 5 **4**

PROS: In almost every way imaginable, Blizzard has improved on an already great game.

CONS: Dopey NPCs and undead sometimes get underfoot; the occasional online lag tends to be a drag.

OVERALL

We barely took bathroom breaks, and even refused to leave for lunch. You're going to love this game.

5 OUT OF 5

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hell Freezes Over

Surprise! John Romero's **DAIKATANA** almost lives up to the hype and expectations

FACT FILE ■ PUBLISHER **Eidos** ■ DEVELOPER **Ion Storm** ■ GENRE **Action** ■ PLAYERS **1-16** ■ ESRB RATING **Mature** ■ PRICE **$49.99**

GAME GLANCE

- 4 Episodes
- 2 Silly sidekicks
- 1,000+ Deaths
- 24 Levels
- 25 Weapons

After all the hype, delays, controversy, and bravado that have surrounded *Daikatana*'s development, our expectations for the game weren't high. Was it worth the wait?

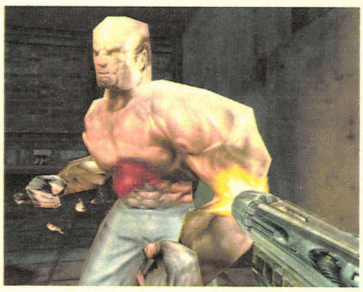
By Steve Klett

Very early on in *Daikatana*'s development, its creator – John Romero (you know, the guy who helped make those little games called *Doom* and *Quake)* – proclaimed in advertisements that the game would be so awesome he was going "to make you his bitch."

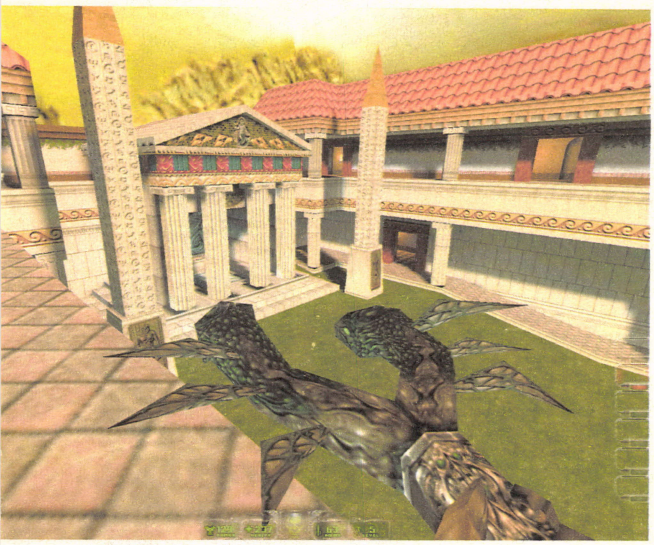
What Mr. Romero was trying to say, in a not-so-modest fashion, was that once the game was installed on your hard drive, you would be unable to do anything else but play the game until you beat it.

Well, good news! Even if you play *Daikatana* for four days straight you're in no danger of becoming Romero's bitch. *Daikatana* is good, but it ain't that good!

In case you haven't heard about the game's backstory, here's the gist of it. You play the role of Hiro Miyamoto, a Japanese warfare expert who teams with sidekicks Mikiko Ebihara and Superfly Johnson in a quest to find and master the mythical and magical Daikatana sword (think Excalibur, but with time-traveling powers).



JAIL BREAK Stressed? Try taking on a bunch of unarmed thugs with your slugger.



GREEK TOURIST Who knew the *Quake* engine could be so, well, colorful? Take some time to view the sights.

Have Patience, Grasshopper

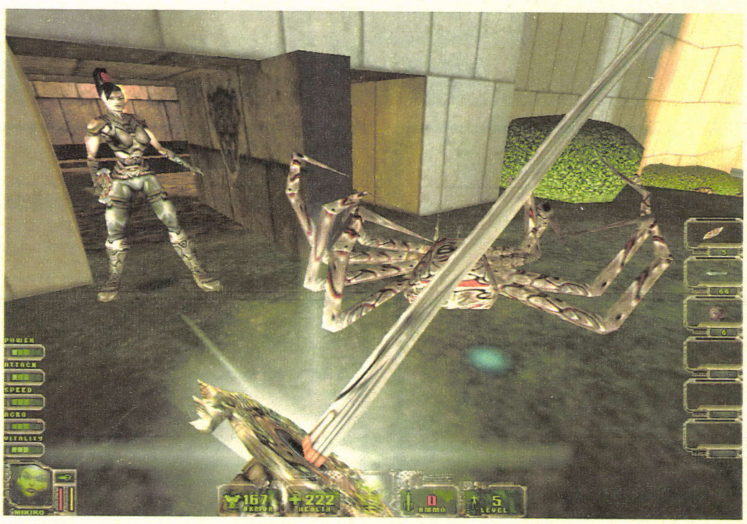
For sure, *Daikatana* couldn't have a more horrible beginning. First of all, the color palette for the marsh levels is out of control – it's as if the artists were all on acid and granted free rein to do whatever they wished. As a result, it's hard to figure out what's going on, where you should be going, and what the hell everything is. And even if you can make heads or tails of the robotic frogs (Froginators) and giant mosquitoes (Roboskeets), they're really annoying. Even worse, they're too hard to kill, ugly, and far too numerous.

Second, because you start out with feeble weapons and little ammo, the going can be extremely tough. Third, you can save the game within the level only if you find a "Savegem," of which you can carry only three in your inventory – if you can even find them. (Some are out in the open, but many are hidden quite cleverly – listen for them!)

Basing your opinion solely on *Daikatana*'s rocky beginning and



MISSED ME! Hey, buddy, you're looking a bit on the thin side. Don't you think it's time you had something to eat?



SPIDER SLAYER That's okay, Mikiko, you can have the legs. I prefer the abdomen anyway. Anybody got any melted butter?



SIDEKICK ASS KICKING Mikiko takes a break from annoying Hiro just long enough to take care of business.

tossing the game into the garbage would be a serious mistake, though. Those who have the fortitude to put up with the first few levels will be aptly rewarded. Trust us: *Daikatana*'s just getting warmed up.

Beauty Isn't Skin Deep

The more you play, the more you get used to the garish colors and the easier you'll find dealing with the robotic pests. You'll soon take less notice of how much the game's *Quake II* technology lags compared with that of *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena*, and begin to appreciate *Daikatana*'s strengths. Believe it or not, there are many: a well-developed and well-executed story plus four distinct game episodes, all with different textures, music, monsters, and weapons (except for the Daikatana, which

You needn't be afraid of becoming anyone's bitch for enjoying *Daikatana*.



WINDOWS 2030? Now that's a fatal computer crash! At worst, *Daikatana* will just freeze up your system from time to time.

Test Center — Daikatana

UP AND RUNNING

INSTALLATION

+ Installation is quick and simple
+ Seamlessly detects hardware
+ Can be tweaked to run on slower machines

ACCESSIBILITY

+ Three difficulty levels
- Limited saves
- Plot starts slowly

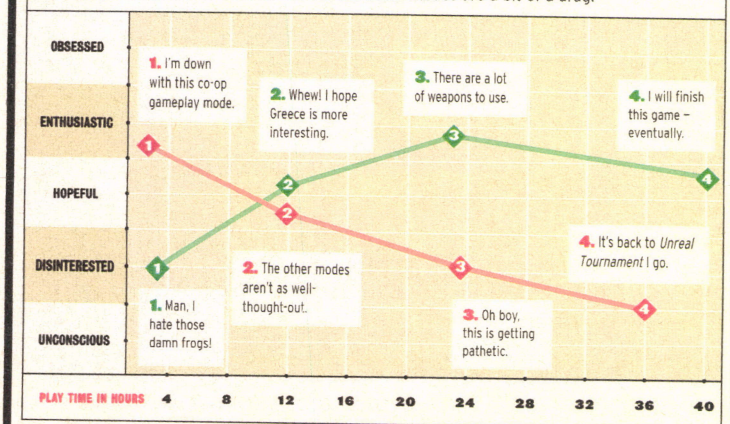
GRAPHICS PERFORMANCE CHART

		Pentium 166		Pentium II 233		Pentium II 350		Pentium II 450		AMD Athlon 700	
SYSTEM RAM ▶		32	64	32	64	32	64	64	128	64	128
Voodoo2 Diamond Monster 3D II	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Voodoo3 3dfx Voodoo3 3000	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Rage 128 Rage Fury	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
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Matrox G400 Millennium G400	640 x 480										
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	1024 x 768										
Savage 2000 Diamond Viper II	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Software	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										

WHAT IT MEANS — Forget it! — Runs poorly — Acceptable — Runs with ease

THE INTEREST CHART

Daikatana offers the deepest **single-player** first-person-shooter experience around. **Multiplayer** cooperative mode is fun, but the other modes are a bit of a drag.



The sword can be raised a total of five levels, and it's in your best interest to make that happen as quickly as possible.

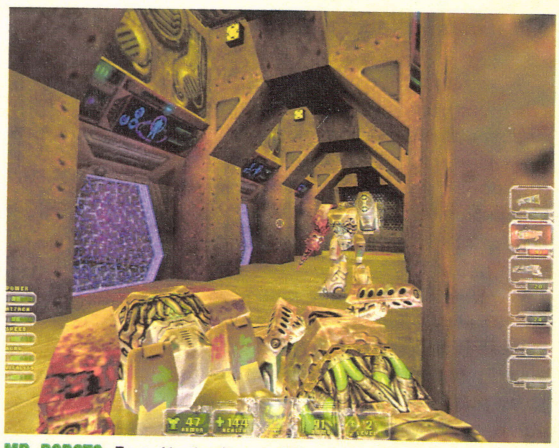
you have in all episodes) – not to mention the two sidekicks you can boss around, Mikiko and Superfly.

Plus, there are some role-playing-game elements, such as the ability to earn experience points by slaying monsters and tweaking Hiro's strength, vitality, attack, jump, and speed attributes. In addition, you gain experience for the Daikatana each time you use it. The sword can be raised a total of five levels, and it's in your best interest to make that happen as quickly as possible.

None of *Daikatana*'s peers can match the full-scale freshness and diversity you'll encounter in its episodes, which are set in Kyoto, Japan; ancient Greece; Norway circa the Dark Ages; and San Francisco circa the year 2030. This is quite an achievement and a big reason why the game took so long to make. (The switch from *Quake* to *Quake II* technology and internal corporate politics were the other major holdups.)

Many of the levels are huge and have several parts (which you'll be thankful for, as the game is automatically saved when a new section of the level is loaded). Some levels, such as The Acropolis in Episode Two, can take an hour or two to complete. And you'll really want to explore every nook and cranny, not just to see the pretty architecture, but to seek out the myriad secrets most levels hold. In classic *Quake* style, you are rewarded for squeezing under stairs, jumping in waterfalls, and searching out hidden triggers.

It's easy to criticize *Daikatana* for not having the curved surfaces



MR. ROBOTO From the boxiness of these guys, it looks like the modelers were running low on polys.



WINTER WONDERLAND No, Superfly, I don't know if there's a snowboard power-up on this level. Why? Look, for the last time, we are *not* on vacation. Now put your hat on before you catch your death.



THE DOCTOR WAS IN And this guy thought he was just coming in for a scheduled cleaning. Ouch!

and fluid character models found in *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena.* After all, it's still trudging along with the tired *Quake II* engine. Cut it some slack, though: *Daikatana* squeezes every ounce of performance out of the engine that could, and features sharp, 32-bit textures, cool lighting, and fogging effects that rival the more state-of-the-art shooters.

Now It Gets Ugly

While it's nice to have Mikiko and Superfly along for the journey, they'll annoy the hell out of you as much as they'll help you. You can tell them to back off, get items, attack, come, and stay. (Perhaps better names for them would have been Spot and Rover). And they'll do their best to follow your orders. However, they'll likely kill you "accidentally" many times in heated battles and have trouble finding their way around obstacles. Still, they're more boon than bane, and they strengthen the storyline.

There are also several clipping problems, so your character will occasionally stick his arm or weapon through a wall, usually after using a powerful weapon or battling in and around doorways. The video performance is a bit buggy, even with all the latest drivers installed. What's more, if you don't have an up-to-the-minute video card, you're screwed.

The puzzles that require you to use your sidekicks strategically are a bit frustrating, and the inability to save whenever you want will surely piss off a lot of people. In addition, an apparent advantage – the game's nonlinear nature – can lead to story confusion. For instance, I found the keys I needed in the Acropolis level before I knew what they were or why I wanted them. Finally, there was the occasional unexplained and sudden crash to the desktop – and worse, a complete system lock-up.

Warts and all, *Daikatana*'s single-player experience is bested only by the likes of *Half-Life* and *Opposing Force.* Sure, *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena* are beautiful multiplayer games, but their single-player modes are dull, dull, dull. *Daikatana* steps out of vaporware status and fills this void quite nicely. And you needn't be afraid of becoming anyone's bitch for enjoying it.

Tech Specs

PROCESSOR & MEMORY

MINIMUM SPEC	233MHz & 32MB
PREFERRED SPEC	300MHz PII & 128MB
MINIMUM INSTALL	200MB HD SPACE

GRAPHICS SUPPORT

Software Rendering	✘
Direct3D	✔
3dfx	✘
OpenGL	✔

AUDIO SUPPORT

EAX (SBLive!)	✔
A3D	✔

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT	
Maximum number of players: PC 1, LAN 16, Internet 16	
CD FOR EACH PLAYER?	Yes
MIN. INTERNET CONNECTION	28.8k

The Verdict

Daikatana

HOW THEY COMPARE

Opposing Force
Still the king of the single-player first-person-shooter hill.

Wheel of Time
The best example of taking a good license and doing it justice.

Daikatana
Strong story, sidekicks, and RPG elements, plus lots of variety.

Requiem Avenging Angel
This overlooked game delivers a solid single-player experience.

Soldier of Fortune
Nonstop blood and guts attempt to cover up shallow gameplay.

GRAPHICS
■ Crisp textures and detailed architecture but a bit too colorful in places, which makes it difficult to navigate.

0 1 2 3 4 5 — **4**

SOUND
■ 3D sound support is still to come, but I didn't miss it! The soundtrack is very well done.

0 1 2 3 4 5 — **5**

MULTIPLAYER
■ Multiplayer is fun, but the game can bog down a bit when more than four players join the fray.

0 1 2 3 4 5 — **3**

PROS: Lots of level, weapon, music, and monster variety; well-executed story; nice mix of RPG elements.

CONS: Sidekicks can be frustrating; early levels are the weakest in the game; you need a super video card.

OVERALL
An ambitious offering that serves up a superb single-player experience – if you've the patience to see it through.

3 OUT OF 5

★ ★ ★



SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION Hiro, in the green, busted tricks whenever he could. Here he pulls a sick nothing while Lance holds on for dear life.

Riders Ready?

Does **MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2** live up to everyone's high expectations?

FACT FILE ■ PUBLISHER **Microsoft** ■ DEVELOPER **Rainbow Studios** ■ GENRE **Racing** ■ PLAYERS **1-8** ■ ESRB RATING **Everyone** ■ PRICE **$34.99**

GAME GLANCE

- 1 Pro 125cc Supercross rider
- 15 Supercross tracks
- 6 Event types
- 50,000 Interactive 3D objects
- 6 Billion possible competitors

When the demo of *Motocross Madness 2* came out many months ago, we were beside ourselves with anticipation. Every time the chance to play the game arose, we indulged ourselves relentlessly. Well, the final code is here, and so is our verdict on whether or not it was worth the wait.

By William O'Neal

Motocross racing is a sport like no other. There's nothing like strapping a dirt bike between your thighs and zipping around a dirt track filled with treacherous potholes, berms, and jumps. And it's all the more exhilarating when you remember that if you take a spill, your back becomes just another bump in the track to your fellow riders. Unfortunately, *Motocross Madness 2* doesn't put



LAST PLACE AGAIN?! Yet another nationals race in which I spent the entire time bringing up the rear. Damn, these guys are fast!



NAC-NAC Just 'cause you're in last place doesn't mean you can't get stylish. A huge nac-nac in the city by the bay.

that feeling squarely in your gut – where it belongs.

The Nitty-Gritty

Once the intro is over you're plopped into a menu screen that's easy to navigate. You create a rider and select your bike from the plethora of available Hondas, KTMs, and Yamahas.

The thing is, though, the game's controls are so squirrelly that regardless of how well you do in baja, stunts, and enduro, once you get to the nationals and supercross events you'll get beat down worse than Abner Louima.

Another problem with *Motocross Madness 2*'s single-player mode is an overall lack of compelling gameplay. The game looks great, but as the races go on you'll discover yourself hard-pressed to find a reason to give a rat's ass about your performance. In baja you'll follow arrows as you race through "easy, open terrain." And the baja events are pretty easy – by design.

The thinking behind this is that developer Rainbow Studios wanted you to become acquainted with the game's controls and whatnot before being thrown into the lion pits that are the national and supercross events. You can even choose how many racers you'll be competing against – anywhere from 0 to 20. Too bad you'll find yourself not really giving a damn if Vladimir beats you or not. Enduro, like the baja races, involves doing laps through open environments. And, like with the baja races, after a lap or two you just stop caring. In fact, it even begins to get boring.

From a game-environment perspective, *Motocross Madness 2* is well designed. Both the baja and enduro races are littered with vehicles such as trains, planes, SUVs, tractors, tour buses, and cop cars that seem to have a penchant for running over motorcyclists. But these events also suffer from what may be their biggest draw. The baja and enduro maps are absolutely huge. This means you can say to hell with racing and just go for some not-so-leisurely rides through the countryside. Sure, exploring the terrain is a ton of fun, but the maps are so huge that the computer has a difficult time drawing them, which slows the game down to a crawl at times. You'll start to feel nauseous not from the speed of the motorcycle, but from the herky-jerky flow of the game. Another editor here jokingly commented, "That's a pretty cool-looking slide show."

The stunt events, such as baja and enduro, take place outside, but since they aren't races, you're free to get your points anywhere on the map where there's something huge to jump. Just like in baja and enduro,



I CAN DO THAT! If you get sick of racing, you can jump through this farm building.

KEEPING EMERGENCY ROOMS IN BUSINESS

THAT'LL LEAVE A MARK!

If you're an adrenaline junkie, chances are you're gonna break a bone or two... or three. We've compiled a list of bones that motorcycle racers are prone to breaking and how long you should expect to convalesce.



ILLUSTRATION BY BOB ROBINSON

Broken Leg

If you're lucky and the bones don't shoot through your skin, you'll probably get off easy with a half-inch-thick rod being placed in your leg. Don't expect to do anything fun for six months except watch TV and fart.

Broken Nose

Sure, you're wearing a helmet, but what do you think that's gonna do when you come crashing down on it at 60mph? If your nose breaks, you'll probably get two horrific black eyes. But you won't mind that. The pain of having doctors reset your broken face will be so excruciating that you won't care what you look like. Race again tomorrow, wuss.

Torn Rotator Cuff

Also known as your shoulder. If you tear it, you're screwed. There's pretty much nothing that modern medicine can do about it. So expect to just sit there suffering for about six months.

Broken Ribs

If you have the misfortune of breaking one or more ribs, you'll realize how much you took breathing for granted. With each breath, your bruised and broken ribs will be pushed around like commuters on a Tokyo subway. If you can get your hands on some of those Steve Young signature cortisone injections, you can be up and riding the next day. Just don't puncture a lung, or you might drown in your own blood.

Test Center — Motocross Madness 2

UP AND RUNNING

INSTALLATION
+ Installation is quick and simple
+ Seamlessly detects hardware
+ Can be tweaked to run on slower machines

ACCESSIBILITY
+ Stunts area lets you get a feel for the bike
- Easy-to-control bikes
- Some races are too difficult

GRAPHICS PERFORMANCE CHART

		Pentium 166		Pentium II 233		Pentium II 350		Pentium II 450		AMD Athlon 700	
PROCESSOR ▶											
SYSTEM RAM ▶		32	64	32	64	32	64	64	128	64	128
Voodoo2 Diamond Monster 3D II	640 x 480										
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Savage 2000 Diamond Viper II	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Software	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										

WHAT IT MEANS — Forget it! · Runs poorly · Acceptable · Runs with ease

THE INTEREST CHART

Motocross Madness 2 offers a weak **single-player** game. **Multiplayer** is much more fun, although the action can drag a bit when you have lots of racers.



If anything, the stunt events show you just how fun this game could have been.

the game really slows down here, and adding more bikes to the competition compounds this.

Technological shortcomings aside, the stunt events are still pretty fun. You compete against other riders in a specified amount of time to bust the sickest tricks. Since everyone likes jumping, this is easily the best multiplayer mode. Riders score points for performing any number of the dozens of tricks – can-cans, nac-nacs, supermen, and heart attacks just to name a few. And you'll score even more points for pulling off combination tricks. If anything, the stunt events show you just how fun this game could have been. Stunt events are pure arcade without a hint of realism, whereas the other events seem to be a schizophrenic amalgam of the two.

Thrown to the Wolves

The national and supercross events are where the game gets really difficult. But the transition from the relatively easy baja, enduro, and stunt events to the more difficult national and supercross events isn't as seamless as it should be. It's sort of like flapping around in a child's backyard pool and being told you can swim, only to be thrown into a rushing river.

Compared with the career-building modes in other games, such as Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed, *Motocross Madness 2*'s career mode just doesn't pull you in. Sure, it's cool starting off on a beat-up bike in a flannel shirt and jeans, but it'd be nice to have more minute control over the various aspects of your rider and bike. At the end of a race you're given a breakdown of the



AND THEY'RE OFF! It might look like fun racing against this many riders, but your computer might not be able to handle the load.



MAKING THE PODIUM At the end of the stunt event, the top three riders gloat. Hit the gas, though, and you'll see who's laughing last.



HUGE, ANYONE? Being a show-off can pay dividends. Busting tricks like this can-can will eventually lead to sponsorship dollars.

amount of money won, how much it'll cost to mend your injuries, and how much it'll cost to fix your bike. But you don't have the option to forgo certain expenses if you'd rather just risk it during the next race. Furthermore, you have so much money at the beginning of your career that frankly, it doesn't matter how much you win or spend.



TRAFFIC IS SCARY Vehicles constantly try to run you down on enduro tracks.

We really wanted to like *Motocross Madness 2*, and in fact, we do. It's just that we wanted to like it more.

Motocross Madness 2's saving grace is its multiplayer capabilities. Where the single-player game lacks compelling gameplay, the multiplayer game seems to be where Rainbow Studios expects its bread to be buttered. The game supports multiplay via Microsoft's Gaming Zone, but you can battle it out against other humans via LAN, direct connection, or the Internet. And the game boasts six multiplayer race types, including baja, stunt, enduro, nationals, supercross, and moto-tag, where you chase and attempt to run down the rider with the ball.

The Finish Line

We really wanted to like *Motocross Madness 2*, and in fact, we do. It's just that we wanted to like it more. It's a great-looking game, and the stunt and multiplayer features are



NICE PACKAGE! This is one rad superman seat grab if he can land it.

enough to have us coming back. It's just that it lacks a truly compelling single-player mode, and game slowdowns required us to play the game at 640x480 in order to achieve some fluidity. All things considered, we're hoping *Motocross Madness 3* does a better job of meeting our now not-so-lofty expectations.

Tech Specs

PROCESSOR & MEMORY

MINIMUM SPEC	233MHz & 64MB
PREFERRED SPEC	300MHz PII & 64MB
MINIMUM INSTALL	200MB HD SPACE

GRAPHICS SUPPORT

Software Rendering	✔
Direct3D	✔
3dfx	✔
OpenGL	✘

AUDIO SUPPORT

EAX (SBLive!)	✔
A3D	✔

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT
Maximum number of players: PC 1, LAN 8, Internet 8

CD FOR EACH PLAYER?	Yes
MIN. INTERNET CONNECTION	28.8k

The Verdict — Motocross Madness 2

HOW THEY COMPARE

Superbike 2000
The raddest motorcycle game ever. Cool graphics, real physics – oh, yeah.

Motocross Madness 2
The Supercross tracks are technical, and the jumps will make you nauseous.

Motocross Madness
Before the birth of its offspring, this was the *Superbike 2000* of motocross.

Superbike WC
Last year's version of *Superbike 2000*. This game still holds its own, though.

Moto Racer 2
Kicking other riders off the road as you blast past them is encouraged.

GRAPHICS
■ This game looks great – everything from the riders and bikes to the scenery and environmental objects is realistic.
0 1 2 3 4 **5**

SOUND
■ Rainbow Studios paid a lot of attention to the sounds – like the country music coming from passing tractors.
0 1 2 3 5 **4**

MULTIPLAYER
■ Easily has the most robust multiplayer capabilities of any motocross game out there.
0 1 2 3 5 **4**

PROS: Good graphics; multiplayer is varied and fun.

CONS: Single-player modes lack depth; after a lap or two it's easy to stop caring about what you're doing; it's also easy to feel you have little invested.

OVERALL
We wanted so much from this game, but the single-player gameplay really dragged down the score.

3 OUT OF 5

★ ★ ★

Jolly Good Sho

Relive the splendor and chaos of feudal Japan in **SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR**

FACT FILE ■ PUBLISHER **Electronic Arts** ■ DEVELOPER **The Creative Assembly** ■ GENRE **Strategy** ■ PLAYERS **1-8** ■ ESRB RATING **Teen** ■ PRICE **$37.99**

GAME GLANCE

- 7 Vicious warlords
- 10 Types of troops
- 66 Provinces to conquer
- 2,000+ Soldiers in one battle

***Shogun: Total War* is based on a very bloody period in Japanese history, the Sengoku Jidai ("Period of Warring States"). Rival Japanese *daimyos* (feudal lords) commanded legions of troops to massacre each other in the name of power and conquest. Sounds like a damn good computer-game premise to us.**

By Di Luo

Shogun: Total War isn't just about the savage thrill of battle. You must manage one resource as well: the koku, one of which represents the amount of rice needed to feed one person for a year. Okay... so maybe it *is* just about the savage thrill of battle. But who wants to futz with a million resources anyway? We just want to kill the enemy, and guess what? There's plenty of killing to do in this game.

Cuckoo for Koku

Before you go on your first murderous spree, you need to build up your infrastructure by constructing the necessary dojos, armories, and smithies. All of this costs koku, of course.

Taxes you receive from the citizens in your province can hardly meet the demands, so you're forced to upgrade your civilian structures, which include mines, ports, and farms, to bump up your koku revenue. Unfortunately, this too requires years of work and a large budget, depriving you of funds for your growing armies.



RIOT GEAR When armies this big get together, all hell breaks loose.

To succeed, then, you must learn when to build and when to fight. This balance between war and peace is precarious, and a bad harvest or particularly bloody battle can devastate your plans, leaving your armies depleted and



NO RESERVATION Yes, the name's Mori. Can we have a table for 10,000, please?

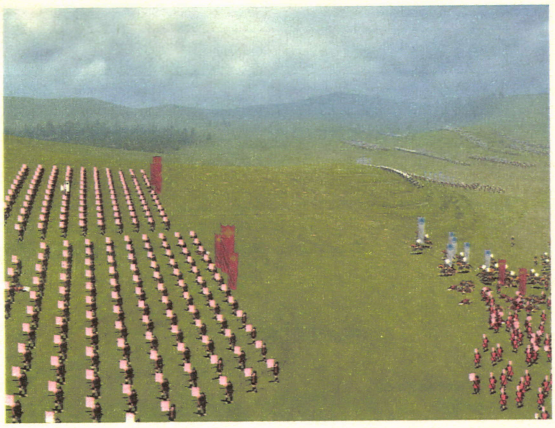
your territories open to conquest. In addition to armies, you can build strategic units such as emissaries, shinobi, ninjas, and geishas for more stealthy ways of defeating the enemy. These units can spy, counterspy, and assassinate.

All of these alternatives are a novel fighting resources, but the game fails to use them effectively. Often requiring many specialized buildings, these strategic units are expensive to build and prohibitively fragile. Unless they have a large amount of honor (usually gained by an expensive building upgrade), they are easily killed. Only when used en masse will your spies and assassins have any impact on your success, making them much less cost-effective than training soldiers, especially on a tight budget.

Works of Art

If the martial pageantry of the tactical battles looks at all familiar, you've probably seen the Akira Kurosawa samurai films that inspired the game. *Shogun*'s developers were heavily influenced by Kurosawa's works, as well as by everyone's favorite bible of battle, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War.*

Kurosawa and Sun Tzu couldn't help much in programming the game's graphics, but the developers did just fine on their own. Featuring 85 fully 3D maps and full weather effects, battle sequences make magnificent eye candy. Battles often contain thousands of colorfully armored and individually modeled soldiers who will march, fight, and die in real time. Snow, rain, and even smoke from your arquebuses add a sense of realism that few games can match.



THEY WALKED IN LINE Disciplined columns will walk right over mobs of disorganized enemy troops.

Kurosawa and Sun Tzu couldn't help much in programming the game's graphics, but the developers did just fine on their own.

Weather Report

More than decorations, the weather effects actually have an effect on the outcome of the battles. Storming a castle during a thunderstorm, for example, may be advantageous to the attacker, as the visibility and range of enemy archers are drastically reduced, and guns, with their powder wet, are rendered completely useless.

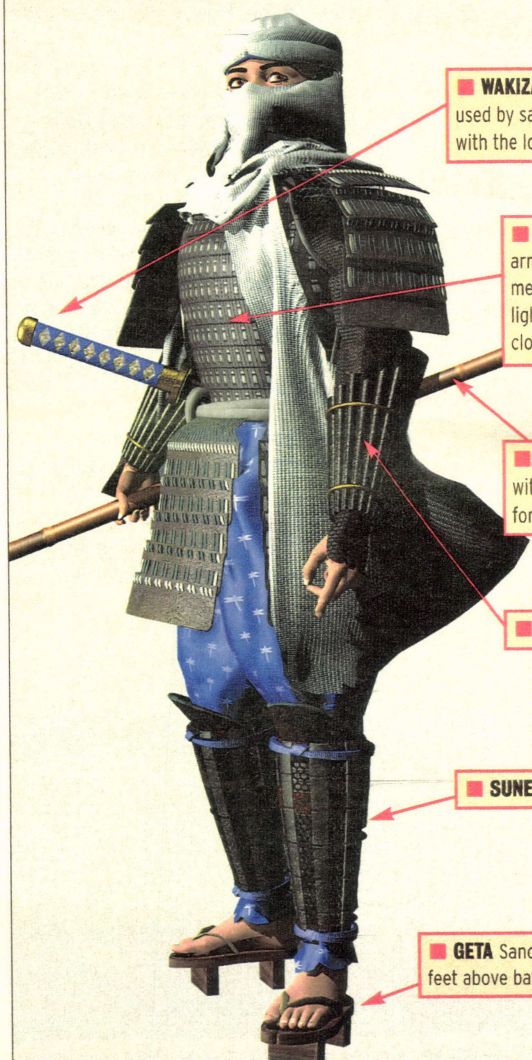
In a heavy fog, the line of sight for troops is limited, and launching a surprise flanking maneuver or ambush becomes much easier.



SAMURAI RISK? The strategic game is simple, yet functional. Just keep an eye on your koku supply.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE WARRIOR

ALL FOR THE DAIMYO



Test Center — Shogun: Total War

UP AND RUNNING

INSTALLATION

+ Easy to install
+ No install glitches encountered
- Large amount of HD space required

ACCESSIBILITY

+ Decent tutorial makes game easy to learn
+ The wide scope gives you a good view
- Some controls don't work well

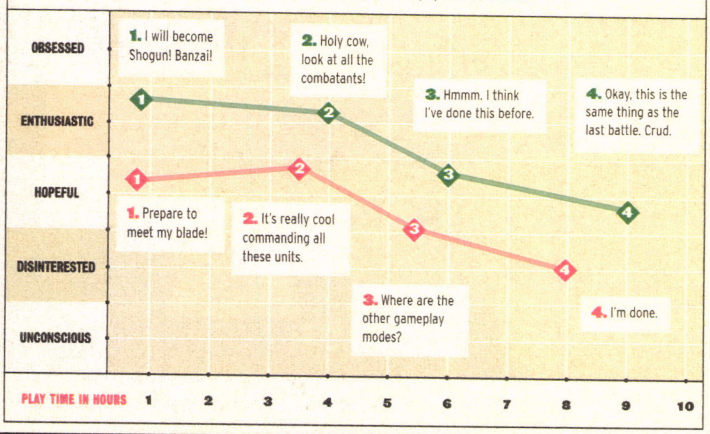
GRAPHICS PERFORMANCE CHART

		Pentium 166		Pentium II 233		Pentium II 350		Pentium II 450		AMD Athlon 700	
PROCESSOR ▶											
SYSTEM RAM ▶		32	64	32	64	32	64	64	128	64	128
Voodoo2 Diamond Monster 3D II	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Voodoo3 3dfx Voodoo3 3000	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Rage 128 Rage Fury	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Matrox G400 Millennium G400	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
TNT 2 Diamond Viper V770 Ultra	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
GeForce 256 Guillemot 3d Prophet	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Savage 2000 Diamond Viper II	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										
Software	640 x 480										
	800 x 600										
	1024 x 768										

WHAT IT MEANS — Forget it! · Runs poorly · Acceptable · Runs with ease

THE INTEREST CHART

Shogun: Total War's **single-player** gameplay is exciting, though it gets repetitive as it wears on. The **multiplayer** game needs more modes of play to keep your interest.



The tactics required for a successful battle separate *Shogun* from most real-time clickfests.

The terrain of the battlefield further increases the complexity of combat. Trees shelter troops from deadly showers of arrows, while a height advantage increases the effectiveness and range of your missile fire. Choke points, such as a river crossing or impassible cliffs, add further depth, as they make it much easier for a smaller army to defeat superior forces by limiting the mass that the enemy can effectively use against you.

Eye on Formations

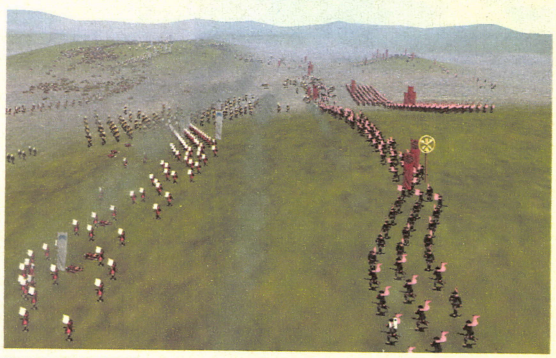
The tactics required for a successful battle separate *Shogun* from most real-time clickfests. Rather than just launching masses of men at each other, formations and troop types matter. Deep columns and wedges, for example, are useful in breaking the enemy line through melee, but they will block the line of sight for your missile troops and reduce their effectiveness.

A unit, no matter how powerful, is easy picking when surrounded and attacked on its flanks. Units also react and perform differently depending on the type of enemy they're fighting. Cavalry, for instance, would be committing suicide if they attempted to charge a wall of spear men head on, but they can easily ride down a line of archers or crush the flank of a column of infantry.

Sometimes infantry is excruciatingly slow and can be devastated by enemy archers before even closing to melee range.

The Ugly Side of War

Despite its greatness, there are still faults to be found in the combat



TECH VS. BRAWN A line of musketeers (on the right) mows down the charging samurai (on the left).



LOVE SHACK "We're fighting for this run-down piece of crap?"

system. Even with various shortcuts and icons to aid you in deploying your troops, the interface can still be awkward. Lining your troops up neatly or specifying a formation of your own can be frustrating and requires quite a bit of trial and error. Since the battle is played in 3D, moving troops to a particular spot or trying to find a necessary camera angle can also be difficult.

Unit balance in the game also needs work. Missile troops, though effective at times, aren't really deadly enough to warrant their cost. With a very short range, it is difficult to launch more than three or four volleys at the enemy before they engage in melee. More expensive troop types, such as cavalry or elite infantry types, also seem extraneous in most battles. Moderately more effective than the basic spear men, they cost more than twice as much to train and require expensive buildings to be built before they're even available.

Despite the claim of The Creative Assembly that the AI follows the teachings of *The Art of War*, it still has many moments of stupidity. It will launch reckless attacks and can easily be lured into ambushes. Send a fast unit forward, skirmish, then fall back and watch the enemy charge into your waiting arms. This aptitude for idiotic bravado is such that the enemy will abandon the defense of a bridge simply to chase after a decoy unit, giving up its advantage in holding a choke point and allowing your main force to attack from behind.

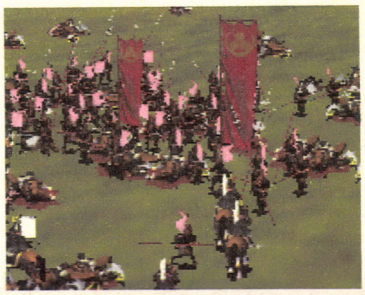


THE BIGGEST BATTLES IN THE FRICKIN' WORLD *Shogun: Total War*'s battle scenes are sometimes a bit over the top. When there are 1,500 soldiers battling it out, it can get pretty bloody.

Despite the developer's claim that the AI follows the teachings of *The Art of War*, it still has many moments of stupidity.

Destiny: Japan

Even with its flaws, the combination of strategic and tactical gameplay makes *Shogun: Total War* one of the most unique and enjoyable games in recent memory. Its eye-catching battles sequences and engaging historical context are reason enough for any of you strategy fans to buy it. It'll give you weeks of bloody fun.



YOU'RE SOAKING IN IT Milk baths are good for the skin, but blood baths cure the soul.

Tech Specs

PROCESSOR & MEMORY

MINIMUM SPEC	200MHz & 32MB
PREFERRED SPEC	266MHz PII & 64MB
MINIMUM INSTALL	400MB HD SPACE

GRAPHICS SUPPORT

Software Rendering	✔
Direct3D	✔
3dfx	✘
OpenGL	✘

AUDIO SUPPORT

EAX (SBLive!)	✔
A3D	✘

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT	
Maximum number of players: PC 1, LAN 8, Internet 8	
CD FOR EACH PLAYER?	Yes
MIN. INTERNET CONNECTION	33.6k

The Verdict — Shogun: Total War

HOW THEY COMPARE

Gettysburg!
Still the best historical strategy game around. Multiplayer and random battles.

Shogun: Total War
Almost got the crown. Too bad it got repetitive in the end.

Myth II
Great multiplayer, but the single-player campaign is weak.

Wargamer 1813
Napoleonic battles in real time. Horrendous AI killed the game.

Braveheart
Tried similar approach as *Shogun* but failed miserably in every aspect.

GRAPHICS
Some of the best graphics ever seen in a strategy game. Thousands of little guys charging to their deaths!
0 1 2 3 4 **5**

SOUND
Great music and sound effects, marred only by bad English voice acting. Should have used Japanese with subtitles.
0 1 2 3 **4** 5

MULTIPLAYER
Fun to fight a few battles, but it lacks game modes and direct TCP/IP capabilities.
0 1 2 **3** 4 5

PROS: Amazing epic battles and a solid strategy mode that emphasizes an effective economy; decent AI.

CONS: Gameplay gets repetitive eventually; some of the units could use some balancing.

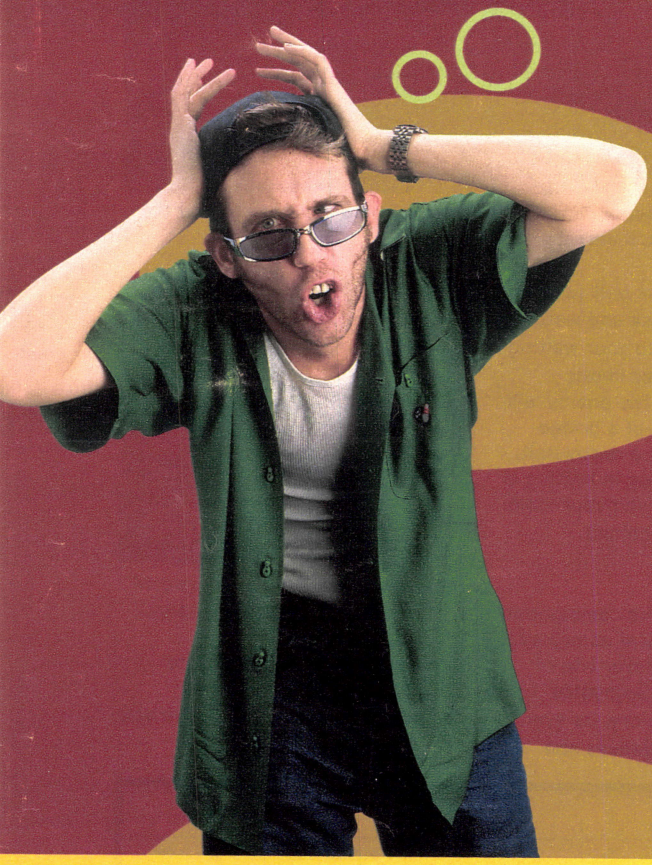
OVERALL
A unique game that blends fast-paced action with deep strategy. Not to be missed by strategy-game fans.

4 OUT OF 5

★★★★☆

Doh!

That $36 would've gotten me on a Greyhound to Graceland!!



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Darwin's Plaything

Like your mom and the gang behind **EVOLVA** say, "You are what you eat"

FACT FILE ■ PUBLISHER **Interplay** ■ DEVELOPER **Computer Artworks** ■ GENRE **Action** ■ PLAYERS **1-6** ■ ESRB RATING **Teen** ■ PRICE **$47.99**

GAME GLANCE

- 12 Huge levels
- 10 Weapons
- 4 Abilities
- 4 Genohunters
- 6 Hours before you're bored silly

It's no secret that *Evolva*'s underlying concept and visuals are excellent. But with all of the gene splicing going down, you'd think the game would have transformed itself into something that's more fun to play.

By Scott Steinberg

Presumably returning from a drinking binge of galactic proportions with a wicked case of the munchies, an interstellar parasite has stopped in for a bite. And who gets to tell the monstrosity and its bodyguards the drive-through lane is closed? You guessed it: your crack team.

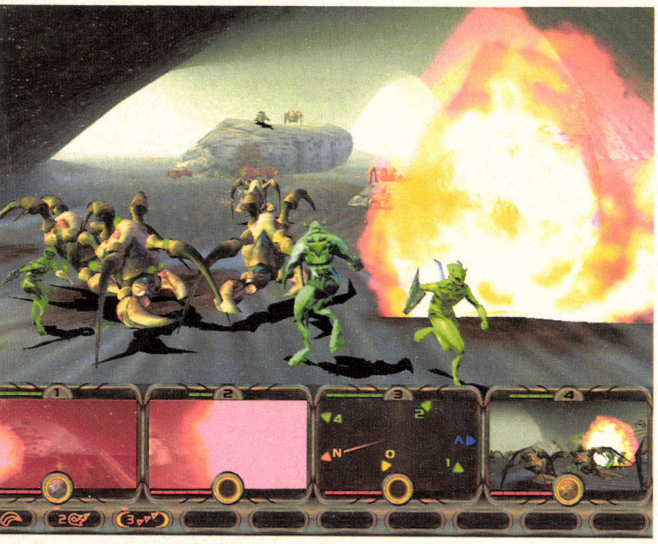
Obviously your team won't be breaking the news lightly. Survival is your first priority when crablike enemies are spotted. And though *Evolva* is an action game, you'll need to use some strategy to command your squad.

But here's the catch: The scientists of the future are stark-raving mad. Genetically enhanced supersoldiers (genohunters) are all they churn out of their cloning tanks. *Hel-lo,* Mr. Brainiac... ever heard of supermodels? Apparently not, because genohunters are the only playmates available. (Although when you're fighting an interstellar parasite, you'd probably rather have a buff genohunter than anorexic Kate Moss by your side anyway.) Genohunters absorb DNA from any organic matter (fresh meat) they encounter, and ingested genes are manipulated so the creatures gain the abilities of fallen foes.

Mission objectives sound complex, ranging from genetic assimilation to escort runs and perimeter defense, but in reality, the gameplay boils down to a prolonged series of running, jumping, and shooting sequences. Impulses to dive headlong into combat with spores, spikes, or flamethrowers blazing must be denied. Lone genohunters are walking targets unless used as scouts or bait for an ambush. Their only recourse is to travel en masse, which presents a problem: Pitiful path-finding routines ensure that every hop across a gorge is a nightmare, every close-quarters encounter a jumbled mess. Miniature camera views alert you to each errant squad member's position, but do little to help rectify the situation.

Evolva is undeniably entertaining nonetheless. Battles involve tactical planning, and deathmatches are brutally enjoyable. Psychedelic colors and organic designs decorate the environments, whose scope is revealed only when you're confronted with enormous boss creatures.

Still, while you will initially appreciate *Evolva*'s finer qualities, it won't be long before the title's stop-and-start style of action will wear thin.



LITTLE GREEN MEN Sure, there are plenty of explosions, but even mayhem can get a little old after a while.



GETTING THE BLUES Battle scenes like this are common in *Evolva.*

Tech Specs

PROCESSOR & MEMORY

MINIMUM SPEC	233MHz & 64MB
PREFERRED SPEC	300MHz PII & 128MB
MINIMUM INSTALL	450MB HD SPACE

GRAPHICS SUPPORT

Software Rendering	✗
Direct3D	✗
3dfx	✓
OpenGL	✓

AUDIO SUPPORT

EAX (SBLive!)	✗
A3D	✗

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT	
Maximum number of players: PC 1, LAN 6, Internet 6	
CD FOR EACH PLAYER?	No
MIN. INTERNET CONNECTION	56k

The Verdict

Evolva

HOW THEY COMPARE

- **MDK 2** — Trumped-up violence with a biting sense of humor
- **Battlezone 2** — Action and strategy make sweet love to each another.
- **Evolva** — Good ideas are overshadowed by poor implementation.
- **Die Hard Trilogy** — The rail shooter is decent... one out of three's not bad!
- **Crusaders of M&M** — A crusade to further milk the *Might & Magic* soap opera.

GRAPHICS

■ The art team must have been on shrooms, because you'll see trippy-looking man-eating snails, crabs, and plants.

0 1 2 3 **4** 5

SOUND

■ *Evolva* is short on music, but roars, moans, growls, and howls will regularly tickle your eardrums.

0 1 2 **3** 4 5

MULTIPLAYER

■ Grab a carcass, chow down on DNA, morph into something nasty, and rip your opponents a new one.

0 1 2 **3** 4 5

PROS: Freaky, psychedelic creatures and landscapes; trading your creations; boss encounters; transformations; impressive arsenal of weaponry.

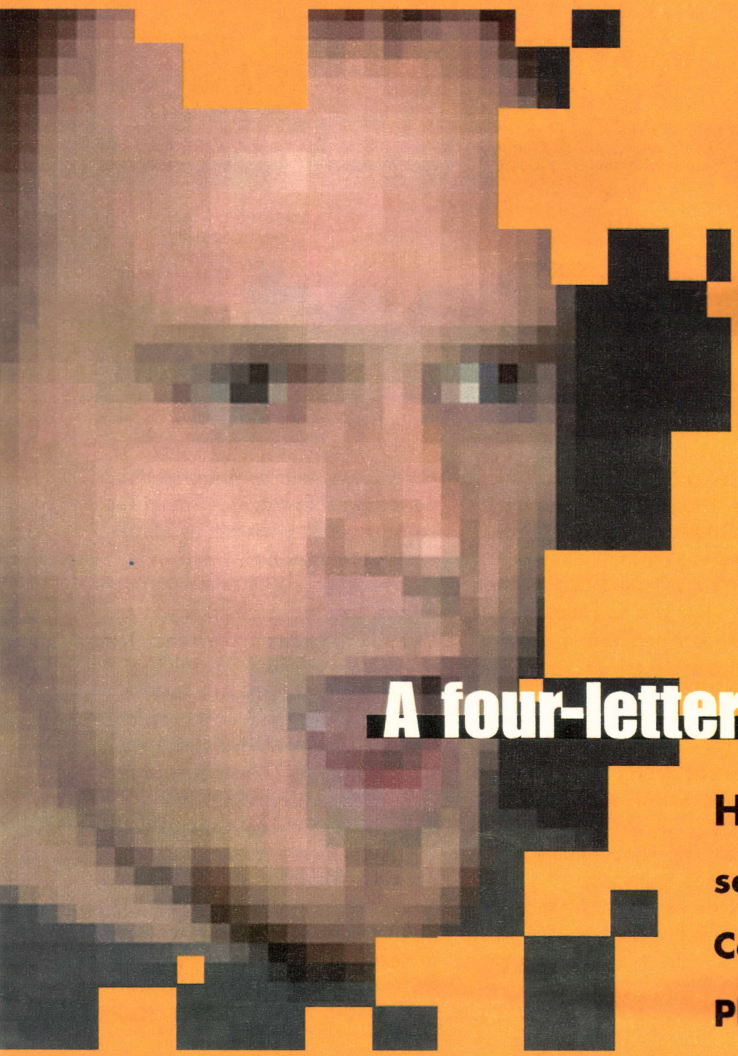
CONS: Three geezers cramp your style; interface quirks; unreliable AI.

OVERALL

She's a looker, but like a 30-second roller coaster ride at Disneyland, the fun wears off too fast.

3 OUT OF 5

★ ★ ★



A four-letter word worth repeating

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King of the Road

TESTED | **Ferrari Force Feedback Wheel,** Guillemot, www.guillemot.com, $130

Overall, the wheel feels solid, and it's not as bulky and cumbersome as some of the wheels on the market.

Ever get the shakes while driving to work? It's early, pre-coffee injection, and your car hits that rumble strip along the highway to wake you up. Most force-feedback wheels these days do a decent job of simulating that feeling, but Guillemot's latest entry lets you feel the road under your wheels without actually weighing as much as a midsize car.

The wheel itself is sharp-looking and has a tacky rubber coating with comfortable thumb rests at the 3:00 and 9:00 positions. These thumb rests do a great job of keeping hand cramps at bay and your grip in place.

There's a standard two-position stick shift, but you can also use the paddle shifters behind the wheel if you don't want to let go. There are also two hat switches and two general-purpose buttons on the front of the wheel, as well as two analog padles behind the wheel for those of you who'd rather not use the pedals.

Overall, the wheel feels solid, and it's not as bulky and cumbersome as some of the other force-feedback wheels you'll find on the market. And its force-feedback power is as strong as some of the more expensive wheels on store shelves these days.

However, we hit some potholes on the way to the checkered flag. You still have to unscrew the clamp every time you want to put the wheel away, because the locking mechanism doesn't work – twisting the knob to unlock it doesn't seem to do anything. The stick shift is also a little stiff and set too far back, instead of right alongside the wheel itself. The spring-hinged pedals are comfortable but not substantial enough for lead-footed drivers like us. Even with a couple of design flaws, though, the Guillemot wheel is a winner.

–Tasos Kaiafas

Ferrari Force Feedback Wheel
Rating ★★★★½



THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

1. Notice the two **thumb rests** on the steering wheel.
2. There's a choice of **paddle shifters** and a **two-position stick**.
3. The **locking knob** doesn't really lock or unlock the clamp.
4. The **pedals** are not substantial enough for those who like to floor it.

Muscle Car(d)s Rule

TESTED **Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS,** Guillemot, www.guillemot.com, $360
Gladiac GeForce2 GTS, Elsa, www.elsa.com, $350

The names of these two video cards sound like tricked-out '70s muscle machines, but whaddaya know, they actually do deliver steroid-injected performance.

Both cards offer very similar performance, since they both feature nVidia's GeForce2 GTS technology, which is the follow-up to the revolutionary GeForce256 chip. But in addition to speedy Direct3D and OpenGL acceleration, GeForce2 features MPEG2 and HDTV decoding as well as a second-generation hardware transform and lighting (T&L) engine that further boosts PC gaming performance. (Read: It makes your games run a whole lot faster.)

At $360, the Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS is designed with gamers in mind and comes with an overclocking utility that lets you tweak the card's performance well into the red. It also has extra heat sinks on the RAM to help prevent overheating, and a TV-out port.

The more basic Gladiac ($350) is geared toward general PC gamers and comes with a cool game bundle: Elsa will hook you up with your choice of two full games from a list of 10 current, quality releases. At press time the final list wasn't available, but sources at Elsa say *FIFA 2001*, *F-16 Aggressor*, and *Evolva* are among the likely candidates.

The 3D Prophet II gives slightly more performance – it's about 1.8 percent faster – and TV-out, but the Gladiac's terrific game bundle gives it the edge in our view.

–Kevin da Luz

3D Prophet II GTS
Rating ★★★★★

Gladiac GeForce2 GTS
Rating ★★★★★



PUSH IT OVER THE EDGE The 3D Prophet II is custom-made for overclocking.

Performance Testing

3D Mark Speeds & Feeds

Mad Onion's **3D Mark** (www.madonion.com) is our choice for the best way to gauge your system's performance. We were able to overclock our 3D Prophet II from the standard 200MHz up to 215MHz. (The Gladiac doesn't come with overclocking features.) Here are some comparison scores for the newest wave of nVidia cards. Notice how the faster processor provides higher performance for each one.

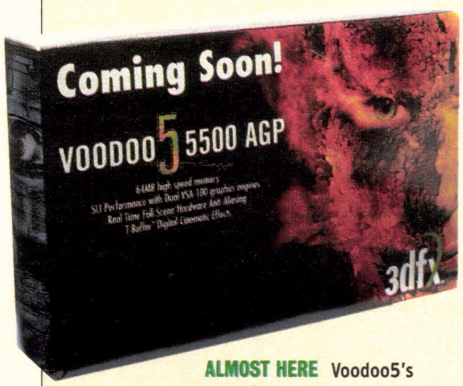
	PENTIUM III 450MHZ SYSTEM	ATHLON 700MHZ SYSTEM
Gladiac (200MHz)	3753	5224
Prophet II (215MHz)	3762	5257
TNT2 Ultra	2495	3015

WINS BY A BUNDLE The same performance, but it's got the games.



FIRST IMPRESSION

Gimme That Voodoo That You Do



ALMOST HERE Voodoo5's impending release might set the industry afire.

So where are 3dfx's next-generation cards in all the confusion? We gave a Voodoo5 beta board and beta drivers a test run.

While card-maker 3dfx's philosophy of pure muscle worked fine in the Voodoo Graphics and Voodoo2 era, its products have recently taken knocks for lacking the latest features. Voodoo3 was fast, but it was limited to 16MB RAM and 256x256 textures, not to mention that it lacked 32-bit color gaming capabilities. The upcoming Voodoo4 and 5 cards are much faster than Voodoo3 and address their predecessor's shortcomings. But there is one catch: The Voodoo4 and 5 boards will not have a T&L engine. As a result, you'll need a very fast CPU if you're expecting to get great performance.

3dfx is currently focusing on improving upon today's technology.

3dfx's products have recently taken knocks for lacking the latest features.

However, we feel that when it comes to hardware T&L, nVidia has already begun pioneering tomorrow's technology – and that's what we're excited about right now.

Next month we should have a final Voodoo5 on hand, so check back for a full review and comparison: 3dfx's Voodoo5 vs. nVidia's GeForce2. It should be interesting to see which one comes out on top.

–Kevin da Luz

The Wringer

PUTTING THE HARD STUFF TO THE TEST | GEARHEADS@IPCG.COM

Sure, they're boring to look at, but **Home Networking Kits** are a critical part of your gaming rig

Home networking is about as sexy as taking a loofah to your grandmother's feet. In fact, right now you're probably asking yourself one of three questions: "Why the hell would I want to set up a home network?," "Am I going to have to call my sister's pimply-faced boyfriend for help?," and "Why isn't my grandfather scrubbing my grandmother's nasty-ass feet?"

The answers, respectively, are "To play *Quake III*, stupid," "Not unless you have the brain power of a toad," and "Grandpa died three years ago, and you're set to inherit a mint when the old broad finally keels over."

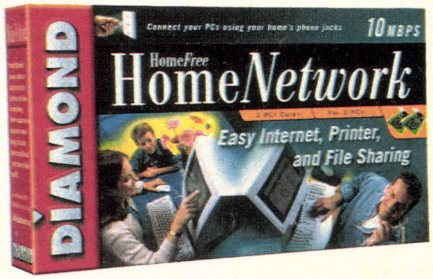
But regardless of your pitiful, Al Bundy-like existence, if you've got two or more computers in the house and one phone line, in all of 10 minutes you can have at least two of the rigs connected to each other and up and on the Net. While setting up your own network isn't the most daunting task on the planet – you simply install the included PCI network cards in your computers and plug them in to your phone lines – it may require you to open up your kit's instruction manual.

The cards in this roundup should get all your PCs connected to one other and to the Net, and they all work pretty much the same way. So what makes them distinctive? Price, ease of setup and use, tech support, and the robustness of their software bundles. For our tests, we figured you shouldn't have to spend more than about $130 to get a game-friendly network up and running.

By Darren Gladstone and William O'Neal

Diamond Multimedia

HomeFree $130
www.s3.com



D-Link

DHN-910 $120
www.dlink.com



Linksys

Homelink $115
www.linksys.com



Intel

AnyPoint $100 (for two boxes)
www.intel.com

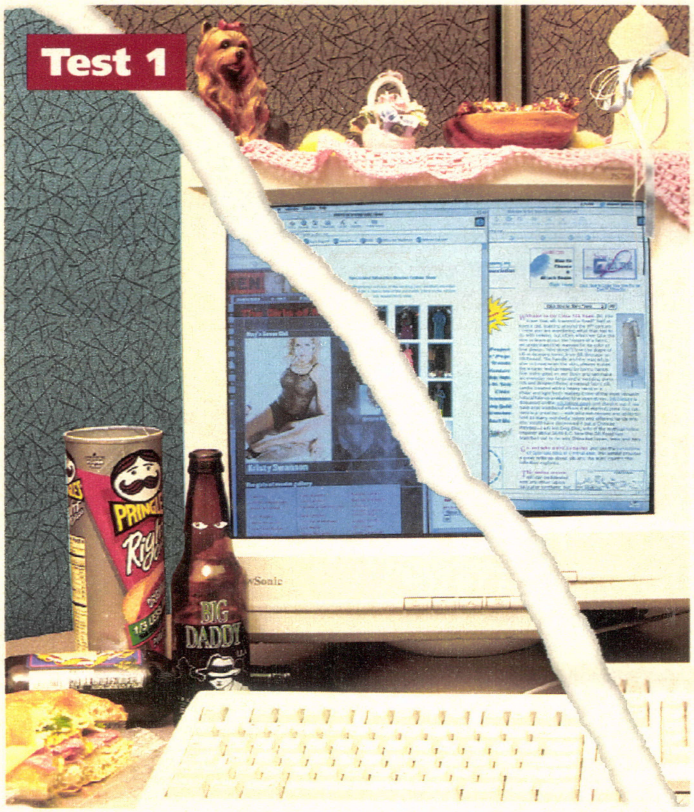


THE WINNER — Intel AnyPoint Home Network

Intel AnyPoint Home Network: Intel's AnyPoint is by far the easiest home-networking kit to get up and running. While we don't approve of Intel's stingy 90-day support policy, the ease of setup means you probably won't even need it. For simplicity and elegance, Intel's AnyPoint is the sole survivor in our book.



BEST OF THE REST
When you have to have the best for your money, AnyPoint is the one.



The Internet Porn vs. Quilting Test

GETTING UP AND RUNNING

With only one computer hooked up to the Net, it's difficult to enjoy the girlie sites when your grandma is standing behind you itching to get online to find some new sewing patterns. The solution: Connect two machines to the Web at the same time. All of our contestant cards will let you do this, but how easy is it to get each up and running?

HomeFree: While the HomeFree is easy to install and get going, its sparse documentation means if anything goes awry while you're setting up, you'll be in a world of hurt.

DHN-910: The DHN-910 has the worst docs, and its configuration software abandons you like Ted Kennedy at Chappaquiddick.

If anything goes awry with the card while you're setting up, **you'll be in a world of hurt.**

Homelink: The Homelink is about as easy to install as the HomeFree, but neither one was anywhere near as simple as Intel's AnyPoint.

THE WINNER

Intel AnyPoint Home Network: The AnyPoint is easily the most headache-free one of the bunch. Granny will never know what "eductational research" you're conducting on the other end.



The Gameplay Test

GAMING AND FILE SHARING OVER A LOCAL AREA NETWORK

HomeFree: It does a great job of supporting networked gameplay, but we would've liked some bundled games.

AnyPoint: Again, no games, but the AnyPoint does a good job of lag-free gameplay on most games.

Homelink: Linksys bundles a limited version of *Descent 3*. Again, smooth gameplay.

THE WINNER

DHN-910: Plays flawlessly. The kicker? Bundled demos of *WarCraft II* and *Diablo* to get you started. Yeah!



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAJAT GHOSH

The Stomp Test

IS CUSTOMER SERVICE AROUND WHEN YOU'RE READY TO STOMP THE CARD?

HomeFree: It's a toll call, and tech support is available only from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays.

DHN-910: Again, the toll-call tech support isn't available 24 hours a day.

AnyPoint: Intel's technical support sucks. After 90 days you'll have to call a 900 number. Weak!

THE WINNER

Homelink: Geeky tech boys are available 24 hours a day, and the call is free.

Gearheads

WE ANSWER YOUR TECH QUESTIONS | GEARHEADS@IPCG.COM

BY DI LUO AND DARREN GLADSTONE

The Big Question of the Month

Peep Your Ping

Q. I've been having trouble playing games over the Internet. Someone told me that my ping is the problem. What the heck does "ping" mean, and what does it have to do with games... I mean, besides a ball and two paddles?

A. When you "ping" someone, your computer is doing two things: making certain there is a computer on the other end and testing the data-transmission speed between the two.

Think of it like this: At a concert, you'll hear some joker on the mic shouting, "Testing... 1, 2... check." That's the same thing. He's testing the connection to make sure the mic is plugged in and to hear how good the connection sounds.

With "ping time" you're testing signal speed. So, as you can guess, "ping time" makes a big difference in your online gaming performance – even though it's usually measured in tenths of a second. A decent ping time on a 56K modem to your Internet service provider is about 115 milliseconds. The lower your ping time, the better your connection to the Internet.

When you want to play a game like *Unreal Tournament* online, you'll need to choose which server on which you want to play. You may notice a little column on the menu labeled "ping." Usually, it's best to pick a server with the lowest number. If you choose a server with a high ping time (more than 115msec), you're going to experience poor gaming performance, such as annoying delays in gameplay, opponents who jump from one spot to another, and in some games, less-responsive controls.

To eke as much out of your 56K modem as possible, you may want to try an MTU (Maximum Transmission Unit) tweak utility, which can improve your standard modem's overall Net performance. MTU refers to the size of the packets your computer sends and receives over the Internet. Larger packets are more likely to get broken down into smaller packets in transit, hindering your Internet performance. By sending out smaller packets in the first place, you can skip this fragmenting process. SwiftNet and MTU Speed Pro are two nifty utilities that let you easily adjust the size of these packets for better performance. Go to www.incite.com to get more info.

Also, Windows 95's default setting for MTU is 1,500. Try setting the number to 576 to see if you get better performance.

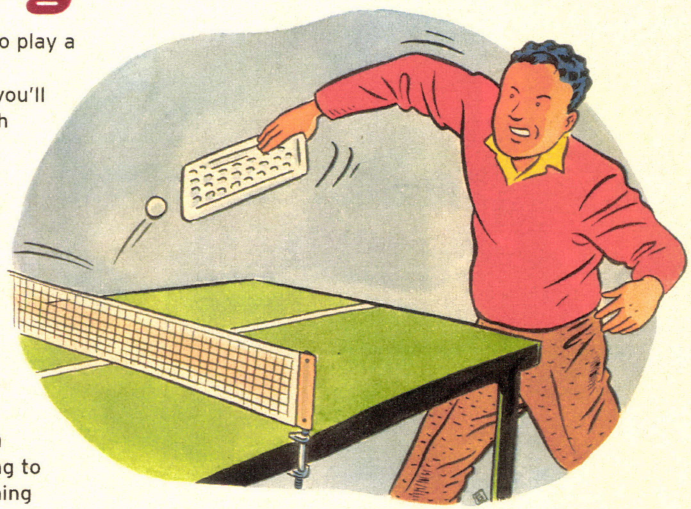


ILLUSTRATION BY A.J. GARCES

Games on TV: In or Out?

Q. I am using a crappy little 15-inch monitor with my computer and was thinking of getting a graphics card with TV-out so I can just use my 52-inch big-screen TV. Will that work?

A. ATI, Matrox, S3, and 3dfx all make TV-out graphics cards, and there isn't much to recommend any one over another. Even Elsa sells an optional plug allowing for TV-out capabilities. Be warned, though, that the maximum resolution you can get out of your TV is around 800x600. And those images won't be nearly as crisp as on a computer monitor.

Playing low-resolution 2D games shouldn't be a problem, but games requiring 3D will look like crap. Your best bet is to shell out for at least a 17-inch monitor, which sells for around $150 to $200. A decent video card with TV-out would cost roughly the same, if not more. The only downside is that you won't be able to chill out on the couch and play games.

Playing low-resolution 2D games shouldn't be a problem, but games requiring 3D will look like crap.

Card Club of the Month

Q. Which video card should I buy?

A. Rather than cover this age-old question with a new answer every month, we're working on a definitive 3D feature for the fall, just in time for your holiday shopping spree. But if you just can't wait, for our dollar's worth, we've been playing around with a couple Geforce2 GTS cards, and in a word – daaaamn! In fact, flip over to our Geforce 2 GTS review on page 89 and see for yourself.

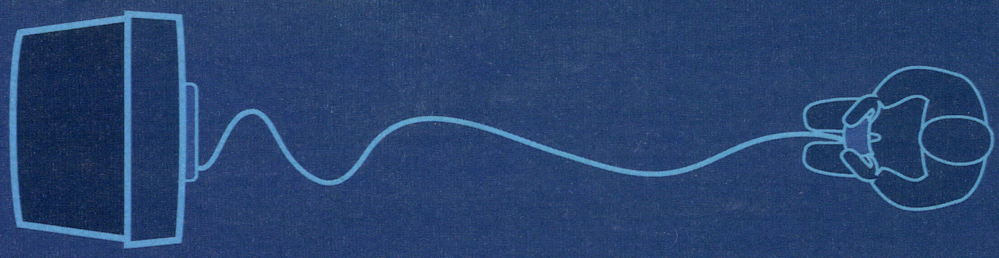


Yahoo! Travel

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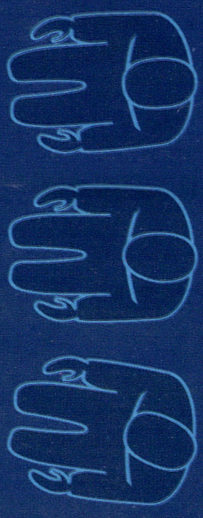
Poorly planned trips are never much of a vacation. Take control. Book your flight. Rent a car. Make hotel reservations in like, two minutes. Maybe three.

www.yahoo.com



When I'm not playing,





I like to watch.

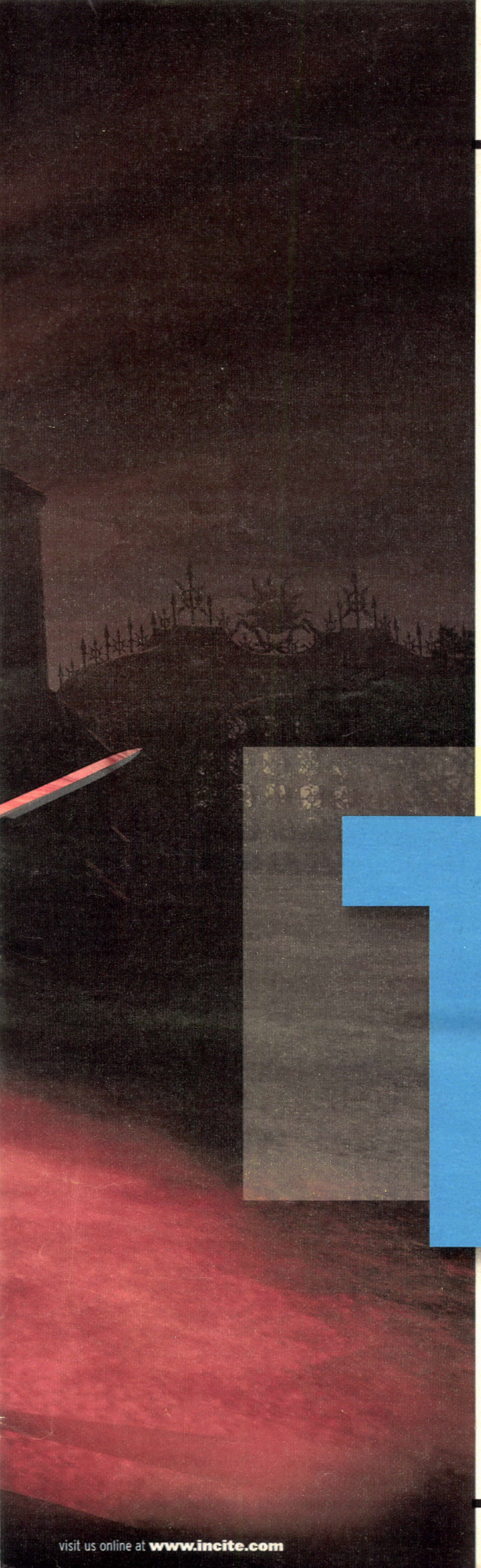
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Videogame television on the web.

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[DIABLO II]

It can be hard to find good help these days. That's why we asked our friends at Brady Games to give us an excerpt from their official *Diablo II* strategy book to help you on your adventure. What you'll find here is information on the six basic skills of each of the five character classes in the game. If you want the same for the rest of the skills, you'll have to spring for the book. Hey, you can't have everything for free.

The *Diablo II* environment allows you to embark on your quest using one of the game's five character classes: the **BARBARIAN,** the **SORCERESS,** the **NECROMANCER,** the **AMAZON,** or the **PALADIN.**

As you might expect, each of these characters has its own strengths and weaknesses. In addition to the characters' innate abilities, there are three skill areas upon which each character can improve. ■ Each area of skill can be enhanced as the character matures and gains experience within *Diablo II,* but the ability to improve skills is limited. This limitation means you can fully develop only one skill line; the other skill lines are either partially developed or ignored, leaving the door open for significant variation between characters' abilities by game's end. ■ This feature is what makes the character development in *Diablo II* so very impressive. You can have two Amazons that start the game at the same time, but based on the choices each player makes with regard to skill assignments, these two Amazons can have considerably different skill sets by the end of the game. ■ For example, one may have mastered every skill in the Bow and Crossbow skill set, while the other has become adept at Healing and Movement skills – giving her very different abilities, such as Decoy (the ability to duplicate herself). This approach makes *Diablo II* very replayable, as you can play it differently even if you use the same character.



HEAVY-DUTY FIREPOWER Many of the spells in *Diablo II* pack a heck of a wallop. Some spells can clear out an entire room, but you must learn to use them wisely. Our guide will show you the dos and don'ts of spell casting.

YOU MUST FIRST DECIDE WHICH OF THE FIVE CHARACTERS YOU WILL USE.

Choosing a Character Class

Before examining which skills to develop and in what order, you must first decide which of the five characters you will use as your instrument for moving through the complex and challenging world of *Diablo II*.

Which character you choose depends on a number of factors, including your preferred style of fighting, the amount of magical abilities you want to have, skills that can be developed (they're different for every character) and, of course, personal preference (gender, looks, attitude). In order to help you make your decision, here is a brief description of the style of combat for each of the character classes.



AMAZON: The Amazon is a powerful and versatile character who excels at using magic spells, magic missiles, arrows, and other methods of combat that cause damage from afar. In short, the Amazon likes to stand back and shoot, making her the "fire and forget" character. If you don't want to be repairing armor while constantly taking hits, the Amazon is a good choice. That said, although she usually handles missile weapons, the Amazon is very strong and can fight surprisingly well in hack-and-slash battles when necessary. This extra toughness makes her a popular character.



BARBARIAN: The Barbarian is the master of hack-and-slash, head-to-head attacks. He's the bloodthirsty warrior who literally lives to face death in intimate combat situations. He likes to fight with large swords, shields and whirling blades, wears sizable armor, and even has a few magical moves that can help him to do damage from afar. The Barbarian is for those of you who like a straight-up fight with lots of hand-to-hand combat. He has ultracool moves such as Leap Attack, and there are some things a Barbarian can do that other character classes can only dream of.



NECROMANCER: Like the Amazon, the Necromancer prefers to fight from afar but can engage in heavy combat if need be. As his name implies, the Necromancer can raise undead to battle for him. The undead minions that have been summoned by the Necromancer will fight "to the death" for their new master while he follows behind them and picks up the bounty of their efforts.

Blizzard employees often call the Necromancer "The General" because of his ability to raise up an army of undead skeletons, revived enemies, and elemental Golems to do his bidding. Despite the Necromancer's ability to create his own personal army, he's a capable fighter in his own right and, properly equipped, will give any

group of monsters a run for the money in melee combat.



PALADIN: The Paladin can best be described as self-reliant. He can fight in heavy battles or attack from afar, but he also has abilities that allow him to heal himself. These healing skills usually mean the Paladin does not have to go back to town as often as the other characters in order to heal his wounds.

Many of the Paladin's skills are best utilized in multiplayer action. Indeed, the Paladin's Auras, although effective in single player, really shine when they can work to add benefits to the party that's traveling with the Paladin. A Paladin is an absolute must in a multiplayer party, but can certainly hold his own in the single-player version of the game as both a capable fighter and a user of magic.



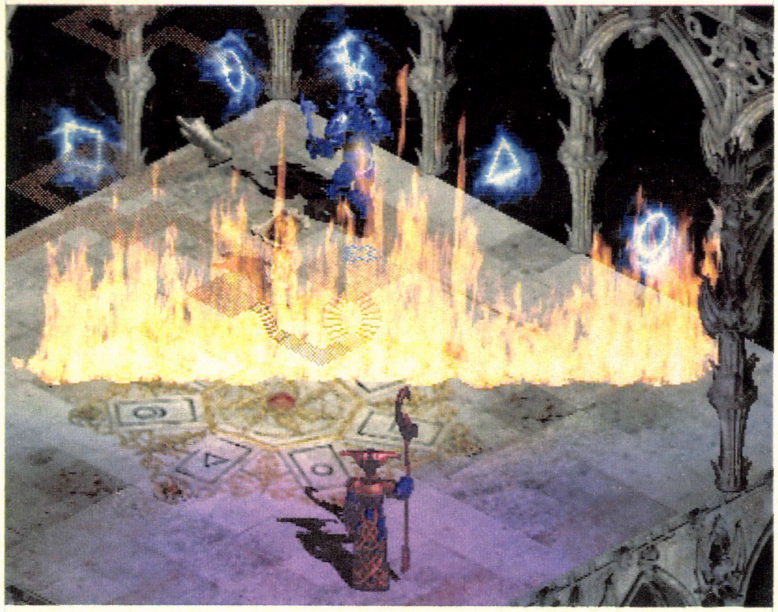
SORCERESS: The Sorceress is a frail being, always attempting to keep as far away from combat as possible. She is all about magic. Equipped with fireball, iceball, and lightning attacks, she is indeed an incredibly powerful mage who can use her devastating magic to take out monsters in bunches. This is the character you'll want to use if you enjoy casting fantastic magical attacks rather than getting involved in the minutia of hack-and-slash combat.

Character Development

One of the great things about *Diablo II* is that the 150 different skills (30 for each of five characters) make character skill development an important part of the game. Your choices in this regard can create dramatically different characters with only a few different skill choices. For example, a Necromancer that puts all of his skill points into Raise Skeleton and Skeleton Mastery will be very different (and require different strategies) than a Necromancer who specializes in Curses and Poison and Bone skills.

Throughout the entire course of a single-player game, you are likely to get in the neighborhood of about 35 skill points to distribute. This may sound like a lot, but when you consider that each skill can take 20 skill points, you will obviously be able to use only a few skills in any one game. This means *Diablo II* has nearly infinite replayability, even as a single-player game! The permutations and combinations of skill mixes is huge; as such, we suggest you pick the skills you think will benefit you most, then build them up and experiment with their use. In this strategy guide we'll go over detailed information about each of the skills for each character class. In addition to basic descriptions of the skills, we'll also provide strategies for how to use and combine the skills to your advantage.

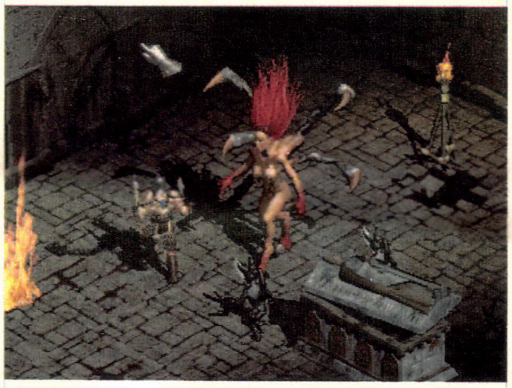
As you put skill points into specific skills, you will receive various benefits in that particular skill area. To learn exactly what attaining the next level of a skill will get you, move your cursor over the skill icon. This will display your current skill status as well as details regarding the next level of skill.



FIRE IS AN EXCELLENT WEAPON Many creatures you'll run into in *Diablo II* are susceptible to fire spells. This fire wall comes in particularly handy.

Wherever relevant, we've included information about the skills as they pertain to multiplayer action or single-player action or, indeed, certain locations within *Diablo II*. Much of the information for this part comes from the Blizzard quality assurance team members, and our thanks go out to them. A large chunk of information was also supplied by Jason Hutchins, senior QA analyst at Blizzard. Now, without further ado...

WE'LL GO OVER INFORMATION ABOUT EACH OF THE SKILLS FOR EACH CHARACTER CLASS.



WITCHY WOMAN The graphics in *Diablo II* go a long way toward helping you personalize your characters.

The Necromancer

THE DEAD KICK ASS – AND WE DON'T MEAN JERRY GARCIA



NECROMANCER

PROS
He's a sweet talker (to the undead); he has lots of friends who like to help him out of jams after he helps them out of tombs; two words: corpse explosion.

CONS
He can't resurrect the dead's brains as well as their bodies, plus he needs to kill off some monsters in order to have some dead to summon.

FAVORITE PICKUP LINE
"So, would you like to see my bone... armor?"

The Necromancer is a dark form of sorcerer whose spells are geared toward the raising of the dead and the summoning and control of various creatures for his purposes. Although his goals are often aligned with those of the forces of light, some believe these ends do not justify his foul means. Long hours of study in dank mausoleums have made his skin pale and corpselike, while his figure has more in common with a skeleton than a man. Some shun him for his peculiar looks and ways, but no one doubts the power of the Necromancer, which is the stuff of nightmares, to be sure.

Necromancer Skills

There are three skill skews that the Necromancer can develop as he moves forward in *Diablo II.* As with the other characters, the skills that are developed will substantially affect the Necromancer's abilities throughout the game. The three skill areas (skews) are Curses, Poison and Bone, and Summoning and Control. There is good reason to invest at least some skill points in each of the skill areas, but ultimately you'll have to make a decision as to which kinds of abilities you want your Necromancer to have. Should he have a powerful Golem, or should Skeletons do his bidding? Read on to find out the pros and cons of each skill.

POISON AND BONE

This skill set incorporates various magical attacks that are associated with – you guessed it – poison and bone. These skills/spells serve a variety of purposes, including defense (Bone Armor), attack (Teeth), traps (Bone Prison), and Corpse Explosion, which is a powerful skill that does damage to nearby enemies according to how many hit points the corpse had before its death.

TEETH (Level 1): This fires multiple magic teeth from another realm. As you add points to this skill, it increases the number of "teeth" that are released and the amount of damage each tooth does. The advantage of Teeth is that it inflicts blows through damage: It goes through the first target and will then hit another target (or targets) behind the first. For these reasons, the Teeth skill is best used against rooms full of enemies, especially at higher skill levels, where the amount of damage it inflicts is substantial. Teeth is a magical, missile-type skill that is useful early on for the Necromancer.

BONE ARMOR (Level 1): Invoking this skill creates a protective shield of rotating bone that absorbs the damage enemies inflict on your character. As you put skill points into Bone Armor, you begin to see significant gains in the amount of damage this skill can absorb, making it a valuable tool when fighting groups of enemies. Bone Armor is especially important if you choose not to use a lot of summoning to aid in your quest through *Diablo II.*

TIP: If you're going to be using Bone Armor for melee combat, assign it a hot-key so you can recast it frequently. This skill effectively absorbs the enemy's attack damage, but it won't last long against the toughest monsters or large groups of foes.

CURSES

The Curses are a set of skills that when invoked affect the enemy hoards in various ways. As a rule, Curses are used in conjunction with other attacks, such as those by skeletons or Golems. Likewise, in multiplayer action the Curses work to the benefit of the entire party, not just the Necromancer using them. For example, an Amplify Damage curse invoked on a group of tough monsters will literally make it twice as easy for your group to take out those affected enemies.

AMPLIFY DAMAGE (Level 1): Amplify Damage is a valuable

skill because it increases the amount of nonmagical damage the cursed unit receives. No matter which level Amplify Damage is at, it will always increase the damage taken by 100 percent. This means that every hit you or one of your minions lands on a cursed unit will do the damage of two hits! As skill points are added to Amplify Damage, the duration of action and its effect radius increase substantially.

Assign a hot-key to Amplify Damage so you can switch to it at a moment's notice. When you employ this skill on a group of enemies they will all be cursed, taking twice the damage they normally would from each hit your Necromancer or his skeletons/golems land. Because the mana cost for Amplify Damage is small, it's an absolute must-have for all Necromancers.

DIM VISION (Level 6): Dim Vision reduces the sight radius of the targeted enemy to 1 yard. This means it leaves your enemies barely able to see past their own noses. If you have the ability to launch a ranged attack (with Teeth or with Skeleton Mages), you can sit back and take the cursed enemies out without them ever seeing you. Dim Vision is also often used to blind enemies that rely on ranged attacks (such as Dark Archers) so they cannot fire their weapons at you or your party.



ARMY OF ONE Once you gain the ability to summon skeleton magic, you can just sit back and watch the fireworks. About eight skeleton warriors and a Fire Golem usually pretty much do the trick.

TIP: If you must escape, Dim Vision can also provide the cloak of cover you need to get past a particularly difficult enemy, whether you're underpowered or simply too injured to continue the fight.

Casting Dim Vision on a tough enemy will blanket him in darkness and give you a chance to get away before it wears off.

SUMMONING AND CONTROL

The Necromancer, as his name would imply, has the ability to raise the dead and employ them to do his bidding. The Necromancer's power extends not only to the dead, but also to the elements, which means he is also capable of summoning Golems from the ground beneath his feet, calling up the fires of hell, or even creating a Golem that steals life for your cause.

TIP: It should be noted that all skeletons, Golems, and raised dead the Necromancer summons (or controls) will contribute experience to the Necromancer who created them. In short, whatever the Necromancer's minions kill, those experience points pour into the Necromancer's experience pool, which often makes leveling up easier in multiplayer games.

SKELETON MASTERY (Level 1): Skeleton Mastery is a very important skill if you have any intention of using skeletons to help your Necromancer make it through the game. It's a very good idea to put at least a few points into Skeleton Mastery, because it dramatically improves the effectiveness of the skeletons fighting for you (including Skeleton Mages). With each point that you invest in Skeleton Mastery, you will increase your minions' hit points and the damage they inflict; however, in higher levels your skeletons will have a hard time keeping up with the enemies they'll face.

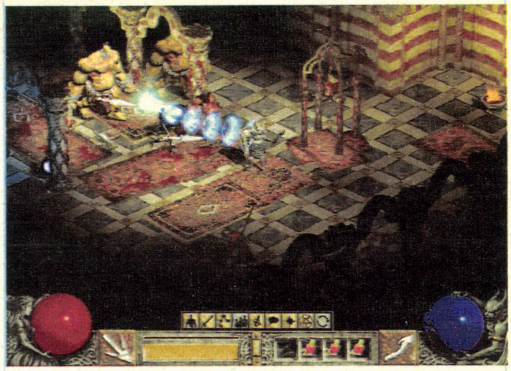
TIP: It's okay to use skeletons early in the game, but once you get into Act III, your skeletons will begin to have a harder time defeating the enemies, and you'll find yourself creating replacement skeletons

IN THE HIGHER LEVELS, YOUR SKELETONS WILL HAVE A HARD TIME KEEPING UP.

SKELETONS CAN DO THE LION'S SHARE OF THE KILLING FOR THE NECROMANCER IN THE FIRST TWO ACTS.

very frequently. In the testing department at Blizzard, the testers tend not to rely on skeletons in higher levels, instead choosing to augment their skeleton minions with a Golem.

Raise Skeleton (Level 1): As the name implies, this skill raises a skeletal warrior that will fight to the death for your Necromancer. Using this skill, the Necromancer can create a small army of skeletons that will follow him and fight any enemy that gets in their path. When combined with Skeleton Mastery, the skeletons created using this skill can become very powerful, and indeed they can do the lion's share of the killing for the Necromancer in the first two acts.



SHOT TO THE HEART He gives Necromancers a bad name. He's trying to take down these guys with just a bone spear.

Because one more skeleton can be raised with every new skill point you put into Raise Skeleton, the temptation is to put in as many points as you can so that you can create a large army of skeletons to fight for your cause. The problems with this strategy are twofold. First, it's difficult to manage all those skeletons, especially in tight environments such as underground caverns and dungeons. Many skeletons will get lost or won't be able to quickly follow the Necromancer through the narrow corridors. Second, as you progress through the game (into Act III and beyond), you'll find that the relatively weak skeletons get destroyed quickly by the tougher enemies, and it becomes a challenge to find dead bodies with which to resurrect new skeletons.

For the above reasons, it's usually best to put only a few points into skeletons and more into Skeleton Mastery. This tactic will provide you with stronger skeletons and will still allow you to put points into the Curses and other Summoning skills, such as with the Golems.

The Necromancer is a good choice for those who like to live a little on the dark side, as well as for those who prefer others to do the fighting for them.

[NECROMANCER SKILLS]

POISON & BONE																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Teeth																				
Mana Cost		3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5	8.0	8.5	9.0	9.5	10.0	10.5	11.0	11.5	12.0	12.5
Damage	2-4	3-5	4-6	5-7	6-8	7-9	8-10	9-11	10-12	11-13	12-14	13-15	14-16	15-17	16-18	17-19	18-20	19-21	20-22	21-23
No. of Teeth	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Bone Armor																				
Damage Shield		30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210
Mana Cost	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
CURSE																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Amplify Damage	Damages Taken +100				Cost: 4															
Radius (yards)		2.6	3.3	4.0	4.6	5.3	6.0	6.6	7.3	8.0	8.6	9.3	10.0	10.6	11.3	12.0	12.6	13.3	14.0	14.6
Duration (seconds)		11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	59	62	65
Dim Vision	Reduces Enemy Vision				Cost: 9															
Radius (yards)		3.3	4.0	4.6	5.3	6.0	6.6	7.3	8.0	8.6	9.3	10.0	10.6	11.3	12.0	12.6	13.3	14.0	14.6	15.3
Duration (seconds)		9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45
SUMMONING																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Raise Skeleton	Hit Points: 21			Damage: 1-2																
No. of Skeletons		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Mana Cost		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Skeleton Mastery																				
Skeleton Damage	+2	+4	+6	+8	+10	+12	+14	+16	+18	+20	+22	+24	+26	+28	+30	+32	+34	+36	+38	+40
Monster Hit Point %		14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63	70	77	84	91	98	105	112	119	126	133	140
Monster Damage %		4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40

The Amazon

SAY WHAT YOU WANT, BUT DON'T DARE CALL HER "BABE"



This powerful woman warrior belongs to nomadic bands of fighters that roam the area near the South Sea. The Amazon is accustomed to fighting to defend her own. Her lifestyle has made her fiercely independent and able to endure severe hardships in her quest for survival. The Amazon is highly skilled in bowmanship, but is also adept in the use of spears and various throwing weapons. Despite the Amazon's skills at ranged fighting, she is still very dangerous in hand-to-hand combat, and can fend for herself impressively.

Amazon Skills

There are three skill areas (skews) the mighty Amazon can develop as she climbs in experience in *Diablo II*. Which skills you choose to develop will ultimately affect her abilities as the quest toward victory progresses. The three skill skews are Bow and Crossbow, Passive and Magic, and Javelin and Spear. The Amazon's large list of passive skills make her a tempting character; this is because passive skills, once you put skill points into them, are always "on." By putting skill points into passive skills as well as active skills, you will get more mileage out of your skill points. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to every skill choice you make.

BOW AND CROSSBOW

These are all ranged weapons (they fire from a distance and keep the Amazon away from the enemy). Seven of the skills in this skill group are specific weapons, such as the Cold Arrow, the Immolation Arrow, and the Magic Arrow. The other three skills – Strafe, Multiple Shot, and Guided Arrow – are modifiers of existing arrow weapons (either from a Crossbow or from a Bow). These don't offer up new distinct weapons, but rather they make your existing missile weapon better.

For example, Multiple Shot sends out several arrows (more when skill points are applied to it) for every one arrow you fire. How you apply your points in the Bow and Crossbow category will greatly affect how you fight through the game, so choose to suit your style.

MAGIC ARROW (Level 1): The Magic Arrow skill shoots an arrow created entirely from mana, meaning you do not need to have any physical arrows in your quiver to use it. This is a very important skill, especially early in the game, when you may find yourself running out of arrows, and will help you to extricate yourself from many sticky situations. It can be used as an emergency backup or to save conventional arrows whenever you have an excess supply of mana or mana potions. This arrow's damage is the same as that of a normal arrow. As skill points are added to it, the damage it causes goes up, while its mana cost actually goes down. At level 12, the Magic Arrow's cost goes all the way down to zero. Yep, you heard right, it's free!

Although Magic Arrows aren't guided, they never miss their target. Consequently, it is an excellent skill to have if your Dexterity rating is low.

The Magic Arrow skill is best paired with Critical Strike. This is because the Magic Arrow never misses, and Critical Strike will often double the damage of the hit. Use a high-powered Bow or Crossbow (which adds to the damage of the Magic Arrow) and you'll have a superweapon that can take you through the entire game!

FIRE ARROW (Level 1): When active, Fire Arrow modifies one of your arrows by adding fire to it. (You'll need arrows or bolts to make this work.) When it hits, the Fire Arrow causes both normal and fire damage, making it much more effective than using a plain arrow. As with all skills, the more skill points you put into Fire Arrow, the more effective it will ultimately be – especially when it's used together with Critical Strike.

AMAZON

PROS
She can peg anything from long range but can also handle a fistfight. She's the best warrior compromise, considering her passive skills.

CONS
Choose your skills carefully early on, because each missile weapon provides different skill benefits later on in the game.

FAVORITE PICKUP LINE
"So, big boy, do you think you're man enough to be my man?"

THE VALKYRIE GIVES YOU A PARTNER IN BATTLE THAT WILL FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

TIP: The Fire Arrow can be used as a kind of "advanced scout" when fired into the darkness of a dungeon. Each Fire Arrow is its own light source, lighting up the area around it as it flies through the air. In this way, it can be a great way to get a glimpse at what's coming before it emerges from the darkness.

PASSIVE AND MAGIC

The Passive and Magic skills are the most important of the three skill trees for the Amazon. The passive skills of Dodge, Avoid, and Evade are critical to your survival in higher levels. They give your character a chance to avoid being hit every time an enemy attacks, while the Valkyrie gives you a partner in battle that will not only fight to the death, but will also heal her wounds over time. How you choose to use your skills in this skill tree will greatly affect how you do battle and how effective your other skills will be.

INNER SIGHT
(Level 1): This skill places a small light source on all monsters within a radius, which appear as little sparkles dancing above the enemies' heads. Because it illuminates the enemies to some degree, this skill allows the Amazon to see dangers in dark places, and can be very handy in dungeons and other poorly lit places. Adding a small amount of light radius to an enemy is a handy feature, but the real benefit of Inner Sight is that it dramatically lowers the enemy's defense rating, making it considerably easier for you to damage them. Essentially, Inner Sight makes the enemy easier to see in dark places and decreases its armor class, which makes your life a heck of a lot easier.

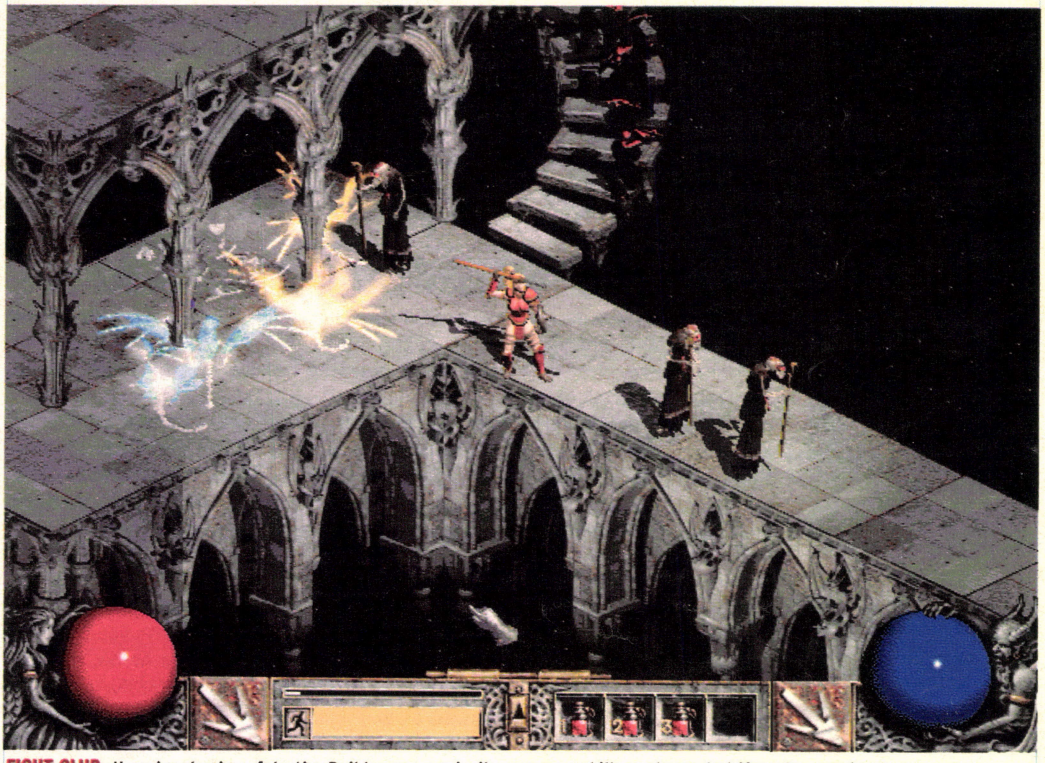
MULTIPLAYER TIP: It's great to have an Amazon in the group that has a couple of skill points invested in Inner Sight. Every member of the party will benefit from the enemy having a substantially reduced defense. In short, it's a great way to make a little mana go a long, long way, and it helps your entire party in the process.

CRITICAL STRIKE
(Level 1): Critical Strike creates a chance you will do double physical damage when you attack an enemy with either ranged or thrust attacks. As you add points to this skill, the chances you'll do double damage go up. In fact, by the time Critical Strike is at level 10, you will have a chance better than 70 percent of getting a double-damage hit with every weapon you use. Because Critical Strike is a passive skill, you'll never need to worry about it. (It's always on.) This allows you to concentrate on fighting, knowing that many of your hits will carry substantially more weight.

TIP: Because of its passive nature and its ability to double the damage of every hit you land (at higher levels), Critical Strike is one of the Amazon's most important skills. Successful Amazons nearly always have some investment in this skill.

JAVELIN AND SPEAR

This group of skills enhances the abilities of – what else? – the Javelin and Spear class of weapons. Each skill in this tree in some way improves upon the Javelin/Spear attacks, or, more specifically, they improve upon weapons that use a thrusting or throwing attack. The higher level skills, such as Fend and Lightning Fury, provide an excellent power punch, while the skills such as Power Strike and Plague Javelin help



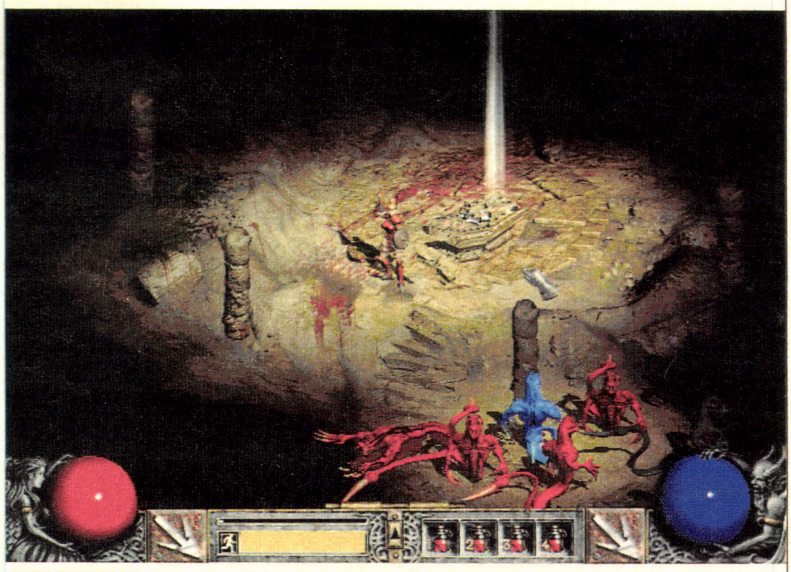
FIGHT CLUB Here is a basic safety tip: Build up your missile-weapons skills early on, but if you're running low on ammo – or if you're surrounded – remember that javelins do decent damage as melee weapons.

to provide a backbone of skills that will serve you well as your Amazon progresses through *Diablo II*.

JAB (Level 1): Jab delivers multiple hits in a single attack, and is a requisite skill if you choose to follow this arm of the technology tree. By slamming the enemy with multiple hits within the span of a normal attack, you can sometimes finish an enemy off in one fell swoop, rather than hitting multiple times. The downside to the Jab skill is that each successive hit is slightly less powerful, and not every jab is guaranteed to hit. However, as you add points to the Jab skill it quickly becomes more effective in terms of attack rating and the amount of damage it inflicts on the enemy.

TIP: The damage inflicted on the enemy when using Jab is actually lower in the first few levels of Jab. Indeed, it's not until you get up to level 5 Jab that you start to see an increase in the damage modifier. (This means you must put skill points into Jab for it to be most effective.)

POWER STRIKE (Level 6): The Power Strike is a straightforward skill that adds lightning damage to an attack. Adding a different type of damage to an attack is always a good idea because it improves both the damage done and the attack strength for thrusting attacks. Although Power Strike has a mana cost, it is nominal and relatively insignificant compared with the benefit supplied by Power Strike. This skill is best used when fighting small groups or single enemies, because the Lightning damage will only affect a single targeted enemy.



JAVELIN TOSSER One of the distinct advantages of the Amazon is that she can pick off her enemies at a distance. Build up her Critical Strike skill and you can kill anything in one shot.

[AMAZON SKILLS]

BOW & CROSSBOW																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Magic Arrow																				
Mana Cost		1.5	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1							
Damage Mod.		+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7	+8	+9	+10	+11	+12	+13	+14	+15	+16	+17	+18	+19
Fire Arrow																				
Mana Cost	3.0	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.5	4.7	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.7	6.0	6.2	6.5	6.7	7.0	7.2	7.5	7.7
Fire	1-4	3-6	5-8	7-10	9-12	11-14	13-16	15-18	17-20	19-22	21-24	23-26	25-28	27-30	29-32	31-34	33-36	35-38	37-40	39-42
PASSIVE & MAGIC																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Inner Sight	Mana Cost: 5																			
Radius (yards)	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
Duration (seconds)	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40	44	48	52	56	60	64	68	72	76	80	84
Enemy Defense	57	63	68	72	75	77	79	81	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	90	91	91	92
Critical Strike	(Passive)																			
Chance to Do 2x Damage	23	34	42	49	55	59	63	65	69	71	73	75	77	79	80	82	82	83	84	85
JAVELIN & SPEAR																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Jab	Mana Cost: 2																			
Attack Rating Bonus	+15	+20	+25	+30	+35	+40	+45	+50	+55	+60	+65	+70	+75	+80	+85	+90	+95	+100	+105	
Damage Mod %	-15	-10	-5	0	+5	+10	+15	+20	+25	+30	+35	+40	+45	+50	+55	+60	+65	+70	+75	+80
Power Strike																				
Attack Mod	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105
Damage	1-9	4-12	7-15	10-18	13-21	16-24	19-27	22-30	25-33	28-36	31-39	34-42	37-45	40-48	43-51	46-54	49-57	52-60	55-63	58-66
Mana Cost	2.0	2.2	2.5	2.7	3.0	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.5	4.7	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.7	6.0	6.2	6.5	6.7

The Paladin

REPENT, SINNERS, AND LEARN THE ERROR OF YOUR HEATHEN WAYS





NO PALADIN SOUP FOR YOU! Even though the Paladin is a bad-ass instrument of God, you still have to pray for some help with the undead. Otherwise, you'll wind up in the pot.

PALADIN

PROS
One bad instrument of God. Whether he wants to create a defensive aura or heal his friends, he's someone you want on your side. He's tough.

CONS
Since he's such a Goody Two-shoes, some of his skills cause damage to himself so he can do better in battle. Whatever.

FAVORITE PICKUP LINE
"Hey darlin'. I can send you straight to paradise."

The Paladin is a battle-ready warrior for whom faith is a shield; He fights for what he believes to be right. Furthermore, his steadfastness gives him powers to do good upon friends and wreak cruel justice upon foes. There are those who call the Paladin an overwrought zealot, but others recognize in him the strength and goodness of the Light. The Paladin is a crusading believer in all that is good, just, and holy. He stands tall and intimidates with a deep, commanding voice that sounds appropriate coming from either the pulpit or the battlefield.

Paladin Skills

There are three skill skews the Paladin can develop as he progresses in *Diablo II*. As with the other characters, the skills developed in each skew will ultimately affect the Paladin's abilities throughout the game. His three skill areas are Combat, Offensive Auras, and Defensive Auras.

COMBAT

As the name implies, this set of skills aids the Paladin in his ability to engage in combat against the evil forces he will face. From multifaceted attacks such as Smite (which not only damages, but also knocks back and stuns) to melee-enhancing skills like Sacrifice, this line contains important skills the Paladin must use in order to be successful.

SACRIFICE (Level 1): This is an odd skill because it gives you the ability to do more damage to the enemy by improving your attack rating; but it does so at a cost of 8 percent to your health. The upside of Sacrifice is that it greatly increases the damage you do, and the cost is always only 8 percent of your life regardless of your level of Sacrifice. Still, the cost of draining some of your own life in order to do damage must always be weighed against the benefits of having a more powerful attack.

If you have a life-stealing weapon that will replenish lost life with every hit, then Sacrifice becomes a very practical and powerful skill. However, if you do not have such a weapon or item, it would behoove you to keep health potions on hand at all times

if you're going to use this skill.

SMITE (Level 1): Smite is best described as a shield bash. When this skill is used, it knocks back and damages the enemy. The real benefit, however, is in its ability to stun the enemy. When you Smite enemies, they become stunned for a short time (a longer time if there are more skill points in this skill), and during this time they cannot move or attack you or do anything. By the time Smite reaches level 15, you're doing a crushing amount of damage (225 percent more) and the enemy is being stunned for a full three seconds, which means you can continue to hit them without fear of retaliation.

TIP: You can take even a tough enemy out by simply continually using Smite on him. Every time you use Smite, enemies will be knocked back, stunning them for a brief period of time. If you Smite them repeatedly, you can push them back against a wall and simply continue to Smite them or trade a sword attack with a Smite attack until they are dead. Using this technique will prevent your foe from fighting back because they will be perpetually stunned.

OFFENSIVE AURAS

This set of skills is aimed at improving existing combat skills, but also provides some unique attributes that will wreak havoc with the enemies. For example, Holy Fire will periodically hit any nearby enemies with a blast of fire, while Thorns will return damage to the monster that's inflicting it on you. Where the Offensive Auras really shine, however, is in multiplayer action. A multiplayer team without a Paladin versed in these skills will be at a considerable disadvantage.

MIGHT (Level 1): This aura increases the amount of damage caused by your character and friendly units. Might, like all auras, is best used when it can help an entire party rather just your Paladin; however, it is still a very powerful aura by itself. Indeed, at level 7 it already doubles the attack value of any hits you lay on an enemy monster.

TIP: Activate Might when playing in a tight group during a fight with tough monsters in Multiplayer. This aura will increase your offensive power (as a group) enough to alter the outcome of a close battle in your favor.

HOLY FIRE (Level 6): This aura is a very powerful skill that, when active, periodically blasts unfriendly units with a hit of fire. The amount of damage it will do on the nearby enemies varies within a range for the level of the skill. By putting more skill points into Holy Fire, you not only increase the amount of damage you inflict on nearby enemies, but you also increase the radius of effect. A great way to use this skill is to run into an area with a large group of nasty enemies, drink down a stamina potion, then simply run around and avoid the enemies while the Holy Fire hits them every few seconds. This technique comes in very handy when your armor is damaged or you are near death, but still need to kill off a group of enemies.

NOTE: Once you reach Act III, Holy Fire will not be effective enough to use consistently – the

THERE ARE THOSE WHO CALL THE PALADIN AN OVERWROUGHT ZEALOT.



I SHALL BRING FORTH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE What is an ancient tomb without a few fire turrets? These magical turret traps are scattered all throughout the game world, so be ready to dodge.

damage it inflicts may not take out the tougher enemies you'll encounter in the higher levels.

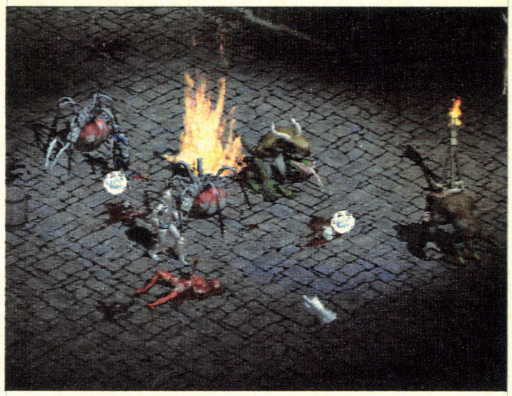
DEFENSIVE AURAS

This set of skills is aimed at improving existing defensive combat skills. For the Paladin, the Defensive Auras are greatly important in multiplayer games because of their ability to protect and affect other party members. As with the Offensive Auras, the Defensive Auras are great in single-player action, but really shine when they can be applied to a team.

PRAYER (Level 1): This is one of the Paladin's most powerful skills, because it has the ability to heal you and your nearby allies passively, simply by being active. When it heals you or a member of your party, Prayer takes mana from your reserve, but only when it heals; otherwise it is simply "on" – passively waiting for your health to fall below the optimum level. When used in a multiplayer party, Prayer is incredibly important, especially at higher levels, because it can heal every member in the party at one time.

NOTE: In multiplayer mode, the Paladin can simply stay behind other party members and leave the Prayer skill active in order to heal everyone as they take hits. This valuable skill underscores the importance of having a Paladin in any multiplayer party.

RESIST FIRE (Level 1): As the name implies, this skill increases your resistance to fire, along with any friendly units (but it only works when units are within the aura radius). Once again, this is a great way to protect yourself and all of your party members in a multiplayer game when you're up against any enemies that deal out punishment with fire. Note that this skill doesn't require any mana, so it can be left on indefinitely. We suggest doing just that.



ARACHNAPHOBIA What is it with role-playing games and giant spiders? Yank out ye olde can of Raid, and blam-o!

THE DEFENSIVE AURAS ARE GREATLY IMPORTANT IN MULTIPLAYER GAMES.

[PALADIN SKILLS]

COMBAT																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Sacrifice	Damage to Self: 8%																			
Attack Mod +%	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115
Damage +%	180	200	220	240	260	280	300	320	340	360	380	400	420	440	460	480	500	520	540	560
Smite	Mana Cost: 2																			
Damage Mod +%	15	30	45	60	75	90	105	120	135	150	165	180	195	210	225	240	255	270	285	300
Stun (seconds)	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.4
OFFENSIVE AURAS																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Might																				
Radius (yards)	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18.0	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.3	30.0	31.3	32.6
Damage Mod +%	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230
Holy Fire																				
Radius (yards)	4	4.6	5.3	6.0	6.6	7.3	8.0	8.6	9.3	10.0	10.6	11.3	12.0	12.6	13.3	14.0	14.6	15.3	16.0	16.6
Fire Damage	1.0 3.0	1.5- 3.5	2.5- 4.5	3.0- 5.0	4.0- 6.0	4.5- 6.5	5.5- 7.5	6.0- 8.0	7.0- 9.0	7.5- 9.5	8.5- 10.5	9.0- 11.0	10.0- 12.0	10.5- 12.5	11.5- 13.5	12.0- 14.0	13.0- 15.0	13.5- 15.5	14.5- 16.5	15.0- 17.0
DEFENSIVE AURAS																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Prayer																				
Radius (yards)	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18.0	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.6	30.0	31.3	32.6
Healing	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Mana Cost	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.8	4.0	4.1	4.3	4.5
Resist Fire																				
Radius (yards)	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18.0	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.6	30.0	31.3	32.6
Resist Fire +%	54	58	60	63	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	71	72	73	73	74	74	74	74	75

The Sorceress

SHE TRIED OUT FOR A PART ON *CHARMED* AND DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT... NOW SHE'S PISSED



One of the rebellious women who has wrested the secrets of magic use from the male-dominated Mage Clans of the East, the Sorceress is an expert in mystical creation *ex nihilo*. Although she lacks hand-to hand combat skills, she does have fierce combative magics for both offense and defense.

Both solitary and reclusive, the Sorceress acts based on motives and ethics that often seem fickle and even spiteful. In reality, she understands the struggle between Order and Chaos all too clearly, and uses this to balance and fit into her role as a warrior in the battles of *Diablo II*.

Sorceress Skills

The three skill skews the Sorceress can develop are Fire, Lightning, and Cold. As with the other characters, the skills developed in each skew will ultimately affect the abilities the Sorceress ends up mastering.

The Sorceress is the master of magic. So if you're looking for some bone-crushing melee combat, the Sorceress is probably not your best choice. However, if you want ultracool and very powerful magic, this is your character.

FIRE

These skills give the Sorceress command over the powerful realm of fire, and include the very effective skills of Fire Wall and Blaze. In addition, she has Meteor, which can eliminate any tightly grouped pack of enemies.

All of the fire skills are worthwhile, but perhaps the most important is Warmth. This skill helps to improve the mana recharge rate for the Sorceress. (Mana is her lifeblood.)

FIRE BOLT (Level 1): Fire Bolt shoots a bolt of fire that causes fire damage to a single enemy. The Sorceress starts the game in possession of this skill. Fire Bolt increases in power as you put skill points into it, but its mana cost stays the same throughout, at 2.5 mana points.

Although Fire Bolt is low-cost, it can hit only one enemy and its damage is limited. This means there are probably other skills in the Fire skill tree that you will want to explore rather than giving the Fire Bolt a couple of extra points.

SORCERESS

PROS
The most obvious pro is equal rights - even among magic users. But she can cast a stable of powerful offensive and defensive spells.

CONS
Standard problem of spell casters: weak, meek, and easy to push around... at least initially. Carefully select her skills.

FAVORITE PICKUP LINE
"Did I mention that the last guy who wouldn't go out with me is now catching flies with his tongue?"



ROACH MOTEL Nothing clears a room quite like lightning spells. If you're in a pinch and are surrounded by oversize termites, cast a lightning bolt and watch the sparks – and bugs – fly.



HAIL TO THE QUEEN Feeling a little under the weather? Send a personalized blizzard to whirl around some of your enemies and watch as they slow to a crawl or freeze in their tracks.

BECAUSE THE SORCERESS IS A SPELL CASTER, SHE NEEDS PLENTY OF MANA.

WARMTH (Level 1): Warmth is a passive skill that increases the mana recovery rate of the Sorceress. It's imperative that you add skill points to this skill. Because the Sorceress is a spell caster, she needs plenty of mana to cast her spells.

Warmth increases the mana recharge rate by a percentage. When you reach level 9 of Warmth, you'll see a recharge rate that is greater than double the standard recharge rate, which obviously makes this one of the most important skills in the game.

TIP: Don't wait to put points into Warmth. The benefits of having at least five points in this skill will hold you in good stead right from the first act, so don't hold back.

LIGHTNING SPELLS

These skills allow the Sorceress to use lightning to crush her enemies. They also enable her to use the energy of lightning to engage in telekenesis and teleporting. Like Fire and Cold, Lightning is an important form of elemental damage, so develop this skill tree in at least a limited way to take advantage of the damage it deals.

CHARGED BOLT (Level 1): This skill fires multiple, randomly moving bolts of electricity toward the target. Each bolt does a small amount of electrical damage when it hits an enemy, with more bolts (which do more damage) at higher levels. The limit is 22 bolts (at level 20), but the amount of damage that each bolt does is not substantial enough to make the kind of impact that's necessary later in the game. For this reason, Charged Bolt is best used early in the game – avoid spending skill points on it after the first act.

TIP: Since Charged Bolt is a relatively inexpensive skill in terms of mana, it can be used to search out areas you cannot yet see. Sometimes it's a good idea to send a few Charged Bolts into a room or area that's off-screen, thus doing some preliminary damage to any enemies that might be lurking ahead.

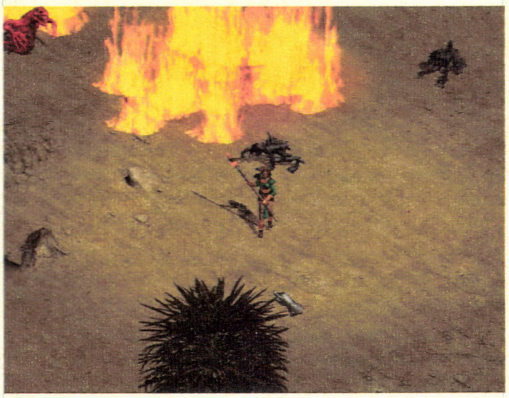
STATIC FIELD (Level 6): Static Field is very powerful as an initial way to greet any group of enemies because it will cause each target in a radius around your Sorceress to lose one third of its current hit points. This is especially helpful when you're in a group and fighting a powerful enemy with a high number of hit points, because two hits with a Static Field will chop that foe's hit points in half. Each successive hit of Static Field causes the target to lose one-third of its hit points, making it easy to lower an enemy's hit points, but less effective for ultimately killing them.

TIP: If you are so inclined, you can kill enemies with Static Field, but it takes several applications of this skill to get the enemy's health low enough. It's much better to simply attack the enemy with your staff or wand when it weakens, rather than wasting mana.

COLD SPELLS

This skill tree gives the Sorceress control over the realm of cold and ice. Cold is an important element because it naturally slows enemies, but more than that it can sometimes freeze enemies and shatter them into tiny shards of ice that melt away. An enemy that's been destroyed in this manner cannot be resurrected. Like the other elemental damage skills, Cold is an important skill tree to invest in, even if it's in just a limited way.

ICE BOLT (Level 1): This is the base-level cold skill that not only



HOT AND BOTHERED When the Sorceress goes out for the night, she leaves the boys with a strange, burning sensation.

will inflict cold damage on the target, but also will slow the enemy for a period of time. How much damage is inflicted and how long the enemy is slowed by cold depends on how many skill points you've put into this skill. Invest at least one skill point because the slowing of enemies can be an important ability later in the game. Ice Bolt is a prerequisite for Ice Blast and Glacial Spike.

TIP: Slowing your enemies with cold is crucial in battle.

FROZEN ARMOR (Level 1):
Frozen Armor is a long-lasting defensive skill that will improve your defensive rating while freezing any enemy attacker that lands a hit on your character. Frozen Armor's length of action is the real bonus because you can simply invoke it and forget it. It's most effective when your Sorceress is involved in a great deal of *Diablo II*'s melee fighting.



SPELL-BINDING OR NERVE-WRACKING? What does this look like to you: an awesome spell that clears out a room or a broken condom? You be the judge.

[SORCERESS SKILLS]

FIRE SPELLS																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Fire Bolt																				
Mana Cost	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Damage	3-6	4-7	6-9	7-10	9-12	10-13	12-15	13-15	15-18	16-19	18-21	19-22	21-25	22-25	24-27	25-28	27-30	28-31	30-33	31-34
Warmth																				
%	25	35	45	55	65	75	85	95	105	115	125	135	145	155	165	175	185	195	205	215
LIGHTNING SPELLS																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Charged Bolt																				
Damage	2-4	2-4	3-5	3-5	4-6	4-6	5-7	5-7	6-8	6-8	7-9	7-9	8-10	8-10	9-11	9-11	10-12	10-12	11-13	11-13
Number of Bolts	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Mana Cost	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5	8.0	8.5	9.0	10.0	10.5	11.0	11.5	12.0	12.5	13.0
Static Field	Mana Cost: 9																			
Damage	Reduces creature's current life points by 33%																			
Radius (yards)	3.3	4.6	6.0	7.3	8.8	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.6
COLD SPELLS																				
SKILL LEVELS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Ice Bolt	Mana Cost: 3																			
Damage	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18.0	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.6	30.0	31.3	32.6
Cold Length (seconds)	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	7.0	8.0	9.0	10.0	11.0	12.0	13.0	14.0	15.0	16.0	17.0	18.0	19.0	20.0	21.0
Frozen Armor	Mana Cost: 7																			
Defense Bonus %	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.6	14.0	15.3	16.6	18.0	19.3	20.6	22.0	23.3	24.6	26.0	27.3	28.6	30.0	31.3	32.6
Duration (seconds)	54	58	60	63	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	71	72	73	73	74	74	74	74	75
Freeze Length (sec.)	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4

The Barbarian

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, EVERYBODY RESPECTS THE GIANT AX



BARBARIAN

PROS
He's strong and hearty enough to take plenty of damage, and is the only guy who likes two-fisted melee combat. He's very mean.

CONS
He's about as smart as Mike Tyson. Don't expect him to know how to cast spells... or be very good at missile weapons like crossbows.

FAVORITE PICKUP LINE
"You know, I'm not wearing anything under this loincloth."

The Barbarian is usually a member of any of several tribes living on the fringes of civilization. These tribes refuse the influence of those they see as soft and weak, and the Barbarian is no different. Ceaseless clan warfare and the constant struggle to survive in the hostile wilderness are reflected in the Barbarian's sturdy and powerful frame.

Perhaps lacking the sophistication of the other characters, the Barbarian has an acute awareness of his surroundings. Because of his shamanistic belief in the animal powers with which he identifies, the Barbarian is sometimes associated with stories of lycanthropy. In fact, he believes he can call upon totemic animal spirits to infuse him with supernormal strengths and abilities, and these abilities work to improve upon his already superb battle tactics.

Barbarian Skills

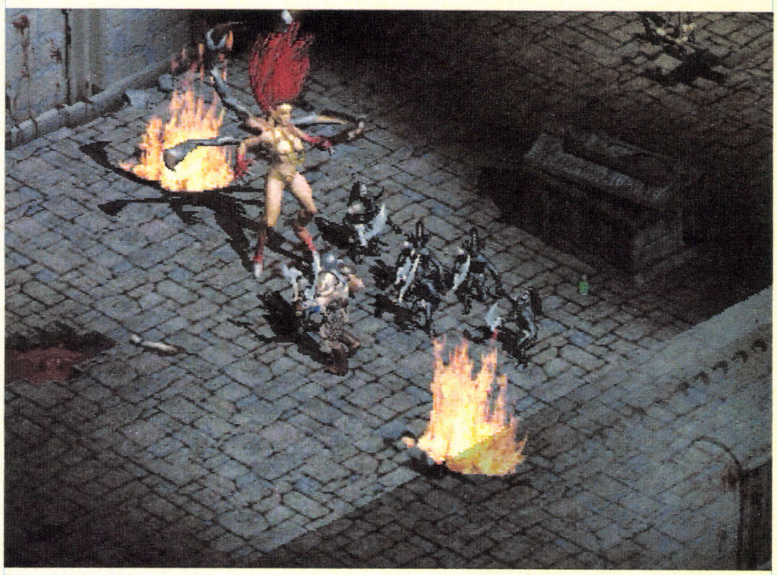
The Barbarian is a pure fighter, and most of his skills augment these core abilities. His three skill skews are Combat, Masteries, and Command.

Out of the Masteries, the higher-level weapons the Barbarian is likely to find are swords. Therefore, if you're looking to create a superbarbarian, it is prudent to put points into Sword Mastery.

COMBAT

This skill tree is the main attack skill tree of the Barbarian, and includes the critical skills of Bash and Leap Attack. Although the Barbarian's Masteries are very important, he'd be hard-pressed to succeed without having at least a few of the skills in the Combat skill tree.

BASH (Level 1): This skill has a powerful smashing blow that knocks the target back, stuns it, and inflicts a substantial amount of damage. Bash not only adds additional damage, it increases the damage and attack modifiers, thus giving you a powerful hit that knocks back the enemy and stuns him for a brief time. Bash is a great skill to use against monsters that are exceptionally tough, because it will get them out of your way for a while, providing a brief period of time for



BIG BOSS LADY And you thought it was intimidating trying to pick up women at the bar? One of the first bosses is quick on her feet and spits out a noxious cloud.

you to attack again, run, or switch skills.

Bash is a level 1 skill, but you can use it effectively throughout the entire game.

LEAP (Level 6): Perhaps the Barbarian's most versatile and important skill, Leap enables the Barbarian to jump over obstacles. Leap not only moves you around the map nicely, but it enables you to do things that other players cannot do. For example, you can leap over rivers or cut corners over areas that the other party members or monsters must walk around. With the Leap skill, you can access places you otherwise couldn't, or use it to escape a scary situation.

Of course, to get the kind of distance that will really make a difference, you must put six or seven skill points into Leap. As an added bonus, when you land after performing a leap there's a small amount of "knock-back" that occurs against enemies. Although this doesn't damage the enemies, it will give you a cushion of space afterward, when you land.

TIP: In multiplayer action, you can often use Leap to reach an item before a party member. This is just one of the advantages of being a Barbarian.

MASTERIES

A Barbarian who's mastered the six arts will be a force to be reckoned with. Unfortunately, putting many points into all of the Masteries is not feasible, so the best thing to do is choose a Mastery and run with it. Oftentimes, gamers will wait and hold onto skill points until they pick up a weapon that they like, and then put the skill points into the area that matches the weapon they like.

MASTERIES (Level 1): This set of skills adds to the damage inflicted by the class of weapons that you've put the skill points into. The Masteries include Sword, Axe, Mace, Pole Arm, Throwing, and Spear. When points are added to these skills, the amount of damage inflicted by the improved weapon class increases dramatically. For example, if you want to use swords throughout the game, you will definitely need the Sword Mastery skill.

The player who puts points into the Masteries will always be more successful than the player who puts their points into other Barbarian skills exclusively. The reason Masteries are so powerful is that they dramatically improve the performance of groups of weapons. Therefore, no matter which weapon in that class you're using, you'll always have the benefit of the Mastery.

For example, if a Barbarian invests heavily in Axe Mastery, no matter which one he uses as he passes through the game, the benefits of the mastery will always be there. Nothing special is needed with masteries. You need only the kind of weapon that will benefit from the mastery into which you've put your points.

TIP: Derek Simmons, senior QA analyst at Blizzard, suggests you save skill points you've earmarked for masteries until you find a weapon that you'll want to keep and use throughout the game. Around Act II, you will have probably found a particularly great weapon, whether it's a a sword, or a pole arm or what-have-you. When you've decided on the kind of weapon to keep, you can put your points into that Mastery so you can exploit the great weapon you've found!

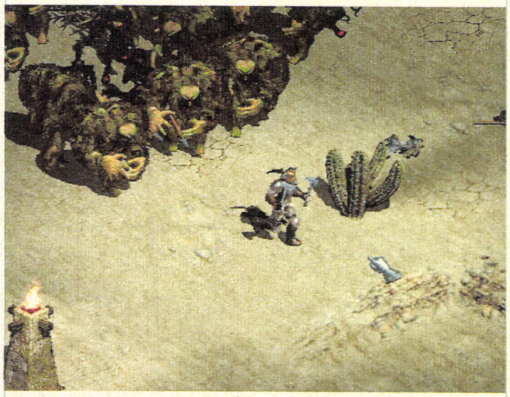
COMMAND

The skills in this area are great tools for the Barbarian at any time. However, many of them,



TWO-FISTED ACTION One of the cool things about being a Barbarian is the ability to have a weapon in each hand. A flurry of ax and club swipes is guaranteed to bring a mighty beat-down on the baddies.

THE BARBARIAN HAS AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF HIS SURROUNDINGS.



YOU'D BETTER RUN Okay, you may be tricked out with powerful axes and armor, but discretion is the better part of valor.

HOWL IS A HANDY SKILL THAT WILL SEND YOUR ENEMIES RUNNING.

such as Taunt and Battle Command, really shine when used in a multiplayer team situation.

Battle Command, for example, gives each party member who's close to you an extra skill point in every skill the party member has for a brief period of time. The first skill of this skill tree is Howl, which forces the enemies to run away from your position. This is handy whether you're in Hell or in the Blood Moor of Act I.

HOWL (Level 1): This skill frightens monsters into retreating from your position. Howl works within a specific radius around your character (which you can see when you use the skill). When you use it, enemies will run for a set distance or a set amount of time, depending on how many skill points you have put into Howl. This ability works just as well in Act IV as it does in Act I, so it's a handy skill to have at any time.

TIP: You can use Howl to make a group of enemies much more manageable. For example, if a group of enemies runs at you, you can invoke Howl and send the first row of enemies away, leaving only those in the rows that weren't affected by Howl to fight you. This can reduce the number of enemies you have to face at once, thus making your task easier and dramatically increasing your chance for victory.

Howl is a very handy skill that will send your enemies running!

FIND HEALTH POTION (Level 1): With this skill, there's a chance that you may find a potion on a dead body. The potion you find is generated randomly, but the most common potions are Health Potions or Mana Potions.

As a rule, this skill doesn't need more than one or two skill points added to it. Even with a 15 percent chance of getting a Health Potion, this usually creates enough potions that your Barbarian won't have to worry about buying potions in town.

This is a great skill for multiplayer action as well, because you can search the bodies of the dead and turn up Health Potions for your party members that may be in need of healing. It's the next best thing to healing magic for this magicless character.

[BARBARIAN SKILLS]

COMBAT																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Bash	Mana Cost: 2																			
Additional Damage	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7	+8	+9	+10	+11	+12	+13	+14	+15	+16	+17	+18	+19	+20
Damage Mod +%	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125	130	135	140	145
Attack Mod +%	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115
Leap	Mana Cost: 2																			
Radius (yards)	4.6	7.3	8.6	10.0	11.3	12.0	12.6	13.3	14.0	14.0	14.6	14.6	15.5	16.0	16.0	16.0	16.6	16.6	16.6	16.6
MASTERIES																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Sword Mastery																				
Damage Mod +%	28	33	38	43	48	53	58	63	68	73	78	83	88	93	98	103	108	113	118	123
Attack Mod +%	28	33	38	43	48	53	58	63	68	73	78	83	88	93	98	103	108	113	118	123
Axe Mastery																				
Damage Mod +%	28	33	38	43	48	53	58	63	68	73	78	83	88	93	98	103	108	113	118	123
Attack Mod +%	28	33	38	43	48	53	58	63	68	73	78	83	88	93	98	103	108	113	118	123
COMMAND																				
SKILL LEVELS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
Howl	Mana Cost: 4																			
Enemy Runs (yards)	16.0	19.3	22.6	26.0	29.3	32.6	36.0	39.3	42.6	46.0	49.3	52.6	56.0	59.3	62.6	66.0	69.3	72.6	76.0	79.3
Enemy Runs (seconds)	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Find Health Potion	Mana Cost: 2																			
Chance to Find %	15	27	36	44	50	55	59	62	66	68	71	73	75	77	78	80	81	82	83	84

incite PC Gaming's General Survival Tips

AS IF ALL THE INFO ON THE CHARACTER CLASSES WEREN'T ENOUGH

Lock an editor in a room to play *Diablo II* for a couple of days and he's bound to come up with some tactics. So, here are a couple of basic hints to keep on this side of the living for a little while longer. Just try to get more sunlight than we did while playing this game.

■ Once you start exploring, look for waypoint markers. When you activate them, you can teleport between different locations throughout an act. Think of them as always-active teleport-spell locations.

■ As in the first game, monsters are afraid of going upstairs. If you find yourself outnumbered, there's no shame in making a mad dash for the exit. Just be prepared for being swarmed the next time you go in.

■ Get a sash or belt as soon as possible. Having one increases the amount of potions you can carry in your action slots. Trust us, you're going to be guzzling those healing potions like tequila shots on a Friday night.

■ Buy books and save some space. You can get spell books for both identify scrolls and teleport scrolls. These save a lot of space in your inventory. One book can hold up to 20 scrolls. Once you get further into the first act, you won't need them anymore.

■ Find the town healers... quick! In every town you're bound to find a healer. He or she will peddle potions and magic wands, but an added bonus is that he will also heal your wounds and mana... as well as your cronies (both summoned and hired).

■ Stash your booty. In town you have a chest you can store your loot in. It's handy for hanging onto gems, magic items, and gold. The last thing you want to do is lose a couple grand in the desert.

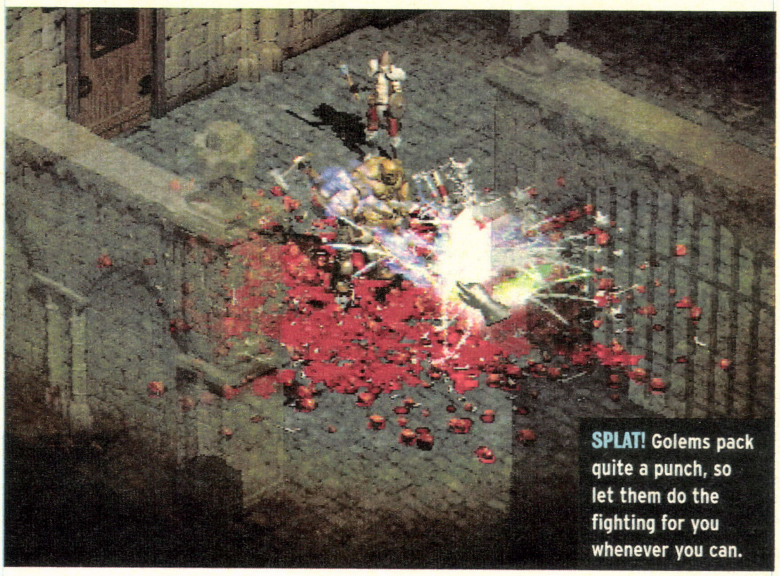
■ Stockpile gems before socketing. In the game you can find items with empty sockets. Depending on the gem, you gain different benefits. So, carefully choose which ones you use. One you use a gem, it's gone.

■ Horadric Cube equals extra storage space. While it may look like a Rubik's cube, it defies all laws of physics. This cube can store several items and weapons twice its size. You'll find this toward the end of Act I.

■ Round up the monsters and herd them through a corridor. The oldest trick in the book still works to a degree. If you're getting swarmed, pull back to a doorway and pick off the monsters one by one as they walk single-file though the door.



SWAP MEET This new screen in the inventory lets you trade gear with an ally in private.



SPLAT! Golems pack quite a punch, so let them do the fighting for you whenever you can.

[CASTING SPELLS]

BARBARIANS love to stage two-fisted attacks. Here's a strategy for when you start finding more magic items: When you find cold-based weapons, equip one, then put a weapon in the other hand. Now you'll have a chance to freeze your opponents and bash them at the same time. It doubles the fun!

NECROMANCERS do it with the dead. You need dead people around in order to summon your army of the dead. Makes sense, right? If you're running low on – ahem – resources, run back to an area with fewer, less powerful creatures that you can easily dispatch for added warriors.

One of the best creatures to summon for the necromancer is the Skeleton Mage. His magical distance attacks will keep you well out of harm's way as he pummels your enemies.

Give the **SORCERESS** some space. Spells can be interrupted: Keep her out of harm's way.

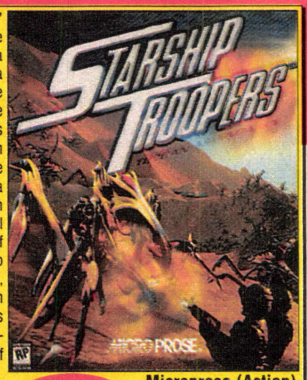
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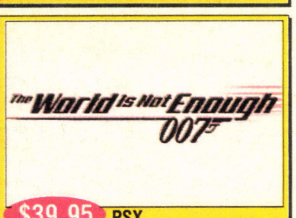
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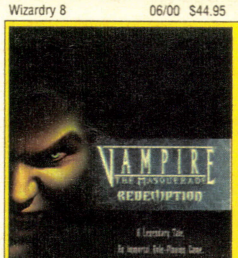


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Activision (Roleplaying)
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Eidos (Strategy)
Release: 11/00
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Release: 6/00
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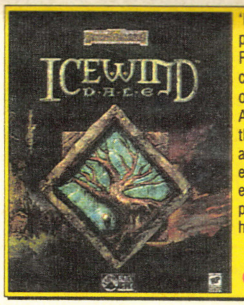
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Interplay (Roleplaying)
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'DIABLO II: INFERNO' As one of 5 character types, you'll journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures & uncover ancient mysteries. Four, fully populated towns & wilderness areas. Multiple dungeons, caverns & crypts to explore. Expanded world filled with new quests, weapons, spells, armor, monsters & non-player characters. Multiplayer support.

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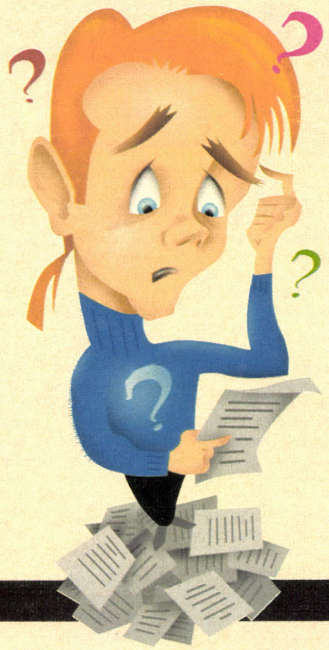
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Say What?



Think cutting through a game company's hype is easy? Take this quiz to see if you can stomach it

Hyperbole and computer-game press releases go together like keyboard and mouse. Nowhere is this truth more apparent than at E3, a three-day dog-and-pony show for game publishers to show off their wares. After a short while, game descriptions all begin to sound the same. See for yourself: Match these real excerpts with their game.

TAKE THE INCITE PC GAMING "DECIPHER THE P.R. BULLS—" CHALLENGE!

1 "The real-time strategy genre will never be the same once PC gamers experience the battlefield of the future. With a whole new 3D engine and a host of standout features including **gorgeous 3D terrain and units**, traditional top-down and immersive "on-the-battlefield" camera viewpoints, never-before-seen strategic options, true line-of-sight, and unprecedented battlefield control, (_____) will innovate the RTS genre and give gamers the most exhilarating war experience ever."

---

2 "(_____) is a game that shatters the confines of typical game environments. The epic single-player game is complemented by a **role-based, cooperative multiplayer team game.** Playing the humans or the aliens, players will use entirely different skills, strategies, vehicles and weapons to compete in a variety of game types."

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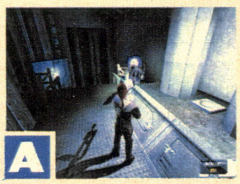
3 "Immersive Gameplay: **19 large detailed levels,** dynamic views from all angles, special techniques and secrets, all designed to enhance gameplay and replayability!"

---

4 "Highly detailed architecture and intricate lighting techniques provide cinematic ambiance and mood. Each of the **three character-paths features over 10 levels of gameplay** across 40 unique, detailed maps, transporting the player through rich, photo-realistic environments never before seen."

---

5 "At its core, (_____) is a **frenetically paced RTS** played out in a stunning 3D world. During the course of the game, players will discover that the art of battle is the key to success as they must effectively manage tactical squads of foot soldiers, mobile units, aircraft and support units as they vie for control of a distant planet."



A Star Trek: Deep Space Nine



B Ground Control



C Halo



D Dark Reign 2



E Dragon's Lair 3D

ILLUSTRATION BY BOB ROBINSON

Answers: 1. (D) Dark Reign 2 (Activision) **2. (C)** Halo (Bungie) **3. (E)** Dragon's Lair 3D (Blue Byte) **4. (A)** Star Trek: Deep Space Nine – The Fallen (Simon & Schuster Interactive) **5. (B)** Ground Control (Sierra)

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