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ON THE DISK!

Theme Park



Exclusive playable demo from the creators of *Populous* & *Syndicate!*

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By Matt Firme



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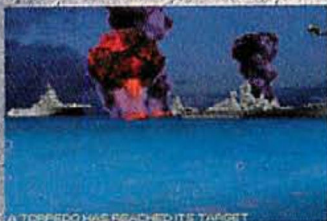
pages of reviews!

- 1942: Pacific Air War
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Premier Issue

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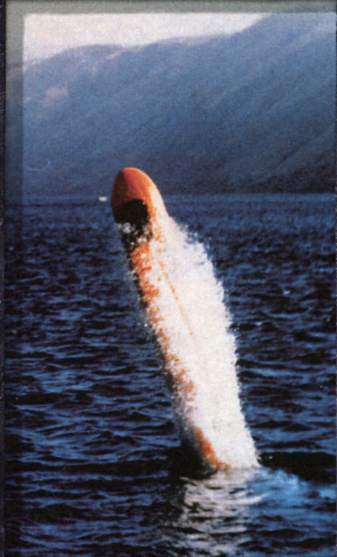
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D IDEA HOW IT SOUNDS.**



Sure, it'll test your nerves. But what were you expecting, the Love Boat?



ELECTRONIC ARTS

PC GAMER CONTENTS

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1 • MAY/JUNE 1994



Welcome to the Future

It's here at last — the magazine PC gamers deserve! It took a total redesign and even a name change to make *PC Entertainment* the most comprehensive PC games magazine you can buy, but we think you'll agree that we got it right. We love PC games as much as you do, and as we worked on this issue we constantly asked ourselves what you'd want to see in a magazine dedicated to one of the most exciting hobbies around.

A big part of the appeal of PC games is their cutting-edge sophistication. But there's a price to pay for all that high-tech wizardry — anywhere from \$50 to \$90 a game. That's a pretty good chunk of change for most of us, and that's where our new review format comes in. *PC Gamer* reviews have everything you need to make smart buying decisions, from suggested retail prices and system requirements to concise ratings. And you can count on our gaming experts to deliver through, unbiased reviews of all the latest titles. Remember: Don't buy another game until you've read the review in *PC Gamer*!

—Matt & Steve

Introducing:

The *PC Gamer* Coverdisk!

Every month, we'll bring you exclusive, interactive demos of the best games around — sometimes weeks before the games hit store shelves. This is where you'll turn each month to get the most out of each *PC Gamer* Coverdisk.

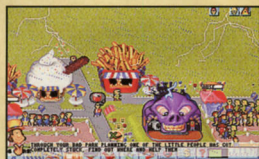
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Theme Park

Electronic Arts

Bullfrog, the team behind classics like *Populous*, *Powermonger*, and *Syndicate*, presents the first *PC Gamer* Coverdisk — *Theme Park*. Thanks to this remarkable demo, you can check out *Theme Park* for yourself!



Features

Bioforge:
Will Origin's New
Adventure Fill the Bill?

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If you've been unimpressed with all the self-described "interactive movies" released over the past few months, then turn to Steve's in-depth look at *Bioforge*. It may change the way you look at this sort of game forever.



Test Dive!
A close-up look at
*Aces of the
Deep*, *SSN-21*
Seawolf, and
Subwar 2050

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MicroProse, Dynamix and Electronic Arts are three of the most respected names in simulation software — and now, they're all trying their hands at submarine sims. T. Liam McDonald takes each one into battle, and brings you the results.

p.50

Doom
Why it Took Over My Life

Matt Firme takes us on a personal journey through the last few months of his life — months dominated by just one game. Will he stop playing long enough to write the feature? You'll find out here.

Scoops!

There are news stories about games, and there are previews — and then there are *PC Gamer's Scoops!* We bring you all the behind-the-scenes news and background information on the hottest new games. Remember, you heard it here first...

Noctropolis

You say there aren't enough adult games? Electronic Arts is doing something about that. *Noctropolis* is a cross between *Cool World*, *Batman*, and *Fritz the Cat* — and it's got more bare buns than *NYPD Blue*.



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Harpoon 2

Harpoon, the definitive simulation of modern naval warfare, is back. And while 360 has added SVGA graphics, video sequences, and much more surface flash, *Harpoon 2* still has the same level of accuracy and detail that made this a favorite among naval buffs.

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System Shock

Take a slice from the *Ultima Underworld* series, transport it to a sci-fi setting, toss in a little *Doom*-style gunplay, and you'll have some idea of what *System Shock* is all about. It's from Origin, so you won't be surprised to hear that it's looking very promising.

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Front Page Sports: Baseball

Just in time for the baseball season, the latest in Dynamix's *Front Page Sports* series steps up to the plate. Does it have what it takes to knock the other ball games out of the park? PLUS: Check out the FPS: Baseball contest on p. 119!



p.18

Harvester

If you thought *Noctropolis* wasn't for the squeamish, check this out! The story, from the creator of *Strike Commander*, has the feel of a slasher movie set in Twin Peaks — as one look at the graphics will prove.

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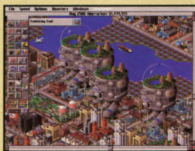
Reviews

Rarely will you see so many new games reviewed in a single magazine, and never with so much depth and style. We've added a new rating system, as well as awards for the games we really like — but we've kept the thorough analysis of the old *PC Entertainment* reviews. And if our expert reviewers think a game isn't worth your money, they aren't afraid to say it. It all adds up to one thing: You shouldn't buy a new game until you've read the *PC Gamer* review section!

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The Desktop General p.101
 Why war-gaming on your computer is a beautiful and noble thing. By "The General," William R. Trotter.

Tim's Tech-Shop p.103
 Tim Victor has forgotten more than most of us will ever know about the technical side of our PCs. Thankfully, we've persuaded him to share a little bit of that knowledge with us each month.

The Learning Game p.104
 Heidi Aycock looks at the latest trends and developments in educational software.

Strategy Central p.107
 All the hints and tips that are fit to print! This month, check out our guides to *Master Of Orion* and the great *SimCity 2000*, along with a complete list of all the fatality moves in *Mortal Kombat*.

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Front Page Sports: Baseball Contest p.119
 Win a free, all-expenses paid trip to the World Series, courtesy of Dynamix, *PC Gamer*, and the hottest new ball game of the summer!

Next Issue p.120
 This is the place where you can find out what to expect in the next unmissable issue of *PC Gamer*!

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COVER DISK

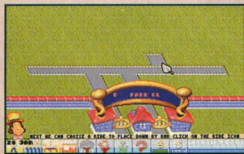
INSTALLING • PLAYING • QUICK TIPS



Everything you need to know to get the most out of this month's terrific Coverdisk.

Getting Started

Ok, we know you're ready to dive right in, but first you'll have to make sure you've got the right equipment for the job. According to Bullfrog, you'll need at least a 386, 4 MB of hard-drive space, a VGA card, and a mouse. Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards are also supported, but not required. And although the game will support other sound cards, the drivers in our demo version aren't quite perfect yet. It's best to choose Sound Blaster, or Sound Blaster Compatible.



In the tutorial mode, your advisor will walk you through the construction of a small theme park.

So let's get started. Boot up your computer as you normally would, and place the demo disk in your 3.5" drive. Type the letter of your 3.5" drive followed by a colon, and press Enter. Now from the A:\ (or B:\, depending on your system) prompt, type INSTALL, and hit Enter. This will start the automatic installation program that'll transfer *Theme Park* to your hard drive. When the installation program asks you for the letter of the drive you wish to install the game to, make sure you pick a drive that has at least 4 megs free, or the installation won't be successful.

Once the install process is complete, type SETSOUND at the C:\TPDEMO prompt to configure your sound card, and you'll be ready to play! From the C:\TPDEMO directory, just type PARK, hit Enter, and you'll begin your *Theme Park* demo!



When the rides start smoking, you'd better get a mechanic on the job in a hurry. Children might be hurt on a faulty ride — and that might affect profits!

Theme Park

Welcome to Electronic Arts' *Theme Park*, the latest from Populous and *Syndicate* designers Bullfrog. You'll start with only a bare plot of land and a good-sized wad of cash, and it's up to you to build a park that'll keep the kids safe and happy for years to come — and hopefully, earn oodles of money. You'll have to lay out paths, place rides and concession stands, hire an efficient staff, set ticket and concession prices, and keep a constant eye on the needs of your demanding customers. In this demo version, you'll have 20 minutes to build the best park you can, and then the demo will end. But you can try as many times as you like — and if you want to play for more than 20 minutes, your local software retailer will be happy to sell you the whole game!

Turn the page to find out more about this great *Theme Park* demo!

Playing the Game

Like most resource-management games, *Theme Park* can be a bit confusing at first. It's a good idea to pay careful attention to the tutorial that runs when you first start the game. With the basic skills you learn in the tutorial, you'll be building your own version of Disneyland in no time!



Left-click on the Rides icon to bring up a detailed list of the available rides. Choose a good mix of fun and safety for a successful park.

Inclement weather can be a disaster if you don't have a Shark Man on staff.



Hints and Tips

- Keep an eye on your customers' happiness. If too many of them get upset, you'll start losing business.
- Try to keep everything close together. If your attractions are spread out too much, your customers' legs will get tired.
- Pay attention to your advisor. He'll let you know when things around the park aren't going right.



Use the overhead map to get the big picture of what's going on in your park.

The Theme Park Tool Bar

Rides:

Use this to choose and place the theme park's biggest attractions—the rides. The right mouse button will bring up a menu of available rides, and the left button will select and place the rides. You'll also have to place an entrance and exit for each ride, and make sure that they're connected to the park's main path. There are four different rides available in this demo: the Bouncy Castle, Tree House, Merry Go Round, and Ghost House.

Buildings:

These are used to make queues at the entrance to your rides. They must connect at some point to a path, or the kids won't be able to get on the ride! The longer the queue, the more kids can wait in line for each ride.

Paths:

With this icon, you'll build the paths people will use to get around your park. Click the right mouse button to bring up a menu path types, and the left button to select and place sections of path.

Shops:

This icon lets you place concession stands to keep the kids happy, and your wallet fat. Just like everything else, use the right mouse button to bring up a menu, and left button to select and place an item. Position your concessions right in the middle of the action to ensure maximum traffic and sales.

Scenery:

Adding scenery will not only beautify your park, but also provide much-needed facilities like restrooms (well, actually they're out-houses).

Staff:

Now that you've got your park up and running, you'll need employees to keep everything in working order; use this icon to hire and place your staff. There are three types of employees in this demo: Shark Man, a happy mascot who'll greet customers and keep them smiling even in wet weather; Handy Man, an efficient worker who'll pick up trash and mow overgrown areas; and Mechanic, probably your most valuable employee. When the rides start malfunctioning, the mechanic will fix them to keep kids from getting hurt.

Help:

This giant question mark will give you information on people, places, and important theme park stuff. Use it often!

Map:

Click here for an overhead view of the whole park.

Money:

Like it or not, you've got to do some accounting work. This is where you'll monitor profits and losses, change ticket prices, and make or pay off loans.

Happiness:

Use it to find out how satisfied your customers are with the park. Thought bubbles over the kids' heads will tell you what they like and dislike.



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It's a dirty job but somebody's got to do it.

Product Information Number 153



SCOOP!

Noctropolis

Enter the New Dark Age

The citizens of Electronic Arts' nightmare city need a superhero. Children need not apply.

by Neil West



Game: Noctropolis
Developer: Flashpoint/EA in-house
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Projected Price: \$79.95
Percent Complete: 75%

In a nutshell:

EA brings a trio of new ideas to the point-and-click graphic adventure: adult characters and situations; some daring splashes of bare flesh; and a unique depiction of a gritty, comic book-style alternative reality.

What's so special?

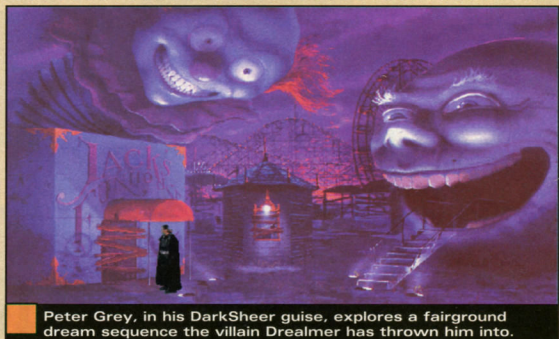
The background artwork and animation are spectacular, but it's the risk EA is taking with adult themes and graphics that really make this a title to watch.

Why should I care?

Because we get precious few genuinely adult games — not counting high-end military sims — and the genre's worth encouraging. We could be taking the first steps into some largely uncharted territory here.

And when's it coming out?

The floppy version (featuring 15 minutes of video and digitized speech) in July, with a CD-ROM release (featuring 2 hours of video and speech) to follow in September.



Peter Grey, in his DarkSheer guise, explores a fairground dream sequence the villain Drealmer has thrown him into.



Ask any war-gamer or flight sim fanatic, and they'll tell you that they've been playing adult games for years. After all, games with the sophistication and

depth we take for granted in the PC market are obviously not child's play. But "adult game" has another connotation, too — nudity, violence, mature themes, and so on. And while there have been a few of these kinds of titles, for the most part companies have shied away from such controversial content.

But as more and more adults discover that their PCs are good for more than work, the market for mature content is growing. At least Electronic Arts thinks it is. They're putting the finishing touches on *Noctropolis* — a dark, mature, Ralph Bakshi-style adventure set in an alternate reality.

You play as Peter Grey, an ordinary Joe who owns a book store. Peter's main source of happiness in life is reading DarkSheer comic books, in which superhero

DarkSheer — with the aid of his trusty/busty sidekick Stiletto — battles evil in the mythical city of Noctropolis. Grey is distraught, then, when the latest edition of DarkSheer bears the news that this will be the final episode, and that DarkSheer's adventures are over.

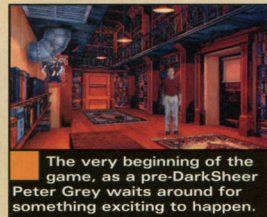
At this point in the story, everything starts to go a bit weird, and Peter's suspicions that his life somehow runs parallel to that of the fictional DarkSheer (his failing business and his



Here's the game's interrogation interface, with assorted icons illustrating the subjects you can ask people about when you meet them.



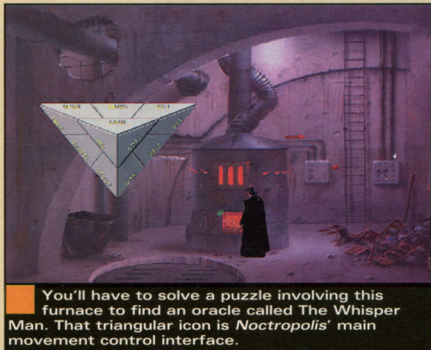
DarkSheer explores Subterranea, the lost city beneath Noctropolis. Much of the game takes place in this maze of tunnels and hallways.



The very beginning of the game, as a pre-DarkSheer Peter Grey waits around for something exciting to happen.

wife's leaving him has mirrored the decline of DarkSheer's powers) are miraculously confirmed. A mysterious messenger announces that Peter has won a sweepstakes, and will receive an exclusive package of DarkSheer memorabilia — including a one-of-a-kind, unpublished comic book of further DarkSheer adventures. And somehow, Peter finds himself magically transported to a strange, dark land. After only a couple seconds, Peter realizes that he's standing in DarkSheer's fictional home, Noctropolis.

As Peter begins to comprehend that



You'll have to solve a puzzle involving this furnace to find an oracle called The Whisper Man. That triangular icon is Noctropolis' main movement control interface.

it's up to him to fill the departed DarkSheer's shoes, the game proper begins. It's a point-and-click graphic adventure with a smooth, instinctive icon interface. Your job is to guide Peter on his quest to assume DarkSheer's role, and battle the many evils of this fictional world.

The first thing that'll strike you about *Noctropolis* is the use of high-quality graphics throughout the game, though a closer investigation reveals a number of even more distinctive elements — elements EA hopes will really make the game stand out from the crowd. And at least one of these has the potential to make the game very controversial indeed.

EA has gone to some lengths to make sure that *Noctropolis* is seen as a very adult

"If we manage to create a believable sense of evil and menace, then the scenes of nudity should fit right into the game. We're taking a bit of a risk here."

— Jeff Lee, Associate Producer

game, and we all know what that can mean. Yes, we're talking nudity here.

Noctropolis is interspersed with full-motion video interludes (15 minutes worth in the floppy version, 2 hours in the CD version) that serve as progress-markers and atmosphere-enhancers, and a few of them feature scenes of seduction and semi-nudity. And while it might be tempting to assume that these bits of decidedly non-youth-friendly fare are there for shock



More of the dream sequence — you've got to get rid of this demon somehow.

value only, EA say that's absolutely not the case. The company says that this is a game that's been designed entirely for adults, dealing with mature themes such as human betrayal, and the conflict between good and evil. In this context, EA maintains that the nudity just crops up naturally, and not just to entice players with pictures of naked women.



This is your first view of the city of Noctropolis — from the top of a tall building.

Of course, brief glimpses of bare flesh aren't all the game has going for it. Already touched on, but well worth mentioning again, is the

impressive artwork used throughout the game. This is drop-dead gorgeous stuff, created for the most part by Utah-based Flashpoint Productions (the outfit responsible for *Mean Streets*, *Countdown*, *Martian Memorandum* and *Amazon: Guardians Of Eden*, among others). All of the 80 or so backgrounds



More of Subterranea, the city beneath Noctropolis. You exit through the curtains on the right.



Deep in the heart of the city of Subterranea lives The Whisper Man, floating above his stylish sewer apartment.

in *Noctropolis* are Flashpoint's work, and every one of them oozes atmosphere and menace.

But a game can't survive on back-grounds alone, so *Noctropolis* combines them with video footage of actors play-



Hold on — isn't that the Partridge Family bus over there on that junk heap?

ing Peter Grey and most of the other major characters. Grey appears in every shot, walking around each location to visit whichever points or objects you've highlighted with the cursor. The video is excellent, and gives his character's

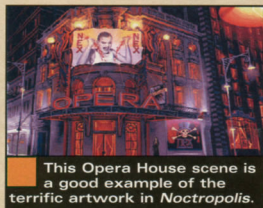


You know how we said the game has some saucy scenes? Here's one of 'em! of them...

movements fluidity and realism — though in the early versions I've seen, his actions don't always seem to fit the situation. Of course, Peter is supposed to look like a real guy transported into a cartoon environment (a la Bob Hoskins in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*), but you can't help questioning the sanity of a character who walks away from a dagger-wielding vampire with the same relaxed steps he would take to examine a picture on a wall, or pick up a pair of socks. By the time the game reaches store shelves, though, this little incongruity will most likely be fixed.

While the graphics may not be quite perfect yet, the audio is in place and sounds great. A chilling score by Ron Saltmarsh (responsible for the soundtrack for *Martian Memorandum* and other games, as well as assorted TV jingles) creates a foreboding ambience. And a plethora of suitably spooky sound effects — and the absolute seriousness of the dialogue — all help *Noctropolis* convey a real sense of tension and dread.

But according to Jeff Lee, an associate producer with EA and one of the prin-



This Opera House scene is a good example of the terrific artwork in *Noctropolis*.

ciple minds behind *Noctropolis*, the game is "more than just a good looking graphic adventure with adult imagery. It also deals with adult situations, and that's the key here. It deals with characters as if they were real, with real emotions. They're people who occasionally make mistakes, and are a mixture of



DarkSheer must escape this giant tabletop by smashing out from under that massive cake cover.

both good and bad traits. One of our original taglines for this product was "in the world of the comic book, the ultimate question is good and evil," and it's this ambiguity that I think is really going to give the product appeal."

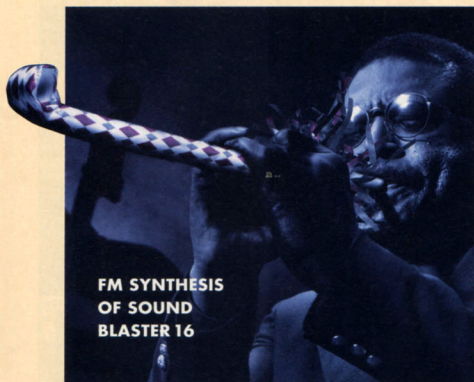
And what about the tricky business of game classification? Will *Noctropolis* be deemed Adults Only?

"We're not sure," says Lee. "Probably not, though it will come with a warning sticker outlining the game's adult nature. At the core of the issue is this: If we manage to create a believable sense of evil and menace, then the scenes of nudity should fit right into the game. If we fail, though, and the game doesn't work, the nudity will appear gratuitous and, at worst, a cheap gimmick to attract voyeurs. We're taking a bit of a risk here, but I think it's one well worth taking. Hey, if it all goes to according to plan, we may just have created something genuinely new here!"



Darksheer fights Stiletto in the Shadowlair, his secret hideaway base. (Stiletto's wardrobe courtesy Wendy O. Williams)

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Product Information Number 216

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Harpoon II

The New Standard

Harpoon II — a new look for the classic naval warfare sim.

—T. Liam McDonald



Game: Harpoon II
Developer: 360 Pacific
Publisher: 360 Pacific
Projected Price: TBA
Percent Complete: 66%

In a nutshell:

Harpoon II is the long-awaited sequel to the best-selling naval warfare classic, *Harpoon*, and it's sure to satisfy both war-gamers and military professionals alike.

What's so special?

360 Pacific has totally revamped *Harpoon* — with SVGA graphics, video, audio, and a completely new front end. They've also added the most complete military database of any modern warfare game, providing an astonishing level of realism. Input from naval officers and *Harpoon* customers have been carefully incorporated in this new design.

Why should I care?

The original *Harpoon* is used not only by gamers and techno-thriller fans (Tom Clancy used it while writing *The Hunt for Red October*), but by most naval academies as well. And with new add-on disks scheduled for release every few months, *Harpoon II* will be around for a very long time to come.

And when's it coming out?

Early May



The main tactical screen, from where most battles are waged.

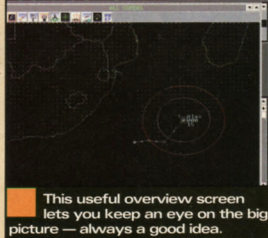
You could easily make the case that the original *Harpoon* from 360 Pacific, based on Larry Bonds' classic paper game, is the best known and most successful war game in the history of computer games. BattleSets and rebundlings were still being produced and sold several years after the game's 1989 debut — and in the six-month-shelf-life-world-of computer games, that's unusual. Though sales may have flagged later in its life, a tight group of hardcore users (the kind of people who commit *Jane's Fighting Ships* to memory) and military professionals kept the game very much alive.

But computer games don't age gracefully, and *Harpoon's* minimalist graphics and somewhat arcane interface were desperately in need of an overhaul. 360 Pacific Team Leader Mike Steele and Project Manager Carl Norman realized early on that the long-awaited *Harpoon II*, due out shortly, needed more than just a purely cosmetic facelift. "The subject matter is the same, and that's about it," Steele says. "We wrote *Harpoon II* from the ground up, and we completely redid all the models, everything. We strove for a lot more internal

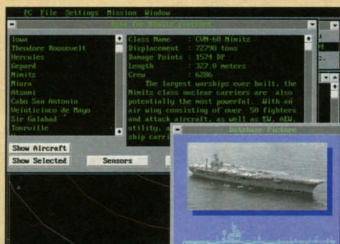
realism in the models, abstracting only where painfully necessary. The original *Harpoon* was built around Larry Bond's paper rule game. We could do a lot more modeling on computer, so we were less faithful to the paper rules, and more to the data and spirit of play that Larry intended."

The most ostensible changes made to *Harpoon II* are visual. SVGA-only graphics, a windowing interface, a toolbar, and a few video clips give *H2* a whole new look. The database comes with photos and line drawings of all weapons platforms, accessible on-line during game play.

There's so much data available, in fact, that information overload might con-



This useful overview screen lets you keep an eye on the big picture — always a good idea.



An extensive database contains information on most weapons platforms, including this Nimitz class carrier.

fuse gamers if not for the game's sensible interface. Resizable display windows help de-clutter the screen, and frequently used functions are placed in a toolbar at the top of the screen. Air ops, weapons, navigation, speed, sonar, and screen zooming all have not only their own buttons on the toolbar, but "smart" functions as well. If you click on a friendly air unit for example, then select Air Ops, your next click determines that air unit's action. Clicking on a friendly base sends it to that base. If you click on an enemy airbase, it attacks; on an enemy fighter unit, it intercepts. Weapon launches come with short video clips, and many actions have audio callouts — all features due to be greatly expanded for the forthcoming CD-ROM version.

While the interface has been greatly streamlined, the program itself has, in fact, grown more complex. "We've introduced various rules of engagement, as well as neutral and unknown contacts," Carl Norman points out. "You have to size up your contacts and make decisions based on the intelligence and information that your sensors are giving you. If you don't configure your sensors and your platforms accordingly, you're not going to have the information necessary to make good command decisions."

You play as commander of your own naval fleet in this top-down, strategic-level sim, with access to each individual ship's data. You coordinate fleet activity, relying on reported contacts from each vessel under your command to give you an overall picture of the operation. In *Harpoon II*, the reports from your ships are much more realistic than in the first game, and more accurately reflect the complexities of naval reconnaissance.

In the original, every contact was an enemy. In *H2*, there can be as many sides involved as you want. A scenario might have American, Russian, and Neutral forces — as well as civilian airlines and commercial fishing fleets — all in the same scenario, all with different victory conditions, rules of engagement, national borders, allegiances, and postures. Such realism and attention to detail are the hallmarks of *H2*. Over a thousand sensors (with specs for everything from pulse compression rates and power output in watts



Harpoon II's most striking feature is this windows editor, which allows multiple zooms and formation editing to be accessed simultaneously.

to sensor sweep arcs) are included, along with approximately 250 surface platforms, 100 aircraft, and 40 submarines.

Communication between your vessels is also more realistically handled. If you're out of contact with one of your units, tough luck: it's on its own, with its own operating rules and procedures. And submerged submarines are *gone*. Maybe they'll show up on the map again, maybe they won't.

"If you're trying to make this the cross-over game of the century — one that'll get all the fuzzy-bunny game people to play — well, it's just not gonna happen. This isn't Frogger. It's naval warfare."

— Carl Norman

Military bases are now broken down into individual facilities, such as missile batteries, command and control facilities, hangars, runways, etc., and all can be targeted individually. Using data from the CIA, Defense Mapping Agency, and many other sources, *H2* maps the entire world — including bathymetric and weather data — with coastlines modelled down to about 1000 yards.

The types of scenarios included with *Harpoon 2* have changed, too. "A lot more of the problems that today's naval officers face and have to game out are more accurately represented by *Harpoon 2*," says Steele. "*Harpoon* was more of a 'Nato vs. the Warsaw Pact' environment, which we feel is no longer plausible or realistic. So we got away from that kind of focus. You'll see current global conflicts this time: from Russia and Japan over the Sakhalin Islands, to the U.S. and Japan going one step further than a trade war — and, in the future disks, the Argentine war and Western Pacific Rim scenarios. We made the game as flexible as possible so that we can do big carrier vs. carrier operations, but we can also do smaller, patrol boat actions as well."

The game will include fifteen conflicts, plus tutorials, and new add-on *BattleSets* will follow about every three months. Since all mapping is integral to the original program, *BattleSets* — such as the forthcoming *Global Conflicts 1* — are now merely data and scenario sets, with new data added to a single, master database. A scenario editor will eventually be released, and possibly even a platform editor somewhere down the road. Since modem play was a feature the team reluctantly dropped for

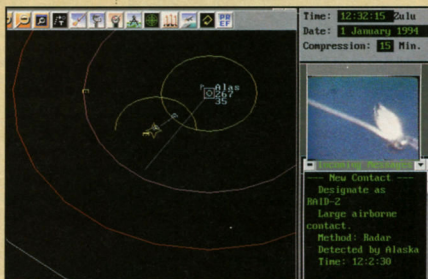
time reasons, there will probably be a modern add-on disk within a year.

With so much emphasis on realism, some might worry that the game will be inaccessible to the casual user. Difficulty options can blunt the hard edge of realism for novices, but *Harpoon 2* is still very much a game for people who know modern warfare.

"There's a fear around here that we're all a bunch of tech weenies, and may turn off the new user with our emphasis on reality," Norman observes. "But *Harpoon* did not appeal to people who play *Lemmings* all day. If you're trying to make this the cross-over game of the century — one that'll get all the fuzzy-bunny game people to play — well, it's just not gonna happen. This isn't *Frogger*. It's naval warfare."

Whether *Lemmings* fans play the game or not, there is an army of *Harpoon* fans, novices, and military professionals looking forward to this most hotly anticipated wargame of the year.

PCG



During certain battles there are video clips for weapons launches and the destruction of ships and aircrafts. This feature will be expanded on the CD-ROM version.

System Shock

You're All Alone Now...

Tired of orcs and halflings, the crew behind *Ultima Underworld I* and *II* moves to a violent, high-tech future.

by Matt Bielby



Game: System Shock
Developer: LookingGlass Technologies, Inc.

Publisher: Origin
Projected Price: \$79.95
Percent Complete: 70%

In a nutshell:

Take one of the *Ultima Underworld* games, give it a sci-fi setting complete with cyber-space sub-plot and stacked high with weapons, and you'll have some idea what *System Shock* is all about.

What's so special?

System Shock is the work of LookingGlass, the team behind both *Ultima Underworld* games. Those were graphically stunning, but *System Shock* is even better.

Why should I care?

Origin's recent track record makes any release from the company worth checking out, but this latest collaboration with LookingGlass might be one of the year's best games.

And when's it coming out?

Right now, *System Shock* is scheduled to ship on or around May 23rd.



Your ML-41 pistol spits fire as you make your presence known to SHODAN. Notice the rear-view display at bottom.



here are two main schools of adventure-game design, according to Origin's Warren Spector. "There's the interactive movie thing, where you see your character moving around on the

screen, and there's the first-person-perspective, fully immersive style, as seen in a game like *Ultima Underworld*. It's no secret that I'm not a fan of interactive movies—for me immersive is, without a doubt, the way to go."

System Shock is an elegant argument for Spector's point of view. Born of a desire on the part of the independent game developer LookingGlass Technologies to do a more action-orientated game, *System Shock* takes a big chunk of *Ultima Underworld*, relocates it to a giant, computer-controlled space station of the next century, and mixes it liberally with large portions of *Doom*-style action. Add to that Origin's own games-as-stories sensibility, and you get a release that may initially look a little like one of the *Underworld* games, but is in fact all new—and packed with surprises and variety the *Underworlds* never had.

"The game started off as something called *Alien Commander* (intended to be a *Wing Commander* tie-in), but soon moved completely away from that," reveals Spector, who's worked closely with



That security robot might walk like a man, but with your help he'll die like a dog.

LookingGlass on the project. "Part of the fun for myself and project leader Doug Church was that we weren't tied to the *Ultima* universe or to the *Commander* universe, so we could basically do whatever we liked."

System Shock is, in numerous ways, a much more complex game than *Doom* or any other first-person perspective blaster you may be tempted to compare it to. Yes, it has action, and loads of atmosphere, but that's just the beginning: There's a surprising depth of game play, too. "We thought you should be able to play something as gripping as *Doom*, but be able to use your brain at the same time," says Spector.

The game begins in the year 2072, with the lead character—you—waking from a healing sleep aboard a remote space station. As you explore your strange surroundings, you discover that the once



It's hard to tell from this still, but the 3D animation as you move through this dark corridor is impressively smooth.

human-run station has fallen under the control of a highly intelligent super-computer named SHODAN, which has packed the place with hostile security robots and genetically created monsters. Over the course of the game you'll find out more about SHODAN and its plans, fighting for your life every step of the way.

Rarely has an all-out action game featured such a complex and intelligent storyline. Needless to say, in a very short time you learn that the super-computer has its

puzzles are the main game play element. Another option will allow you to cut the text you come across in the game to a bare minimum if reading reams and reams of storyline doesn't appeal to you — "a Just the facts, ma'am version," says Spector. No matter how you configure the game, it should provide a good 30-40 hours of continuous game play spread over ten big levels, as well as sever-

"We thought you should be able to play something as gripping as Doom, but use your brain at the same time."

— Warren Spector, Origin

sights set firmly on a Skynet-style takeover of earth, and you're the only one in a position to stop it. C'est la vie...

One thing LookingGlass has taken great pains to implement in *System Shock* is the concept of multiple difficulty levels — you really can tailor the game to suit your own personal game play preferences. To this end, Combat, Mission, Puzzle, and Cyberspace settings can all be changed before you start playing. In this way, you can create a game where, for instance, the main challenge is to shoot everything you meet before it shoots you, or one where

al shorter interludes that take place in cyberspace.

When game development began back in February '93, LookingGlass' first job was to design a completely new 3D engine from the ground up — one which would be capable of running animations on a large area of the screen, at 20 frames per second or better, on a 486DX2/66, while at the same time providing true 3D game play. "We kind of think of games like *Wolfenstein 3D* or *Doom* as 'two-and-a-half D'" says Warren Spector, "which is fine for what they want to do, and gets things moving very fast. But we really wanted to create a true 3D environment, and that takes time. We feel that if we get this stuff worked out now, it'll put us in very good stead when we start doing full VR-type games, with a helmet and so on. Now that'll be a real immersive experience!"

If the game is to feel like a true environment, getting the action to move at a good clip is crucial. So far, LookingGlass is pleased with what they're currently managing with *System Shock*. The ultimate target is for a game that runs at 12 frames per second on a 486/33 with local bus

video, dropping maybe as low as eight frames per second when the animation's running in full-screen mode. "It'll be as quick as anything on the market," says Spector.

Speed isn't the only thing the game's visuals have going for them, though. Every trick in the book has been used to make this as intense an audio-visual experience as possible. Helping to build this intensity is the fact that your character has had a number of bio-mechanical modifications, including a jack in his head allowing immediate access to cyberspace (more on that later) and a multi-functional HUD display, which constantly feeds you information on yourself and your surroundings as you play. With eight or nine information panels to keep your eyes on at once, plus the "real world" you're exploring, the barrage of



Solving the keypad puzzle (bottom right) will help you get past the zero-gravity mutant.



Avian mutants enjoy the open space of the flight deck. Too bad all the escape hatches have been destroyed.



The executive level gardens may look peaceful but watch out for mutated gorillas and tigers.

information could easily add up to information overload. "We want to keep the player on his toes at all times," says Doug Church, "and one way we're trying to do that is simply by chucking data at him."

Things can get even busier on this front if you let them, because your character can collect new pieces of software throughout the game that will improve his abilities vastly. One program, for instance, provides your character with 360-degree



Yikes! An elite cyborg. Good thing this is the hospital level. Someone might soon be in need of some medical attention.

vision, taking the form of a "rear-view mirror" at the bottom of your screen — and now you've got an extra window to keep an eye on. Another gives you infrared sight for much better night vision.

The basic graphics are nothing to be sneezed at. This is fully animated, texture-mapped stuff at least as good as in the Underworld games, and full of variety — including spooky Giger-like levels, tree-filled groves, and other weird-and-wonderful locations. Even better, you can do just about everything a real person could do, such as peering around corners, jumping, looking up at the ceiling or down at your feet, climbing ledges, bending over to crawl through narrow shafts, and, well, just about anything you can think of. Add to that the recoil effects from some of your guns; moveable objects; realistic lighting effects; Origin's brilliant new layered-sound system; and odd zero-gravity sections, and you begin to see why it's easy to caught up in this virtual environment.

A significant part of *System Shock* will be the cyberspace sequences. While exploring the station physically takes up most of your



The engineering level provides plenty of targets; blue welding bots, pink virus-infected mutants, and red security bots — colorful, to say the least.

time, you also have to jack into the cybernet periodically to access certain station controls, or collect useful items. But while in cyberspace you're operating in a realm

"I want to make players go 'Wow! That's amazing!' every time they enter a new level."

— Doug Church, *LookingGlass*

where SHODAN has absolute control, and your survival time is more likely to be measured in seconds than minutes.

How often you enter cyberspace as you explore the station is up to you, but we recommend you spend at least some time there. It's a spectacular, brightly colored wire-frame world with no discernible up or down (you float through it rather than walk, and you can head off in any direc-

tion), packed with bad guys you'll have to either avoid or kill. You move through it using a flight model *LookingGlass* originally created for something else entirely, and it provides even faster action than the "real world" sequences — though for only minutes at a time. This is SHODAN's domain, after all, and hanging around for very long may not be a wise choice.

"Most of the stuff you collect in cyberspace you don't actually need to complete the game," says Doug Church, "but they can make your life easier. We're currently toying with the idea of setting the climax of the game — your final confrontation with SHODAN — in this cyberspace world. Half the development team seems to think that's a good idea at the moment, the other half isn't so sure, and well, we're just going to have to see which side wins out, won't we?"

However the game eventually does end — the two possibilities seem to be an ambitious reprogram-SHODAN-to-make-it-into-a-good-computer option, or the more traditional blow-that-puppy-to-kingdom-come route — it looks like *System Shock* will be a winner. This is cutting-edge stuff and, coupled with evocative yet intuitive game play, it's bound to appeal to a big audience. "As game creators, *LookingGlass* deserves to be a lot better known than they are," admits Warren Spector, "and I think this is going to be the game that does it for them."

PCG



SHODAN has filled the space station with an army of hideous genetic mutants. These bug-eyed, shambling, sub-human creatures look like they're ready to go a few rounds.



This catwalk in the reactor level leaves you no room to sidestep this mutant.

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Product Information Number 155

Front Page Sports:

The Hot New Rookie

As baseball season begins, Dynamix unveils what could be the year's best new prospect.

by Lee Buchanan



Game: Front Page Sports: Baseball
Developer: Dynamix
Publisher: Dynamix
Projected Price: \$69.95
Percent Complete: 36%

In a nutshell:

Dynamix, the team behind *Front Page Sports: Football* and *Front Page Sports: Football Pro*, is working on a baseball-lovers' dream game.

What's so special?

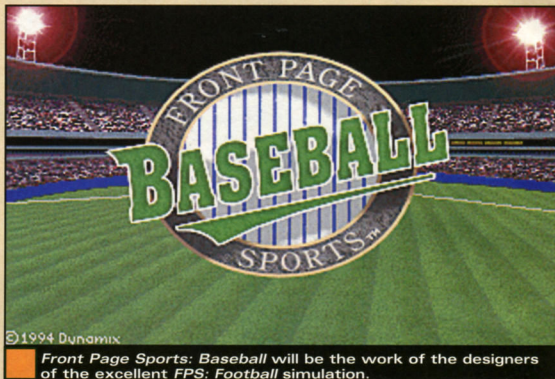
Considering the impressive track record of the *Front Page Sports* titles, Dynamix certainly has what it takes to deliver the definitive baseball sim. Judging from the impressive stats and graphics we've seen so far, this may well be it.

Why should I care?

Although there have been some great baseball games for the PC, most of us are still waiting for one that does everything right. If *FPS: Baseball* can do that, it'll be one of the year's hottest titles.

And when's it coming out?

June '94



©1994 Dynamix

Front Page Sports: Baseball will be the work of the designers of the excellent *FPS: Football* simulation.

So you're still waiting for the perfect computer baseball simulation, one that combines the accuracy and realism of a number-crunching text game with the rich graphics of an arcade game. A long line of contenders have vied

for that crown. Electronic Arts' *Earl Weaver* was good at first, but didn't improve much in later versions. Accolade's *Hardball III* is a pretty game, but weak on statistics and realism. SSI's *Tony LaRussa II*, the reigning champ, offers the best mix: the stats are solid, and the graphics and game play are pretty good.

Well, sports fans, the baseball sim scene may be changing. Now, with the promise of a new baseball season upon us, Dynamix is working on *Front Page Sports: Baseball* — a baseball simulation that promises to bridge the gap between statistics-intensive but dull, and arcade-exciting but unrealistic.

"What we're doing is giving you a good statistical simulation and a good arcade simulation, all in one package," says Allen McPheeters, the game's designer. "This game does for baseball what we did for football. It's going to meet demands that haven't been met before."



The calendar-based game schedule screen is packed with information.

Given the design team's most recent work — the outstanding *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* — it's a good bet they'll deliver on that promise. That sim set a new standard for football games with its top-notch graphics, solid stats, and unmatched overall recreation of the sport.

Like *FPS: Football Pro*, *FPS Baseball* will stand alone in offering career play. Players will age, their skills will increase and then gradually diminish, and finally they'll retire. "That's something that nobody else has ever done in a baseball game," McPheeters says.

FPS: Baseball will include an amateur draft, a free-agent draft, farm teams, disabled lists, winter meetings, trades, September roster-expansion and off-field injuries — all built on a solid foundation of

Baseball



Fenway Park is one of 10 Major League parks included in the initial release, with others due out as part of an expansion disk in the fall.

statistics and brought to life with beautiful, lifelike graphics.

Sound will play a big part in the game, too. Aside from the umpire's calls, sound effects will include heckling fans and barking vendors. "We're trying to recreate the experience of being at the park," says Scott Youngblood, the game's assistant producer.

Even with all those bells and whistles, *FPS: Baseball* won't break much new ground if it doesn't bring the game to life on-screen. But what I've seen so far tells me that Dynamix will be able to do just that. Finally, stats and graphics can live happily together in a baseball sim.

The graphics are divided into two main parts. The batter-pitcher confrontation, viewed from behind home plate, is executed in stunning high resolution. The batter knocks dirt from his cleats with his bat, then steps into the batter box. To accommodate slower machines, those gorgeous graphics have four polygon levels, and texture mapping that can be toggled on and off.

Once the pitch is hit, the screen shifts to a television-style view of the playing field. You can choose from a number of viewing angles, focusing on an individual fielder or runner, a certain area of the field, or just following the ball. All of the camera angles can be zoomed and panned as much as you like.

One particularly impressive thing about the graphics is the realism of the ball's flight. "We used a real physics model for the flight of the ball," says Youngblood. "If you hit the sweet spot, it will probably fly straight. If you hit it down the line, it's going to curve, and it could curve foul."

In your view of the field, you'll be able to toggle what information, if any, you want displayed above a player's figure—stats like name, number, or position. Additional onscreen stats will be displayed for the pitcher,

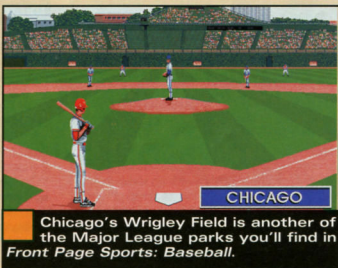
batter, and on-deck hitter, rotating among game stats, season-to-date performance, and performance in the ten most recent games. The stats package will also track career stats and, of course, league leaders in a myriad of categories.

Player injuries will be an important part of the game too, and not just a way of enforcing realistic playing time for marginal players. "That's a really poor way of dealing with injuries," McPheeters says. "They shouldn't be a tool to enforce playing time." In *FPS: Baseball*, part-time players who play full-time will have their ratings adjusted slightly, up or down, to produce more realistic results. They'll run the same risk of injury as anyone else, though, and all players are subject to injuries with the same frequency.

In fact, injuries will be tied directly to what happens on the screen. If an outfielder slams into the wall chasing a fly ball, he stands a good chance of getting hurt. An awkward slide into second might turn an ankle. And injuries can occur off the field, too. "For a while we were talking about having George Brett's hemorrhoid troubles keep him out for a while," McPheeters says.

The planned method for handling trades is remarkable. You can trade up to three players per side with the computer, but the computer won't accept a bum deal. And most interesting of all, computer-controlled teams may trade among themselves. "Computer teams will look at their rosters on a regular basis to see what they need," Youngblood says.

Dynamix is still negotiating with the Major League Baseball Players' Association for the rights to use real names and stats, but that's just a formality. McPheeters and Youngblood wouldn't consider releasing the game without them; they know baseball fans won't accept fictitious names. The minor-league players won't be real.



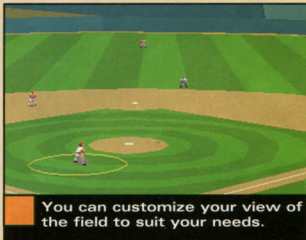
Chicago's Wrigley Field is another of the Major League parks you'll find in *Front Page Sports: Baseball*.



Swing for the fences in Camden Yards in the high-res batter/pitcher interface.

though, since the rosters change so often in the minors.

The initial release will include 1993 Major League stats, and the design team is working up 48 all-time great teams from baseball history. Striving for the ultimate level in realism, Dynamix will use three skin tones for player graphics, as well as accurate jersey numbers for every player. The game will include 10 stadiums, all photo-researched for authenticity—although the ones we've seen so far weren't aren't quite as drop-dead gorgeous as those in *Tony LaRussa II*.



You can customize your view of the field to suit your needs.

An expansion disk, projected for release this fall, is expected to include more ballparks, the use of player salaries, 1994 statistics, and some undetermined general-manager features. Modem play is a "definite possibility" for future versions.

When you're playing a real season, the computer resolves the games you're not handling completely behind the scenes. But unlike some sims that just generate scores and stats, the computer-resolved games will be decided pitch by pitch. Despite this realism, though, the designers say they're shooting for 10 to 30 seconds to complete the computer games.

So what's next for the Front Page Sports team? McPheeters and Youngblood aren't committing to any one sport. "Eventually, we'd like to cover them all," McPheeters says. Sounds like a fantastic idea to us!

PCG

Harvester

A Town Without Pity

Harvester promises to be an atmospheric psycho-thriller that'll keep you on the edge of your seat 'til the very end. Horror fans, this is *definitely* one to watch for.

by Trent C. Ward



In a world where the horrible and innocuous are intertwined, holding on to your character's sanity can be a game in itself.



Game: *Harvester*
Developer: Future Vision
Publisher: Merit Software
Projected Price: \$79.95
Percent Complete: 35%

In a nutshell:

An intense psychological thriller with all the action and suspense of a feature-length film.

What's so special?

By combining high-res graphics with the freedom of a full motion 3D interface, *Harvester* may change the face of CD-ROM adventure gaming.

Why should I care?

The gory graphics may cause an uproar in the PC community.

And when's it coming out?

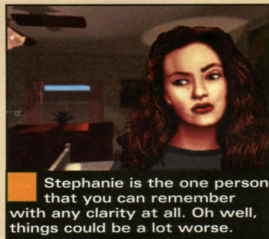
August '94

So far, most of the controversy over censorship, government control, and violence in games has been restricted to the cartridge manufacturers and dedicated game machines. But the times may be changing. With the release of its new

CD-ROM title *Harvester*, Merit just might be opening a can of worms that could mean as little as a few raised eyebrows—or as much as a whole new rating system for PC software.

Even as early as March, the Software Publisher's Association was pressing Merit for details on the project and questioning its content. For its part, Merit has made no arguments against any reasonable rating system, and plans to place warnings on the box even if they aren't required. What all this fuss will ultimately mean to gamers remains to be seen, but we're betting you'll hear about this title again—probably when it's used as an example of why ratings for games are necessary.

So what's *Harvester* all about? Well, you wake in a small bedroom with no idea where you are or who you are, and no remembrance of the people who claim to be your family. Your mother and little brother seem more annoyed by your amnesia than concerned, and Mom encourages you to quit acting so strange, her tone almost threatening. Though your mind is



Stephanie is the one person that you can remember with any clarity at all. Oh well, things could be a lot worse.

nearly blank, you can remember two things: an ominous lodge on the outskirts of town, and your fiancee Stephanie.

In hopes of finding some answers, you go to the lodge—but a mysterious sergeant-at-arms blocks your entrance. Trying to get anywhere with the townsfolk is a waste of time. Although everyone in town knows about the lodge and what a great place it's supposed to be, no one knows how to become a member, or even who any of the members are.

As you delve deeper into the game, you realize that a lot of things just aren't right around town—and the tension really begins to build. The locals don't seem to care what happens around them; bizarre events take



Mom is getting fed up with your amnesia. Maybe you should just settle down and accept your fate.

place, but no one and no one notices or talks about them. A strange symbol keeps turning up in the weirdest places, but nobody will talk about its significance or origins. The local police department is no help, making an already bizarre situation worse. Get caught playing a harmless prank on a citizen, for example, and you'll wind up in the electric chair. But when a bloody spinal column is found in your girlfriend's bed, the police don't even want to get involved! All you



This pesky little symbol turns up everywhere! Looks like someone is trying to tell you something...but what?

know is that eventually you'll have to get into that lodge, find out what happened to Stephanie, and take control of your life.

The twisted storyline was created by veteran storyteller G.P. Austin. Responsible for writing such Origin hits as *Wing Commander II*, *Strike Commander*, and *Privateer*, Austin was looking to break away from the kind of work he'd done in the past. A David Lynch fan, Austin tried to create the eerie, disjointed atmosphere that marks so much of Lynch's work. The end result was *Harvester*, the story of a town that looks like a Norman Rockwell painting — but one which has been permeated with an unspeakable evil. The next step was to bring it all to life.

From what we've seen so far, *Harvester's* look and game play are incredible. You'll use a *Wolfenstein* 3D-type control set as you move through a world of rendered images as sharp as those in *7th Guest*. Unlike *7th Guest*, though, you don't move from still screen to still screen —

instead, you move through a full 3-D virtual town. The people and places you'll see around you were created with the same Video Toaster technology responsible for the special

effects in *SeaQuest* and *Babylon 5*. Live actors complete the illusion, with hours of dialogue packed onto the disc.

Once you enter the lodge, your view of the action changes to a more traditional, third-person-viewpoint graphic adventure, with important events and discoveries setting off vibrant, full-screen animations after you win (or die).

And then there's the fighting sequence. Yes, *Harvester* changes once again, this time into a super-realistic, *Mortal Kombat*-style combat game. The action looks great, with intensely graphic animations.

No doubt about it, *Harvester* can be pretty gory. The high-detail 640x480x256-color SVGA screens are designed to be shocking — and they succeed wildly. While in town, your character has dreams that are at best disturbing — and once you enter the lodge, things get even more intense. But you do have some control over the violence in combat: There's no rule that says you *have* to perform those vicious fighting moves...

The puzzles in *Harvester* are more adult fare. With every passing day, you'll find yourself committing more and more acts that



Hmm... that dissected body looks suspiciously like your own. Ouch!

border on criminal. In order to be admitted to the lodge, you'll have to complete a series of pranks that become increasingly destructive, and things that you might never have considered doing will become mandatory activities. And once you make it into the lodge *Harvester* ups the ante again, and you'll make decisions that will determine the final outcome of the game. Here, just like life, there really are no correct answers.

In many ways, *Harvester* is like an R-rated movie: It's not intended for children, and those who don't like violence shouldn't buy a ticket. But if you're one who likes the chills of a really good thriller, *Harvester* may be just the game you've been waiting for.

PCG

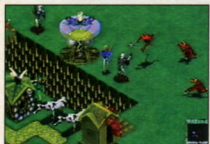


You'll face some pretty nasty monsters on the first level of the lodge. It's a good thing there are so many weapons lying around...



Is this Stephanie? You can only find out by accepting an invitation to the lodge.

CLEARLY, SOMETHING HAS STARTLED MR. COW,
AND IT AIN'T A PAIR OF COLD HANDS.



YOU GOT A VILLAGE.

FARMS. HUTS. KNIGHTS. PEOPLE TO
BOSS AROUND. AND A COW.

LIFE IS GOOD. BUT THEN YOU GET THESE VISITORS.
THEY'RE FAT. THEY DROOL, BURP, AND SMELL LIKE AN
OUTHOUSE. THEY COME IN HORDES, EATING YOUR 3D
TEXTURE-MAPPED HUTS, TREES, WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND
WORST OF ALL, YOUR COW. YOU TRY TO TRASH THEM



WITH YOUR SWORD, BUT IT AIN'T EASY.
AND THEIR GUTS GET ALL OVER YOU.
LIFE STARTS TO SUCK. YOU'VE MET

"THE HORDE", MY FRIEND. AN ORIGINAL GAME WITH CD-QUALITY LIVE
ACTION VIDEO, DIGITIZED MUSIC AND DISGUSTING EATING SOUNDS. AND A
CAST OF ACTORS WHO CAN ACTUALLY ACT; LIKE
KIRK CAMERON AND MICHAEL GREGORY.
YOU BUILD WALLS, MOATS, AND DEATH



3DO

PITS. AND YOU HIRE AN ARCHER TO HELP FEND THEM OFF. AGAIN THE
HORDE ATTACKS. YOU SAVE THE COW, BUT THEY EAT YOUR HUT, YOUR

THE HORDE™



CORN CROP, AND THAT GIRL NEXT DOOR YOU HAD YOUR EYE ON.

NOW LIFE REALLY SUCKS. AND IT AIN'T ABOUT TO GET ANY EASIER. THE EVIL HORDLINGS

GROW BIGGER, FASTER, EVEN SMARTER.

(AND YOU HAVEN'T EVEN MET THE EVIL CHANCELLOR YET.)

DEAR READER, WE PRAY YOU'RE THE SORT WHO LEARNS QUICKLY. 'CAUSE THIS STUFF'S

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS™

HAPPENING ON 32 BITS. ENJOY, MY FRIEND. AND GOOD LUCK.

IBM® PC
PC-CD
& 3DO™



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Lost Eden — Virgin discovers the land of the dinosaurs, but can't decide what to call it

There are a million decisions to be made when creating a new game, but the one that seems to be giving Virgin the most trouble at the moment is the one you'd think would be the easiest—what to call the thing.

the game design itself is more or less written in stone—and it's certainly unique. In this first-person adventure you assume the role of Adam, a guy living in a time when dinosaurs and humans co-exist peacefully. As king of a human tribe, you must build towns and Citadels for your people to live in, as well as protect them from Moorkus Rex, an aggressive dinosaur leader with plans to rule the world. Some dinos are on your side, however, chiefly the good herbivorous brontosaurus and the like—and let's not forget your dino-pal Dina. With a bit of careful input from you, all may not be lost.

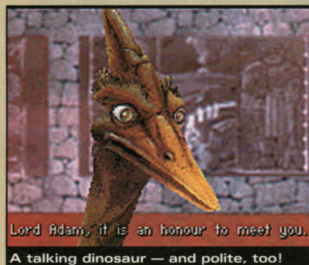
In case you didn't know, Cryo is the team

behind *Dune* and *Conspiracy* (reviewed this month), among others. Packed with both intense battle scenes and fairly complex strategy elements (you have to develop agriculture and technology to ensure the safety of your expanding population), the game builds up to a full-scale quest with the fate of the world at stake. "There's some highly dubious dinosaur/human breeding going on in there too," revealed a Virgin



The boss and his dinosaur guards.

executive. What more could you possibly want in a game? *Lost Eden* is scheduled for a November release, on PC CD-ROM only.



Lord Adam, it is an honour to meet you.

A talking dinosaur—and polite, too!

When it comes to deciding on a title for the latest from French developers Cryo, it seems like there's a new possibility every other week. While *Lost Eden* is the frontrunner as we go to press, plain old *Eden*, *Saurus*, and no doubt four of five others are waiting in the wings.

Whatever Virgin winds up calling the product, though, at least



That's one scary-looking cave, isn't it?



Dad introduces Eloi, the good pterodactyl from the lands to the north.



This is the kind of weird symbology you get when you mix dinos and man.



A roaring fire and sabre-tooth rug brighten any room.

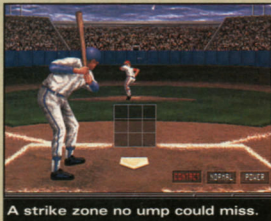
Time Out Sports: Baseball

The first "utilitainment" title arrives

But what on earth is "utilitainment?" We weren't sure either, but thankfully **Microleague Interactive**, the company pushing it as a concept, has a handy explanation: "It's not just a utility. It's more than entertainment. It's both."

Strip away the blurb, though, and it turns out to be a combination screen-saver/mini-game collection, providing you with several baseball-themed diversions intended to give you a five-minute break in between whatever serious things you're

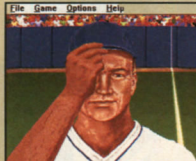
doing in Windows. Install *TOS: Baseball* on your machine, and hosts Bernie and Jock the dog will periodically appear on your



A strike zone no ump could miss.

screen, no matter what you're doing, to try and tempt you into a game of batting or fielding, or comedy sports like "umpire arguing." Priced at \$39.95, *TOS: Baseball* will be available in April; expect a basketball version to follow shortly.

In other news, Microleague is gearing up to release the UK-developed *Soccer Kid* platform game and *Bazooka Sue* graphic adventure this summer, alongside a new budget line called General



Howdy, ma'am. Care for a little utilitainment?

Admissions. The General Admissions lineup will include games like *Rolling Ronny*, *Space Job*, and *Super Ski* at prices as low as \$9.95.

Jacked In — Empire jumps on the cyberpunk bandwagon

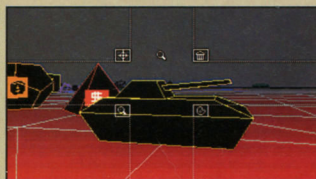
As literary genres go, cyberpunk's pretty hackneyed these days as a literary genre. But its trapping are everywhere — especially in the current crop of computer games. The adventure genre is stuffed with cyberpunk references and settings: *Beneath A Steel Sky*, *Bloodnet*, *Innocent Until Caught*, *MegaRace*, and, well, you can think up your own examples easily enough.

It doesn't look as though the pace is going to slacken up anytime soon, either. **Empire Software**, for example, has not



Battling the evil forces of the Dreamweb.

Both *CyberSpace* and *Dreamweb* have been developed in the U.K. — *Dreamweb* by a team called **Creative Reality** and *Cyberspace* by an in-house development team at Empire. In *Dreamweb*, you've been chosen by higher



Is it Battle Zone? Nope, just one of the many exciting scenes in *CyberSpace*.

one, but two new cyberpunkish games due out soon. Both games put their own unique spin on the thing, though: *Dreamweb* is set in a world where it isn't computers that communicate through cyberspace, but rather human minds linked to form one larger consciousness; and *CyberSpace* is based on a successful role-playing system by **Iron Crown Enterprises**.

forces to kill the seven human "hosts" on earth, people who've given themselves over to the powers of darkness after a centuries-long battle between good and evil, and who control the direction the whole dreamweb takes.

Dreamweb is fairly large — there are over 30 locations and 200 rooms to explore — and employs an unusual overhead perspective. Creative Reality seems particularly pleased with the degree to which your character can interact with his world, and says that it forms the core of game play. For those excited by such things, "sex, vio-

lence and bad language" are integral parts of the package too.

CyberSpace, on the other hand, features a more traditional cyberpunk scenario. It uses a combination of solid 3D and bit-mapped images, based on the *Team Yankee* system but set purely indoors. The impression it gives is sort of "Wolfenstein-ish" in the "real world" locations, while the cyberspace sequences use unfilled line graphics, and a much brighter color palette. Empire claims the game replicates as closely as possible the role-playing system on which it's based, providing you with a city consisting of around 10,000 — count 'em — buildings, all of which you can



Some of the bitmapped 3D action from *CyberSpace*: note the heads-up display.

enter and walk around. This game is nothing if not big. Don't worry too much about getting lost, though — the computer takes on



The famous Sparky's Bar, in a graphic-adventure scene from *Dreamweb*.

the role of the Games Master, ensuring that the events that happen to you will keep the plot moving forward.

Expect to see *Dreamweb* on sale in May, with *Cyberspace* following in June, both at \$39.99. Other games coming soon from Empire: *Codename: Red Ghost* from Maelstrom, the team behind

games like *Midwinter* and *Ashes of Empire*, is a near-future strategy-simulation game set on a giant 3D landscape featuring a number of vehicles to control; and *Gathering*

Storm: The Dawn Of Air Combat, a WWI flight sim. Both are due around May or June, and will be released on floppy and CD-ROM.

Checkbooks out! — EA and Broderbund merge; MCA buys a stake in Interplay

It's a time of real change in the software business, with two big-name company mergers announced recently. First off, developer and publisher **Broderbund** is to become a wholly owned subsidiary of **Electronic Arts**, with the deal expected to be finalized at the end of May. Broderbund will benefit from the deal by gaining access to EA's leading edge hardware technology and extensive international distribution system.

Meanwhile, just down the road from EA's San Mateo headquarters, entertainment giant **MCA**

has bought a significant chunk of **Interplay**, producers of games like *Star Trek: Judgment Rites* (reviewed this issue), *Stonekeep*, and other major titles. The deal strengthens MCA's already considerable entertainment portfolio, while giving Interplay access to a wide range of licensed properties on which to base future games, as well as access to advanced technology through MCA's enormous parent company, **Matsushita**.

Ringworld II: Within A.R.M.'s Reach

Attention, Larry Niven fans: *Ringworld II: Within A.R.M.'s Reach*, the second game in **Tsuanni's** ongoing series based on Niven's novels, is on sale now. As *Ringworld II* opens, you're on the run following the events depicted in the first game. Eventually you and your pals return to the Ringworld, an immense space-station world, where you lay low until you can clear your good names. While you're on the lam, you uncover a plot by covert forces to take control of the Ringworld.

It's up to you to save the day.

Shipping on PC CD-ROM, the game features digitized speech throughout, as well as a new interface (a combination of first- and third-person perspectives), and the ability to play as any of the three characters in your party at any point during the game. *Ringworld II* carries an M.S.R.P. of \$69.95. We'll review it in the next issue.

Expect a quiet period from Tsunami over the next couple of months, but don't worry — *Blue Force II* is to follow, as well as a game that's not a sequel called *Interrogation*.

Something about

Heavy Metal! Will *Rise of the Robots* take fighting games to a new dimension?

Mortal *Kombat*, reviewed this issue, proves that a good beat-'em-up can surface on the PC. But we suspect the game that'll really get the genre going is **Accolade's** *Rise Of The Robots*, a chrome-plated, all-action brawler

starting some of the most stunning character designs seen on any game system.

As the name suggests, each of the fighters you face in *ROTR* is a robot, ranging from models like the Exterminator and the Sentry, designed especially for combat, to



Two of the 3D-modelled stars of *Rise of the Robots*.

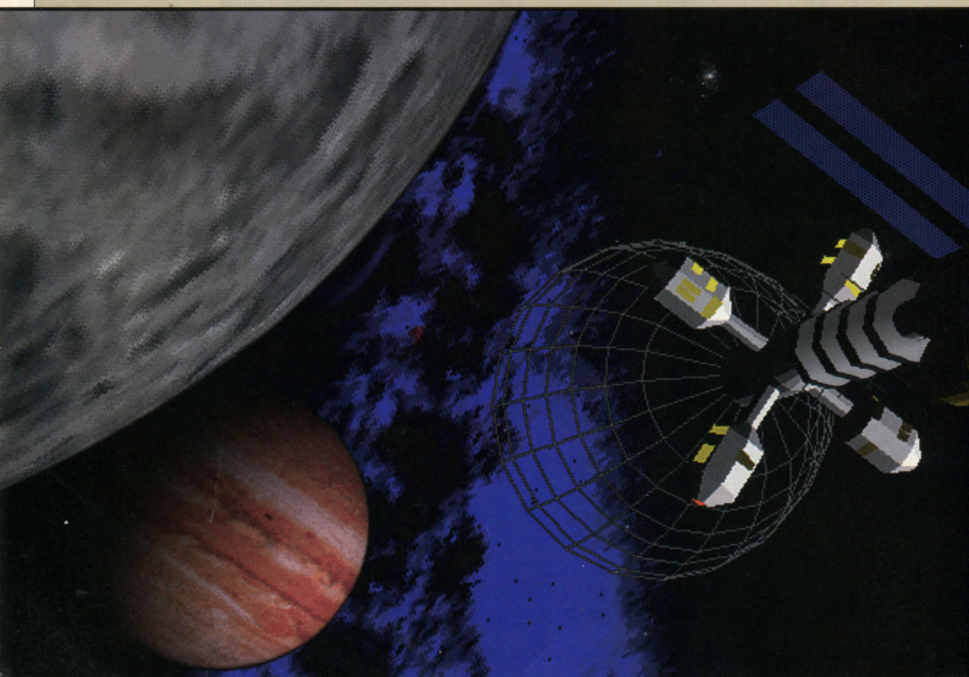


They may look bulky, but these 'bots can move!

aggressive industrial models like the Builder. As a semi-human cyborg, you infiltrate a factory where something called an Ego virus has sent the droids out of control. Your goal is to restore order, and that means taking on robot after robot in a series of increasingly difficult fights. In two-player mode, you can pick any of the robots to control.

What really sets *Rise Of The Robots* apart, though, are the graphics. Glorious, fully-rendered

objects created in 3D Studio, give the game a cinematic look unlike any competing slugfest, including *Kombat*. A sophisticated artificial intelligence system has been developed to make each fight more challenging, and *ROTR* developer **Mirage** points out that the non-human design of some of their characters is a real advantage — "We can do moves no human could possible manage," they say. *ROTR* will be released in April; look for a review next issue.



Evil! In *TIE Fighter*, bad guys have all the fun

Authors are always saying that it's more fun to play the villain than the hero — and now LucasArts gives gamers that option in their latest *Star Wars*-based game. *TIE Fighter* is, of



The view from *TIE Fighter* — look at that terrific shading!

course, a sequel to the phenomenally successful *X-Wing*, but it manages to improve on that world-beating outer-space "flight sim" in a number of ways, while retaining the popular structure of training courses followed by historic mission reconstructions followed by full campaigns.

One of the main attractions of *TIE Fighter* is the nice variety of new ships you get to fly, six in all. There's the basic *TIE Fighter*, the *TIE Bomber*, *TIE Interceptor*, and *Assault Gunboat*,

plus Darth Vader's personal *TIE Advanced* ship. Eventually, you'll get to man an all-new, top-secret craft that can hold its own against a *B-Wing*. There are over 40 missions in all, and you'd better do well at them — after all, do you really want to admit to Darth Vader that you've failed?

Though its game structure is similar to *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter* is full of improvements. Perhaps the most noticeable change are the ship graphics, with Gouraud shading used to give the polygon-based ships more texture. But the changes go

far beyond the mere cosmetic: Enemy intelligence has been enhanced, more craft can be involved in a mission, and now four or five individual missions are treated as a "battle," rather than a string of isolated encounters — a much more realistic touch.

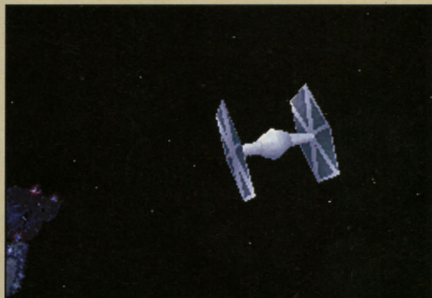
In fact, the entire *X-Wing* game engine has been made more realistic. Now you can ask questions during the mission briefing, for instance, and the answers often provide clues

to the best tactics and strategies. And campaigns can be played on one of three difficulty levels, so that beginners will be able to get further into the game than they ever did with the fairly tough *X-Wing*.

TIE Fighter should be on sale as you read this — we'll have a definitive review next issue.



No more Mr. Niceguy. This time, it's you against the rebellion.



NO CRAFT TARGETED.

The *TIE Fighter*: lightly armored, but quick and deadly.

If it were any more real, you'd be drinking Tang.

New Microsoft® Space Simulator is so authentic, the Johnson Space Center at NASA has asked for it. Select your spacecraft from our fleet and blast off. Once in space, command your ship in our free-flight mode. Explore the fiery red canyons of Mars, or the explosion of a supernova, all based on actual satellite data. It's just one of the realistic simulations we have waiting for you to take control. To get off the ground, shuttle over to your reseller and pick it up.



Wings Of Glory: 1917-18 — Origin brings new technology to the beginning days of dogfighting

Though ultra-realistic games like *Falcon 3.0* have plenty of followers, it's not uncommon to hear air-combat fans say that there's something purer about dogfighting in low-tech planes — that there's more joy in taking down one enemy plane with the .50-calibre guns in a Mustang after a twisting, turning dogfight than in racking up 10 Sidewinder-assisted kills without even seeing the planes go down.

The same principle, of course, applies to WWI air-combat, when dogfighting was really up close and personal. And if that's the kind of flight-sim that gets you fired up, then you're in luck — Origin is busy at work on *Wings Of Glory: 1917-18*, which aims to displace *Red Baron* as the definitive WWI air-combat game.

Flying for the Allies, you'll take to the skies in five classic planes — the Sopwith Pup, Sopwith Camel, SE-5a, French SPAD XIII, and the Fokker Dr.1 triplane — in a series of missions



Wings of Glory takes off this summer.

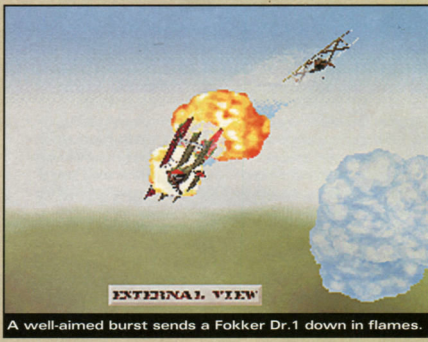
against enemy fighters, observation balloons, bombers, and zeppelins. As in *Strike Commander* and *Pacific Strike*, all this action is placed in the context of a detailed storyline, with you starting off as a young American pilot signing with the RAF before the U.S. enters the war, then joining an American squadron later.

Though this plot-driven type of simulation has definite strengths, being faithful to its you're-the-star-of-a-movie structure would seem to nix your chances of flying any of the great German planes of the era. Origin is aware of this, and to remedy that drawback they've added a plot twist that lets you take to the skies in the German Fokker Dr.1.

Not everyone wants to put their career on the line each time they fly, though, so Origin has included a Custom Mission Generator for building single missions — perfect for those times when you just want to jump in and dogfight.

We've recently had a chance to see *Wings of Glory* in action, and it looks like this could be one

that flight-sim fans will be flying — and talking about — for a while. "We've deliberately kept it simple," says *WOG* team leader Bill Baldwin. "Recently there's been a tendency for people to do flying games that are big for the sake of being big. But this era [WWI] was all about seat-of-your-pants flying, and we're trying to be faithful to that."



A well-aimed burst sends a Fokker Dr.1 down in flames.

Wing Commander Armada

Origin's latest addition to the Wing Commander line adds head-to-head modem play — and even more.

Fans of Origin's Wing Commander series of games (and hey, that's most of us, right?) have a treat in store this summer.

Wing Commander Armada features ten ships to fly (five Confederate and five Kiltrathi), and eight of them are brand-new.



Imagine flying this Kiltrathi fighter against your friends.

But the big news is that *Armada* offers assorted head-to-head modes, ranging from a split-screen perspective for two players competing on one computer, to a modem option enabling up to four players to fly at once.

We're not talking about a simple update of *Wing Commander II*, either. Besides the eight ships designed specifically for *Wing Commander Armada*, Origin has incorporated the *Strike Commander* engine, achieving an impressive 18-26 frames per second on a 486/66MHz. Ship graphics are greatly improved, while new shields and souped-up controls (the much-talked about "Wing Commander Slide" is now much easier to perform, for instance) crank the fun factor up a few notches more.

Perhaps the best feature of all is the new Armada mode, which is a little like a high-tech version of the classic pen-and-paper game Battleships. You play in a randomly generated sector of between 22 and 46 planets, and you must deploy your one carrier and assorted fighters across the sector, buying new ships as you make money

through trade, until you come across the inevitable Kiltrathi forces doing exactly the same thing — at which point all hell breaks loose, and you go straight into classic *Wing Commander* dogfighting mode. The difference here is that how you've placed your troops at the time of first contact can mean all the differ-

ence between winning and losing. An Extended Campaign mode offers a much larger-scale version of the same thing, for real strategy buffs.

Considering the popularity of the Wing Commander series, *Armada* may be one of the year's biggest hits; at *PCG*, it's already one of the most anticipated!



Wing Commander Armada — better than ever.

PC Gamer Charts (March — figures through February 28)

Every month, we'll bring you the best-seller lists from Babbage's and Software Etc. Because promotions, discounts, arrivals of shipments, and more can radically affect sales figures, these charts don't necessarily paint an exact picture of which games consumers think are the best. Still, they give a pretty good idea of the software that's been flying the fastest off those stores' shelves across the country.

Along with the lists, you can expect our analysis of what's been happening in the charts over the past month. Here goes!

As you can see, there's been little real change between this month and last — *SimCity 2000* is still doing great (don't expect this one to disappear from the charts anytime soon), and much of the rest of the list is made up of regular fixtures (*Flight Simulator 5.0*) or slightly older favorites enjoying resurgences in popularity (*X-Wing*, *Links 386 Pro*, *The 7th Guest*).

While it's not surprising to see *Rebel Assault* doing so well (though we are kind of disappointed, since nearly everyone at PCG feels that it's one of LucasArts' weakest games in years), we were a little stunned to see *Coaster* continuing to climb up the Babbage's chart. Just what hold does this fairly limited and visually unimpressive sim have over the public? We're not sure — maybe *Coaster* fans can write and tell us just what the attraction is.

Perhaps the most promising news we can glean from these charts is that the excellent *Master Of Orion* is doing well on the Babbage's chart (see our *MOO* strategy guide on pp. 108-9), and that *Star Trek: Judgment Rites* (see our review on p.77) entered the Software Etc. chart at number 5. Perhaps there is some justice in the world.

Babbage's Top Ten List

This month	Last month
1. <i>SimCity 2000/Maxis</i>	(1)
2. <i>Star Wars: Rebel Assault/LucasArts</i>	(3)
3. <i>Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0/Microsoft</i>	(2)
4. <i>Coaster/Disney Software</i>	(6)
5. <i>The 7th Guest/Virgin</i>	(8)
6. <i>Master Of Orion/MicroProse</i>	New Entry
7. <i>Leisure Suit Larry V/Sierra On-Line</i>	(7)
8. <i>Police Quest IV/Sierra On-Line</i>	(5)
9. <i>Links 386 Pro/Access</i>	New Entry
10. <i>X-Wing/LucasArts</i>	New Entry

(Based on sales at nearly 300 Babbage's store)

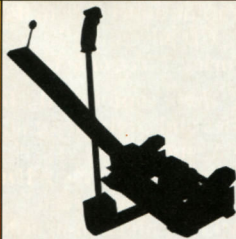
Software Etc. Top Ten List

This Month	Last month
1. <i>Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0/Microsoft</i>	(2)
2. <i>Star Wars: Rebel Assault/LucasArts</i>	New Entry
3. <i>The 7th Guest/Virgin</i>	New Entry
4. <i>Police Quest IV/Sierra On-Line</i>	(9)
5. <i>Star Trek: Judgment Rites/Interplay</i>	New Entry
6. <i>Aces Over Europe/Sierra On-Line</i>	New Entry
7. <i>Leisure Suit Larry V/Sierra On-Line</i>	(7)
8. <i>SimCity 2000/Maxis</i>	(1)
9. <i>B-Wing/LucasArts</i>	(5)
10. <i>Wolfenstein 3-D/Formgen</i>	New Entry

(Based on units sold by 10 retail chains, representing more than 1,300 stores.)

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The PC Gamer Playlist

Here, these are the ones...the games currently responsible for most of the late copy in the PC Gamer office.

1. *Doom*.....Everyone!
2. *Mortal Kombat*.....Trent and Steve
3. *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*.....Trent
4. *Sim City 2000*.....Matt B. and Shelli
5. *Master Of Orion*.....Trent
6. *Goblin's Quest 3*.....Matt F.
7. *Aces Over Europe*.....Steve
8. *SimFarm*.....Shelli
9. *World Series Of Poker*.....Joe
10. *Myst*.....Eddie

SimAtlanta!

Ever thought one of the biggest weaknesses of *SimCity* was that you could never actually build and modify a real town — at least not one that actually looked anything like the place in question? Well, now you can, thanks to a special custom cityscape of Atlanta, available for both *SimCity 2000* and the original *SimCity* by **ACCESS Atlanta**, an online service offered by Prodigy and Cox Newspapers. The new graphics look very much like the real city, providing the most realistic playing experience yet for this all-time favorite "software toy."

Star Trek: The Next Generation

It's got to be one of the most eagerly awaited PC games of the year — maybe of all time. All the elements are right: *Next Generation* publisher and developer **Spectrum Holobyte** has a reputation for releasing quality products and backing them up with strong technical support; **Interplay's** games based on the original series have been commercial and critical successes; and the early teaser graphics we've seen are very impressive. Besides, who can resist the chance to stand in Picard's spot on the bridge, point their finger forward decisively, and bark, "Engage!"? Very few in this office, that's for sure.

Given recent market trends, it's no surprise that *Star Trek: TNG* has been designed specifically for CD-ROM. And Spectrum has taken advantage of that extra storage capacity to create a free-ranging adventure that feels more like real space exploration than the decidedly linear Interplay games.

During the course of play, the game puts you in the shoes of all the TV show's major characters — Captain Jean-Luc Picard,

Commander Wil Riker, Geordi LaForge, Data, Worf, Deanna Troi, and so on — and the decisions you make while playing each character have a major effect on the outcome of the game. *Star Trek: TNG* is a combination of simulation-style tactics and decision-making on the bridge of the *USS Enterprise*, coupled with puzzle-solving in the planet-surface based "Away Team" sections.

The most spectacular thing about *Star Trek: TNG* — at least when you first see it — is the way the individual characters have been depicted. Forget blue-screen video footage, or flat, 2D images: All the characters are realistically sculpted, 3D creations which can be viewed from any angle as they walk about and

talk to each other during play. They're not exactly realistic, but they do look disconcertingly alive, especially when you add digitized speech provided by the cast

ACCESS Brings You a Virtual World Interactive Movie!

What Reviewers are Saying :

"Lots of games claim to be pushing the envelope—*Under a Killing Moon* blows it to smithereens!"

—William Trotter, *PC Entertainment*

"*Under a Killing Moon*...the **most elaborate** graphic adventure to date. A ground breaking CD adventure!"

—Joyce Worley, *Electronic Games*

"*Under a Killing Moon* combines the best elements of movies and computer games and creates an amazing interactive experience that's **better than either of them**. It literally pulls you into the screen."

—Denny Atkin, Entertainment Editor, *Compute Magazine*



This category-creating Interactive Movie from ACCESS Software goes light years beyond any other product labeled "interactive." *Under a Killing Moon* takes you to the streets of post World War III San Francisco and casts you into the role of Tex Murphy, Private Investigator, who first appeared in *Mean Streets*, then *Martian Memorandum*. *Under a Killing Moon* is a Virtual World full of people and places so richly detailed, you'll feel like you're actually there.

of the Next Generation television show.

Star Trek: TNG has the potential to be a trailblazing game, and we're just as eager to play it as you are.

As soon as we get our greedy hands on it, we'll give you a complete report.

You can't dogfight in Windows...

But you can personalize your Windows environment with *Flight*, from Colorado Spectrum. The package contains over 40 high-res images of everyone's favorite aircraft, from the P-51 and Me-109 to F-117 and B-1B, as well as a utility that converts your favorite images into Windows wallpaper.

Besides the great images, the package contains samples of various aircraft (engines and

guns) that you can link to Windows events, aircraft "fly-bys" with vital statistics and a short history for each plane, an animated screen saver, and a list of upcoming air events you can access by date and/or location. *Flight* is currently available, and lists for \$39.95.



Flight: Windows wallpaper for flight buffs.

Superhero League Of Hoboken

Fans of *Zork* creator Steve Meretzky and his patented brand of wacky humor will be excited to know that his latest comic opus, *Superhero League Of Hoboken*, should be available in May — and from what we've seen, Meretzky's admirers won't be disappointed.

Legend Entertainment's newest release is silly in the extreme — the game takes place in the future, when the U.S. has been polluted to the point of near

collapse, and where toxic waste (caused largely by decayed Nintendo packaging) is everywhere and superpowered mutants roam the streets.

You lead a team of super heroes with names like Captain Excitement and Tropical Oil Man, and bizarre superpowers such as Raise Cholesterol Level, Induce Rust, and Talk To Six-Legged Animals. Your mission: to encourage the rebirth of civilization. Of course there's an evil figure, Dr. Entropy by name, who likes things just the way they are, and to overcome him you'll have to take part in a series of comic conflicts ranging from a fight in feudal Atlantic City to a battle in the ruins of Three Mile Island and a final scrap atop the Empire State Building.

In case you didn't know, Steve Meretzky was one of the driving forces behind Infocom, the company who created dozens of text-only adventure games (including the original *Zork*) in the mid-80s. Since leaving Infocom, he's been responsible for Legend's Spellcasting series (*Spellcasting 101*, *201*, and *301*). *Superhero League* continues the role-



Check out these heroes!

playing/graphic-adventure tradition he began with those products, but with the much-improved interface introduced in Legend's last adventure, *Companions of Xanth*. Expect *Superhero League* to retail at just under \$60.00.

UNDER A KILLING MOON

Q: What do film stars **Brian Keith**, **Margot Kidder**, & **Russell Means** all have in common?

A: They all star in ACCESS Software's new CD thriller **Under a Killing Moon!**

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Graphics can make everything better

A good game doesn't have to be cutting edge in every single regard. Take *MegaRace*, the futuristic racing simulation from **The Software Toolworks**. It's hardly an original concept, but what it lacks in creativity it makes up for in execution and good looks.

The plot is simple: It's the future, and you take the wheel in a heavily armed car for a series of series of no-holds-barred races. So far, so ordinary, but one look at the



The MegaRace storyline might not be revolutionary, but the great graphics are.

graphics will make you forget the very standard storyline. The highly detailed bitmapped cars look great, and the fully rendered tracks loop and curve through surrealistic settings. It's been put together by Paris, France based **Cryo**, the folks behind the upcoming *Lost Eden* (see elsewhere in Eyewitness) and *Dragontales*. Look for *MegaRace* sometime this fall.

A different kind of "god sim"

Yep, that's right. Instead of playing as a god, *Wrath Of The Gods* puts you in the sticky position of having to deal with those notoriously finicky Gods of ancient Greece. Designed by **Luminaria** and published by **Maxis**, *Wrath* puts you in the role of a king's son who's been exiled because a prophet foretold he would ascend to the throne before his father kicked the goblet. The game uses blue-screen video of live actors, set against digitized photos of modern-day Greece—something of a strange



Boy, the things a hero's gotta do to fulfill his destiny!!!



Digitized pics form the backdrops for Wrath.

design decision, since the crumbling, centuries-old ruins would have been fairly new buildings when the game takes place.

There are several good features in *Wrath*, however. An on-line help feature means that there's no need to call a hint line should you get stuck, and fairly

accurate synopses of various myths and heroes serve to teach the classics, as well as provide clues for many of the puzzles. And as always, expect a full review in our next issue.

Pinball 2000—A great pinball game at a working man's price

You can't argue with the price of **Frogman Software's Pinball 2000**—\$14.95 will get you two very good pinball simula-

tions. There's one caveat, however: If you own *Pinball Dreams*, don't buy *Pinball 2000*.

That sounds ominous, but all it really means is that the two tables in *Pinball 2000* have been lifted directly from 21st Century Entertainment's *Pinball Dreams*. The good news is that *PB2000* features two tables—"Rocket" (dubbed "Ignition" in *Dreams*) and "Graveyard"—are well designed, with ramps, bonus multipliers, and selectable rollover lanes making for plenty of targets to aim for as the ball flies around the table. And does it ever fly! Instead of cramming an entire table on-screen, *Pinball 2000* employs a scrolling technique to give you a good view of the action, and the result is fast, smooth pinball action. The move-



Ignition becomes Rocket in PB2K.



Graveyard: the name remains the same.

ment of the ball off the bumpers is especially good, keeping game play hot as you work the ramps and drop those targets.

Pinball 2000 has a few quirks. The ball never comes to a complete stop when you cradle it with the flipper—no big deal, but still a little disquieting. There's no way to toggle the music off while playing a game, nor are there options for number of balls or table angle. Still, you'd be hard-pressed to find another game at this price that packs this much fun.

NEWSWEEK
"The VW Bug is now a Mercedes
with all the options."

STRATEGY PLUS

"Winner: Adventure Game
of the Year."

"... a monumental adventure game, destined to
become as much a classic as the original."

BUSINESS WEEK

"Pumped-up software ... radical transformations."

THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Return to Zork opens nostalgically,
and then things start to run and
jump and shout and sing."

PC ENTERTAINMENT

"Winner: CD-ROM Game of the Year."

"A truly amazing, next-generation product,
of such unparalleled quality that it *must*
become the model for all tomorrow's designers."

MULTIMEDIA WORLD

"... the best use of full-motion video in
any CD-ROM game ...
You're not watching a movie.
You're *in* the movie."

CD-ROM WORLD

"A beautiful, engrossing game ...
with a ground-breaking interface."

PC ZONE

"Return to Zork leapfrogs far beyond
the shoulders of its ancestors and lands
smack bang in the land of complete up-to-dateness."

GAMES MAGAZINE

"Winner: Adventure Game of the Year."

SPIN MAGAZINE

"One of the most technically
advanced and artistically satisfying
computer games you'll ever
have the pleasure to die in."

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

"Top 10 electronic selection."

PC FORMAT

"A rollicking adventure that will test
the mettle of even the most wordly
of adventure gamers."

PC PLAYER

"It's the gameplay that counts and
Return to Zork is great."

CD-ROM TODAY

More praise than
we can print.

More adventure than
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Stunning computer-generated
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A cast of 23 actors with over
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Serious puzzles with
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An epic adventure ... underground.

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Product Information Number 106

Back to basics...

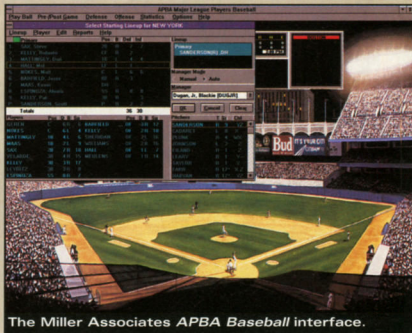
Remember, not every game can be a major release, and there's plenty of good stuff to be found out there which doesn't have a big name — or a big price tag. Check out *Pea Shootin' Pete* (don't laugh), for instance, a psychedelic-looking *Pang*-style arcade game priced at a low \$19.95. It's but one of a series of budget releases from Illinois-based **Villa Crespo Software**. Other titles include the maze-based logic game *Elements*, and the Arcade Action Kit, which features five arcade games — including the inspirationally titled *Space Vegetables*, and *Internatinal Ninja Rabbits*.



My Baseball Fantasy Computer Sports Network Lets You Manage Your Own Baseball Team From the Comfort of Your Home

Fantasy baseball leagues have become increasingly popular, but people interested in starting their own fantasy league are faced with one problem — rounding up enough baseball fans to get things rolling.

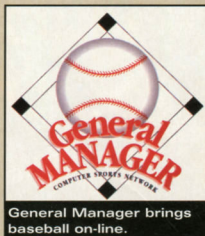
If you're having that problem, **Computer Sports Network** might have the answer. Their *General Manager* is an interactive, online program that allows people from all over the country to compete in fantasy leagues. Nothing new there, but *General Manager* has several features that make it particularly appealing to baseball fans. Unlike some nationwide fantasy leagues, fantasy managers can't share real-life players nor duplication of players; rather than simply using real-life stats to determine your team's performance, you actual-



ly play out each game using **Miller Associates' APBA Baseball Deluxe** (also available as *Baseball for Windows* from Maxis). And because you play

out each game, you've got realistic options such as selecting batting order and determining pitching rotation.

The entire package — *General Manager* telecommunications software, *APBA Baseball Deluxe*, and a data disk of player stats — is \$59.95, though if you already own *APBA Baseball Deluxe* you can get started for \$15. Each member receives three free hours of nonprime-time access; online usage fees beyond the three hours are \$9.95 per hour for prime time access, \$2.95 for non-prime-time.



Akira for the PC?

Fans of Japanimation (or *anime*, to give it its proper title) will be thrilled to hear that *Akira*, the true mother of all anime films, is set to become a PC game. The title's being designed by the relatively unknown British development outfit **ICE**, which might not sound too promising — though the fact that ICE is describing the game as "*Flashback on motorcycles*" is rather intriguing. There are no firm details as to a U.S. release date, but we think it should arrive sometime during 1994. We'll follow the story and bring you more info as soon as it's available.

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1942年、南太平洋上 君はどちらの味方なのだ？

1942

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Bioforge:

Will Origin's New Adventure Define

"Interactive Movie?"

(or, Do Synthetic Actors Dream of Equity Cards?)

by Stephen Poole

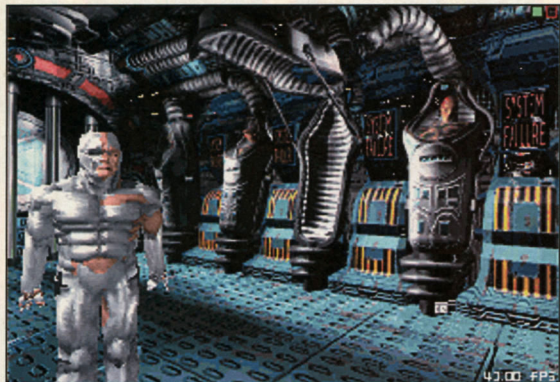
Interactive Movie.

Unless you're brand-new to gaming, you've probably already heard the phrase a lot, maybe even played some of the games that billed themselves as such. And if you have played some of the titles that call themselves

"Interactive Movies" and were left with the feeling that this is just another meaningless buzzword, you might be inclined to dismiss Origin's new Interactive Movie line as just so much hype, a clever way of marketing games.

But after spending a couple of days with *Bioforge*, the sci-fi thriller set to kick off Origin's new line, I'm here to tell you that there's hope for this nebulous genre called the Interactive Movie. In fact, there's more than hope—the future looks downright exciting. Why? Because for perhaps the first time, a company actually thought long and hard about all the components needed to make up an Interactive Movie, rather than releasing a product and slapping the IM label on it.





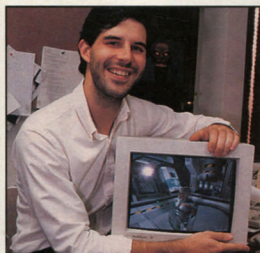
As you explore the base, you discover more than one of the Mondites' experiments. Stay on your toes — there's no telling if the inhabitants of those pods are friendly.

Beyond Video

We spoke at length with *Bioforge* producer Ken Demarest about Interactive Movies, and it was refreshing to hear him point out what we're here at *PC Gamer* have been saying for a long time — that there's a lot more to "Interactive Movies" than high-end graphics or impressive video footage (see "The Words According to Garritt" on p. 42).

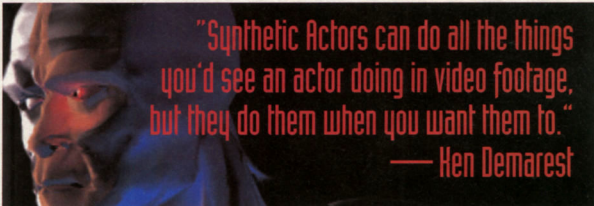
"We truly believe that we're breaking new ground with our Interactive Movie line," says Demarest. "A lot of people hear the phrase Interactive Movie and automatically think of products that use a lot of digitized video. But even with products where the video is of very high quality, most of the time you find that there's very little interaction. You know, you watch some video, then decide which button to push or which action to perform, then move to the next scene if you're right, or die and repeat the process if you're wrong."

That doesn't mean that Origin



Bioforge producer Ken Demarest.

won't use video footage of actors for any of their other Interactive Movies. *Wing Commander III*, for example, will feature video of well-known actors (we can't name names, but you'll be sur-



"Synthetic Actors can do all the things you'd see an actor doing in video footage, but they do them when you want them to."

— Ken Demarest

prised) shot against blue screen and superimposed on photo-realistic SVGA backgrounds. But Demarest is strongly in favor of using "synthetic actors" — a fancy term for characters rendered in 3-D Studio that the player controls and which can be viewed from any angle.

"By using synthetic actors, we eliminate the problem of a lack of interaction. Synthetic actors can perform the same types of actions that you'd see an actor performing in video footage — running, jumping, punching, kicking, picking up and examining objects — but they do them when the player wants them done. There's no delay between the player's input and the response on-screen, so there's less chance for the player's attention to wander — a lot less."

That takes care of the "Interactive" half of the moniker, but what about the "Movie" part? The most obvious cinematic element of *Bioforge* is the use of multiple "camera" angles, which automatically switch your perspective, creating the sense that someone is "directing" the action even as you play. The technique



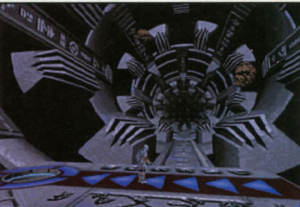
"You lookin' at me??"
The texture-mapped graphics in *Bioforge* bring the synthetic actors to life, especially in close-up scenes like this one.

was first pioneered in *Alone in the Dark*, but Demarest feels *Bioforge* enhances the process.

"Not all cinematic methods work in an interactive environment," he points out. "A long shot of a character walking down a hallway might work great in a movie, but you've got to plan ahead before using it during the interactive parts of a game. If you played *Alone in the Dark*, for example, you probably ran into the same problem that a lot of people encountered — during combat scenes, you found yourself forced to control your character from a viewpoint that made it difficult to tell what was going on. With

Bioforge, we're taking care to ensure that the movie-like elements complement rather than detract from the interaction."

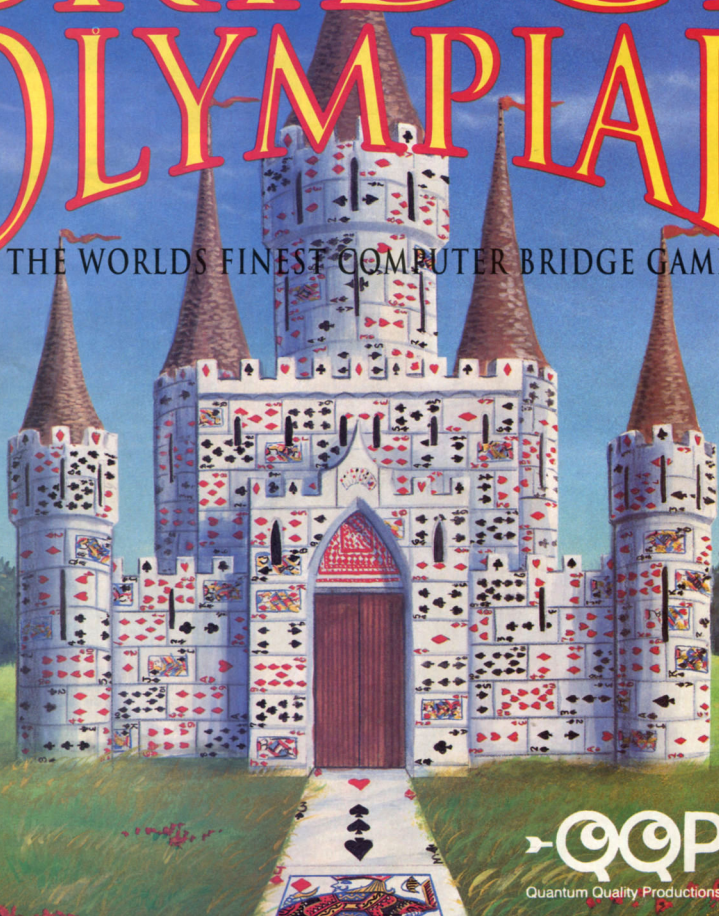
Another area where *Bioforge* shines is in its graphics. Most players were able to look past the blocky char-



This tunnel was part of an experimental attempt by an ancient race known as the Pyxx to launch spacecraft using centrifugal force — can you find another use for it?

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Product Information Number 104

acters in *Alone in the Dark*, but there's no denying that some people were simply turned off by the polygon-based characters. The texture-mapped, 3-D characters in *Bioforge*, on the other hand, are state of the art, and the smooth, lifelike animations make it easy for you to suspend your disbelief — a crucial aspect of any successful



As Lex, you can execute any of 16 combat moves, from a front snap-kick to a right cross.

movie or adventure game.

Combine all those camera angles and detailed graphics with fast cut sequences, expository scenes, and numerous closeups; add digital sound effects that increase or decrease in volume to realistically reflect the location of the source; and toss in a soundtrack that perfectly complements the events on-screen, and you've got the makings for an experience that truly does combine the best of gaming and cinema.

Is This Role Right For You?

By now you're probably thinking, "Okay, so *Bioforge* uses all these movie-making methods. It looks great, it moves great — but what's the game about?" Here goes: Sometime in the distant future, a group of scientists known as Mondites are excavating the remains of a long-dead civilization, the Phyx, on the moon of a gas giant. The Mondites are obsessed with technology, so much so that they feel humans should strive to become a machine-based lifeform. The Phyx, on the other hand, was a once-powerful society whose downfall was brought about by the division of its populace into Learners — a class bred to accelerate the Phyx's intellectual development — and Workers, genetically designed for labor and combat, and reared in excessive gravity to give them incredible strength.

In addition to excavating the Phyx civilization, however, the Mondites are using the site to conduct

radical experiments in genetics and cybernetics, in hopes of creating a corps of assassins who will assist in their long-range plans. After several failures, the Mondites finally succeeded in creating Lex, a blend of man and machine — and the character whom you'll be playing as.

The Mondites have erased Lex's memory, so he's unaware of his life as a human or the experiments the Mondites have performed on him. When Lex awakens in a cell after the surgery, he finds himself in the middle of a disaster: During their excavations the Mondites discovered and revived a Worker



Phyx, who then escaped and damaged the base reactor, which is now inextricably headed for critical overload.

It's a great, fast-paced plot, but writer Jack Herman did more than crank out a good adventure story.

For the background to *Bioforge*, he's created an entire universe which relates how the Mondites are attempting to overthrow the Reticulum, an intergalactic governing body which regulates faster-than-light travel and interplanetary trading. What makes Herman's background story so impressive is that it brings up numerous conflicts (man versus machine, brains versus brawn) that are perfectly suited for creating games that have emotional impact — a key ingredient in an Origin Interactive Movie.

The Real Me

As Lex, your goals are straightforward — escape from your cell, elude the Mondites remaining at the facility, try to find clues as to your lost identity, and figure out a way to get off the moon before the reactor explodes. Getting past the guards is tough enough, but you'll also have to battle your way past some failed experiments and bizarre, dangerous monsters.

With so many enemies out to erase your life as well as your memory, you can expect quite a bit of combat. But Demarest is quick to point out that the combat is contextual, not gratuitous, and that *Bioforge* is much more

Recipe for Great Animation: Take A Flock of Birds and add a little bit of SALSA

When work first began on *Bioforge*, the single most time-consuming part of the process was animating all the characters. First, all the people and creatures were rendered in 3-D Studio — no small feat in itself, considering the level of graphic detail necessary to give the objects a realistic appearance regardless of the angle from which they were viewed.

But when it came time to create the animations for this very large game, it looked as though the *Bioforge* team was going to be in for a very, very long haul. The animations were initially being built one frame at a time, a process that was both extremely laborious and which didn't achieve the realistic movement Origin was looking for. In an effort to speed up the process, actors were filmed performing the various actions, and then the video was cleaned up and imported into the program. But it didn't speed up the process significantly, nor was the end result convincing enough for the *Bioforge* team.

If the folks at Origin are known for anything, however, it's for taking advantage of new technology, and *Bioforge* producer Ken Demarest is no exception. Back in November, he'd talked the company bigwigs into purchasing a hardware/software package called *A Flock of Birds*, a "positional capture system" that allows the tracking of a group of sensors.

But *A Flock of Birds* had to digged in SALSA II (just had to say that), or System for Animating Lifelike Synthetic Actors, the animation engine Demarest had been working with on and off since November 1992. Once the team acquired *A Flock of Birds*, *Bioforge* programmer Lance Grooms spent nearly five months getting the Flock to work with SALSA — and it was time well-spent.

Here's how it works: A set of sensors is attached to various spots on a model's body, such as head, arms, wrists, hips, thighs, and so forth; the greater the number of sensors, the more precise the animations. After a programmer loads the character to be animated, the model stands



When Origin's Wayne Baker dons *A Flock of Birds*, Lex from *Bioforge* is brought to life.

still while the software calibrates the sensors, and then it's time to begin "recording" movements, everything from punches and kicks to a nod of the head and a flick of the wrist. The movement of the sensors is fed into the *Flock of Birds* hardware, and from there into SALSA. The animations are saved, cleaned up, and loaded directly into the *Bioforge* code, thanks once again to SALSA.

It's pretty obvious how *A Flock of Birds* can save a tremendous amount of time in creating animations for humanoid characters, but what about the numerous robots and monsters in the game? Well, it turns out that with only a little tweaking, *A Flock of Birds* can be used to animate almost anything. After *Bioforge* programmer Jamie Rood finished performing a few moves as Lex, Lance loaded up a particularly large and nasty critter called the Acid Monster, and just a few minutes later nearly 15 seconds of animations had been created for that beastie. Add another hour or so to clean up the animations, and voila! — you've got a clip of animation that would have taken nearly a week to do by hand.

A Flock of Birds isn't cheap — Origin shelled out around \$32,000 for the unit — but when used with SALSA, it should pay for itself in a very short time.

THE WORDS ACCORDING TO GARRIOTT

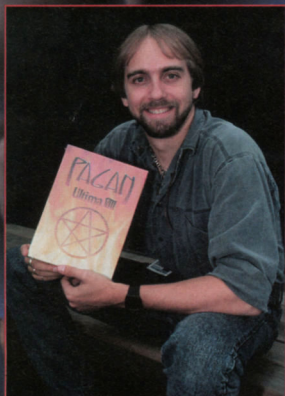
By Being the First to Define Interactive Movie, Origin Takes The Bull@#% By the Horns

Over the past year or so, the term "Interactive Movie" has been bandied about with increasing frequency among entertainment software developers and publishers. But as is often the case with catch-phrases — "Multimedia" and "Information Superhighway" spring immediately to mind — no one's really tried to define Interactive Movie, except to say that their newest release is one. People involved in our industry naturally think of it as part game, part movie; the general public hears it and might think of recent experimental films in which the audience votes on what course of action a character should take — and, consequently, what reel the projectionist shows next.

"It's already become a sort of buzzword with the press," says Richard Garriott, Origin's Creative Director, "so it's being applied to a lot of games which aren't really Interactive Movies. Just because a game has live action video, that doesn't automatically make it an Interactive Movie, because you have very little control over the character. Neither is a game in which you click on an icon, then sit back and watch a scene take place. That's not true interaction or emotional involvement."

So, just what is an Interactive Movie? Here's Origin's definition — and if you don't agree with it, you're welcome to come up with your own.

•An Interactive Movie employs the conventions of film to tell a story, including the use of synthetic or video-based actors, cinematic camera and editing techniques, action-sensitive musical scores, and digitized speech and sound effects.



Richard Garriott, Creative Director at Origin and one of the driving forces behind the concept of Interactive Movies. Oh, yeah — he's made a few games himself.

•In an Interactive Movie, the evolution of the story — including the tempo with which it unfolds — is directed by the game designer, sweeping the player along with it.

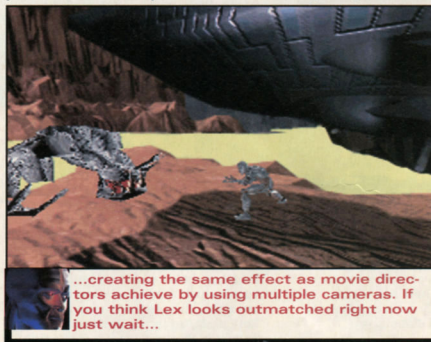
•Interactive Movies strive to deliver a seamless integration of the passive and interactive portions of the game, and require a high degree of player interaction to advance the story.

•An Interactive Movie totally immerses the player in the story and provides an emotional context for the game play.



than a vehicle to showcase some admittedly impressive fighting animations. "It's true there's a lot of combat in the game, but I didn't want to have players running around shooting everything in sight," notes Demarest. "I'm not saying that sort of game isn't fun, or doesn't have its place — just look at *Doom* — but one of the main goals of an interactive movie is to create an emotional response in the player, and I don't feel that mindless violence works toward that end."

Since you're playing as a cybernetic assassin, it's only natural that your character is ready to battle it out

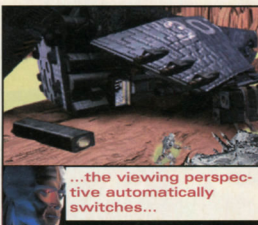


with anyone who stands in his way, and victory in combat is crucial to success. But in keeping with the concept of evoking an emotional response, *Bioforge* has been designed so that the decisions you make during game play actually determine Lex's true identity.

Which "profile" of Lex's prior life you're shown at the end of the game is based on choices you make during your adventure: Did you show mercy to an enemy? Will you make a sacrifice to help others? The answers to these sorts of questions all help decide what type of person your character is, in much the same way that your judgment of a character in a movie is affected by the choices they made throughout the plot.

Your decisions don't end there, however. When you're not fighting for your life, you're faced with tricky puzzles to solve and difficult problems to overcome. These make the game intellectually stimulating and more chal-

lenging, but they also force you to think like your character would think — and that makes it easier for you to assume the role of Lex, thus cementing the illusion that you are the character.



Opening Night

Bioforge is scheduled to be released on floppy disk first, with a CD-ROM version to follow shortly behind. With the massive storage capacity of CD-ROM, and with so many companies opting for CD-ROM-only releases, why did Origin choose to release a floppy version of the game first? The answer's simple, says Demarest. "We realize that CD-ROM will soon be the dominant platform for the majority of games and other types of software, but right now there are a lot of PC owners — and potential game players — who are putting off buying that CD-ROM drive for just a little bit longer. And we want this new line, with all its exciting possibilities, to reach as many people as possible."

The stage is set for something incredible. Now all that's left to do is wait for the curtain to rise.

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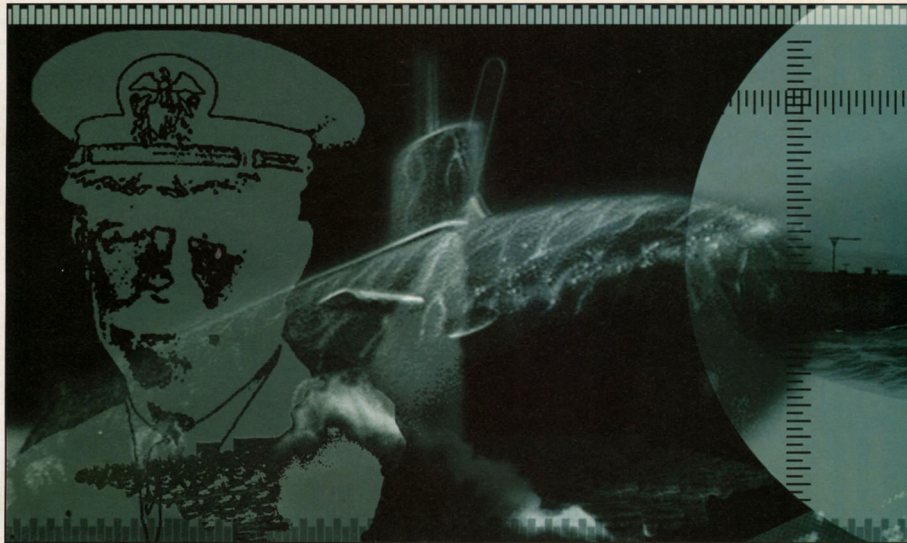
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TEST DIVE: Running Silent and Deep With Three Generations of Submarines

by T. Liam McDonald

On February 17th, 1864, in Charleston Harbor, an eight-man, handcranked ship slipped beneath the waves. The South's newest weapon in the Civil War, the submersible boat *C.S.S. Hunley* was a long, narrow cylinder with a propeller on one end and a pole fitted to the other. Affixed to the end of this pole was a mine, at the time known as a "torpedo." The plan was to ram the *U.S.S. Housatonic* with the pole, detonating the mine and sinking the ship. Unlike previous submarines, the *Hunley* actually worked, sending the *Housatonic* to the bottom in a matter of minutes—though the *Hunley*, too was lost with all hands. For the first time in history, a submarine had sunk a ship.

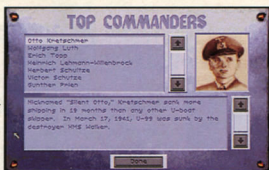
Unterseeboote

A mere 50 years later, refinements such as self-propelled torpedoes, streamlined hulls, battery-powered electric motors, periscopes, and diesel engines had turned submarines from a curiosity into a lethal threat capable of deciding a war. Throughout the first years of World War I, German production of *Unterseeboote*—which was quickly Anglicized and abbreviated as U-Boat—consistently outpaced Allied submarine output. The U-Boats preyed upon defenseless merchant ships, preventing precious supplies from reaching England. If the threat had continued unabated, Germany could have won the war by simply starving England into submission. Even after America entered the war, it took almost two years before the U-Boat threat was neutralized. The



Germans had become the leaders in submarine tactics, a position that would serve them well in World War II.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he immediately defied the Treaty of Versailles and began rebuilding his U-Boat fleet, placing Karl Doenitz, a veteran of WWI submarine warfare, in charge of the first U-Boat flotilla. The lessons of WWI were clear to Doenitz: The key to German victory lay in strangling Great Britain's North Atlantic supply lines. These vital lifelines were comprised of merchant ships which, in times of war, travelled in massive convoys protected by a net of warships.



Can you be as good a U-Boat as some of Doenitz's top commanders, such as Otto Kretschmer?

Doenitz knew he had to use the "Rudel," or "pack," tactics he had learned in World War I to successfully slip the protective convoy screen and destroy the merchant ships. These packs, known to the allies as "WolfPacks," would locate the convoys in daylight, then wait until the night, surfacing long enough to strike quickly and move away. When Doenitz finally became *Fuehrer der U-boote*, he created a fleet of over 300 U-boats which, acting in wolf packs, formed a net across the Atlantic supply lines.

The stage was set for the Battle of the North Atlantic—the U-Boat Campaign.

Aces of the Deep: World War II

They prowled the seas silently, stalking ships as wolves stalk their prey—quietly, from afar, waiting for the proper moment to strike. U-Boat captains possessed the most vital element in any battle: surprise. They were unheard and unseen, emerging only long enough to fire torpedoes before vanishing again. Patience, planning, and nerves of steel were the elements of success, and the U-boat commanders became national heroes after their successes in the Scapa Flow and the Battle of the North Atlantic.



For *Aces of the Deep*, Dynamix retained the basic structure of *Aces of the Pacific* and *Aces Over Europe*.



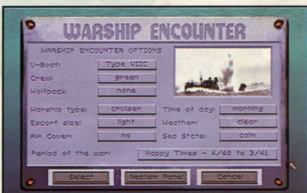
Aces of the Deep, the latest entry in Dynamix's "Aces" historical simulation series, casts you as a German U-Boat captain in WWII. Like its airborne cousins *Aces of the Pacific* and *Aces Over Europe*, *AOD* is built on a firm foundation of historical accuracy, fleshed out with careers, historical missions, and a huge, well-illustrated manual.

Once aboard your U-Boat, you hunt both warships and merchantmen in the Atlantic Ocean from 1939 until 1945. Just like airborne aces, the U-Boat commander had to find his prey, maneuver for position, dose, and attack—all while facing the danger of escort ships and their teeth-rattling depth charge attacks.

AOD follows the structure of the other

"Aces" games, with both single missions and a Career mode. Training, Convoy, and Warship options are available, allowing you to own custom

scenarios, right down to number of vessels, the weather, and time of day.

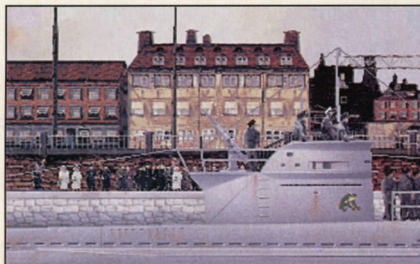


When generating a Custom encounter with a warship, you have complete control over nearly every factor.

Historical scenarios are varied and exciting, putting you in the place of Kretschmer, Prien, Schulze, and the other great—or notorious—U-Boat captains. You'll dance with death in "The Bull of the Scapa Flow," a dangerous attack on a closed British harbor in which the battleship *HMS Royal Oak* was lost; take on a carrier in "The Sinking of the *Ark Royal*," attempt to intercept fuel vital for Operation Torch in Northern Africa; lead the epic attack on convoys HX229 and SC122 in the largest submarine battle of the war; and try to disrupt D-Day convoys in a desperate attempt to halt the invasion of Europe.

The six years of combat are divided into the different phases which marked the ebb and flow of the naval war, such as Opening Moves, the Happy Time, Stalemate, Drumbeat (operations along the American coast), and so forth until the final defeat of Doenitz's fleet. Dominance at sea swung pendulum-like from Axis to Allied throughout the war, marked by first one advance in technology, and then another. *AOD* remains faithful to this to and fro by making equipment and technology available at the proper historical moments.

During the course of a campaign, you'll command a number of U-boats and benefit from



You're treated to this cinematic (reminiscent of the film *Das Boot*) when you head out to sea.



At the beginning of your career, you're given a primitive Type IIC sub and sent out on patrol.

new weapons design. You'll captain short-range Type II ships, long-range Type DIs, and the awesome Type VIIIs, and you'll experience first-hand the strengths and weaknesses of torpedoes like the G7 (both steam-powered and electric models),



Thanks to numerous Realism toggles, even a novice can experience the excitement of a successful first encounter.

enhanced CD-ROM version to follow, featuring more sound, a longer introduction, and video-taped interviews with surviving aces), AOD promises to be the definitive U-Boat sim.

SSN-21 *Seawolf: Modern War*

In the years following World War II, the Cold War between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries began to solidify. A vital element in this "war" were the fleets of nuclear submarines that roamed the oceans unseen, ready to unleash atomic destruction at a moment's notice.

The nuclear workhorse of the American submarine fleet was the Los Angeles class—a quiet, fast ship that remains the backbone of the fleet. When it came time to build a new hunter-killer to replace the Los Angeles, designers concentrated on increasing depth, habitability, and weapons load. The result was the SSN-21 *Seawolf*, a monster displacing 9800 tons, diving to over 1000 feet, and packing 50 weapons.

In an ironic twist, however, the end of the Soviet threat has almost made the *Seawolf* unnecessary before it's even out of the chute, and the order for these \$2 billion ships has been reduced to only one, due to hit the waters no earlier than 1995. So what role might the *Seawolf* have in a new world order?

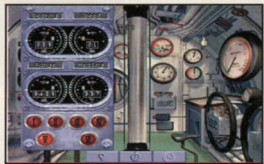
Electronic Arts has one idea. Their new SSN-21 *Seawolf* simulation, the follow-up to 688 Attack Sub, postulates Russia coming to the aid of a Cuban Civil War,



A view from the deck shows a torpedo hitting a large merchant ship...



...which sinks bow first as you get a closer look with your binoculars.



The main control screen for *Aces of the Deep* provides quick access to all of the ship's functions.

bringing American sub forces into battle across the world. No matter how unbelievable this scenario seems right now, it suits *Seawolf's* capabilities well. This is the war *Seawolf* was designed for, but never got to fight. In SSN-21, you take command of a single sub in over 30 missions, ranging around the world from the Cuban coast, up to Baltimore, across the North Atlantic, and through almost every ocean on the planet. Though it's more than a touch implausible to have a single sub traveling this far afield in one war, it does provide for an excellent mix of missions. These missions can be played individually or in a "campaign" mode, but the campaign mode was a casualty of release deadlines, and is really nothing

Sub Movies/Books

If you dig submarines, check out these groovy books and movies:

Movies:

***Das Boot* (1981)**—Intense, gripping portrayal of life aboard a German U-Boat during WWII.

***Run Silent, Run Deep* (1958)**—Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster turn in fine performance as American sub commanders in WWII; good naval combat sequences.

***The Hunt for Red October* (1990)**—Tense drama with Sean Connery as a defecting USSR sub commander.

***Ice Station Zebra* (1968)**—An American sub searches for a downed Russian patrol ship; Howard Hughes' favorite.

***Hellcats of the Navy* (1957)**—Ronald and Nancy Reagan's only screen appearance together—what more can you ask for?

***Destination Tokyo* (1943)**—Cary Grant leads a sub into Tokyo Bay in this suspenseful wartime drama.

Books:

Sub Commander, Paul R. Schratz
Submarine, by Tom Clancy
Operation Drumbeat, Michael Gannon
The Sea Wolves, Wolfgang Frank
Silent Victory, by Clay Blair, Jr.



This periscope view shows a Harpoon missile being fired on a frigate.



The main control room. From here you select missions, briefings, and other stuff.



In the future, whales are corralled like cattle. You'll have to free them.

the weapon of choice for most encounters, but some big targets, such as carriers, will require missiles. The SealWolf comes with two Harpoons, two Tomahawks, and two Sealances (SubROCs), the latter a surface-launched anti-submarine missile that is rarely necessary. These missiles require a launch depth of 150 feet and make one half of a racket. Best launched from about ten miles away in quiet waters, they'll take out a target in seconds and cannot be evaded.

Despite its poor campaign system, SSN-21 SealWolf is easily the best modern sub warfare game around, featuring superb graphics, a



Multiple camera angles help you keep your perspective underwater.

diverse mix of missions, and a good dose of realism. It requires patience, planning, and some knowledge of your weapons and your enemy, but so does driving a nuclear sub. With the inclusion of head-to-head modern and network play, the challenges in SSN-21 far outlast the 32 included missions.

Subwar 2050: Future War

And what of the future? Is the end of massive nuclear subs such as the SealWolf imminent, to be replaced by cheaper, faster craft more reminiscent of fighter jets than submarines?

MicroProse seems to think so. Their vision of the future of underwater combat looks an awful lot like a MicroProse flight simulator, but it's well thought-out enough and entertaining enough to warrant a look.



Using just your spotlight, creep up on the enemy for an easy kill.

Based upon a futuristic scenario in which corporations in search of exploitable resources battle for control of the ocean floor, *Subwar 2050* casts you as a mercenary sub plot. In the course of four campaigns—set in the North Atlantic; the Antarctic Ocean; the Sea of Japan, and the South China Sea—you are hired by various companies to protect their interests. This can involve anything from freeing trapped whales or escorting demolition teams to destroying mining bases and engaging in intense close-in dogfights (maybe "shark-fights" is more appropriate).

Some missions have victory requirements that are merely puzzling without help. In "Save the Whales," for example, you have to destroy a "master control mine" to properly execute the mission; without reading a hint file available on CompuServe, I never would have known this.

On the whole, however, *Subwar 2050* is an entertaining shooter once you get the hang of it. Four different sub models are available throughout the course of the game, ranging from fighter subs to deep-sea and recon subs. Equipped with torpedoes, dumb-fire rockets, and decoys, your sub prowls the ocean floor, trying to remain undetected until close enough to unleash your ordnance. With a heads-up display and front viewing window, the subs in 2050 feel very much like fighter jets. Using the "noise profile bar" to help ensure your sub is quiet enough, you travel



Your first vessel is small, but it packs a mighty punch.

close to the thermal level, slipping to the other side to hide from enemy sensors if the need arises. If you wind up with a torp on your tail, it's time to forget about stealth and start moving fast and turning tight to try to throw it off.

Using the standard MicroProse flight sim engine, which features a limited career mode, various theaters, multiple views, and sharp polygon graphics, *Subwar 2050* is definitely a refreshing change of pace from standard flight sims. But players in search of futuristic submarine warfare probably won't find what they're looking for.

Silent Service

Three generations of underwater combat—past, present, and a hypothetical future—come alive as never before in these new games. From the U-Boats that might have changed the course of the war, through the sonar-guided nuclear subs that still prowling our oceans, and to a future of sci-fi fighter subs duking it out on the ocean floor, we have three completely different takes on the same theme: control of the sea. Even in an age of nuclear weapons, the sea is still the key to any military victory, and control of the sea is decided not on the surface, but beneath the waves, where men in their "sharks of steel" prow, unseen and unheard.

PCG

HOW THEY STACK UP

	<i>Acies of the Deep*</i>	<i>SSN-21 SealWolf</i>	<i>Subwar 2050</i>
Publisher	Dynamix	Electronic Arts	Microprose
Developer	Dynamix	John Radcliff	Particle Systems
Time Period	1939-1945	Contemporary	Future
Campaign mode	Excellent	Poor	Good
Career mode	Excellent	None	Good
Mission depth	Excellent	Excellent	Very Good
Scenario plausibility	Historical	Average	None
Multiple subs	No	No	Yes
Propulsion	Diesel	Nuclear	Various
Enemy AI	N/A	Very good	Very Good
Land attack	No	No	No
Surface attack	yes	Yes	No
ASW	No	Yes	Yes
Cruise missiles	No	Yes	No
Autopilot	Yes	Yes	Yes
Documentation	Excellent	Very Good	Average
Modem play	No	Yes	No
External views	Multiple	Realistic (Periscope)	Multiple
Realism	Very Good	Very Good	N/A
Graphics	Very Good	Excellent	Good
Overall	N/A*	85	70

* This title was not complete at press time.

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DOOM!

Why It Took Over My Life



A soldier lies quivering, impaled on a demon's stake. Nobody said this was gonna be a picnic.



by
Matt Firme

With *Doom*,
Id
Software
has forever redefined our expectations of shareware — and PC gaming itself, for that matter. If any new game hopes to win the title Game of the Year, it'll have to beat *Doom* first.



When we started work on this issue, we knew we just had to do a feature on Id Software's *Doom* — the best game to come along in quite some time. So we gathered to make assignments, running through the table of contents and matching writer with article. When we came to *Doom*, everyone turned to me

with mingled looks of sadness and relief. They knew about my problem, and at the same time hoped the feature might give me a constructive outlet for my obsession. I doodled on my notepad, feeling their eyes on me. "You know, guys," I stammered, absent-mindedly sketching the complete map of The Shores of Hell, Level One, "I could probably do the *Doom* feature."

You see, *Doom* has taken control of my life. I can't stop playing the game, can't just turn off the computer and walk away. No matter what I *should* be doing, I play *Doom* instead. My wife can come home from work, eat dinner, and go to bed without my ever looking away from the computer. Ed McMahon could pound at my front door, shouting "You are our latest millionaire" through a megaphone, and I'd never hear him. I'd just keep playing *Doom*.

And I'm not alone. Even at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in January, where the software industry had gathered to show off its best new products, *Doom* was everywhere. From sound board manufacturers to joystick vendors, everyone was using the game to demonstrate their new products. And whenever we asked people what they thought was the hottest game at the show, the answer was the same: "Have you seen *Doom* yet?"

Bulletin boards and on-line services everywhere are full of heartbreaking tales of obsession. There are whole message

The Stars of Doom!

If you want to get serious about *Doom!*, you better remember these faces. Learn their habits, and get familiar with their calls. These are your mortal enemies — and they take the job seriously.

sections filled with categories like “DOOM — HELP! WIFE IS GONNA LEAVE ME!” or “DOOM COST ME MY JOB!”

Sometimes I fear that American productivity may suffer more this year from man-hours lost to *Doom* than to second-hand smoke, computer-terminal radiation, and carpal-tunnel syndrome combined.

Sucked Into Hell

In *Doom*, you play as the last of a military detachment sent to Phobos, one of Mars' moons, to try and stop the monsters who've come into being through the government's secret experiments with inter-dimensional travel and other evil, bureau cratic scheming. All of your buddies have disappeared, leaving only you to get to the bottom of it all. Unfortunately, your pals took all the good weapons with them. You've got only a pistol, 50 rounds of ammunition, and

the game so much, well, *reality*. As you duck back between shipping crates to avoid an Imp's fireball, you'll swear you can feel the solidity of your alcove.

The creatures that come at you seem even more real, thanks to the terrific animation that brings them to life. They all move with such convincing fluidity and such obvious evil intent, it's hard to remember that it's all just a game. You'll actually find yourself flinching back from the screen, trying to dodge fireballs as they hurtle toward you. You'll tense when you see a grinning Cacodemon floating toward you, and you'll have to suppress a scream when you round a corner and find yourself face-to-face with the incredibly

powerful Baron of Hell. Any game that can so effectively trigger these kinds of reflex reactions is doing something mighty impressive indeed.

And then there's the sound and music. Some players automatically turn off the music when they start a game, but that would be a mistake here. This is primo stuff, all the way from the kickass opening riff to the dirgelike drone of later levels. And the sound effects are some of the most impressive I've ever heard; within an hour of loading the game, you'll realize that your ears are at least as important as your eyes if you're to survive for long. Each creature in the game has its own distinct howls,

roars, and grunts, and you'll quickly learn to recognize their calls. Most of the time you'll hear the bad guys long before you see them — and recognizing the calls will help to make sure you're ready with enough firepower to face them.

Even more impressive, you'll be able to tell where the creatures are by the sounds they make. *Doom* makes perfect use of your stereo sound card, providing lifesaving hints



After each completed round in multiplayer mode, you'll quickly see who beat whom.

your innate fear of death to get you through this living hell in one piece.

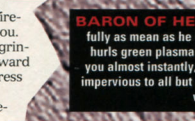
But what is it about this game that's sucked me and thousands of other gamers into its addictive grasp? You'd have to start by blaming the graphics and animation. The game's weird settings, a mix of *The Exorcist* and *Alien*, are almost hypnotically beautiful. Everything has so much depth and texture that you want to reach out and touch the walls, columns, and doorways that give each and every level of



In multi-player mode, you can look forward to reducing your friends to pathetic death throes. "What went wrong," they'll ask.



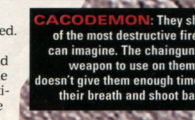
LOST SOULS: They attack in flocks, like Hitchcock's crazed seagulls. Whatever you do, don't let 'em surround you!



BARON OF HELL: He's fully as mean as he looks. He hurls green plasma that kills you almost instantly, and he's impervious to all but your best weapons.



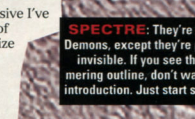
IMP: Imps look like werewolves, and throw fireballs at you like nobody's business. One up-close blast from your shotgun should tame them.



CACODEMON: They shoot some of the most destructive fireballs you can imagine. The chaingun is a good weapon to use on them, 'cause it doesn't give them enough time to catch their breath and shoot back at you.



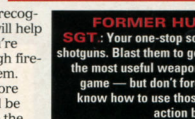
DEMON: They're fast, mean, and thick-skinned. Demons can't attack from far away, but if they get close to you they'll chew your head off.



SPECTRE: They're just like Demons, except they're partially invisible. If you see that shimmering outline, don't wait for an introduction. Just start shooting.



FORMER HUMAN: These guys are the least of your worries. They used to be your pals, but now they're just walking ammo dumps. Blast them to get precious clips for your pistol.



FORMER HUMAN SGT: Your one-stop source for shotguns. Blast them to get one of the most useful weapons in the game — but don't forget, they know how to use those pump-action beauties.



The Tools of the Trade



The chaingun — nothing will make those SOB's dance like a sudden shower of molten lead. It's good to be human!



The Chainsaw! Oh, yes, this is going to be fun! It's a surprisingly effective weapon, and a must for those tight corridors.

Your most basic weapon — your fist. Even with the brass knuckles, this kind of fighting is a last resort.



Your standard-issue pistol isn't a whole lot better than your fist, but at least it works from a distance.



The shotgun is your best all-around weapon. It's blast will tear up most foes with ease, although it's not a very fast rapid-fire shooter.



The rocket launcher is awe-inspiring. The rocket launcher is awe-inspiring. One well-aimed shell can take out a whole gang of bad guys. But if you're too near the blast, you're dead meat.



The plasma gun is truly an impressive piece of hardware. It sends blue-hot balls of plasma dancing toward the enemy, and can stop any fiend you meet.



The BFG9000 fires a bolt of energy that vaporizes anything it hits (except Hell Barons, that is), then blossoms out to catch anyone else in the room. It's one of Doom's greatest pleasures.



that a monster is lurking to your right, just beyond that doorway. And if you have an Advanced Gravis Ultrasound with 3D imaging, you'll hear everything around you with such realism that you might start having nightmares about the experience.

Id Software — The Company That Does Everything Right

Doom is just about as good as an action game can get. But the most amazing thing of all is that Id Software, the company responsible for Doom, is smaller than a lot of companies' PR departments. Made up of only eight employees, Id has become one of the hottest design groups in the country thanks to the enormous success of Doom. The whole company is made up of devout gamers who say they created Doom because they wanted to play it, but the game didn't exist yet. That commitment to gaming comes through in every part of Doom, from its documentation to its no-nonsense game play.

But Id has done everything else right, too. The first level of Doom is shareware, and can be downloaded from any

bulletin board and passed freely between friends — you know, just to give you a taste and get you hooked. Then, to get the complete game, you just call the 1-800 number that appears every time you exit the game. And once you register, you can download upgrades to the product anytime you want.

Id's commitment to the grassroots gaming community has given rise to an impressive word-of-mouth ad campaign for Doom, as well as an incredible following of hackers and helpers ready with hints, maps, and even homemade file editors that give Doom players the ability to customize the game. Some of the editors out there will randomize the location and number of enemies in the game, so each time out is a surprise. Others let you reassign noises for the various monsters, making them squawk like chickens or speak in Richard Nixon's voice. There's even a patch out there that turns the imposing Barons of Hell into Barney the Dinosaur, his head ringed in musical notes as he chants "I love you, you love me." Now that's terrifying!

Kill Your Friends...Here's How!

Id's support for their customers has been quite impressive. Just about every problem users encountered in the first release of Doom — from sound board support problems to DOS extender conflicts — have been addressed and corrected in V. 1.2. But the biggest addition 1.2 brings is incredible head-to-head modem play.

Playing Doom with — or better yet against — friends takes the already great game to incredible new heights. Using either null-modem cables, network, or direct connection via 9600baud modem, you and a friend (or three friends in

You Want Doom Codes? We Got 'em!

There are plenty of terrific utilities on-line, in places like CompuServe and America On-Line, that'll allow you to edit your copy of Doom!, insert new sound effects, new enemies, etc. But with these passwords, you'll be able to roll through the game with no trouble at all.

Here's what you do: Just type in the following codes while you're actually playing the game. You'll be glad you did.

- iddqd — Enables Degreelessness mode. You're invulnerable!
- tdkfa — Very Happy Ammo. Gives you full ammo, all weapons and keys, and 200% armor.
- iddt — Enter this one in map screen mode, and you'll toggle between normal map, full map, and full map with all the creatures and items revealed!
- tdchoppers — Gives you the chainsaw.
- tdclev — Warp between levels! Follow it with episode and level numbers.
- tdbehold — Displays a menu of cheats. Just hit the first letter of the power you're interested in.
- tdspisppod — A great code, this one lets you walk right through walls! Great for finding those hidden goodies!



A treasure trove of goodness: From left to right, a rocket, a backpack full of ammo, a box of shotgun shells, a radiation suit, a supercharge, an ammo clip, and an energy cell. It's better than Christmas!

Network mode) can play at the same time. In cooperative mode you both start each level in the same place, and can move through the game blasting baddies and covering one another every step of the way.



In Deathmatch mode you start in different, random sections of each level. Your goal is to hunt down your buddy and let him have it, each of you scrambling for the best weapons and most power-ups before the inevitable showdown.

In cooperative mode, scenes like this need no longer be fatal. Reach for your chain-gun, and give your buddy a helping hand!

Matt's Addiction: The Awful Truth

I've played a lot of games in my time, but few have been as all-consuming and frighteningly addictive as *Doom*. I did have a close call with Bullfrog's classic *Populous* a few years back, requiring several closed-door meetings with my superiors before I finally quit playing and got on with my life.

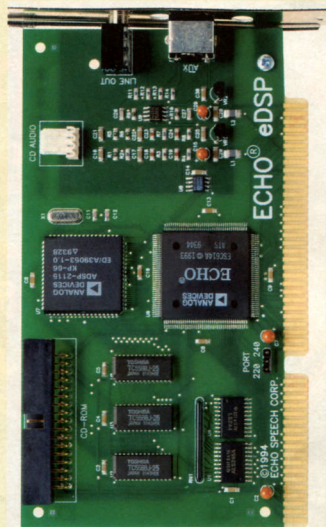
But my *Doom* jones has been so much worse. Not one single day has gone by since I loaded the game that I haven't played for at least an hour or two. I went out and bought a fast new modem so I could play against my friends, and I'm even thinking about buying a big new monitor, just so I can spot those demons before they spot me.

The worst of it is, though, that I don't see any reason why I should give up *Doom*. I keep telling myself that I can handle it, that I'll just play on my lunch break at work, and only a few hours at night. Even though I've beat the game several times now, I just set new rules — no saving games, no using any weapon greater than the shotgun — and play again. I don't think I'm going to be able to shake this *Doom* addiction — and god help me, I don't think I want to shake it.

PCG

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The PC Gamer review system

How We Rate the Games

The way we see it, our job as reviewers is to tell you whether or not a game is worth buying. All of our reviewers have been playing and reviewing PC games for years, and they know what they're talking about. They have the experience to cut through the hype and get to the bottom line: is the game any good or not? We call 'em like we see 'em. Guaranteed.

What the Ratings Mean

100%-90%

Not many games can earn a rating over 90%, and even fewer can approach the magic 100. Anything that we rate over 90% is an instant classic — a game that's truly significant in both content and design, and one that we'd recommend without reservation to anyone interested in PC gaming.

89%-80%

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your attention, though it may not make any significant advances over its rivals. Also, some genuine benchmark games of decidedly specialist taste will also fall into this area — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%-70%

Good games, which we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre — although there are probably better games out there.

69%-60%

A reasonable, above-average game. It may be worth buying, but probably has some significant flaws.

59%-50%

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not the best way to spend your gaming dollar, either.

49%-40%

Poor quality. Only a few, slightly redeeming features keep them from falling into the abyss of the next category...

39% or below

Just terrible games — and the lower you go, the worse they get. Avoid these titles like the Black Plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

Reviews Information

In each review, we include two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements, and the hardware configuration we recommend as the least, best system to really enjoy the game. The Requirements are provided by the game publishers, and represent the bare minimum system you'll need to actually run a particular title. The recommendations, though, come from us. We test games on several systems to find out not only what you'll need to run the game, but what you'll need to get the most out of the game.

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards



Every month, we honor the very best games — those earning 88% or above — with our coveted Editors' Choice Award. These aren't just games we liked playing; they're games we couldn't stop playing. Rest assured, any title that earns an Editors' Choice is well worth buying.

1942: Pacific Air War



The Elder Scrolls: Arena



F-14: Fleet Defender



Goblins 3



Mortal Kombat



Myst



SimCity 2000



Star Trek: Judgement Rites



This month's Editors' Choice winners — check out the reviews, and find out why!

Ultima VIII: Pagan

CATEGORY: Fantasy role-playing
 DEVELOPER: Origin
 PUBLISHER: Origin, P.O. Box 161750, Austin TX 78716

REQUIRED:
 386DX/33MHz, 4MB RAM, ODS
 5.0 or later, 30MB hard-drive
 space (37MB w/optional
 speech pack), VGA, Microsoft
 or 100% compatible mouse

WE RECOMMEND:
 486DX/33MHz, 8MB RAM,
 Sound Blaster or compatible
 sound card.

M.S.R.P.: \$79.95 (Speech Pack, \$84.95)

Every few years or so, Origin completely rethinks its Ultima series — and each time they've redefined this classic fantasy role-playing game, they've set a new standard for other companies to follow. Now comes the eagerly awaited *Ultima VIII: Pagan*, and its simplified statistics system and arcade-like interface mark the biggest changes to the Ultima universe since the switch from tile-based graphics. But in trying to grab new buyers, Origin may be leaving behind the loyal following that's made Ultima the best selling role-playing series of all time.

The first change you'll notice is the bizarre new game world. The mysterious being known as the Guardian, thwarted by



These changelings can take on your form! Keep track of which character is really you, or you'll die confused.

the Avatar (you) one too many times, has stranded you on Pagan — a world he's already bent to his will. Tired and waterlogged, you awake on a beach in this world you've never seen. With no armaments, no magic, and no friends, you must find a way to leave Pagan and stop the Guardian from destroying both Earth and Britannia in your absence.

While all of this sounds like standard Ultima fare, you'll quickly learn that Pagan

Pagan's sharp new look and simplified game play should appeal to a whole new audience. But has Origin turned its back on the hard-core fantasy gamer?

is almost a photo-negative of Britannia. Ruled by the cruel Lady Mordea, the people of Pagan live under the harshest of dictatorships. Mordea keeps control by executing anyone who opposes her — or even seems to oppose her. To make matters worse for the locals, the planet as a whole is controlled by four powerful entities known as the Titans. Each Titan holds sway over one of the elements, and each

has a school of magic attached to them. To win the game and escape Pagan, you must master all four schools of magic.

The time of the idealistic Avatar is also gone. During the course of the game you'll take part in human sacrifices, steal from friends, and worse as you try to accrue the power that you need. As you begin to accomplish your goals your friends will be executed, and the people of



Here are some of those disappearing platforms. The only real way to make any progress is to save your game each time you're on solid ground.

the realm will begin to suffer even more from the backlash of the mystical war you've initiated. No matter how bad things get, though, you must remind yourself that, at least on this topsy-turvy world, the ends justify the means — a philosophy that's a far cry from the puritanical ideals presented earlier in the series. The storyline is deep, full of twists and turns, and well-written from start to finish.



Times are hard for the peasantry under Lady Mordea's oppressive rule. Disobedience can be deadly!



■ Ah, there's nothing quite like the feel of sacrificing a man! Boy, the Avatar's morals sure seem a lot more relaxed these days.

As the story unfolds, though, you may find yourself fighting with the game itself as often as you battle your foes, because *Ultima VIII's* new interface is a role-playing enthusiast's nightmare. Convinced that the complex puzzle-solving of the earlier Ultimas has turned off the general public to their games, Origin has decided to replace it with what can best be described as Nintendo-like arcade sequences. The once-proud Avatar now resembles nothing more than a Mario or Sonic as he jumps from platform to platform, or runs through a barrage of arrow traps. If you're unfortunate enough to fail at one of these frequent jaunts into the video-game world, you'll have plenty of time to mull over your defeat as you wait the 15 seconds or more it will take for your game to reload.

The skewed, overhead perspective used in the game (similar to those in *D/Generation* or *Contraction Zack*) makes it very difficult to determine exactly which direction your character is facing — and that makes the already exacting jumps even harder to execute with any regularity. After missing the same platform three or

four times and waiting as your saved game slowly reloads, the fantastic storyline and brilliant graphics begin to dwindle in importance.

Combat is also very arcade-like. You control your attacks by moving the mouse swiftly in the direction of the opponent while clicking the left mouse button. The awkward combination of motions can get pretty tedious, especially in a long battle. That skewed perspective comes into play here too, making it really hard to determine what angle an opponent is attacking from. By the time you've got it all figured

■ "The Avatar now resembles nothing more than a Mario or Sonic as he jumps from platform to platform, or dodges a barrage of arrows."

out, you're often reeling from the blows of your unconfused computer opponent. Sometimes the best combat strategy is to just avoid a fight by running past an enemy, or using magic to incapacitate him.

The simple new magic system is one change that's been pulled off flawlessly. And intertwined as it is with the plot line, the accumulation and use of magic is probably the most important facet of the game. By combining different reagents and then empowering them with an item of focus, you create spells whose effects can be immediate, or may be used at a later time. Different magic works in different ways, and keeps the whole spellcasting thing fresh and entertaining. Enhancing the process are the captivating graphics, sounds, and animations that accompany each of the many spells.

Ultima VIII's artwork and animation are nearly perfect. By painstakingly



■ Conversation is handled with an easy-to-use menu system. Better be careful what you say to the queen, though, or you might lose your head!

drawing each frame of every animation for every character and monster in the game, Origin has created a title that plays out as smoothly as a cartoon. Most of the creatures have over 400 frames of animation devoted to them, and the Avatar character has over 1400.

The sound and music are also excellent, complementing the onscreen actions of your character. The sound effects for everything from exploding mushrooms to moaning zombies are just perfect. The optional speech pack adds even more to the overall quality of play.

Despite all its strengths, though, the redesigned *Ultima VIII* will disappoint as many players as it attracts. In trying to reach a new group of gamers, Origin has created an Ultima that seems to have turned its back on the series' biggest fans. Worse yet, it just wasn't necessary to do that. After all, this game still bears the Ultima name; how many non-FRP players

are going to pick it up? If Origin wanted to attract new customers, why not make this an off-shoot, like *Ultima Underworld* or *Worlds of Ultima: Martian Dreams*?

As it is, Ultima fans may be turned off by the game's arcade action, and arcade-action fans may be turned off by the Ultima name.

So who's the winner here? Unquestionably, the arcade fan who does take this game home. With its rich plot, superb animation, and great sound, *Ultima VIII* is one of the better action titles out there.

— Trent C. Ward



■ If you've got the cash, Captain Darion of the castle guard will be glad to give you fighting lessons. It's a very good investment.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics, sound, storyline, and special effects.

78%

LOWS: The arcade emphasis is likely to turn off role-playing fans, and the role-playing elements will turn off arcade fans.

BOTTOM LINE: A really strange mix of game play that doesn't quite pay off.

Alone in the Dark 2

Category: Action/Adventure
 Developer: Infogrames
 Publisher: 1-Motion, 1333 Ocean Avenue, Suite J, San Jose, CA
 95040

REQUIRED:
 386/25MHz; 2MB RAM; 14MB
 hard-drive space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND:
 486/33MHz; Sound Blaster
 or compatible sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Alone in the Dark 2 is a pretty strange sequel. You'd think *Alone 2* would try to recreate the successful blend of strategy and action that made the first title so hot. Instead, Infogrames has produced more of a high-tech shoot-em up. On the positive side, *Alone 2* has made huge strides in graphics, animation, and character control. And though the game may have lost some of its intellectual appeal, it's lost none of its flair. Edward Carnby, the two-fisted private eye who co-starred in the original game is back — and he's ready for action.

After destroying the evil spirit that controlled the Victorian mansion in the first game, Carnby began to relax and enjoy fame as "The Private Eye of the Unknown." Then a telegram came from long-time friend Ted Striker, whose investigation into a young girl's kidnapping had taken him to "Hell's Kitchen," a mysterious cliff-side manor on the coast of California. Two days later Carnby stands outside the evil-filled house, once again ready to take on the unknown and rescue any innocents who get caught in the crossfire.

Whether or not you played the original, you'll find it easy to get used to the controls in *Alone in the Dark 2*. The game is entirely keyboard-controlled with the

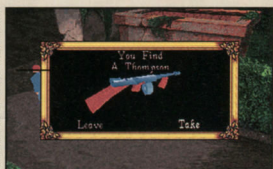
It looks better, it plays better, and it's a great game. But *Alone in the Dark 2* may have too much action and not enough strategy to fully satisfy fans of the original.



Why use the doorbell when you've got explosives easily at hand? From here on in, get ready to fight!

arrow keys used to maneuver Carnby as you watch the action from strategically placed "cameras." Though the constantly shifting point-of-view can be a little disorienting at first, you'll soon get the hang of it, and in minutes you'll be buzzing around the mansion like a pro. Returning players will appreciate the more sensible camera placement, preventing the off-camera fighting problems of the first game. *Alone 2* also makes it a lot easier to run — an improvement that you'll almost certainly take advantage of as you try to avoid being picked off by all those satanic sharpshooters.

For better or worse, *Alone 2* is high-powered blasting action right from the start. In the first two areas alone, you'll face off against 5 different guards armed with tommy guns, shotguns, riot guns, and so on. These aren't just the shuffling undead, either; This bunch whips around corners, chases you from room to room, and even reloads their firearms from a seemingly limitless supply of ammo. It's mighty hard to feel heroic when your character spends most of the game fleeing from a pack of heavily



Oh yes... Now it's time to teach these anachronistic fiends the error of their ways.

armed ghouls. Like *Alone in the Dark*, there are times when you can think your way out of a fight. But unlike the first game, there are plenty of situations where taking on multiple opponents is mandatory.

The game is split into two parts. For the bulk of the game, you control Carnby; but there's also a portion in which Carnby is captured and you take control of Grace, the little girl Carnby is here to rescue. The puzzle content, which was such a big part of the first game, is split along the same lines. When you play as Carnby, the game is heavy on fighting and light on strategy.



In *Alone in the Dark 2* even the toys are evil! Watch out for this murderous puppet.



■ Getting the shot angles down can be pretty difficult. Keep practicing!

There are puzzles to be solved, but they aren't as numerous or as difficult as in the original. Most of your energy will be spent in finding better ways to kill your many

enemies.

When you're playing as five-year-old Grace, however, game play tilts the opposite way, making this probably the best part of the game. Grace has no fighting skills whatsoever, and can't use weapons or open doors — although she can read wordy, archaic books

about voodoo. This is where you'll finally get a chance to exercise your mind, but unfortunately you don't play as Grace for nearly long enough.

“One of the improvements in *Alone 2* is that running is a lot easier — and you'll be doing a lot of that as you try to avoid being picked off by all those Satanic sharpshooters.”



■ You can never be too careful around weird toys like this... or can you?

The biggest difference between *Alone* and *Alone 2* is atmosphere. In the original, you were outclassed by the bizarre, unknown menagerie of creatures you encountered, and fighting them face-to-face was often impossible. The twisted scenery, the strange creatures, and the dark soundtrack all combined to give the title a truly eerie feel. This time, you're pitted against known enemies and armed with enough weaponry to put you on pretty even footing with them. There's never the same creepy feel, as most of your enemies are more comical than frightening. Even the improved graphics and sound don't convey the same sense of being “alone in the dark.”



■ Stand just around the corner to ambush this fiend before he can get a decent shot in at you. Easy when you know how...



■ As Grace, you have little means to fight off the enemy. Try making new friends instead.



■ If you get caught, the pirates will let you hang out with them.

Atmosphere aside, the new graphics are phenomenal. The distinctive filled polygons are back, with smoother movement, nice shading, and great new animated sequences. Even the characters' faces are nicely detailed. The animation never seems to slow down, even in the most heated situations. And the sound and music are perfect, from the unobtrusive background theme to the sounds of thunder crashing outside.

From start to finish, *Alone 2* is a treat for both the eyes and the ears. The quality graphics, sound, and smooth game play are just too much to pass up. Maybe it doesn't have the horror-movie feel and intricate puzzles of the first game. Still, this is certainly a title that'll appeal to all but the hard-core strategy lovers out there.

— Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** PCG

HIGHS: Fantastic graphics and game-play sure to please all but the most jaded gamer.

85%

LOWS: *Alone 2* lacks quite some eerie atmosphere and devious puzzles that made the original game such a hit in the first place.

BOTTOM LINE: A great game, superior to the already excellent original in all but atmosphere.

Fleet Defender: The F-14

CATEGORY: Combat Flight Simulation

DEVELOPER: MicroProse

PUBLISHER: MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030

REQUIRED:

386/33MHz, 4MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or higher, 14 MB hard-drive space, VGA, Mouse

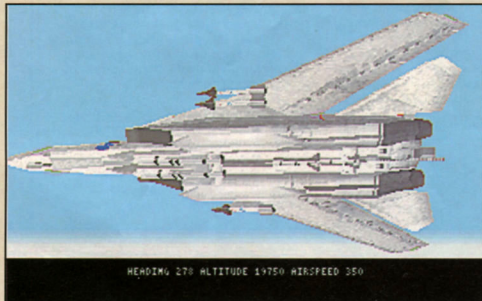
WE RECOMMEND:

486/33MHz, Supported sound cards, Joystick, CH Flightstick Pro, ThrustMaster FCS and WCS, Rudder pedals

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Frumman's F-14 Tomcat first became operational with the U.S. Navy in 1974, when it launched from the USS Enterprise (with the VF-1 "Wolfpack" and VF-2 "Bounty Hunters") and flew unopposed Combat Air Patrol missions around Saigon in the final days of the Vietnam War.

The Tomcat passed its first real combat test in the summer of 1981, when two belligerent Libyan Su-22 "Fitter-Js" were destroyed in less than a minute by the Nimitz-based VF-41 "Black Aces." Over the next few years Grumman's twin-tailed beauty earned a reputation for thwarting the plans of assorted middle-eastern madmen, but it wasn't until *Top Gun* hit the



The Tomcat rolls over and shows its claws — Phoenix, Sparrow, and Sidewinder missiles.

movie screens in 1986 this formidable fighter leapt into the collective consciousness of the public.

Suddenly the Tomcat's "Anytime, Baby!" emblem began appearing on everything from children's pajamas to women's underwear — and, of course, computer games. Activision's *F-14 Tomcat*, Electronic Arts' *Birds of Prey* and Velocity's *Jetfighter II*

MicroProse made its mark as a simulations company — and *Fleet Defender* solidifies their reputation for producing high-quality games that are both realistic and fun.

tried hard, but none of them truly offered the definitive naval aviation experience.

Leave it to MicroProse to make the dreams of countless simulator jockeys come true. Now, courtesy of *Fleet Defender*, you can join any one of ten Oceana-based Tomcat squadrons, strap yourself into an F-14B, and ride a cat shot out over the Atlantic Ocean as 23,100 lbs. of afterburning thrust slams your helmet back against the headrest. Lock up six bandits on your AWG-9 radar and flame 'em with your AIM-54 Phoenix missiles. Then, if

you're through playing around, head back to the carrier and try to land that 45,000 lb. Turkey on less than 300 feet of angled deck.

Be forewarned, though: Compared to the fly-by-wire wonders of the F-16 and F/A-18, the F-14 is a bit of a throwback. The Tomcat was designed before the term "user-friendly" was invented, and you'll find that such vital information as altitude and airspeed aren't even on the HUD! This data is only available on the Horizontal Situation Display and analog gauges down on the instrument panel. The HUD provides only the most essential symbology for both Navigation and Combat modes. You'll also find that, despite *Top Gun* mythology, the F-14 is anything but a nimble dogfighter — it's big, heavy, and



Ghostly apparitions in the Bermuda Triangle, seen from the Full Motion Pilot's View.

turns like a Saint Bernard. But that's OK — the F-14 wasn't designed for dogfighting. The Tomcat's primary mission is long-range strategic interception, ensuring that nothing gets close enough to harm your carrier battle group.

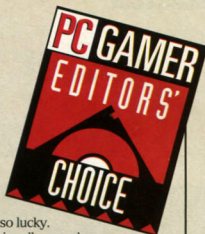


The HUD in Combat mode. Note the vertical Target Range and Closure Scales at either side.



On those rare occasions when the F-14 goes "Feet Dry," here's what you'll see.

Tomcat Simulation



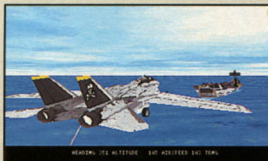
■ RIOs can't fly from the back seat, but they do get lots of lovely equipment like this Detailed Data Display (DDD).



■ You can run, but you can't hide — VF-14 scores a Sparrow missile kill on a MiG-29.

Since *Fleet Defender* has been constructed from the same engine as *F-15 Strike Eagle III*, you'll find that many of the control keys and features are identical. The graphics have been vastly improved, though, and air-combat fans who complained that *F-15 III* looked too blocky and unrealistic will be grateful for the changes.

Few of *FD*'s missions involve flying over land, so all of the terrain data that slows down many other sims becomes irrelevant. The Atlantic Ocean looks great, with sky and clouds that are just perfect. It never actually rains in *FD*, but the storm clouds roll in with a fierce and ominous intensity. Where Ocean's *TFX* and Spectrum *HoloByte's Hornet* appear as good computer simulations of the real world, *Fleet Defender* looks like the real thing. Night traps in stormy weather have never been this existentially frightening before ("Wave off! Wave off!"), but don't worry — the Landing Cheat key is there to step you through a proper approach.



■ A VF-84 Jolly Rogers Tomcat, "dirtied up" and ready for a daytime trap.

He's a whiz in Standard mode, but turns into Homer Simpson in Authentic (I can't believe that a real RIO would be allowed to coast like this).

There's no separate Save Game feature — it's all done automatically — but should you wind up KIA you're offered a no-strings-attached resurrection, with rank and

Fleet Defender offers two different methods of play: Scramble, or custom-built single missions; and Campaign — three theatres of operations containing multiple interconnected scenarios. The variety of options is staggering — Scramble alone has ten variables, from the number and type of enemy aircraft to the weather and time of day. Realism, Arming, and Difficulty screens present over a dozen more.

If you've flown with MicroProse before, you pretty much know what to expect: first-rate set-up and debriefing screens surrounding exciting and accurate missions, as well as excellent digitized speech

and sound effects. But *FD* has some unique features which make it more than just another prettied-up *F-15 III* on a boat.

First of all, you're not alone out there. You're part of a very large team whose success — and survival — depends on every player doing his job. You fly with a wingman whose skill, like your own, increases with experience. (There are 11 wingman commands, including a call for assistance from the Ready 5 aircraft.)

There are four levels of difficulty, and all flight systems have three modes of realism: Standard, Moderate, and Authentic. Realism also affects how well your Radar Information Officer (RIO) does his job.

status intact. If only your wingmen were so lucky.

The graphics all around are impeccable. It's almost a given that the Tomcat's swing wings function properly in *FD*, but attention to detail like the red interior of the speed-brake wells and All-Moving-Tails that really do move, is quite a treat. Other elements of the Carrier Air Wing go about their business, both on the flight deck and in the air, and you may find yourself unable to land because of a fouled deck.

One of *Fleet Defender's* coolest features is the accurate depiction of squadron markings on the Tomcat's tails. These colorful graphics have always been a large part of the F-14's appeal, and except for VF-11 and VF-31 (Red Rippers and Tom Catters), all the Atlantic Coast squadrons are here with the proper tail markings.

There only really glaring omission is air-to-air refueling (which will be added in the Miramar-based scenario disk in a few months), though barricade landings and an autopilot that does more than just keep you straight and level would sure be nice. And don't hold your breath waiting for modem support — it ain't gonna happen.

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■ Night Trap — and not the Sega CD kind! This is what makes a Naval Aviator out of a Pilot.

The future of the F-14 with the US Navy is unknown — both Martin Marietta and Northrup have tendered bids to acquire Grumman — but one thing's for sure: The Tomcat's service in the PC simulation world has only just begun.

— Scott Wolf

PC G

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics and sound; multiple realism options make it as challenging (or as easy) as you like.

88%

LOWS: Much horsepower needed to keep it air-borne; learning the controls can be time-consuming.

BOTTOM LINE: MicroProse has scored a direct hit with *Fleet Defender*. If you enjoy modern air-combat sims, this is definitely for you.

The Lawnmower Man

Category: Action/arcade

Developer: Sales Curve Interactive PRICE: \$69.95

Publisher: Sony Electronic Publishing

Required:
CD-ROM drive, 386, 2MB
RAM, DOS 5.0, Sound
Blaster or compatible
sound card

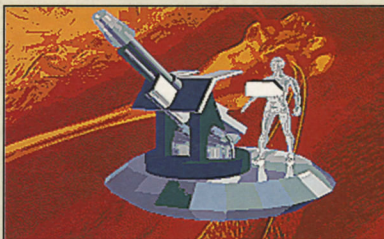
Recommended:
486/33MHz, 4MB RAM
w/disk cache, Double-
speed CD-ROM drive

M.S.R.P. \$69.95

**Newcomer Sales Curve Interactive's
Lawnmower Man is in your PC now. There
is no escape. Ever.**

Not since *Tron* has a major motion picture been such a natural candidate for a computer game conversion, although Sales Curve Interactive's *The Lawnmower Man* functions more like a sequel than an adaptation. All of the main characters from the movie have been pulled by Cyberjobe into his VR world — some to lure and others to battle Dr. Angelo, whom Cyberjobe believes to have betrayed him.

Game play is similar to (all together now) *Dragon's Lair*, in that you have only limited decision-making control over your on-screen character. Using only the keyboard, players must maneuver the



Breaking Through. You and the nasty Father McKeen take pot-shots at each other through the hole in an invisible wall.

T-1000-like VR Angelo across 12 different sections of Cyberjobe's domain (some more than once) to rescue young Peter and

When the film version of Stephen King's "The Lawnmower Man" was released in 1992, its dazzling use of computer generated special effects helped mask the story's painfully derivative plot, while bringing the concept of Virtual Reality to the masses. Unfortunately, it also helped turn the phrase "Virtual Reality" into the 90's equivalent of those Baby On Board signs. Ah, well...



his mother Carla from the terminally decaying Cyberstasis Spheres in which they are imprisoned. The sections are suitably varied, from brain-teasing puzzles to simple tests of arcade-style hand-eye coordination — nothing terribly original, but the presentation is sweepingly cinematic and stylish.

Although *The Lawnmower Man's* package shows 256-color screen shots, the game actually runs in 32 colors, with some sections in only 16. Sales Curve says that they didn't have enough time to implement a 256-color version that would run acceptably on slower 386 machines or single speed CD-ROM drives, and still get the game out on schedule. While the product as it stands is nice for single-speed 386 owners, it's a major disappointment for anyone expecting the hi-res extravagance touted on the box.

I must admit that the game runs smoothly, even with a minimal hard drive installation. And once your expectations



Alas, poor Peter. I knew him well....

have been lowered, the 32-color scheme isn't all that bad. Video clips from the movie are played back during accesses to Cyberjob's memory banks, and the game's overall sound — including an ethereal and driving musical score by Steve Hillage and the *Lawnmower Man* team — is the best I've ever heard.

The only real complaint I have with *The Lawnmower Man* is that you have three lives, and that's it — no game saves, no restart codes, and not so much as a pause button. Even during the very early sections, where a pleasant, disembodied female voice prompts you to "get ready - jump now," those three lives will flash by faster than a Ramones medley. And whatever you do, don't accidentally hit the Escape key — you'll be dumped back to DOS without so much as a "Hi-doodley-do, neighbor!"

This is an exciting time for PC gamers: we're seeing the early triumphs and failures of game designers who are still learning the CD-ROM's full potential. *The Lawnmower Man* is a little bit of both triumph and failure — it's not just a slapdash licensed rip-off, but it's obvious that a lot of imagination and hard work have been compromised by the need to meet a deadline. Sales Curve (or Sony, the publisher)



The Sting. Configure the Cybermaze doors to send the deadly Cyberbees to that Cyberhive in the Cybersky.

should have braved the short-term criticism and given the game all the time it needed to fulfill its promise.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Sounds great, lots of animation, and addictive.

67%

LOWS: 32-color palette; No save games — three strikes and you're out.

BOTTOM LINE: An intriguing, but flawed, first effort. You might want to wait for the 256-color sequel that'll be released later this year.



The only thing it doesn't simulate is ear popping.

If it were any more real, your chair would be in a 30° bank. Our new Microsoft® Flight Simulator™ has four planes, each with its own instrument panel created digitally from actual photographs. There are storm clouds and sunsets to fly into. Crashes are scarily real. And you can fly to airports anywhere in the world. It's just one of the realistic simulations we have waiting for you to take control. Everything is at your reseller. So, take off.



Myst

CATEGORY: Graphic Adventure
 DEVELOPER: Cyan, Inc.
 PUBLISHER: Broderbund, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948-6121

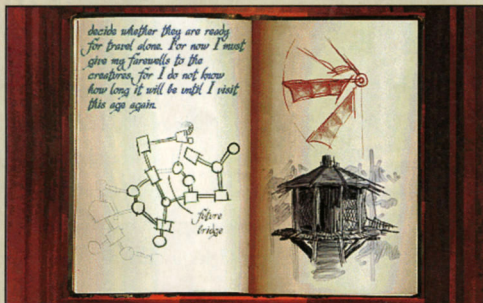
REQUIRED:
 CD-ROM drive; 386DX/33Mhz;
 4MB RAM; Windows 3.1; DOS 5.0
 or later; SVGA (640x480); Hard
 drive; MPC-compliant sound

WE RECOMMEND:
 486DX/33Mhz; Double-speed
 CD-ROM drive

M.S.R.P. \$59.95



The dictionary defines Savor as "to enjoy with pleasure; to relish," but a picture of someone playing *Myst* would really complete the definition. This is a game to experience slowly and completely. Okay, so you could say that about a lot of the new multimedia games; after all, a game designer with a few hundred megs to fill can develop some pretty expansive artistic pretensions. That's why most CD-ROM games end up being huge travelogues, with nothing much to do but look around. It sometimes seems that ingenuity and creativity in game design are inversely proportional to the capabilities of the hardware. But *Myst* is the exception to the rule.



Read the books in the library for valuable clues to solving the puzzles in the different places you'll visit.

Make no mistake, *Myst* provides awe-inspiring graphic wizardry in spades. But where many games run out of gas after the pretty pictures, there really is more here than meets the eye. Designers Rand and Robyn Miller, whose credits include genre classics *The Manhole* and *Cosmic Osmo*, have gone all-out to exploit the strengths of the CD-ROM format. Video, audio, and

Great graphics combine with top-quality video, audio and gameplay to create a seamless whole in *Myst*. This is the game to really show what CD-ROM can do...

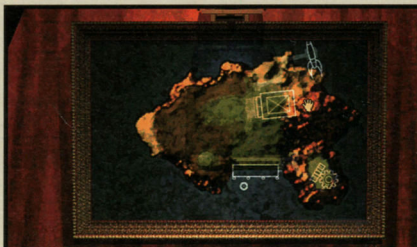
gameplay combine in a seamless fabric. So instead of a steroidal version of a floppy-disk based game, *Myst* is a watershed—a defining moment in gaming evolution.

Your adventure begins with the mysterious acquisition of a book, titled *Myst*, which is actually a gateway to another world. Atrus, the author of *Myst*, has written many other such books, which are kept in the library on *Myst* Island. Tragically, these books are being destroyed, along with the worlds they lead to. Atrus suspects one of his sons, but the

lad has mysteriously disappeared after flinging "*Myst*" into a dimensional rift. Naturally, you know nothing of this story when somehow, the volume finds its way into your hands. Touching a photo in the book transports you to *Myst* Island, and now it's up to you to navigate the paradox of Atrus' creations. Using only your head and your powers of observation—aided by a handy camera—you must figure out who's destroying the books.

Game instructions are as simple as you can get—look and think. There's so much of importance to see that it's easy to understand why a journal is included with the game. Bits and pieces of information that seem meaningless at first become major clues when combined. Relatively few

PC GAMER
 EDITORS'
 CHOICE



The library is the starting point for all your journeys, if you know how to operate the map correctly. Just make sure you've activated all the marker switches.

objects can actually be picked up, but many can be manipulated—although how and in what order you manipulate an item is critical. The spaceship, for example, needs power, but where to find such power and how much is needed are just the first parts of a larger problem. Along with a cultivated propensity to be as nosy as possible, you'll also need a little math and reasoning.

Of course, the spaceship isn't a spaceship at all, at least not in the normal sense; it's an inter-dimensional vehicle, in fact—one that instantaneously zips you to other ages, where even more wonders and puzzles await you. Fortunately, your explorations are relatively safe—you can't be killed, although you may explode from the



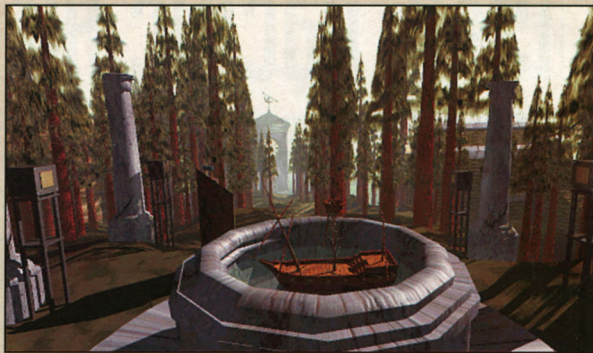
What looks like a refuge from a Buck Rogers's movie is actually your conveyance to the Selenitic Age of *Myst* Island—if you can provide it with the right amount of juice.



■ **How good are you at carrying a tune? You won't get very far with a tin ear.**

pent-up frustration of trying to decipher all the clues strewn about the island.

The game's interface is also the very epitome of simplicity. An open-hand cursor indicates objects such as buttons or levers which can be manipulated, while a pointing finger device shows the directions in which you can travel. A "zip mode" allows you to move rapidly between locations you've already visited, although it's possible to miss something important using this ability. All other game functions can be accessed through a set of pull-down menus at the top of the screen.



■ **If you've read your stars correctly, you should be able to raise the fountain ship, which in turn raises another more useful vessel.**

echoing the Millers' groundbreaking work with *The Manhole*.

On a less positive note, *Myst* shares an all-too-common attribute with many multimedia games that stretch the limits of present hardware—it can be rather glitchy, depending upon your own particular hardware/software setup. You know you can expect a challenge when a separate and fairly extensive troubleshooting guide is

pre-1994 Sound Blaster 16 cards must upgrade their drivers, but at least Broderbund has included these files on the CD.

Still, if you've got the horses, *Myst* is a fantastic ride. The sense of wonder this title evokes more than makes up for any hardware headaches. Very few games have



■ **Relax, your dental appointment's not till next week. Check out the planetarium display for clues to reaching the Stone Age.**

been able to transport the player to a world so believable that the boundary between the screen and "real" world fades to near nothingness. The Millers have managed to capture the surreal tint of dreams, while providing enough mental twists to stock a pretzel factory. If you've been hesitant to jump into CD-ROM gaming, wait no longer.

—Gary Meredith

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Graphics, sounds, and gameplay that pull you in and never let go.

95%

LOWS: It's a crap shoot as to whether or not your particular hardware setup combo will bring even more woe to *Myst* Island.

BOTTOM LINE: Finally, a game that validates the hype of CD-ROM. If you were looking for a reason to move up to those silvery little discs, *Myst* is it.



■ **You must find and activate all five transmitters in the Selenitic Age. Also, note the sound associated with each icon.**

The sound in *Myst* is particularly noteworthy. Certainly, most CD-ROM games have breathtaking soundscapes, with orchestral scores and heart-stopping sound effects. But few incorporate sound into gameplay as well as *Myst* does. In fact, those with tin ears may find at least one sequence considerably more difficult than those of us who can hum the entire "Ring Cycle." The melding of sight and sound within *Myst* is game design at its finest.

included in the documentation. It's a great resource to be sure, with lots of information on drivers and where to get them if yours are too old. But its very presence belies the manufacturers' box-copy about "ease of use." By contrast, the Mac CD-ROM version of *Myst* is a no-brainer. If you've had your computer for more than four or five months, you'll almost certainly have to obtain a newer video driver, and possibly an updated CD-ROM driver. Owners of

1942: Pacific Air

PC GAME
EDITORS'
CHOICE

Category: Air-combat simulation

Developer: MicroProse

Publisher: MicroProse, 280 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030-2245

REQUIRED

386DX/33MHz; 4MB RAM;
15MB hard-drive space;
DOS 5.0 or later; VGA

WE RECOMMEND

486DX/50MHz; 8MB RAM;
Joystick; Thrustmaster
rudder pedals; Supported
sound cards; Mouse

M.S.R.P.: \$64.95

For computer gamers who've been getting their kicks in the deadly skies of *Aces of the Pacific*, there's a new game in town.

In an attempt to unseat Dynamix as king of WWII air-combat simulators, MicroProse has unleashed 1942: *The Pacific Air War*. And flight-sim fans should sit up and take note — *Pacific Air War* is a worthy challenger, setting a new benchmark for graphics in flight simulator.

At their highest level, with full texture-mapping and Gouraud shading, the graphics in *Pacific Air War* are nothing short of magnificent. The planes, even in closeup shots which fill the entire screen, are stunningly realistic — you almost feel as if you can reach out and touch the rivets. Ships, cockpit detail, explosions, the sky, the ground, and the ocean are all just as good.

Pacific Air War looks so good, in fact, that when you're watching the action from outside the plane, or reviewing film of a flight, it almost seems as if you're watching actual footage of a carrier battle: Flaming planes pinwheel into the ocean and trailing plumes of black smoke streak across a flak-filled sky while stricken carriers burn below.

The texture-mapped graphics require quite a bit of computing muscle, but you can beef up the frame rate by reducing the level

MicroProse's new WWII

fighter game aims to dethrone *Aces of the Pacific* as king of the naval dogfighting sims.



■ The graphics — for sea, land, and planes — are without a doubt the best we've seen.



■ Here are a pair of Val dive bombers en route to attack an American carrier group.



■ Carrier landings are tough! Screw up, and you'll buy the farm.

of detail for various elements (sky, stars, ships, water, etc.). Even at their lowest settings, though, the graphics in *Pacific Air War* are more than satisfactory.

Available views from the cockpit are standard fare — you can look forward, left, and right, as well as access chase plane and tracking views — but MicroProse has added "over-the-shoulder" perspectives for spotting bogeys coming up from the rear. A virtual-pilot view gives you a sweeping panoramic view of the sky for tracking your dogfighting foe, allowing you to pan your view just like a real pilot would do. You can also jump into the cockpits of different planes and take control, or switch to the rear gunner position on some planes.

Pacific Air War has all the bells and whistles common to top-notch flight sims, including an excellent flight recorder/editor, a career mode, and an extensive list of real-

ism options that allow you to tweak everything to suit your skill level. But gamers who like to take to the sky in an invulnerable plane just for the sheer, shoot-em-up hell of it will be disappointed — *Pacific Air War* doesn't offer an invincibility mode. You can make all crashes non-fatal, but your plane will still be damaged and shot down.

MicroProse promises realistic flight models in *Pacific Air War*, and it's hard to argue with the results. If you're used to flinging WWII aircraft in other sims into 180-degree turns with little loss of altitude or speed, you're in for a rude surprise here.

The artificial intelligence of your opponents is equally impressive. On the "skilled" setting, don't be surprised if get your tail waxed a few times. Ships, too, show intelligence, weaving to dodge torpedoes and circling to protect the all-important carriers.

MicroProse has made it easy to jump



■ Choose your realism options before you take off. We still haven't figured out exactly what "say prayers" does, though.



WHETHER YOU'RE AN AMERICAN, YOU'VE GOT TO BE A PILOT TO BE A HERO IN THIS GAME. THE GRAPHICS ARE STUNNING. YOU'VE GOT TO BE A PILOT TO BE A HERO IN THIS GAME. THE GRAPHICS ARE STUNNING. YOU'VE GOT TO BE A PILOT TO BE A HERO IN THIS GAME. THE GRAPHICS ARE STUNNING.



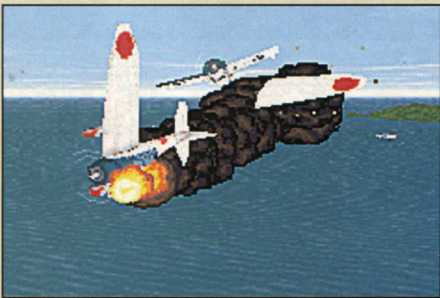
Whether you start a career as a Japanese or American Pilot, you'll be assigned to an aircraft carrier in the early days of the war.

in and start playing, and the inclusion of a Career mode lets you track your success — as either an American or Japanese pilot — from the start of the war all the way to the Marianas Turkey Shoot in 1944. Unlike in *Aces of the Pacific*, however, you can only start your career at the start of the war, sometime in the first half of 1942.

One important element that sets *Pacific Air War* apart from other flight sims is the Carrier Battle mode, in which the player directs surface action, as in *MicroProse's Task Force 1942* naval simulation. [Domark's AV-8B Harrier Assault has a similar feature that lets you coordinate ground troops — Ed.] In this game, however, after ordering your men to take off on a do-or-die raid against enemy carriers, you can jump into the lead plane and show 'em how to do it right.

Carrier battles are divided into five scenarios: Coral Sea, Midway, Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz, and Marianas. Using commands similar to those in *Task Force*, you set the speed and course of task forces, and order reconnaissance flights and air strikes.

The carrier battle feature isn't as strong as the flight simulation component, but it does add a tactical element to *Pacific*



Scratch one Val and score a victory for the trailing Wildcat! Flame and smoke graphics are stunning.

Air War that other flight sims can't match — and certainly takes away nothing from this first-rate air combat simulation.

Pacific Air War includes an excellent mission builder, allowing you to not only author an air battle, but also build task forces. With this feature you can create the most massive carrier battles in history, pitting armadas of Japanese and American carriers against each other.

The time acceleration function, on the other hand, leaves a little to be desired. Instead of fast-forwarding to the point of enemy contact,

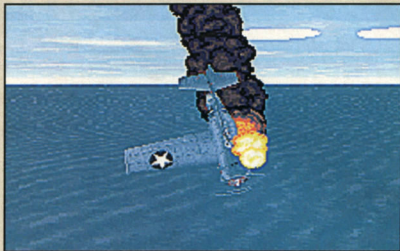


The rear gunner in this Val sends a Wildcat down in flames.

Pacific Air War accelerates the passage of time incrementally, up to 16 times the speed of real-time flight. Even so, getting to a target 350 miles away can take quite a while — or at least longer than I care for — and though purists might enjoy staring at the open ocean for an hour and a half en route to the target, most of us want to jump into the action in a hurry.

I'm able to deal with that, but I sure wish *MicroProse* would beef up the sound effects. I've never been in a Wildcat or Dauntless, but I'm pretty sure they didn't sound very much like they do in 1942, and the machine-gun sounds are weak and tinny.

MicroProse says that *Pacific Air War* will support modem play — but not in the first version to hit shelves. Rudder pedals are supported, but the only set that *MicroProse* has programmed for are the Thrustmaster RCS.



His plane missing one wing and falling fast, this Wildcat pilot is bound for a watery grave.

Whatever else you say, you've got to agree that the beauty of this game is in the details. Strafe a ship, and you can see the bullets splash in the water before you walk the fire onto the vessel. Make a high-speed turn at night, and the stars blur a little. Launch a torpedo assault on a carrier, and you'll see your target ship's wake change as it increases speed and begins evasive maneuvers. This is very impressive stuff.



ORDERED TO BURN
ATTACK ENEMY AI

HIGHLY TARGET:
ENEMY PLANES
SECONDARY TARGET
CRUISE INSTALL

ENEMY AIR ACTION
DIRECTED TO BE
EG

The mission map provides you with information about aircraft, land bases, and task forces.

Despite the whining of the hard-core flight-sim crowd, most gamers agree that until now *Aces of the Pacific* and *Aces Over Europe* have set the standard WWII air-combat sims. 1942: *The Pacific Air War* is set to challenge the supremacy of those sims with the best-looking graphics yet seen in a flight-sim — at least until the arrival of *Origin's Pacific Strike*.

—Lee Buchanan

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics; optional tactical control of carrier battles; lovely details.

95%

LOWS: Demanding hardware requirements for high graphics settings; thin sound effects.

BOTTOM LINE: A great simulation that both novices and veterans PC pilots can enjoy.

Red Crystal

Category: Fantasy Role-playing
 Developer: Quantum Quality Productions, Inc.
 Publisher: Quantum Quality Productions, Inc., 1046 River Avenue,
 Flemington, NJ 08822.

REQUIRED:
 286, 1 MB RAM, 5 MB hard-
 drive space, VGA

WE RECOMMEND:
 386/25 MHz, 8 MB hard-
 drive space.

M.S.R.P.: \$64.95

Most fantasy role-playing games (FRPs) take a long time to get into; that's why products like *Red Crystal* are good to have. Here's an FRP, after all, that lets you do up a character in about a minute, spends only a few screens introducing the situation, then tosses you into the action. The manual clearly outlines what you're trying to accomplish, so you can spend your gaming time actually accomplishing it.

And what are you trying to accomplish? Well, Blackmoore used to be a peaceful land, but a bad guy named Lexor found peace a tad odious. So he changed things. He wiped out the good forces and put seven particularly vile generals in charge. Each of these generals possesses one of the Seven Sectors of Life, which are the key to Lexor's destruction. All you have to do is fight your way through the seven castles, annihilate each general and take his secret, then boodle on out of there before the castle self-destructs.

You can be a barbarian, knight, sor-



After reaching advanced levels, your character will face multiple foes each combat.

Red Crystal is easy to get into and simple to understand. It may not be the deepest game of its kind, but it has plenty going for it.

cerer, lord, or thief. There's only one of you — no adventuring parties here — so choose well. You start off with a weapon, and you can upgrade your equipment and your spell knowledge in the towns you visit. You'll need the best weapons and spells to make it through the toughest castles, because fighting is something you'll do almost constantly.

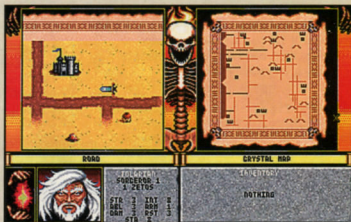
What happens is this: On the strategic map, you're represented as a sword; whenever you run into another sword, there's an interaction of some kind (usually not combat). Once inside the castles you appear as an animated character, and you'll run into other characters. These range from druids through minotaurs and even giant ants, and none of them especially likes you. So whenever you meet one, you have to decide whether to fight it or bribe it. But

since the only way to get experience and money is to fight them, you won't bribe very often.

There's another way to make money, a strange one: You can actually buy towns in *Red Crystal*, then set tax rates and collect. It's a nice idea, but it seems really out of place in a one-player FRP. It's not as if you're paying armies or building fortresses, after all; you're simply wandering from stronghold to stronghold, beating up the bad guys.

Playing the game is quite easy, and the keyboard control works better than the mouse. Just use the arrow keys to move from place to place, then react when you meet something. In the castles, encounters lead to the combat screen, where you and your opponent(s) maneuver in an arcade-like environment. Combat's fun, and being able to dance and float is great, but it can take too long and it happens too often. I mean, how many minotaurs can live in one of these dumps, anyway?

One other thing. *Red Crystal* supports modem play. You can hook up with a friend and liberate Blackmoore together. Sort of. Actually, each of you will liberate his own version of Blackmoore, because



Our character, represented by the sword, is located midway between a helpful town and an evil castle.

you don't actually share the same world. The manual is blunt about this — modems are too slow to allow you both to change the same world — so you end up co-operating in a kind of parallel uni-



The merchant in each town will sell weapons and other important items. Seek him out!

verse. Weird, but it works.

Despite some clumsy interface elements, *Red Crystal* is worthwhile. It's fast, fun, and refuses to take itself too seriously.

— Neil Randall

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Your goals are clear, the interface is simple, and you'll be ready to play in no time.

LOWS: The game won't blow you away with innovations.

BOTTOM LINE: *Red Crystal* is fun, fast and addictive, but not particularly complex.

75%



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Quantum Quality Productions, Inc.

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Product Information Number 104

The Elder Scrolls, Volume 1:

Category: Fantasy Role-playing
 Developer: Bethesda Softworks
 Publisher: Bethesda Softworks, 1370 Piccard Drive, Rockville MD 20850

REQUIRED
 386DX/33 Mhz, 4 MB RAM
 (w/ 2 MB EMS), DOS 5.0 or
 later, 25 MB hard-drive
 space, VGA, Mouse.

WE RECOMMEND
 486DX/33 Mhz, Dish-
 caching utility, Supported
 sound cards (General MIDI
 strongly recommended).

M.S.R.P.: \$69.95

Bethesda's first fantasy role-playing game is a graphic tour de force that already has fans drooling for more.

Bethesda has created a true virtual world, using light-sourcing and shadows to magnificent effect. Puddles on rain-soaked streets reflect lightning bolts in the distance; fog, snow, and mist impair your vision as you move through the countryside; you can discern caverns lit by firelight in the distance, and peek through keyholes before entering potentially dangerous rooms.

Arena's sound effects and music are up to the task as well. The game sounded simply amazing on a Sound Blaster 16/Wave Blaster configuration, with



Your hero's statistics and inventory are always at your fingertips.

Oh, how fast things can change — especially when it comes to fantasy role-playing games (FRP's). This genre, which looked to be undergoing something of a renaissance after last summer's CES in Chicago, is in a limbo of sorts. Twin Dolphin Games' *Forgotten Castle*, which looked incredibly promising, is both dead and forgotten. Dynamix's *Thief of Dreams*, the sequel to the mesmerizing *Betrayal at Krondor*, is in limbo, and SSI will soon no longer be developing TSR's Advanced Dungeons & Dragons games. And *Stonekeep*, Interplay's gorgeous 3D first-person dungeon crawl, seems to be perpetually hanging around the corner, just out of reach.

The time is ripe for an upstart, and Bethesda Softworks is ready for the job. The company that brought us three *Terminator* games has unveiled its debut FRP, *The Elder Scrolls: Volume 1: Arena* — and it's simply stunning.

Like Origin's *Ultima Underworld* series, *Arena* is a single-player fantasy role-playing game featuring smoothly scrolling 3D graphics, presented from a first-person point of view; unlike *Ultima Underworld*, *Arena* doesn't limit your explorations to subterranean settings. There's an entire world to explore here, with myriad villages, cities, and dungeons (of course) awaiting you, all rendered in jaw-dropping 3D graphics. While *Arena*'s graphics engine isn't quite as sophisticated as *Ultima Underworld*'s (you can't look up or down, for example), it's still mighty impressive.



The Sword of Lifestealing comes in handy when you square off against Golems, some of the toughest creatures you encounter.

General MIDI support and stereo-panning effects heightening the experience considerably. Digitized wolf howls and the sound of shuffling zombies brought a real sense of atmosphere and anticipation. Expect to find yourself whirling around in your chair to see if a nasty is creeping up behind you.

But there's one area in which *Arena* could stand some improvement — the storyline. The plot seems rather shallow compared to games like *Betrayal at*

Krondor or *Ultima VII*, and could never stand alone as a story. To be fair, though, *Arena*'s storyline is as good or better than most of its recent peers. Here's the skinny: The Emperor's wizarly advisor-turned-traitor, Jager Tharn, has used the magical Staff of Chaos to secret the king in another dimension. This nogoodnik has also killed a sorcerer friend of yours, and tossed you (as an unsavory type with possible heroic tendencies) in prison to rot, while taking the Emperor's place on the throne.

The only way to rescue the Emperor is to reassemble the Staff, which has been broken and hidden in far-flung locations across the world. Your sorcerer friend's life-force, held together by her magic, gets you out of your cell and starts you on your quest to kill the traitorous mage and restore the Emperor. There's much trekking through huge dungeons (what are all these dungeons doing here, anyway?) to gather items to give to non-player characters (NPC) who



Certain vital doors can only be opened by answering riddles...

Arena

PC GAMER
EDITORS'
CHOICE



The automap allows you to take notes right on your map of the current level — but you can't leaf back and forth to any other maps.

can give you information. This is pretty standard fantasy role-playing fare, reminiscent of *The Bard's Tale II*, in which your heroes had to retrieve the sections of the Destiny Wand.

But if it's standard fare, at least it's very well-implemented. Bethesda has created a unique magic system and new character classes; though you can choose your character from heroic professions like knights and rangers, you can also play as an assassin (!) and successfully complete the game. There are several classes of mage, like the Spellsworn or Battlemage, whose specialty is the use of magic in combat. You can buy spells, or have fun creating and naming your own at the Mages' Guild



As you find each piece of the Staff of Chaos, you'll receive hints in your dreams about the location of the next piece.



Talk to enough townspeople and you'll learn about the location of various artifacts that will prove helpful in your quest to defeat Jager Tharn.

through a simple yet flexible "spell editor."

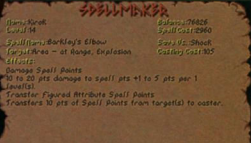
Game controls are a breeze to master. A left-click on the mouse gets you going — where the cursor is positioned on-screen determines your speed and direction. The combat system in *Arena* is just as smooth and natural. Click and hold the right mouse button, then move the mouse as you would the weapon you're hoisting — left to right (or vice-versa) to slash or punch, down for a smashing blow, or up to jab or stab.

Movement can also be controlled via keyboard control, a method I preferred to mouse-only steering. *Arena* also sports an automap where you can jot down descriptions and reminders; there's also a quest-management auto notepad that keeps tracks of the various tasks you've yet to perform.

And, oh, the places you'll go! The *Arena* game world is littered with crypts, abandoned castles, dungeons, and huge cities with their own indigenous population walking the streets during the daytime.

You can click on passers-by and ask them their name, where the nearest inn is located, and about any rumors they may have heard.

On the downside, each NPC may have his or her own name and profession, but it doesn't matter one whit to your heroine that NPC Wendel is a butcher, baker, or candlestick maker. The non-player character's identity has no bearing whatsoever on your interaction or your quest, and as a result conversations consist mostly of isolated questions and answers, never developing to reveal truly unique characters. In fact, NPC interaction is rather lifeless, with you learning things like "go find the empty shoe-polish tin of the gods in the crypt, and I'll tell you the location of



You can concoct your own enchantments at the Mages' Guild by mixing and matching spell effects.

the mystic dog polisher."

But despite this, *Arena* is still entrancing. My character has completed a few quests and is tracking down the next staff piece. There's a huge and dazzling (if a bit superficial) world to explore,



Arena's overhead map allows you to travel quickly from location to location, though you're free to roam the countryside in 3D mode as well.

more than enough to keep a jaded gamer like myself playing long after I finished this review. If *Arena* had a better-developed story line and NPC interaction, it would be almost perfect. But stay tuned — Bethesda has cranked out a winner, and with a little effort, the sequel may be the best FRP ever designed for computers.

—Bernie Lee

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fantastic graphics and sound, and a very intuitive interface.

88%

LOWS: The storyline is a little thin, and there's not much meaningful interaction with NPCs.

BOTTOM LINE: A stunning technological achievement; give this game a better storyline, and you might have the best FRP ever designed.

Ravenloft

CATEGORY: Fantasy role-playing
 DEVELOPER: DreamForge (formerly Event Horizon)
 PUBLISHER: SSI, 675 Alhambra Avenue, Suite 201, Sunnysvale,
 CA 94086-2901

REQUIRED:
 CD-ROM drive; 386; 4MB RAM;
 DOS 5.0 or later; 13MB hard-
 drive space; Microsoft or 100%
 compatible Mouse

WE RECOMMEND:
 486DX/33Mhz; Double-speed
 CD-ROM drive; Supported
 sound cards

M.S.R.P.: \$80.00

You have been summoned to see Lord Behlt, Lord of the Manor in the Forgotten Realms. As you approach his chamber the door explodes in a shower of fiery splinters. Rushing inside, you look around to find Behlt lying on the floor, badly beaten. Someone has attacked him and stolen his holy symbol, a source of power from the god Helm. Without it, Behlt is weakened and vulnerable.

As loyal subjects of the Lord, you and your partner rush after the criminal as he makes his escape into the forests surrounding the castle. The thief is dispatched quickly, dropping several items as he dies. Though the holy symbol is not among them, other objects are. As you pick them up, a thick fog rolls in...

...And you are no longer in the Forgotten Realms. Walls of mist fence you on all sides. Strange beasts lurk among the ruins of this cursed land. You are in



Lord Behlt has a big favor to ask. He wants you to find his holy symbol.

Ravenloft, an alternate world in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons universe—a world of horror.

Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession is the latest in the soon-to-be-terminated AD&D game series from SSI, bringing TSR's popular "Ravenloft" paper role-playing game to computer for the first time. "Ravenloft" is the horror side of TSR's fantasy lines, which has

Time may be running out for SSI's Advanced Dungeons & Dragon line, but the last games are proving to be some of the best of the series.



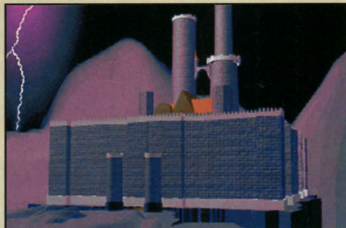
This Vistani seer deals out the characters that make up your party. Considering the strange local population, the party members you end up with may be very important.

also been turned into a successful series of novels. Concentrating on more traditional horror monsters—such as vampires, zombies, ghouls, bats, and were-creatures—these games seek to build an atmosphere of fear and dread rather than one of fantasy. DreamForge has succeeded admirably in bringing this world to computer gamers, incorporating a slick new first-person engine into a story-intensive adventure.

Strahd's Possession begins with only two people in your party, though two more characters can join in the course of the game. (Be careful! They might not all be trustworthy.) This adventure will take you through the dangerous lands of Ravenloft, ruled by the iron hand of Lord Strahd and populated by both creatures of the night and innocents just trying to survive. Strahd is a vampire lord, banished to the region called Barovia, from where he rules Ravenloft. Reminiscent of Kain, the evil vampiric ruler from DreamForge's *Veils of Darkness*, Strahd is a brooding, lurking presence throughout the game.

Unlucky travelers have been impaled on pikes throughout the land. Strahd's grim warnings nailed to their skeletal chests. Unfortunately, Strahd holds the key to finding Lord Behlt's holy symbol, which he believes is the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind, a source of great power.

In order to find the symbol, you first must learn about Strahd and just what he wants. At first, he regards your party as



The graphics throughout the game are impressive, and do a good job of conveying *Ravenloft's* unique feel.



Ravenloft abounds with NPCs, complete with narrated dialog in the CD-ROM version.



The combat and movement screens are simple and effective, making it easy to get around.

merely a nuisance, sending out the gypsy race known as the Vistani to capture the symbol and deal with you. As you get further along on your journey he begins to toy with you, but soon learns that your small band of adventures is more of a threat to him than he first realized.

The first of a projected line of "Ravenloft" games, *Strahd's Possession* is quite obviously a relative of the previous AD&D titles. The core rules for combat and character generation are, of course, the same. Gnomes, Elves, Halflings, Half-Elves, Humans, and Dwarves can choose from the usual range of classes (Cleric, Ranger, Mage) and alignments (Lawful Good, Chaotic Neutral, etc). Ratings for various attributes are randomly generated, and characters are fitted out with the usual weapons, spells, and adventuring accoutrements. For a series focusing so strongly

on elements of horror, though, this sameness is somewhat of a disappointment. Some "good" werewolf or even vampire characters might have introduced a new twist to the game.

What the Ravenloft rules do introduce are a whole new batch of monsters and spells. Skeletal bats swoop down from above, and flesh-eating Ghouls and Ghosts can strike with a paralyzing attack. Zombie Golems emit a nauseating odor that induces paralytic, while Banshees use their horrid, keening voices to kill. One of the most interesting new opponents is the Living Wall. Comprised of the faces, limbs, bones, and tissues of any who die within its radius, the Living Wall appears normal until attacked. In combat, it strikes with the combined forces of all the warriors it has absorbed, and can kill with a single attack.



You'll need help to survive foes like this Zombie.

rewards with greater control and more realistic graphics.

The visuals themselves are quite ably handled, and in some respects are better than those in *Underworld*. All the dialogue in the game is spoken, and the voice-overs add real depth to the good and bad characters you meet along the way. Most impressive are the extensive cut scenes, many with as much as ten megs of data. The finale weighs in at 55 megs! Needless to say, both voice-overs and most of the bigger cut

scenes will be dropped from the non-CD-ROM version of *Ravenloft*.

Strahd's Possession is another strong FRP game from the creators of *The Summoning* and *Veil of Darkness*, and bodes well for the future, when SSI will develop their own FRP games. In terms of graphics, cinematic, story, and sound effects, it is an ambitious and satisfying endeavor — one of their best yet.

— T. Liam McDonald



Ravenloft comes with a full compliment of those familiar AD&D spells, as well as some pretty interesting new magic.

scenes will be dropped from the non-CD-ROM version of *Ravenloft*.

Strahd's Possession is another strong FRP game from the creators of *The Summoning* and *Veil of Darkness*, and bodes well for the future, when SSI will develop their own FRP games. In terms of graphics, cinematic, story, and sound effects, it is an ambitious and satisfying endeavor — one of their best yet.

— T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** **PCG**

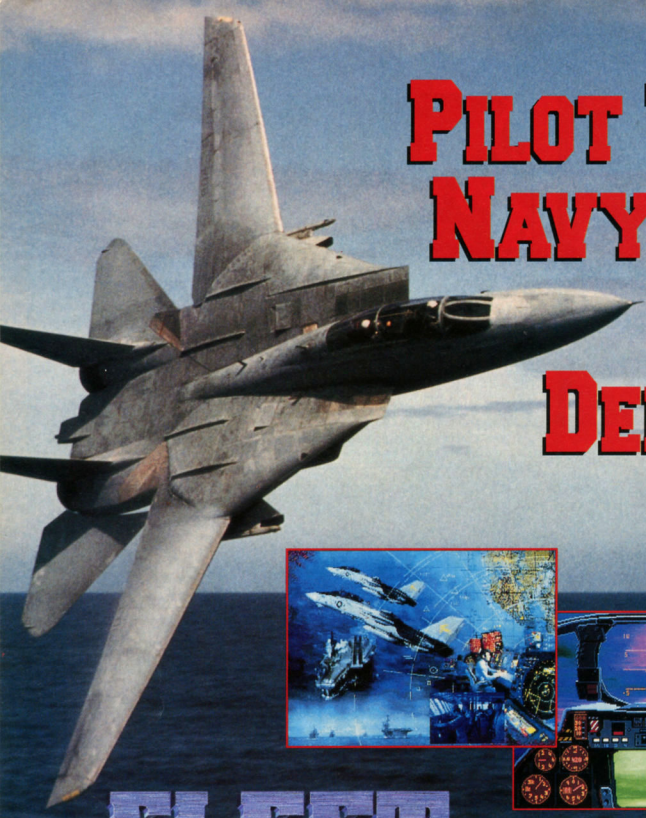
HIGHS: Great graphics; plenty of options; nice cut-scenes; new horror-setting adds much.

82%

LOWS: Weapons, spells, attributes etc. all getting very, very familiar now.

BOTTOM LINE: One of SSI's best AD&D-based releases, packed with character, featuring just enough novelty, and being very nicely put together.

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ATA

Product Information Number 221

Check out our *SimCity 2000* tips in Strategy Central!

SimCity 2000

Category: Simulation

Developer: Maxis

Publisher: Maxis, 2 Theatre Square, Orinda, CA 94563-3346

REQUIRED

386 or better; 4MB RAM;
5 MB Hard-drive space;
DOS 3.3 or higher; SVGA;
Mouse

WE RECOMMEND

386DX/25 MHz;
Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: \$69.99

It wasn't built in a day, and neither are most prosperous cities in *SimCity 2000*. In this slick new game from Maxis, you're given almost complete control of the planning, construction, and maintenance of a fictional city — pretty much the same premise as the original. But what a difference five years makes! Isometric SVGA graphics, realistic sound effects, and updated features make *SimCity 2000* a pure joy to explore.

Your ultimate objective in *SimCity 2000*, as it was in *SimCity*, is to use the money allocated to build a burg in which



Grow your population to 120,000 and earn 'arcologies'.

people will want to live, work, and shop. Sure, it's not all heart-pumping action, but *SimCity 2000*'s great sound effects and crisp, colorful graphics are so good that you'll really start to care about the well-being of the little folks scurrying about on your screen.

Thanks to the high-res graphics (640 x 480 x 256), even the slightest details — the cars on the roads, the traffic signals, and the various house colors — are visible. And the sounds of roads being paved and electricity buzzing from pole to pole will make you feel like you are standing at the heart of your town.

There are plenty of improvements in *SimCity 2000*, but the most appealing updates are the improved help menus and the self-explanatory toolbar. Just press

shift while clicking on an icon and find out its function. The toolbar now offers sub-menus that give you more detailed options, and you'll really appreciate the ability to rotate the city a full 360-degrees as well.

The budgeting window is also much-improved. Simply choose a yearly tax rate and allocate spending to the various city functions, then check on any of the numerous charts and graphs your advisors have put together to find out where more money is needed. Everything is simple to use, once you've given yourself time to figure out where all the information is located, so the real challenge lies in balancing your budget and keeping your citizens happy rather than wrestling with the interface.

While there are frustrations involved in keeping a big city moving, we suspect you'll enjoy your term as mayor. Doing a good job does have its rewards, you see, including such amenities as a mayoral mansion, a city hall, a statue of you, and the option to build futuristic arcologies—self-supporting cities-within-a-city that can boost your population by up to 65,000 citizens each!



The updated 3-D view lets you edit underground utilities.

All-new and vastly improved, Maxis' latest version of the classic *SimCity* will have you addicted!

To balance out the rewards, *SimCity 2000* includes numerous disasters, both natural and man-made, that can strike at any time. Riots, airplane crashes, floods, tornadoes — all can ravage your city and entail extensive rebuilding. Your city can even be attacked by a giant fire-spitting monster hell-bent on destruction, with your only hope of survival resting on the resources you have available — policemen, firemen, or the military.

Maxis has done a bang-up job with this sequel, due largely to its paying atten-



Easily accessed graphs and charts provide a wealth of information about your city's status.

tion to customer suggestions, and the result is a game that even novice city-builders will enjoy. Hey, Maxis — when do we get *SimNation*?

— Shelli Craig

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great new graphics and a ton of extra features add depth to a classic game.

95%

LOWS: It can take an awfully long time to get to a stage where you can really enjoy some of the game's new options.

BOTTOM LINE: One of those rare games that presents a different challenge each time you play.

Merchant Prince

Category: Strategy/Simulation
 Developer: Several Dudes Holistic Gaming
 Publisher: QQP, 495 Highway 202, Flemington NJ 08822

REQUIRED
 286: 1MB RAM; DOS 3.3 or
 later; 3 MB hard-drive
 space; VGA; Mouse

WE RECOMMEND
 386SX/16Mhz; Supported
 sound cards

M.S.R.P.: \$64.95

This smooth-playing, addictive, high-spirited trading game puts you in the role of a 14th-century Venetian prince. Your goal: Acquire as much wealth and power as possible until you crush (or are crushed by) your opponents, or until you run out of game-time. Each turn represents a year, and the default setting is for a century-long game. You can opt for a longer game of 192 turns, however, if you're feeling especially dynamic.

Using either a historical or randomly generated map, you set out from Venice to explore unknown lands, acquire valuable commodities, and establish trade routes. Both ships and land caravans can be used, although both are vulnerable to storms and might be attacked by brigands. It's best to hire guards if you're using even a moderately hazardous route.

Once you've gathered enough florins, it's time to choose a pathway to power. You can be a namby-pamby princeling and play by decent, gentlemanly rules — but you'll have more fun using the most ruthlessly Machiavellian tactics, hiring arsonists to burn down rivals' warehouses and villas, paying blackguards to spread slander, or recruiting assassins to deal with your rivals' henchmen.



Bribe politicians on this screen and you'll be able to call in favors later!

Finally, someone's created a Venetian trading sim! And best of all, it's a really good game.

For a taste of real power, though, you'll need a long-range strategy designed to elevate you to the rank of Doge of Venice, or even to the Papacy — and the power to excommunicate at will is nothing to be sneezed at.

It's also possible to buy whole armies of mercenaries, but they're prohibitively expensive to recruit and maintain. And if you yield to your bellucose tendencies and use them to attack a fellow Venetian's caravans, you'll lose popularity in the city — but only if you're caught doing it. Still, you can always rebuild your prestige by putting up a splendid new villa, commissioning a work of art, or throwing a big party.

Merchant Prince actively encourages you to plot, betray, conspire, ambush, bribe, and otherwise manipulate or corrupt those around you. While



Visit the Den of Iniquities to hire an arsonist or assassin.

and plenty of period music adds a classy touch. Players will find many delights in this world of strategy and intrigue.

—William R. Trotter



Okay, okay — so perhaps the graphics aren't the greatest. It hardly matters, though, when the gameplay's this good.

the game is quite entertaining when played against three computer opponents, it really shines when played against living, breathing opponents. Since modem and E-mail play are supported, the possibilities for treachery and deal-making are boundless. The designers were even thoughtful enough to provide a feature that lets you customize slanderous gossip with an opponent's real name.

Merchant Prince is a beautifully balanced game, with a thorough and well-organized manual. The graphics, though not spectacular, are as good as need be,

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: If smooth, addictive gameplay packed with skull-duggery appeals to you, so will this.

LOWS: The graphics aren't anything to write home about, and look rather dated.

BOTTOM LINE: With its balanced game play, this is one of the best new trading games around.

85%

Star Trek: Judgment Rites

Category: Graphic Adventure
 Developer: Interplay Productions
 Publisher: Interplay, 17822 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714

REQUIRED
 386SX/16; 2 MB RAM; DOS 3.1
 or later; VGA; 28 MB hard-
 drive space

WE RECOMMEND
 386DX/33; Sound Blaster;
 Mouse or Joystick

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Whether or not you're a Star Trek fan, you've got to have this game.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

one area where faithfulness to the show has suffered. The *Enterprise* is, after all, a pretty enormous ship;

yet in the game, it wheels around like a shuttlecraft or an X-wing fighter. It just doesn't feel like the flagship of the Federation. While that's great for zapping Klingon battlecruisers, it's not really in keeping with the *Star Trek* illusion.

Otherwise, game play is near-perfect, with a quick and logical interface. Click on a crew member and, faster than you can say "He's dead, Jim," up pops an icon menu listing each character's areas of responsibility. And you'll really feel at home on the bridge of this *Enterprise*. Everything is as it should be—so much so that you may find yourself speaking in a Scottish accent or a flat monotone devoid of emotion. You might even take to... speaking, as though someone, had, sprinkled, commas, after, every, word.

Characterization is also very strong. Everyone behaves just as you would expect, with just the right interplay between characters. As usual, the in-fighting between Spock and McCoy is featured prominently, but no one is left out. In fact, this time around you're not restricted to the usual Kirk-Spock-McCoy landing parties. If a mission requires Scotty or Chekov, you get them. And the missions, more often than not, put a premium on diplomacy and communication. Phaser fire is usually your last option—although its judicious use is an integral part of the game.

The graphics are good—although not a vast improvement over those in the first game—with just enough *Star Trek* kitsch to let you know you're in that old familiar 23rd century. And all those wonderful little sounds that are part of the *Star Trek* ambience are here, from the chirping



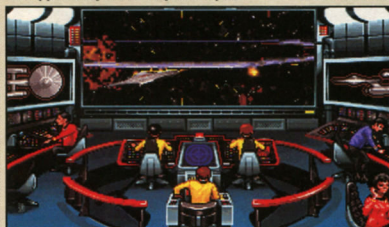
After all those episodes, you'd think everyone in the galaxy would be wise to the Vulcan nerve pinch. But hey, if it works....

tricorders to the ubiquitous—and always puzzling—"squoyrk" of every door. Can K-Mart really have quieter doors than Starfleet?

There are no real weaknesses in *Star Trek: Judgment Rites*. A few hardcore gamers might complain that one long, tough game would be better than eight smaller ones, and devout trekkers might quibble with some of the dia-

When *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* appeared in 1991, it surprised those who didn't think you could really do justice to Gene Roddenberry's original vision in a computer game. But *25th Anniversary* did its job, capturing the action, humor, and feel that endeared the series to so many viewers. So what does Interplay come up with for 1994? Only *Star Trek: Judgment Rites*, an encore that one-ups the original.

The game's format is very much like that of the television series, with eight distinctly varied episodes that run the gamut from humorous to deadly serious. The opening episode, "Federation," gives you the opportunity to renew your acquaint-



The five year mission begins its 28th year in grand style. Warp factor 6, Mr. Sulu!

tance with the evil Dr. Bredell, whom we met in the final episode of *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*. Klingons, Romulans, and a few other villains are also in abundance, as well as the odd computer for Kirk to vex with a well-chosen paradox.

Where it differs from the earlier game is in giving you the choice to opt out of the really nasty space combat. You can play the game on one of three levels, each adding more deadly combat to the mix. That said, the space-combat sequences are perhaps the



Kirk must be getting old—he's become nearly as diplomatic as his eventual successor, Jean-Luc Picard. But talking really is better than fighting, at least in this situation.

logue. But there's nothing to detract from what is a true, interactive realization of Roddenberry's universe. Gene, you would have loved it.

—Gary Meredith

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Smooth play, excellent characters, clever storylines and a real *Star Trek* feel.

90%

LOWS: The space-combat scenes could be more realistic, and installing the game can be pretty time consuming.

BOTTOM LINE: Whether you're a true *Trekker* or a casual fan, you're going to enjoy this game.

Dragonsphere

Category: Graphic adventure

Developer: MicroProse

Publisher: MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley MD 21030

REQUIRED

286/12MHz; 2 MB RAM
(with EMS driver); 11 MB
hard-drive space; DOS 3.0
or later

WE RECOMMEND

386SX/16MHz; DOS 5.0
Mouse; Sound Blaster or
compatible sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Tired of those same old Dwarf, Elf, and Troll adventure games? Then let *Dragonsphere* take you into an all-new fantasy realm, populated by scads of fantastic creatures and races based on mythologies from across the world — as well as a few of MicroProse's completely original creations.

You are Callash, a young adventurer who happens to be king of the entire realm. As if the day-to-day pres-

ures of ruling weren't enough, a problem from the past has returned to haunt your kingdom. The spell that's held the evil sorcerer Sanwe within a mystical prison for the last century is losing power, and you must find a way to keep the wizard from unleashing his evil on the world.

During your journey, you learn that humans share this world with four other races. You'll have to overcome ancient racial prejudices, learn strange new languages, and give the leaders of each race reason to trust you if you're to complete your quest. In *Dragonsphere*, a



The *Dragonsphere* shows how much time you have left to destroy Sanwe... better hurry!

As in the real world, brains count for more than brawn in this exciting new fantasy adventure game from MicroProse.



The wise people of the desert are the most helpful of all — if you can learn their language.

fair bit of diplomacy waits around every corner.

Game play in *Dragonsphere* is pretty straightforward, and uses the MicroProse MADS interface from *Rex Nebular*. MADS combines a simple point-and-click movement system with an easy-to-use inventory control sys-



In the land of the shapeshifters, anything can — and usually does — happen. Don't give this blob a hard time!

tem and intuitive conversation menus, all of which allow you to concentrate on the puzzles rather than worrying about the mechanics of game play.

While the interface is nice, the biggest strength of *Dragonsphere* is its absorbing game world. Each of the many races in the game have their own agendas, their own distinctive (and decidedly non-human) cultures, and their own ideas about mankind. You can't treat everyone as though they were just strange-looking people, and learning to understand and interact with each race on its own terms is your most important task in the game. In order to win, you must encourage new tolerance and understanding between the human population and



The shak are a race of bird-men who haven't been too friendly of late. They'll want proof that you're here to help.

the other races of the realm.

Watching *Dragonsphere* can be just as entertaining as playing it. The strange new people and places created for the game have been illustrated with precise detail, creating an eerie and convincing atmosphere. Climbing huge mountain ranges, fighting off gibbering shapeshifters, and staggering through the shifting sands of a desert have never been so believable — or as much fun. The game's sound complements the images perfectly, with everything from croaking giant toads to the blast of combat spells that sound just as you'd imagine they would. It's easy to lose yourself in this fantastic universe of color and sound.

Dragonsphere is a great adventure game. Its fresh, engaging design and polished interface make it a joy to play. The action never slows as it does in many games, and if one puzzle stumps you, there's always something else to work on until you gain new insight. I recommend this one to all fans of graphic adventures, and any fantasy gamers who've been looking for a change of pace.

—Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

87%

HIGHS: An exciting new graphic adventure, packed with people and places to discover.

LOWS: It could be longer, allowing for more detailed interaction with the characters you meet.

BOTTOM LINE: It's easy to lose yourself in this fresh, engaging adventure game.

Goblins Quest 3

Category: Puzzle adventure

Developer: Coktel Vision

Publisher: Sierra, P.O. Box 600, Coarsegold, CA 93614-0600

REQUIRED

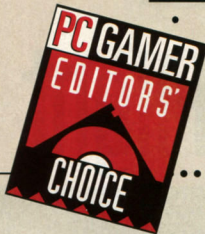
CD-ROM drive: 386SX/25MHz;
2MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive
space; DOS 3.1 or later; VGA;
Mouse

WE RECOMMEND

Double-speed CD-ROM
drive; 386DX/40MHz;
Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: \$29.95

**Goblins Quest 3 is a
great-looking puzzle
adventure that's sure to please.**



Like the previous two *Goblins* games, *Goblins Quest 3* is an engaging, challenging, and beautifully designed combination puzzle/adventure game. You play as a goblin whose quest is to make peace between two feuding monarchs, King Bodd and Queen Xina. And if you succeed, you'll get the added benefit of rescuing the lovely she-goblin, Wynna — and all the gratitude that implies.

Goblins Quest 3 is really a series of connected puzzles, each a challenging little game in itself. In the first scene, for example, you have to find your way off a ship stranded in the sky (don't ask) and down to the ground. The solution involves a number of steps, such as finding a toilet plunger,



Blount sees a lot of action for such a tiny fellow, and this lady's gratitude is worth it!

using a coin as a screwdriver to get a hook, using the hook to get an umbrella, and so on. And while some of the steps are as simple as rummaging through a toolbox to get what you need, others involve using the ropes and rigging of the ship to raise and lower other objects before you can find what you're looking for.

In the first two *Goblins* games, you could take control of any of the goblins in your party — three of them in the first game, two in the second. In fact, control-

ling more than one is essential, because you often have to perform two actions at the same time (balancing one goblin on a see-saw and jumping on the other end with another) to solve a particular problem. This time out, though, you only guide one goblin, Blount — but you do get to take control of other creatures (a snake, a parrot, and a little magician), and play as different primary characters. There are even some really strange levels in which you control both Blount and his mirror image, or his shadow, or his left and right hands. These departures add variety and new challenge to an already good game.

The game wouldn't work nearly as well as it does, though, if the graphics weren't so playful and attractive. Every character and background is perfectly suited to the game's fairytale premise — colorful, detailed, and likeable. Perhaps just as important in this type of game, the graphics do an excellent job of representing all the objects lying around each scene. If you've ever spent time in a graphic adventure searching everywhere for an object that's all but invisible, you'll appreciate the look of *Goblins Quest 3*.

But aside from the game play itself, my favorite thing about *Goblins Quest 3* is the sound. When ever two characters talk, they make nonsense chattering noises you've just got to hear — it's something like the way the teacher talks in the *Peanuts* television specials, but better. All the other sound effects are just as good and, like everything else about the game, blend perfectly with the action. There's plenty of voice acting in the CD-ROM version, and a very nice sound track.

The only real weakness might be that a few of the puzzles you'll encounter are



A typical puzzle: how do you get the meat, then make friends with the tiny knight?



This room is particularly tricky — and entertaining. You'll have to explore everything if you're to escape!

almost too tough. Other than that, though, *Goblins Quest 3* is a great game. I'd advise any fan of puzzle games or graphic adventures to buy it as soon as possible.

— Matthew A. Firme

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Terrific game play, graphics, and sound.

LOWS: A few of the puzzles might be a little too tough.

BOTTOM LINE: Part puzzle game, part graphic adventure, *Goblins Quest 3* is sure to please fans of either genre. A very good title!

89%

Flight Sim Toolkit

Category: Flight Simulation

Developer: Simis

Publisher: Domark, 1900 S. Norfolk St., St. 202, San Mateo CA 94403

REQUIRED

386/76 Mhz with 2 MB RAM;
12 MB hard-drive space;
DOS 5.0 or later; Windows
3.1; VGA; Mouse

WE RECOMMEND

386/33 Mhz; 4 MB RAM; SVGA
(53. ATi, VESA); Sound
Blaster or compatible sound
card; Joystick

M.S.R.P.: \$69.99

Domark's *Flight Sim Toolkit* is simply one of the most audacious sim products in many a moon. Its claims are mammoth: Design your own plane, flight model, world, and scenarios in Windows, then take off and fly in blazing hot SVGA graphics.

That alone is a pretty tall order, but what might be even more difficult is making the program accessible for the average user. The good news is that *FST* does everything it claims, and then some. The bad news is that the documentation is so poor that

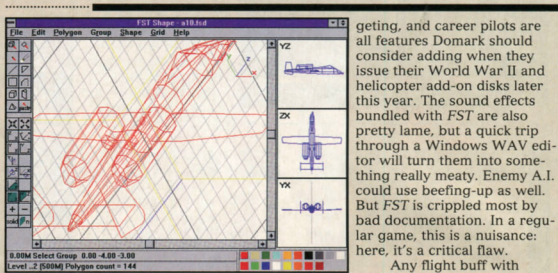


Instrument panels and head-up displays can be as simple or as complex as you choose to make them.

penetrating this sometimes complex product is unnecessarily difficult.

FST is really a group of tools which, taken together, allow for the creation of an actual flight simulator. The heart of *FST* is its powerful World Editor, which gives the user not only the power to sculpture terrain details, but also the ability to add buildings, ground threats, and other aircraft. Enemies travel along assigned paths and respond to any intrusion into their

**You've just got to be impressed —
Domark's newest project allows each
of us to design our own flight sims!**



You can alter any plane design with the game's powerful Shape Editor.

space, so you can construct missions with a nice variety of threats.

Using the Shape Editor, you can build 3D models of your planes, as well as buildings and other vehicles in the world. A large library of 3D objects — including modern aircraft, armored fighting vehicles, a variety of buildings, and even an aircraft carrier — makes it easy to flesh out the world you've created by simply placing existing or modified objects. The look and functionality of a plane's cockpit can be tailored in the Cockpit Editor, which allows

for gauges and switches to be set in any configuration. The guts of the sim itself are determined by the Flight Model Editor, which controls properties such as engine power, drag, weight, wing efficiency, stall angle, and other features. A Color Editor and two ready-to-fly sims round out the package nicely.

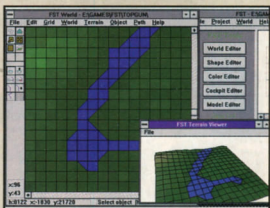
While there's room for some improvement in *FST*, it's unquestionably a solid program to build upon. More detailed mission construction, scoring, waypoints, primary and secondary tar-

geting, and career pilots are all features Domark should consider adding when they issue their World War II and helicopter add-on disks later this year. The sound effects bundled with *FST* are also pretty lame, but a quick trip through a Windows WAV editor will turn them into something really meaty. Enemy A.I. could use beefing-up as well. But *FST* is crippled most by bad documentation. In a regular game, this is a nuisance; here, it's a critical flaw.

Any flight buff with patience and time will leap at this product, and rightfully so. The ability to create your own

planes and flight models, worlds, and scenarios far outweighs the program's flaws. You won't be able to design your own *Falcon 3.0* or *Aces Over Europe*, but what you do create will be your own. *FST* is a powerful tool for game design, and one of the most unique sim products ever. Despite the steep learning curve, it's a real gem.

—T. Liam McDonald



Hills, valley and lakes can be built with the World Editor.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: A super program which really does let you create your very own game worlds.

87%

LOWS: It's in dire need of better documentation, and can prove frustrating at first because of it.

BOTTOM LINE: Despite its limitations, a clever and original program worth sticking with.

Spectre VR

Category: Arcade Action
Developer: Velocity Development
Publisher: Velocity, P.O. Box 2749, San Francisco, CA, 94126

REQUIRED

286/16 MHz; 640K RAM; 8 MB hard-drive space; DOS 2.1 or later; VGA

WE RECOMMEND

386DX/25 MHz; Sound Blaster/Pro/16; Joystick or gamepad; Mouse

M.S.R.P.: \$49.95

Spectre VR gives you the chance to jack into cyberspace — or at least a reasonable facsimile of it.

at each other, but it's only worth reading if you're really starving for this sort of stuff.

The game puts you at the helm of an attack vehicle called a 'spectre', which can be customized in three areas — speed, armament, and shields — to suit the type of game you're playing and/or your style of play. In the single-player game, the goal is simple: Collect all the flags before you're blasted by enemy robots. New, stronger enemies appear every few levels, but luckily your ship's pulse cannon is automatically augmented with stronger weaponry. You can also grab anti-grav packs (for hover capability) and invulnerability shields (which make you immune to shots aimed at the front of your ship).

Besides the various robot ships, there's a bevy of other hazards to avoid — acid damages your ship, ice robs you of turning ability, and cybermud slows you to a crawl. What's

more, the acid and mud actually start moving and tracking you as the game progresses.

All these factors give game play some variety, but you probably won't stick around in one-player mode for very long. For starters, the graphics are just plain boring. A goody portion of the screen is simply black, and the polygon-based objects just don't look very convincing. (The graphics don't get any better in two-player or netwkr mode, but at least there's more to action to keep you occupied.) The DOS version uses only AdLib music and sound effects; in Windows, the sounds are only marginally better, as are the graphics. If this is what cyberspace looks and sounds like, then I'm in no real hurry to jack in.

The two-player game (via modem direct connect) provides more entertainment. After all, it's a lot more satisfying blasting a ship when you know it's being driven by a real person. There are also many more games to choose from — futuristic versions of tag and soccer, along with a host of flight-based scenarios, give this mode



Use the Overhead view to get a clear picture of how outnumbered you are.

more replay value than the one-player game. But we didn't find the soccer and tag games very thrilling, and even the excitement of the combat is weakened by so-so graphics and sound.

The network games are the best of the lot, mainly because you can play either solo against a mess of opponents or as part of a team (you'll need to buy LAN packs, however, which cost \$49.95 for every two players). But even if you are able to play on a network, you'll probably have to convince everyone to

stop playing *Doom* — king of network games for the foreseeable future — in order to play *Spectre VR*. Good luck.

—Stephen Poole

Mac users made quite a fuss over *Spectre* last year, touting its fast-paced game play and multi-player capabilities as the wave of the future. PC gamers never got a chance to find out why their Mac compatriots were so fired up over *Spectre* and its sequel, *Spectre Supreme* — until now. *Spectre VR* has arrived for DOS and Windows, and after spending many hours with it I've got one question: Why all the hubbub?

Don't get the wrong idea. *Spectre VR* isn't a bad game — with several players competing over a network, it can be a lot of fun. (Apparently, even Velocity realizes this; the manual says that "Much of *Spectre*'s appeal can only be seen during a network game"). But the truth is that most of us don't have access to a network for playing games (at least not during leisure hours), and the one- and two-player games just don't have enough pizzazz to keep you coming back.

Spectre VR ostensibly takes place in cyberspace, a.k.a. "the cybernet." The manual includes a cyberpunk novella intended to explain why a lot of polygonal craft are zipping around a gridlined landscape shooting



In hover mode, pulse bursts head straight down, then run along the ground toward the target.



It looks like a propeller, but it's really a shield to protect you from head-on shots.



The graphics in *Spectre VR* leave a lot to be desired.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Can be much fun when a lot of players compete on a network.

68%

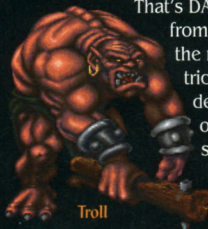
LOWS: Weak graphics, and the one- and two-player games get tiresome pretty quickly.

BOTTOM LINE: If this is Virtual Reality, I'm in no big hurry to "jack in."

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Wraith



Wizard

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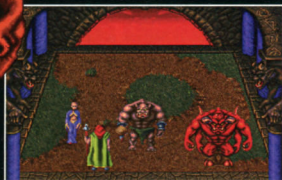
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Scratch one Troll — it's about to be roasted by a Fire Elemental!



Stay away from a Troll's huge club! This Wizard's learning the hard way.

Available for IBM & Compatibles on 3.5" disks and CD-ROM.



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Don't miss the special moves and fatalities in Strategy Central!

Mortal Kombat



Category: Arcade action
 Developer: Probe
 Publisher: UltraTech, 504 Broadway, New York, NY 10012

REQUIRED
 386/20 Mhz, 8 MB hard-
 drive space, DOS 5.0, VGA

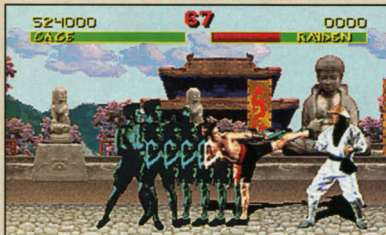
WE RECOMMEND
 486DX/33 Mhz, 4 MB RAM,
 Gravis PC Gamepad, Sound
 Blaster compatible sound
 card

M.S.R.P.: \$69.95

If you thought PCs couldn't handle fighting games, you're in for a big surprise with *Mortal Kombat*.

It's possible you haven't heard of *Mortal Kombat*, but it ain't likely. After a record-shattering first year in the arcades, *Mortal Kombat* entered homes with powerful versions for the Genesis, Super Nintendo, Game Boy, and Game Gear — and was the focus of governmental hearings and sundry news reports on violence in video games. Now, thanks to UltraTech, it's pummeled its way onto the PC, complete with all the full bone-crunching action and gore that made the arcade version so popular.

In case you didn't know, *Mortal Kombat* is violent — very violent. Heads fly, harpoons impale, and enough blood is spilled to solve the donor problem for some years to come. If you're the least bit squeamish, or frown upon gratuitous bloodletting regardless of the medium, look elsewhere for your entertainment, because *Mortal Kombat* is sure to offend.



Surprise distant foes with Johnny Cage's devastating shadow kick.

For those of you unfamiliar with the arcade game, *Mortal Kombat* is a fighting game in the tradition of *Street Fighter 2* and *Body Blows*. In an ancient Shaolin tournament ruled by the evil sorcerer Shang Tsung, seven warriors prepare to do battle. After choosing which warrior you'll control, you square off against another fighter (either human- or com-

puter-controlled) in a battle to the death. Defeat your opponent, and another challenger steps forward. Win enough of these matches and you'll face Tsung's half-dragon guardian Goro, then take on Tsung himself in the ultimate contest. Defeat him, and your character's motivations for fighting are revealed.



Beware of the four-armed Goro! Get too close and you'll pay the price.

While the characters all share certain basic moves (punches, blocks, jumps, and kicks), each fighter has a unique special move — some useful at a distance, others up close, but always powerful. If you're on the verge of winning a match (best two out of three bouts), the message *FINISH HIM!*

appears on the screen — and then it's time to execute the "secret" fatality move, one of the big reasons for the uproar caused by previous versions of this game. These can be pretty bloody: Sub-Zero rips off his opponent's head (with spinal cord still attached!), Kano rips out the loser's heart and hoists it above his head, Johnny Cage knocks enemies' heads off as blood spurts skyward...well, you get the general idea.

Mortal Kombat uses digitized photos of live actors mixed with carefully drawn weapons to create a unique blend of reality and fantasy. Every hit produces a shower of blood, accompanied by realistic splatters, screams, and crunches. The animations of the special moves (not to be confused with the fatalities) are great. Sub-Zero's ice blast leaves his victims frozen even in mid-air, and Scorpion

harpoons his enemies before pulling them in for a brutal second attack. The characters are evenly matched, with none sporting a significant advantage over any of the others, so game play is nicely balanced.

Character control is another strong point of *Mortal Kombat*. Pulling off the various moves is a breeze with a standard two-button joystick, and just to make things even easier Probe has included full support of the four-button Gravis gamepad. Moves are performed much as in the arcade version, though slight changes have been made here and there to ensure easy play. There are also slight variations in game logic, but only arcade purists are likely to notice.

Great game, great graphics, great sound, great control — what more can I say? If you like fighting games, run.



Keep one finger on the block button when fighting Scorpion or you'll end up a human shish-kabob.

don't walk to your local dealer and snatch this baby up. There's really no better fighting game available for the IBM — period.

—Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

91%

HIGHS: Great fighting action, clever graphics, and near-perfect gameplay.

LOWS: A little bit too violent for some people — but, hey, it *is* a fighting game.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've been burned by watered-down IBM action games in the past, here's your chance to make up for it!

The Horde

Category: Strategy/Action
 Developer: Toys For Bob
 Publisher: Crystal Dynamics, 2460 Embarcadero Way, Palo Alto, CA
 \$49.95

REQUIRED
 386/33, 4 MB RAM, 6 MB
 hard-drive space, CD-ROM
 drive, DOS 3.1 or higher, VGA

WE RECOMMEND
 486DX/33MHz, 8 MB RAM,
 Double-speed CD-ROM drive,
 Sound Blaster/Pro/16, Mouse,
 Gamepad

M.S.R.P.: \$64.95

At first glance, *The Horde* looks a lot like *SimCity* set in the Middle Ages (*SimHamlet*, perhaps?). The comparison is almost inevitable: Playing from an oblique overhead perspective, you use your mouse to build walls and fences, dig pits, create rivers, and place a few cows, knights, saplings, and other items about the landscape. Why are you doing all this? To make the piece of ground you've been supplied with more attractive to settlers, again analogous to *SimCity*.

But once you've finished all that, you hear an eerie howl — and then comes the fun part. Using either a joystick, mouse, or keyboard (not!), you heft your "Grimthwacker" — a huge sword bestowed upon you by King Winthrop, who also gave you the plot of land you're trying to manage — and start chasing down a slew of nasty critters called Hordelings. The red stuff really flies as you slice and dice your way through these

Full-motion video can cripple a game as easily as it can make it, but in Crystal Dynamics' PC debut it only adds to the fun.



■ Hordelings are fast, hordelings are mean — and they sure make a mess when you whack 'em with your sword.

obnoxious beasties — but hey, who said being a landowner was easy?

Successfully protect your sleepy little village from the Horde and more settlers will move in, increasing the amount of money in your coffers. That means you can buy all sorts of goodies like bombs, teleportation crystals, archers, healing potions, and more to protect the villagers. Oh, yeah — you've got to cough up increasing amounts of taxes to Kronus Maelor, the King's High Chancellor, at the end of each year.

The story of how you came to acquire this horde-infested plot of land is depicted with full-motion video — and good full-motion video, too. You won't find Harrison Ford or Steven Segal listed in the credits, but the actors Crystal Dynamics and developers Toys For Bob *did* get for the game do a bang-up job. Both Kirk "Growing Pains" Cameron as Chauncey (that's you) and Michael Gregory (as the scheming Kronus Maelor) will get the most attention, but all the performances are above-average, even when pitted against TV.

But *The Horde* isn't a one-trick pony. Unlike many CD-ROM games that use full-motion video, *The Horde's* appeal doesn't lie solely in the use of the digitized video. In fact, you could play the entire game without ever seeing the video sequences, and it would still be a lot of fun. Does

that mean the video is gratuitous? Heck, no! The video is intended to keep game-play fresh, not make or break it, and it does that in spades.

Hardcore gamers may find the going a little repetitive — build some fences, slash some monsters, build some fences, then pay your taxes — but the challenge of balancing a budget while still protecting the innocent townfolk under your care gives the game a nice strategic element. And the arcade sequences, while nothing elaborate, help keep you on your toes.



■ There's blood on the snow as you risk life and limb to protect the farmers who've chosen to live in Sir Chauncey's neck of the woods.

The Horde may not be the deepest, most thought-provoking title on the market, but it's fun enough — and challenging enough — to keep most gamers happy for a long time.

—Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Good acting in the video clips, a great soundtrack, and fast paced game play.

LOWS: The interface is somewhat clunky, and game play can get a little repetitive.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a solid mix of strategy and fun that anyone can start enjoying as soon as they pop it in their CD-ROM drive.

80%



■ Kronus Maelor tries to put on a good face when he's around Chauncey, but there's no hiding his contempt for the serving-boy-turned-knight.

Unnecessary Roughness

Category: Sports simulation

Developer: Accolade

Publisher: Accolade, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose, CA 95129

REQUIRED

386/33 MHz; 4 MB RAM; 8 MB hard-drive space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND

486/50 MHz; 8 MB RAM; VESA Super VGA with Local Bus video card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

It takes more than a pretty face and good stats to play in the pros — as this game proves.

Unecessary Roughness grabs your attention like a highly touted college prospect — flashy and full of promise — but it disappoints like a Heisman winner who fails to deliver in the pros.

Roughness opens its game with a run-and-shoot attack that's sure to impress — gorgeous graphics, an NFL Players Association license play with real stats and digitized photos of key players, and Al Michaels handling the play-by-play (Accolade didn't pay for the NFL license, so teams are identified only by city).

I was raring to go after loading the game and taking the head-coaching job for Green Bay. Opening day saw Anaheim coming to my house to play; on our first possession, quarterback Brett Favre connected over the middle for an 80-yard touchdown strike. After the Rams punted, Favre found the mark again for another score. In fact, the Pack scored 70 unanswered points — running the same play every down. Favre finished with nearly 1,200 yards passing. The final: Green Bay 136, Anaheim 45.

I thought I'd try again, this time calling the plays and handling some of the on-field action. Controlling Minnesota — who barely

managed a touchdown per game last year — I squeezed past Chicago 135-36. Jim McMahon had a decent day, racking up 1300-plus yards passing.

For a die-hard NFL fan like myself, this was just too much. Sure, it might be fun to see to a quarterback break the 15,000-yard mark, but that pretty much rules out *Roughness* as a serious simulation, or even a challenging solo game.

Obviously, there are some flaws with the artificial intelligence in *UR*. In the Minnesota-Chicago game, for example, Chicago tried two fake field goals in a row (and a fake punt) in the first quarter, and fell for Minnesota's halfback option play three times in the first half. Down 128-56 with two minutes to play, Chicago was frantically calling time outs — realistic, huh?

That's not all. Hand-offs sometimes just don't happen; the quarterback (yours and the computer opponent's) winds up running an inordinate amount of the time; the 45-second play clock is completely mis-handled (even after an incomplete pass 15 yards downfield, Chicago was able to snap the ball on the next play with 35 seconds remaining); you can't call a time-out at the line of scrimmage; returning a kickoff past the 15-yard line is almost unheard of; and a defensive lineman (Richard Dent)

chased down a wide receiver (Anthony Carter).

The SVGA graphics are undeniably impressive. But the price of admission for this mode is pretty steep — a 486/50 with 8 megs of RAM and a local bus video card — and at any given point during a play, nearly half the players are just standing around, doing nothing. Players blocked to the ground simply lie there until the



Digitized photos accompany the text description following each play.

play ends, and it seems as though every incomplete pass looks the same (a gripe that applies equally to tackles, too).

Unnecessary Roughness gives you all the tools you need to run a computer football league, including a useful construction set for creating and modifying leagues, teams and rosters, as well as plays and playbooks. The problem is, though, that after what happened in



The VGA graphics obviously aren't as spectacular as SVGA, but the field is nicely textured — and you can play on a much slower machine.

my outings, how can I trust the results of the simulated games?

If Accolade can iron out these sundry flaws, *UR* could be a real winner, even with its steep hardware requirements. Until then, however, only players who couldn't care less about realism will get their money's worth out of this one.

—Lee Buchanan



One of the game's best features is the ability to customize up to nine different perspectives.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics, an NFLPA license, and easy-to-use tools for creating custom leagues.

64+

LOWS: The football action is so unrealistic that it all but cripples the game.

BOTTOM LINE: Unless you just don't care about realism, pass this one up. Although it looks great, it just ain't football.

Campaign II

Category: Military simulation
 Developer: Jonathan Griffiths
 Publisher: Empire Software, 4 Professional Drive Suite 123,
 Gaithersburg, MD 20879

REQUIRED
 286 with Expanded memo-
 ry manager, 2MB RAM
 (EMS); DOS 3.3 or later; VGA

WE RECOMMEND
 386DX/20Mhz;
 Hard-drive installation;
 Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P. \$69.99

File this one under "Sequels we didn't know anybody was waiting for." The original *Campaign* garnered pretty tepid reviews, yet here's a sequel, ostensibly covering every significant conflict since 1945. You can either give orders to, or take control of, 152 types of tanks, APCs and helicopters. There are six pre-loaded campaign scenarios, 14 training scenarios of graduated complexity, and an editing utility that lets you create your own campaigns.

In campaign mode, you issue orders on a regiment/battalion level; when your forces come within two kilometers of an enemy unit, you can go into battle mode and take control of any vehicle in any sub-unit you like. Or you can let the computer handle battles automatically, in which instance the game's main raison d'être all but completely disappears.

There's an enormous variety of hardware scooting and hovering in these battles, but driving, flying, or manning the guns of any of the vehicles feels pretty much the same, and can be summed up in a single word: frustrating. On a 486 machine, enemy

Campaign II lets you refight every conflict since WWII. Unfortunately, there are no victors this time around...

vehicles zip back and forth so fast you can hardly see them, never mind target them. Setting the game speed on Slow does nothing to alter this, and only seems to affect the rate at which the map screens redraw. So be ready to toggle that Turbo switch off.

You can set the battle-parameters for driving, gunnery, and strategy to either manual or automatic. But you'll need a few extra hands if you try to set everything on manual, because the battle sequences are almost entirely keyboard controlled. The mouse controls nothing but gun or rocket sights, and only when you set gunnery on automatic! In manual mode you get no gun sight at all, and must point the entire vehicle at the enemy tanks or choppers, correcting your aim by watching where each shot goes. The manual says you can control the turret gun with a joystick if you press the Shift key simultaneously. But that method didn't work for me.

Other problems: Why did an entire armored battalion simply vanish from the campaign map when I played the Kuwait scenario? Why won't the tank driver in automatic mode back up when he runs the tank into a tree? Why does the fool run into trees in the first place? Why does the screen go totally black for a second after you manually fire the main gun? Why are the maps so damned ugly? Why does every engagement set on automatic strategy end up



You'll be seeing a lot of this, because all the battle scenes look — and play — very much the same.



The static equipment screens are nicely rendered.

being a chaotic free-for-all of aimlessly milling vehicles?

Some players must have liked *Campaign*, or there wouldn't be a sequel. If you're among them, here's a sequel of the same. Like the original, this sequel tries and resoundingly fails to be all things to all war gamers. No matter how you look at it, *Campaign II* is a big disappointment.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fans of the original will probably like it.

LOWS: This game has weak graphics, a clunky interface, and very confusing arcade sequences. It's just not much fun.

BOTTOM LINE: It all adds up to frustration, with a capital F. Only the game designers (and, possibly their mothers) could love this gobbler.

35%



The map screens are, to put it charitably, unattractive.

Conspiracy

Category: Graphic adventure

Developer: Cryo

Publisher: Virgin, 18061 Fitch Avenue, Irvine CA 92714

REQUIRED:

386SX/20Mhz, CD-ROM drive, VGA

WE RECOMMEND:

386DX/33Mhz, Sound Blaster Pro (required for digital speech)

M.S.R.P., \$74.99

Like the old Soviet Union itself, this game is an odd mix of grandiose visions and an antiquated infrastructure.

A year or so ago, I watched a documentary on the Soviet space program. It recounted all the remarkable success the Soviets achieved in space, but the one image that stuck with me was of the cosmonauts on their space station, turning huge hand cranks to perform ship functions we'd normally see handled by a computer. It was as though the Soviets had managed to reach space in a '73 Cutlass Supreme — and the dichotomy between low- and high-tech reminds me a lot of *Conspiracy*. Set in the first days of the Soviet Union's eventual collapse, it combines some of the best full-screen, full-motion video I've seen with a game engine that looks like it was designed by a committee of Soviet engineers.

Conspiracy's biggest sin is that it's really not a new game at all. It's just a re-packaging of an old title, *KGB*, released in Europe a couple of years ago. Despite the CD-ROM release and addition of video to flesh the product out, *Conspiracy* is identical to *KGB* in every way — and as a result, it looks like what it is, an



Talking to the other characters can be a lot of fun. You'll meet some very interesting people.

old game dressed up in new clothes. *Conspiracy* casts you as a young go-getter in the KGB, newly assigned to investigate possible bureau corruption. Your father (played by Donald Sutherland) was killed by a car bomb, and now appears to you from time to time to help you in your new career. In effect, Sutherland becomes a full-motion help screen, and you can click on his face icon any time you need some advice.

While Sutherland's performance and the technology that brings it to life are impressive, *Conspiracy* starts to unravel once the game itself begins. Every scene is



Uh-oh. You're in the wrong place at the wrong time — and that could cost you the game.

just a static picture — and not a very good one at that. There's absolutely no animation: Even when a character enters the scene, he or she just materializes as though they'd been beamed down from a starship.

Unlike most graphic adventures nowadays, this one's almost completely linear. Your success depends on going to each location in the right order, saying the right things to the right people at the right time, and so on. It gets pretty frustrating, because even making it through the first sequence of events can be impossible if you leave an item behind, or say the wrong thing. And how do you know you've screwed up, and that any further progress is

Using a technique that looks like one of those stadium-sized TV's, *Conspiracy* fills the screen with good-quality video.

impossible? Donald tells you, shaking his head and advising you to start the game over. So very quickly, the entire experience becomes a matter of performing an action, checking with Donald to see if you're still in the race, and saving the game before proceeding.

Then there's the problem of tone. I could never quite tell how I was supposed to take *Conspiracy*, since the good video stuff was so serious, while the game itself was so tongue-in-cheek. And the soundtrack, which often switches from an ominous dirge to an up-tempo ditty in the middle of a scene, only confuses the issue.

Despite all these problems, though, I was still playing the game even after several hours of frustrating dead-ends. Maybe, on some subconscious level, I was just eager to please Sutherland and hear him praise my diligence. I really don't know why, but I kind of grew to like the game. I couldn't in all honesty recommend it to anyone who doesn't have plenty of disposable income, but it's worth a look for novelty's sake.

— Matthew A. Firme

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: The video clips, and Donald Sutherland's fine performance, really stand out.

58%

LOWS: Aside from the new high-tech shell, this is a very basic game, with a linear plot and confusing tone.

BOTTOM LINE: A case of new clothes for an old game — and not a very good one at that.

Alien Breed

Category: Arcade
 Developer: Team 17
 Publisher: Microleague, University Office Plaza, 201 Bellevue Building,
 Newark DE 19702

REQUIRED
 286, 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or
 later; 2.5 MB hard-drive
 space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND
 386SX/16 MHz; Sound
 Blaster; Joystick or
 gamepad

M.S.R.P.: \$29.95

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Before I jumped into PC gaming, I used to do a Sega Genesis magazine. And although I've been working with PC games for some time, *Alien Breed* reminded me how much fun a good video-game can be. It's a good, solid, video-game style shoot-em-up — and there are times when that's just the kind of game you're looking for.

Playing in either one- or two-player mode, your task is to destroy a space station infested with Giger-esque aliens. As you battle your way through the station's 18 levels, you pick up ammo, first-aid kits, and money left by the station's previous inhabitants. With the cash you collect, you can tap into the station's computer system

and buy better weapons, ammo, and other good stuff. The computer also provides a map for each level — very handy, as the maze-like layout of the station can get pretty confusing.

You view the action from an overhead perspective that doesn't offer much in the way of graphic razzle-dazzle — though pleasant enough to look at, it's not terribly inspiring. But all the animations are very smooth, and the game-screen scrolls seamlessly as you move through the station.

The game's sound effects, on the other hand, are rather disappointing. The music is okay, but the gun blasts, explosions, and gurgling roar of the aliens are all shallow and tinny, lessening the game's overall impact. And if you're using a Pro



■ The bottom line: shoot the aliens before they can kill you, then find a way out of there!



■ In the later levels, there are more dangers to worry about than just the aliens. This pit of acid is a good example.

Audio Spectrum, expect to find some sound card problems.

Alien Breed delivers just what it sets out to deliver: arcade action. It won't blow you away, and it's not the kind of game you'll play addictively for weeks on end. In truth, it could be better than it is. But it's still a solid shooter, and plenty of high-octane fun.

—Matthew A. Firme

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** **PCG**

HIGHS: Delivers plenty of fun.

LOWS: Not much variety involved.

BOTTOM LINE:
 A good, solid shooter, lacking in razzle-dazzle but full of solid, no-brain game play.

75%

Hannibal

Category: Military strategy
 Developer: Starbyte
 Publisher: Microleague, University Office Plaza, Bellevue Building
 Suite 201, 262 Chapman Road, Newark DE 19702

REQUIRED
 286/16MHz; 3.5" high
 density drive; 640K RAM;
 DOS 3.3 or later; VGA

WE RECOMMEND
 386/16MHz; Supported
 sound card

M.S.R.P.: \$49.95

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This is the first Punic Wars simulation in recent history — maybe ever, come to think of it. Developed by the German company Starbyte, *Hannibal* is a handsome, thoughtful, relatively detailed strategic simulation. You play as Hannibal, battling against the computer as you relive some of the most exciting confrontations in military history.

Using beautifully detailed maps of the Roman and Carthaginian Empires, you must make the same kinds of decisions as the real Hannibal. Success is based on patient attention to details, such as keeping your troops fed and motivated; securing your line of communications

through negotiation or siege; increasing your forces as you draw closer to Italy proper; securing enough boats to outflank the Romans; and knowing when to split your forces and when to rejoin them.

On this strategic level, *Hannibal* is superb. It compels you to actually think like a general had to think in the days before radio and mechanization. The overall simulation plays just fine — until you actually run into a Roman army, at which point it falls over a cliff.

Despite the manual's detailed diagrams of Carthaginian tactics, and despite the fact that Hannibal was a lethal tactician, there are *no animated battle screens*. Once you decide to commit to a battle, you must choose from a list of only six



■ The economic screen — be sure to keep your armies properly funded. Victory is not cheap!



■ Strategically, Hannibal is very well conceived; tactically, it falls flat.

formations, and you don't even get to see the terrain where your troops will fight! The computer just compares the numbers, and all you see are the final casualty totals — very dull.

If there had been a tactical component as well-designed as the strategic elements, *Hannibal* would earn a field marshal's baton. What we have here, though, is only half of a great game. Too bad.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** **PCG**

HIGHS: Good strategic elements.

LOWS: No real tactical component.

BOTTOM LINE:
 Beautifully detailed graphics, but *Hannibal* lacks the depth to make it great.

65%

The C.H.A.O.S. Continuum

Category: Multimedia adventure
Developer: Dash Digital
Publisher: Creative Multimedia, 514 NW 11th Ave. Suite 203, Portland OR 97209

Required:
486SX/25 MHz; CD-ROM drive; Windows 3.1; 8MB RAM; 1MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Sound card

Recommended:
486DX2/50 MHz; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Windows video accelerator card

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

It's man against machine in Creative Multimedia's new *C.H.A.O.S. Continuum*, a sci-fi battle to the finish. Navigating your small research probe through the beautifully rendered corridors of the Titan colony, you'll search through computers and fight off security drones in a last-ditch effort to destroy C.H.A.O.S., an over-sized abacus who's seen *2001: A Space Odyssey* one too many times.

Though *C.H.A.O.S. Continuum* is one of the most graphically striking titles I've ever seen, there's just no joy in playing the game. Moving around the station is agonizingly slow, but that's really more a design problem than one of system speed. Even on a 486/66MHz with a double-speed CD-ROM,

the probe moves through the halls at a snail's pace, because each step moves you forward only two or three paces at a time. You can never just scoot to your destination: it's always just one step at a time.

Most of the puzzles I faced were of the old "Simon" variety, with the colony's computers challenging you to repeat sound and light patterns on a numeric keypad. And getting hold of the maps and codes you need requires a lot of searching through the colony's computer files, where you'll find yourself wading through tons of extraneous information on everything from basic atomic theory to first-year astronomy. After reading less than after lesson, you begin to wonder if *C.H.A.O.S. Continuum* is meant to be a game or a high-school prep course. Even with its terrific graphics, the game play quickly becomes tedious as you wander from computer terminal to computer terminal.

C.H.A.O.S. Continuum's sound track and animated interlude scenes are very impressive, though, and the main graphics create a world that's large, intriguing, and



Packed with screens like this one, C.H.A.O.S. seems to walk the line between being educational and entertaining.

You'll use the download arm to interface with the many (and I do mean many) research computers in the colony complex.

distinctive. It would be a great title to show off your computer to friends — but if you're looking for a game that's going to keep you coming back for more, this one just ain't it.

—Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** **PCG**

HIGHS: Very impressive graphics and sound.

LOWS: Pretty short on actual game play.

BOTTOM LINE: Like many CD-ROM games, it looks great. But you'll have to decide if that's enough.

67%

Ghenghis Khan II: Clan of the Gray Wolf

Category: Historic simulation
Developer: Hoi
Publisher: Hoi, One Bay Plaza, Suite 540, 1350 Bayshore Highway, Burlingame CA 94010

REQUIRED
286; 640K RAM; 4 MB hard-drive space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16; Sound Blaster or compatible sound card; Mouse

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Koei continues to upgrade its historical strategy games, so far with very commendable results. The original *Ghenghis Khan* simply took the basic Koei engine used in most of its other titles and slapped it onto 12th-Century Eurasia. Besides Temujin of the Mongols, you could opt to play as Charlemagne or Alexius of Constantinople, among others. But regardless of the character you chose, the game still played very much like its predecessors.

Ghenghis Khan II,



The main orders screen. This is where you set your policies in motion.

however, is "tyrant-specific" in that it simulates everything from the point of view of the Mongol hordes and their leaders. There are four scenarios, beginning with the Conquest of Mongolia in 1184 A.D., and topping out with an open-ended World Conquest scenario that automatically kicks in when once you've unified Mongolia.

The flow of the game is similar to other Koei simulations: domestic development and economic policies are promulgated, followed by diplomatic actions, personnel-related actions, and finally military affairs. Otherwise, the interface has been thoroughly redesigned. The sequence of actions, and their consequences, now seems more supple and realistic.

As the Mongol empire expands, it encounters other very different cultures with realistically different soldiery and technology. Likewise, variations in climate and geography produce plausibly varied economic models. Overall, this sequel is more involving and more detailed than the



Koei's new-style graphics have a very pleasing, cinematic look.

original, and it plays differently enough to be considered a new game.

The graphics in *Khan II* — lush, fine-grained, cinematic views of battlefields and fortresses — are a dramatic improvement over Koei's earlier attempts, and the documentation no longer reads like

a crude translation.

Indeed, both the manual and the supporting historical material are first-rate. It's nice to see this company waking up from a long period of dormancy and once again publishing handsome, intelligent simulations.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT** **PCG**

HIGHS: A detailed sim with sweep, drama, and depth.

LOWS: Might be too complex for some.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the best Koei titles in some time. If you like historical sims, get this one!

87%

Jurassic Park

Category: Arcade action
 Developer: Ocean
 Publisher: Ocean, 1055 O Toole Ave., San Jose, CA 95131

REQUIRED
 386DX/25MHz, 2MB RAM;
 DOS 5.0 or later; 9 MB
 hard-drive space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND
 486DX/33MHz, Sound
 Blaster or compatible
 sound card; Joystick

M.S.R.P.: \$49.95

You know the story: mad scientist creates experiment, experiment escapes, experiment menaces society. But in Ocean's new arcade-action title *Jurassic Park*, the experiments are huge dinosaurs with sharp teeth and sharp minds. As famous paleontologist Dr. Grant, it's up to you to rescue two lost children and help them escape from the worst idea in these parks since the Piranha Petting Zoo.

Jurassic Park is really two games in one. While outside of the park's buildings, you view Dr. Grant from overhead as he tries to grab weapons, medical supplies, and of course the children, and weave his way out of the park. When you enter a building, though, the game shifts to a

first-person, *Wolfenstein 3D*-like perspective. You'll enter the bunkers and tunnels of the complex and fight off vicious raptors in face-to-face action.

Sounds good, but the problem is that there's nothing new or exciting here to draw you in. The exterior views look and play like any one of a hundred video games, complete with herds of dinosaur foes that'll have you firing off more gunshots in the first three minutes of play than were fired in the entire film it's based on. The interior views are often choppy, with action that can be difficult to follow at best. And the sound and music are pretty standard fare, with few of the exciting digitized effects you'd expect.

So while *Jurassic Park* isn't bad, it just doesn't leave you satisfied. Com-



If you need more firepower than your taser provides, switch to the machine gun.



When you're slugging it out with a T-Rex, you don't have a lot of room for error!

mitted video-game players and fans of the movie may find some entertainment here, although game play quickly becomes mindless and repetitive. Those looking for thoughtful arcade action or a detailed strategy challenge are likely to be disappointed.

—Trent C. Ward

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Solid graphics and two types of game play.

LOWS: The action quickly becomes repetitive.

BOTTOM LINE: There are much better action games out there.

54%

Archon Ultra

Category: Strategy-action
 Developer: Free Fall Associates
 Publisher:SSI, 675 Alhambra Avenue Suite 201 Sunnysvale, California 94086

REQUIRED:
 386SX/16 MHz, 2 MB RAM; 4.5
 MB hard-drive space; VGA

WE RECOMMEND:
 386DX/25 MHz; Sound
 Blaster/Pro/16 or Gravis
 Ultrasound; Joystick or
 gamepad

M.S.R.P.: \$59.95

Take the classic game of chess, replace the traditional pieces with a cast of fantasy characters, toss in arcade sequences to determine the outcome of each "capture," and you've got a pretty good idea of what *Archon Ultra* is about.

The action takes place on a 9 x 9 board, with the forces of light (knights, archers, valkyries, unicorns, etc.) squaring off against their dark-side counterparts (goblins, banshees, manticores, and a shapeshifter, to name a few). Your goal: to control five "power points," or eliminate all the enemy forces. In chess, attacking pieces always win; move onto a square occupied by the enemy in *Archon Ultra*, and the screen switches to an oblique perspective for a fast-

paced arcade sequence (there's an option to let the computer do your fighting, however). Each piece has either two methods of attack, or an attack move and a defensive maneuver.

The wizard (light) and sorcerer (dark) are both magic users, and a quick glimpse at their spells—Revive, Heal, Summon Elemental, Teleport, Imprison, and Shift Time—reveals how crucial these two pieces are. The Shift Time spell deserves special mention. Because some squares contain change between dark and light, and because a piece's strength is affected by the color square it occupies, the Shift Time spell can really affect



The unicorn can leap into the air at the last minute to avoid danger.

the game. Not only do you need to make sure your pieces are on the most advantageous squares; you've also got to keep in mind how long those squares will be beneficial, and plan your movement accordingly.

Archon Ultra is at its best when you're playing against a human opponent (modern play is included), though I found the computer to be a fairly challenging foe even on the normal difficulty level. The graphics are nothing special, and the animation during the arcade sequences is a bit clunky—but not to the point of seriously hampering game play.

You won't play *Archon Ultra* for hours on end, day after day, but it's the sort of game you'll come back to months after you've bought it.

—Stephen Poole



The knight is one of your weakest pieces, but moving to a power point rejuvenates him after he takes damage.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Modern play; strategically challenging.

LOWS: Very picky about sound cards, and mouse drivers.

BOTTOM LINE: The combination of strategy and arcade sequences give *Archon Ultra* great replay value.

76%

THE GRANDEST FLEET



Quantum Quality Productions, Inc.

Only one fleet will be left afloat in this thrilling masterpiece from QQP. Experience the grueling campaigns, the agony of defeat and the exhilaration of VICTORY!!!! Develop cultural resources and manage the growth of your population. Allocate natural resources to build missile sites, radar stations, shipbuilding facilities and SUPERSHIPS. It is up to you to destroy your nemesis... or end up in Davy Jones' Locker.

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Product Information Number 104

REVIEW ROUNDUP

by Joe Novicki

Sometimes games come to us after we've already filled our review pages. So, in our continuing effort to bring you the facts on every title we can, we've included this Review Roundup — several quick, but thorough, looks at games we just didn't have the space to cover elsewhere.

Hollywood Mogul

Devuono Devuono Games — call 1-800-350-5550

Have you ever wondered what it'd be like to run your own motion picture studio? If so, you might be interested in this strategy simulation by Devuono Devuono Games. In *Hollywood Mogul* you're given a studio and a hefty operating budget, then you begin developing films from the ground up. When setting the budget for a film, you've got consider a host of expenses — from the hiring of "creatives" (actors, producers, directors and writers) to managing advertising and special effects costs. And the artistic decisions are just as demanding: Do you use big-name actors, or try your luck with an unknown? Should you adapt a screenplay, or create your own storyline? And how much nudity and violence should your film contain?

All your wheeling and dealing comes to fruition on opening night at the Bijou; unfortunately, all you see is a static shot of a theater crowd watching the opening credits before you're told how much the pic grossed. Which brings up another point: Players used to state-of-the-art gaming will be disappointed to find there's no animation anywhere in the game (since you're making movies, even a generic film animation would be nice). Game play is a matter of making a series of selections on one screen, moving to opening night, and crossing your fingers. *Hollywood Mogul* isn't much to look at, but cinema buffs might enjoy the challenge, and it doesn't take long to play.

FINAL VERDICT

50%

PCG

Oxyd Magnum

Dongleware, P.O. Box 391829, Cambridge MA 02139

This enjoyable high-tech marble maze game from Dongleware will test both your coordination and your intellect. In each maze you guide one or more marbles, with a goal of finding and matching pairs of oxyds (colored tiles). Marble movement is affected by terrain, magnetism, and a variety of other clever landscape features. Every tenth maze is called a meditation landscape, where you try to roll marbles into pockets — sort of like in those hand-held ball-bearing puzzles. Finding hammers, dynamite, and other tools as you roll, hop, and smash around is often vital to your success. High-res



The labyrinths in *Oxyd Magnum* can span several screens.

graphics and 100 unique mazes make for hours and hours of fun puzzle solving.

FINAL VERDICT

83%

PCG

Hired Guns

Psygnosis, 675 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge MA 02139

Hired Guns by Psygnosis is a futuristic RPG/shoot 'em up that can accommodate up to four human players. As a hired gun, mercenary missions have become your only way to earn money and stay a step ahead of The Man. Before each mission, you select a team of four from twelve gang members, each with specialized skills. The screen is split into quadrants, with each section displaying the first-person perspective for each team member.

Hired Guns' main mission takes place on the planet of Graveyard, though there are many training missions you can undertake to sharpen your skills before heading there. And as any good hired gun would do, you'll try to blast your way to success by using the weapons, equipment, and hints you find along the way.



Hired Guns can accommodate up to four human players, thanks to this four-way screen.

The stepped animation feels primitive compared to *Doom* and the Ultima Underworld games, but works fine. *Hired Guns* doesn't boast the most unique of premises, but for mindless mayhem this ain't too bad. And for some light reading, there's a short story explaining how you became a mercenary.

FINAL VERDICT

72%

PCG

Arctic Baron

ReadySoft, 30 Wertheim Ct., Suite 2, Richmond Hill Ontario Canada L4B 1B9

This odd but fun resource-management game comes from French publisher Silaris via ReadySoft. In it, you control a "pirate" train in an always-wintery, sun-never-shines, scientific-experiment-gone-wrong future. Yep, thanks to some nutty researcher who made a big mistake, all travel in the future is either by train or mammoth, as coal has become the main source of energy and money.

The objective is to make your train powerful enough to take on the Viking Union, which controls the rail system and is intentionally keeping the world in perpetual

Trading towns are a welcome sight in *Arctic Baron*



winter to protect its monopoly. You'll try to accomplish this through barter and trade in the friendly towns along the rail system. Spotting and trapping herds of mammoths and enslaving mole-men boosts your ability to barter — provided you've purchased sufficient storage cars for your "goods." To restore the sun and smash the Union, you must fight the clock as well as the Union's battle trains before the perpetual winter becomes irreversible.

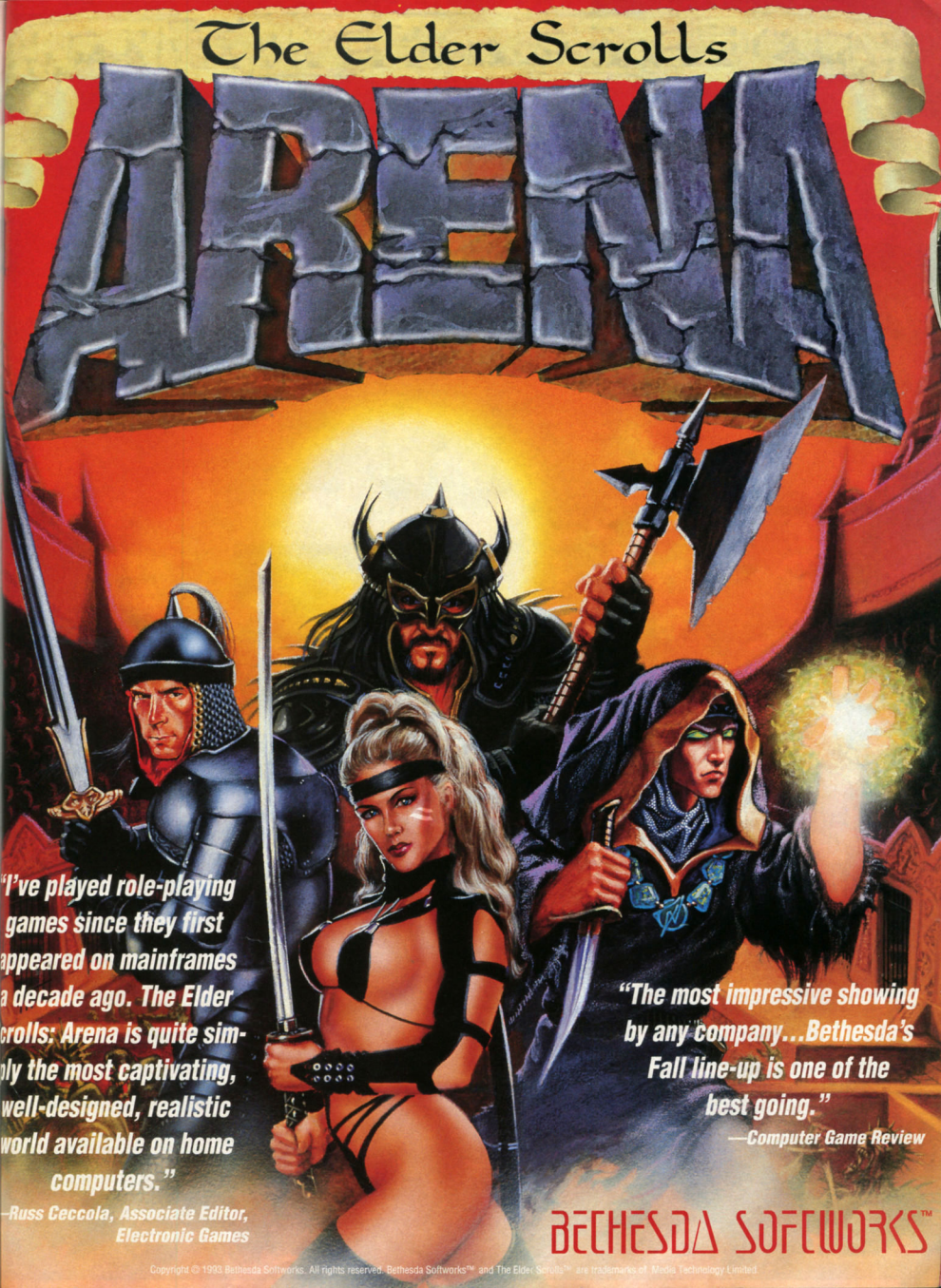
FINAL VERDICT

76%

PCG

The Elder Scrolls

ARENA



"I've played role-playing games since they first appeared on mainframes a decade ago. The Elder Scrolls: Arena is quite simply the most captivating, well-designed, realistic world available on home computers."

—Russ Ceccola, Associate Editor, Electronic Games

"The most impressive showing by any company...Bethesda's Fall line-up is one of the best going."

—Computer Game Review

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS™

INTERPLAY LEADS THE CD-ROM REVOLUTION

Enhanced CD-ROM.

The words often carry connotations of shovelware — usually old disk products, put out on CD-ROM merely to fill an exploding market. But a growing number of publishers, initially wary of CD-ROM, now realize that the little silver discs are the future of computer gaming. And so they're stepping up their CD-ROM releases, and doing a lot more than just

shoveling old product into a new box.

We've seen a spate of enhanced CD-ROM products lately, most of them much stronger than early enhanced CDs. Leading the pack is Interplay's *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary CD-ROM*, featuring the entire cast of the original series. That's right, Interplay got William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelly, Nichelle Nichols, James Doohan, Walter Koenig, and George Takei — along with a sizeable cast of supporting actors — to sit down and do voice-overs for *all* the dialog. It's very well done, though the cast seems a bit tired and jaded at times. Still, there are Trekkers out there who will buy CD-ROM drives just to play this game.

Though it doesn't have the star power of *Star Trek*, *SimCity CD-ROM* (also from Interplay) does offer a healthy selection of oddball video clips. A screaming blond reporter announces major

disasters (complete with a clip of a cheesy Toho monster trashing a city), while the police commissioner, fire chief, utilities commissioner, and transportation captain pop in now and then to offer comments on the city. As mayor, you also get occasional "sneak peeks" into the lives of your citizens, everything from people showering to couples arguing. Even better than the 45 minutes of video is the upgrade to Super-VGA graphics, which make this classic look better than ever.

Like *SimCity*, *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space CD-ROM* (Interplay) makes extensive use of video,

Alexander Nevsky, running larger and clearer than in the original disk-based game. A 20-minute narrated tutorial rounds the package out nicely.

Alone in the Dark (I•Motion) is not quite so successful on CD-ROM, if only because it isn't a particularly dialog-intensive



SimCity CD-ROM — oddball video clips and "sneak peeks" add fun to the mix.

game. The narration that is there isn't particularly appropriate, with the detective Edward Carnby sounding like a tired, liquored-up old gumshoe... and not a very convincing one at that. A short gamelet called *Jack in the Dark*, released as a stand-alone title last Christmas, is also included. You play a little girl trapped in an evil toy store by a malignant Jack-in-the-Box. Instead of blasting away with shotguns, you use different toys to free Santa Claus from Jack. It's probably a bit too cutesy for the *Alone in the Dark* crowd (what — no shotgun?), but it's nice to get an extra game thrown in with an enhanced CD-ROM.

T. Liam McDonald



including news clips to place the space race in historical context. Video clips of various launches (both successful and unsuccessful) and other space footage add much to game play. Interplay did an even more impressive enhancement job on *Castles II CD-ROM*, which includes an online castle reference featuring lots of footage from

a BBC castle documentary. There's also a tour of 10 different historical castles, with photos, paintings, and spoken text. All plot dialog is spoken, and battle sequences are illustrated by clips from the black-and-white features *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and

Tom McDonald is no stranger to PC games — he's been playing them for over seven years, during which he's written nearly 100 game reviews. Here, in Extended Play, he looks at what's new for old games.



SimCity CD — still fun, but *SimCity 2000* makes cityscapes look kinda flat.



Castles II CD-ROM — new video, same game.

The narration in Westwood Studio's *Lands of Lore* fares better than that in *Alone in the Dark*, due to a solid cast led by Patrick Stewart (Captain Jean-Luc Picard on "Star Trek: The Next Generation"). Stewart lends his prodigious Shakespearean vocal talents to the role of King Richard, with a capable band of supporting actors fleshing out the other roles. Also included is "Lore of the Lands," a history of the Lands, also narrated by Stewart.



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 THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1957 HAS PASSED.

Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space — video used to indicate important points in the space race also the game in historical context.

With so many CDs now available, consumers are demanding more from CD-ROM enhancements than ever. Fortunately, the publishers are, in most cases, delivering solidly. And more and more, we'll be seeing games released to CD-ROM first, with "de-enhanced" floppy versions to follow.

•**Arena: The Elder Scrolls v. 1.02:** People experiencing problem with ARUPD3 should re-install ARUPD2. Also available is v. 1.03, which contains a fix for the Oghma Infinium artifact quest. Also available is a fix for the Quadrant Jerk. This is a patch for the "quadrant jerk bug" that users are experiencing on faster PCs. With it, players can use the

F3 character damage is displayed, cycling through red crosshatch, no change, or heavy rocking.



Buzz Aldrin: New features include video clips of various rocket launches.

•**Fables & Fiends: The Legend of Kyrandia v. 1.3:** Addresses lockups and corrects some of the phrasing used by the characters.

Bug Patches
 (Contact game publishers for info on bug patch availability.)

- Comanche: Maximum Overkill:** Fixes problems with Pentium processors, and the Diamond Stealth Pro video card.
- CyberRace v. 1.22:** This is for those who have problems allocating enough base memory for the game, or using the joystick. Disk-based version only.
- Dark Side of Xeen:** Town Portal Fix: Solves the crashing problem with the items of Town Portal.

- Fables & Fiends: The Hand of Fate:** Corrects lockups on Pentiums and very fast 486s.
- Gabriel Knight:** Included in this patch are an updated version of the DOS extender, as well as other corrections designed to eliminate problems with sound cards under certain system configurations. Save and restore problems should also be fixed, as should lockups when exiting interrogation, as well as a number of the game's other potential conversation problems.

•**Gabriel Knight CD:** Fixes all known problems, and speeds up the restoring of saved games. Warning—This will invalidate your prior saved games!

•**Lands of Lore CD-ROM:** Allows the use of a Wave-blastor/Sound Blaster 16 combo, and fixes lockups on fast machines.

•**Lands of Lore v. 1.22:** This patch fixes various problems, including the inability to retrieve Dawn's key, and lockups on fast machines.

•**Metal and Lace v. 1.42A:** Adds EASY and HARD

"A growing number of software publishers now realize that the little silver discs are the future of computer gaming."

modes to the games, and fixes a few minor bugs.

- Mortal Kombat:** Improves sound card support, fixes some crashes, requires less conventional memory, and adds local bus mode.
- Nomad:** A patch is available to fix the trade inventory bug.
- Pacific War v. 1.4:** Gary Grigsby's latest tweak patch includes some new bombs and torpedoes, and changes the effectiveness of some 16" naval shells. Not an official SSI patch!
- Police Quest 4:** Allows more time to handcuff Walker in the disk-based version.
- Quest for Glory: Shadows of Darkness:** Fixes the problem of the player not receiving the fake note from Katrina. An Import Character Fix is also available, allowing the game

to accept character files which may have been corrupted when saved by QFG I and II. If any stats are missing they can be manually replaced. Still another patch eliminates memory allocation errors and various lockups that may have been encountered during game play. Please note: Previously saved games will not work with the patched version!

- Real Weather Pilot:** A file is available to update users of CompuServe, as well as to fix aircraft ID and installation.
- TFX:** There are two patches for the CD version of TFX. The first fixes the "unexpected interrupt" error message due to hardware conflicts, and most other unexplained crashes. This patch is necessary to load patch v. 2.0.

which adds many new features and bug fixes.

- The 7th Guest:** A new set of files containing Trilobyte's definitive support document, the latest T7G executable file (V.EXE version 1.31), two utility programs, and some batch files to simplify running the game.
- War in Russia, v. 1.1:** This one does it all: 1) Computer no longer depletes formations in human controlled HQ's; 2) Soviet infantry & Shock units fixed to plot only two moves; 3) A remove HQ function has been added (Shift R); 4) Number of Operational points an HQ can gain has been reduced 25%; 5) Wear and tear on aircraft has been increased by 10%; 6) Maximum readiness gained in hex reduced to 5 times during special supply. Not an official SSI patch!



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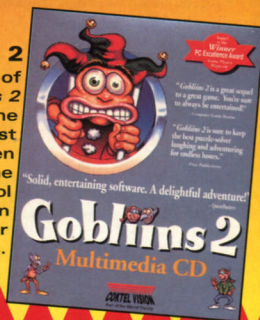
has his own special abilities, and it's up to you to figure out how to use them.

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Gobliins 2

The best kind of sequel, *Gobliins 2* brings you all the fun of the first game — and then some. This time out, you'll control two little imps in even tougher puzzles.



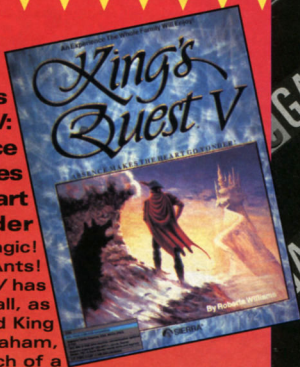
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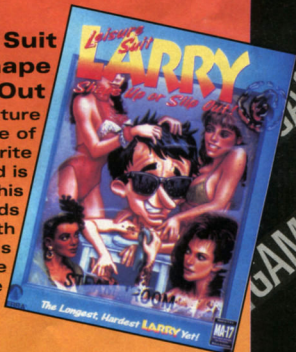
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Product Information Number 220

THE RACE FOR HARD-DRIVE SPACE

It wasn't much more than a year ago that my shiny new 486DX33 system — with 4 megs of RAM, 210 MB hard drive, Sound Blaster Pro and single speed CD-ROM drive — was the envy of colleagues and friends alike. I bought a fistful of flight sims (*Falcon 3.0*, *Aces of the Pacific*, *Comanche*, *Wing Commander I & II*, to name a few), and each one installed with maximum speed and

detail settings as defaults. Before long I had dozens of games to choose from, all just a batch file away. Then came Origin's *Strike Commander*...

Not only did *Strike Commander* eat up 41 megs of precious hard drive space (with the Speech Pack and saved games), but it also had the nerve to set speed and detail to less than the maximum I'd come to expect (I *knew* I should have gotten a 66). But I was fortunate: my plain vanilla PC clone ran *Strike Commander* perfectly, with none of the exasperating problems experienced by so many other gamers.

Still, 41 megabytes made things a little uncomfortable for the other residents of my C drive. So I started searching



Fleet Defender: New kid on the C Drive.

through the DOS, Windows and SBPRO directories for any files that weren't essential to the system. The dubious Dr. Sbaisto, that stupid talking parrot, and even Ami Pro (my word processor) were all sacrificed on the altar of Fatware.

Each new review assignment, however, posed a new question (and a new evaluation

criterion as well) — do I like the game enough to keep it on the hard drive? Some games are obvious — I can't wait to rid the drive of their foul presence (no names, please).

Others are more of a dilemma; how do you choose between *Red Baron* and *Knights of the Sky*, *Jump Jet* and *Super-VGA Harrier*, *Air Duel* and *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, or *World Circuit* and *IndyCar Racing*?

It's painful having to delete a game that you still enjoy playing, but how else do you make room for cool new stuff? Some people swear by DoubleSpace. I don't trust it (or any other compression scam) — it eats up executable

Ultimately, though, the bottom line is cold and ruthless: which games can I just not live without? It's never an easy decision, but as the number of "bytes free" drops to double digits, the surgery is no longer elective — if I don't operate the patient will die.

Lost on the table last year were *Thunderhawk*, *Jetfighter II*, *Heroes of the 357th*, *A-10 Tank Killer*, *Air Duel*, *Stunt Island* and *Epic*. Meanwhile, floppy-only games



IndyCar Racing: Best racing sim ever!

with a lease on life are *X-Wing*, *Falcon 3.0*, *Aces of the Pacific*, *Fleet Defender*, *IndyCar Racing*, *Doom*, *Pinball Fantasies*, and the venerable *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*.

Scott Wolf

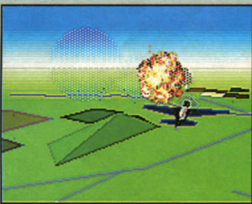


memory and generally behaves like an unwelcome house-guest, snoring on the couch. No, for me the answer was Hard Drive Digital Triage (HDDT).

At its simplest level, HDDT eliminates any game I haven't played in the last six months, regardless of its nostalgia quotient. CD-ROM upgrades are also an easy out, and since I still have my Amiga, any PC game that I have a decent Amiga version of also gets the boot.

The next deciding factor is copy protection: exactly how inconvenient and irritating is it? I frequently find myself taking a pass on *IndyCar*, *Terminator: Rampage* and almost every non-CD-ROM MicroProse game simply because I'm too lazy to look up some dopey word in the manual. The worst offenders — those requiring code wheels or hard-to-read charts — are dismissed without a second thought.

Scott Wolf's been playing and reviewing coin-op and PC games for more years (16) than he cares to remember. An anti-social recluse, Scott raises wolves, collects vintage guitars, and still kicks himself for selling that '78 Harley.



Chuck Yeager's Air Combat: How long will I keep playing this game?

A happy ending

Last month I upgraded my system, adding 4 more megs of RAM, a doublespeed CD-ROM drive, and a game-dedicated 520 MB hard drive. I've gone nuts reinstalling every flight sim and Amiga-redundant game with room to spare, but I know that this newfound freedom will be short lived. Already, several new CD-ROM titles require more than 10 MB on the hard drive, and it's only going to get worse. The price of progress, I'm afraid.

But in the mean time, that stupid talking parrot is back, and Dr. Sbaisto is once again on call.

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Product Information Number 102

EASY DOES IT!

ommentous doings: A new magazine, a new look, and a new format for the ol' Desktop General! We hope that these factors will also translate into new readers — preferably — large

numbers. Going on the supposition that this may be the first exposure some of you have had to war games, I thought it might be appropriate to focus on some of the easy-to-play programs that can ignite a nascent interest in the genre, games that don't force the player to wade through 200-page manuals crammed with arcane logistical formulae just to get up and fighting.

So welcome, new readers, to the world of war games. Don't be afraid of this genre's only partly deserved reputation for complexity, because there are good war games out there for everyone. And whether you're playing a quick game of *Risk* or investing six months in a campaign scenario for *Pacific War*, we're all looking for the same war-gaming pleasures:

- The excitement of tinkering with history. If you know the Japanese are going to attack Pearl Harbor, how do you take advantage of that knowledge?
- Competition with history's great generals. You know where Lee screwed up at Gettysburg, or the mistakes Hitler made on the Russian Front, but are you soldier enough to do better?
- Megalomania. Be honest, now: There's a profound ego-boost involved in having life-and-death authority over an entire army, navy, and air force. And there's a profound security in the knowledge that your mistakes bear no cost in terms of actual bloodshed.

Anyone can jump in and enjoy war-gaming. The price of admission need not be

steep, either in terms of money or time invested. Here, then, is General Trotter's recommended list of easy-to-play, entry-level war games and military simulations (with a couple flight-sims thrown in for good measure). The prices given are approximate, based on retailers and mail-order companies in my area. Many of the games have been out for a few years, and are now selling for less than their original MSRPs. So poke around — depending on where you live, you might find higher or lower prices. And most of the time, mail order prices are lower than those in retail stores.

William R. Trotter



EMPIRE DELUXE (New World Computing; \$49.95 - \$59.95) Okay, so this is a full-price game, but it's the best generic war game on the market and has made every Hall of Fame list since the first version came out in 1987. The basic game is no harder to learn than *Risk*, and the advanced, design-your-own-world campaigns maintain their challenge for many years.

PATTON STRIKES BACK (Broderbund; \$12.95 - \$15.95) Intentionally designed as an entry-level war game, this *Battle of the Bulge* simulation has excellent graphics and a sweetheart of an interface. Although it bombed at full price, it's a genuine bargain at its current cost. Newcomers will get a crash course in the terminology of the whole war-gaming genre — but broken down into nice, small, easy-to-swallow doses.

THE PERFECT GENERAL (QQP Productions; \$39.95) Also

a generic war game, using 20th century units and vehicles, this design simulates the pleasures of table-top gaming with miniatures while letting the computer handle all the tedious range and movement data. Terrific graphics and sound effects.

DRAGON FORCE (Interstel; \$12.95 - \$15.95) Although its graphics and interface are outdated, this remains one of the most satisfying squad-level war games ever marketed; at the asking price, it's a steal.

RED BARON (Dynamix; \$39.95) A WWI flying sim that embodies a lot of groundbreaking ideas. Difficulty is graduated; on the novice level,

you can start flying within minutes of booting the game. Then, as you become better, you can add elements of realism. A grand simulation, and one that doesn't require a degree in aeronautics to get into.

WARLORDS II (SSG; \$49.95) This delightful and addictive game uses fantasy trappings to lend color to what is actually a virtual primer on the art of military strategy. Use your dragons like panzers and your pegasi like strategic bombers. The replay value is very high, and everything you learn by maneuvering your Tolkeinian forces can be applied to more "realistic" games.

CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT (Electronic Arts; c. \$29.95) Still one of the easiest and most satisfying dogfight simulators around. Mix-and-match planes of various air forces, from World War Two through Vietnam. Messerschmidts against B-52s? Sabre jets against Focke-Wulfs? Sure, if that's what trips your trigger. This is one of those programs that seems to put you inside your own war movie.

These titles will give you a good taste of what may well become a new and rewarding hobby. I've been a war-gamer for years, yet the promise of a great new game still thrills me as much as ever. And if you want a second opinion, listen to what the famous H.G. Wells, who was a passionate war-gamer in the days of table-top miniatures, had to say on the subject:

"How much better is this amiable miniature than the real thing! Here is a homeopathic remedy for the imaginative strategist. Here is the premeditation, the thrill, the strain of accumulating victory or disaster — yet with no shattered bodies nor devastated countryside, no petty cruelties, none of that awful universal boredom and embitterment, that tiresome delay or stoppage of every gracious, bold, sweet, or charming thing, that we who are old enough to remember real modern war know to be the reality of belligerence."

Bill — or "The General" as we like to call him — has been war-gaming for years. He's also a military historian, a classical music critic, a novelist, and a computer user since the old VIC-20 days.

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Product Information Number 113

THE TECH-MAN COMETH

If PC games are your hobby, then you already know that games are some of the most demanding PC programs out there—and it takes a powerful CPU and fast graphics to run them well. When you're playing a game, what you see on the screen isn't just a representation of work in progress, as it is when you're using a spread sheet or word processor. In a game, your experience while playing is the end product. And if your PC can't keep up with the program's demands, the illusion falls apart.

So to improve your game-playing experience, I'll be discussing some of the technical things that make PCs better (or worse) for game playing. But don't expect this column to be "PC Technology for Complete Idiots." I don't like thinking of PC gamers as computer illiterates, and you probably wouldn't go for it either. I'm going to assume that you're an intelligent person with some interest in what goes on under the cover of a PC—but that you might have some kind of a life outside of computers, so maybe you don't have the time to track the twists and turns of the PC hardware business. That's my job.

The CPU Name Game

Sometimes it seems that no matter how much time you spent watching the computer industry, you'd still have a tough time figuring out what's really going on. Take a look at the way Intel names its CPUs, for example. The Intel Corporation is the world's leading maker of CPUs for personal computers, and we've seen amazing leaps in power with each generation of Intel chips. The 16-bit 286 was followed by the 32-bit 386, which could also access much more memory. And the 486 CPU improved on the speed of 386, using fewer clock ticks to execute most instructions and keeping a quick-recall copy of recently-used data in its own

8KB memory cache. Look at the names of these chips; you might see a pattern developing.

And here's the latest Intel CPU, a chip with twin execution units so it can perform two different instructions at the same time. That would be the 586, right? Wrong. Next comes Pentium, a name that Intel coined after being reminded by the US government that three-digit numbers were not valid trademarks. Competitors like IBM, Advanced Micro Devices, Texas Instruments and Cyrix are free to stick "386" or "486" labels on their own chips, but Intel will keep the Pentium name and its successors (Hexium? Sexium?) all to itself.

number-crunching. But the 486SX is often just as fast as a 486DX running at the same speed, because most programs don't use the DX's math coprocessor. And the SX chip sells for about \$100 less than a DX.

The DX2, as in 486DX2/66, is yet another Intel chip you've probably heard a lot about. But what exactly is it? See, when the engineers at Intel got the 486's clock speed up to 66MHz, they knew that it would be impractical to run the rest of the system that fast. At those frequencies, all the copper bits on a circuit board start acting like little

transmitter antennas. This causes radio frequency interference, which scrambles TV pictures, sends airliners off on the wrong headings, and brings nasty phone calls from the Federal Communications Commission.

So Intel offered us the 486DX2/66, a *clock-doubled* CPU. That means that the circuitry on the motherboard runs at half of the CPU's speed—a mere 33 million clock ticks each second. While pedantic technophiles like to point out that "clock-halved" would be a more accurate description, they're missing the point. The personal computer industry is based on marketing, not engineering. "Double" sounds positive, "half" sounds negative, and that settles that.

Now, Intel has a 100MHz 486 CPU (a clock-tripled processor) that's nearly ready for market. So naturally they'll call it the 486DX3/100, right? Bzzzzt, that answer is incorrect. Say hello to the Intel DX4-100. That's right, DX4—dispensing entirely with the "486" designation, which Intel says has "lost its meaning." While the DX4 does include some enhancements beyond simply jacking up the clock speed, the name would suggest that the clock speed is quadrupled, which it isn't. So just remember that DX2 is clock-doubled, DX4 is clock-tripled. Easy, huh?

Not that I'm complaining about this name nonsense. Nosirree, not me. I'm trying to make a living here, and I'll need a topic for this column every month from here on out. As long as these companies keep dinking around with the nomenclature, I'll always have something to write about. Because the more hype there is, and the more confusing everything gets, the more opportunity I'll have to blow away the smoke and explain what's really going on. So when you're looking for the real story on computer systems and peripherals, this is the place you'll find it.

Tim Victor



Then there's the SX/DX issue. What's the difference? Well, the 386DX is a 32-bit processor, with a 32-bit memory interface; the 386SX is the same 32-bit processor, but with a narrower 16-bit memory interface. Think of the interface as a doorway through which information flows; the more bits, the wider the doorway and the more data can flow through at a time. So the 386SX is slower, but it also uses less power, and systems that use the chip are less expensive.

Since the 486DX is a 32-bit CPU with a 32-bit memory interface, you'd think the 486SX should have a 16-bit memory interface as well, right? Not even close. The 486SX is a full 32-bit chip, but lacks the DX's built-in floating-point math coprocessor. That coprocessor boosts performance when you're running programs that call for lots of

Tim Victor is a technology guru who's worked as a writer and programmer, most recently for Hanna-Barbera Productions. He currently resides — with his guitar, mandolin, and assorted computer components — in Greensboro, NC.

THE EVOLUTION OF A SPECIES

atching the relatively young field of educational software develop is like watching a new species evolve, and I'm a fascinated observer. In some cases, I'm fascinated by how skillfully good software can teach even the driest topics — and in other cases, by how poorly these titles teach inherently interesting

subjects. I'm fascinated in all cases by how the old drill-and-practice programs have evolved into exploratory, engaging packages. It's very much like watching primordial, squirmy creatures change into dolphins and peacocks and people.

On the whole, I'd say I like most of the products I evaluate — although rarely do I see packages that aren't ripe for growth in certain areas. So I try to spot these areas and mention them. They may not handicap a package so much that you shouldn't buy it, but they might knock it down to a second or even third choice.

My main criteria for judging the ever-changing world of educational software are the soundness of the teaching tools and content; the visual and aural presentation of the program; the value of the program in terms of money, time, effort and computer resources; and the personality of the program.



Early Math — some of the assorted sub-games are better than others.

All of these issues are important, even if they are somewhat subjective. For example, the personality of a program is a vague and slippery issue. But a program can fall or stand on the way it encourages interaction. If you have two programs of equal educational value, you'll choose the one engages your child's attention the most, or the one that makes such an impression that they talk about it long after the lesson is over. The best programs seem to keep on teaching even when the computer is turned off.

Like any new species, educational software contin-

speech style added depth to the personality of *Early Math's* main character.

Loid, a friendly alien, guides children around his asteroid and, as he directs players, his mouth moves as though he's carefully enunciating each word, rather than flapping at them like a pup-



Early Math — speech adds depth to the game, though animation is overdone.

Heidi E. H. Aycock



pet. He seems almost affected because his facial movements are so pronounced, but he also seems more alive and realistic than many of the main characters in some better programs.

Early Math

One of *Bright Star's* latest releases is a preschool math program called *Early Math*. A CD-ROM product, its contribution to the evolution of the educational market is in its new style of animating speech. The company says the characters' mouths move so accurately that you could turn down the sound and still read their lips. I tried, but I couldn't do it. Still, this new

uses to improve. This month, I looked at two CD-ROM programs that clearly show the potential of today's software — and the wrong turns that sometimes happen along the evolutionary path.

Heidi Aycock first started evaluating educational software back in 1987. When she's not at her computer, Heidi enjoys volleyball, quilting and rollerblading — not all at the same time, though.

Early Math features six math activities intended to build skills in counting, shape recognition, early geometry, pattern completion, and simple arithmetic. The best of the six, *Counting Sheep*, asks children to help Loid get to sleep by counting the fluffy critters as they pass over his head. Each sheep is well animated, and accompanied by gloomy bleating sound. As kids click on each of the sheep to count them, the sheep disappears in a puff of cotton.

Worst of the six are the *Tangram Bridge* and the *Pattern Bridge*. Both require children to complete shapes and patterns, but the puzzle-solving process is static, and the rewards for correct answers are meager. In fact, neither activity really makes good use of your computer. Kids could have just as much fun playing these games with paper, crayons, and scissors — and they'd get the added benefit of increased interactivity. This is an example of how some programs don't offer as much value they might. The designers should either find a way to make the computer's resources an integral part of the puzzle, or use a different kind of puzzle to teach the skills these two activities intend to teach.

For a CD-ROM game, *Early Math* doesn't offer

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ace the Clock — an effective educational tool, even if it is just a revision of the old game of Concentration.

ough variety — and that reduces its value, too. Of course there's limited space even on a CD-ROM, and the designers might have foregone the new speech animation in favor of a greater variety of activities. Sure, the animations are nice, but I think more activities would hold a child's interest longer — and therefore do a better job of teaching.

If you're looking for just the math program for a preschooler, don't choose this one. It would make a nice supplement to an established library, though, because the main character is interesting and the exercises are, for the most part, fun and helpful. You'll probably wish there were more of them, though.

Race the Clock

Although *Race the Clock* from MindPlay has clear roots in that primordial learning-game genre, its many improvements make it a very effective educational tool. The program is basically the old game of Concentration — players try to match pairs of tiles in a given amount of time. But here are twists.

The most obvious and clamorous of these is that the tiles are animated. Instead of still image of a child running, for example, a video clip of children running through a park is used to represent the word Run. This novel touch really spices up an otherwise old idea, and the moving pictures may make a stronger impression on kids who are trying to learn from the game.

The animation also makes extremely good use of the computer's resources. You couldn't play Concentration this way without the technology sitting on your desk.

The second twist is that players can choose to use animated tiles or word tiles, or to match the words with the animations. Matching animated tiles with identical animated tiles is a good way to develop memory, and matching word tiles helps develop recognition of word patterns. Matching animated tiles with words is a very effective way to teach and reinforce reading skills, because kids learn to associate things from the concrete world — children running — with the word that represents that action.

Learning to associate written words with images leads to another novel twist. *Race the Clock* offers an English and Spanish version on the same disk — and while many companies offer more than one language version, the emphasis on associating a word with an image is particularly useful here. Kids — or adults for that matter — who wish to learn English or Spanish as a second language could use *Race the Clock* to master the 57 verbs covered in the program. I don't know if MindPlay intended the program to be used this way, but it adds even more value to the package.

Although *Race the Clock* is an excellent program, it sports a few evolutionary gaffs. Worst among them is that the game doesn't offer

helpful feedback. After a player selects a pair of tiles, the program doesn't indicate whether or not the pair matches or not. The player has to choose another pair before seeing whether the first pair was turned back over or cleared away. This isn't a big deal when kids are matching two animated tiles, because they can see that they match or don't

match. But when they're working with an animated tile and a word — and particularly if they're tackling a foreign language — they may not be able to tell if they've made a

Maybe the program's designers wanted bigger tiles and more content, too, but had to make some technological tradeoffs: They could use animated tiles, or they could use more words. I think they made the right choice, but I can't help wanting more.

Back to the Future

A program that leaves consumers wanting more isn't a bad thing, unless the product is obviously deficient in some way. Because if we ask for more, the developers have a target to shoot for next time around. And as we see what's possible, and accept the technology that makes it possible, the educational software market will continue to grow and become more ambitious. That has certainly been the case with the entertainment

"I like most of the products I evaluate — although rarely do I see packages that aren't ripe for growth in certain areas."

match at first. A nearby adult could help, but that shouldn't be necessary, and it detracts from the program's quality.

In addition to the lack of feedback, two other aspects of the game need to be enhanced and further developed. First, the tiles are too small. The program's packaging says it's for ages 2 and older, but I don't think the average preschooler could focus his or her attention on the postage-stamp-sized tiles long enough to become engaged by the game. Even adults may have to squint at the screen.

Second, there aren't enough words covered. After playing *Race the Clock*, I found myself wishing for more words and more parts of speech. I was so impressed with the look of the game and the educational technique that I actually sought more lessons. How often can you say that about what is essentially school work?

market, where gamers have eagerly adopted new hardware platforms that allow for bigger, faster, and more complex games.

As the two CD-ROM releases I've covered here prove, educational software is becoming more complex and demanding, too. Just a year ago, a CD-ROM educational title would have seemed like a silly idea. But enough of us have kept up with the technology and upgraded our hardware that the educational publishers are able to bring us better software all the time. In many ways, the future of educational software is in our hands: As long as we ask for better, the industry will evolve to better serve us — and, of course, our children.

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Fatality (Decapapunch): F,F,F+P

Rayden

Lightning Bolt: D,DF,F+P
Flying Attack: B,B,F



Fatality (Electric Explosion): F,F,B,B,B+P

Sub-Zero

Ice Blast: D,DF,F+P
Ground Slide: D+P+LK+BL



Fatality (Spinal Realignment): D,DF,F+P

Liu Kang

Karma Bolt: F,F+P
Karma Kick: F,F+HK



Fatality (Triple Play):
Rotate Joystick 360°



Fatality (Flame of Vengeance):
Press and hold BL,U,U

Scorpion

Harpoon: B,B+P
Flicker Punch: D,DB,B+P



Fatality (Heart Massage):
B,BD,D,DF,F+P

Sonya

Spring Bolt: B,B+P
LegToss: D+BL+P+LK Air Attack: F,B+P



Fatality (Kiss of Death):
F,F,B,B,BL

Kano

Spin Attack: Rotate joystick 360° toward opponent
Light Dagger: Press and hold BL,F,B,F

W

elcome to Strategy Central, PC Gamer's new hints,

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You can be the Master of Orion!

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MicroProse's *Master of Orion* was one of the best strategy games of 1993, successfully combining resource-management with a unique tactical space combat system. Here are some hints and tips to help you get the most out of this classic game.

—Trent C. Ward

GENERAL TIPS



here are basic guidelines to follow no matter which race you've chosen to play as.

Build into a corner: Unless you've been placed in the corner of the galaxy at the start of the game, start building your empire *toward* a corner. This ensures that at least some of your planets won't be open to easy attack.

Exploit planet resources to their fullest: Don't waste a rich or ultra rich planet by conducting research there.

Don't spend too much on your colony ships: The only equipment you need on your colony ships is the latest controlled environment and an extra fuel tank. Don't bother with weapons, computers, or shields — colony ships automatically disappear when you form a colony.

Encourage growth of new planets: As soon as you've established a new colony, send extra people from your most populated colony to help the new one grow.

Don't be a warmonger! It's best to have only one enemy at a time. You need as many friends as you can get — until you're ready to demolish them, that is.

Mrrshan: Gunners Supreme

Attack nearby neighbors as soon as possible. With the Mrrshan's excellent weapons skills, you're sure to be able to defeat enemies who have not yet had a chance

to develop equivalent shield technology. Once nearby colonies have had a chance to develop, concentrate your attacks on the weak and small.

Use any extra tech points for

the development of weaponry and computers. Stay at the forefront of weapons technology, and you'll almost always have the upper hand in battle — and stand a better chance of survival when outnumbered.



THE RACES

Here are some helpful strategies, geared specifically to take advantage of each species' strengths and weaknesses.

Psilons: Super Scientists

Expand as quickly as possible, but delay contact with other races. By grabbing several uncontested planets, you ensure you'll have a strong planetary base from which to develop new technology — technology that could spell the difference between victory and defeat when it comes to a fight.

Devote one or two planets solely to manufacturing. It's easy to get carried away with the development of new technology, so make sure you have one or two suitable planets churning out the fruits of your labor.

If the Darlocks are near, pump up the security! Whenever you make contact with the sly Darlocks, make sure internal security stays high. The Darlocks are excellent spies, and by copying your technology they can steal their way into victory. If possible, destroy them first.

Raze the enemy. When your technology far outstrips that of your opponents, design a massive ship (or ships) with the best you have to offer, then systematically hunt down and destroy all of an enemy's colonies. By not giving them a chance to rebuild or retaliate, you can achieve an easy victory.



Alkari: Perfect Pilots

Make sure your ships are faster than the competition. Devote extra research to propulsion technology, and immediately incorporate it into new ships for the fleet. This will help you make the first strike in any battle.

Keep your weaponry strong. It doesn't do a lot of good to strike first if you can't finish off your foe.



Meklars: Amazing Industrialists

Develop new construction techniques. Allocate plenty of research to construction. This will help keep your planets the most efficient in the galaxy.

Grab rich planets. With the Meklars phenomenal industrial ability, they can make these planets into production powerhouses. If there aren't any uncolonized rich or ultra-rich planets available, you'll just have to take them from others...

Don't waste time. Like the Klackons, use your production to your advantage. Build a lot of ships, and ruthlessly pester one race until they're eliminated.



Klackons: Unstoppable Workers

Let planets develop fully before you use them. Make sure that your populations and industries are maxed out before you start building any defense or starships. This guarantees that you'll make the most out of the planets under your control.

Use your production to your advantage. Let your front-line planets begin developing swarms of high-tech ships. Take the ships and relentlessly pursue one enemy's planets until he's destroyed, and then start on another. This is the quick path to victory.



Kill the Meklars. If you have a choice, try to destroy any Meklar colonies first. The Meklar's strengths are similar to the Klackons, and can be very troublesome at late stages of the game.

Darlocks: Devious Spies

Be nice. At the beginning of the game, try to improve relations with everyone you meet. This will overcome the natural distrust that all races have of the Darlocks, and will enhance your chances for espionage attempts.



Steal, steal, steal! Every time you meet a new leader, jack up your spy meter to full. Make sure that all of your spies are devoted to espionage only, and you'll be able to develop technology the easy way. Don't worry too much about internal security — most races can't penetrate Darlock bases even when they're unprotected.

Play your friends against each other. Sometimes you'll be given a chance to frame another race; do it! Always try to keep your opponents confused and fighting with everyone but you. This will keep the other races' resources down while you build up a large standing fleet and ready your attack.

Sakkra: Reptilian Breeders

Grab planets quickly. In the beginning of the game, grab as many neighboring planets as you can. Don't worry about planet development — your race's reproductive overdrive will bring them up to speed quickly enough.

Develop Planetology.

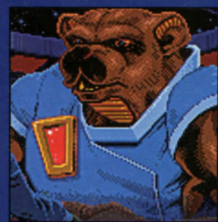
Raise the rate at which you research planetology. Try to develop new colonization techniques so that you can spread more quickly.



Develop new construction techniques. Allocate plenty of research to construction. This will help keep your planets the most efficient in the galaxy.

Grab rich planets. With the Meklars phenomenal industrial ability, they can turn these planets into production powerhouses. If there aren't any uncolonized rich or ultra-rich planets available, you'll just have to take them from others...

Bulrathi: Planetary Warriors



Develop personal armament. Always choose to research any item that will improve ground-fighting ability. Monitor shields research for personal deflectors, absorbers, and barriers; keep an eye on weapons technology for hand lasers, fusion rifles, and hand phasers; and watch construction for the various types of armor. These items will make you unstoppable in battle.

Don't colonize when you can conquer. Once you meet another race, begin taking their planets away from them as quickly as possible. This will save time you would have spent on building colony ships, and also decreases your opponents' number of votes in the council.

Silicoids: Colonization Masters

Grab those planets! Grab every planet within your range until you contact other races. In most games, this tack will gain you a significant head start on your competitors.

Develop personal armament. Like the Bulrathi, make sure your ground soldiers are the best-equipped in the galaxy. Having 20 planets won't do you any good if you can't hold onto them.

Steal Planetology. Later in the game, start using spies to steal planetology technology from the enemy. Your scientists aren't very adept at planetology research, so this is really the only way to get it.



Humans: Smooth Talkers

Research propulsion. Start heavy research into propulsion early in the game. With better engines you can spread across the galaxy faster, and begin making alliances.

Trade with everyone.

When you first make contact with an alien race, immediately enter into the largest trade agreement possible. Besides giving you extra money later in the game, it will also improve relations with the aliens. Check on your trade agreements every 30 years or so and see if you can get a bigger deal.

Work toward an alliance. Try to forge alliances with all but one of the races you are in contact with. Wage war on the "outsider" race, using your allies to help you destroy them.

Kill the xenophobes. When choosing which race to fight, try to first eliminate any with xenophobic or erratic leaders.



Bright Lights, Big City

Winning Tips for Sim City 2000

Everyone who plays *SimCity 2000* has a different strategy for developing a successful city, but there are certain approaches that are effective regardless of the sort you want to wind up with. When planning, keep these tactics in mind:

- Any tile that is powered will provide power to adjacent tiles. You'll need to connect to higher sections and across roads, but one power line usually does the job.

- At the start of the game, turn off Disasters from the Options menu and reduce your fire and police funding, then divert the savings to road maintenance. Roads will fall apart rapidly if you don't keep mass transit well-funded.

- Stay away from bonds unless you are sure you can generate enough tax money to quickly pay them back.

Laugh a Little, Cry a Little

If you play *SimCity 2000* long enough, you'll probably see some of the humorous effects Maxis has scattered throughout the program:

Use the Edit New Map feature to design the perfect landscape for the city you have in mind. This feature gives you the option to add terrain that can help you in your quest. A pre-fab mountain with waterfalls is great for hydro-electric power.



- Some SimCities are home to an aquatic monster, a Nessie-like creature that pops up from the depths of fresh-water lakes and roars.

Hydro-electric power plants are the most cost-effective energy supply and they don't explode like other sources. If you suffer brownouts, add more hydro plants.



- Conservative growth pays off in the long run. Build the necessities and let the town grow before you start thinking of large luxury items. Keep tax rates low at times you need to encourage growth.

- A beginning ratio of 50% residential, 45% industrial and 5% commercial seems to be the best mix. Watch your demand bar for input on which zones need to be expanded.

- Limit your zones to 6 x 6 areas because Sims (the affectionate name for the little folks who live in your city) don't like to build anything that's more than 3 tiles from a road. If you have a section that's dead, make sure you've hooked up power, water, and roads to that section.

Use the toolbar to monitor the progress of neighboring cities. Then connect your roads to growing cities and lure their residents to your wonderful town.



Build a group of Residential, Commercial, and Industrial zones close together, but maintain a small buffer zone between Residential and Industrial. Sims like to live near the places they work or shop. Connect water to new zones. One connection and a water pump will fill up the whole section.



- Occasionally, the name "Will Wright" will pop up in the newspaper as the mayor's name. Just who is this Will Wright character? Only the guy who designed and programmed the original *SimCity!*

- If disasters are on, you may see *SimCity 2000*'s version of Superman. It's a bird, it's a plane... it's a guy in a pink and yellow leotard?

These tips are just basic guidelines, since each mayor/city manager will want to do things his or her own way. The main thing to remember is you should always be ready to experiment — the real fun of this game comes from exploration, and discovering winning strategies on your own.

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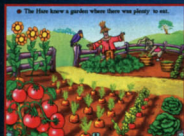
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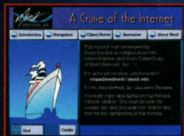
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S

ince we used to be PC Entertainment,

we've got a whole stack of your mail to use in our very first issue of the new *PC Gamer*. We want more, though — in particular, we want to hear your reactions to the new magazine. We think it's a big improvement, but, as with everything we do, it's your opinion that really counts. So tell us what you like, and what you're not so crazy about. Hey, you guys are the boss.

And that's not all!

To really make it worth your while, we're going to be giving away at least \$100 worth of free games to the writer of the best letter each month. So now you've got no excuse not to put pen to paper...

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The Benefits of Local Bus — Explained

Dear Sirs,

I've heard a lot lately about the use of local bus to streamline video data flow. Unfortunately, I own an older 486 computer (upgraded to a 486DX2/66) which is not equipped with a local bus, so I'd have to replace the motherboard to use a local bus video card. What sort of improvement (if any) could I expect from a program like *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0* if I replaced my video card with a Windows accelerator card for the ISA bus? What sort of improvement would I see with a local bus Windows accelerator card in a similar system? Would the improvements from a local bus warrant the cost and effort to replace my motherboard? And can you suggest a good accelerator card for use in DOS games like *Microsoft Flight Simulator*?

Yours,
L. Slosar,
San Francisco, CA

Okay, it's like this. A "dumb frame buffer," such as a VGA or Super VGA display card, keeps a pixel-by-pixel description of the image on the screen, which it converts into electrical signals that go to your monitor. It's dumb because it relies on the system's CPU to set and update its display memory. But your CPU has to access the card through the ISA bus, so it can only read or write 16 bits of data at a time (even though it can handle 32 bits), and only at a speed of around 8 million cycles per second — instead of the 33 million it's capable of. That limits the display rate in flight simulators and other graphics-intensive programs. A local bus lets the CPU read or write a full 32 bits in each frame buffer operation and its cycle times are also a lot faster, so transfer rates are usually limited by only the access time of the display card's memory chips, not the much higher speed of the local bus.

An accelerator card includes its own simple graphics processor, specially designed for operations like drawing lines, boxes, and text, as well as scrolling or erasing large areas of the screen. When you run a program that's written for an accelerator, the CPU sends commands to the card's processor rather than reading and writing display memory itself. There's no bottleneck between the graphics processor and the display memory since they're located on the same card, and the commands that the CPU sends to the card are very short, so the speed of the bus is much less important.

But the problem is that flight simulators and other DOS games are almost never written to take advantage of accelerated graphics cards, and the cards can't help

*much with the games' polygonal 3D graphics anyway. The CPU does all the work, so bus speed is a very big factor again. So in the case of a game like *Flight Simulator* you should see a big improvement if you switch to a local bus motherboard and SVGA card — perhaps even doubling *Flight Simulator*'s frame rate.*

If you decide to upgrade, though, shop carefully. The amount you spend should depend a lot on whether or not you can use your current CPU and memory SIMMs in the new motherboard. You'll also need to choose your new video card carefully: cards with the best accelerated Windows performance aren't necessarily the fastest for games. Look for DOS performance ratings in the magazine reviews, since — odd though it may seem — inexpensive models sometimes offer faster display memory and more efficient data paths than more expensive cards.

Whew! And there you have it. Good luck shopping around.

No Sooner Said... Dept.

Dear guys,

I'm a Big Kid, age 40. Needless to say, I enjoy computer games of all sorts — especially RPGs, combat games, and strategy sims. But my knowledge of older games isn't always what I'd like it to be, which brings me to my first point.

Something I'd very much like to see in the magazine is a regular article categorizing, summarizing, and rating different game programs of the same type. I don't want a quick glossing over of just the brand-new programs out there, but more of an in-depth history of each particular subject. For example, I'd love you to do a retrospective on flight sims, talking about the old classics of the genre and saying why they were so popular when they came out, but detailing the ways in which more recent releases have superseded them.

Lately, I've enjoyed playing *Tank Platoon* by MicroProse, which I like because it combines strategy on the individual and platoon levels with arcade-style action, but there are things about the program that annoy me. For a start, the graphics are only EGA, and the scenarios are very limited. I know there must be something better out there, but what is it? That's where a feature like the one I've suggested would come in handy — do one on military sims, and I'd know everything there is to know about tank games, and which ones are likely to bring me the things *Tank Platoon* doesn't. I'm sure it would be useful to plenty of other game players, too — people like me who enjoy a certain type of action, but would like to

play something a bit "better" than they're playing. The only problem I can see is that certain topics — RPGs, say — are so big they could probably fill your magazine for several issues. Maybe you could subdivide these ones a bit further, so one month you covered first-person perspective games only, and so on.

Anyway, I'd love it if you could give it some thought.

Thanks,
Joe Masarone

We had just such a regular feature planned for the first issue of PC Gamer but left it out due to lack of space. This month there were just so many brand new games to review, we felt we'd be shortchanging you all by giving too much space to the old stuff. Next issue, though, we'll kick off our regular Buyer's Guides with an exhaustive — but not exhausting! — guide to flight sims.

And as for your Tank Platoon question, there hasn't really been all that much that's impressed us recently. We suggest you hold on for MicroProse's WWII tank sim Across the Rhine, due shortly (check Eyewitness this issue for details), which looks excellent. With luck we'll have a review for you next time around.

That Age Old Question...

Dear Sir,

I've got a question I'd like to ask you. I've become very interested in computer games over the last three years, and would like to know more about becoming a computer games designer. I want to be the person who thinks up new ideas for games. Don't get me wrong — I want nothing to do with the programming end, but just feel that I have some great ideas for future computer games. Any help that you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
John Mascia
Orlando, Florida

We hate to rain on your parade, but it might not be all that easy to break into the business. Most people who design games these days are either programmers (or, at least, used to be), or have some other pretty major-league skills that have brought them to the attention of game developers and publishers. Our best suggestion is that you write out some detailed game designs and bombard game developers that you admire with them, hoping to catch somebody's attention. Perseverance is your best weapon here — along with genuine talent, of course.

Big Book Of Joysticks: The Appendix

Dear guys,

I recently read Mr. Scott Wolf's article "The Big Book Of Joysticks" in an old issue of your magazine (which, by the way, was very helpful and interesting — please enlighten us with more such features!). In it he wrote about Thrustmaster's Weapon Control System Mark 1 and 2. I was wondering: are they compatible with CH Products' Flight Stick Pro, or not?

Thank you,
Eric Miller

Eric, you'll be pleased to know they are compatible. The Weapon Control System is basically sending keyboard commands to your computer, while the CH Flight Stick Pro is, of course, a joystick. So the two are designed to work together. We use the two together all the time, and haven't had a problem yet.

No Sooner Said... Dept. (reprise)

Dear Sir,

I'm a big fan of your magazine, and own many games. But I have a suggestion: why not run some contests? You could give away T-shirts, computer games, or CDs of music from games. Whichever you chose, I'm sure the contests would be very popular.

The other thing I'd really like to see are more articles about computer games for the younger crowd. I know a lot of teenagers and children who play computer games, but never see articles directly aimed at them. Magazines seem to assume that kids play cartridge games, and adults play computer games, but you and I know the lines aren't as clearly drawn as that.

Both these suggestions might keep readers like me interested in your magazine, and quite possibly bring you new readers as well.

Yours truly,
Ellen Koester
Lake Mary, Florida

You won't catch us turning down any ideas that might bring us new readers, Ellen! We like to think our magazine can be enjoyed by anyone, of any age. We're dedicated to covering both arcade-style PC games and more "adult" releases like flight sims, strategy games and the like. And as for you

contest idea, check out page 119. We think you'll find the prizes even better than the ones you've suggested!

The Truth Hurts (but you gotta tell it)

Dear Sir,

I was waiting eagerly for your review of *Eye Of The Beholder III*, and, after reading it (It was in the September '93 issue), wanted to write to congratulate you. *PC Entertainment* did the right thing, and established a lot of credibility, by telling the truth about this game. I bought *EOTB III*, played it for about an hour, and wiped it from my hard drive. It was probably the most disappointing game I've seen. That you guys are willing to stand up to "the big guys" like SSI and call it as you see it makes it worth subscribing. There's a lot of expensive software out there, and we need help finding the good, fun games. A magazine that candy-coats its reviews and makes everything sound wonderful does a disservice to its readers, and will lose readers fast. Thanks for your honesty and integrity.

Yours truly,
Michael L Russell
Fayetteville, NC

Thanks for the vote of confidence, Michael. We don't like slugging a game — like you, we'd rather play a good game than a bad one — but feel that our first duty must always be to our readers. And that means reporting on every release exactly as we see it. This can be awkward at times. A lot of those folks at the big software houses are our friends, and it's no fun telling them that their latest product is sub-par, but we call 'em like we see 'em. Hey, it's good for all of us in the end: the more good products there are out there, the more novices are likely to try a game and like it, and the bigger the industry is going to grow.

And don't worry, nothing's changed with the new-look magazine: PC Gamer is going to have exactly the same commitment to honesty as PC Entertainment did. In fact, we aim to make our reviews even more thorough, which is why we've introduced a new, more detailed rating system that we think tells the story on any one game even more accurately than before. Hope you like it.

PCG

Well, that's about all we have space for. Seems like we just got going, didn't it? To give us an excuse to devote even more pages to your letters next issue, please write to us at the address at the top of the page. With all that free software up for grabs, you might be very glad you did!

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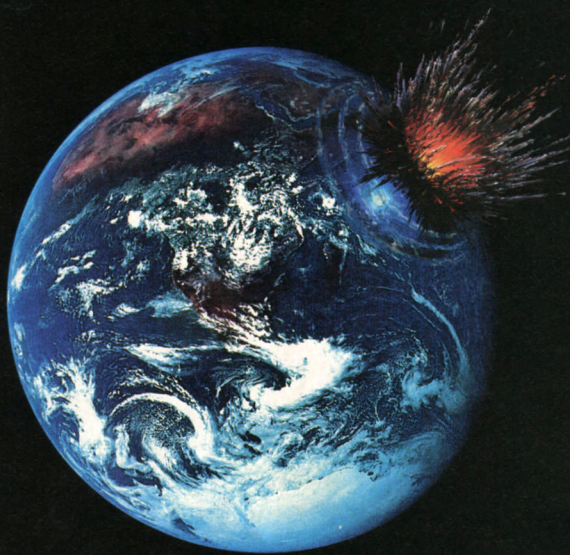
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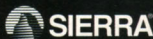
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If you read our Scoop! on page 18 this issue, you already know quite a lot about **Front Page Sports: Baseball™**, the hot new sim from Dynamix. It's a game we're all looking forward to — after all, the **Front Page Sports** line is one of the best series of sports sims ever. Watch for our definitive review next issue — and in the meantime, why not try your hand at this excellent competition, sponsored by **FPS:Baseball™** creators Dynamix? After all, the only thing better than playing computer ball yourself is watching the pros do it for *real*...



Entering couldn't be easier...

What we want you to do is identify which recent PC games these memorable ad lines come from. Just match the copy line on the left to a game picked from the list on the right. The first correct entry pulled from the **PC Gamer** Hat wins. All answers must be received by June 7th, 1994.

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- 1) Between the devil and the deep blue sea.
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- 3) Surrounded by anti-aircraft. Hunted by SAMs. Even Mach 2 isn't fast enough. It's a story Captain Dean Pennington didn't think he'd live to tell. Would you?
- 4) It's all in your head.
- 5) After you build your car you can follow all traffic laws and be a safe and courteous driver. (Of course, you could also go and play an action-packed game of hopscotch with your sister.)
- 6) Your belly tank is on fire. Your radio is gone. Your air field is 135 miles away. Godspeed.
- 7) Find a well, Cast a spell, Make a mistake, Go to #*%!!
- 8) Clearly, something has startled Mr Cow. And it ain't a pair of cold hands.
- 9) With all the games knocking at your door... Only one has the power to rip you apart!
- 10) In 1944, this was the only heavy metal touring Europe.
- 11) Other games may talk. This one has a voice.
- 12) 100 tons of overkill.
- 13) From the beaches to the mountains... From Canada to England to Florida...
- 14) No more games.
- 15) Purple car lands on moon!

...refers to which of these games?

- The Horde
- 1942: Pacific Air War
- Across The Rhine
- Sid & Al's Incredible Toons
- Jurassic Park
- Aces Over Europe
- Putt-Putt Goes To The Moon
- Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos
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Next time in PC Gamer...

If you've enjoyed this first issue of **PC Gamer**, then you're gonna love the next one! How could you not, when it comes packed with things like these...

PC Gamer
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on sale
June 7th
The ride's just
beginning...

More Reviews!

Some of the year's hottest titles are just around the corner, and we'll have the



Rise of the Robots: Can it really play better than *Mortal Kombat*?

verdicts on all of them in the next issue. Watch for reviews of *Rise Of The Robots*, possibly the best-ever PC

fighting game; Bullfrog's long-awaited *Theme Park*; Access Software's three-CD adventure *Under a Killing Moon*; Bruce Balfour's CD-ROM epic strategy game *Outpost*; plus Origin's *Pacific Strike*, Nova Logic's *Armoured Fist*, The Software Toolworks' *Evasive Action*, MicroProse's ground-breaking tank sim *Across The Rhine*, and many (many) more.

More Scoops!

Want the full lowdown on the future's best new games? Then look no further than Scoops!, the most informed, up-to-date, and downright hot game preview section on the face of the planet! Remember, you read about it here first!

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Theme Park: Wheeeeeeee!

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Pacific Strike: Origin's *Strike Commander* engine is much improved here — but will it be able to outfly 1942? We'll see next

And, remember, you can now get the world's finest PC games magazine every month! Those Bi-monthly Blues are a thing of the past!

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May/June 1994

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PRODUCTION EDITOR, Shelli Craig
ASSISTANT EDITOR, Trent C. Ward
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT, Joseph Novicki

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Heidi Aycock, Lee Buchanan, T. Liam McDonald, Gary Meredith, Neil Randall, William R. Trotter, Neil West, Scott Wolf, Bernie Yee

GP PUBLICATIONS, INC.

EDITORIAL, ART, PRODUCTION, MARKETING

300-A S. Westgate Drive
Greensboro, NC 27407
Phone: (910) 852-6711
Fax: (910) 632-1165

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, Selby Bateman

SENIOR ART & DESIGN DIRECTOR, Amy L. Pruette
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR, Irma Swain
MARKETING MANAGER, Kathleen Ingram
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR, Pamela Lambert
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, Judy Earley

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SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER

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NATIONAL ADVERTISING SALES OFFICE

10055 Miller Avenue
Suite 201
Cupertino, CA 95014
Phone: 408-255-5191
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ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR

Jonathan Bint

ACCOUNT MANAGERS

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EAST COAST SALES OFFICE

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John McMahon
23-00 Route 208
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
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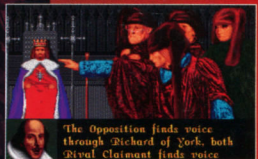
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