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PC GAMER

The World's Finest PC and CD-ROM Games Magazine

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CyClones



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Vol.1 No.4
September 1994

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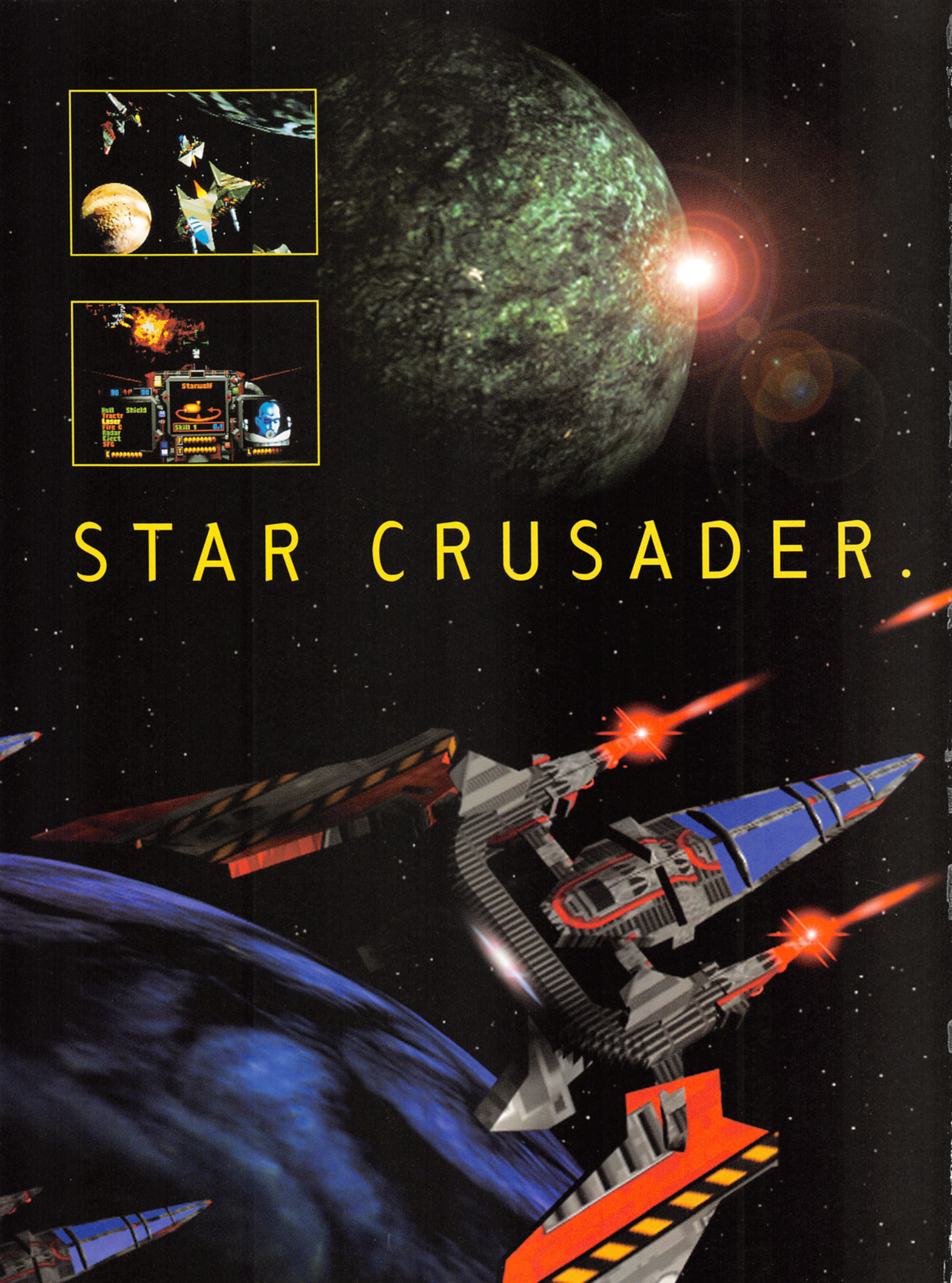
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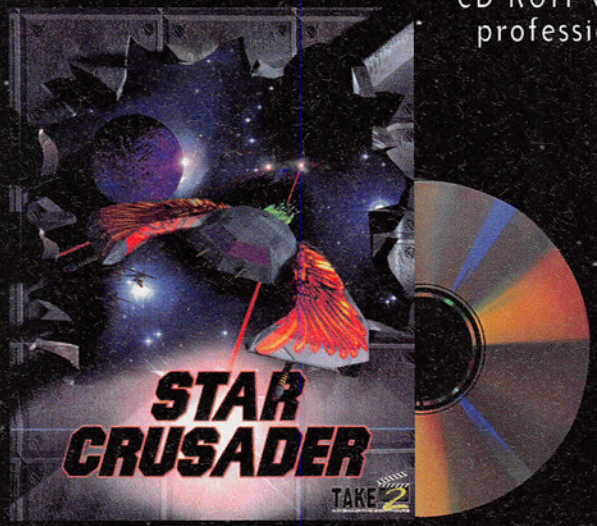


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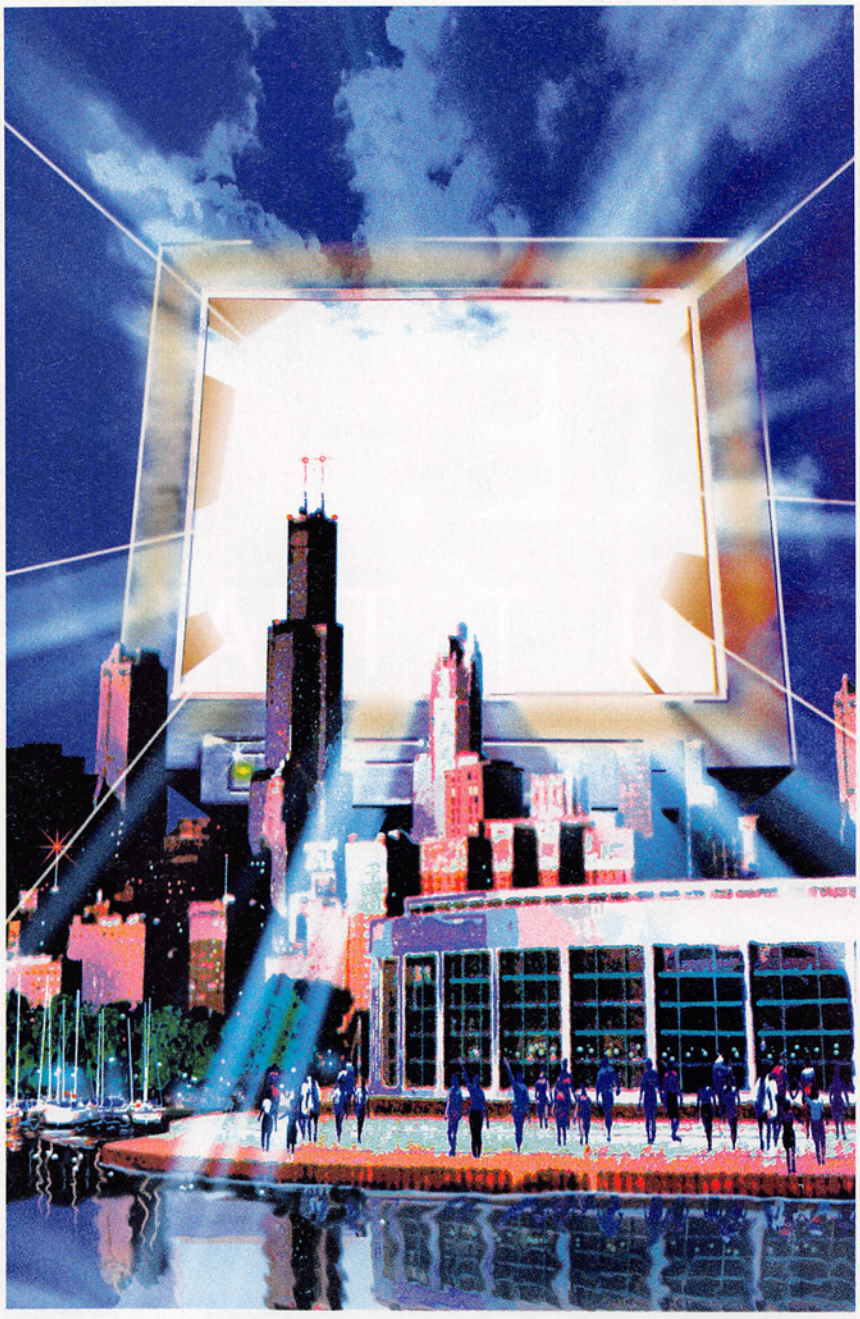
Special! The Year of the PC

Part 1: The Games of the Future

At the Summer Consumer Electronics Show this past June, we saw what may be the finest crop of new PC games in years. And one fact stood out above all else: The PC is now considered *the* games platform of the future. With its incredible processing power, cutting-edge sound and graphics capabilities, and almost unlimited room for growth, the PC is replacing dedicated game machines as the electronic entertainment system in the American home. And if you want proof, just look at the overall quality of titles coming out this year and next. Our comprehensive cover story will reveal all: the best new games, the big players entering the PC arena, and why the PC is becoming the focus of some of the best and most ambitious design work in the history of gaming.

Part 2: The Dream Machine What to Buy — and Why

If you want to position yourself on the leading edge of PC entertainment — and maybe even hop on that fabled "Information Highway" — it's pretty obvious you'll need more than that old 286 in the den. But how much more? And what's it going to cost? Gary Meredith takes you through your system from top to bottom, and shows you exactly what'll you'll need to assemble your own Dream Machine.





A Word About Those Ratings....

Lately, we've been hearing a lot about our ratings, both from our readers and from game publishers. And it seems that the opinions on the accuracy and fairness of the ratings are divided pretty much along those lines. Nearly all of you who've written in with your comments on the ratings agree that *PC Gamer*'s reviews are the fairest and most accurate in the business. Publishers, though, sometimes say that the ratings are lower than what they're used to seeing, and that they're disappointed.

We can understand why they feel that way; most of our ratings average six to seven points less than in other mags. But *you've* told us time and again that you appreciate *PC Gamer* because of our honesty in rating games. So even though we use an entire page to explain the rating system, we want to take time here to clear it up once and for all.

Our ratings aren't based on the same system you grew up with in high school and college. A 77 there was a low C, or even a D. But a *PC Gamer* rating of 77% means Very Good. That's a game that's worth checking out — and certainly nothing for a publisher to be disappointed about.

We believe that our reviews and ratings are the most accurate you'll find, period. And at the end of the day, that sort of reporting is good for gamers and software publishers alike.

— Steve and Matt

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On the disk!

CyClones

by SSI

For a complete guide to installing, setting up, and playing this action-packed demo, all you need to do is turn the page. Hold on — this one packs quite a punch!

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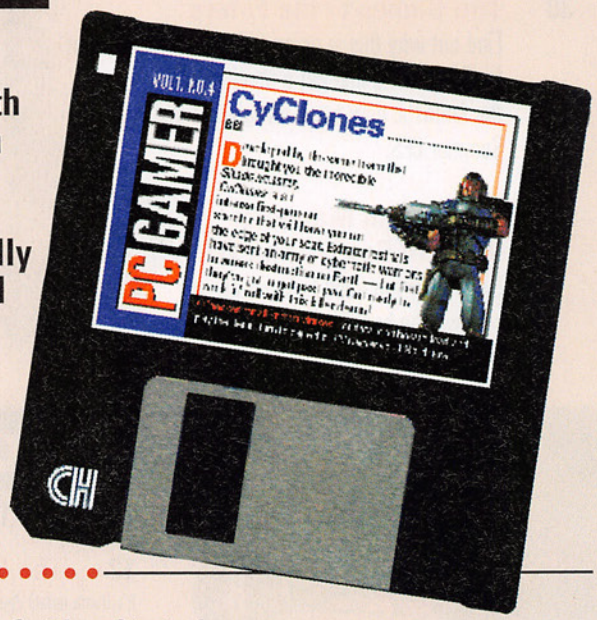
PC Gamer (ISSN-1059-2180) is published monthly by GP Publications, Inc., Suite 210, 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010. Second-class postage paid at Greensboro, NC, and additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by the Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: One year (12 issues) US: $89.95. Canada: $103.95. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #128220688). Outside US and Canada: Add $2.00 per issue. For customer service, write *PC Gamer* Customer Service Dept., Suite 210, 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010. Postmaster please send change of address to *PC Gamer*, Suite 210, 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010. Corporate, advertising sales, and circulation offices: Suite 210, 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010. Phone: (415) 696-1688. FAX: (415) 696-1678. Editorial and production offices: 300-A S. Westgate Drive, Greensboro, NC 27407. Phone: (910) 852-6711; FAX: (910) 632-1165. Editorial product information should be addressed to Editor, *PC Gamer*, P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, NC 27429. Overnight delivery parcels should be addressed to *PC Gamer*, 300-A S. Westgate Drive, Greensboro, NC 27407. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. GP Publications, Inc., also publishes *Game Players Sega-Nintendo, CD-ROM Today: The Magazine of Personal Multimedia, Computer Entertainment News*, and *Game Players Encyclopedias* covering Nintendo, Sega, and PC games.

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COVER DISK

INSTALLING • PLAYING • QUICK TIPS

This month, we've been working closely with SSI and the highly acclaimed crew at Raven Software — the ones who helped create *Shadowcaster* for Origin — to bring you *CyClones*. This high-end shooter will naturally remind some players of *Doom*, but you'll find that *CyClones* has an entirely different feel from the head-on carnage of that title. Strategy is just as important as firepower in this outstanding new game.



CyClones *by SSI*

For years, few believed the reports of UFO sightings and alien abductions of humans — but now we know they were true! Extraterrestrials have landed and begun taking tissue samples from humans, with the goal of creating cybernetic warriors — CyClones. The aliens are putting the finishing touches on the first batch of CyClones, and if they get loose mankind's future doesn't look too bright.

You're part of a military program that's been created to stop the invaders. You've been given the latest high-tech armor and weaponry, and sent to infiltrate a CyClones staging area. Stay frosty — you'll stand a lot better chance of survival if you take on as few enemies at a time as possible.



After killing a CyClone, examine his body for ammo or key cards.


Don't carelessly stumble over a land mine. If you find one, step back and blast it with your Gauss Pistol.


If this is the only weapon you've got left, you won't last very long!

Getting Started

To run *CyClones*, you'll need at least a 386/40MHz (though we suggest a 486/33 or higher), 4MB RAM, VGA, and a little over 3MB hard-drive space. Play will be slow but acceptable on a 486/33, fairly smooth on a 486/50, and very smooth on a 486/66.

CyClones supports Sound Blaster and 100% compatible sound cards (**except** for the Gravis Ultrasound — players with that card should select "No Sound" during Installation). If you do have problems with sound, check our Tech Tips further along.

To install *CyClones*, insert the disk in your 3.5" drive, type the letter of that drive followed by a colon (e.g., A: or B:), and press Enter. Next, type INSTALL and press Enter, and CyClones will install itself on your hard-drive, in a directory called CYCLONES. **DO NOT** cancel insallation if you get a message saying you don't have enough XMS or EMS even though you have 4MB RAM (see "Troubleshooting Tips" below). After the game's been copied and unpacked on your hard drive, the Sound Setup Program will run; once that's completed, simply type CYCLONES to run the game. **NOTE: *CyClones* does not support the Advanced Gravis Ultrasound card. If that's what you're using, please Select "No Sound" at the Sound Setup Menu!**

Quick Tips

* Pay attention to the color of the cursor. If it's orange, it means it's resting over an enemy unit; purple means it's over a door, and green indicates an item that may be used.

* Try using the numeric keyboard for movement and the mouse to aim. It's a little tricky at first, but you'll soon get the hang of it.

* Explore every room thoroughly. You're bound to take damage, so keep an eye open for biokits, as well as ammo for your Gauss pistol.

* Look for secret doors — it's not too tough, since the cursor will change colors when you move it over one. There's a chaingun hidden in a secret room on this level — can you find it? IMPORTANT: Be sure to pick up the chaingun first, THEN the clip. If you try to pick up the clip first, it'll tell you there's no chaingun when actually there is.

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New!

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Accessory missions for id Software's Spear of Destiny™









The Action Continues. . .

in two brand new missions for the fantastic virtual reality game - Spear of Destiny™! Now you can enjoy more of the heart-pounding, adrenaline-pumping excitement you loved in the original game! These terrific new missions feature all new floors, guards, bosses, graphics and sounds!

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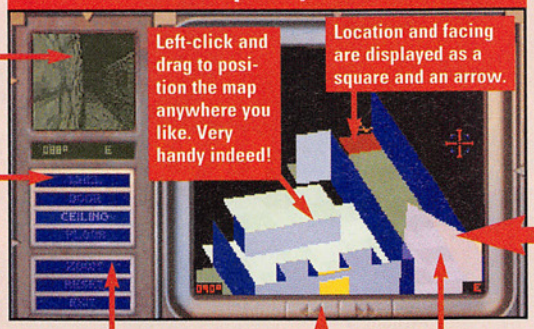
Each mission features 21 exciting new levels, with new enemy guards, new treasures and a whole new fortress to penetrate. New puzzles require thought as well as quick reflexes. Fantastic new art and unbelievable digital sound make these the most exciting games ever! Get the latest missions and get into the action!

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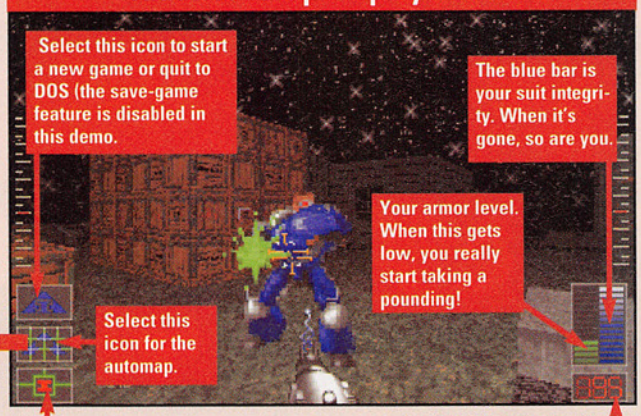
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Product Information Number 157

The Automap: Key to Success



That Heads-Up Display In Full!





Clicking on the bottom icon brings up the inventory. To use an item once in inventory, just right click on it. To drop an item, select drop, then place the down arrow on the item you want to leave behind.



Here's how much ammo your currently selected weapon has left. Select the ammo status icon to choose another weapon.



The cursor changes to purple when placed over a door, secret or not. (left) Check all rooms, and you *will* find this chain gun and ammo. (right)

Controlling Your Warrior

You can use a mouse, the keyboard, or a combination of the two to play *CyClones*.

Keyboard Movement (use numeric keypad)

Forward = 8	Backward = 2 or 5
Ahead left = 7	Ahead right = 9
Turn left = 4	Turn right = 6
Move laterally left = 1	Move laterally right = 3

Jump = +

Mouse movement (hold down right mouse button and move arrow in area between cross-hairs and box angles):
Forward (center, above cross-hairs)
Backward (center, below cross-hairs)
Ahead left (top left corner)
Ahead right (top right corner)
Turn left (center, left of cross-hairs)
Turn right (center, right of cross-hairs)
Move laterally left (bottom left corner)
Move laterally right (bottom right corner)
Jump (not available with mouse)

Aiming: Use mouse, keyboard cursor keys, or alpha keys W (up), A (left), S (down) and D (right) to place cursor over target
Shooting: Left-click mouse or press Spacebar
Selecting icons/opening doors: Right-click mouse or press Enter

PCG

Troubleshooting Tips

Raven Software has included a HELP.TXT file with this demo, mainly dealing with sound problems. Here are a other few tech tips to help you get the game up and running.

Problem: I have 4MB of RAM, but the installation program shows that I don't have enough XMS or EMS. What gives?

Answer: Ignore the message and install the game. If you have 4MB of RAM, you can definitely run the game, though you might need to disable SMARTDRV.EXE from your CONFIG.SYS or AUTOEXEC.BAT file. Consult your DOS manual on how to disable SMARTDRV.EXE.

If you have 6MB RAM or more, you'll probably want to keep a 1MB SMARTDRV cache; with 8MB of RAM, you can run a 3MB cache. Raven Software says this will help speed the game up, especially if you're playing with sound on.

Problem: I have an Advanced Gravis Ultrasound that's supposed to be Sound Blaster compatible, but every time I configure the sound I'm thrown out of the program, my PC resets, and I see a message telling me to press F1 to run Setup. What do I do?

Answer: The *CyClones* demo does not support the Sound Blaster emulation of the Ultrasound; if that's your sound card please select "No Sound" on the Sound Setup Screen. If you've tried to configure the game to your Ultrasound's Sound Blaster emulation settings, are kicked out of the program, and arrive at a screen telling you to press F1 to run Setup, just turn your computer off, turn it back on again, then go back to the CyClones directory. Type SOUND and press Enter, and select "No Sound" from the menu.

Problem: My mouse doesn't work with the game.

Answer: *CyClones* has a problem with version 6.12 of the Logitech Mouse driver. Using a later (or earlier) version should solve the problem. To obtain the latest Logitech mouse drivers, contact your dealer; they are also available on many online services.

If You're Having Technical Problems...

If you Coverdisk is damaged and won't load, mail it to:

PC Gamer Coverdisk #4
300-A South Westgate Drive
Greensboro, NC 27407

If you're having technical problems with the demo once it's been installed, call SSI technical support at (408) 737-6850 between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Pacific time) Monday-Friday. You can also send technical questions to Raven Software on Compuserve (GO GAMAPUB and select SSI), America On-Line (keyword SSI, then select Let's Discuss), or SSI's own bulletin board (408-739-6137). Also, Raven Software says they'd love to hear your opinions and suggestions about *CyClones*; you can write them at:

CyClones Demo
Raven Software
559 D'Onforio Drive, Suite 15
Madison, WI 53719



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Product Information Number 160

SCOOP!

EXCLUSIVE! BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF THE HOTTEST GAMES

NASCAR® Racing

Where The Rubber Meets The Road

Auto racing is Papyrus' specialty, so it's only natural they're turning to the most popular version of the sport.

by Leslie Mizell

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: NASCAR® Racing
Developer: Papyrus Publishing, Inc.
Publisher: Papyrus Publishing, Inc.
Projected price: DOS $74.99; CD-ROM $79.99
Percentage complete: 60%

In a nutshell:

A stock-car racing simulation with nine tracks, each painstakingly based on real NASCAR courses, featuring plenty of your favorite NASCAR drivers.

What's so special?

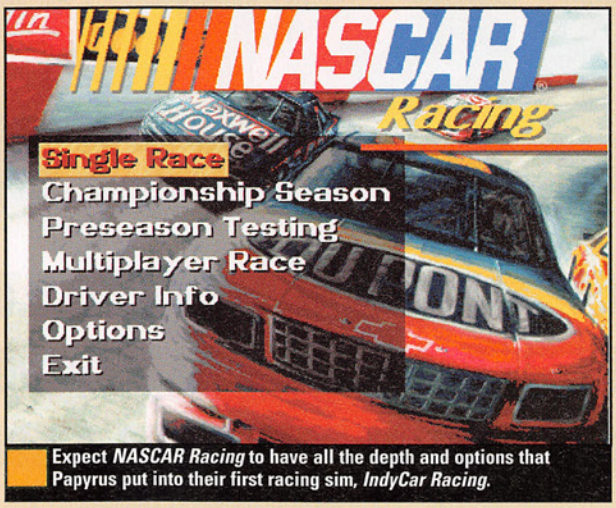
NASCAR has never been bigger than it is right now, and *NASCAR Racing* is designed to satisfy fans on every level. If you want, you can let the computer handle things like customizing tires, suspension systems, and gears, or you can step in and do it all yourself. This is racing done by people who know racing.

Why should I care?

With an impressive pedigree like *Indy 500* and *IndyCar Racing* (the latter was voted *PC Gamer*'s Runner-up for Best Simulation of 1993), how can *NASCAR Racing* go wrong?

And when's it coming out?

NASCAR Racing will arrive sometime this fall.



Expect *NASCAR Racing* to have all the depth and options that Papyrus put into their first racing sim, *IndyCar Racing*.

Well, race fans, it's still a *little* early to say, but judging from what we've seen so far of *NASCAR Racing*, it looks like the odds-on favorite to take the checkered flag of racing sims.

Just look at all it has in its favor. It's designed by Papyrus, whose previous titles, *Indianapolis 500* and *Indycar Racing*, were both critical and popular successes. It's based on the massively popular sport of stock-car racing. And it looks like it does just about everything right.

"It was really a natural progression," says Adam Levesque, *NASCAR*'s producer and designer. "I'm a huge NASCAR fan — it's the single most popular spectator sport, and in the last couple of years it's really taken off. Our customer support staff gets 30-40 calls a week from people specifically asking us to develop a NASCAR game."

Levesque heads a core design team that also consists of Dave Kaemmer, co-founder of Papyrus and designer for *Indycar Racing*, and John Wheeler, the lead technical designer. But the extended crew also includes five 3D designers, four artists, and six programmers. Levesque himself got involved in game designing largely by accident, answering an ad for a game tester on a whim. He worked at Infocom for a year, then moved to Spinnaker Software before joining Papyrus. He was the lead 3D artist for *Indycar*; *NASCAR* is his first shot at producing a sim.

"I go up on CompuServe every day," he says, "and I hear from those who love *Indycar Racing*. I also hear from players who complain that this isn't right or that isn't right. While it's wonderful to hear the good responses, they don't help you very much when it comes time to do a new game. We took the complaints to heart, compiling a list of features and additions people wanted. For *NASCAR Racing*, we went through the list, added our own suggestions, then picked out the ones we thought were most important."

One of the major complaints racers had — including our own Lee Buchanan, who reviewed *Indycar Racing* in the last issue (March/April 1994) of *PC Gamer*'s forebear *PC Entertainment* — was that you couldn't save your race in progress, even



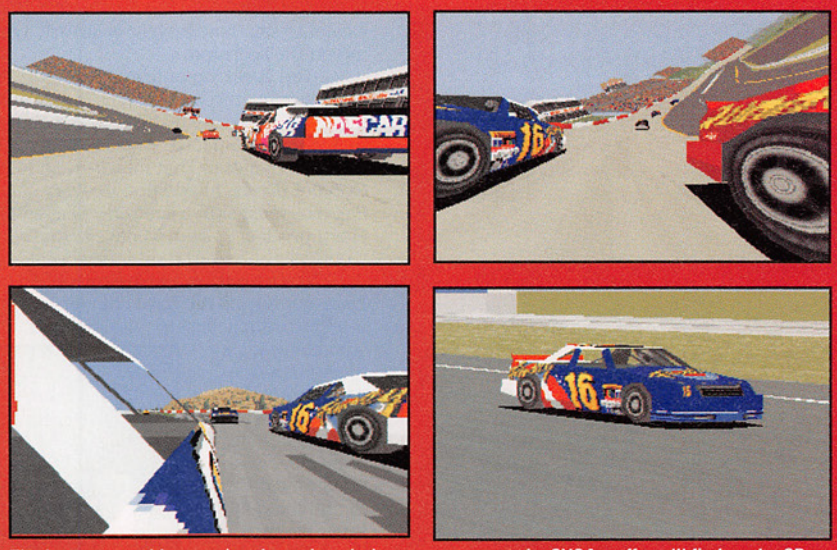
Papyrus is known for its meticulous attention to detail in recreating the nuances of every aspect of auto racing.

though some races lasted three hours or so. That's been fixed in *NASCAR Racing*. In addition, there's now an option to drive from an outside-the-car perspective (a la *Virtua Racing*) and better assistance features (such as improved automatic shifting and braking) for novice drivers.

Obviously, most game designers would be extremely concerned about making sure that the physics of drafting or the G-forces in corners were translated correctly. But capturing the specifics of stock-car racing threw up no caution flags in Levesque's mind.

"Surprisingly enough," he says, "I wasn't worried about that at all. I knew that Dave Kaemmer, the main force behind *Indycar Racing*, knew how to get the physics of driving right. I was more concerned about how we were going to make it different from *Indy*. The challenge was to capture the different feel of the car.

"I love *Indycar*. And I admire *World Circuit* [from MicroProse]. I've played them both a lot, and they're a lot of fun. But once you look past those two, the quality of games drops off a bit. It's because the most difficult thing to achieve in a racing sim is to make the player who's sitting at his computer feel like he's really driving a car. There are lots of games that have you driving spaceships, and that's not as hard because no one's driven a spaceship — you don't have anything to compare it to. But it's a challenge to have someone believe that even though he's using a joystick or keyboard, he's actually driving a car."



The low-res graphics aren't quite as knock-down gorgeous as the SVGA stuff you'll find on the CD-ROM version, but they still look very, very good.

NASCAR vehicles obviously handle differently from Indy cars, and of course most of the tracks are different from Indy courses as well. Grease monkeys can really get in there and play around with car customization in *NASCAR Racing*, adjusting such items as rear spoiler angles and tire temperature. The long and short of it is that *NASCAR* truly is a new driving experience.

"People are going to have to forget what they've learned with *IndyCar Racing*," Levesque says. "They're going to be driving a car that's more than twice as heavy and has much less downforce. It's a very different experience. For example, you could drive around New Hampshire in *Indycar* flat out. But a NASCAR car couldn't — you can't go flat out. You have to brake and let up on the gas."

"For *NASCAR Racing*, people are going to have to forget what they've learned with *IndyCar Racing*. They're going to be driving a car that's more than twice as heavy and has much less downforce. It's a *very* different experience."
***NASCAR Racing* producer Adam Levesque**



***NASCAR Racing* is so realistic that you'll almost swear you can smell rubber burning.**


Stock-car racing is one place where you don't want to dodge the draft! The SVGA graphics in the CD-ROM version provide very realistic images.

Nine NASCAR tracks will be included in *NASCAR Racing*, including some of the best tracks on the Winston Cup circuit — Darlington, Talladega, Martinsville, to name a few — and Papyrus has also tossed in Watkins Glen (Wow! Left- *and* right-hand turns!). The design team hasn't visited all the tracks featured in the sim, although the different tracks provided data and video footage that were extensively studied. And don't forget that company trip to Darlington, where the team toured the pits and garage area. That's where Andrew Petree, Dale Earnhardt's crew chief, unexpectedly pulled out a copy of *Indycar Racing* from the trunk of his car. He's a fan.

"One thing about Indy racing is that all the tracks are different. I was thinking

Papyrus Publishing: Road Tested, Driver Approved

No other company has developed such a solid reputation in as short a time as Papyrus has with its *Indianapolis 500* and *Indycar Racing*. But just what makes them so good? Here are capsule reviews.

Indianapolis 500 (Electronic Arts) — Sure, it's four years old. But the truth's in the design, and Papyrus cut its racing teeth on this sim. The game's realism is what got it noticed — no other game at the time was able to generate such an incredible sense of speed, or offer as many options for altering each car's performance. That more than made up for the one, albeit world-famous, track. Jockeying for a position with 32 other drivers, as long as there's plenty of wreckage and action replays, is reward enough.

Indycar Racing (Virgin Interactive) — Man, what a ride! Last year's release earned a fistful of awards and certificates (including a berth at Number 20 on *PC Gamer's* Top 40 Games of All Time list), and it's easy to see why. When you burn rubber in this one, you can practically smell the fumes. But it's not just racing action. You must customize your car to its maximum efficiency, from tire pressure to wing settings. And with the two add-on disks just released, you can now race on every track of the IndyCar circuit.



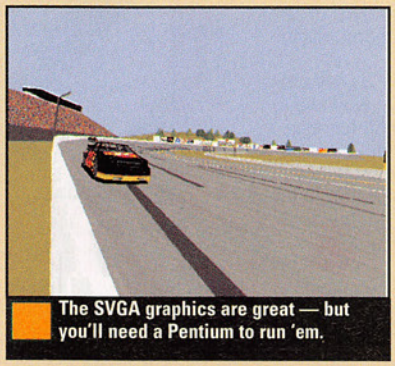
IndyCar Racing: Indianapolis 500 was a great game, but *IndyCar* is the one that burned the name Papyrus into the minds of racing fans everywhere.

initially that the NASCAR tracks would be alike since most of them are all ovals. But they're really completely different. Each one has a different setup and requires different skills. For example, Bristol is a half-mile oval banked at 36 degrees. That's quite a difference from Martinsville, which is also a half-mile oval but flat. There's actually a variety of tracks, ranging from short ovals to super speedways, and unique NASCAR tracks like Darlington. We really got a good balance of tracks for the initial release."

Initial release? That means add-ons, folks. *Indycar* had two supplemental disks with extra courses, so it's a cinch *NASCAR* will have something along the same line. Levesque can't confirm anything now, except to say that Papyrus is already working on the licensing.

And speaking of licensing, *NASCAR*, quite frankly, throws Papyrus into licensing hell. One of the features of the game is that you can duplicate your favorite car's colors and decals. That means in addition to every driver, in addition to every car, Papyrus must sign a licensing deal with every product -- from Maxwell House to Goodyear — featured on every decal.

"It's a pretty massive project," Levesque says. "We have one person working with licensing full-time, and sometimes it's a more-than-one-person job. But we think the benefits of including the realism far outweigh the difficulty in obtaining all those licenses."



The SVGA graphics are great — but you'll need a Pentium to run 'em.

Although as many as 20 drivers will be included in the final simulation, Papyrus didn't work particularly closely with their real-life counterparts. The game used the 1994 season as a model, but the company didn't want to duplicate any one Winston Cup star, for example, who would be the best driver in just about any race.

"We're definitely working on trying to add some personality to the drivers," Levesque says. "Some opponents, for instance, might be more aggressive in the last half of the race than the first half. But we also wanted players to be able to model drivers after themselves, to be able to adjust the drivers any way they wanted to."

NASCAR Racing is simple in concept, but everything else about the title is high-tech. Like *IndyCar*, it uses Papyrus' proprietary 3D Super Texture, which gives the game its incredibly detailed graphics. It has a modem feature that Levesque promises has fewer bugs in it than *Indycar*'s. And the CD-ROM includes both VGA and SVGA versions of the games, although players are going to need a Pentium system to take advantage of the majority of them.

"The products we've done," Levesque says, "have all pushed the edge. SVGA graphics give players another option. We realize that just a small number of players are going to be able to run them right away, but we think this is one of the directions in which the industry is growing. It's too early for games designed for the Pentium to have mass-market appeal, but as prices fall, we think people will rediscover *NASCAR Racing* on their shelves. The SVGA graphics are so different from the VGA that it will be almost like playing another game. So we're focusing our efforts on the future, although the low-res VGA version is also top-notch."



To stay in the running on all the different tracks in *NASCAR Racing*, you'll need to fine-tune your car based on factors such as track type.

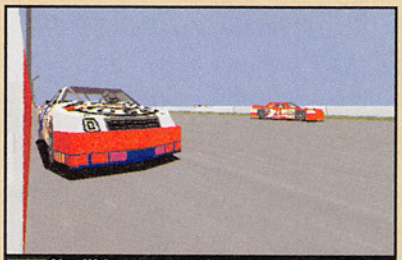
Just how realistic is *NASCAR Racing*? Strip away the graphics and the extras, and what do you have? Well, you've got an amazingly authentic simulation. Levesque tells the story of an ex-NASCAR racer he met during June's Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. The guy didn't know computer games at all, and the first time he tried tooling around the Michigan track, he made all the mistakes newcomers make — hitting the wall, going onto the grass, and so on.

"By the fourth or fifth turn," Levesque recalls, "he was lifting up as he went into the corner... running really fast laps. He said that at first he was just jamming on the gas and going. But then he remembered where he was, and he drove like he would if he were actually on the Michigan track — then he was fine. That really blew me away."

NASCAR Racing is only around 60 percent complete, but Lesvesque is already looking to his next project. He promises another racing game, though he wouldn't give us any details. But he encouraged all the fans out there to keep in touch.

"The really important thing to us is listening to our customers," he says. "We obviously can't do everything they say, but we really want their feedback. As I said, I'm on CompuServe every day, and I hate giving generic BS answers. I try to explain why we do the things we do, and why we make the choices we make. That's what people want. People are smart — they can tell if you're being honest with them or just handing them a line. As a company, we know it's very, very important to listen to them and take what they say seriously.

"We've got a reputation for racing simulations now, and it's a reputation we have to live up to. We're happy about that — it pushes us to do even better. We've got a good basis for a racing engine here, but, of course, our ultimate goal is to release the best racing game ever."



You'll have to use the same sort of tactics that real drivers use if you hope to come out ahead of the pack in *NASCAR Racing*.

A lot of people — including us — felt they'd already achieved that goal with *IndyCar Racing*. And if *NASCAR Racing* surpasses that one, chances are it will have a permanent lock on the Best Racing Game award for the foreseeable future.

PCG

PRAY IT'S ONLY A NIGHTMARE



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Product Information Number 109

SIERRA

The Fortress of Dr.

Laughing Through the Gore

You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll kill everything that moves. It's the kind of special happiness you'll only find in *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*.

by Gary Meredith



You didn't expect an uninterrupted journey through the lair of Dr. Radiaki, did you? Oh, well — you'll probably be able to make a good handbag out of this guy when you're through with him.

FYI. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki
Developer: Future Vision and Maelstrom Software
Publisher: Merit Software
Projected Price: $69.95
Percent Complete: 75%

In a nutshell:

The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki injects some much-needed humor into the smoothly scrolling, first-person, blood-and-guts shooter. Wheeee!

What's so special?

Have you ever watched people playing *Doom*? They don't smile. Nope, not at all. Maybe a grimace approaching the configuration of a smile, but hardly what you'd call an expression of unbridled joy.

Why should I care?

Now, whether this is because the game's so grim or because smiling would somehow screw up their concentration is moot. In T*he Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*, you can't help but smile.

And when's it coming out?

Floppy version : August 1994
CD-ROM version: September 1994

The flood is coming, and there's no point in running. Quicker than you can recite the MPC Level 2 requirements, we'll all be awash in a sea of *Doom*-like shooters, with endless corridors and the gory dispatching of gruesome bad guys. The summer Consumer Electronics Show featured more "sons of *Doom*" than you could shake a shotgun at. With that sort of inundation on the way, a game has got to have a really strong hook to make it stand out from the rest of the pack. *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki* has just that sort of hook — humor.

Yeah, throwing humor into the violent mix of a first-person shooter sounds something akin to showing up at a funeral wearing nothing but pasties and a pair of Birkenstocks. But some of the best horror films were liberally laced with dark humor — and when done well, a few laughs can set up a nice tension, what with all the killing and mayhem. At least that's the way it ends up working in *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*.

The plot — that's right, there is a method to the madness — is right out of Ian Fleming (by way of Roger Corman and Mel Brooks). It's 1963, and the world is still a tad gun shy after the near-miss of the Cuban Missile Crisis, two years previous. Dr. Radiaki, a mysterious Japanese businessman with questionable acquaintances, is both suitably eccentric and appropriately megalomaniacal. He's ensconced himself on a remote Pacific island, where his ambi-



Smooth character movement is evident even in the death throes of this gator guy.

Radiaki



The thought of going up against a highly trained samurai with a baseball bat would have others cowering. But not you, right?

tions for world domination are finally made real. For the huge sum of one billion dollars (this is 1963, remember, when a billion bucks was the annual GNP of a lot of countries and not just Bill Gates' pocket change), Radiaki will promise not to loose nuclear destruction on all humanity.

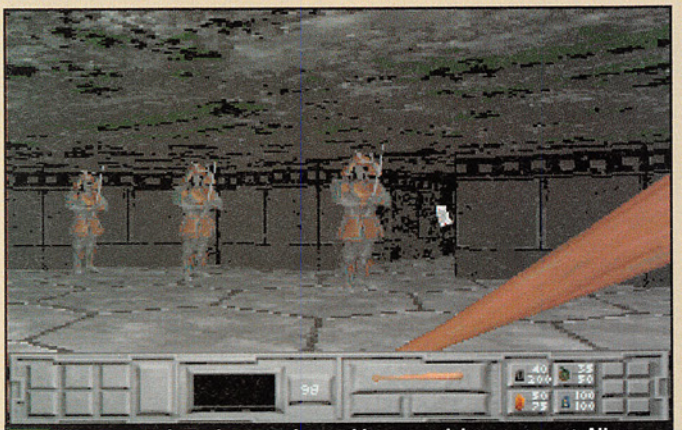
Dr. Radiaki's identity is initially unknown, and it's only after U.N. Intelligence traces a load of nuclear waste back to that remote island in the Pacific that you, Special Agent Mack Banner, are dispatched to check things out. Inexplicably, you're delivered to the island via torpedo tube, armed only with a corked baseball bat. Fortunately, you can pick up more weapons as you progress — but you'll be amazed what a good weapon a tricked-up Louisville Slugger can be.

Of course, you must battle your way through those aforementioned endless corridors, taking out Radiaki's minions and fortifying your own weaponry and supplies. The object, as always, is a final duel with the Doctor himself, in which you overcome his terrible invention, the Ultimate Weapon. And all this is carried on with the designers' tongues permanently lodged in their cheeks.

A lot of the humor in the game comes from the variety of foes, and the funny ways in which they meet their respective makers. The samurai warriors, for example, face death with due obeisance to the code of the warrior: Lay enough of the hardwood on them, and they'll drop to their knees and commit *seppuku*. The robots that patrol a lot of the corridors are one part Asimov to two parts Sunbeam. With heads shaped like toasters, what else could they do when snuffed but pop out a couple of toast slices, all ready for butter. There are more than 20 enemies to battle, each with its own strengths and weaknesses — and of course, its own amusing death throes.

These characters are rendered in a smooth, three-dimensional style that creates the sensation of depth. Perspective from foreground to background, and vice versa, flows quite nicely, whether you're moving toward a stationary foe, it's moving toward a stationary you, or you're both moving toward each other. Gilbert Austin, president of Maelstrom and one of the game's designers (along with Edwin Herrell and Joel Manners), speaks of how they wanted to use the graphics as a departure from the *Doom* mold, by emphasizing character over atmosphere. Certainly, the graphic quality and the personality of the characters are the most distinctive facets of the game.

> **"You can kill things and feel good about it, 'cause you've got a smile on your face."**
> ***Gilbert Austin, Maelstrom Software***

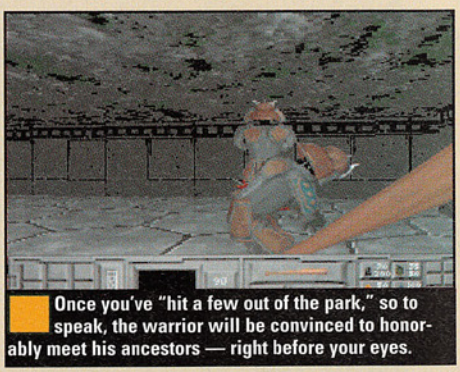


These samurai warriors guard something essential to your quest. All you can do here is knock the dirt from your cleats and start swinging.

It's obvious that the design team took a long, hard look at the game's predecessors, primarily *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D*, before setting out on their own path. The basic idea was to make the game, as Austin puts it, "a fun exercise...you can kill things and feel good about it, 'cause you've got a smile on your face. Good taste never enters into the equation."

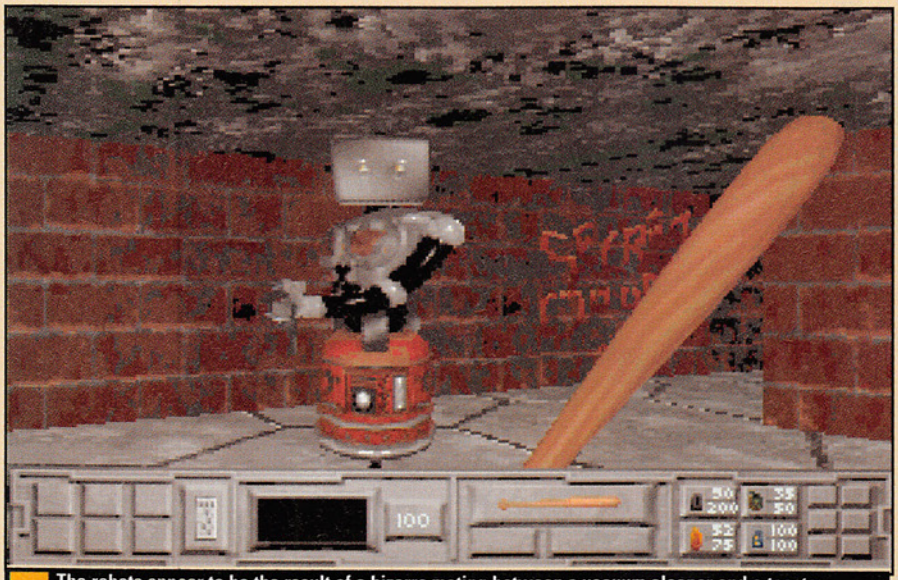
If that sounds a bit off the wall, then you've pegged the irreverent attitude that's behind *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*. Austin, Herrell (Gilbert made sure we'd spell it right, Edwin), and Manners started the design process by just "hanging out, making each other laugh." They hypothesized a funny *Wolfenstein 3D*, and from those musings came the kernel that evolved into *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*. That kernel was a mutant teutonic 'enfant terrible' named Junior, who runs around in lederhosen and bunny slippers, professing friendship while he takes potshots at you.

Along with graphics, sound was also an important consideration for the designers. The sound effects in *Doom* are all very similar, and Austin feels *that Wolfenstein 3D* was superior in this sense. "I lived to hear 'Mein leben!' each time a bad guy bit the dust — you felt like you'd really put the 'hoit' on 'em." That's the sort of sonic fun that they tried to bring to *Radiaki*, and the game abounds with sounds to enhance and entertain. Blast a toaster robot, for example, and you hear the 'ding' of the timer bell just before he blows his toast.

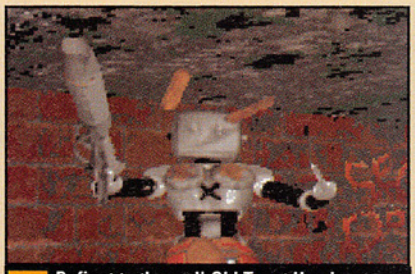


Once you've "hit a few out of the park," so to speak, the warrior will be convinced to honorably meet his ancestors — right before your eyes.

The designers took something of a bold step in choosing the mouse as



The robots appear to be the result of a bizarre mating between a vacuum cleaner and a toaster.



Defiant to the end! Old Toast Head may have popped his last piece of bread, but he makes no effort to hide his disdain.

the primary control device. This may not sit all that well with all the *Doom*meisters out there, but it's a natural for adventure gamers, who've been pointing and clicking for some time now. And it really makes sense, given the freewheeling nature of character movement. All that's needed is your basic two-button mouse. To move, you just hold down the left button and steer. Using your weapon is simply a matter of clicking the right button. And movement is not limited to 90- or even 45-degree rotational increments. You can use the keyboard if you simply can't work up a murderous demeanor with the rodent, but that begins to feel clunky after you've taken a spin or two with the mouse. There are at present no plans for a joystick interface, although Austin suspects there will eventually be a patch for it. It certainly makes sense for this game, so you probably won't have to wait too long before joystick support is made available.

There will be two versions of the game — one floppy, the other a CD-ROM; the floppy version is the least demanding of the two in terms of hardware. Nominally, it can be played on a 386SX-25 or better with 4MB of RAM and either an 8-bit or 16-bit sound board. The CD-ROM, however, requires considerably more muscle: a 486SX or better, and a whopping 8MB of RAM. Buyers of the CD-ROM version will be rewarded with smoother animation, more sound effects, and additional levels. "There's only so much you can do in a game of this sort with only 4 megs of RAM," Austin maintains. That's not to say that the floppy version is any less of a game — far from it, in fact. The beta version we've been playing displays good animation and acceptable speed, even on lower-end computers.

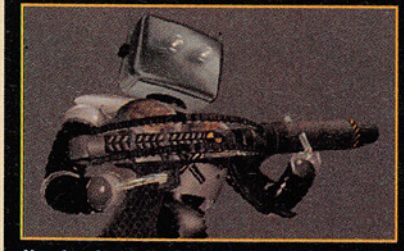
"We're not pushing technology for technology's sake," says Gilbert Austin. "Our design philosophy is more conceptual than high-tech. We're trying to put new spins on present state-of-the-art engines, and using our energies to put the fun back into gaming."

That viewpoint is wonderfully illustrated in this title. The no-holds-barred, laugh-your-ass-off attitude runs all through the game, and only makes us look forward to more creations from these guys. But for now, you'll probably have all action — and laughs — you can handle with *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*.

PCG

Dr.Radiaki's Menagerie

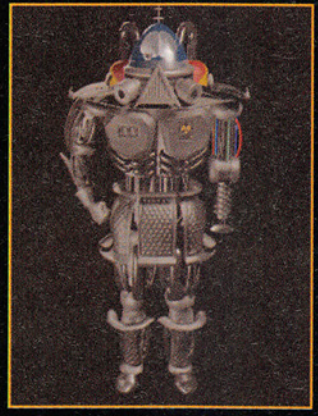
A few high-res publicity shots of Radiaki's pals. They won't look quite this good in the game, but this'll give you some idea of who you'll be dealing with when you storm the fortress.



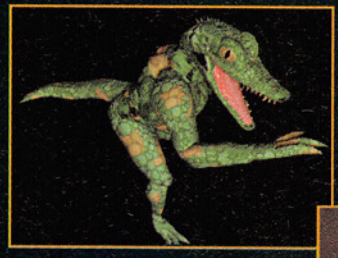
Here's what Julia Childs dreams of after too much of the Chateau neuf Du Pape



No, this is not the foyer at Nintendo's home offices. The receptionist there is much tougher to get past.



All the mouthwash in the world won't help get rid of this guy's radioactive breath!



These aren't farm-raised gators, and they don't take to strangers. They're mean and fast — and fortunately for you, they're kind of stupid.



Don't you just hate those sneaky, conniving Ninjas? Won't it be a joy to creep up behind one of 'em, and squash his head like a cantaloupe?

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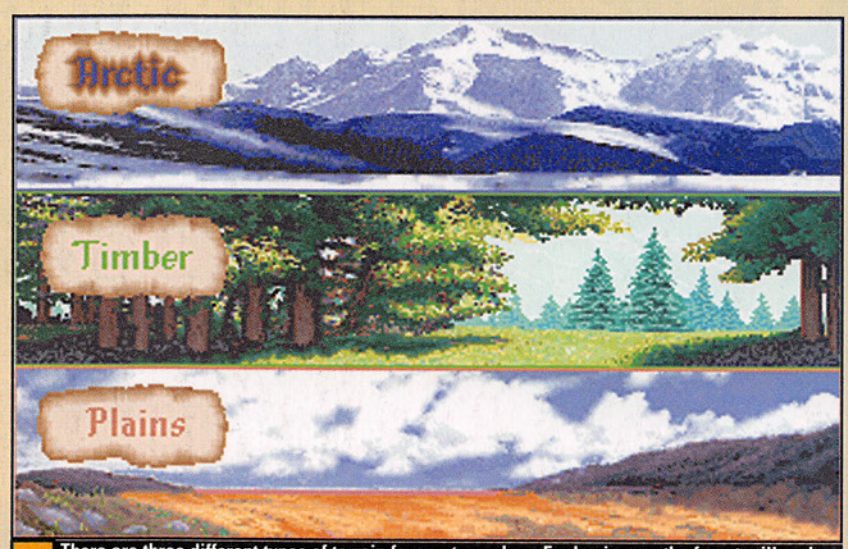
Product Information Number 158

Wolf

The Call of the Wild

Wolf is so completely entertaining, it blurs the line between fun and learning. This is the future of educational software.

by Trent C. Ward



There are three different types of terrain for you to explore. For beginners, the forest will probably offer the best chances for survival since it offers more security and better food supply.

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Wolf
Developer: Manley & Associates
Publisher: Sanctuary Woods
Projected Price: $49.95 on CD-ROM
Percent Complete: 80%

In a nutshell:
Wolf is part role-playing adventure and part sim, putting you in the shoes (or paws) of a wolf as it goes through its daily life.

What's so special?
In addition to being a load of fun, *Wolf* really is educational. Anyone who plays this game — adult or child — will come away with a better understanding of life in the wild.

Why should I care?
Even if you don't want to learn anything about animal life, *Wolf* is still one of the most unique PC titles to come along in quite some time. It's definitely not a "me too" program. And a portion of the profits from the game will be used to help in continuing wolf preservation efforts.

And when's it coming out?
October 1994

PC game design often seems to run in cycles. An original, best-selling game like *Railroad Tycoon* or *Doom* comes out, and soon there's a whole flood of similar titles. In fairness, many of them are very good — sometimes even better than the originals. And it's easy to see why publishers opt to emulate big hits; it's a lot safer to go with a proven format than to try something completely new.

But if someone's not willing to step up and try something different, PC gaming won't grow. Fortunately there are plenty of innovators out there, and publishers willing to support them.

Manley & Associates is a perfect example of one of those innovative design groups — and the proof of that can be seen in their latest title, *Wolf*. With equal parts nature documentary, role-playing game, and simulation, *Wolf*'s unique gameplay could probably be best described as a wolf simulator.

If the game sounds familiar, it's probably because it was originally shown by Disney Software at last year's Winter CES, where *Wolf* garnered a lot of good early reaction. Shortly after the show, Disney decided to drop the project without explanation. Fortunately for Manley & Associates (and for all us gamers) Sanctuary Woods entered the picture and, after seeing the program, immediately decided it was a definite winner. Development continued with Sanctuary Woods as publisher — and despite the travel, the end-product seems no worse for the wear.



Before you begin simulation mode, you can customize the game's parameters. You can choose the amount of food available, the season, and even the amount of money the hunters will receive for your pelt.

Wolf actually casts you as member of a wolf pack, and your goal is to rise in strength, intelligence, and rank until you become leader of the pack. In practice, this means that you'll have to live your life as that wolf as it goes through the trying (and often dangerous) business of day-to-day survival. There's a scenario mode, which challenges you to accomplish one of 40 different tasks ranging from something as simple as locating fresh water to more difficult things like finding a mate within a given period of time. For action that's a little more free form, there's the simulation mode that allows you to play for half a month, a month, or even longer periods of time just trying to survive, increase your standing among the other wolves, and hopefully mate and bring new life to your pack.



Rainy weather can be tough on the senses. Smells and sounds won't travel far, and under these conditions, you'll often find that you've travelled in the wrong direction.

While these scenarios would be difficult in even a perfect world, you'll also have to deal with such complications as competing packs, hunters looking to make money off your pelt, and shotgun wielding farmers trying to protect their domestic animals. If you don't learn to avoid these and other dangers while still finding enough food and water to stay alive, your game will be over as quickly as it begins.

While the realism of these scenarios and your place in the environment are decidedly sim-like, the role-playing elements in the game are unmistakable. Instead of experience points, the computer keeps track of the number of different animals you've killed, and the number of challenges against other wolves that you've won or lost. As you gain experience stalking game, defending yourself, and so on, your wolf will gain status in the pack, moving from omega all of the way up to alpha. With each move up in the pack hierarchy, your chances of successfully mating will also increase. This is important, because the only way you can continue your game is by taking control of one of your cubs. If you don't have any offspring, your game is over.

All of this is a lot more entertaining than it might seem, and *Wolf* combines the almost alien intricacies of life in canine society with detailed video footage and clear sound samples to help keep the gameplay fresh and absorbing no matter how may times you play.

There's plenty of subtle educational value in *Wolf*, too. First off, just playing the game will give you an idea of how complex and social a wolf's life really is.

Will the Real Wolf Please Stand Up?

The numerous wolves you have a chance to play as or interact with in the world of Wolf are more than just figments of some programmer's imagination. The names and faces of the wolves were taken from actual animals studied by Wolf Haven International, a non-profit organization based in Seattle that's devoted to the preservation of wolves. Wolf Haven worked closely with Manley & Associates in the development of this project, to ensure its realism and to provide expert insight into wolf behavior. The stats and histories of the game's characters are based on long-term observation of animals over the years in parks all over the Northwest. These are some of the members of the Orange Leaf pack. Get to know them well — your life may soon depend on them.



A good example of a female in her prime, Rumour is almost 3 1/2 years old. She had her first kill at 9 months, and has won 4 of her 6 challenges.



One of the oldest females in Orange Leaf, Silver Back has almost reached her eighth year with the pack. She has won 4 of the 7 tests she's entered into, and made her first kill at 8 months.



Cloud Sing is a 5 year old female who's been in more fights than many males in the pack. She made her first kill at 8 months, and has won 5 of her 9 challenges.



A young male looking to make his mark, Draco has only recently become a full -fledged member of the pack. Though he's only been in three fights, he's managed to win two of them. He made his first kill at 8 months.



Cepheus is a 7 year old male who has a pretty good amount of muscle and experience to back him up in the hunt. He made his first kill at 7 months, and has won 4 of 8 challenges.

You'll hunt for food to sustain yourself and the pack, learning which animals a wolf can tackle on his own, and which require the help of the entire pack. You'll learn how wolves care for their young, bringing food back to the den after a successful kill, or regurgitating meat for young pups. *Wolf* also shows



Once you achieve alpha status, other members of the pack will follow you as you travel. This gives you a much better chance of taking down big prey.

the complex social structure of a pack, and the various stances, expressions, and sounds that the animals make when interacting with one another. And perhaps most importantly, you'll see the many ways man is responsible for many of the problems that the wolf faces in day-to-day life.

To top it all off, *Wolf* also contains a fully interactive documentary titled *"About Wolves."* Sort of an encyclopedia



Finding water is just as important — or more important — to your survival as finding food. Try to find a source of water fairly close to your den.

of wolf facts, *About Wolves* takes you on an explorative journey through the life of this often-misunderstood animal. Since the game portion of the program is so accurate, a player who's having trouble can go to the documentary, see how a real wolf might act in a given situation, and return to the simulation to utilize the knowledge they've gained.

Wolf is going to appeal to people on a lot of different levels. As an educational product, it does a fantastic job of immersing you in the fascinating life of the wolf, while helping you understand the necessity for preservation. As a game, *Wolf* is addictive, entertaining, and fast-paced fun.

Even if you don't care in the slightest about animals or ecology, this is a title that will put you under its spell just because it's so completely different. *Wolf* is a welcome departure from the gaming norm, and is definitely unlike anything you've played before.

PCG

My Life as a Wolf

Wolf **is a lot of fun, but make no mistake — the emphasis here is on realism. Actions like fighting, hunting, and mating will force you to think like a wolf in order to survive.**



Once you bring down an animal, you'll watch on as your wolf eats. Using different commands, you can bury meat for later or tear off pieces to take back to your cubs.



You might think mating would be one of the easier tasks facing you, but that's not the case. Be patient, and don't ever give up — your future in the pack depends on it.



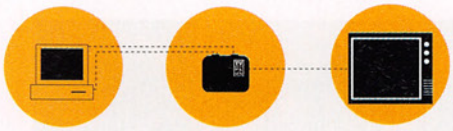
When your cubs are young or there isn't any nearby meat, you can feed them by regurgitating a past meal. The sound effects for this one help bring the scene to life — perhaps a little too much so for some players.



Learn to balance raw power with intimidation. Keep in mind that it's better to see a rival skulk away than to expend your energy — and risk harm — by fighthing it out.

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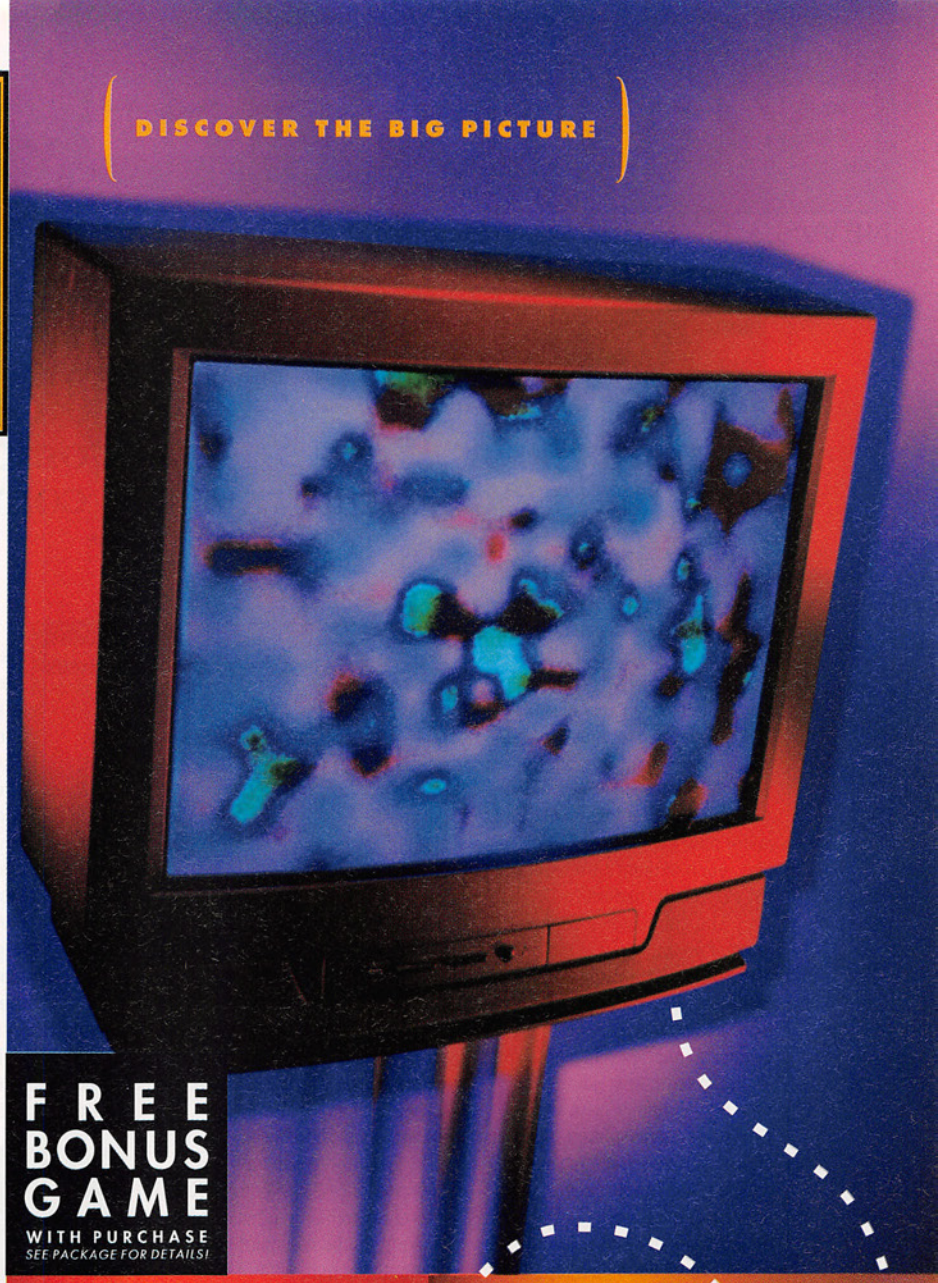
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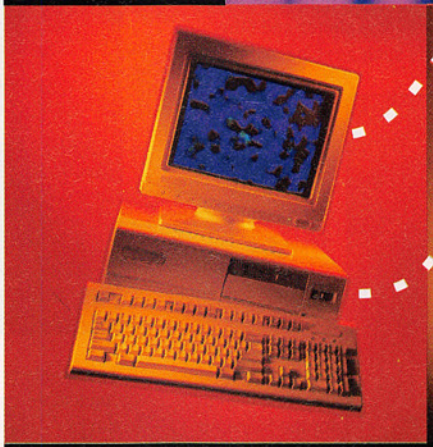
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EA Strikes!

Navy Fighters kicks off Electronic Arts' new flight-sim line; *Noctropolis* nearing completion; *Magic Carpet* set to fly in November

They didn't exhibit at CES, but that doesn't mean Electronic Arts has lost interest in PC games. Far from it, in fact, as a visit to EA's offices in San Mateo, CA, directly after the show revealed. Almost-finished versions of three major new games were on display, each of them sure to interest *PC Gamer* readers.

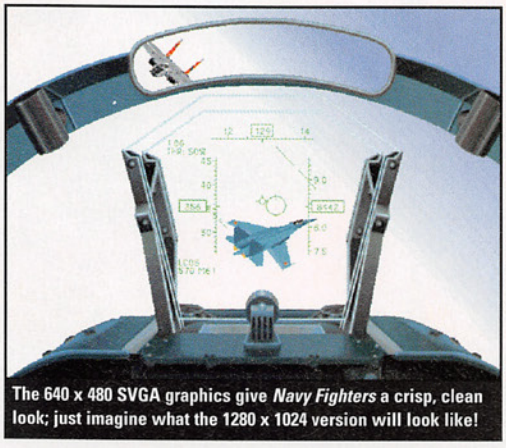
The game we've seen the least of up until now is the carrier-based flight sim *Air Combat: Navy Fighters*, the latest project from *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* creator Brent Iverson. Like *CYAC* — voted tenth best game of all time by the editors here at *PC Gamer* — *Navy Fighters* is designed very much in the currently popular "dogfights-are-the-most-important-thing" style, but with an unusual mix of planes. Flight models have been developed for numerous modern American and Soviet combat aircraft, though



Navy Fighters **offers a wide variety of options, from weapons loadout to customizable nose art.**

which of these will make the final cut is unclear; current favorites include the A-7E Corsair II, F-14B Tomcat, F/A-18 Hornet, Su27 "Flanker," and the brand-new Lockheed F-22. Other popular planes, including the go-anywhere Harrier, are likely to be saved for a sequel or for the inevitable mission disks.

EA and Iverson have set a lofty goal for *Navy Fighters*: They intend to challenge players with some of the best simulated air combat yet seen, with realistic AI for enemy planes and other targets such as ships and tanks.



The 640 x 480 SVGA graphics give ***Navy Fighters*** **a crisp, clean look; just imagine what the 1280 x 1024 version will look like!**

One mode allows you to pick your plane, air force, and weapons load irrespective of whether these combinations would ever come up in real life — for instance, you could quite happily load a Soviet Su-22 with American Phoenix missiles, then fly it for the Royal Air Force. What's more, you can make up your own air force name (General Trotter's Napoleonic Flying Corps, anyone?), and even create your own nose art in Deluxe Paint — all this looks especially cool in the game's two high-res modes.

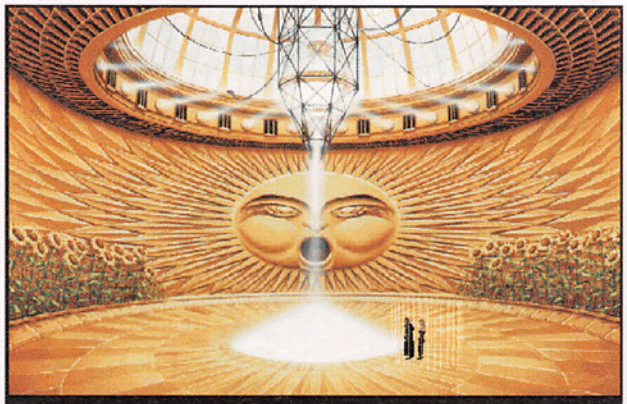
Besides pure head-to-head combat, the game also offers a campaign mode — based on a Russian invasion of the Ukraine — 50 stand-alone missions, and a mission creator. Things like an autopilot for carrier landings make *Navy Fighters* less intimidating to flight-sim beginners than it might otherwise be, while simply stunning graphics — including lovely details like texture-mapped targets, digitized explosions, and animations of the flight crews running across the carrier flight decks — make it a strong contender for best-looking sim yet.

The standard game can be run in low- or high-res modes — you'll be wanting a 486/33 for the low-res, and a 486/66 for the 640 x 480 high-res — but even more amazing is the special Pentium-specific version that'll be on sale separately, boasting a mind-boggling 1280 x 1024 resolution. All versions of the game are currently scheduled for October release, though it might be wise to figure in another month or two — you know how those release dates can change.

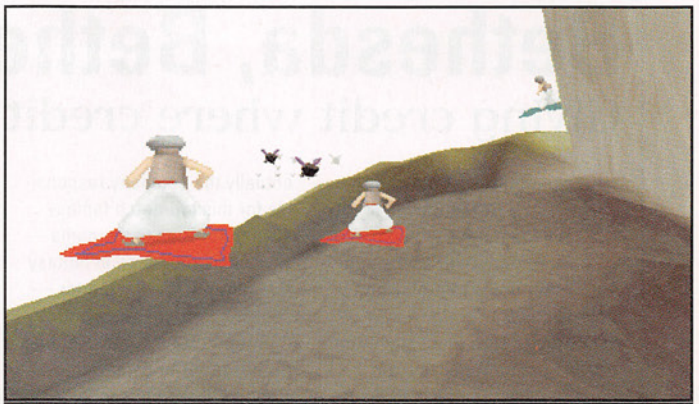
Meanwhile, two upcoming EA games we've already looked at in some detail are getting much closer to completion. *Noctropolis* (Scooped in the first issue of *PC Gamer*!) is geared up for a September release, and will now ship only on CD-ROM; indeed, EA says it will no longer release *any* products on floppy disks.Thanks to the extra storage space the CD will provide, much more video footage has been added than we were aware of at the time of our Scoop — over two hours of it, in fact — and across the board the game is looking a lot more polished and impressive. The controversial "adult" scenes have now been added, though we can't see them causing too many problems — if anything, EA may have erred on the side of caution here. There is



Originally slated to appear in both floppy-disk and CD-ROM formats, ***Noctropolis*** **will now be released only on CD-ROM. EA says it will ship this September.**



Noctropolis takes you into a truly fantastic world — and a CD-ROM-only release means you can expect stunning graphics to enhance the atmosphere.



Aladdin meets *Falcon 3.0* in Bullfrog's new title, *Magic Carpet*. The landscapes you'll fly across are generated onthe fly as you play, ensuring new vistas each time you play.

nudity (female, of course) and some sexually suggestive scenes and dialogue, but little more than you'd get on the average episode of, say, "NYPD Blue." With a bit of luck, we may have a reviewable copy in time for next issue. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

Finally, there's the striking new Bullfrog release *Magic Carpet,* which comes across like a playable version of the famous magic-carpet scenes from Disney's *Aladdin*. This project has always featured a highly impressive landscape generator, but now it's looking a lot more like an actual game than ever before — shoot-'em-up elements are in there (imagine *Space Harrier* crossed with a proper flight sim, and you'll get some idea of what it's like), as well as assorted-magic weapons.

One power that our Arabian hero can collect as the game progresses is the ability to create volcanoes to block his pursuers' paths, an effect that brings to mind the land-raising-and-lowering from the classic *Populous*, but seen from so close that you're scared one of these newly forming mountains will poke you right in the eye! The landscape you fly over is a mixture of fixed terrain and stuff generated by your PC on the fly, meaning that gameplay will never look the same twice.

Like *Navy Fighters, Magic Carpet* will have a custom-built, super high-res Pentium version specially developed for Intel; that one will ship in the fall. The "ordinary" model — and it's hard to use "ordinary" to describe this game — is scheduled for release in January of 1995. As is the case with *Navy Fighters* and *Noctropolis, Magic Carpet* will be a CD-ROM-only product requiring at least a 486/33.

Can It Call My Boss And Tell Him I'll Be Late?

New peripheral combines sound-card, fax, and phone features in one board

Looking for new ways to use your PC? Then you might want to check out Best Data products' new ACE multimedia card. The ACE (Advanced Communication Enhancement) board gives users fax, modem, sound-card, and telephone-answering capabilities, and even acts as a CD-ROM interface. In addition, the ACE can perform many of its tasks simultaneously, so that your work isn't interrupted when a fax is being sent or a phone message is being taken. Best Data also claims that when new technology such as faster modems or color faxing becomes available, a software upgrade pack will bring your existing card up to speed.

Besides serving as a 16-bit sound board that supports wavetable synthesis and sample rates up to 44KHz, the ACE will also allow users to route incoming calls to their PC, with the machine serving as an answering machine. Voice mail is also included, with up to ten separate mailboxes. Each mailbox is equipped with its own password for security.



The ACE is a single internal board with fax, modem, and voice-mailbox capabilities that also serves as a 16-bit sound card — a bargain at an MSRP of $299. Best Data says upgradeable software will keep it current.

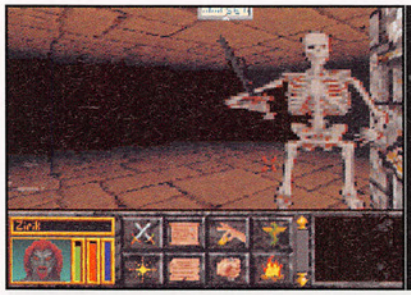
Perhaps the most impressive thing about all of this is that the ACE board carries a suggested retail price of $299, and you can bet the street price will be lower. Even at $299, however, the ACE is only a little more expensive than a 16-bit sound board alone, and is a major savings over the costs of buying all of the included components — a sound card, fax/modem, and answering machines — separately.

The ACE represents an important trend: Since many users are starting to run out of slots for new accessories, boards like this one are going to become increasingly valuable — and it's a safe bet that we'll be seeing more reaching the market soon.

Bethesda, Bethesda, Bethesda!

Giving credit where credit is due

In our massive (and controversial) Top 40 Games of All Time feature last month, we listed Activision as the publisher of the role-playing epic *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*. While we're sure that little mixup doesn't bother Activision too much — *Arena* came in at number 18 on the list — it should be noted that Bethesda Softworks is actually the company responsible for this top-notch fantasy adventure. Fans of the game — or anyone interested in fantasy role-playing, for that matter — should check out this month's CES report for the latest info on Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*, the hot sequel to the award-winning *Arena*. If it's better than that game, it will be *hot*.



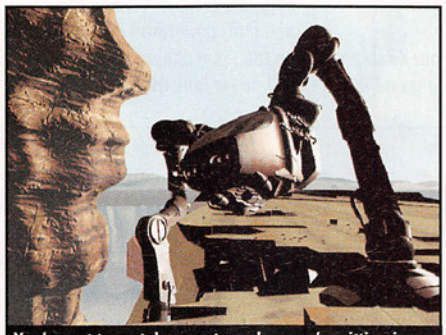
We ranked *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* the 18th best game of all time, but attributed it to the wrong publisher. It's from Bethesda Softworks, and we suggest that all you FRP fans who haven't tried it yet run down to your software store and pick up a copy. You won't regret it.

Heavy Metal Mania

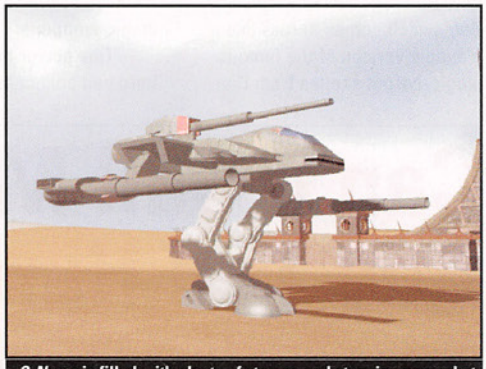
New interactive movie takes a different look at 'mechs

If you love those immense battling robots but don't necessarily want to slug it out on the battleground, then Merit Software has got a game for you. Somewhat different from the rush of tactical sims (*MetalTech*, *MechCommander*, *MechWarrior II*, and *Battledrome*) that are preparing to hit the shelves, *G-Nome* is really more along the lines of *Under a Killing Moon* or *The 7th Guest* than anything else.

G-Nome puts you in the role of a war hero who's been given his choice of any job in the galaxy. In an attempt to get closer to your American Indian heritage, you choose a sheriff's post, patrolling a dusty group of planets on the outer fringes of the galaxy.



You've got to watch your step when you're sitting in a 100-ton machine. Step on a fragile surface, and you'll reach terminal velocity pretty quickly

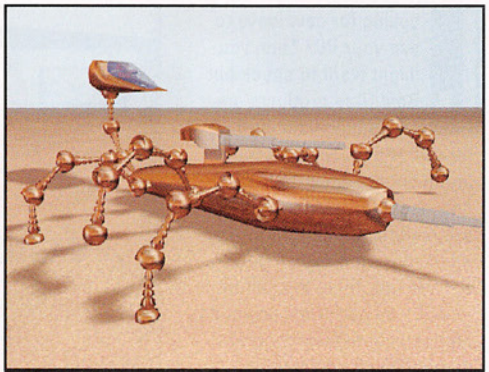


***G-Nome* is filled with plenty of strange and stunning new robot designs. This hoss looks like he was made for business — and you *don't* want to be one of his customers. Ouch!**

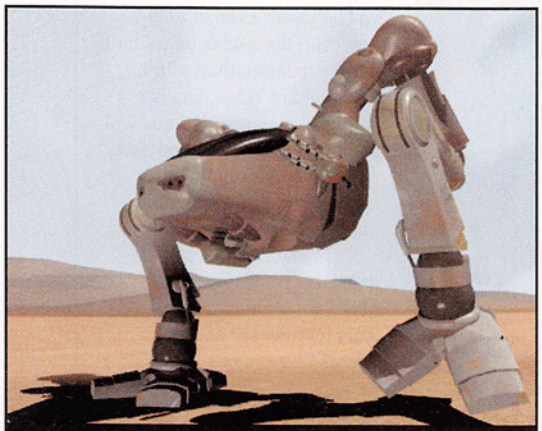
While in transit to the first planet on your interstellar beat, you meet a beautiful archaeologist who's discovered that an animal previously thought to be extinct may very well be alive on the surface of the dangerous world.

After touching down on the planet surface, you're informed that local hunting parties have been attacked by some strange creature. As the new sheriff in this quadrant, it's your duty to figure out just what's going on, and take the steps needed to stop the killings. Eventually, you'll learn that the creature, called the G-Nome, may not be a natural force after all — and that raises the question of just who's responsible for unleashing this deadly new menace.

Helping the game's story along are some of the most silky-smooth 3D animations we've ever seen. Movements of "the vehicle" — the 'mech-like transport that your hero eventually discovers — are simply unbelievable (keep in mind that we were watching a self-running demo, however). Release dates and pricing information are still unavailable for this futuristic thriller, but keep your eyes on our Scoops! section in the coming months to find out all the very latest info on this potentially electrifying title.



Looks like the scorpions on this desert world might pack a bit more power in their stingers than the one's back home.



Though you 're new to this planet, once you climb inside a machine like this one you're bound to make all sorts of new friends.

The PC Gamer Playlist

CES took a *major* bite out of this month's fun time, but as usual we found plenty of opportunities to slip in a little furtive gaming.

Sierra's *Outpost* was a disaster to production schedules, forcing most of the editorial staff to come up with a lot of creative excuses for playing it one more time, and *SimCity 2000* made sure that the art staff was too busy to complain. When we finally got back from the show, the howls from Sanctuary Wood's new *Wolf* had our offices sounding like the back woods of Transylvania. And as if all of this wasn't distraction enough, our new disk editor, Gary Meredith, brought a whole bundle of new game addictions with him, fitting in perfectly with our hard-working, hard-playing crew. Ain't technology just grand?

1) *Outpost* (Sierra) — Trent, Steve, Matt F.
2) *SimCity 2000* (Maxis) — Shelli, Gary
3) *Wolf* (San. Woods) — Matt F., Trent, Eddie
4) *Links 386 Pro* (Access) — Eddie, Scotty
5) *Aces Over Europe* (Dynamix) — Steve, Gary
6) *Bridge Olympiad* (QQP) — Joe
7) *NHL Hockey* (EA) — Matt F., Steve
8) *Crossword Wizard* (Cogix) — Shelli, Matt F.
9) *Ringworld II* (Tsunami) — Gary
10) *X-COM* (Microprose) — Joe, Trent

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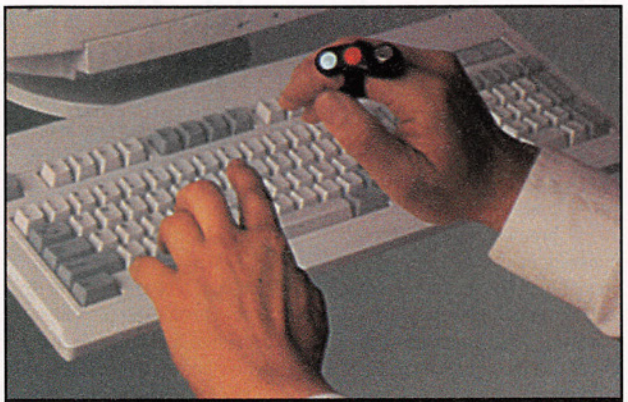
New mouse offers three-dimensional control

Getting tired of moving your hands back and forth from keyboard to mouse? Then get ready to try out a completely new approach to pointing devices. At this summer's CES, Spectrum introduced a new "deskless" device called the *Ringmouse*. Weighing in at less than half an ounce, the Ringmouse uses a combination of infrared and ultrasonic technology to keep track of the pointer's position at all times.

Spectrum claims that the new unit will offer relief from a lot of the hassles of conventional mice. Since there are no mechanical parts, the Ringmouse doesn't need frequent cleaning, won't skip, and doesn't take up any deskspace. Another benefit is the ability to use the mouse from any position that's comfortable to you.

The Ringmouse can also reduce the risk of office-related ailments such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Repetitive Stress Injury. But perhaps the most interesting thing about the device is that it can act as a three-dimensional pointer. Using a simple system of triangulation, the receiver device not only computes X and Y coordinates for the mouse, it also delivers a third Z stat. In software applications written to support the mouse, the user can actually reach "back" and select files or boxes resting behind other objects. This opens a whole new world for software developers, both in entertainment, and in productivity. The unit sells for around $100, so it's in roughly the same price range as many other high-end mice.

The Ringmouse includes the two-button command ring, a batteryl, the infrared and ultrasonic controller, an installation disk, and 3-D games to help users get used to moving in three dimensions.



The Ringmouse may reduce office-related injuries like CTS — and radically change the way you play games.

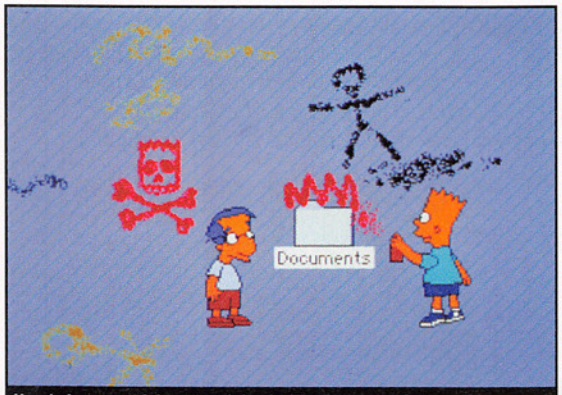
Protect That Screen!

Berkeley Systems readies four fun new screen savers

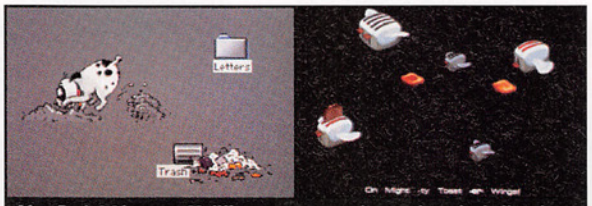
It looks like the folks at Berkeley Systems have been pretty busy: they've got four new screen savers due for release before Christmas.

First up is a new version of the old standby *After Dark*. The new *After Dark 3.0* will contain 30 different screen-saver routines, including 15 new modules. There's a zany game show called "You Bet Your Head," a destructive appearance by Bad Dog, and even a karaoke style sing-along featuring the new *After Dark* anthem. One of the most impressive new additions to the product is EcoLogic power management capability. The EcoLogic management software will power down Energy Star-compliant monitors after a pre-determined amount of time. This not only saves the monitor from potential burn-in, but also saves energy. Berkeley Systems says *After Dark 3.0* should be on the shelves in September.

Comic book fans will be interested in the new *X-Men Screen Saver*. Licensed from Marvel, the *X-Men Screen Saver* lets users watch on as Wolverine unsheathes his claws and begins to shred your computer screen, Beast hops around performing amazing acrobatic stunts, and Magneto unleashes a powerful assault. Hey, it'll even allow you to see through the eyes of a mighty Sent-inel as he scans for the elusive band of superheros. Real enthusiasts will be able to test their knowledge of the team with a trivia module that asks questions about all aspects of the X-Men. While the program is a standalone screen saver, it is compatible with all of Berkeley's other products.



Here's just one of the 15 modules in *The Simpsons Screen Saver*. Somehow it seems very fitting that Bart appears when you've been idle for too long at your computer, doesn't it?



***After Dark 3.0* features 30 different screen-saving routines, including the always-popular "Flying Toasters" — and a new monitor hero, Bad Dog.**

If it's television humor you crave, then *The Simpsons Screen Saver* is perfect — it'll save you from the horrors of screen burn-in when you walk away from your PC to check out the TV show. Boiling over with all kinds of zany action, this screen saver offers more entertainment value than some games that I've seen. *The Simpsons Screen Saver* includes 15 different modules featuring Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, Maggie, Grampa, and even Krusty the Clown. And for sheer destructive value, you just can't beat the mad antics of Itchy and Scratchy as they employ every method available to mangle one another for your amusement. Shipping in September, this one will retail for about $50.

Teaming up with Paramount, Berkeley is also busy at work on what could be their most popular program ever. *Star Trek: The Next Generation Screen Saver* comes complete with modules featuring some of the cast and crew from the hit television show. Users will get a chance to receive dancing lessons from Data, learn about Klingon armament from the formidable Worf, avoid the pranks of the gremlin-like Q, and even enjoy a little counseling from Counselor Troi. Carrying the same $50 price tag as *The Simpsons, Star Trek: The Next Generation Screen Saver* will be available sometime in November.

While none of this is gaming by a strict definition, all of these screen savers are amazingly good fun. If you've been worried about phosphorous burn-in, or just want to catch some pretty funny animations, make sure to keep an eye out for this bunch. One word of warning, though: We've noticed that several game manufacturers have suggested that you unload any screen savers (and *After Dark* has been mentioned by name) before playing their games. Players using DOS 6.0 or higher, though, can easily get around this by using the multiple boot configuration option.

Out Of Control

Thrustmaster adds the next level of realism with new joystick

Summer CES was an electronic playground full of new gaming software, but there were also some pretty impressive new accessories unveiled. Thrustmaster Inc., famous for their realistic joysticks and pedals, was displaying what promises to be the next level of realism for flight sim fans.

Based on the design of actual F-16 Fighting Falcon controls, the F-16 FLCS is designed with hard-core simulation fans in mind. Featuring four 8-way hat switches, four auxiliary control buttons, and a dual-stage trigger, the FLCS has more than enough options to keep even the most demanding pilots happy. Fully programmable, the stick should offer no trouble to users looking for compatibility with new and existing software interfaces. Though no price has been set, Thrustmaster tells us to look for this one toward the end of this summer.

Also shown at CES was Thrustmaster's Formula T-1 Driving Controls. On store shelves since earlier this year, the T-1 contains a steering wheel unit with a conveniently placed gearshift control, and a floor unit with brake and gas pedals. For fans of auto racing sims, this system offers a degree of realism in PC driving that's pretty much unattainable when playing with keyboard, mouse, or gamepad, or joystick. On sale now, the Formula T-1 Driving Controls have a suggested retail price of $179.95.



Thrustmaster's realistic F-16 FLCS is sophisticated enough to satisfy even the most experienced joystick jockeys.

Adding A New Dimension to Sound

3D sound technology gets a boost from software companies

This past June, Interplay and Spectrum Holobyte both announced that they would be incorporating SRS Labs' 3D sound technology into their new CD-ROM releases. By using special recording techniques, the enhanced sound — normally available only to those using a sound card with 3D sound capability— will play on any standard sound board.

Stephen Sedmak, president of SRS Labs, is pleased with the union of the two technologies. "Prior to the new Interplay and Spectrum Holobyte releases, the SRS technology was found only in playback systems such as televisions, multimedia computers, and electronic game accessories. Now, for the first time, the SRS technology has been incorporated directly into the content of the audio program, allowing game enthusiasts to experience 3D sound without having to purchase special equipment for their computer or game system."

Interplay's first SRS inclusive titles will be *Castles II: Siege and Conquest CD*, and *Mario Teaches Typing CD*; Spectrum Holobyte's *Star Trek: The Next Generation "A Final Unity"* will be their first game to incorporate the new technology.

By adding enhanced sound at the time of production, companies can deliver the best possible audio without requiring users to purchase additional hardware. But if this process doesn't become a standard — which seems the most likely outcome in an industry which can't agree on anything — gamers can still enjoy this sort of 3D sound in any game if they own a sound card which uses SRS's 3D sound technology, or if they have SRS's AK-100 signal processor. For more on the AK-100 and other 3D- sound devices, just take a glance to your right and get the full story.



NuReality Vivid 3D Pro is perfect for computer users who want to experience 3D audio without having to install a new sound card.

Strange Magic

3D sound is becoming a big part PC games

Of all the various advances in audio technology over the past couple of years, none is as impressive — or as mysterious — as the SRS (Sound Retrieval System) 3D sound. The first time you hear audio through this system, especially if you're able to immediately compare it with standard stereo, it seems to have a mystical effect, increasing the depth and richness of music and effects no matter where you're seated in relation to the speakers. Concert music sounds like what you'd hear sitting on the front row, and common sound effects truly seem like they're moving around you in proper relation to their source. When you hear it, you'll probably ask yourself: "Just *how* did they do that?" Well, here's a quick explanation of how it works.

First off, one reason that the sounds you hear live are noticeably different than a recording is that even in the most modern of studios, microphones miss a lot of the audio cues, such as air pressure and instrument placement, that the human ear detects constantly. SRS technology takes a recorded sound, and restores a great number of the details that most recordings are missing. SRS-treated sounds will have you noticing instruments you may not have heard on the original recording — and with such clarity that you can mentally "see" where each piece of the audio is coming from. Another effect of the system is the elimination of stereo "sweet-spots." An SRS 3D sound will sound just as good to the left or right of center as it will if you're sitting directly between both speakers.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about the process is that the restoration of signal can take place at *any* point in the audio process, and will work with any sound. The first way of achieving 3D sound in software is by encoding it into the program itself. Interplay and Spectrum Holobyte have just started using this 3D method, which will deliver the improved sound without requiring the user to have any additional, specialized hardware.

The second way is by purchasing a 3D-capable sound card. SRS has licensed their technology to a host of sound-card manufacturers, and there are plenty of different boards to choose from. These boards take the sound from the program, and as the audio is being converted to play through your computer's speakers the signal is treated with the SRS effect. These cards cost about the same as standard sound cards from other companies. MediaVision, New Media, and Alpha Systems Labs all have 3D sound cards available.

The final way to achieve 3D sound is by adding a signal processor to take audio coming out of your computer, change the sound, and then output it to your speakers. SRS produces a unit called the AK-100 that sells for about $299 that will work with any kind of audio signal, be it from your TV, stereo, CD-ROM, or sound card. NuReality is another company that makes a more compact signal processor, called the Vivid 3D Pro, that's specifically designed for home computers, and even includes an amp to ensure that the product will work with existing speakers.

3D sound will add an incredible amount of quality to your existing system, and greatly enhance the overall effect of most games. Best of all, it's an unusual upgrade in that it doesn't cost a fortune. If you're really into the multimedia experience, or just want to build to get a new experience in gaming, find a dealer who'll let you hear the difference one of these products can make.

Top Ten Lists

(June — figures through May 31)

Here are the top ten-best sellers for June, based on sales at two of the largest retail software chains in America. As always, bear in mind that these figures are often affected by sales promotions, discounts, and late game arrivals, and don't always give the most complete picture on game popularity.

A lot of re-shuffling has been going on in the hierarchy of both charts this month, but in general there weren't enough new faces to give the old favorites much serious competition. Looking at both charts, it's easy to see that *SimCity 2000* still has lots of fans out there, and *Myst* is gaining popularity fast. Long-time hits like *Flight Simulator 5.0, The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, and *Master of Orion* are hanging on to their spots pretty well, but for sheer tenacity, you've got to give the award to *Coaster*, a title that has stayed on the charts for months, much to our amazement (no offense, Disney).

The few new titles that did creep into the charts, however, were a little surprising. SSI pushed into the number five spot with their *Gold Box* compilation, which consists of the first three titles from the AD&D series. Capstone has made a pretty solid entry with *Corridor 7*, hitting both the Babbage's and Software Etc. charts simultaneously. Origin's *Pacific Strike* seems to be doing well on one front, while remaining absent from the other, a situation that most likely has something to do with the way the different stores compile their lists. Finally, Dynamix's *Betrayal at Krondor* has returned to the software charts after a fairly long absence, no doubt due to its relesae on CD-ROM.

Babbage's Top Ten List

This Month	Last Month
1. Myst (Broderbund)	2
2. SimCity 2000 (Maxis)	3
3. The 7th Guest (Virgin)	7
4. The Elder Scrolls: Arena (Bethesda)	4
5. AD&D Dragons Gold (SSI)	*
6. Rebel Assault (LucasArts)	5
7. Master of Orion (MicroProse)	8
8. Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix)	*
9. Corridor 7 (Capstone)	*
10. Coaster (Disney)	10

(Based on sales at nearly 300 Babbage's stores; * denotes new entry)

Software Etc.'s Top Ten List

This Month	Last Month
1. SimCity 2000 (Maxis)	1
2. Corridor 7 (Capstone)	*
3. Pacific Strike (Origin)	*
4. Fight Simulator 5.0 (Microsoft)	4
5. Elder Scrolls: Arena (Bethesda)	3
6. Ultima VII: Complete (Origin)	2
7. Metal & Lace (Megatech)	6
8. X-Wing (LucasArts)	10
9. Master of Orion (Microprose)	8
10. X-Wing: B-Wing (LucasArts)	7

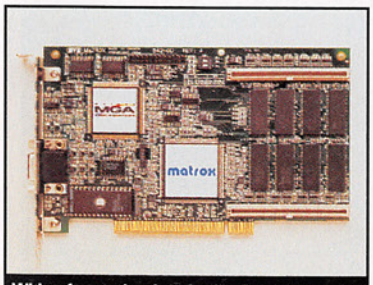
(Based on sales at 335 Software Etc. stores; * denotes new entry)

Judging by all of the new products we've saw at CES, it looks like there are some exciting changes coming in the next few months, more than we've seen in a long time. As always, we'll be here *to* keep you up to date on all the latest news from both the retail and development fronts, stay with us. And drop us a line with your comments on the Top Ten Lists.

No Brakes Neccesary

New video card adds vital speed to your graphics applications

Sierra's new *Outpost* may make a lot of users realize that a fast processor and double-speed CD-ROM drive may not be covering all of the bases when it comes to playing games that utilize high-end graphics routines. That's where the *MGA Impression Plus 64-bit 3D* graphics accelerator card from Matrox Graphics Inc. enters into the picture. Matrox says that the MGA Impressions can provide the solution to much of the trouble gamers may have been having with those slow animation speeds.



With software developed using RenderWare, the MGA Impression Plus accelerated video card can deliver video playback of 30 frames per second — at a resolution of up to 1240 x 1024.

The Impression Plus uses a 64-bit graphics chip to deliver resolutions of up to 1600 x 1200, full 24-bit color at up to 1280 x 1024, and Matrox says its board has the highest refresh rate in the industry. The Impression Plus comes with 2MB of on-board VRAM, upgradeable to 4MB. For multimedia fans, Matrox boasts a video playback in 1280 x 1024 resolution at up to 30 frames per second. Now at such a high resolution, that's *fast*!

Trying to improve the overall performance of graphic intensive software, Matrox has decided to support the use of RenderWare as a development environment for MGA applications. Games that have been put together under *Renderware*, from Criterion Software, will automatically be detected by the Impression Plus, and deliver an even more accelerated performance. Moses Ma, chairman of Velocity Development, whose past products include *Jetfighter* and *Spectre VR*, says," By using RenderWare as the 3D API to write applications, developers like us get the best of both worlds — support for transparent hardware acceleration of games when it detects the presence of the graphics accelerator, and for users who don't have the Impression Plus, RenderWare is fast enough in software to provide true interactivity all by itself."

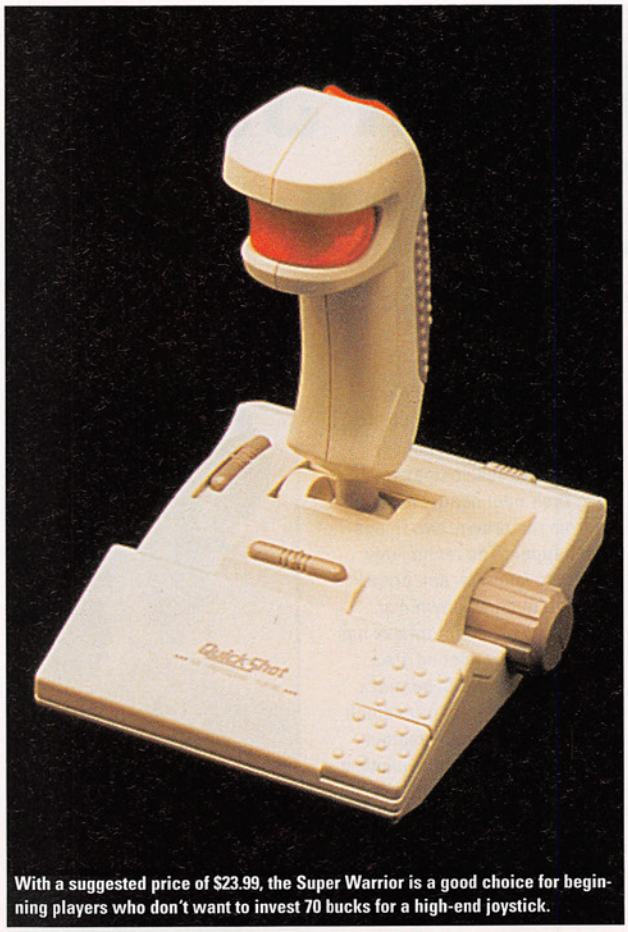
The Impression Plus delivers great performance at surprisingly low price. Matrox has already signed agreements with companies like Compaq, Hewlett-Packard, and Gateway 2000 to include the cards with new systems. By giving this new option to developers, hopefully we'll start to see faster and more colorful graphics routines without the need for users to go out and purchase a new computer every year.

Lethal Power For Arcade Fanatics

Quickshot launches new line of joysticks

Quickshot, one of the biggest producers of joysticks in both the cartridge and PC markets, has just luanched a new line of joysticks called the Lethal Series (Lethal? That sounds a bit disheartening, doesn't it?). The first controller in the Lethal Series is the Super Warrior, which will feature four buttons (two on the stick and two near the front , in order to complement various player styles), an ergonomically designed "Bio-grip" that Quickshot claims will reduce fatigue, and a separate, base-mounted throttle for all you flight-sim lovers. The throttle function should be compatible with most existing sims.

The Super Warrior has a suggested retail price of $23.99, which might mean street prices as low as 15 or 16 bucks. And although the stick may not be as versatile as some of the high-end products that are currently available, its combination fo low price and solid functions should make it a pretty good choice for beginners. But as with any stick, it's ultimately how it *feels* that'll make or break the Super Warrior.



With a suggested price of $23.99, the Super Warrior is a good choice for beginning players who don't want to invest 70 bucks for a high-end joystick.



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Product Information Number 127

Four Times The Fun

New quad-speed drive pushes CD-ROM performance to new heights

It seems like only yesterday that we here at *PC Gamer* were telling you about those hot new triple-speed CD-ROM drives (in fact it was only two months ago), and already they've hit obsolescence. Well, maybe *that's* too strong — but they're no longer the fastest drives around, because Plextor's new quad-spin drive has once again raised the stakes in the quest for the ultimate in multimedia gaming.



Double-speed, triple-speed, quad-speed — just how fast are they going to get CD-ROM drives to run? We don't know, but we like it.

The new unit, titled the 4PLEX, offers a 600KB/sec data transfer rate, 220ms access speed, and a 1 Meg buffer — all in a half-height, 5.25" housing. Best of all, the drives list price is surprisingly low: only $549 for the internal model (more for the external).

Although this is great news for CD-ROM performance, the speed with which drives are evolving may scare users who might be interested in buying one of these drives. If a triple-speed was the fastest for only a couple of months, why should we expect this unit to be any different? But since the fastest rate necessary to show full motion video in 24-bit color at 30 frames per second is 500 Kb/sec, and no other home CD-ROM task requires even this much speed, there's no real reason for companies to make a faster drive.

Felix Nemirovsky, engineering manager for Plextor, thinks further CD-ROM development will concentrate on other problems. "Now that the speed problem has been solved, companies are running into storage problems," says Nemirovsky. "While some companies may try to make a 6x drive, I think the greatest changes will affect the *amount* of information a disc can hold." This could mean a change for CD-ROM drives similar to the one that disk drives went through many years ago, when designers discovered ways to pack more information on the same size hard drive. So the future may well bring drives that can handle standard 600 MB discs, as well as discs designed to hold *twice* that much — a full 1.2 Gigabytes!

Though there are never any promises in the PC world, if you're looking for optimal performance with multimedia applications, quad-speed drives look like they'll be the new standard — at least for a while.

The Virtual World Just Grows And Grows

Victormaxx offers new low-cost VR headset

In an attempt to beat the cost of other head-mounted displays (HMD), Victormaxx Technologies has released a VR headset called the Cybermaxx. Like other systems of its kind, the unit uses a real-time tracking system to allow users to immerse themselves in a 3D world — for only about $700. Animation is smooth and fluid, and the system's response to movement is instantaneous. Several companies have already lined up to support the headset, including such big names as Origin Systems, Interplay, and New World Computing.

Unfortunately, the Cybermaxx has its share of problems. The unit latches to your head with a series of unwieldy straps that must be cinched tight in order to keep the headset secure. Couple this stress with the fact that some of the unit's weight sits on the bridge of the nose, and it's easy to see how the headset can get pretty uncomfortable during extended gameplay sessions.

In addition, *Cybermaxx* uses binocular-like tubes that press right up against your eyes to block out light. For users who have contacts, this pressure can cause those lenses to pop right out after only a few minutes of play. In fact, that's just what happened to our art director, Eddie Malstrom, when he tried out the Cybermaxx at CES.

Headsets like the Cybermaxx are sure to be the next big thing in peripherals. And as more companies compete to make their own headsets stand out from the crowd, two things *must* happen: The technology has got to improve, and prices will have to come down. For now, it looks like Victormaxx has the edge in that second area.

But while the *Cybermaxx* may offer the lowest priced unit so far, comfort must remain a consideration. Before you invest a large lump of cash on *any* headset, make sure you try it out for yourself. As we're beginning to see, not all of these things are created equal.



The Cybermaxx is the undisputed champ of VR when it comes to price; at around $700 it seems like a bargain. But there's one rule to live by, even in a Virtual World: You get what you pay for.

Sigma Designs and Activision present

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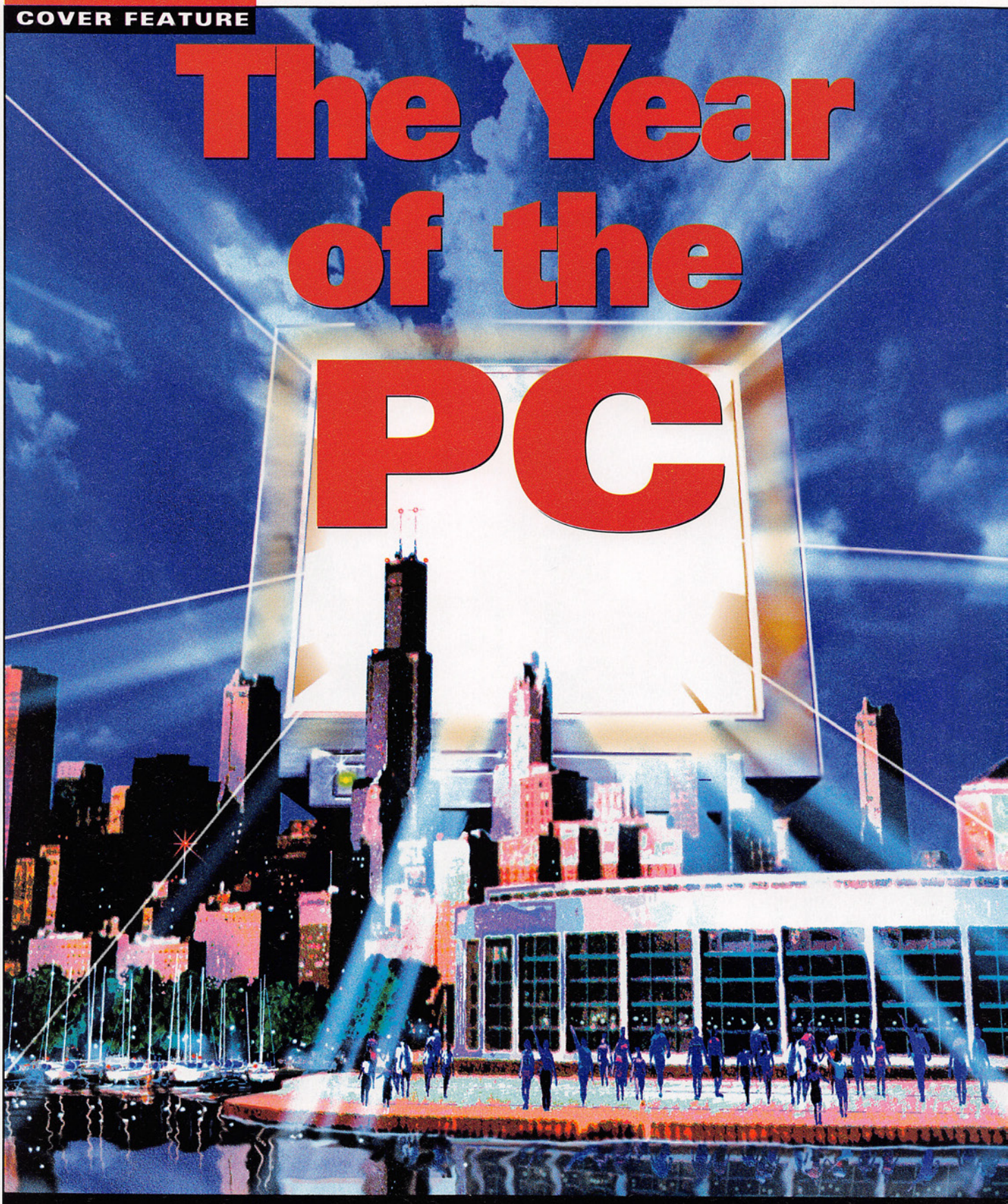
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Product Information Number 106

The Year of the PC



We're just going to go ahead and say it: If you own a PC, you made the right choice. You're on the cutting edge of entertainment technology — and you're about to enjoy the best year in the history of PC gaming. Don't believe it? Then read on, and find out why we think it's the truth. Just a glimpse of the new crop of games we saw at this year's Summer Consumer Electronics Show, and all doubt will fade. Then, turn to p.52 to find out what you'll need to enjoy these games — and why.

Part 1

The Games of the Future

The Summer Consumer Electronics Show, held this past June in Chicago, has usually been the undisputed realm of the videogame machines. PC software has always seemed to blend into that background of screaming ninjas and 16-bit porcupines. But this time around, there was a change in atmosphere. The PC games on display seemed to spark more interest than ever before — certainly a lot more than they did just two or three years ago.

We walked onto the show floor that first day, and almost immediately were struck by the fact that the PC game publishers were drawing a lot more attention they ever had. And for good reason: The PC titles on display this time around were, on the whole, the best new crop we've seen in years — and maybe ever. As Nintendo trotted out a souped-up version of *Donkey Kong*, the PC publishers were integrating high-quality video with honest-to-god interactive gaming to produce titles no videogame machine could run. We saw SVGA, 3D-rendered characters moving smoothly through alien worlds — and entirely under the player's control. Over and over, we saw flashy graphics, thrilling action, and challenging gameplay, all rolled into one package. No dedicated videogame machine around could handle the PC games we saw at almost every turn.

The Hard Facts

All the important game publishers are acknowledging that the PC has the edge in home entertainment. In fact, Spectrum HoloByte included a study in its press kits this year which states the case for the PC quite nicely. The study points out that while 32-bit game systems are only now appearing, the PC has been using 32-bit processing for years — and now, is moving closer to true 64-bit power. PC owners have been enjoying CD-ROM and high-quality graphics for a long time, too. And PC use in the home is on the rise: The study estimates that about half of all the advanced PCs sold today are used in the home, and that there may be as many as 30 *million* PCs in American homes today.

As a result of all this, the study continues, PC gaming has become the *fastest growing segment in the entire entertainment software industry*, with sales rising at 27 percent a year — compared with under 10 percent for the industry as a whole!

Like any business, PC gaming is about money. And the area that offers the highest profit potential will naturally move to the forefront of entertainment software. Right now, it looks certain that the PC is entering a phase of growth, of new respect, that's sure to make this the best year ever for PC gamers.

Access

After much anticipation, *Under a Killing Moon* is finally here. This third Tex Murphy adventure looks as good as we'd hoped it would, integrating video and gameplay in a way that should become the model for other "interactive movie" titles.

But the title that has all of us here in the *PC Gamer* offices holding our breaths is *Links 486*. This latest in the ever-advancing Links series features some of the best graphics you've ever seen — as well as the best, most realistic golf engine in the business. We almost hope it'll never make it to our desks; if it does, we won't get anything done for months!

Accolade

Accolade hasn't had a major hit in the PC market since *Hardball III* and *Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition*, but their fall lineup could change that in a big way. September is the month to look for *Battle Isle 2200*, released as *Battle Isle II* in Europe to much critical acclaim. This sci-fi wargame employs a top-down view for strategic planning, and a first-person 3D perspective for viewing the outcome of each battle. Up to five human players can compete over a network, or by E-mail on electronic bulletin boards. If *Battle Isle 2200* is as easy to get into as its predecessor, this could be a wargame for the rest of us. The CD-ROM version is slated to ship in September, and will carry a $59.95 sticker price; in a surprising move, the floppy version will only be available through direct order (800-245-7744), for $29.95.

The Hardball series has been a consistently successful line for Accolade, and with *Hardball 4* the company hopes to take it to an entirely new technological level. What we saw looked very good: SVGA graphics, digitized video for player graphics, several new animations for pitches, batting stances, and swings. And there are now zooming and panning windows which keep the base runner on-screen and in sight at all times.

But *Hardball 4* does more than look pretty. All 28 MLB ballparks are included in the game, and Accolade has calculated such factors as altitude, field design, and wind conditions for each one. While *H4* won't get into as much statistical depth as, say, *Pro League Baseball*, the game does track such stats as players' batting averages against left- and right-handed pitchers, put-outs, percentage of outs that are pop-ups, and more.

Accolade also plans to simultaneously release *Hardball 4 MLBPA Players Disk*, featuring the stats and digitized color photos of 700 MLBPA players, for $24.95 — a must-have for baseball fans who expect realistic player stats to go with the realistic physics of the game.

Perhaps the most impressive game we saw from Accolade, though, was the

Sierra On-Line Looks to the Future — But Doesn't Forget Its Past

It really comes as no surprise that Sierra On-Line has a strong lineup of games scheduled for release over the next few months. But even as Sierra is putting the finishing touches on several long-awaited titles, they've found time to celebrate their past as well — and for people who've just gotten into PC gaming, this could open their eyes to some of the outstanding products that helped make Sierra the industry leader it is today.

In celebration of 15 years of producing computer games, Sierra is releasing special CD-ROM editions of the King's Quest and Space Quest adventure series. *The King's Quest Collection* includes not only all the games in that cycle, but also background information on how the games were made, and a sneak peek at the upcoming *King's Quest VII: The Prince-Less Bride* (more on that one later!).

Sierra has done the same thing with *The Space Question Collection*, but they've also tossed in some previously unreleased software developed by "Two Guys from Andromeda," designers of the first four Space Quest games. Sierra's packed a lot of interviews, anecdotes, and history into these two packages, and if you're new to PC gaming or haven't gotten around to playing classics like *Space Quest I* or *King's Quest VI*, these collections are really a bargain at an M.S.R.P. of $79.95 each (expect to pay less at retail). They should be available by the time this issue goes on sale.



A scene from Sierra's *King's Quest VII: The Prince-less Bride.*

A Leisure Suit Larry Collection is also in the works, due out in November. Even if you've never played a Leisure Suit Larry game, you're probably familiar with designer Al Lowe's alter-ego, a not-so-smooth-talker who sometimes manages to hit it off with the ladies in spite of himself. Besides five Leisure Suit Larry games, the *Larry Collection* will also include *The Laffer Utilities*, several utilities for making memos, birthday cards, schedules, and more, all with that special Laffer touch.



***LL6*: Not even the power of CD-ROM will help Larry score with this woman.**

Other Sierra games making the move from floppy to CD-ROM are *Leisure Suit Larry: Shape Up or Slip Out* (see "Extended Play" in this issue); *Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist*, a graphic adventure set in the Old West with enough puzzles to make even veteran graphic adventurers happy for a long time; and *Police Quest 4: Open Season*, which puts you on the trail of a serial killer in Los Angeles (it was co-designed by ex-L.A. Police Chief Daryl Gates). All three CD-ROM games carry a suggested retail price of $79.95.

continued ...

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The Horror — and Humor — of it All

If you saw issue 2 of PC Gamer, you already know about *Phantasmagoria*, the stunning multimedia horror game from King's Quest designer Roberta Williams. The story is time-tested and true: Inside an eerie, imposing mansion, a young woman struggles to uncover an evil force, and find a way to escape with her life — and her sanity. The game is played out in chapters, similar to Sierra subsidiary Dynamix's award-winning *Betrayal at Krondor*.



Phantasmagoria is a real departure for Roberta Williams, creator the King's Quest series.

Sierra has pulled out all the stops for this CD-ROM game, calling in Hollywood director Peter Maris to help with the production and assembling special effects teams to help bring the story to life. All the characters are being shot on video, then superimposed over lovingly rendered SVGA backgrounds. *Phantasmagoria* is a real departure from the lighthearted adventuring of Williams' King's Quest games, so the final product — which will be ready by October — could be interesting, to say the least.

If *Phantasmagoria* sounds a little on the heavy side, you can always try *Capitol Punishment*, a collection of arcade games, trivia quizzes, and other lighter fare, all aimed squarely at the people we love to hate — politicians. At first we were a little leery when we saw "Bill and Hillary's White Water Adventure," an arcade game where you guide the First Family down a river full of puns; it seemed that this was just going to be some more Prez-bashing.



The King's Quest Collection packs all your faves on CD.

But we forgot that no one is sacred to Al Lowe, as we soon discovered with the "Dan Quayle Spelling Bee," "Congressional Shooting Gallery," and "Shredtis," where you have to re-assemble shredded documents to find out what the boys on the Hill have really been up to. Like all Al Lowe games, some of the jokes in *Capitol Punishment* are just plain dumb — but when one clicks, you'll actually laugh out loud (a rare occurrence in computer gaming). And the price won't wipe the grin off you face, either: $34.95 for the floppy and ten bucks more for the CD-ROM. *CP* will ship about the same time as *Phantasmagoria*.

Roberta Williams: Busiest Woman in Gaming?

As if the massive *Phantasmagoria* weren't enough for one award-winning designer, Roberta Williams is also working on the next game in "the best-selling adventure series of all time" (at least according to Sierra). Set in a world full of elves, trolls, talking animals, and other fantastic creatures, *King's Quest VII: The Prince-less Bride* follows a princess and her mother as they fight to keep an evil fairy queen from destroying the world they know and love.

Sierra is comparing the animation in *KQ VII* to that in *Aladdin* and *The Lion King* — a bold claim, but one which the company is determined to live up to. We had a chance to see a few of the animations, and while they clearly were created just in time for June CES, they were still remarkably fluid and lifelike — especially when you consider they were running under Windows.

Just the mere mention of a new King's Quest game is enough to excite thousands of gamers, and PC Gamer plans to keep you posted on all the details of this ambitious new project.

successor to *Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition*. Untitled as of press time, the game boasts graphics as good or better than *Links 386 Pro* — and that's saying quite a lot. We'll keep all you golf-sim fans posted on how this one's shaping up.

Alliance Interactive

You probably aren't all that familiar with Alliance Interactive, but that might be because they've been hard at work doing just what their name implies — forming partnerships with developers and signing distribution agreements with publishers.

In addition to publishing game under the Alliance name, the company will also release titles under two other labels: Digital Illusions will publish war and strategy games, while Gecko Games will handle a line of budget-priced educational software. Six of the Gecko Games — *Word Rescue Deluxe* ($24.99), *Math Rescue Deluxe* ($24.99), *Word/Math Rescue Deluxe* ($34.99, CD-ROM), *Talking ABC's Deluxe* ($19.99), *Talking 123's Deluxe* ($19.99), and *Talking ABC's/123's Deluxe* ($29.99, CD-ROM) — should arrive shortly after this issue goes on sale. *Gruzzle Puzzles*, for DOS and Windows, is expected to ship sometime during the fourth quarter and carry $29.99 price tag, but perhaps the most attractive product in the Gecko line is the *Christmas Edutainment CD*; for a retail price of $59.99 you can get all five Gecko games on CD-ROM.

Digital Illusions has already released two games, *Sub Battle Simulator* and *PT Boat Simulator*, both separately on floppy and packaged on one CD-ROM called *Seaworthy*. But those two games were originally released six or seven years ago, and really show their age. What's more exciting about the Digital Illusion line is its upcoming Premier Series. While Alliance is being hush-hush about specific titles, they claim they've managed to bring in some of the industry's most respected designers and developers to create high-end simulations. As usual, we'll keep you up to date on the latest news of their upcoming titles — especially the top-secret Premier Series.

But perhaps the biggest news are the games that will be carrying the Alliance name. For starters, Alliance has gained the license to the wargame classic *Harpoon*, as well as the accompanying Battlesets, Scenario Editor, and *Harpoon Online* from Kesmai (more on them later), which will allow for multiplayer capabilities on online networks. Being developed by Arsenal Publishing but carrying the Alliance name, they'll all be bundled together and sold as the *Harpoon Classic CD* — but instead of merely slapping an old game on CD and re-merchandising it, Alliance plans to make major graphical and interface enhancements, improve the artificial intelligence of the computer player, and incorporate new tutorials. And there's a very good chance they'll deliver on their word: The company has brought the majority of the original *Harpoon* development team in to help. Alliance plans to release *Harpoon Classic CD* sometime in September.

Other games being developed by Arsenal and published by Alliance include *TacOps*, a turn-based, squad/platoon-level wargame with 24 scenarios in which the player controls either Army or Marine Corps troops; *Flight Commander 2.0*, *ETO: D-Day*, *A Nation Divided: Gettysburg*, and *Weapons Free*. Alliance president Gordon Walton feels that there is a solid market for wargames, and this lineup obviously bears out his conviction. Arsenal and Alliance are working hard to make sure *TacOps* and *Flight Commander* arrive before Christmas; a first-quarter '95 release is planned for *ETO: D-Day*, *A Nation Divided: Gettysburg*, and *Weapons Free*.

Alliance also announced that it had signed an agreement with *Kesmai Corporation* — most famous for on-line games such as *Air Warrior* and *MultiPlayer BattleTech*, and *SVGA Air Warrior*, which is both a stand-alone game and a front-end for the on-line game *Air Warrior* — to create on-line versions of titles produced by Alliance. In return, Alliance will publish and distribute all of the latest simulations developed by Kesmai.

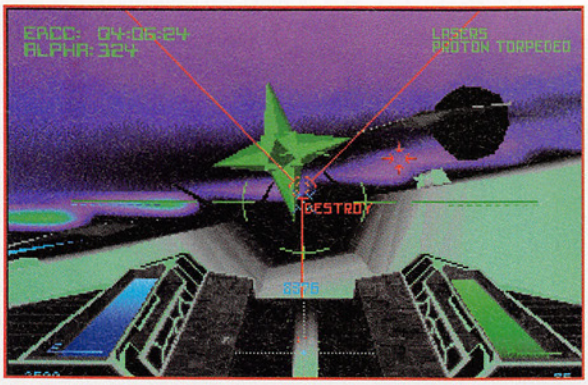


If you think this game screen from Bethesda's _The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall_ looks good, wait'll you see it in motion!

Bethesda Softworks

Coming off their incredible success with *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, Bethesda showed that there's more to come in '95 — and some of it's going to be hot.

Not satisfied with producing just another sequel, Bethesda has added some pretty impressive upgrades to their new *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*. This time around, having already established yourself as a hero in the land of Tamriel, you're sent on a mission for the Emperor to stop a potential uprising in the royal court of Daggerfall. As in the original game, the player can choose whether to actually pursue this plot line, or to go adventuring on their own throughout the immense landscape. If you do decide to do the Emperor's bidding, you'll find yourself surrounded by more back-stabbing, insanity, evil sorcery, and more seduction than you could shake a sword at. Those who can stand the heat will uncover a plot to recreate a powerful force from thousands of years past — and ultimately, you'll decide who will wield this incredible power.



Bethesda's *Delta-V* is fast-forward action from the start. The polygon graphics have been nicely shaded since we last saw the game.

Another title that looks like it will turn a few heads is the long-awaited, high-speed, arcade-style flight game *Delta-V*. You're a Net-runner, attempting to pilot your Trace vehicle down a virtual trench as you race against other runners piloting their own nimble craft. The colorful polygon graphics aren't exactly cutting-edge, but do manage to create an amazing sensation of speed. The total effect is pretty heart-pounding. Bethesda had this one hooked up to a VR helmet, and it looks like this could be one of the first games to take advantage of that new technology.. Cyberwarriors should start watching the shelves for this one in December of this year. M.S.R.P.: $69.95.

Bethesda also showed *NCAA Road to the Final Four 2*, and they were very high on the product, calling it "the most realistic five-on-five basketball simulation in the history of interactive entertainment." You'll have complete control of the on-court action in arcade play, but *Final Four 2* also tests your coaching skills by allowing you to set your lineups and manage substitutions. Bethesda used flight simulator technology to achieve the 360-degree rotating camera angles seen in the game, and the VoxFX sound engine to produce high-quality effects ranging from player banter to the squeak of tennis shoes on the court floor. While pricing information was not available, Bethesda tells us that *NCAA Road to the Final Four 2* will ship in late September.

Daggerfall will incorporate an entirely new 3D texture mapping engine, to provide a level of ground detail far superior to that in the first *Elder Scrolls* game. And to increase realism, players will be given new options for interacting with other characters. The game is filled with loads of new locations, including realistically designed caverns, castles, and even underwater gateways to new dimensions.

Like *Arena*, *Daggerfall* will allow for player customization with a Spellmaker, but this time you can create even more complex and bizarre new magic, magic items, and potions. There's even a class creator, which allows you to design *exactly* the characters you want. Players can buy their own houses and even ships, and choose their own careers (will you take to the trading life, or smuggle to make ends meet?). These touches make your character — and the gameworld you inhabit — just that much more realistic. Bethesda has taken huge steps in making a game that was already great even better. *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* is expected to ship sometime in February of next year.

Blizzard

Veteran educational software publisher Davidson & Associates recently acquired this development team and made it an independent division of the company, with the goal of widening their product line. Blizzard was founded under the name Silicon & Synapse back in 1990, and has several outstanding video-game titles under its belt — *Rock 'n Roll Racing*, a Super Nintendo game which featured supercharged versions of songs like "Paranoid" by Black Sabbath and Deep Purple's "Highway Star;" *The Lost Vikings*, a great arcade-puzzler for Genesis, Super Nintendo, and PCs; and *Blackthorne*, a side-scrolling action game strongly reminiscent of *Flashback*.



***Warcraft* was one of the more intriguing stragety titles we saw at the show. It has plenty of depth and action.**

Blizzard will still release cartridge games, but their focus is mainly on PCs with *Warcraft*, an ambitious strategy game set in a land in which orcs and humans are at war (aren't they always?). Playing as the leader of one of the forces, your basic goal

The Year of the PC Part 1

The Dynamix Formula For Success: Exciting Concepts Backed By A Commitment To Excellence

Dynamix may not be the biggest company in PC gaming, but there can be no doubt that their products are among the most well-crafted — and well-supported — in the industry. Everything we saw from the Oregon-based company was undeniably impressive, and proved beyond a doubt that these guys know what they're doing. And regardless of your gaming preferences, you're likely to find a Dynamix game that suits your tastes: Their impressive new product line covers everything from wargames to simulations, from puzzlers to arcade action.



***MetalTech: Earthsiege* has all the high-powered intensity of an arcade shooter, but it's also richly fleshed out with deep simulation elements.**

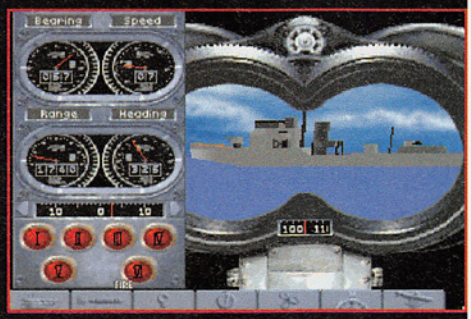
So just what *are* they doing? Well, the first title out of the gates is the eagerly anticipated *Front Page Sports: Baseball*, which we previewed back in our premiere issue. Simply put, this could be the best stats-graphics combo ever seen in a baseball game. *FPS:Baseball* lets you manage 50 players per team (25 MLBPA players, 15 AAA players, and 10 from the low minors), and to help you make those crucial calls there are over 500 statistics available for each and every player!

Just as in *Front Page Sports: Football Pro*, you'll take full control of the team from the dugout to the front office — drafting new talent, sending players to the minors, setting batting lineups, calling the plays on the field, and much more. For players who like to take matters into their own hands, the arcade action is very satisfying — as good as what you find in many video-games which lack the statistical depth of *FPS: Baseball* — and a VCR lets you view that game-winning homer from a nearly infinite variety of angles. But don't think that you can just step up to the plate and bang one out of the park; Dynamix says the game uses a highly sophisticated physics model that incorporates factors such as altitude, humidity, wind, and so forth, so you're faced with the same challenges as real big-lea-

continued ...

guers. Now if only *Front Page Sports: Baseball* could help you pull down the kind of dough those hotshots are making....

When we first heard that Dynamix was updating *Loderunner*, a huge best-seller from back in the early 1980's, we were a little skeptical. Come on, we thought; how can you make *Loderunner* any better, except to improve the graphics? Well, all we can say is that we were surprised — *very* surprised. This is one jamming game, packed with rich graphics, challenging yet accessible puzzles, and some of the downright funniest animation touches you'll find anywhere.

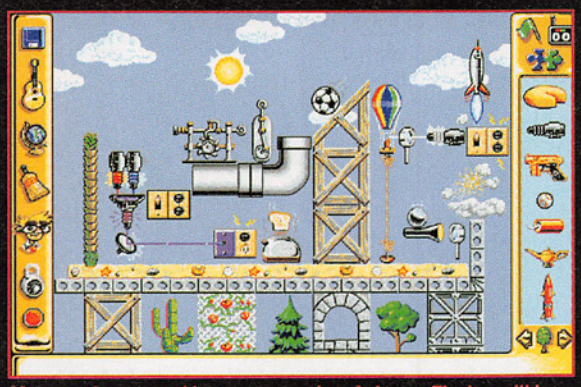


If Dynamix is true to form, *Aces of the Deep* could set a new standard for playability in submarine simulations.

For those of you who never got a chance to try the original, the game is pretty simple: You control this little guy as he runs around trying to steal gold from the Mad Monks of the Bungeling Empire. To do that, you've got to do things climb up and down ladders, dig holes for them to fall into, blast them with a laser pistol, cast spells that make them do some crazy things, and lots more. It's a puzzle-filled platform game, sure, but it looks like it could be the *best* of its kind in a long time. And a Game Generator feature lets you create your own puzzle. You've got to see it to believe it — and hopefully we'll have a full review in our next issue.

Then there's *Battle Bugs*, the first wargame from Dynamix — but you've never seen a wargame like this! It's a cross between *SimAnt* and *SEAL Team*, but that pithy description doesn't do *Battle Bugs* justice. Your troops are an assortment of insects; your objective, defending or assaulting a pile of food. There are over 20 different types of bugs in the game, each with its own special abilities — ants are infantry, dragonflies are strike aircraft, beetles act as armored forces — that you must coordinate just as in a "serious" tactical wargame. Dynamix hopes to have *Battle Bugs* ready by mid-August, and as with *Loderunner* we're looking forward to give you the full lowdown in the October issue.

We voted *The Incredible Machine* 1993 Puzzle Game of the Year, so naturally you can expect *The Incredible Machine Volume II* to contain the same delightful, mind-bending puzzles as its predecessor. *Incredible Machine II* has everything a puzzle addict could hope for: 150 puzzles of increasingly difficulty, a turn-based head-to-head mode that gives this cerebral affair a nice competitive quality, and a feature that lets you build your own puzzles to share with friends. If you're a puzzle fan, you'll love *The Incredible Machine Volume II*. The only bad thing is that you'll have to wait until October to wrap your brain around it.



More puzzles, more objects, more modes of play — *The Incredible Machine II* should keep puzzle fans in a state of bliss for a long time.

You've already heard a lot about *Aces of the Deep*; we covered it extensively in our May/June issue. Now the project is nearing completion — the version we played at the show seemed pretty complete — and all we can say is, "Bring it on!" Dynamix has earned a well-deserved reputation for producing simulations deep enough for the hardcore crowd but with enough realism options to let newcomers start blowing things up with nary a glance at a manual, and *Aces of the Deep* follows in that tradition.

Enlist in the *Kriegsmarine* for a full career, test your skill in Historic Missions, create your own scenarios — this sim is as flexible as any you could hope for. And when it comes to graphics, Dynamix just keeps getting better: All the ships and aircraft are Gouraud-shaded, and the 3D-modeled targets actually sink by the bow or stern, or break in half before sliding beneath the waves. Much fun!

The company's sim expertise is carried over to the futuristic *MetalTech: Earthsiege*, which puts you in the cockpit of massive, heavily armed robots. While this one packs a lot of pyrotechnics, beneath all the explosive fury is a remarkably deep simulation that requires careful resource management and strategic planning. Like *Aces of the Deep*, multiple realism options make *MetalTech* a good choice for beginners or sim freaks. Dynamix says the game will reach you by September, and judging from the version we tried at CES it seems that they have a good chance of making that date.

is to find and wipe out the enemy. But there's a lot more to *Warcraft* than search-and-destroy missions; this is a remarkably multifaceted game. For starters, you've got to find resources (stone, timber, etc.) in order to build strongholds, catapults, and other war machines. Once those are constructed, you must train your troops how to use these weapons, then send them out to explore and conquer. And you've also got to manage your economy so that you'll have enough gold to pay for all this stuff.

The interface couldn't be simpler — we got the hang of it after only a few minutes — and the top-down perspective means you can quickly access information on any part of your territory. Best of all, Blizzard also plans to incorporate modem- and network-play options, a thoughtful addition that should give *Warcraft* even more replay value.

Warcraft will ship on both floppies and CD-ROM, hopefully in time for Christmas, at $40-$45 for the floppy version and $45-$50 for the CD-ROM edition. Check the Eyewitness section in upcoming issues for more info on this intriguing game.



***Dust: A Tale of the Wired West* is CyberFlix's first attempt at incorporating the more traditional graphic adventure elements in a game.**

CyberFlix

CyberFlix has earned a solid reputation among Mac users for producing high-quality action titles on CD-ROM, and now they're gearing up with a line of MPC titles. We reviewed *Jump Raven* in this issue (*PC Gamer* rating: 76%), and while the game had a few problems, it is a marked improvement over *Lunicus*, CyberFlix's first game. Now Cyberflix has announced



***Skullcracker* has plenty of blood and gore; if it's got the playability to go with them it could be a coffin full of fun.**

two new titles, *Dust: A Tale of the Wired West* and *Skullcracker*, and if those games show the kind of improvement over *Jump*

Life After *Dark Sun*: SSI Rebounds From A Near-Death Experience And Emerges Stronger Than Ever

If you're new to PC gaming, you're just now learning a fact about entertainment software that we veterans have known — and had to deal with — for a long time: Games never arrive when companies say they will. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, but for the most part you can count on at least *some* delay between the announced ship date for a game and the time when it actually makes it to retail outlets.

These delays are frustrating for consumers as well as us in the media, but it can be much worse for the software publisher: Repeated delays in the release of a much-ballyhooed product can literally force a company right out of the game business.



Wake of the Ravager has a top-down view, and features an excellent combat system.

Just ask SSI. When the California-based company showed *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands* at the 1992 Summer CES, they announced that the product would be released that fall. Fall came and went, and *Dark Sun* hadn't arrived — no big deal, right? Everyone's late, right? Well, SSI had apparently added expected profits from *Dark Sun* into the ledger, and when summer of 1993 rolled around and the game still hadn't shipped, the financial picture was looking bleak. Serious layoffs ensued, and there were rumors of buyouts, bankruptcy, and even liquidation.



The clean, crisp SVGA artwork in _Panzer General_ is sure to win fans.

But SSI has bounced back from that disaster — and in a big way. Recent releases such as *Dark Legions*, *Great Naval Battles II*, and *War Game Construction Set II: Tanks!* have received critical acclaim, and all of them arrived within a week or two of when theywere supposed to — a real confidence builder. Better yet, though, is the quality of the products SSI has in the works; all are proof that the company is committed to producing games that are on a par, in graphics and playability, with any PC games around.



***Menzoberranzan* is an AD&D title set in the Forgotten Realms game world.**

While all of SSI's upcoming games look promising, four titles in particular — *Panzer General*, *AD&D Menzoberranzan*, *AD&D Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager*, and *Renegade: Battle for Jacob's Star* — caught our eye at CES. (We liked *CyClones*, too, but you'll have to turn to the Disc Pages to find out more about this action title.) Take *Panzer General*, for instance. SSI has published a lot of wargames over the years, but is this the first to incorporate elements from non-military strategy games. The game opens in 1939, just before the invasion of Poland. You assume the title role, with several "core" units under your command, and unlike in traditional wargames the soundness of your tactics and the performance of your troops directly affects the path your career will take. Your successes — or failures — are reflected through Prestige and Influence points, which affect your performance in subsequent confrontations.

The SVGA graphics in *Panzer General* are razor-sharp, the hex-based maps are richly detailed (you can toggle the hexes off, if you like) and SSI has interspersed authentic WWII film footage to keep things lively. And though factors such as supply, weather, and morale play a role in all battles, SSI has gone to great lengths to make them as easy for newcomers to grasp as possible. When this arrives in October, you can bet a few of us here will want to try our hand at a little world conquest.

Set in the AD&D Forgotten Realms game world, *AD&D Menzoberranzan* (love that name!) starts off with a bang: Your adventuring party is attacked by Drow Elves, who rob you of magical items and kidnap several party members with the intention of making them slaves. When you venture to the Underdark realm, you meet the famous Drizzt Do-'Urden, who decides to join the party and act as a guide to Underdark. But then *he*'s captured, and your job is clear — save Drizzt before he becomes a human sacrifice to the Demon Goddess Lolth.

It's a fast-paced story, and along with the smooth-scrolling first-person perspective it gets you into the action quickly — and once there you'll appreciate the extras that *Menzoberranzan* developers Dreamforge Entertainment (also responsible for *Ravenloft: Strahd's Revenge*) have included in the game. In a nod to the pen-and-paper games, levitation and flight are both available during combat — pretty useful, since the Drow can levitate during combat, too. The game has a wonderful auto-map feature that lets you not only write notations on maps, but also then print out the map for future reference. And you can access your entire party's inventory items from one screen.

The *Ravenloft* engine has been enhanced for *Menzoberranzan*, so scrolling is smoother and more realistic; the 320 x 400 graphics make for highly detailed objects and backgrounds without requiring an SVGA card. And players with slower machines (a 486/33 and 4MB of RAM is required) will be able to adjust the size of the viewing window to keep the action rolling along at a good pace. *Menzoberranzan* is the latest game from SSI under the TSR license, and the CD-ROM version will go on sale this October for around $65; the floppy version arrives a month later, with a price tag of $60.

Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager will ship on both floppy and CD-ROM, and marks the end of the long SSI-TSR partnership. This last of SSI's AD&D titles and follow-up to *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands* returns you to the land of Tyr, where you must fight to preserve order lest Tyr slip into anarchy.



We saw quite a few space-combat sims, but SSI's _Renegade_ was among the very best.

Wake of the Ravager uses the same top-down perspective as *Shattered Lands* — which is kind of refreshing, considering the glut of new first-person RPGs. SSI estimates that it'll take between 50 and 100 hours of gameplay to get through this epic, but enhancements such as an ever-changing musical score, 26 different monsters and over 200 new spells will keep the experience fresh every step of the way.

And then there's *Renegade: The Battle for Jacob's Star* — one of the most impressive space-combat sims we've seen since *X-Wing*. This all-SVGA extravaganza will be shipping on CD-ROM only, and casts you as a brash young pilot fighting the alien Tog for control of a star system. The graphics in this game are pretty spectacular, and the impression of actually flying through space is uncanny. Coming in November.

The Year of the PC Part 1

Spectrum HoloByte, MicroProse, and Sid Meier's *Colonization*

The now-enormous conglomerate that is Spectrum HoloByte and its subsidiary, MicroProse, has a lot of new product planned for the coming months. But perhaps the biggest of all is the long-awaited follow-up to *Civilization, Sid Meier's Colonization.*

You could certainly tell Spectrum/Prose is banking on this one to be a big hit. The game was announced with an unusual, stagey performance: First, a trumpeter blared a call for us all to gather. Then Sid took the mike to begin announcing his latest "god" game when suddenly, God's Own Voice rumbled from a pair of speakers over the stage. God and Sid had a talk about all this "god" sim stuff Sid seems to like so much, and we all got to listen in. It was clever bit, almost like eavesdropping on a private conversation — one we're sure God and Sid have had many times.

But anyway, the game *does* sound intriguing. It's part *Civilization* (and looks a good deal like it, too) — with plenty of strategic decision-making and challenging economic, military, and political models — and a part *Seven Cities of Gold*, with its theme of the colonization and exploration and exploitation of the New World.

Colonization didn't *look* as impressive as many of the products we saw during the show, but it *is* a Sid Meier game — and that alone is enough to make it one of the year's most eagerly awaited titles.

The Rest of the Story

MicroProse had more to plug than *Colonization*, though. Another biggie on the horizon is *Masters of Magic*, a strategy/adventure game in the spirit of MicroProse's excellent *Master of Orion*. This time around, though, you struggle to conquer a fantasy world full of magic, monsters, and treasure. You're a wizard, competing against other magic-users for ultimate control of this mystical realm. But you have to do more than cast spells to win: you'll have to do a good bit of resource management and military planning, as well.

Sports fans will be happy to hear about *Ultimate Football*, a game that includes both a good-looking football sim and a fantasy league program. The game also carries an NFL license, and authentic teams, drafts, trading, and even player injury and aging in the straight football sim; the fantasy league program will also include real NFL rosters, very thorough statistical models, and the impressive capability to download real NFL stats weekly via Prodigy, or the Franchise Sports Properties BBS.



...and suddenly God spoke to Sid, saying "I think it's time for a *Civilization* sequel."

MicroProse also showed *Across the Rhine* (impressively retitled *1944: Across the Rhine Armored Combat*). Obviously, the game didn't make it's hoped-for June ship-date, but it should be available about now.

Star Trek At Last

The big news on the Spectrum HoloByte side is that *Star Trek: The Next Generation "A Final Unity"* may finally make it to store shelves soon — maybe even by the end of the year.

Spectrum has been working on the project for well over a year now, and showing bits of the game at the last few Consumer Electronics Shows. We expected to see it at the beginning of the year, but obviously the scale of the project has created some major delays. It may turn out to have been worth the wait, though, if the gameplay proves as impressive as the CD-ROM's distinctive look.

The graphics are all high-res SVGA, and the details of the *Enterprise* and its many well-known locales are strikingly realistic. All of the characters from the television series are represented, too, but as 3D-rendered figures rather than the flat, 2D forms you'd see in a more traditional graphic adventure. You'll be able to play as any of the show's major characters, changing from one to another as the situation demands, and the actual stars of the much-beloved series provide the voice acting.

Spectrum also announced the launch of a new line of puzzle games, to be endorsed by *Tetris* creator Alexy Pajitnov. No word on a name for the line (how about "Alexy Presents..." or "Pajitnov-approved?"), but we got to play the first title in the new line, *BreakThru*. It's a Windows title, and the goal is to tear down a wall of colored blocks in a given amount of time. Of course, there are more blocks falling from above...

The other Spectrum announcements were the release of a stand-alone version of *MiG-29* (originally a *Falcon 3.0* add-on), and a new *Falcon* add-on named *Hornet: Naval Strike Fighter. Naval Strike Fighter* will allow players to take to the skies over Bosnia.

Domark, and the *Lords of Midnight*

Spectrum HoloByte will also be distributing Domark's *Lords of Midnight*, a new game by designer Mike Singleton. *Lords* is a fantasy role-playing title boasting fractally-generated landscapes, control of up to 24 independent characters, and a game world so big, it would take your character an hour of real time to walk from one side to the other. We haven't tried walking across any other game worlds, so we're not sure if an hour is a long time or not. But it sure *sounds* impressive!

Raven as that game did over *Lunicus*, we could be in for some first-rate gaming.

Dust is something of a departure for CyberFlix. Set in the town of Diamondback, New Mexico in 1882, the game is part graphic adventure, part arcade shooter with over 30 characters you can interact with. We didn't get a chance to see the game running, but the graphics in the still screens are very good. CyberFlix hopes to have Dust available by the beginning of next year.

Skullcracker, on the other hand, is a lot like *Jump Raven* — this one is arcade action all the way as you sign up to work for Mortality Enforcement, a company whose mission is to put the dead back in their graves. The "butt-kickin' arcade gorefest on CD-ROM" takes place in all the places the undead love to go to when they rise — cemeteries, cathedral, and shopping malls (eat your heart out, George Romero!). If CyberFlix makes their ship date, the game will arrive at a very appropriate time — this Halloween.

Elite of America

Here's another company making the move from console games to the PC. Elite is foregoing floppy versions of its first two PC titles (we're not counting Elite's PC conversion of the SNES hit *Joe & Mac Caveman Ninja*, which was published by New World Computing), and instead concentrating on CD-ROM and all the extra features that medium makes possible.

The first title you can expect from Elite is *PowerSlide*, a road-rally game that will also appear for Super Nintendo and 3DO. With six cars to drive, fourteen tracks to master, and co-drivers to help with navigation, *PowerSlide* strives to place equal emphasis on realism and accessible gameplay. There's also a two-player mode that uses a horizontal split-screen, but as of press time we were still waiting to find out if modem and/or network play were going to be supported.

Elite says that *PowerSlide* has the most realistic physics model of any racing game — a pretty audacious claim by anyone's standards. With so much emphasis on realistic physics, it's strange that there are no plans to incorporate any standard cockpit perspectives in the game; you'll do all your driving from an external, behind-the-car viewpoint, though there will be an option for you to adjust that view. Expect *PowerSlide* sometime before Christmas.

Virtuoso is a smoothly scrolling, 3D action game in which you play as a rock star in a future where music and Virtual Reality have become the new opium of the masses. Yes, you're armed, and yes, you blast enemies — but there are a couple of twists to set this one apart from other 3D shooters. For one thing, you play the game from a third-person perspective, above and slightly behind the character you're controlling. But the big news here is the identity of the character you'll be controlling. Elite's been trying to sign up a Big-Name-Rock Star to play the title role, and was very hush-hush about whom they are negotiating with. Most of us at *PC Gamer* think Ted Nugent would be the perfect choice, but we'll have to wait and see. As with *PowerSlide*, Elite hopes to have *Virtuoso* out before Christmas.



***Frontlines* is Impressions' "beer and pretzels" war game. Just the thing for our own General Trotter!**

Gremlin

Gremlin is one of the larger European developers and publishers, but they've never had much luck with distribution for their games over here. By the time games like *Lotus*, *Nigel Mansell's World Championship* and others reached us, they were already showing signs of age.

Now Gremlin has signed a distribution agreement with joystick specialist Suncom Technologies, and we should start seeing Gremlin games over here at about the same time they are released overseas. The first titles Gremlin expects to ship are two videogame translations; that may not sound exciting at first, but these are translations of two very good videogames. *Desert Strike* and *Jungle Strike* both employ an oblique overhead perspective as you guide a Comanche attack 'copter on missions in the Middle East and South America. Simulations fans may turn their noses up at these two titles, but if you've got any arcade action at all in your blood they're definitely worth a look.

But Gremlin's doing more than just translations of console-based games. *Retribution* is set nearly 400 years in the future,where it's been discovered that an alien race, outwardly friendly to Earth, has been using human settlers as food. This combat simulator puts you in the cockpit of a heavily armed hovercraft as you try to put an end to their unsavory eating habits. It should be released sometime in the fourth quarter.

Slipstream is a racing game set in the future in which cars have been replaced by flying craft, sort of like *CyberRace*. From the short demo we saw, the graphics in *Slipstream* appear to be on par with those in *CyberRace*; now the question is whether or not it will play better than that game. *Slipstream* is also scheduled to arrive sometime in the fall.

Empire Software

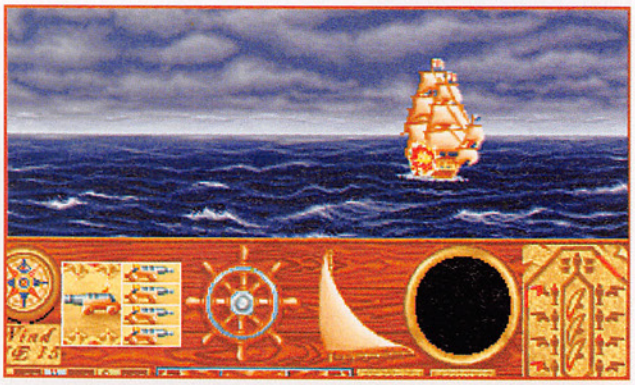
Empire has been a little slow making headway in the U.S. market, but the two titles that had on display at CES show that they are committed to producing top-quality games. *Dreamweb*, for example, is a cyberpunk graphic adventure with several unique twists. The game uses a top-down playing perspective, a technique rarely used in this genre, and Empire says they've included over 2,000 animations in the game: These little fellows move very realistically. The game also has many adult themes; the sex and violence in the European version are going to be toned for the U.S. release (boo!!!), but there'll still be some in the version we get over here. We expect to have a complete review in the next issue.

Dawn Patrol is a WWI air-combat simulation with VGA and SVGA graphics. Dozens of historical missions are featured here, and you have the ability to change many of the mission parameters to customize each to your skill level and preferences. Empire says *Dawn Patrol* is very close to completion, and should ship in September. But will this game finally challenge *Red Baron*'s supremacy among WWI air-combat sims?

GT Interactive

GT scored a monumental coup this year when they secured the rights to distribute id Software's *Doom II: Hell on Earth*. This retail-only sequel to the best PC game ever made has you returning to earth after the events in *Doom*, only to find that all those damn monsters made it home before you. Now you'll have to clean them out again — and save the human race in the process.

GT has never been what you'd call a household name — and they might not be, even after this. After all, who's gonna remember to ask for GT, when every store in the country will understand "Gimmee *Doom II* — NOW!" just fine.



Impressions gives you another chance to take to the seas, plunder trading vessels, get rich, and buy more ships in *High Seas Trader*.

Impressions

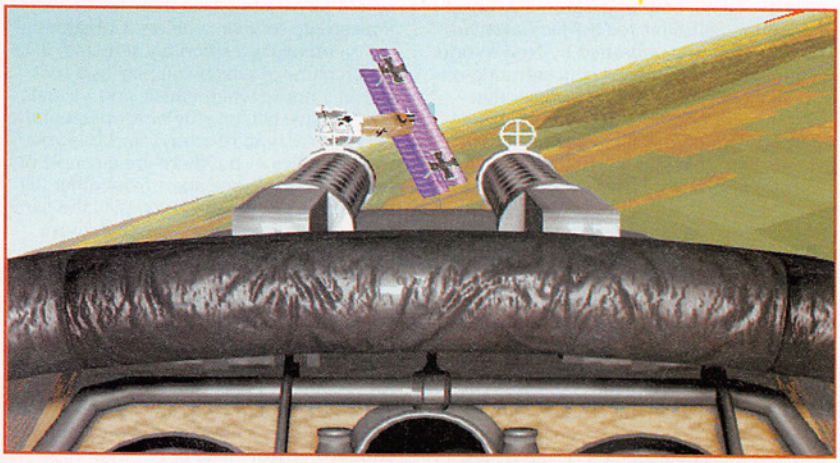
Impressions, the company that wowed us with *Detroit*, is one of those software houses that seems perched on the edge of greatness. While the titles we saw at the Impressions booth certainly didn't make the visual splash many others did, they all seemed to share an underlying quality of design and emphasis on gameplay that exceeded some of those all-flash extravaganzas. Perhaps that's why the company is such a reliable publisher: They haven't put the cart before the horse, choosing instead to concentrate on solid gameplay before tackling all that 3D rendering software. Still, if they're to make that jump into the ranks of Major Playerdom, some more impressive graphics will be important.

So what was on display? First up is *Front Lines*, which Impressions proudly bills as a "beer-and-pretzels" wargame (just the thing for our Desktop General Bill Trotter, a devout beer and pretzels connoisseur). The hex-based game takes place in the near future, with units like hover tanks and tech infantry. There's a scenario editor, allowing players to design their own battles, and the always-welcome modem-play option.

Another new release is *High Seas Trader*, which casts you as a 17th-century merchant out for profit, exploration, and all-around adventure on the high seas. We're looking forward to this one, although it must be said that the premise *has* been done before. *Pirates!*, *Merchant Prince*, and *Uncharted Waters* all used roughly the same idea, and *High Seas Trader* looks to be a little of all of them.

One pretty neat program was *Project USA*, an educational title focusing on US geography. It stood out because of its many neat features, like a fly-by, scrolling, topographical representation of the entire country and loads of data on each state.

And finally, although it's a long ways down the road, we're really hyped about



***Dawn Patrol* looks fantastic, as this screenshot from an actual mission proves. But Empire couldn't show us the game on a proper machine, so the question of actual gameplay is still unaswered.**

The Year of the PC Part 2



Project USA is a geography tutor with enough fun and depth for children and adults alike.

Powerhouse. This will be an SVGA economic sim along the lines of *Detroit*, recreating the power utilities biz. Just imagine, rushing to make a quick buck on that newfangled nuclear power stuff!

I•Motion

What with the World Cup being played here this year, some folks are claiming that the U.S. is ripe for a soccer invasion — a fact not lost on I•Motion, who hopes to have *Planet Soccer* on store shelves before August rolls around. They'll be going up against *Sensible Soccer* and *Empire Soccer '94* (the latter is reviewed on p.69 of this issue), but *Planet Soccer* benefits from being the only one of those titles that offers an on-the-field perspective. The movement of the players is stunningly lifelike and fluid, due largely to the 6,000 animations that *Planet Soccer* developer Condor Software has packed into the game. But *Planet Soccer* does more than just look good; there are enough options here to satisfy even hard-core soccer fans.

You can control any of the 24 teams that qualified for the World Cup in real life, as well as six other top-ranked squads. All the recent FIFA rule changes have been incorporated into *Planet Soccer*, and like top-notch sims of other sports you can either act as coach and watch the action unfold, take control of the players, or let the computer crunch some numbers and then access the score and stats for each game. We hope to have a full review of this game very soon.

I•Motion was also showing videotapes of two sequels: *Alone in the Dark 3*, which takes detective Edward Carnby to a Western ghost town during the 1930s; and *Shadow of the Comet 2: Prisoner of Ice*, which features some interface improvements over its predecessor. Look for both games to arrive early next year.

The Learning Company

The Learning Company has always been a leader in the educational and edutainment software industry, but now it looks as though they're set to ratchet up the standards for all educational products. We weren't able to put our hands on everything they've got coming up, but the two products we did check out in detail evinced their serious commitment to educational content, high-quality graphics, and engrossing gameplay. These products looked fantastic, sounded wonderful — and seem very well equipped to really

The Experienced Virgin

Although a lot of the stuff Virgin Interactive was showing may be quite a ways from completion, it was hard not to be impressed with the quality of the previews we saw. Virgin has carved out a solid reputation as a top software publisher, and this massive new crop of titles should bolster that rep even more.

The Westwood Connection

A lot of the credit for Virgin's success has to go to Westwood Studios, the Las Vegas design crew behind many of Virgin's biggest hits. Some of the best known of Westwood's creations include *Legend of Kyrandia*, *Dune II*, and *Lands of Lore*. But as good as those games were, Westwood's new offerings are more impressive-looking than any of them — and they're all slated for CD-ROM release only.

First up, we are returned to Kyrandia in *Kyrandia Book Three: Malcolm's Revenge*. For those of you not hip to the Kyrandia thing, Malcolm was an evil jester from the first Kyrandia game who was turned to stone by that game's hero. This time around, though, you play *as* Malcolm, helping him seek vengeance on those who crossed him.



A scene from _Creature Shock_, and the 3D-rendered look we saw so often.

The sense of humor that marked the first two games in this series remains, but the graphics have improved dramatically. Using 3D Studio (you'll be seeing a lot of that name in the coming months), rendered graphics and 3D backgrounds were created to enhance the look of *Malcolm's Revenge*. Watch for it toward the end of the year.

Another promising Westwood project, *Command and Conquer* ("A strategy simulation whose name says it all," according to the press release), should be a big hit with strategy gamers everywhere. It's based on the wonderful *Dune II* engine, and set in a futuristic world where two great powers vie for control of the mineral Tiberium.



In Westwood's _Lands of Lore II_, graphics this good are par for the course.

In addition to the striking cut scenes and game graphics that seem common to all of Westwood's new releases, *Command and Conquer* features modem-play options that are sure to bring thanks from the strategy crowd.

But perhaps the most impressive-looking Westwood offering was *Lands of Lore II*. It employed those 3D Studio-type graphics, but not only in cinematic interludes. In *LOL II*, the characters throughout the actual game look as good as anything you'd see in a cut scene. That's important, because we've all had the experience of delighting to those impressive cinematics, only to be disappointed by comparatively dull game graphics. The big question, though, is just how fast a machine will we have to use to enjoy the game at anything approaching a decent frame rate?

Help From Abroad

Most of Virgin's other new titles come from European developers — with the exception of Trilobyte's *The 11th Hour: The Sequel to The 7th Guest*. (Yes, it *will* be out, maybe even by the time you read this.) The European titles run the gamut from wargames to shooters.



Lost Eden — but whether this is a dinosaur or a human, we don't know.

In that shooter category, watch for the eye-popping graphics of *Creature Shock*, developed by Argonaut Software. You basically fly and walk through a number of locations, moving your cursor to blast monsters. *Rebel Assault* fans should love it.

From UK developer Cryo comes *Lost Eden* (previewed in *PC Gamer*, issue #1), an adventure game set in a world where dinosaurs and man co-exist. Coming at you this fall.

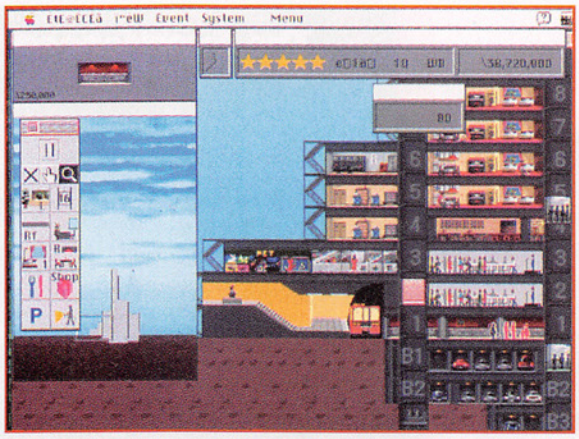
Graffiti is the team behind *Mech Commander*, one of several *MechWarrior*-style robot combat sims to be released this year. *Mech Commander* lets you pilot a massive robotic fighter through battle with both computer and human opponents. Unfortunately, the early info we have specifies that you can play against friends only via null modem — no mention of network or full modem play. Multi-player capability is pretty important to this type of game, so we'll have to wait and see how it eventually turns out.

Cannon Fodder from Sensible Software is probably already familiar to most of you, thanks to its success in Europe and all the word-of-mouth it's generating. The good news is that we'll soon be enjoying it in America, too.

Cannon Fodder is pretty straightforward: The theme here is kill or be killed. You command 360 raw recruits through 24 separate missions, ranging from simple "kill every enemy you meet" scenarios to hostage rescues and destroying enemy factories. And best of all, the game has an irreverent sense of humor that'll keep you entertained as you watch your men fight it out. Coming this fall.

Rowan Software brings us *D-Day: Operation Overlord*, a flight sim that lets you fly Spitfires, Mustangs, and Typhoons against the Germans. An SVGA mode and plenty of nice shading promise to provide lots of visual appeal, and a unique campaign structure adds a role-playing feel to the whole thing. But how does it *fly*? We'll all know by late summer (...that's right about now, isn't it?)

Another flight sim scheduled for late summer release, *H.A.W.C* gives you access to six helicopters (including the Werewolf, Bell Super Cobra AH-1W, Westland Army Lynx, and Kamov MI-8 Hip E), and supports the complete Thrustmaster peripherals line.



In *SimTower*, the latest "software toy" from Maxis, you design and build a skyscraper, then manage it any way you see fit.

teach kids something important while they've having fun.

With *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Journey*, the Learning Company has set a pretty high standard: They say that it actually teaches children to read. Part of the program consists of stories, which start children out with short, simple sentences and build up to more complex sentences as the tale progresses. Another part of the program lets children practice skills such as phonics, sounding out words, word recognition, and more.

All told, *Interactive Journey* features 40 stories and over 100 skill-building activities. Most importantly, the entire program is infused with a fun atmosphere that will have kids eager to continue playing and learning. The Learning Company is serious about this product — they're backing it with a full money-back guarantee if you aren't satisfied. Expect *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Journey* this September, with an M.S.R.P. of $99 (the price at retail will almost certainly be lower).

Speaking of Reader Rabbit, The Learning Company has given the longtime bunny/reading tutor a makeover with the CD-ROM version of the classic *Deluxe! Reader Rabbit 1* and *2*. Lifelike speech, new SVGA graphics, and silky smooth animations bring this time-tested reading tool into the '90s with a bang. For those of you not familiar with the original *Reader Rabbit 1*, it's made up of several activities that help develop your child's skills in phonics and letter recognition, spotting spelling patterns in different words, matching pictures with words — and there are some drills to help with memory and concentration in there, too. The program is very child-friendly, with an on-line help demo that clearly shows how each activity works. The graphics are beautiful (we saw it running on a 32" monitor and couldn't pick out a pixel), and the voice-acting was gentle and encouraging. We could go on and on about *Deluxe! Reader Rabbit 1*, but we'll just sum it up by saying that this upgrade is so good that even parents who already have *Reader Rabbit* will want to check it out.

Maxis

If you saw last month's issue, you already know about *SimTown*, one the newest "software toys" coming from Maxis. Sort of a "*SimCity* in microcosm," *SimTown* allows kids to design and run their own neighborhood, with individual houses, streets, parks, and stores, as well as places of special interest to kids, such as pizza parlors, videogame arcades, and movie theaters. If you've played or even heard about *SimCity 2000*, you know this one's going to be a real winner. Look for it in the fourth quarter of this year.

If *SimTown* is a micro-*SimCity*, then *SimTower* is *SimCity* under an electron microscope: Here you have control over a single high-rise building in the heart of a big city. *SimTower* puts you in total control — you start out with a limited budget, and must build the skyscraper from the ground up. Once the tower is completed, it's up to you to make a profit by leasing space for apartments, restaurants, offices, and shops — but you've also got to lay out your money for repairs, security, and safety features, because that's your responsibility as a landlord. And since those crazy guys at Maxis always want to throw a wrench into urban life, expect such emergencies as terrorist threats, major roach problems, and even a giant gorilla who mistakes your structure for a mountain on his native island. Maxis says the Mac version will ship sometime in the fourth quarter, but was unclear as to when it would arrive for DOS and/or Windows.

Click 'n Play, designed by Europress Software, was one of the more interesting things we saw during the show. Basically, *Click 'n Play* lets you design and play computer games — and you don't have to know a thing about programming to do it. In fact, *Click 'n Play* literally guides you through the process: After choosing from over a thousand objects (you can also import your own graphic images), the program will let you choose the outcome you'd like to see whenever any type of event occurs. There are hundreds of sound effects available (like the objects, you can incorporate any *.WAV file into the program), and best of all you can save any game you create as a stand-alone program! Yep, once you've completed a masterpiece, you can give it to a friend who can then play it even if he doesn't own *Click 'n Play*. You won't be able to design the next Ultima with *Click 'n Play*, of course, but it looks like it could be a lot of fun. The version we saw looked nearly complete, and Maxis says *Click 'n Play* should be headed your way by the end of September at the latest.



Critical Path was knocked for limited gameplay, so Media Vision hired the designer of the puzzles in Disney's *Heaven and Earth* to make *The Daedalus Encounter* more challenging. And they also got Tia!

Media Vision

Though you may think of Media Vision as mainly a hardware producer, the company has a lot of new software headed to store shelves in the coming year. Concentrating their efforts entirely on CD-ROM development, Media Vision is working hard on further defining that most illusive of concepts, "interactive movies."

Continuing the story started in *Quantum Gate*, *Quantum Gate II* takes the "VirtualCinema" thing a step further. A sort of psychological thriller, the game puts you deep into the mind of Drew Griffith, currently stationed on the planet Aylinde. As play progresses, you'll explore the colorful worlds of three different dimensions, never quite sure which one is real. Adding to the title's long-term value, there are several different story-paths and endings, so you can enjoy a different experience each time you play.

The Daedalus Encounter is another interactive movie, starring *Wayne's World* co-star Tia Carrere. As a former navigator whose body has been destroyed in an interstellar war and replaced with a mech-

The Year of the PC Part 1

anical probe, you must use your new technical abilities to help your crewmates survive an encounter with an alien vessel. The game is filled with lots of puzzles and high-tech graphics, all using film-quality production values. While it's still too early to pass judgment on the actual game, what we've seen of Tia looks mighty good....

From Steve Meretzky, the creator of *Spellcasting 101*, comes Media Vision's new *Hodj n' Podj*. This interactive comedy has players attempting to rescue the beautiful Princesses Mish and Mosh in order to win the gratitude of King Mediee. Filled with games like Mankala, Peggleboz — and even stranger things like Poker — *Hodj n' Podj* will offer continued entertainment to players even after they've finished the comical quest.

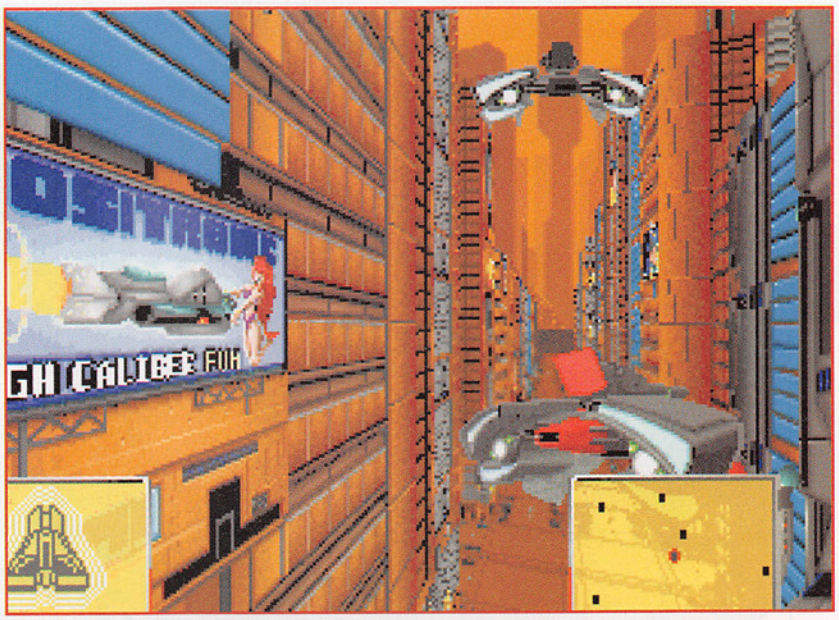
Lastly, there's *Coolsville*, a sort of educational music adventure. In a city inhabited by instrument-playing cartoon animals, gamers can run across the likes of Duck Ellington, take rides in a cab named Calloway, and even play gigs on Swing Street and Bebop Boulevard. But unfortunately, a mysterious fiend is trying to destroy Coolsville, and you must try to stop him before the whole town goes square. Shipping in fall of 1994, this one looks like it could be pretty fun to watch.

New World Computing

Since its beginnings in 1984, New World Computing has always been associated with RPG's. But at this year's show, New World proved that they're more than just a one-trick-pony by showcasing some slick new products that fall outside their usual areas of endeavor.

The biggest surprise was New World's first foray into historical wargaming, *Iron Cross*. In this overhead tactical warfare simulation, players are dropped into the most important battles of World War II in an attempt to relive or rewrite history. Players can command either Axis or Allied forces in 12 different scenarios, ranging all across Europe. A bit different than most games of this type, *Iron Cross* is played completely in real time, forcing players to react to events around them even while under fire from other quarters. No more getting up and having a sandwich while you step back and unhurriedly plot out your next move!

In an attempt to make the game as historically accurate as possible, each of the 80 different units in the game is rated in four-



New World's *Zephyr* puts you at the controls of a futuristic hovertank. You're flying for the man.



Iron Cross drops you into the most important battles in World War II — and gives you the chance to change history.

Merit Software

Entertainment Unleashed

One of the most impressive lineups at this Summer's show was that of the fairly inconspicuous Merit Software. Originally created as a software investment company, Merit begin to branch into the publishing, marketing, and distribution of entertainment titles in 1989. And now, after a long, hard road, Merit has managed to acquire some of the hottest development teams in the business.

Future Vision, Merit's number-one power, has more than a little experience designing computer games. Consisting in part of several ex-Origin employees, this powerful team showed three high-impact products sheduled for release over the next 12 months or so.

Future Vision

Coming off of the initial success of their first title, *Command Adventures: Starship*, Future Vision is preparing to release a sequel, *Starship: The Rogarian Agenda*. In the beginning of this new space-thriller, your character loses everything he owns in a poker game, to a member of an ancient race known as the Marthain. This particular Marthain, Jharan, offers to return your planetary wealth if you will run several dangerous missions for him. Naturally you agree, and find yourself sent to seemingly random planets to complete these arduous tasks. But as you continue, you begin to realize that you're merely a pawn in a plot for galactic domination. Your only chance for survival — and of protecting countless other innocent victims — is to uncover the plot and stop those responsible.



Psychotron, an interactive movie, didn't excite us at first glance.



Sure, *Harvester* is a horror title. If you doubt it, just take a look at this Gacy-esque clown!

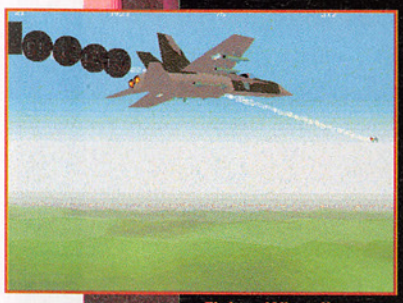
The game story and the individual missions are the works of G.P. Austin — famous for writing *Privateer*, *Wing Commander II*, and *Strike Commander*, as well as many traditional film and theater projects.

Next in the Future Vision line is a joint project between Merit and Future Vision that's probably one of the most talked about products currently in development. In *Harvester*, you wake up in the small town of Harvest with absolutely no memory of your whereabouts or your past. As you explore your surroundings, you'll slowly realize that this town is like no other you've ever seen.

Also written by Austin, *Harvester* keeps the player off-balance from beginning to end, building a thick psychological tension. For those of you who've been following this project from the start, the sneak peek we

continued ...

Merrit (continued)



Fighter Wing allows up to 16 players to dog-fight over a network.

saw at CES leads us to believe Merit and Future Vision are committed to preserving the horror and gore that makes *Harvester* unique. This *will* be one of the most talked-about games of 1995.

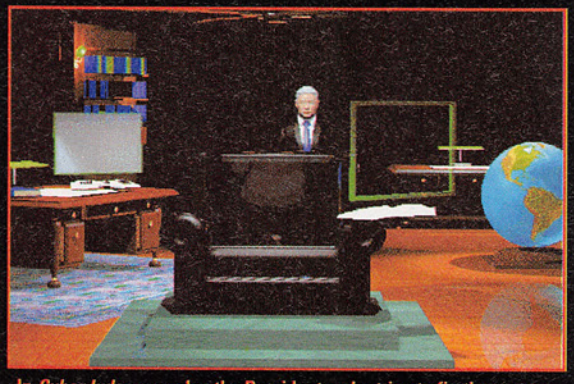
In another joint project, Future Vision and Maelstrom software have linked up to produce the bizarre action title *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*. In *Fortress*, you enter a *Doom*-like labyrinth for the sole purpose of finding and destroying the nefarious Dr. Radiaki before his evil can do the world any harm. You'll face 20 different types of enemies, each fully animated with their own weird forms of attack. Most of the creatures you run across are intentionally humorous, from toaster-headed constructs to strangely honorable samurai who commit *sepukku* after losing a fight. Rounded out with graphics and sound that are some of the most detailed we've seen in an action game, *Radiaki* is sure to be a hit. For more info on this title, slated for a mid-August release, check out our full preview in Scoops!, page 12.

Into The Skies, CyberJudas! The Rest of the Lineup

Fighter Wing, Merit's first entry into the world of flight sims, is being designed by Gemsoft Corporation. The main idea behind the sim is to offer all of the realism of the more well-known flight games, but without the steep learning curve of those titles. Players can select from three different scenarios, each designed to slowly teach the skills necessary for the next level of play. The most impressive thing about the product is that it will allow up to *16 players* on two teams to play together on a network. At the heart of the game is a Russian-designed 3D engine that claims to deliver higher resolution and more realistic results than any other engine in use today. *Fighter Wing* is scheduled for a mid-autumn release.

Boasting the best name for a new product we've ever heard is *CyberJudas*, DC True's sequel to *Shadow President*. Adding unbelievable 3D graphics to a state-of-the-art political simulation, *CyberJudas* puts you in charge of the most powerful nation on Earth (that's the U.S., friends). Unlike *Shadow President*, though, there's more going on here than just diplomatic maneuvering. One of your most trusted advisors is trying to destroy you, and perhaps the rest of the planet as well. If you don't figure out who it is — while at the same time continuing to manage world affairs appropriately — you and your country could be doomed. Since the identity of the traitor and the actual world events are all random, the game presents a new challenge every time you play. In addition to the game's spectacular 3D images, *CyberJudas* also features the latest real-world information from the CIA factbook, further enhancing the title's realistic feel. *CyberJudas* is scheduled for release at the end of September.

Lastly comes *Psychotron*, an "interactive movie" from The Multimedia Store — and in truth, this was the least compelling title Merit had on display. Anyway, the plot line of this one could come from today's



In *CyberJudas*, you play the President as he tries to fix the economy, pass health reform, and find a backstabber in the White House.

headlines: The Russian government, starved for cash in the face of economic ruin, begins to sell off some of the technology that they've been working on for the past few years. The most devastating product that's up for bid is a mysterious Psychotronic Generator — an ESP device that's quickly bought by the CIA.

The game consists of a bunch of video clips, with you being asked to make decisions as the plot unfolds. *Psychotron* should be available sometime in late July.

With a lineup like this one, Merit is sure to be a name you'll hear several times in the coming year. But not satisfied to rest on their laurels, Merit also showed us some sneak peeks at what the future is going to bring. Though it's a long way from being complete, we saw a game that's so good-looking you won't believe it. Check out Eyewitness for all the facts — and pictures, too!



Heroes of Might and Magic is really an update of New World Computing's *King Bounty*. Sounds good to us, though.

teen categories, such as accuracy, mobility, firepower, and reload time. It will be pretty interesting to see what the response of hard-core wargamers is to this new high-speed approach to gaming.

New World is also taking a stab at the action market with a new arcade-style sim, *Zephyr*. It's set in yet another dark, cyberpunk world of the future, where those evil mega-corporations now so popular in games battle for business domination in bizarre arena combat, featuring hi-tech hovertanks called Zephyrs.

But the story isn't as important as the fast and furious action it produces. You fight from a first-person perspective, and you can swivel your hovertank's turret to blast enemies hiding down side-streets as you hurtle forward though the game. There are eight different alien worlds in which to battle, each with several arenas.

Zephyr uses an advanced artificial intelligence system to keep even the most experienced of gamers on their toes, while still providing easier levels of play for first-time players. Rounding everything out are a rock-and-roll style soundtrack, as well as network and modem support to let you take on your buddies as they fight for other corporation's interests. New World promises that the game will be compatible with the latest computer accessories — up to and including VR headsets.

For all those fans of New World's *Might and Magic* series, there's a new strategy game that will be based on the people and places of Xeen. A little similar to the company's earlier release *King's Bounty*, *Heroes of Might and Magic* is a wargame that pits players against three computer-controlled warlords who are looking to conquer the world. You must gather forces comprised of both heroes and monsters in an attempt to acquire new lands, find items of power, and crush your foes wherever possible. More than just a wargame, *Heroes of Might and Magic* will require players to consider resource management as well as the subtle diplomacy necessary to convince the creatures of Xeen to fight by your side. Due to a random item-placement routine, each game played will require a different strategy if you're to lead your armies to victory.

For those role-playing fans who might be feeling a little abandoned, take heart! New World also has a strange new RPG developed by Several Dudes Holistic Gaming. In *Hammer of the Gods*, the Dudes (they're the team behind *Merchant Prince*) are putting role players in the shoes of a Viking hero. Starting from simple origins, you must complete quests for increasingly important gods of Norse mythology in a game of exploration and trading. Though the price for failure is often swift and disastrous, success can leave some deities indebted to you — and who wouldn't like to have a god in his corner? Modem and network support are included, so you can compete with up to four of your friends.

Separated from their long-time distributor Broderbund now for only a few months, New World looks to have a strong lineup to back them on this first solo flight.

The Year of the PC Part 1

But even with all the good news coming from the company, loyal fans may be wondering where the next installment in the *Might and Magic* series is. Unfortunately, even under the most belligerent questioning possible, the folks at New World just aren't talking about that.

NovaLogic

Although NovaLogic didn't show as much product as a lot of other companies, the one game they did show was spectacular. Using the same high-tech wizardry found in *Comanche*, NovaLogic has taken the battle down to earth with their new (and long-awaited) *Armored Fist*.



We've been patiently waiting for *Armored Fist* — but now it's here, and looking mighty fine.

The new sim puts you in command of a company of armored units; you may fight as either an American or a Russian. Depending on how you want to play, you can issue orders to your four platoons from your command station, or hop behind the controls of one of your tanks and get into the action yourself. If it looks like you're losing the fight, you can even call in for remote artillery or air support.

The game is filled with the same unbelievable terrain and animations seen in *Comanche*, but includes terrific sound and amazing, brand-new visual effects like translucent smoke, night-vision controls, and realistic explosions.

Armored Fist will include support for all of the top gaming accessories, like the Thrustmaster Flight Control System and the CH Flightstick Pro, as well as full support for Sound Blaster and Roland sound boards. If you're a simulation fan, or if you're just looking for some of the most impressive graphics available on a PC, you've *got* to start watching store shelves for this one.

Rocket Science Games

There's a major new force rising in the world of CD-ROM gaming, a force made up of some of the hottest names in the film, computer, and comic-book industries. Founded only last year, Rocket Science Games has amassed a great deal of talent — all working toward the production of fully interactive gaming that will blur the line between movies and games forever. At Summer CES, we finally got a peek at some of the projects that Rocket Science has been working on. While the gameplay on most of these titles was still pretty simple, viewing them as a company's first shot at the market helps you to appreciate what these guys may be capable of.

The first product to be released for the PC CD-ROM will be *Loadstar: The*

GTE Interactive Media

If money talks, then GTE is about to make a lot of noise in the PC gaming market — and it could give the entire industry a boost

Just before we left for Chicago, we learned that GTE — the $20-billion electronics giant — was planning to jump into the interactive entertainment market. It was exciting news on the whole, but we were a little skeptical of what it would mean to PC gamers; with the videogame market currently far outstripping PC games in sales, would they focus most of their attention on dedicated game machines?

Well, GTE Interactive *is* planning to publish games for the videogame crowd, but they're also firmly committed to the rapidly expanding PC games market as well. Make no mistake: GTE is serious about the future of PC games. They've invested millions of dollars in creating a "digital media studio," and say that they've been working on this project for the past four years. All of GTE Interactive's products will be released on CD-ROM under the GTE Entertainment label, which is divided into various product lines.

For example, there's the Interactive Toys category, designed with 3- to 6-year-olds in mind. Interactive Toys are further broken down into series called Lost & Found, Vitsie Visits, MegaMorf, Night Light, X-Ray, and Big Bugs. All these series have high production values, as



You may find Vitsie freakish, but GTE Interactive promises the kids just love her. Honest.

we saw with one of the Lost & Found games and *Vitsie Visits Oceans*. In the Lost & Found games, the goal is simple: The child must locate one of eight items hidden in a very busy (but highly detailed) digitized scene. Hints are provided through digitized speech, and the emphasis is on positive reinforcement. High-quality live-action video rounds out this fun package.

The star of the Vitsie Visit series is, naturally enough, Vitsie — a cheerful lady with Bowie-red hair and day-glo green goggles. Adults may find her to be a bit on the weird side, but we all know that kids don't look at things the same way grown-ups do. Each CD-ROM has 30 minutes of live-action video with Vistie singing songs, guiding children through learning activities, and putting a general fun spin on the entire affair. The interface is simple enough for children who haven't learned to read, but there's enough information here for kids at more advanced learning stages.

But enough kid stuff. GTE also showed *C.A.R.S* (that stands for Cyberspace Automotive Rivalry Simulation, in case you didn't know), a title from the Action Arcade line. There's not a lot of plot here — you pick a character to portray you, hop in a heavily armed vehicle, and start drivin' and/or shootin' in a virtual world — but for a crew like us that thinks *Doom* is the best game ever, that's no big problem. The 3D graphics here, while not the best we saw at the show, are *truly* 3D: During play, each car can be seen from 32 different perspectives, unlike objects in some "3D" games which can only be seen from two or four sides. Plus *C.A.R.S* will feature network play for multi-player combat (at press time, there were no plans for a modem-play option). *C.A.R.S* should arrive in the fall.

And then there's the Street Sports line, obviously designed to appeal to fans of what we at *PC Gamer* call "grunge sports" — games where fouls are a thing of the past, and attitude is almost as important as aptitude. *Jammit*, for example, is a two-on-two basketball game with a street-wise sensibility. We've played the Sega Genesis version of the game, and while it's not quite as intense as the mega-hit *NBA Jams*, it's got a lot going for it. There's a multitude of game types, "Slam-Cam" views that put dunking action right in your face, and a head-to-head mode for competition against a real live opponent (though modem-play doesn't appear to be supported in this one, either).

It's hard to tell how GTE's products are going to fare in the increasingly competitive computer gaming market, but you certainly can't accuse the company of trying to "hit-and-run" with low-budget products and make a fast buck. GTE is obviously going to be around for awhile — and their presence alone gives the PC gaming industry a new stature for potential investors.





Product Information Number 242

Interplay: Home of the "*Doom*-Killer"

Although this company's banking on CD-ROM, its biggest title is still floppy

At the Winter CES in January, the folks at Interplay told us that they were going to be doing all their major new releases on CD-ROM. But one of the most impressive titles we saw during Summer CES was a floppy-based game called *Descent*, shamelessly hawked as a "*Doom*-killer."

Descent puts you at the helm of some futuristic craft, hurtling through the mines of Pluto to try to stop some alien presence from taking over the Solar system. But the story isn't important: With *Descent*, all you're gonna remember is the action.



Cyberia is full of pyrotechnics — though not all of them are so big!

As in *Doom*, the gameplay is all first-person. But you can pivot your ship a full 360 degrees, sliding though narrow passages and avoiding enemy fire. The sensation of speed is amazing, and the 3D, texture-mapped graphics make this game a genuine joy to behold.

But the real star of the game is the control system. Using a combination of joystick and keyboard, players can make their craft hover, reverse, turn on a dime, and just plain haul ass through the game's passages and chambers. You'll battle alien machines and grab weapons and power-ups — but none of that's as important as the ease with which you'll do it. Of all the *Doom*-like titles we saw, this one (and LucasArts' *Dark Forces*) are easily the best.

Cyberia

In a great party/press announcement, Interplay also unveiled it's next big project — *Cyberia*. This one will have to be on CD-ROM, because it's so chock-full of graphics and gameplaying merriment that no platoon of floppies could hold it.

Cyberia is set (can anyone guess? You there, in the blue sweater-vest?) in a future where global terrorists hold mankind on the brink of destruction. The terrorist groups are all after a doomsday device, code-named Cyberia, that's been discovered in Northern Asia. You have to get it before they can.

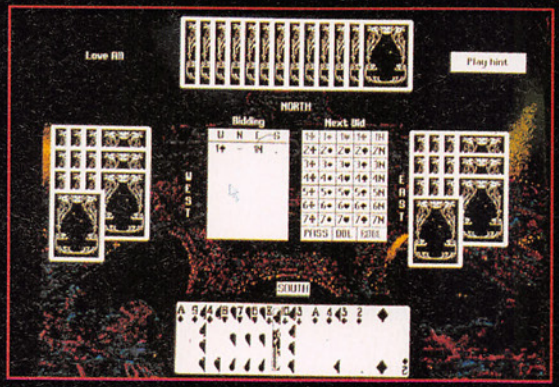
Cyberia employs all the latest graphics technologies to make a very strong visual impression. There are 3D-rendered craft and synthetic actors, and very fluid animation throughout. And the sound effects and music, performed by Thomas Dolby, are incredible.

Watch for *Cyberia* to hit the shelves sometime late this year.

Another interesting CD-ROM project, *Voyeur*, is a political thriller starring none other than Robert Culp. Culp is running for president — but unknown to him, a member of his own family doesn't want him to be elected, and is even willing to reveal some unsavory family secrets in order to ensure his defeat.

Equipped with a video camera, you watch Culp and his family (voyeurism, get it?) for 24 hours, trying to discover the secret that could change American politics forever.

Press releases on this title tout "love, sex, lust, revenge, betrayal, and even murder" as reasons you should sit back and peep on Culp's family and career. Sounds good to us, but we can't help but wonder about the gameplay: Is the biggest challenge going to be making sure that the batteries in your camcorder are fresh? Once again, we'll just have to wait and see...



Who better than Omar Sharif to bring bridge to CD-ROM?

Mission Studios

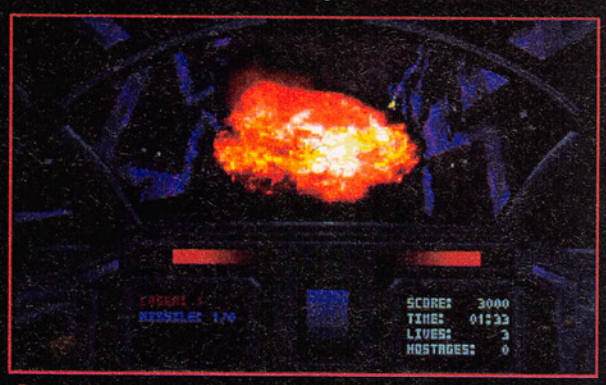
Interplay will be publishing three new titles from Mission Studios, the company made up in part of former Velocity employees. And one of Mission's biggest new titles will be *Jetfighter III* — which we just happened to have seen in action during the show.

Although the version we saw was a very early alpha put together just for the show, *Jetfighter III* looks like it has the right stuff. The ground and sky detail were quite nice, and the game clicked along at a good frame rate during flight. We'll be watching this project very closely, and will bring you more news as soon as it becomes available.

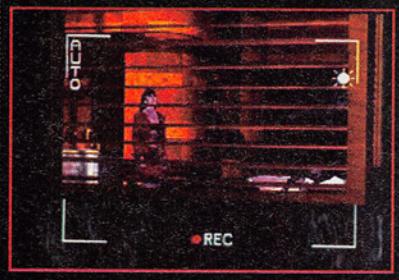


Casino! For Windows, one of the smaller titles on display at the Interplay booth. It looked good, and we love gambling.

Another big Mission release — and this one's right around the corner — is *Battlecruiser: 3000 A.D. Battlecruiser* offers dizzying depth and control over space-battle operations of galactic proportions. Yes, you do get to fly ships in combat, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. You'll have to set waypoints and goals for a whole fleet of interceptors; orchestrate planetary infantry assaults and take enemy bases; manage trading and resources; and the list goes on. It's a lot to take in, let alone control, and becoming familiar with the game will probably take players quite some time. Artificial-intelligence routines can take some of the burden off your hands, but at any time you're free to jump in wherever you like and do for yourself. The sheer depth is commendable — but will it be playable?



Descent features some of the *fastest* fast-forward action we've seen.



Don't feel bad about peeping through this window; in *Voyeur*, that's the whole point.

The Year of the PC Part 1



***Kingdom: The Far Reaches* has a very distinctive look, especially in its cut scenes.**



***Star Reach*: Interplay's been working hard to ensure that the quality of the artificial intelligence of the computer opponents is first-rate.**

And finally, there's a chess program that has something to offer the beginner. If you're an experienced player, *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess* might not be for you. For players who want to learn the basics of chess, however, *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess* is a good way to get started. Based on the best-selling book, *BFTC* aims squarely at beginners by explaining how all the pieces move, check and checkmate, stalemate, and sometimes misunderstood moves such as *en passant* and castling. Once you've got those down, the program steps you through dozens of checkmate problems, asking you whether or not checkmate can be achieved and, if so, what the correct moves are. The graphics are minimalist, and there are few bells and whistles — but beginning chess players don't need those anyway.



This scary guy from *Stonekeep* has been waiting for nearly two years to ram that sword in your gut. Now being designed for CD-ROM only, *Stonekeep* is finally near completion.

Stonekeep: The Game that Wouldn't Become Vaporware

Interplay has been talking about *Stonekeep* for almost two years now, and it looks like the title will finally arrive this year. It'll fill a couple of CD-ROMs with its 3D graphics, fancy new interface, digitized actors, and so on.

It will be interesting to see this game when it finally does make it to market. Too often, we've seen projects that take as long as this one turn out to be real disappointments. But since the designers have spent their time incorporating so many next-generation features, *Stonekeep* may prove the exception to the rule.

Other new Interplay CD-ROMs include *Zombie Dinos from the Planet Zeltoid*, billed as an entertainment/educational title. In order to stop an alien race from taking over the earth with dinosaurs lifted out of the past, players will have to learn as much as possible about dinosaurs and their habits. Certainly sounds, um, interesting...

Another CD title coming later this year is *Kingdom: The Far Reaches*, a role-playing adventure boasting "fantastic storytelling, richly animated cartoon sequences, and a simple point-and-click interface."

And then there's the much-awaited bridge game, *Bridge Deluxe II with Omar Shariff*. This CD-ROM follow-up to the impressive *Omar Shariff on Bridge* will feature in-depth tutorials by Dr. Tony Sowter and Shariff himself, as well as all the options a bridge-lover could ever dream of. It could well turn out to be the new king among PC bridge games.

Interplay is also releasing a CD-ROM enhanced version of Maxis' hit *SimAnt*. Bolstering this game's distinctive style will be state-of-the-art graphics and cut scenes, audio effects and music, and over 20 minutes of documentary footage.

Legend of Tully — a cinematic shoot-'em-up co-written by Rocket Science's own Ron Cobb (whose past film credits have included *Alien*, *The Last Starfighter*, and *Star Wars*), and Brian Moriarty, famous for his work with *Loom* and *Beyond Zork*. In *Loadstar*, you are captain Tully Bodine, with the somewhat odd mission of getting a shipload of contraband camels off the moon. Standing between you and your goal is the unpleasant Sheriff Wompler (played by Ned Beatty!), and a host of electronic gizmos trying to shoot you out of the air. Due to ship sometime this fall, *Loadstar* has graphics and direction worthy of any feature length film. The question is, how will it play?

Next on the company's agenda is another strange adventure titled *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*, based on the graphic novels of Mark Schultz. The game takes place in the 26th century, an era when dinosaurs and men are living together and competing for survival. As Jack "Cadillac" Tenrec, you must pilot your '53 Cadillac through ten stages filled with all-kinds of bizarre horrors. Using a technique that Rocket Science has dubbed "2 1/2-D," the game takes two-dimensional images and places them in a three-dimensional space, creating a 3D feel without requiring the machine to do a great deal of work. *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* is also due for release sometime in fall of this year.

Rocket Science has generated a lot of public interest with their views on how games should be designed and played, but the bottom line (as always) will be the consumer's response to their products. If the company makes good on the claim of creating games that look like movies while still remaining completely interactive, their future should be a long and profitable one.



Sanctuary Woods is currently working on *Buried in Time*, the sequel to *The Journeyman Project*

Sanctuary Woods

Founded in 1988 to develop custom multimedia applications for corporations and government clients, Sanctuary Woods has been making a mark for themselves in entertainment titles. At this year's show, Sanctuary Woods showed two pretty impressive games — and with some of the talent they've got lined up, the company's future looks bright.

After Disney mysteriously dropped the product (could it have something to do with the fact that all new CDs are being developed in-house?), Manley & Associates' *Wolf* has a new chance to impress



One of the contenders for Most Delayed Games is Sir-tech's *Jagged Alliance*. Soon, the wait will be over.

the masses, thanks to the Sanctuary. In this great-but-strange game, you're one of several wolves who must go thorough the rigorous business of survival. Players will get a chance to hunt, fight, and even mate in this thoroughly researched simulation. For more info, check out our three-page Scoop! in the front of the magazine.

Sanctuary's other big release is a sequel to the CD-ROM adventure *The Journeyman Project*. The new game, called *Buried in Time*, features six different *Myst*-like worlds filled with beautiful, photo-realistic graphics. As in the first game, you play a time-traveling policeman responsible for rooting out and repairing temporal crimes. One morning, as you rest in your living room, you're surprised by the appearance of your future self — who informs you that you've been framed for altering history. Before your own government imprisons you, you must search through time for clues to solve the problem, or you'll wind up jailed for life. On the way, you'll travel through Medieval France, Mayan Yucatan, and even Renaissance Italy, constantly looking for a way out of this confusing dilemma.

Sanctuary Woods promises significant advances over *The Journeyman Project*, like a longer story, live-action video, and upgrades in the game's sound and graphics. Sounds right on target to us! Look for this two CD-ROM package to start appearing on shelves in the first quarter of 1995.

The way this company has been growing, there's probably going to be even more good stuff coming in the next year. Sanctuary Woods is definitely a group to keep your eyes on.

Simon & Schuster Interactive

The biggest title from this newcomer isn't really a game at all, but we've got a feeling that a lot of PC players out there will be interested in *Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual*, based on the book of the same name. Simon & Schuster went straight to the source — the TV show's technical writers, set designers, and film-production company — to create this huge product. Over 10,000 photographs of the show's studio set, models, and props were used to develop a 3D environment players can explore at their leisure. If you're a diehard Trekker, you'll want to check out this product when it arrives sometime this fall.

Macbeth: The Game seems like an interesting idea, but just how much of a *game* it really is remains to be seen. Here's the setup: The witches have captured your soul, and you must perform a series of tasks for them. The catch is that each task requires you to take on a new role, from a rat to Lady Macbeth herself, and move throughout a 3D game world based on actual set designs. It sounds like a great way to teach kids about this classic play, and we're eager to give it a try when it comes out this fall.

If you've got children, they'll get a kick out of *Alistair and the Alien Invasion*, an electronic book based on Simon & Schuster's book series about a young boy genius. In a unique twist for electronic books (Simon & Schuster calls *Alistair* a "living story"), *Alistair* allows the player to "enter" each page, then actually explore *beyond* the page by making 90-degree turns and examining the surroundings. Each screen has hot spots which can be clicked on to produce animations, and there's also a game in which the player must find four plants; where the plants will be found depends on how much investigation the player has done. *Alistair* should arrive sometime in September.

My Favorite Monster lets children visit the home of Mooky, a cute green monster who's got interesting stuff all over the place. There are hundreds of hot spots on each screen which can be clicked on to activate animations or educational activities. The graphics are bold and bright, just the type kids love, and the program is loaded with high-quality children's music.

Sir-tech

Sir-tech has been pretty quiet for the last couple of years. — *very* quiet. But it looks like this year is going to be different.

After several false alarms, it looks like the overhead-view adventure *Jagged Alliance* is about to ship. First slated for release about two years ago, the game is being touted as "a strategy role-playing simulation." On an abandoned nuclear testing site in the South Pacific, several scientists are trying to extract a toxic sap that can be used to treat a degenerative children's disease. But one of the scientists is motivated more by greed than by charity, and is seeking to control the supply of sap for himself. Not able to fight the villain themselves, two members of the team turn to you, a mercenary trained in ground combat, to help recover the medicine.

The game contains 60 voices with over 4000 lines of dialogue and a unique



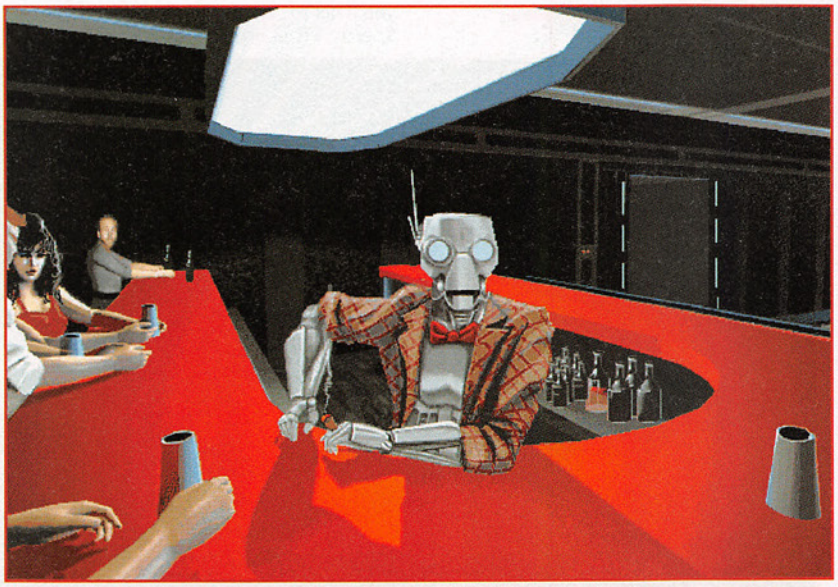
Star Trail, the sequel to *Realms of Arkania: Blade of Destiny*, certainly got Associate Editor Trent Ward's blood boiling during the show. He watches the self-running demo over and over, and swears he'll write us a nice Scoop! for next month's issue. We're holding him to his word.

The Year of the PC Part 1

overhead combat system with over 2000 frames of animation. In addition to slugging it out, you'll have to avoid traps left by other soldiers, manage the harvest of sap in order to finance your operation, and search out enemy strongholds to find important information on the enemy's tactics. The battle begins this fall....

Fans of Sir-tech's *Realms of Arkania* will be glad to see that the game's sequel, *Star Trail*, has been upgraded with the latest in graphics and sound. This impressive new role-playing adventure will feature more than 50 animated monsters, 350 weapons and magical items, a fully animated phased-time 3D combat, and an incredible new smooth-scrolling 3D outdoor and dungeon interface. If you've been waiting for a new angle on the classic role-playing adventure, *Star Trail* may be just the title you need.

In addition to the two new games, Sir-tech is also releasing *Wizardry Trilogy 2*, a collection of *Wizardry V, VI, and VII*.

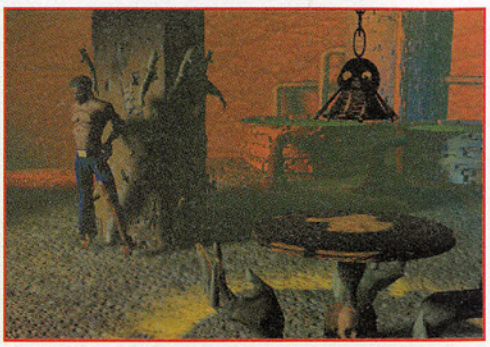


It seems that no matter where you go in life, there's always a friendly bartender ready to help you out, give you advice, and sell you hard liquor. It's no different in Software Sorcery's *Phoenix Fighter*.

Software Sorcery

Software Sorcery's first two games — *Jutland* (1993) and *Aegis: Guardian of the Fleet* (reviewed in *PC Gamer* issue 2: 85%) — were reality-based simulations; now it looks as though the company is ready to branch out into some new waters. *The Party at Crawdad Creek*, the debut title in a new educational line, is aimed at kids ages 3 to 6. The star of the show is Frisko Fox, whom children guide throughout the forest in order to help Frisko's animal friends prepare for the party mentioned in the title. Each of Frisko's pals needs help with a specific task, and by helping all the animals, kids will be practicing educational skills. By picking the berries that Eaton Bear needs for his punch, for instance, kids will sharpen their counting skills, as well as learn basic colors. The SVGA graphics are sharp and crisp, and the audio quality is very good. Best of all, the game was designed around positive reinforcement, so if a kid makes the wrong choice there's a gentle reminder to get him or her back on the right track. Software Sorcery reckons that *Crawdad Creek* should be available sometime this fall, with an M.S.R.P. of $49.95.

Phoenix Fighter is more closely related to *Jutland* and *Aegis* in that it involves combat, but that's about all it has in common with Software Sorcery's earlier games. *Phoenix Fighter* is a classy-looking space-combat/resource-management game that challenges the player to salvage parts from wrecked spacecraft, then build a fighter and break out from a deep-space penal colony called the Dead Zone. Software Sorcery wasn't showing a lot of the game, but the between-mission screens looked very sweet indeed. 386 owners, however, are forewarned: *Phoenix Fighter* will *run* on a 386/25MHz, but the company is recommending a 486DX2 or a Pentium to run this SVGA, CD-ROM-only product.

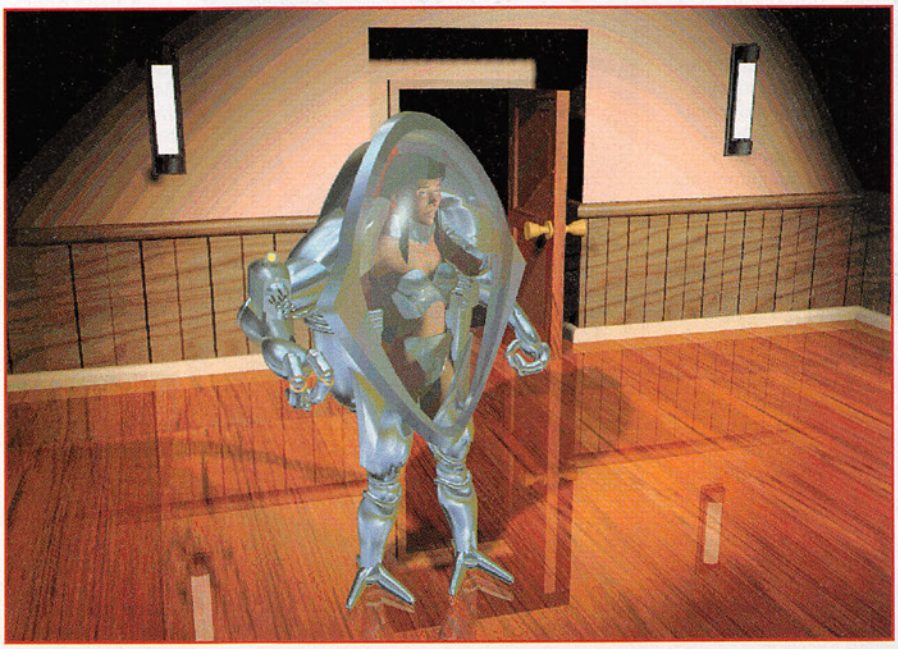


Dennis Hopper, Grace Jones, and Stephanie Seymour star in *Hell*. No, it's not about Seymour's fling with Axel Rose.

Take 2

If you saw the *Star Crusader* scoop in last month's issue, you already know a little about Take 2 Interactive Software. In addition to *Star Crusader*, Take 2 is busy at work on *Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller*. While we only saw a short, self-running demo, just a look at the cast credits is enough to get your interest piqued. Let's see, there's everyone's favorite crazy, Dennis Hopper; the exotic singer and film star, Grace Jones; the "UN-Cola" guy, Geoffrey Holder, who also starred in *Live and Let Die*; and supermodel Stephanie Seymour. While Geoffrey Holder will only be doing the voice of a computer (that should be interesting), both Hopper and Seymour will be seen in actual digitized video footage, and they as well as Jones will do voice-acting for their rendered characters.

The concept behind *Hell* certainly sounds good enough for Hopper and



***Bureau 13* is Take 2 Interactive's version of *The Boy in The Bubble* (only kidding). Although it's a long ways down the road and we don't know a lot about it, we don't really care — we just want to see more of it.**



Alien monkey-business and high-tech action abound in *Star Crusader*, Take 2's first release.

friends to get their collective teeth into. In the future, the government claims to have discovered there really is a hell — and, in a fairly astute business move, is now selling pardons they claim will keep people out of the fiery pit. You play as either a male or female formerly employed by the government, but now hunted for crimes against the state.

If *Hell* has the same high production values as *Star Crusader*, we're all in for a treat. But it'll be a little while before we know for sure: Take 2 says that the game will be out by October 1st, with an M.S.R.P. of $79.95. On CD-ROM only.

21st Century Entertainment

When it comes to designing PC pinball games, 21st Century Entertainment is one of the very best. Back in issue 2, *PC Gamer* readers got a chance to play one of the tables from *Pinball Fantasies*, and many of you wrote in to say how much you liked the game.

Well, if you enjoyed *Pinball Fantasies*, you'll be happy to learn of *Pinball Arcade CD-ROM*. The company's first CD-ROM title will feature *eight* tables (four brand-new designs, and four enhanced tables from 1993's *Pinball Dreams*), a multimedia history of pinball tables, and a great soundtrack. It should be available by the time this issue hits newsstands, and will carry an M.S.R.P. of $59.95.

With worldwide sales of over half-a-million pinball games, it would be easy for 21st Century to stick to its tried-and-true formula. But in an effort to broaden its market base, the company announced its plans to release their first non-pinball game. *Synnergist*, a graphic adventure being developed out-of-house by Vicarious Visions. *Synnergist* started out as a project by three college students, who have worked on it over the last three years; with 21st Century's help, they hope to have the game ready before the year is out. Set sometime in the future, *Synnergist* challenges you to solve some very bloody — and very mysterious — murders. Vicarious only had a few demo scenes at CES, but the interface seemed very smooth. And guess what — on the product information sheet one of the characters bears a chilling resemblance to serial killer Henry Lee Lucas!

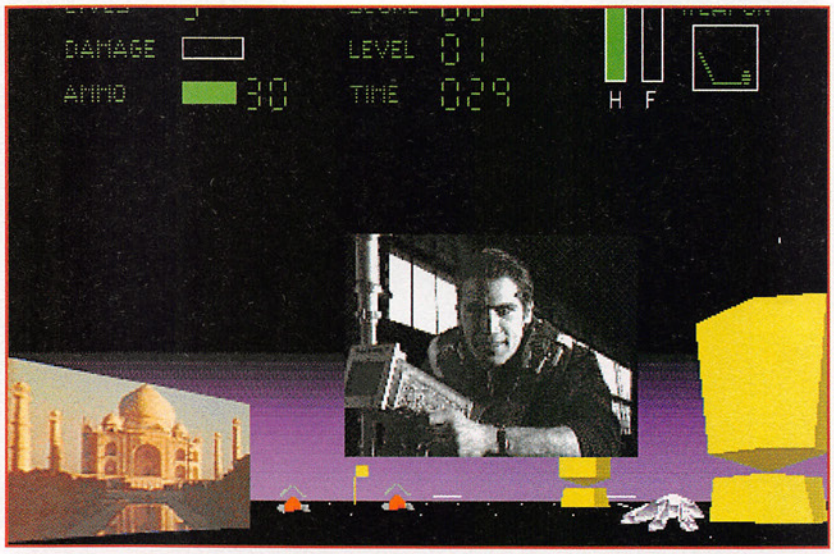


Beat Box is one of the tables in Pinball Arcade CD-ROM, from 21st Century Entertainment.

Velocity

Think of Velocity, and two things come to mind: the Jetfighter series and the Spectre games. But the next Jetfighter is being done by Mission Studios, and Velocity is turning to other areas for inspiration — though they're not forgetting that a large part of their success is based on making fast, highly playable multi-player games.

Before those titles arrive, though, you'll get to see the CD-ROM version of *Spectre VR* — and from what we can tell this version has a lot more visual appeal than the polygon-only floppy-based game. Velocity should have it out the door soon.



"I'm, too sexy for this game," our digitized friend seems to be saying in the CD version of *Spectre VR*.

But back to the new stuff, *Quarantine*, for instance, is an outer-space action adventure that puts you on a mission to destroy a hungry pack of flesh-eaters that will support both network and modem play. *Quarantine* carries a $69.95 tag, and will ship only on CD-ROM in January 1995.

Jet Ski or Die (great name!) is another multi-player game, albeit a little more down to earth. Sure, you get to ride a jet ski — but you're also armed to the teeth with some very lethal weaponry. That's a good thing, since the other competitors are also packing heat, and even the spectators are prone to pop off a round or two. *Jet Ski or Die* will also incorporate live-action video to round out the experience. Velocity hopes to have this unique game ready by Christmas; it too has an M.S.R.P. of $69.95.

With *Hot Shots: Le Interactive*, Velocity is coming right out and saying what some people have been thinking for a long time: there are some hard-core flight-sim fans out there who need to be reminded that it's only a game. We didn't care a lot for the movie, but if this thing flies smoothly — and it should, since it's from many of the people who created *Jetfighter I* and *II* — it could be a real kick. *Hot Shots* is still in the earliest stages of development, and Velocity doesn't expect to have it finished until the first quarter of 1995.

PCG

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Prepare yourself for the Second Coming.

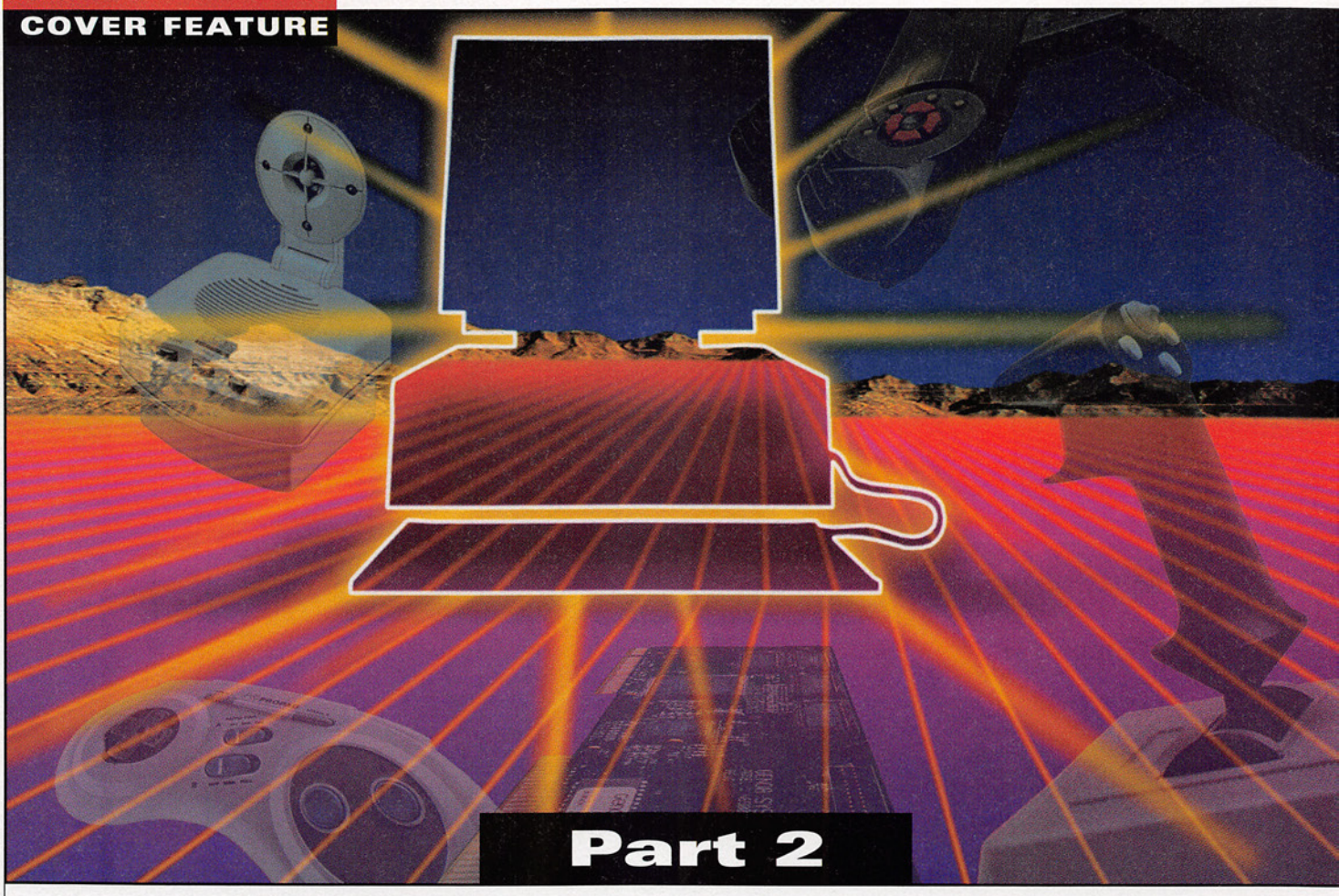
Monday, October 10, 1994

DOOMSDAY

id SOFTWARE INC

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Product Information Number 177



Part 2

The Dream Machine:

What to Buy — and Why

by Gary Meredith

The Year of the PC Part 2

Interactive entertainment is one of today's fastest growing industries — a fact that's not gone unnoticed by big players in the fields of traditional entertainment and communications. There's about to be a huge explosion in gaming software, and it appears that many developers, producers, and investors see the PC as the perfect platform. Here's a look at what you'll need if you want the perfect PC for gaming — and how much it might cost you.



Bit Happens

References to 8-bit, 16-bit, or 32-bit refer to the width, in bits, of a particular data path. That is, an 8-bit component moves data eight bits at a time, while a 16-bit component moves data in chunks of 16 bits. A bit is the smallest binary unit; eight bits make one byte, or one character, so a 32-bit 486 chip moves data at a rate of four bytes at a time.

At first glance, the choice of a game machine has never been more confusing. The more established, dedicated game platforms such as Nintendo and Sega are, if not exactly in eclipse, at best fading shadows of their former selves. Newcomers like 3DO and Jaguar are, well... you tell us. And playing games is pretty much the only thing you can do on these things; with the recent crop of videogames looking for the most part like weary rehashes, that's not an exciting proposition.

As far as personal computers go, the Amiga is dead — and it was certainly a long, lingering death, wasn't it? — while the Mac suffers a major identity crisis as the Power PC battles the old 68000 machines for the hearts and minds of the "warm and fuzzy" set. And in the middle are such question marks as CD-I, with comparitively low sales and potential as yet unfulfilled.

But amidst all this turmoil stands a game machine with a design continuity unmatched by any other system, a huge user base, extensive software library, a rapidly expanding arsenal of peripherals, and exponentially increasing performance. Yes, it's your PC, and it's hardly surprising that it's become *the* game platform of choice for developers and players alike.

This past June, at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, the great majority of game developers were predicting a bright future for the PC. After years of taking a back seat to dedicated game machines, PC-based titles both present and future dominated the show. Many industry experts are still talking about the coming explosion in 32-bit games — which, to hear the videogame manufacturer's hype, is a new development, when in fact PC game designers have been writing 32-bit code for over two years now.

And besides giving you the chance to play some truly exciting, stimulating games (the sort of games that almost never appear on videogame systems, and which are much less common for the Macintosh because developers tend to write games for the largest market), the PC lets you do other things. Perhaps stuff like spreadsheets, databases, word processors, telecommunication software, and other productivity programs don't fire you up, but there are thousands of people who've used them to start their own businesses, and that's something no dedicated videogame machine can offer.

For all these reasons, PCs are here to stay, and they're only going to become more commonplace. In the nebulous world of consumer electronics, the PC has developed a permanence quotient right up there with washing machines and microwave ovens.

If It Says MPC...

The MPC standard was created to give developers an idea of what type of PCs they would be designing multimedia games and applications for — and to give consumers an idea of what they would need to run a game carrying the MPC logo.

Sounds simple, but the concept has had a few revisions. The very first MPC standard called for a 286/12MHz, though that was changed pretty quickly to a 386/16MHz. Now we're up to MPC-2, and you can see that things have gotten a little complicated.

MPC-2 Standards

486SX/25 or better
25MHz clock speed minimum
4MB RAM
160MB Hard Drive
1.44MB High Density floppy drive
9600bps Serial Interface, 9 or 25 pin
Parallel Interface
SVGA Video
640 x 480 with 256 colors, 800 x 600 with 16 colors
2-button Mouse
Analog Joystick Port (IBM)
MIDI Port
MPC-compatible Sound Card: 16-bit DAC (Digital to Analog Converter) and ADC (Analog to Digital Converter)
MPC CD-ROM Drive: 300K/sec transfer rate, 400ms (or less) average seek time, 10,000hrs MTBF (Mean Time Before Failure), CD-ROM XA, multisession capable

First Rule: Forget the Letters "S" and "X"

But to enjoy today's PC games, you have to know what to look for. Say you're ready to upgrade — or maybe you're shopping for your first PC — and figure you might as well look for a system that can handle everything those envelope-pushing programmers send your way. But what PC do you buy? What's the perfect machine to meet the hardware demands of not only today's best games, but whatever gaming breakthroughs are lurking just out of sight?

Since it seems everyone and his brother is selling computers these days, the picture is more than a bit muddy. A lot of retailers, discount stores, and mail-order houses are pushing mid- and low-end 486SX systems as sort of multimedia "Swiss army knives" that they claim will satisfy all your present and future needs. The prices are very attractive, to be sure, and these machines will handle most games — albeit with wildly varying degrees of success. There are even quite a few fast 386 computers still being sold that can adequately handle many games. For now, anyway.

The truth is, though, that anyone who thinks a 386 or 486SX will be his primary game machine for the next few years is a prime candidate for buying Wyoming beachfront property. Even equipped with a double-spin CD-ROM drive and a quality local-bus video board, the 486SX processors offered with most entry-level outfits

Speaking the Language

Sometimes it seems like everything about computers has been reduced to acronyms. Just think about it: RAM, CPU, SCSI, VLB... the list goes on and on. There isn't space here to offer an explanation of every single abbreviation and acronym associated with computers, but the following list should help decipher some of the lingo:

bps:
Bits Per Second, used to desig nate the rate data can be transmitted over a modem. Also known as Baud Rate.

Bus:
A grouping of circuits through which computer components communicate.

Clock Speed:
The speed at which the CPU operates, determined by an on-board clock chip; measured in megahertz (MHz).

CPU:
Central Processing Unit. In a PC, this is the microprocessor, and is the heart of the entire system. Examples include the 386, 486, or Pentium chip

EISA:
Extended Industry Standard Architecture. An extension of the 16-bit AT-Bus to 32-bit; results in faster communication between various components.

IDE:
Integrated Drive Electronics. A hard drive or CD-ROM drive which has its own built-in circuitry

ISA:
Industry Standard Architecture. A non-proprietary standard developed by several computer manufacturers to enhance hardware compatibility.

KBPS:
Kilobits Per Second (see BPS).

PCI:
Peripheral Component Interconnect. A local-bus standard formulated by Intel to enhance component speed and ease of use.

RAM:
Random Access Memory

SCSI:
Small Computer System Interface. A universal interface standard which allows the chaining of peripherals using a single 50-pin connector.

VESA:
The Video Electronics Standards Association

VL-Bus:
A local bus based on the standards set by VESA

Built For Speed

Kelt Reeves has some definite ideas about PCs and gaming, ideas that he and the other folks at Falcon Northwest Computers — as dedicated a bunch of gamers as you're likely to find — have realized with their line of Mach V game computers. Most computer systems these days are optimized for Windows performance, and the marketing material for them will make your eyes glaze over with reams of Windows benchmark statistics. But what's good for Windows is not necessarily good for DOS, and that difference forms the basis for the Falcon Mach V design philosophy.



The Falcon Mach V is designed from the ground up for running high-end games.

Many games, and especially flight sims or smoothly scrolling first-person action games like *Doom*, place as much of a burden on the video processor as they do on the main CPU. A Windows video accelerator can actually *retard* DOS video performance, so Falcon supplies its machines with a video board optimized for DOS performance. This, along with some configuration wizardry, allows a frames-per-second rate — nearly 59 FPS with the Pentium Mach V — considerably higher than a standard Windows-optimized system. Even after factoring in the "drag" of the application on video processing, the FPS rate still averages out at better than 40.

Another key to this optimized gaming system is the care that's been taken to ensure the components work together as smoothly as possible. Dozens of hard drives, CD-ROM drives, sound boards, speakers, and input devices were tested in various combinations to come up with the most complementary setup. Beyond hardware considerations, the AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files have been tweaked to the point where you may never have to use an alternate boot-up configuration again, no matter how demanding your games.

The underlying notion that component selection needs to be optimized for gaming can best be seen by Falcon's sound-board selection. The reason Reeves and friends chose a Sound Blaster Pro, instead of a high-end 16-bit board, is that for most games it's all you'll need; in fact, some games actually sound *worse* through 16-bit boards. And games on CD-ROM often play music and sound directly from the CD, instead of producing them with the sound board, and to that end an 8-bit board is fine. As games become more sophisticated and take full advantage of high-end boards, however, it's comforting to know that replacing a sound board is one of the simplest upgrades you can perform. Falcon does give you the option to order a Sound Blaster 16 ASP instead of the Pro.

High-quality components, such as a CH Products FlightStick PRO — and speed- sensitive dual game port — are used throughout. About the only thing you might want to add is a modem, if only to download the inevitable bug patches that accompany almost every release nowadays.

The Mach Vs will function perfectly well with non-gaming apps, and provide adequate Windows performance, but its real forte is intensive gaming. It's an intriguing answer to the special demands of game play.

are at the limit of their ability to cope with the demands of today's most advanced games. The situation will only worsen as more sophisticated software makes its way into the pipeline — something that's sure to happen as developers continue to push the PC as far as it can go.

Is There 486 Happiness in a Pentium World?

A true dream machine needs flexibility and power. High-end 486 machines — the DX2-66MHz and the DX4-100MHz — are certainly the most affordable of the real contenders. In particular, the DX4 offers the speed needed for the most complex games: It still uses the older 486 architecture, but its faster clock speed allows it to compete favorably with the wider data paths of 60MHz and 66MHz Pentium processors. The DX4 processor, with its 3.3 volt technology, also uses less energy than the first-generation Pentiums.

Nearly all DX4 machines have Pentium upgrade capability, and the money you save by not buying a Pentium can be put into better peripherals. This situation will probably change soon, however, as Pentium prices continue to drop.

But don't simply dismiss a well-equipped 486 DX2/66Mhz computer. The prices on these have literally dropped through the floor, and yet they offer great performance with good upgrade potential. You'll be hard-pressed to find a game that won't run well on a DX2/66, especially if you invest in extra RAM, a good double or triple-spin CD-ROM drive, and a fast video board.

For a money-is-no-object dream machine, the obvious choice is a 90MHz Pentium with a combination of EISA and PCI buses. A lot of first generation 60MHz and 66MHz Pentium machines are out there, but aside from the slower speed, the chips in these machines are also of the older 5-volt Pentium variety. The newer 90MHz chip runs at a lower voltage and temperature, drastically reducing reliability problems. The argument can be made that specifying a 90MHz Pentium for a game machine is akin to plinking flies with a 40mm cannon, but that attitude doesn't take into account the processing power future games will require. The prices on these speed demons are dropping, and you can figure on seeing even lower sticker prices as Intel's competitors — AMD, Cyrix, and NexGen — crank up production of their own Pentium clones. Some of these have certain performance advantages over the Pentium, so the buyer's market should starting heating up soon.

You can't go wrong with 486 or Pentium packages from Gateway 2000, Zeos, Dell, IBM PC Direct, or Compaq. A quick run through the pages of *Computer Shopper* will uncover many other smaller companies with equally inviting offers. Just be sure to check out a company thoroughly before giving it your hard-earned money.



Altec-Lansing's ACS100. You might mistake a single speaker for a contact-lens case on steroids, but their sound quality will amaze you.



Media Vision's Premium Deluxe Multimedia Kit includes the fast Reno CD-ROM drive, a 16-bit sound board, speakers, and scads of discs — all for less than $600.

Don't' Be Overdrawn at the Memory Bank

In a Pentium (or any PC for that matter), it's important to get as much memory — RAM — as you can possibly afford. It really is true that you can't be too rich, too thin, or have too much RAM. 4MB of RAM is still standard for entry-level machines, though most DX4s and all Pentiums come with at least 8MB. 16MB is even better, and should satisfy your gaming memory needs for at least a couple of years. You only have to see a game run on a machine with 4MB, and then see the same game run with 8MB or 16MB, to realize the true value of memory. At about $40 for 1 megabyte, RAM is about as cheap as it's ever been. Origin's Galen Svanas — no stranger to demanding software — calls extra memory the perfect stocking-stuffer.

Then there's hard-drive space. Games are getting bigger: It's not unusual for a

The Year of the PC Part 2



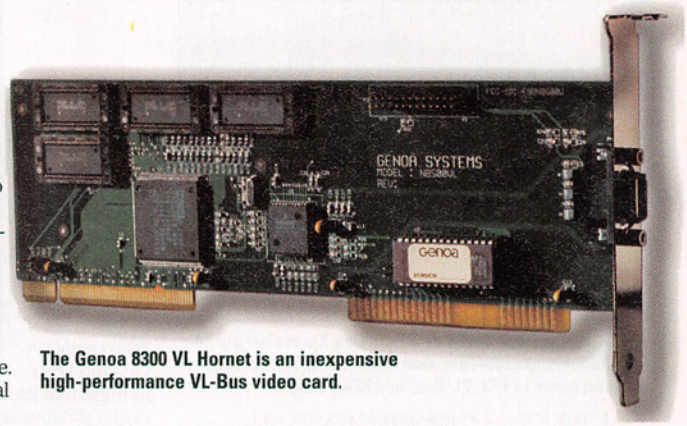
Audio-Technica's MMS557 Speakers boast high performance in a small package.

game to use 20 or 25MB of hard-drive space, or even more. Fortunately, the hard disk capacity/price ration has more than kept pace with this burden. And with many newer games playing directly off CD-ROMs, loading only a few system and executable files on the hard drive, large hard-disk capacity has become much less critical. A good quality drive in the 300MB neighborhood should provide all the space you'll need. There are some great bargains out there, with a number of 300+MB drives in the $300 street price range. A general rule of thumb would be to pay a street price of no more than $.90 to $1.00 per megabyte for drives up to about 500MB.

Most of these drives will be IDE, although there are a few SCSI models available. A short while back, the SCSI drive would have had the performance edge, but the latest IDE drives are more than a match, and usually carry a lower price. And you won't have to buy a special adapter if you get an IDE drive.

As far as floppy-disk drives go, it wasn't that long ago that you really needed both a 5.25" and 3.5" unit. The 5.25" diskette, though, is rapidly fading from the scene, and unless you have a lot of old games or other programs on the larger diskettes, you can probably get along quite well with only a 3.5" drive. If you really feel you need the larger drive, but don't have space for it, you can buy a rather pricey combination 5.25"/3.25" unit that will fit in one drive bay.

CD-ROM drives are rapidly becoming *the* peripherals of choice. With all the new games and other exciting programs available on CD-ROM, a drive is already almost a necessity. Even the fastest CD-ROM drives still access data much more slowly than hard drives, so you'll want to get the fastest drive possible. In terms of a Dream Machine, that means at least a double-spin drive, although a triple- or quad-spin is better yet. A good drive will also have multisession, XA (extended architecture), and Photo CD capabilities. Right now, you should look for drives with a SCSI-2 interface, although that may change soon as new IDE drives come onto the market in the next few months, promising considerably lower prices.



The Genoa 8300 VL Hornet is an inexpensive high-performance VL-Bus video card.

Sound and Vision

A great game machine really is more than just a CPU, memory, and storage. Processing power is critical for the newest games, but input and output are still the essentials of gaming.

Choosing the right sound board can be tricky, depending on what you might want to do beyond gaming. For most games today, a Sound Blaster Pro — or its equivalent — will suffice. There simply isn't that much aural sophistication yet. But a Dream Machine should anticipate future needs, and that means using a 16-bit board with wave table synthesis, rather than the FM synthesis of older boards, and a DSP (Digital Signal Processor). This setup will not only let you hear the most sophisticated games at their best, but can also be the doorway into complex sound processing. Just try that on a Sega Genesis or Super Nintendo!

Currently, the market is dominated by Creative Labs Sound Blaster and Media Vision's Pro series. There's been a lot of hype for Turtle Beach's new Monterey sound board, but we can't recommend this unit for gaming as it doesn't support either the Sound Blaster or the MT-32 standards. Other good boards are made by Advanced Gravis, Ensoniq, Logitech, Aztec Labs, and Diamond. Count on paying from about $100 for the least expensive 16-bit boards, although the Sound Blaster Pro, an 8-bit board, can be had for as little as $80.

It's hard to believe that a very few years ago, most of us were content to play games accompanied only by the beeps and squawks emanating from overdriven 3-inch speakers. Self-powered speaker technology, in parallel with sound board advances, has blossomed to the point where a good computer speaker setup should be sonically indistinguishable from a good compact home sound system. The speakers are generally smaller, but most offer the range and response of their larger cousins. And as with home systems, speaker choice is a very subjective thing. What sounds good to you is what you should buy. Speakers from Altec-Lansing, Audio-Technica, Acoustic Research, Labtec, Logitech, Jazz, and Yamaha are very good choices, with street prices ranging from around $70 to over $200 per pair. Remember, you get what you

Unlike Diamonds, DOS Isn't Forever

Should horror filmmaker George Romero feel compelled to again remake *Night of the Living Dead*, he need look no further than the computer software industry for his lead character. Let's face it — has there ever been a more mobile corpse than DOS? Its premature obituaries would fill several CD-ROMs, and yet it gamely soldiers on.

In truth, DOS has lasted this long only because of the sheer numbers of PCs with which it is bundled, and its glaring faults are becoming increasingly evident. Newer operating systems, designed to take full advantage of 32-bit processors while still supporting DOS applications, are set to take over.

For gamers, the two most promising are IBM's OS/2 and Microsoft's Windows 4.0 (code name: Chicago). Both could be strong presences as the operating-system universe realigns itself in the next year or so. OS/2 is already a viable product, with a relatively small but extremely loyal user base and a very promising new version, 2.2, expected to arrive later this year. Reams have been written on Windows 4.0 and its improved capacity for running DOS programs, but the product's final form is yet to be seen.

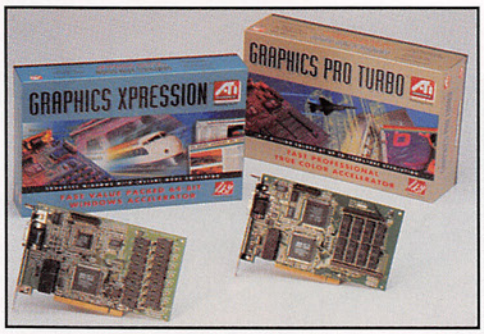
Lloyd Webber of IBM succinctly states the OS/2 marketing strategy when he says, "You've already paid for 32-bit capability — why not have an operating system that really takes advantage of that power?" Indeed, OS/2 represents a quantum leap beyond DOS in terms of memory and resource management, application compatibility, and user-friendliness. Features such as on-the-fly system configuration changes and the Multimedia Presentation Manager /2 promise to bring new flexibility to game play, and on top of what it can do for your DOS games right now are its multi-tasking and multi-threading features which could lead to more complex and exciting games in the future. Winning a "Best of Show" at COMDEX/Windows World '94 underlines the critical acclaim OS/2 has received.

The greatest obstacles to widespread acceptance of OS/2 by developers and end users are the computing public's fear of the unknown, and the near de facto bundling of DOS and Windows with PC systems. The fear factor has been addressed to some degree by OS/2's Boot Manager option, which allows the user to boot up into either DOS, Windows, or OS/2.

There's a great deal of potential for OS/2, especially in its soon-to-be-released 2.2 incarnation, but IBM still faces an uphill battle must battle up to wrench folks away from Microsoft's hegemony. Whether users will follow Big Blue up the hill is still a big question mark.

Microsoft is, of course, hoping you won't make that climb. Windows 4.0, more commonly known by its code name, Chicago, is also designed to be much more friendly to DOS programs than Windows 3.1. Backward compatibility with DOS programs is a given, and 4.0 also supports the new Plug-and-Play hardware as it becomes available. Multimedia management will also be a strength of 4.0.

So much has been written about 4.0 that it's difficult to separate fact from fiction, but what's certain is that the probable bundling of Windows 4.0 with new PC systems will only serve to hasten DOS's move to supplementary status — unless Microsoft makes some fundamental changes in DOS version 7.0, that is.



ATI's Graphics Pro Turbo and Graphics Xpression are 64-bit Windows accelerators that offer 1280 x 1024 resolution and come in PCI, VL-Bus, and ISA versions.

pay for — and good speakers can add immeasurably to your enjoyment of today's great-sounding games.

The right video board is critical in assembling the best game machine. Slow video performance is a bottleneck the fastest CPU can't overcome, particularly in games such as flight simulators. A Super VGA VESA Local Bus or PCI board, able to handle 1024 x 768 resolutions at a full 256 colors, is the minimum you'll need these days, and should provide good performance for most games. VLB buses are more common in 486 machines, while the newer but rarer PCI bus boards are found almost exclusively on Pentiums. Whichever you get, remember that the more video memory you can afford, the better. Look for a minimum of 1MB video memory — and 2MB if you really want fast video performance and maximum resolution with lots of color.

The newest PCI and VLB standards feature 64-bit data paths, and provide amazing color and resolution capabilities — although most present games never even come close to utilizing this potential. Boards from ATI, Diamond, Genoa, and Orchid range from about $150 for base ISA VL-Bus models with 1MB of memory, to as much as $400 for 2MB EISA VL-Bus and PCI-Bus boards. And look for DOS performance, not Windows performance, if you'll use the machine primarily for gaming.

Monitor technology has probably changed less in the past couple of years than any other computer component area. There are more flat screen models on the market to be sure, and they're preferable for graphically exacting uses such as CAD or illustration because they distort a bit less than curved screens. For gaming, more modest 15-inch monitors with standard screens work fine, with prices that won't irreparably damage your bank account. A good 15-inch model can be had for as little as $350 on the street. 17-inch monitors usually cost around twice as much as 15-inch models, so you'll have to decide for yourself if the extra two diagonal inches are worth the premium. A lot of package deals still offer 14-inch monitors as standard, but these really hug the bottom boundary of viewing comfort. The key specs to look for would be non-interlaced, .28mm (or less) dot pitch, and at least 1024 x 768 resolution. Oh, and keep in mind that the actual viewing area is usually a couple of inches smaller than the stated measurement. NEC, MAG, Magnavox, Sony, and Nanao monitors usually rate near the top, with industry leading dependability, fidelity, and longer warranty periods.



STD's PC PROPAD is a smooth-playing alternative to joysticks.

In the Palm of Your Hand

The right joystick or game pad is probably as subjective a choice as speakers, with such undefinable parameters as "feel" and "response" being major parts of the equation. A good input device will fit your style of playing rather than making you adapt to it. A lot depends on whether you'll be running mostly flight sims or arcade-action, or if most of your time is spent in point-and-click strategy affairs. A stick with a substantial molded grip is best for the former, while a pad or a lighter joystick is preferable for other games. But beyond these personal considerations, you should evaluate the reliability of a pad or stick. Products from CH Products, Suncom, Thrustmaster, STD, and Advanced Gravis are noted for both their response and dependability.

Finally, a modem might be considered an essential peripheral for any computer these days, even one used primarily as a gaming machine. Games that can be played head-to-head across phone lines are becoming more common. Also, the ability to access bulletin boards (BBS) and tap into the wealth of shareware and freeware gaming files is another consideration. Many BBSs have entire directories devoted to single games, such as *Doom*. Speed is the main criterion in choosing a modem, with 9600 bps being the acceptable minimum. With the low prices of 14.4K bps modems, however, it doesn't make sense not to go with one of these. 28.8K bps units are also available, although at considerably higher prices. If you plan to use an external modem, make sure the computer you buy has a 16550 UART high-speed serial port for the speediest data transfer. Most internal modems will already have a UART chip on board. For either internal or external modems, make sure that the V.32bis standard is supported. Internal 14.4K bps modems can now be found for less than $100, while 28.8K bps internals start at around $250. External modems usually average around 10-15% higher than their internal brethren.

The PC's bright future means that more game developers will turn to it as their preferred platform. The next year will see an explosion of new games that will test the limits of PC technology, so it only makes sense that you assemble the most capable machine you can.



The FlightStick PRO from CH Products offers flexibility, durability, and comfort.

Putting It All Together

So in the end, what is the Dream Machine? It all depends on what you want to spend....

BUDGET DREAM MACHINE
($2200-2500)
486DX2 66MHz
8MB RAM
340MB Hard Drive
SVGA VL-Bus 32-bit Video Card with 1MB memory
SVGA Non-interlaced 15"monitor (.28mm dot pitch)
Sound Blaster Pro (or equivalent)
Double-spin CD-ROM Drive
Joystick
Speakers
14.4K bps modem

MID-RANGE DREAM MACHINE
($2800-3200)
486DX4 100MHz
8MB RAM
340MB Hard Drive
SVGA VL-Bus 32-bit Video Card with 2MB memory
SVGA Non-interlaced 15" monitor (.28mm dot pitch)
Sound Blaster 16 ASP
Triple-spin CD-ROM
Joystick
Speakers
14.4K bps modem

THE DREAM MACHINE
($4000-4800)
Pentium 90MHz
16MB RAM
540MB Hard Drive
SVGA PCI-Bus 64-bit Video with 2MB or 4MB memory
SVGA Non-interlaced 17" monitor (.28mm dot pitch)
Sound Blaster AWS
Quad-spin CD-ROM
Joystick
Speakers
28.8K bps modem

The Year of the PC Part 2

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NUREALITY



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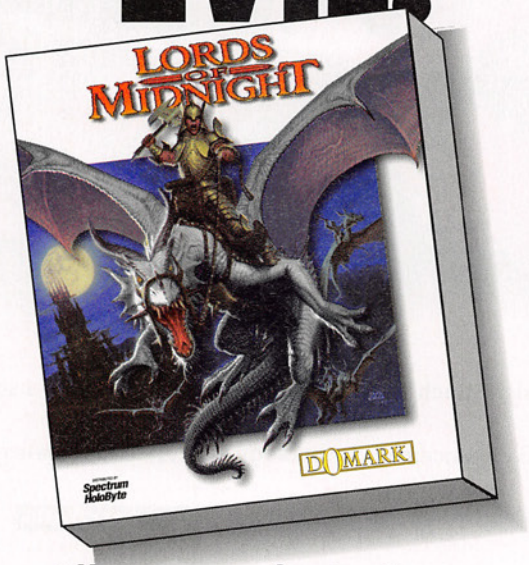
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The PC Gamer Review System

How We Rate The Games

Take a careful look over the section just below, "What the Ratings Mean." We feel our game-rating system is as clear and comprehensive as it can be. But to get the most from our reviews, you need to know exactly what the ratings mean. This isn't college, where a 75% might be a C- grade. A 75% percent here is a very good score — but leaves room for improvement. Know what the ratings mean, and you'll never buy a bad game again.

What the Ratings Mean

100%-90% Classic

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% Excellent

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 probably fall into this category — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%-70% Very good

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

69%-60% Good

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

59%-50% Fair

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

49%-40% Below Average

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

39%-0% Don't Bother

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

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements, and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

This month's PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

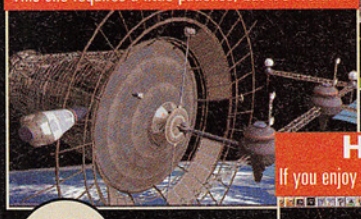
Each and every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or above — with our coveted Editors' Choice award. We don't just hand these things out to anyone, either: a game's got to be *very* impressive to earn this honor, and a lot of very good games still fall just short of the mark. When you see a *PC Gamer* Editor's Choice on a product, you *know* it's good.

Wing Commander Armada p.60
Head-to-head play makes WCA a winner

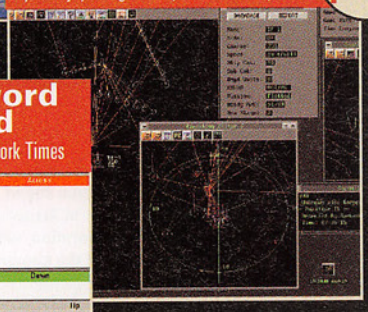


p.74

Outpost
This one requires a little patience, but it's worth it!

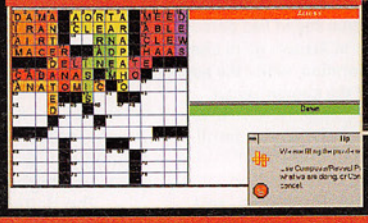


Harpoon II p.70
If you enjoy wargames, you'll love Harpoon II



p.86

Crossword Wizard
So good you won't need the New York Times



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

Wing Commander Armada

This new Wing Commander game lets you be both strategic commander and space-fighter pilot.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Space-combat simulation
Developer: Origin
Publisher: Origin, P.O. Box 161750, Austin, Texas, 78716

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
486/33; 4MB RAM; 13MB hard-drive space; 2400-baud modem (for modem play)	486/50; Joystick or gamepad; 9600-baud modem

M.S.R.P.: $55-$65.00

We understand, *Wing Commander* fanatics. You need something to make your life meaningful until the release of *Wing Commander III*. *Wing Commander Armada*, the latest in the now-legendary series from Origin, is exactly what you've been looking for — and then some. It's a satisfying mixture of conquest game and white-knuckled space-combat action, and one that you'll be playing for a long, long time.

Few computer games have had the staying power of *Wing Commander*, the space-combat simulation pitting the brave Confederation against the ruthless Kilrathi for control of the galaxy. And Origin has kept that classic game alive with a host of add-on products and new games through the years, most recently *Wing Commander Academy* and *Privateer*.



From the planet menu, you make decisions regarding the production of space craft and the management of natural resources. Build a shipyard here, start cranking out spacecraft — then get ready for some high-octane action.

Taken separately, the strategy and action modes of *Armada* aren't really all that new. But together, they add up to a package that makes for some *very* entertaining gaming — especially since, this time around, you can actually challenge your *friends* to a duel via modem, network, or split screen.

The Battle mode is a quick, arcade-style game pitting the player against waves of enemy ships, with more and tougher opponents coming at you every step of the way. You can fly for either side, and can pilot 10 different ships ranging from light to heavy fighters. Flying for the Confederation, you choose from the Arrow, Phantom, Wraith, Gladius and Banshee; for the Kilrathi, you can fly the Dralthi, Shok'Lar, Jrathek, Korlarn or Goran.

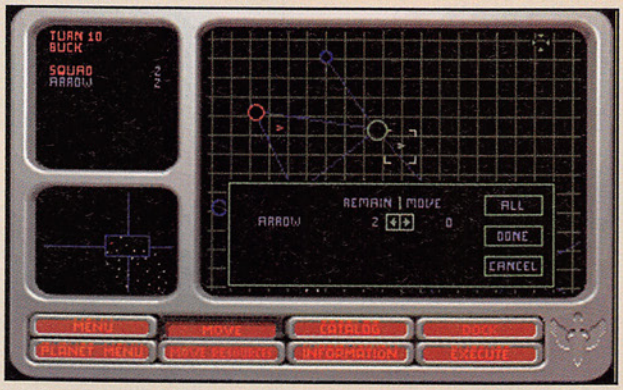
In multi-player Battle mode, the ship you end up flying against your opponent is of vital importance. In a new twist on the old kids' game, paper-rock-scissors the two players shuffle through the five ships available per side until they both click on the "commit" button. If you find yourself in a lightweight Arrow, pitted against the heavy Goran fighter, you'd better be ready to pull off your best high-speed maneuvers.

The Battle mode is fun, but the heart of *Armada* lies in its Armada and Campaign modes, where you explore and exploit sectors planet by planet, building the resources required to assemble a fleet and conquer your enemy. Carriers ferry supplies to help build mines, shipyards, and fortresses to defend the strategically important planets.

Starting from your home planet, you send flights out to claim neighboring worlds to add to your empire and build your forces. Planets offer varying amounts of resources, and must be mined to extract those resources. Once the ore is flowing, you can build a shipyard — although you'll have to station an orbiting carrier over the planet while the shipyard is being built. Upon completion, shipyards keep pumping out the vessels you want without your carrier's presence.

As you explore your sector, sooner or later you'll encounter the enemy. Early in the game, your opposition is likely to be a lone ship; later on, you'll run into small fleets. So choosing which ships to produce and how to assemble them in squadrons quickly becomes a key element in your success in the game.

The Armada and Campaign portions of the game are virtually the same. The Campaign game, naturally, is a bigger version of the Armada mode, with more sectors to explore and the ultimate goal of destroying the enemy's homeworld. There is a quick combat option to resolve the battles in the Armada and Campaign games, but most players will want to get in on every skirmish.



In the Armada mode, a Confederation squad has detected Kilrathi forces at a neighboring planet and a pair of Arrows go to challenge the enemy. The main screen tracks your exploration, while the smaller windows show you the planet and a map of the known sector.

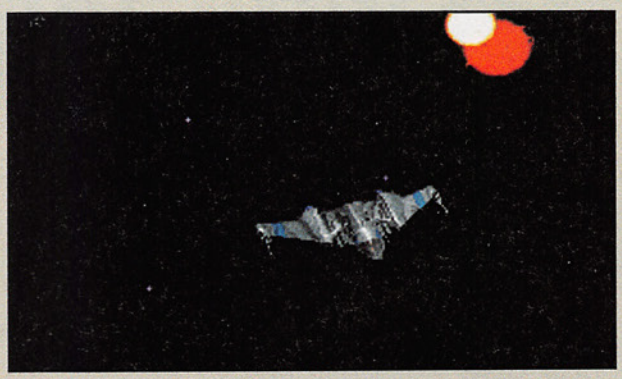
Armada adds a new twist to the familiar scenario. Here, you're in control of either the Kilrathi or the Confederation. You control production, deploy forces, and explore the universe. And when you encounter your nasty enemy, you jump into a space fighter and help win the day.



Choose your ship from this Battle-mode selection screen. In two-player games, both players have to hit "commit" before the battle begins.



This Confederation Banshee fighter is about to be toasted. The ship graphics are the best so far in the Wing Commander series.



After racking up several kills, the pilot in this Gladius fighter goes hunting for more victims in this cut scene in Battle mode.

Armada is one of the first space combat simulations to combine strategic and arcade-quality action modes into a single game, letting you plot your moves and then jump into a space fighter and slug it out. But its *Armada*'s multi-player options that set this sim apart. You can play all three modes — Battle, Armada or Campaign — against another player via modem, network, or in a split-screen mode. The modem and network options are solid additions to the Wing Commander universe, and the split-screen mode is a nice touch for those gamers who can't hook up by telephone or network. You don't see a cockpit in split-screen mode, and the instrumentation is abbreviated, but the dogfights can get fast and furious with two space jockeys fighting side by side.

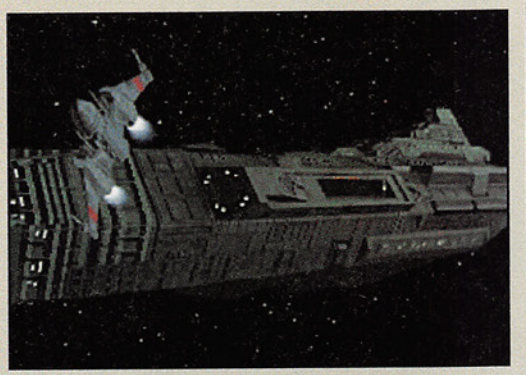
The graphics and sound effects are the best yet in the long Wing Commander saga. Explosions are especially gratifying, both to the eyes and to the ears. Your enemy's shields are revealed as a transparent bubble when hit by laser fire, and once the shields are down the ship's armor begins flying off in giant shards of metal as your weapons find their target.

The ships themselves look better than ever and, thanks to great sounds and visual effects, *feel* more realistic. The Kilrathi vessels an especially menacing sight as they scream straight toward you. The screech of laser fire, the whine of missiles, and the rumble of explosions are all a treat to hear. And when your shields are down and the armor is giving way, you'll clench your teeth in anticipation of that next, probably fatal, blow.

Armada doesn't break any new ground in space combat simulations, but its mix of strategy and action, along with excellent multi-player options, make _Armada_ for a pretty potent package.

There's no real story line here, except the one you create for yourself in the Armada and Campaign modes. Unlike *Wing Commanders I* and *II*, there aren't any nifty cinematic sequences or characters to hold a plot together. *Armada*'s mission is simple: Conquer the galaxy, rack up as many kills as you can along the way, and have fun .

The Battle scenarios *are* pretty simplistic, varying only in the number and type of ships on either side. No tactical objectives, no escort missions, no rescues — just you against the Kilrathi (or the Confederation, if you're tired of playing the good guy). The artificial intelligence of the computer pilots is a bit lacking, with many battles consisting mainly of a series of head-on encounters, sort of like a high-tech joust. That complaint is moot, of course, when *Armada* is played between two human opponents. The multi-player capabilities give this game a very long shelve life.



A Gladius fighter takes off from its carrier to meet a Kilrathi challenge in this introductory scene.

Even with its few shortcomings, *Armada* boasts a strong blend of strategy and action, and finally allows us Wing Commander fans to go head-to-head. Even if this were merely a dogfighting game, that feature a lone would make it worth buying. But when you combine it with entertaining strategic gameplay, convincing sound effects, and the best graphics we've seen in a Wing Commander game, you've got an unqualified winner.

— *Lee Buchanan*



With its shields down, a Confederation vessel is taking a pounding and losing big chunks of armor. The end is near.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

88%

HIGHS: Solid arcade-like strategy and action. Outstanding multi-player options.

LOWS: In combat against the computer, the battles start to feel all too similar.

BOTTOM LINE: *Wing Commander* nuts will find a lot to like *Armada*; everyone will enjoy battling friends head-to-head via modem.

☥ Interactive

CD-ROM

Category: Music Interactive
Developer: Graphix Zone
Publisher: Compton's New Media 2320 Camino Vida Roble Carlsbad, CA 92009

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
486SX/25Mhz or Faster; 4MB RAM; 15MB Hard-drive; Double-speed CD-ROM;SVGA; Supported sound cards or Windows compatible sound card; Window 3.1; Mouse	Hard-drive installation; 8MB RAM

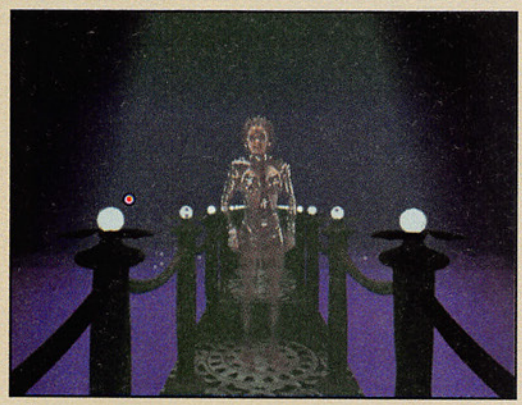
M.S.R.P.: $49.95

☥ is known as one of the music industry's most creative artist of the 20th century, but interactive he's not.

As a ☥ (that little squiggle means "the artist formerly known as Prince") fan since the mid-70's, it's not unusual to see me camped-out at my nearest CD store, eagerly awaiting the arrival of a new ☥ title. So I naturally had some great expectations for ☥'s new interactive CD-ROM. I was hyped, to say the least. But as I inserted the CD-ROM into my double-speed drive, all that initial enthusiasm quickly turned to sadness and frustration.

Maybe the hardest thing for a ☥ fan to believe is that a product that bears his name would fail so thoroughly to leap (or at least walk) to the head of the interactive music genre. And while ☥ fans will find some enjoyment in the fact they'll be able to hear two new tracks (if they can manage to find them both), *Interactive* and *Endorphin Machine*, not even that is worth the $49.95 price of admission.

The sound and full-motion video are some of the few impressive attractions in the program. The video supports MPEG boards for a full 30 frames per second; but even without an MPEG board, it still looks good. Unfortunately, there's precious little video in the program. The static graphics are OK, but hardly anything groundbreaking.



You find Kat on your way back to the spaceship. She'll warn you there are more places to explore... yeah, right.

Your experience with *☥Interactive* starts with your space shuttle landing on an unknown planet, in front of a structure called The Dawn, which is shaped like the artist's new name pictogram. You maneuver through the symbol with a very sluggish, time-intensive, point-and-click interface. You're limited to moving at 90-degree angles and straight lines, making it all too complicated to walk toward a door 30 degrees to the left.

Your hostess through the ☥ symbol (that glyph's getting annoying, isn't it?) is Kat, a former ☥ dancer and vocalist on the CDs *Lovesexy* and *Sign 'O' The Times*. You can explore seven chambers: the foyer, studio, music club, candle room, library, boudoir, and virtual video. Going through each area, you search for Jewel Pieces that in the end will form (of course) that ☥ shape, which is crucial to solving the meaning of The Dawn's existence — and most importantly, to hearing that last song.

Throughout your experience, you encounter several token, easily solved puzzles and riddles. There are also clips of ☥'s videos, concert footage, and music snippets. The major problem with these bits is that they're all too damn short. Just when your feet start tapping to the music the clips come to an abrupt end. And from start to finish there are only four complete music videos to enjoy.



This is one of the small clips of ☥ performing "Kiss" in concert, viewed from your balcony table in the music club.

But the biggest disappointment, if not downright disaster, is that there is no ☥. There's absolutely no "interaction" or even information from the artist formerly known as Prince — no interviews, no insight by ☥ on his music or life, not even a word of welcome, or thanks for buying the CD, from the man himself. ☥, Graphix Zone, and Compton's could all have learned a valuable lesson from titles like Macplay's *Xplora 1: Peter Gabriel's Secret World*, and Bob Hamilton's lifeworks series *Heart: 20 years of Rock & Roll*. The artists involved in both titles actually reward their fans by involving themselves in the project, rather than settling for readily available video clips, photos, and silly puzzles.

This project could have made ☥ more accessible to his followers than ever before; but regrettably, he chose to sign his name to a mediocre product — and risk alienating fans like myself.

— Eddie Malstrom

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

49%

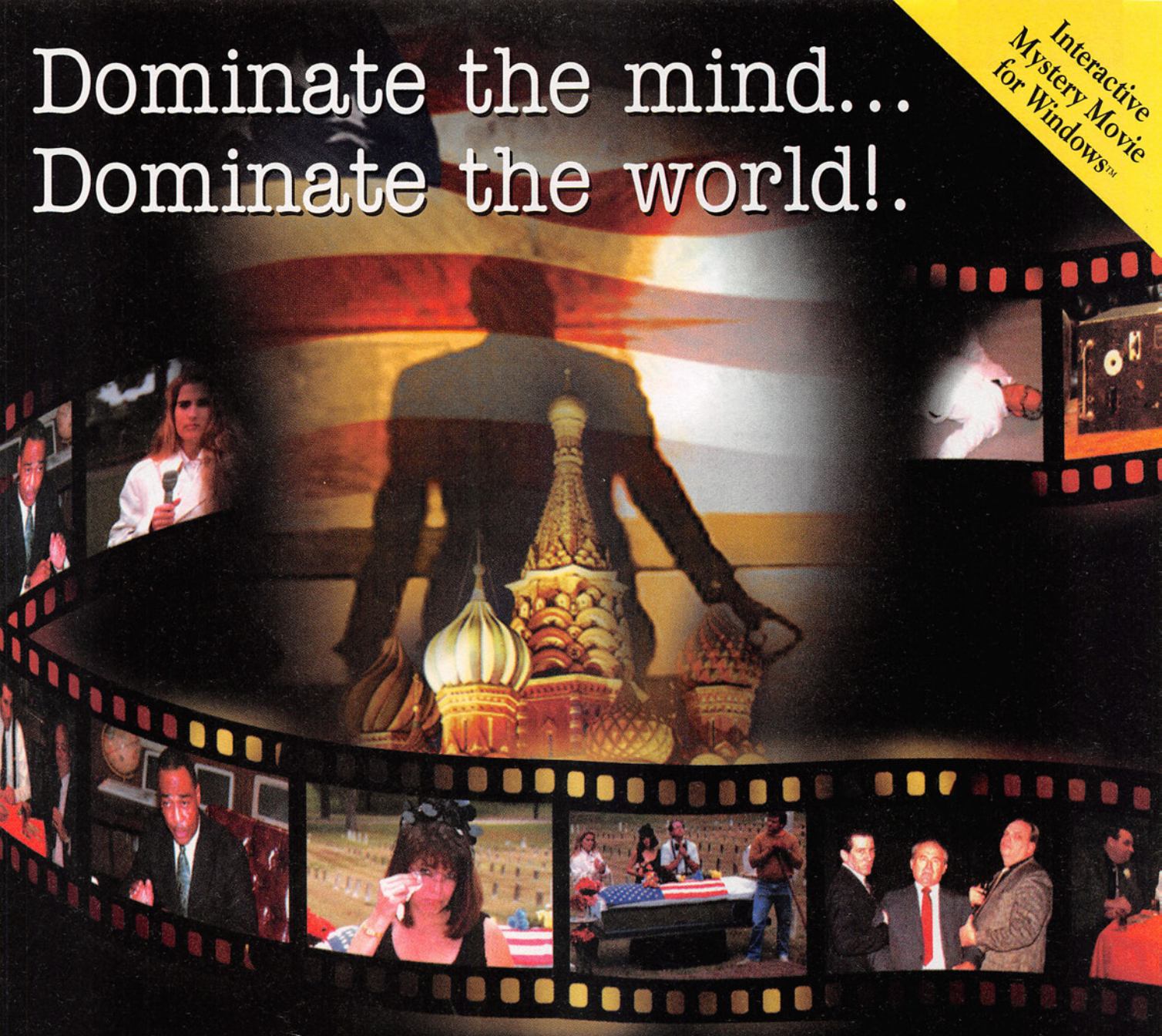
HIGHS: Great full-motion videos, and two new jams.

LOWS: The gaming is silly with sluggish movements and a total absence of interaction with ☥.

BOTTOM LINE: If you are a *true* ☥ fan you should consider waiting awhile for this baby to be reduced in price before purchasing it.

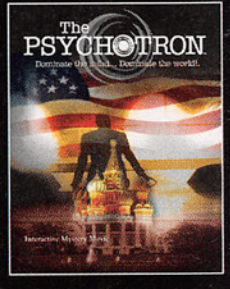
Dominate the mind... Dominate the world!.

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CD-ROM Edition

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Merit Software
Dallas, Texas 800-238-4277

Product Information Number 220

CD-ROM

Outpost

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Strategy
Developer: Bruce Balfour, Sierra On-Line
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 600, Coarsegold CA 93614

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
CD-ROM Drive; 386/25MHz; 4MB RAM; 5MB hard-drive space; MS-DOS 5.0 or later; Windows 3.1 or later; Mouse	Double speed CD-ROM drive; 8MB RAM; 36MB hard-drive space

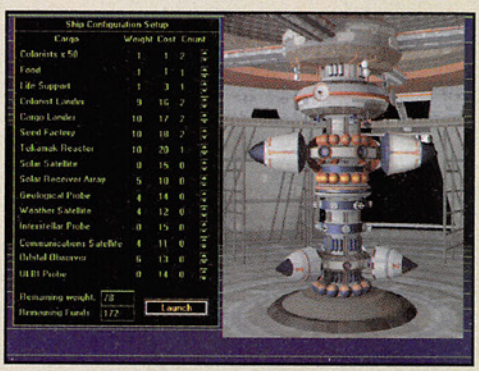
M.S.R.P.: $46.99

It's a little tough to get into at first, but *Outpost* is an in-depth and totally engrossing new strategy title .

Many games have put us in charge of a doomed mankind's fate. In the long history of PC strategy games, our beloved Earth has been attacked by aliens, devastated by nuclear holocaust, and bombarded by asteroids. But Sierra's *Outpost* does something that none of the others have managed to do: By combining some of the finest graphics I've ever seen, a perky AI voice that would leave the HAL 9000 drooling, a nail-biting storyline, and all the gaming extras a strategy fan could want, *Outpost* creates a "doomed mankind" scenario that seems almost real.

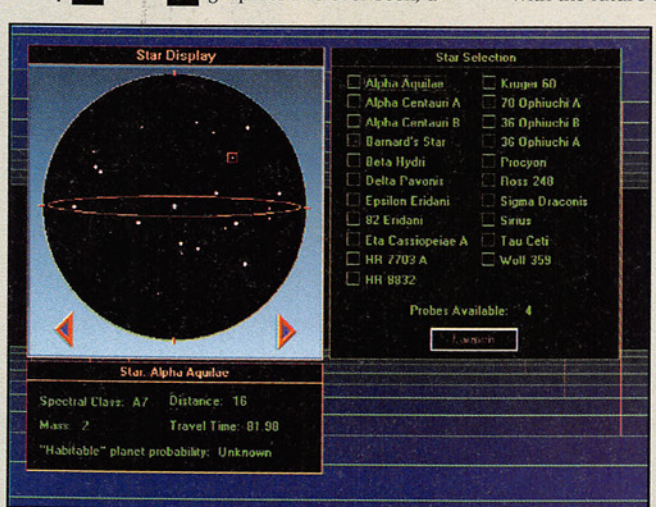
A lot of the game's realism comes from the fact that Bruce Balfour, the game's designer, used to work for NASA, and brought actual NASA research to bear on *Outpost*'s premise and spacecraft. The story? In the 21st century, scientists discover that our planet is on a collision course with an asteroid known as Vulcan's Hammer. As if this weren't problem enough, our space program — bled dry for years by self-serving politicians — is completely unequipped to deal with the impending crisis.

In spite of a planned attempt to destroy the meteor with a nuclear missile, one company decides that the situation is hopeless, and builds a massive colonization ship with all of the materials and technology necessary to sustain a human colony on another world. You're the commander of the colonization ship and, as you watch from the vessel's fueling orbit around Jupiter, you witness one of the most dramatic scenes imaginable as the nuclear missile splits the oncoming asteroid in two pieces — both of which remain on their collision course with Earth. The now-doomed planet behind you, you head for the stars with the future of mankind resting solely on your ability to guide a handful of frightened people through the rigors of establishing a new homeworld for your race.



Once you launch your probes, it's time to decide on the goods and personnel you'll take with you to the new planet. Those satellites are *very* important — don't try to squeeze in more colonists at their expense.

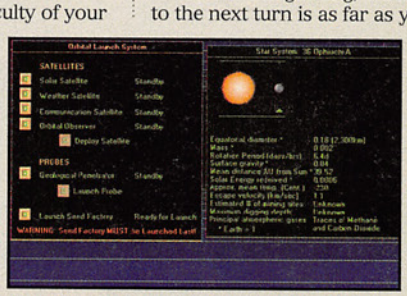
Once the game proper begins, *Outpost* doesn't waste much time putting you in complete control. In the first few moments of play, you must choose four of about twenty star systems to send probes to — and this is just the first of many trials that make clear the difficulty of your mission. If at least one of those probes doesn't find a habitable world, it's likely that your entire crew will die before ever reaching a new world.



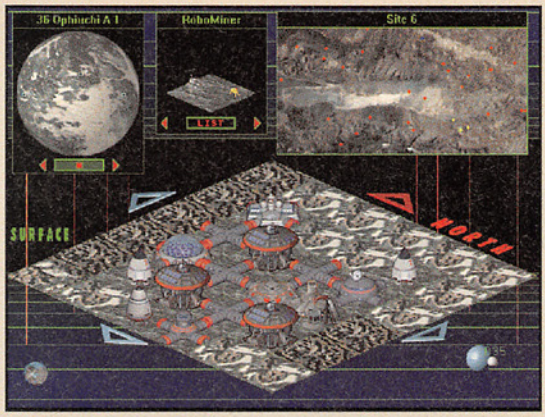
As soon as possible, find a star system and planet that can sustain life. Choose carefully — you only have four probes with which to find the right planet.

Just as *SimCity* had its marauding monsters and violent floods, *Outpost* has plenty of disasters that may make you wish you'd taken your chances on Earth. The harsh effects of a solar flare or planetary volcanic eruption can destroy even the best-laid plans. Even more disturbing, when you do find a suitable world and make planetfall, a few of your passengers will mutiny, taking much-needed supplies with them as they strike out to found their own colony. In order to protect yourself, you'll have to move to set up early warning systems and, most importantly, generate life support, food, and power generators so you can move your colony underground, and away from the dangers of the planet surface.

One of the most amazing things about *Outpost* is the vast number of options and types of equipment you'll have at your disposal while building your colony. Starting with only your small seedship/landing craft, you'll eventually build dozens of specialized structures — all of which play a vital role in your colony's survival. In the beginning, when just surviving to the next turn is as far as your planning can go, you'll need to tend to the basic needs of the colony: agriculture stations, to keep your people fed; CHAP (Closed Habitat Atmospheric Production) facilities to produce air and water; mines to pull ore from deep underground; smelters to turn that ore into materials and allow further construction; and huge power generators to keep everything going. With these basics in



When your ship's loaded up and ready to go, you'll pick a star system and go. Once you arrive, you'll have to choose from the planets that orbit that sun. As you can see, sometimes the decision is an easy one.



On arrival at your new home, you must send down a seed-ship that will provide the colony with the most basic requirements for human life. As soon as possible, build an agricultural dome, an air and water production facility (CHAP), and a power generator.

place, you'll begin the creation of a vast subterranean empire — the one truly safe place for your people to live.

The rest of the game will be spent dividing your time and resources between heavy industry, life support functions, and the new society you've created underground. In order to make any real progress, you must build laboratories where scientists can attempt to make life on this strange world a little more pleasant for the colonists who must now call it home.

Pretty quickly, you'll realize that research and development is the single most important part of the game. At first, your scientists will have to relearn a lot of the technology of old Earth. Then you can begin research into new areas of biology, mathematics, physics, and other technologies to help your people through the hard times ahead. With each new advance comes the ability to build new structures, improve old ones, and even construct probes that can give you information about other planets.

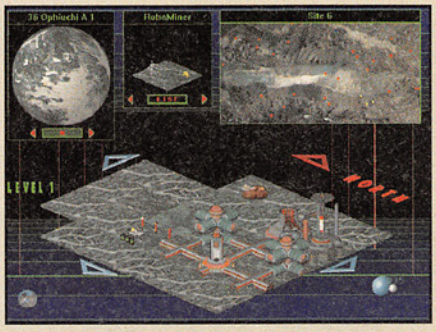
The most impressive thing about the science content is that social sciences — like sociology and police services — are just as important as computers and chemistry. And that adds to the game's realistic feel, because keeping a group of colonists cooped up together without running into some serious cabin fever would probably be just as great a challenge as building a more efficient factory or ore-smelter. *Outpost* is full of this kind of intelligent design, and that makes it incredibly easy to suspend your disbelief and lose yourself in the experience.

If *Outpost* were nothing more than its strategic core, it would still be a great game. But it's just full of top-of-the line graphics and special effects, making it an instant classic. The game's animations are as breathtaking as anything you'd expect to see in a high budget sci-fi film, and adding to the atmosphere is the superb voice acting of your computer. All of this is brought together in a flawless manner that makes it very easy to forget that you're sitting in front of your home PC, and not behind the controls of some vast, futuristic command center.

The one real problem with *Outpost* is its sometimes sparse documentation. A game this complex cries out for careful explanation, and even a tutorial. But the neither the manual nor the on-line help is as thorough as it could be, making the game almost inaccessible to beginning strategy gamers. Also, since the game runs under Windows, players are subjected to all of those Windows speed and configuration problems.

Sierra's *Outpost* truly is what a lot of strategy games claim to be — a simulation. Everything in the game, from its sharp graphics to its realistic strategy models, makes you feel like you're actually there on that alien world. Take it from me: If you're willing to take the time to really understand it, *Outpost* offers a gaming experience you just can't afford to miss.

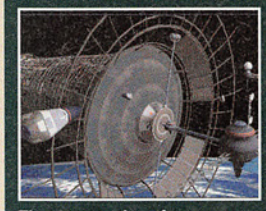
— Trent C. Ward



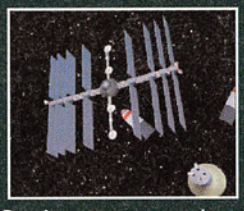
All of your habitats and most of your research laboratories must be build underground. Try to keep the layout of the base simple, or you'll create a maze that gets pretty hard to follow.

Good Looks *and* Great Gameplay

While there are a lot of games out there with excellent plot animations, *Outpost* takes computer graphics to their next level. All of these objects were rendered in Autodesk's Animation Studio, and move smoothly without losing any of their resolution. This kind of 3D imaging most likely marks the future of PC graphics. Most important of all, though, is the fact that *Outpost* backs its great looks with great gameplay. So in this case, the graphics enhance a great game, rather than mask a mediocre one. Just take a look at these screens, and you'll see what we mean.



The construction of your mighty vessel takes place in orbit around Jupiter. During these scenes, you look on as small vessels drift around, delivering materials to the different parts of the ship.



Drawing nearer to your selected system, you're given the opportunity to launch a solar-powered satellite. What starts out as a small pod sprouts arms, and then unfolds its power-generating solar array.



The orbital observer is another device that you must launch before reaching your destination. This unit will allow you to view the surface of your new world from far above — and it looks great, too.



When launching your satellites, you'll get a better look at your space-faring craft. In this particularly well-planned scene, the bay-doors rotate around to create a launch window.

Finally, it's time to set down on the surface of a new world. The seed-lander settles to planet and then drops open its four doors to release its precious cargo.



PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Unbelievable graphics, fantastic sound, addictive and ever-changing gameplay.

93%

LOWS: Windows slows it down and there isn't enough info in the manual to get you started on your first colony. Might be hard for first- timers.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're a strategy fan, you simply *must* own Outpost. Period.

"I Wish My Parents Had ImagiNation."



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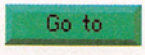
game called Red Baron.® His cousins live 2,000 miles away, but that didn't stop them from sending James down in flames. After that, his mom got on and played speed chess



with TRISH, her on-line sister. And then, at midnight, his dad got on as ZORK2,



dungeon master of The Shadow of Yserbius.™ But don't bring it up, James is kind of sensitive about it. And talk about cool. The interface is full color and easy to understand.



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Product Information Number 159

Jump Raven

CD-ROM

Category: Arcade action
Developer: Cyberflix
Publisher: Paramount Interactive, 700 Hansen Way, Palo Alto, CA 94304

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
CD-ROM drive; 386; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA; Sound Blaster or compatible sound card; Mouse	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33MHz; 8MB RAM; 30MB hard-drive space

M.S.R.P.: $69.95

This CD-ROM shooter has fantastic music and voice-acting and a simple interface, but falls short in the gameplay department.

Jump Raven has been out on the Macintosh for some time now, and has picked up a couple of impressive-sounding awards during its stint on that system. After checking out the MPC version of the game, I'm convinced of one thing: When it comes to gaming, Macintosh owners are easier to impress than PC players.

I'm not saying *Jump Raven* isn't for you. It's got all the bells and whistles necessary to make it a first-rate action game. But once you've gotten past those extras and invested a few hours of actual gameplay into it, it's a crap shoot as to whether you'll be bored to tears, glued to your seat, or just plain frustrated.

Here's the plot: In the future, all that's left of thousands of species is genetic code stored in pods — and Neo-Nazi skinheads have stolen them. You've been asked to retrieve them, and to that end you've been given a hovercraft and $1000 bucks to outfit it. After you've received your mission briefing, made your weapons purchases, chosen a co-pilot, and selected some appropriate theme music, it's off to the Bronx to blast through the Skins and retrieve the gene pods.

All the pre-mission stuff is extremely well-done. The voice-acting for the animated characters is dead-on, with each voice almost perfect for the talking head it represents. The Weapons Lady, who sells you the firepower you'll need to take on the Skins, is prim and businesslike, responds to your purchases with phrases like "Smashing!" and "An excellent choice!" The co-pilots are the best, though; from the spacey Chablis to the rad Thrash to the cool-as-ice Cheesestick, these guys just *sound* real.

A fairly extensive list of interview questions reveals each candidate's skills and tendencies, but it also gives you an idea of how you'll get along with them — i.e., how long you'll enjoy their in-flight banter. That's actually pretty important, because they'll keep on chattering to the bitter end.

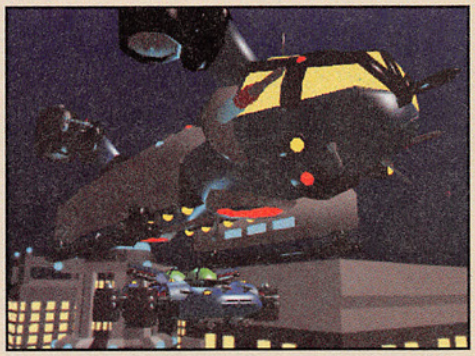
And then there's the music. You only get a short riff of each of the four types of music — grunge, rap, heavy metal, and house — but the quality of these snippets is outrageously good. In fact, I've loaded up *Jump Raven* and selected "Death-killer" (the heavy metal selection, naturally) just to show off my Altec Lansing ACS speaker system. These tunes kick!

You can man the weapons, control hover, and guide the craft all by your lonesome, but you'll really have your hands full if you try that. Since none of the pilots seem eager about grabbing the genetic pods that are left behind when you destroy certain ships, you're probably best off picking a trigger-happy co-pilot and handling the driving yourself. Unfortunately, I think that most players would rather shoot than drive, and if that's the case you'll probably wind up doing both yourself anyway.

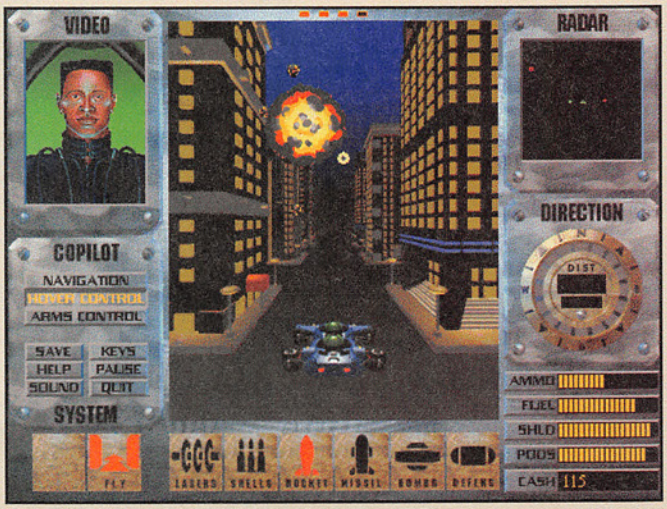
Enemy ships are very well-rendered, the explosions are loud and satisfying, and the cutaway scenes — for repairs and purchasing new weapons — are a fun break from the action. But in the end, *Jump Raven* left me disappointed. The main problem is that while the game starts off fresh and exciting, it turns into a numbing routine. Yes, I know that arcade-style games are often like that, but almost everything here — the scenery, action, and co-pilot chatter — becomes repetitive *very* quickly. And when you do finish the first level, you'll find that the background graphics remain nearly unchanged in the next one.

Hard-core arcade fans should definitely check out *Jump Raven*; for the rest of you, I suggest that you try it before you buy it.

— *Steve Poole*



Cinematic cutaways look marvelous — and give you a respite from the battle, too.



These streets of fire start to look the same after only a few minutes of gameplay — because when it comes down to it, they *are* all the same.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

76%

HIGHS: Nice graphics and voice-acting; a lot of work went into creating this game world.

LOWS: Little variation in background graphics, in-flight dialogue, and gameplay.

BOTTOM LINE: Die-hard arcade fans will probably love it, but others may not feel they're getting their money's worth.

No More Questions

Page 83: 5th Paragraph; 1st and 2nd letters of last 4 words backwards.

Answer:

Suggested Retail Price $78.00

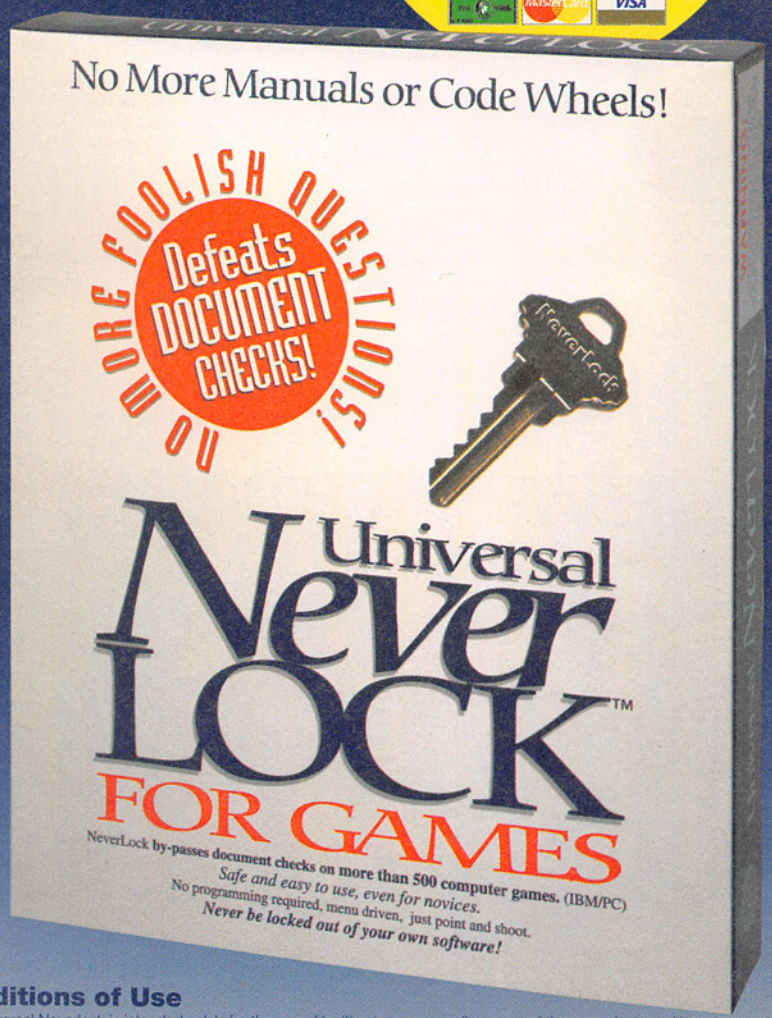
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Product Information Number 189

Empire Soccer 94

Category: Sports Arcade
Developer: Graftgold
Publisher: Empire Software, 4 Professional Drive, Suite 123, Gaithersburg, MD 20879

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386; 640K RAM; VGA; 1.4MB hard-drive space	Joystick or gamepad; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: $39.95

***Empire Soccer 94* just might get American football fans hooked on the *real* game of football — at least on the computer.**



The referee thought that tackle was a bit rough.

Just as the World Cup made its rowdy way to America, *Empire Soccer 94* — a first-rate action soccer game — hit the shelves of computer game stores. This English import (you know its English because the manual calls the game `football') isn't the most serious sports simulation available, but it's definitely one of the most fun to play.

The action is non-stop, and includes about all the moves and kicks you can think of. You control the player nearest the ball, and all commands are given with a single device — joystick, mouse or keyboard. Getting into the game is a snap, but advancing far in the World Cup at the higher skill levels will take some work.



You don't control your goalie. Don't worry, though; he's good, and you've got enough to worry about.

OK, the furious pace is more like fast-break basketball than World Cup soccer, but who cares? The, uh, deliberate play of the real thing is what many Americans hate about soccer anyway. True football fans might not like the run-and-gun pace of *Empire Soccer 94*, but most players will find the action thrilling. A warning, though: *Empire Soccer 94* might run out of control on the fastest of machines, and the game doesn't give you any way to slow it down.

On the field, you control the player — tagged with a number on the screen — closest to the ball. Passing, kicking, and tackling are controlled with a joystick button, and you can control the height and spin on kicks. There are lots of different shots available, including headers and overheads, free kicks, throw-ins, and penalties. You can play against a friend, the computer, or invite up to eight of your closest soccer buddies to vie for the World Cup. To give all the human players an even chance, you can set the teams to equal strength.

Empire Soccer 94 is such a blast to play that it will surprise you with its depth. Play challenging exhibition matches, or go for the World Cup against 23 other teams from around the globe, each with different strengths and tactics. Your management decisions are limited to making substitutions and changing formations, but the game manages the tournament and sets the team groupings.

The VGA graphics are just fine, especially considering the blazing speed at which *Empire Soccer 94* runs. The players look a little too big, though, and are slightly cartoonish. The sound effects are adequate: You hear the ball being kicked, of course, along with grunts from colliding players, the shrill sound of the referee's whistle, and the roar of the crowd.

It would be nice if *Empire Soccer 94* kept statistics for real players, or at least had players with names. The game is worth some extra features, especially for friends who want to go head-to-head for the Cup. And at 1.4 MB on the hard drive, I wouldn't complain one bit about another meg or two worth of bells and whistles.

My biggest gripe, though, is the limited view of the field the game provides. You only see a narrow patch of grass, so you really can't tell where your teammates are up-or down-field, which makes accurate passing a tough task. Floating jersey numbers tell you the location of the player who's closest to the ball, but there's no help for finding teammates offscreen.

It's not the most sophisticated sports simulation; it's not filled with statistics or player portraits; and it doesn't have a digitized announcer. But what *Empire Soccer 94* does offer is ease of play, breakneck action, and challenging opponents. And that's a combination sure to mean top sports action.

— *Lee Buchanan*



A U.S. player finds himself with a shot on the right side, one-on-one with the Romanian goalie.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

79%

HIGHS: Fast, fun and easy to play, but it presents a real challenge at higher levels.

LOWS: Passing is tough because you can't see very far upfield. Hold on to your seat — it may run *too* fast on the faster 486 machines.

BOTTOM LINE: There's plenty of entertaining soccer action packed into this little game.

Harpoon II

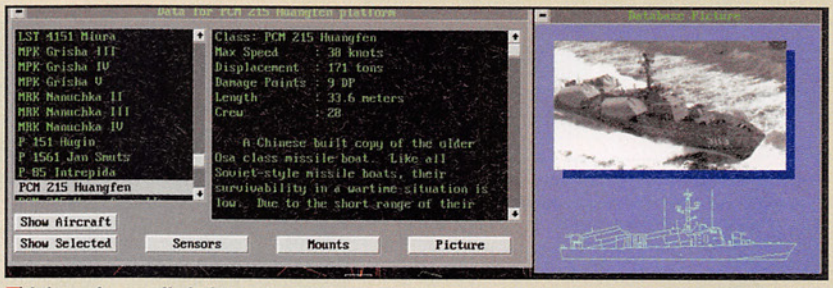
PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Naval warfare simulation
Developer: Three-Sixty Pacific
Publisher: Three-Sixty Pacific, 2105 South Bascom, Suite 165, Campbell, CA 95008

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX; 4MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; 25MB hard-drive space; 512K VESA-compatible video card; Mouse	486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 1MB video card; Sound Blaster or 100% compatible sound card

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

What do you get when you improve upon a classic? In this case, one of the best computer wargames ever.



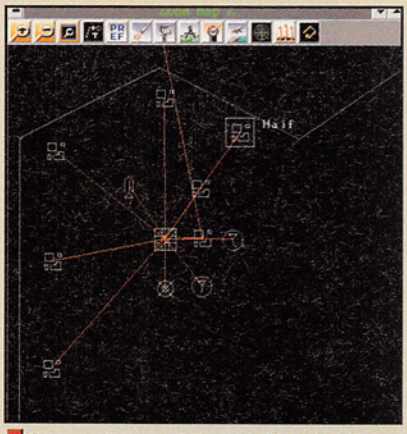
Information on all platforms, weapons, and mounts is available at the touch of a button.

Harpoon is one of the most recognized and successful wargames in the history of computer gaming. A simulation of contemporary naval warfare, the program developed a legion of devoted users, both civilian and military alike. Courses at naval academies used it as a basis for the study of fleet tactics and other issues relevant to war at sea. It spawned countless add-on disks, and stuck around for years after its initial release five years ago. For *Harpoon 2*, Three-Sixty Pacific could have just given the original a much-needed face-lift: some new graphics, a new interface, a couple of bells and a whistle or two. Instead, they rebuilt it from the ground up. The result is a state-of-the-art product that's quite possibly the most realistic military simulation ever released.

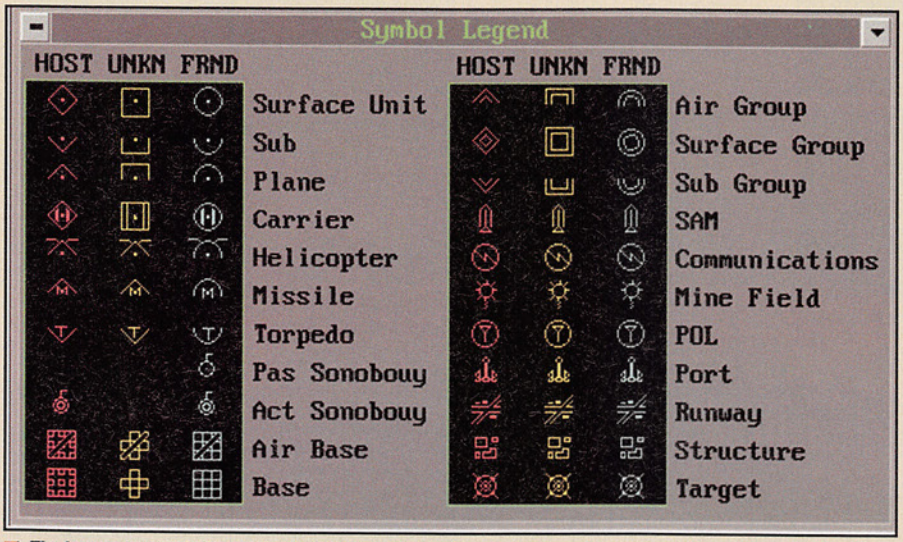
Using an interface resembling a Combat Information Center (CIC) — the location in a modern warship where fire control and primary sensor displays are consolidated — *HII* casts the player as a fleet commander managing his air, surface, and submarine assets in pursuit of victory over an opponent. Sounds simple? Hardly. There is a complex web of elements that comprise a successful campaign, from designating different tasks for each weapons platform, to setting patrols, to properly configuring all of your sensors, and a dozen other issues in a dynamic, constantly changing combat situation.

The first thing players of the original *Harpoon* will notice about *HII* are, of course, its technical enhancements. With its SVGA graphics, a flexible windowing interface, audio callouts for all contacts, and video clips for weapons, *HII* offers a visual package that is enhanced yet simplified from the original. The constant flow of information coming into the CIC would be enough to overwhelm most players, but the ability to open multiple information windows makes things manageable. The entire environment is determined by the user: You can open as many windows as you want, assigning them to track individual units as they go about their missions. Adding to this ease of use is a simple icon bar running along the top of each menu, making the control of sensors, speed/altitude/depth, navigation, air operations, formation, and other tasks a snap.

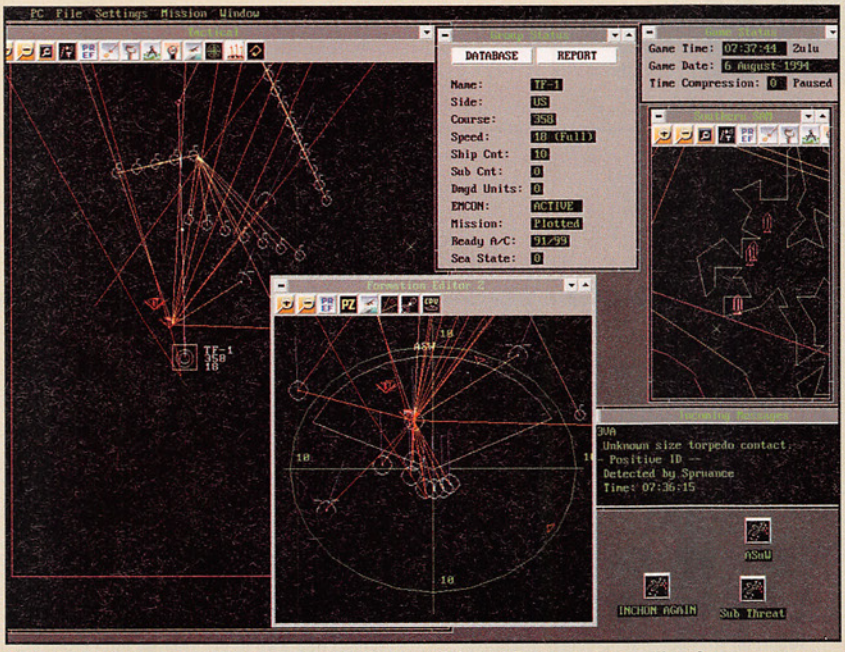
The most powerful function of *HII* is its mission editor, however. This allows you to set reference points on the mission map, then assign units to patrols, recon missions, or even strikes. The perfect "force package" for surface, submarine, air, and even most ground missions can be created from a simple series of menus that list all assets. These assets will then go about their missions automatically, responding to any enemies according to a preset routine. It allows the desktop fleet commander to avoid the micromanagement that can cripple a



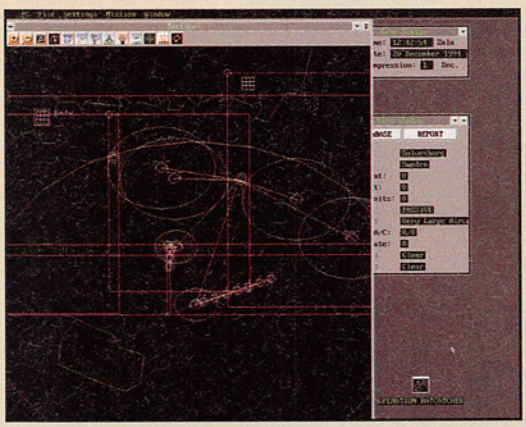
One new feature of *Harpoon II* is the ability to target individual elements of bases, such as SAMs, fuel storage, runways, bunkers, etc.



The key to the NTDS (Naval Tactical Display System) symbol set — the one used by *real* men to identify hostile, unknown, and friendly units. It takes a little bit of practice, but you'll get used to it.



A poor sonobuoy pattern has allowed a sub to sneak in and fire two torps, nailing the outer screen of the American carrier task force in "Inchon Again."



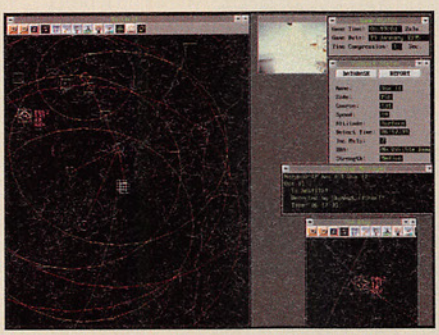
Swedish ASW choppers and three small task forces begin to hunt sub-infested waters in "Operation Ratcatcher."

game as complex as *HII*, and instead concentrate more on broader strategic issues.

But if the *HII* development team had one rallying cry in creating this sim, it was "realism." They modeled over a thousand sensors, hundreds of weapons and weapons platforms, and the entire map of the world including shorelines, political boundaries, and weather data. Each engagement involves innumerable calculations, and the game is very unforgiving to those who blunder in without realistically appraising their situation. (Numerous difficulty settings can tame this realism a bit.) The missions themselves are a timely and diverse mix of large and small encounters which epitomize the evolving face of modern warfare. The United States participates in only a few, including a nostalgic carrier task-force "fight to the death" with Russia and an all-too-plausible fight with North Korea. Fast-and-furious coastal actions are balanced by full task-force operations and complex subhunting scenarios, and these, of course, will be supplemented by numerous add-on disks.

Harpoon II is more than a game: it is a tool for the study and understanding of modern naval warfare. It is designed for the new generation of computers, and therefore is very unforgiving to older machines — but this simply means that it will last all the longer, and you've been meaning to upgrade anyway, haven't you? This is the mother of all naval wargames, and the care and attention that went into creating it is gloriously obvious. *Harpoon II* is definitely not for everyone, but those willing to set their minds to it will find this extraordinary game to be one of the most fulfilling wargaming experiences ever created for the computer.

— T. Liam McDonald



Two Israeli missiles prevent PLO missile boats from striking the Haifa beach resort in "Assault on Zion," a real turkey shoot.

Tips From The Bridge

The Mission Editor: Learn it, master it, use it: This is the key to winning at *Harpoon II*. Use your briefing information to set out reference points in the places most likely to have an enemy presence. Run surface, air, and subsurface patrols constantly, and plan carefully timed force-packages to nail enemy targets on sea and land alike. Without it, you'll be micromanaging your way to a hasty defeat.

Air Operations: If you have air assets, keep them in the air running AAW and ASW patrols, ensuring that they'll automatically intercept any enemy contact. If you can, keep a constant Airborne Early Warning (AEW) presence: information is life in *Harpoon II*. Don't commit so many aircraft to a strike mission that none are left for combat air patrol (CAP) to protect your task forces.

Formations: If there is a sub threat, keep the best subhunters out front on sprint-drift. Remember to adjust the threat axes as you travel to compensate for a change in the enemy position. If you have a carrier task force with AEGIS cruisers, don't even *think* about letting those cruisers break formation. They're your carriers' chief protection.

Submarines: A submarine presence will slow your progress to a crawl (well, it had *better*). Keep those ASW helicopters in the air at all times, dipping sonar and laying sonobuoys as they clean a corridor for your task force. If you have a submarine, send it out on its own (no emissions!) and cut communications. Once she's under water you'll definitely want to avoid communications with it, so don't forget she's down there and fire on her by mistake. *Enemy subs will be your biggest problem*, especially in "Inchon Again," where one may be tempted to get sloppy about ASW. Don't.

Speed/EMCON: Slow speeds are usually the best way to get a solid passive sensor fix, but plodding along for the sake of sensors can lead to some bad results in some scenarios. "White Death," for example, requires you to nail the *Pilot Pardo* before it accomplishes its mission. Keep those sensors passive or only intermittently active for as long as you possibly can.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

PCG

HIGHS: Sleek interface, extraordinary realism, excellent scenarios, and a massive database.

93%

LOWS: A tough game to learn and master; appeal is limited to those with an interest in modern naval warfare.

BOTTOM LINE: Simply the best modern warfare game ever. This is a classic made even better.

Theme Park

Category: Strategy
Developer: Bullfrog
Publisher: Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Boulevard, San Mateo, CA 94403

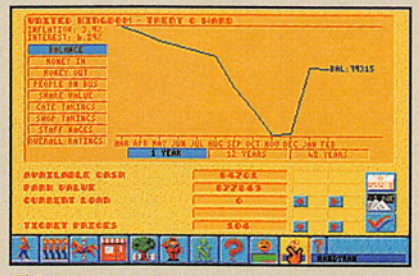
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/25;4 MB RAM; 490K free; VGA; 21 MB free hard-drive space; DOS 5.0 or higher; Mouse	386SX/33 ; 8MB RAM; Sound card

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

Theme Park creates a new realm for power freaks to rule, but it may leave some strategists frustrated.

After a quiet couple of years, the resource management/strategy genre has gotten a real shot in the arm. With games like *SimCity 2000*, *Ultimate Domain*, *Alien Legacy*, *X-Com*, and *Serf City* flooding the stores, it seems the market for "God" games has finally come into its own.

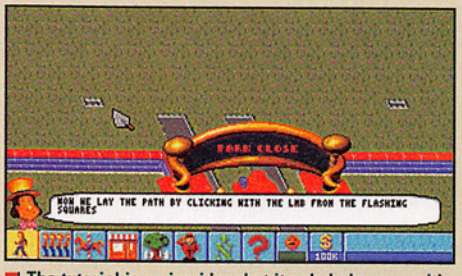
Now, with the new sim *Theme Park*, Bullfrog — one of the pioneers of the genre — has returned to test its mettle against this new crop of titles. But strangely enough, even though the game combines good graphics and sound with a simple-to-use strategy engine, the end product seems to be less than the sum of its parts.



From the money screen, you can set ticket prices, pay off debts, and get a complete report on your general monetary situation.



This is the happiness screen, which shows what kids think of your park. Sometimes it seems like they're not pleased with anything.



The tutorial is a nice idea, but it only helps you with the most basic ideas of park operation.



These buses will carry kids in and out of the park grounds. With more money allocated to research, you can build bigger buses, and that means bigger profits.

The idea behind *Theme Park* is pretty straightforward. You've come into a sizeable sum of money, and decide to start your own amusement park where kids of all ages can come to see the sights, ride the rides — and most importantly, to give you money. As the President, CEO, and owner of this little paradise, you'll be constantly bombarded with decision after decision as you attempt to create a park that's both profitable and fun.

Just to keep things interesting, you'll be competing against a host of ruthless businessmen with the same idea in mind, an unsavory group who won't hesitate to buy the ground out from under you. Equally as horrific are the children who frequent your park. If you don't cater to the little ones' every whim, you'll quickly find your park deserted and forgotten. For those of you used to controlling vast empires with but a click of the mouse, you'll find it pretty demeaning to have to listen to all these tots and their constant complaints.

Like a Disney-esque *Sim-City*, *Theme Park* revolves around the placement of different rides, shops, and shows on a piece of land that you choose from several locations around the world. For your first game, the computer will lead you though the basics of constructing a park, instructing you in the fine art of building placement and the complex skills re-quired to lay roads and pathways. Unfor-tunately, that's about all the tutorial tells you, leaving you high and dry when you begin to have questions about researching new rides, calling employees to a given area, and satisfying your customers. Although the idea of an online tutorial is commendable , it should have placed more emphasis on aspects of the game that aren't quite so obvious.

Once you've opened your park, kids will start getting off a bus and paying you money to enjoy themselves. If you've managed things correctly, the income you receive will far outweigh the cost of paying your employees and maintaining your amusement sites.

Watching the game as it goes through its paces is probably *Theme Park*'s greatest pleasure. The beautifully detailed rides spin, bend, and twist the children into heavenly bliss. Kids wander around, stand in line, buy balloons and other toys, and even go to the bathroom. The employees you've hired go about their duties, the repairmen will sit down and eat lunches, the handymen will start mowing the lawns or picking up garbage, and the various entertainers will try to keep kids happy. After only a few moments of play, you'll have a fully functional park complete with all of the extras.

To keep beginners from taking too much on their shoulders at once, the game features three different levels of game play. On the Sandlot level, gamers will control a very basic, no-frills theme park. After you've mastered running the park in Sandlot, you're ready to step up to the Sim level. Now you'll also be responsible for squelching employee strikes, and you'll have to control the research and development of park design. On the Full setting, players are required to reorder the merchandise their stores need, and even keep an eye on the added stock market

Step Right Up!

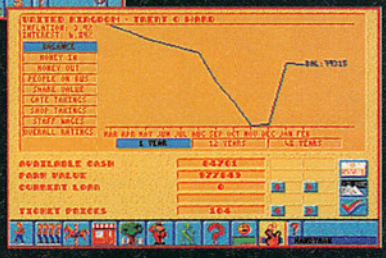
Theme Park **is filled with all kinds of wild rides and off-the-wall attractions. As your park grows, you'll find that some of the sights are as much fun to watch as they are to build. Here are some of the best.**



A good all-round family attraction, the Plane Flyer ride delivers a nice mixture of speed and safety.



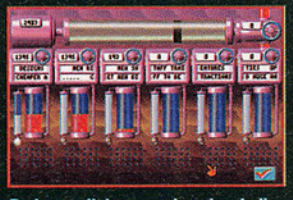
Who can resist the good old Water Splash? Make sure to lay down some steep drops into a big pool of water for the maximum splash effect.



When you're ready to shake the children up a little, give them a ride through the Haunted House.



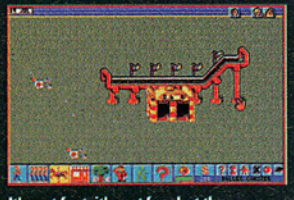
Tied for the best show in the park, Medieval Acts features armed combatants slugging it out for your entertainment. No betting on the outcome, please.



Perhaps a little tamer than the gladiators, the Dolphin Acts is still great entertainment. Look on as Flipper and his friends frolic and play in one of the tiniest tanks I've ever seen.



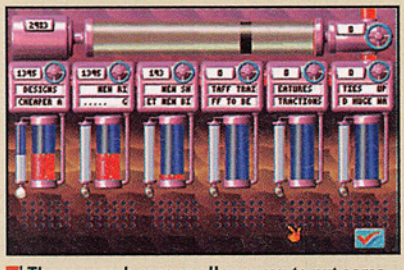
If you're looking for humid fun without the fear factor of the Water Splash, then the Rubber Tubing Ride is the perfect compromise. It also makes a nice distraction as you watch the marks go flying by.



It's not fast, it's not fun, but the Observation Tower does offer the best view of the park available. It looks really cool, but don't expect to get rave reviews over this one.

options. Keeping up with all this at the same time is enough to give even the most experienced strategy fan a whopping headache.

Yet even with all of its options and settings, *Theme Park* seems to fall short on actual playability. For example, the children in



The research screen allows you to put some of your money each month into the development of better rides and equipment. When the balloons at the bottom are full, a new advance has been obtained.

the park — your customers, and thus your main concern — seem to get angry about things that aren't really a problem. It's pretty frustrating to see children complain about being hungry and thirsty when they're standing in front of a food stand.

To make matters worse, the computer's poor control of the employees forces you to constantly scan the park, looking for problems. Your workmen will sit and eat lunch right next to a ride that's about to explode for need of repair, and you handymen will wander about mowing unoccupied areas of the park while the streets around the attractions fill up with garbage.

Research and development is heartbreakingly linear, and while it lets you allocate money to different types of development, it doesn't let you decide which ride you wish to be working on. So every time you play, you're forced to invent the same rides in the same order.

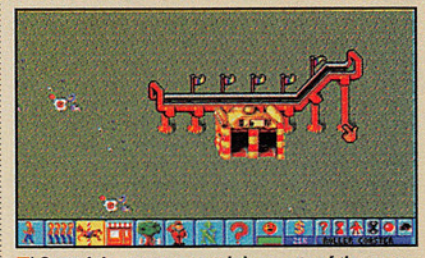
In fact, the single biggest problem with *Theme Park* is that just about every game plays out almost exactly the same, the only variation lying in where you place the rides. There just isn't any long-term play value, and no incentive to keep coming back to your machine to play again. All of the game elements are great ideas, but over and over again they turn out to be disappointing in their implementation.

I'm sure that plenty of people are going to love *Theme Park* in spite of all its quirks, and there's certainly a lot about the game that's new and exciting. The basic idea is fantastic, the graphics and sound are well-crafted, and the interface is (for the most part) intuitive and easy to use. In fact, if my review was based solely on the look and concept of the game, *Theme Park* would have earned a much higher score.

But in the end, the program just doesn't deliver the kind of entertainment you'd expect from a Bullfrog sim. Especially on the Full level, it often seems more like work than fun. And even on the Sandlot level, keeping your park running smoothly is just too big a chore — and I do



When you need to take in the big picture, use this convenient map screen. You can also use the map to locate children lost in the park.



One of the most entertaining parts of the game is designing your own roller coaster. Lay out the track the shape that you want, then use a mouse click to raise or lower the track.

mean chore. If you're a gamer who likes to have total control of a sim — and doesn't mind keeping an eagle eye on everything going on everywhere at all times — you'll most likely enjoy this great-looking product. If you just want to create new worlds and then watch as they grow and change, you may find that *Theme Park* will leave you disappointed.

—Trent C. Ward

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

79%

HIGHS: Terrific premise, great sound and graphics and more resource management than most strategy fans could hope for.

LOWS: Annoying movement interface; control of the park is unreliable; little long-term play value.

BOTTOM LINE: A first-rate strategy game with some let-downs. Fans of *SimCity* will like it.

CD-ROM

Who Shot Johnny Rock?

Category: Arcade Shooter
Developer: American Laser Games and Southwest Productions
Publisher: American Laser Games, 4801 Lincoln Road NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/16MHz; CD-ROM drive; VGA w/ 512K RAM; Mouse	386/25MHz; Double-speed CD-ROM Drive; non-accelerated VGA card; Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Who Shot Johnny Rock? has all the basic ingredients of _Mad Dog McCree_, but it just doesn't deliver the same kicks.

Game play just doesn't get any simpler than in *Who Shot Johnny Rock?*, the newest shooter from arcade-experts American Laser Games (ALG). Set in a gangster-ridden city in the '30s, *Johnny Rock* casts you as a private dick asked to find out who deep-sixed the title character, an aspiring crooner with some pretty unsavory business connections.

All the action in the game is portrayed with live-action video. Here's how it works: After choosing a destination from a map of the city (well, not the whole city — there are only four or five places you can go), you immediately enter a scene. Once there, you use the mouse to aim and fire a machine-gun-shaped icon at various bad guys as they pop up from behind cars, boxes, blackjack tables... you get the picture. Oh, and there are also some innocent bystanders that you've got to avoid spraying with a burst of .45-caliber lead.

Now, I've got nothing against a shoot-'em-up — I wasactually pretty fond of *Mad Dog McCree*, the first PC title from ALG — but a game this simplistic had better look good and offer smooth game play. And *Who Shot Johnny Rock?* doesn't succeed very well on either level.

For starters, the video quality hasn't improved a lick since *Mad Dog McCree*. In fact, it looks worse. Unlike *Mad Dog McCree*, nearly all the action here takes place in dark settings, and sometimes it's nearly impossible to see what's going on. There are a couple of sequences where you'll get plugged and get a chance to try it again — but even though you *know* what's going to happen, you've got little chance of success because the video is so hazy. Sometimes you have to just watch the scene two or three times to spot the target (sometimes *very* tiny, like part of someone's head behind an object) you need to aim for, then make repeated attempts to nail the sucker.



Why can't bystanders stay down when you're blasting your way through a room full of gangsters?

Another annoyance is that sometimes the game just doesn't seem to play fair. In one scene, a hoodlum standing behind the front of a car lights a stick of dynamite and hurls it at you; you've got to pick him off before he finishes his windup. I had the cursor parked right on the spot where he was standing and pumped about 20 rounds into him, but no go. I even called a couple of other editors over just to make sure I wasn't mistaken, and they couldn't believe it, either.

A game like *Johnny Rock* obviously can't be realistic, but at least in *Mad Dog McCree* the actors behaved, after a fashion, as they would in real life: Townsfolk would whisper and run away as you walked down Main Street toting a hogleg, and citizens would emerge from hiding places, trembling in fear, to give you a bit of advice. In *Johnny Rock*, though, almost no one seems fazed that you're hauling a Thomspon submachine gun around the city (until you've gunned down everyone in a scene and a suspect comes forward with a clue, that is). When Johnny Rock's girlfriend Red comes to your office to ask your help, for instance, she doesn't even flinch in her chair when you shoot three thugs (in *three* separate gunfights) within five feet of her.

There are a couple of other minor problems. If you fire more than one round into the very first baddy — easy to do with a machine gun — the program thinks you wanted to skip the expository video, and the unintentional jump cut makes it sound like the guy you just shot was Johnny Rock! And I could never get the game to run properly with sound on my accelerated Cirrus Logic video card and Pro Audio Spectrum 16.

American Laser Games has a couple more of these types of games scheduled for release (*Mad Dog McCree II*, for one), so if you like the idea of a simple shooter with live-action video, you're best off waiting to see if they make some improvements in video quality. Unlike other genres, this is one type of game where image is everything.

— Steve Poole



The video in *Johnny Rock* is hazy to begin with (left), but if you select single-speed CD-ROM during installation it deterioates even more (right).

PCG

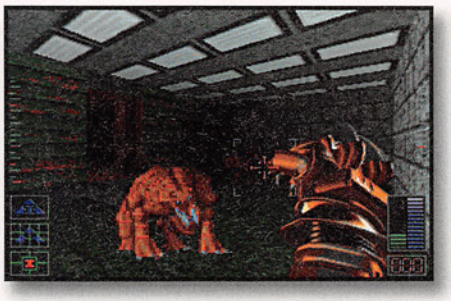
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

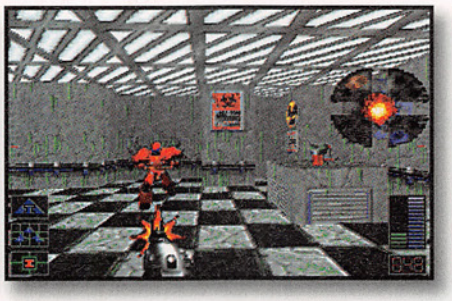
59%

HIGHS: You couldn't ask for a simpler interface, and there's lots of bang-bang.

LOWS: A game like this needs good graphics — and *Johnny Rock* doesn't have'em. Video-card compatibility problems don't help, either.

BOTTOM LINE: If you want a CD-ROM shooter with live-action video, wait on *Mad Dog McCree II*.







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CD-ROM

Richard Scarry's Best Neighborhood

Category: Preschool education and entertainment
Developer: Activision for Kids
Publisher: Activision, 11601 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90025

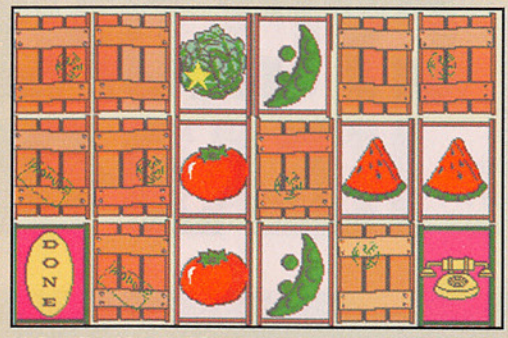
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
CD-ROM drive; 386/25MHz; 1MB RAM; 6MB hard-drive space; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; Supported sound card; Mouse	386/33MHz; 4MB RAM; Double-speed CD-ROM drive.

M.S.R.P.: $49.95 each

Activision brings the atmosphere of Richard Scarry's books to CD-ROM. They're fun, but fall short on educational content.

With *Richard Scarry's Best Neighborhood Ever* and *Busiest Neighborhood Ever*, Activision has certainly created a charming series of interactive adventures for kids — but when it calls them the *Best Neighborhood Ever* and the *Busiest Neighborhood Ever*, they've stepped into the Exaggeration Zone. The programs are neither the best nor the busiest programs available. But they *are* entertaining and engaging, primarily because they imitate Richard Scarry's style — and anyone who's seen a kid with a Scarry book knows how successful that style is. However, they don't earn the Scarry-like title Activision has given them.

For those of you who don't know about Scarry, he was a prolific author of children's books. Revered with the likes of Dr. Seuss and Maurice Sendak, Scarry's style relies more on characters and setting than on plot. Scarry's books reflect the world of his readers. He wrote about and illustrated ordinary objects and events in children's lives — post offices, playgrounds, and police stations — but he peopled his books with extraordinary characters that kids could easily identify with, like the cheerful Lowly Worm and earnest Huckle Cat.

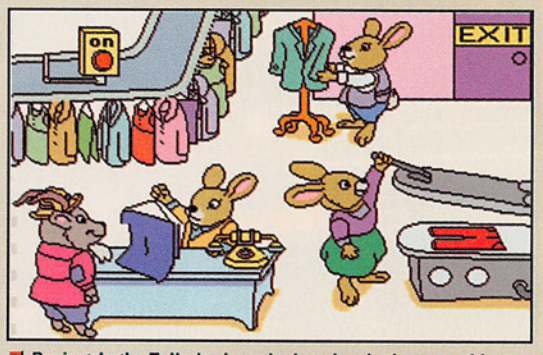


Best Neighborhood: **Some shops feature games or puzzles, such as the memory game in the Grocery Store.**

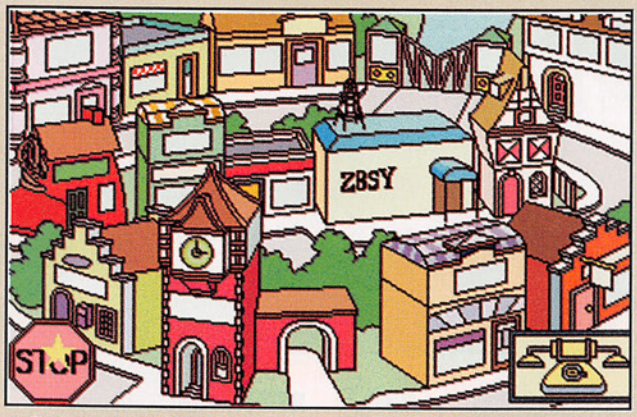
Set in Scarry's Busytown, *Best Neighborhood Ever* and *Busiest Neighborhood Ever* encourage children to explore and experiment, while reinforcing traditional skills such as reading and math. Scarry's neighborhood is filled with various shops and buildings — a music store full of instruments, a toy store, a supermarket, a doctor's office, and so on. In each location, kids use their mouse to trigger responses. Some responses are simple: Click on the tailor, for example, and the little mouse says "Stitch and sew, stitch and sew." Some are elaborate; click on a music book in the library, and everyone in the place performs a song-and-dance number. These are well-drawn, smoothly animated, and entertaining scenes. Some shops also offer puzzles or games that promote pattern recognition and memory skills.

Although kids may not complain, the program has several shortcomings that their parents will notice. The graphics, while beautifully executed in some ways, are rough in others. The outlines of objects are very jagged. These grainy edges were very distracting to me, especially as the street scenes scrolled by. The ragged outlines gave the whole program an unprofessional and blurry look. The color selection, on the other hand, is true to Scarry's style, leaning a little more toward pastels than brights.

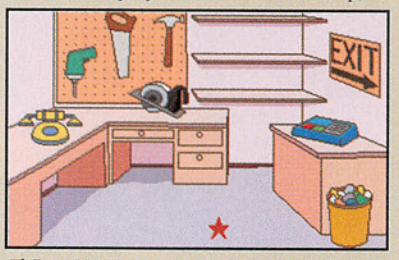
A bigger problem is the lack of depth in each activity: If this is such a busy neighborhood, why isn't there more to do? Many shops are just window-dressing because you can't enter them. Many activities appeal to only one sense at a time, show only one aspect of an object, or produce the same response over and over again. In the music shop, for example, you can click on an instrument — a snare drum, perhaps — to hear how it sounds. But why can't you also *see* how it's played? In Mr. Fixit's shop,



Busiest: **In the Tailor's shop, the bunnies do the same thing each time you click on them. Click on the bunny at the top of the screen, for instance, and she says "Stitch and sew, stitch and sew" — no matter how many times you try.**

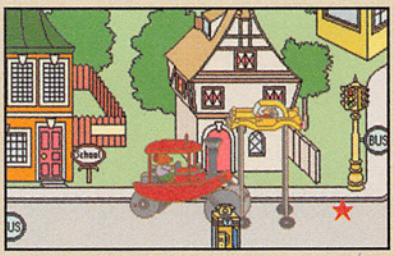


Busiest Neighborhood: **A map of Busytown is really the main menu in Activision's PC adaptation of Richard Scarry's cast of characters.**



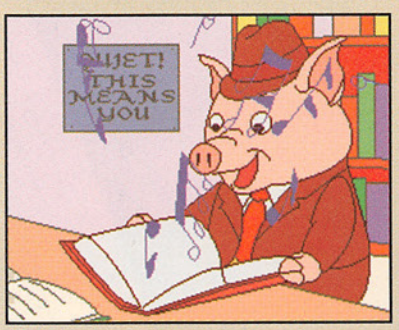
Best: **Mr. Fixit's shop is bare, except for an answering machine and tools. The activity is a bit bare, too — you only get to hear each tool rather than seeing how it works, what it builds, and so on.**

Ever and Busiest Neighborhood



Best: **True to Scarry's style, a small car makes an impossible stretch to safely pass a large steam roller.**

you can click on a power-drill to *hear* it bore a hole through a piece of wood, but you don't see it working; if kids didn't know what the tool was before the activity, they'll know little more afterward.

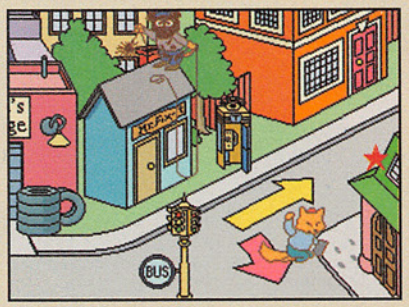


Best: **Some activities include elaborate productions, such as the song-and-dance number reminding children to be quiet while reading in the library.**

The lack of depth seems to come from a lack of focus. The programs try to do a little bit of everything: A little development of classic thinking skills and a little storytelling; a little traditional counting practice and a little non-traditional exploration of the adult world. The program appears scattered and superficial because no one mission is accomplished.

While you'll wish there was more to do, your kids will probably be happy with Activision's Scarry series. *Busiest Neighborhood Ever* and *Best Neighborhood Ever* are entertaining enough to bring kids back for several return visits. The programs faithfully recreate the Scarry world, so how can they miss? On the other hand, it seems like they could have been a lot more effective than they are.

— Heidi Aycock



Best and Busiest: **Richard Scarry's neighborhoods are plagued with jaggies reminiscent of old, low resolution graphic programs.**

Paramount Interactive's Scarry Vision

Several months ago, Paramount Interactive released *Busytown*, a CD-ROM package significantly different from Activision's *Best Neighborhood Ever* and *Busiest Neighborhood Ever*. The graphics in Paramount's program are beautiful and sharp — most notably, none of the jagged edges found in the Activision games and lots of bright, vivid color.

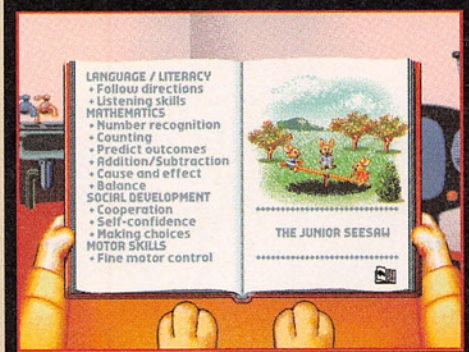
When I first saw Activision's lower-quality graphics, I called the company. I was confused because I thought all three programs would look similar, since they seemed to be part of the same series. It turned out that both Paramount and Activision had gained rights to Scarry's characters, but that was all the two series had in common.

I was also confused because the quality of Activision's graphics seemed to be noticeably inferior to Paramount's. So I went back to the two Activision titles and compared them to the art in Scarry's books — and came away convinced that Activision's graphics were truer to Scarry's style of illustration. I also preferred Activision's animated sequences.

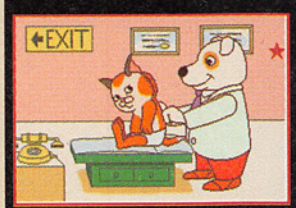
Another big difference between the companies' programs is their content. Paramount's *Busytown* is more clearly educational than Activision's neighborhoods, and Activision's neighborhoods are more Scarry-esque. Compare activities in the very same settings. In both games, you can visit the playground. On Paramount's playground, you place characters onto the seesaw to make it balance — obviously an exercise in comparing values. On Activision's playground, clicking on a piece of equipment shows how it's used — click on the see-saw, for instance, and two hippos teeter and totter.

Another locale common to both series is a doctor's office. In Paramount's program, Dr. Diane asks you to place bandages on different parts of her patient's body, teaching kids the name of body parts — no bones about it. In Activision's game, kids try out Dr. Bones' instruments. They can weigh the patient, check his temperature, test his reflexes, and so on. Dr. Bones is comforting kids by making frightening things familiar — no Diane's about it.

Generally, Paramount has exploited Scarry's work in an effort to make the program's educational aims more palatable to kids, and I believe they've succeeded while respecting the author's style. Activision has simply brought Scarry's style to the computer to entertain kids, in much the same way that Scarry's books entertain kids. Activision's series reinforces lessons learned outside the scope of the program, but doesn't instigate new learning.

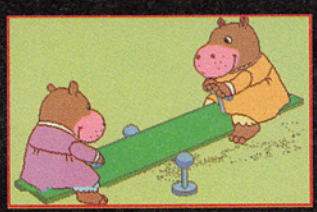


When your child is through playing Paramount's *Busytown*, the program gives you a synopsis of the activities he or she tried that session.

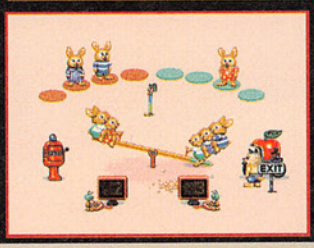




In Activision's program, the friendly Dr. Bones lets you try out his medical instruments, possibly calming fears that some children have about checkups. *Busytown*'s Dr. Diane is there to teach kids the names of various parts of the body.



Activision's Scarry series uses a see-saw to show two kids having fun...



While Paramount's *Busytown* uses the same object to teach children how to compare the values of numbers.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

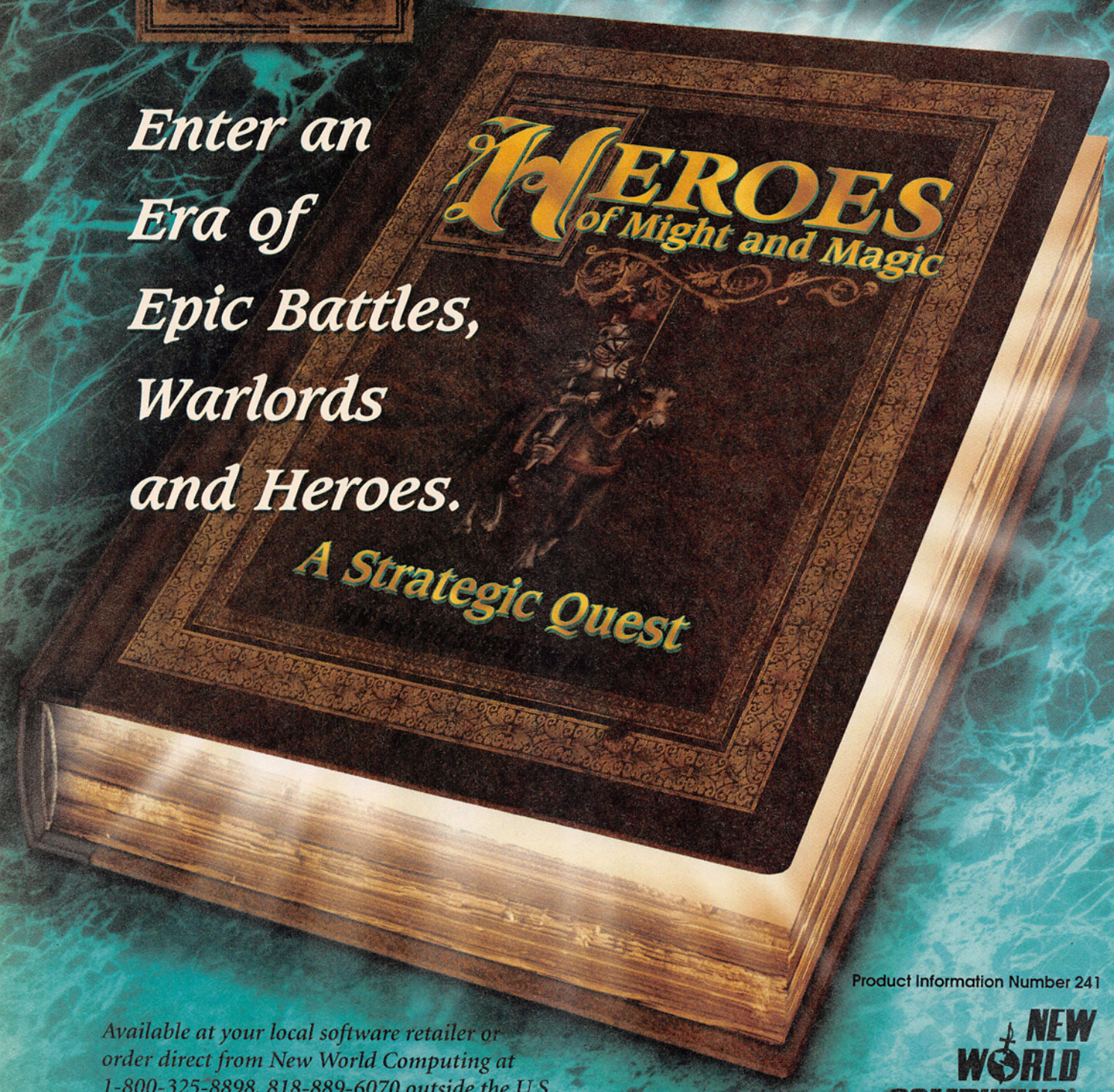
HIGHS: The programs are true to Richard Scarry's style, and are very nicely animated.

73%

LOWS: The graphics are so-so, with the kind of jaggies we used to see years ago; little depth.

BOTTOM LINE: Both Neighborhoods will engage children through words and pictures, but parents will wish each disk had more activities.

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Cowboy Casino

CD-ROM

Category: Poker Simulator
Developer: IntelliPlay
Publisher: Intellimedia Sports, Inc. Suite 300, Two Piedmont Center, Atlanta,GA 30305

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
486/25MHz; 4MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA w/512K RAM; CD-ROM drive; DOS 5.0 or higher; Windows-compatible sound card; Mouse; 5MB hard-drive space	486DX/33MHz or better; 8MB RAM; Accelerated VLB w/1MB RAM; Double-speed CD-ROM drive

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

Cowboy Casino takes you to the Old West for a cowboy-style pokerfest. It looks great — but can these dudes play poker?

In _Cowboy Casino_, you're thrown into an ole-timey poker game in a smoke-filled saloon, complete with dance-hall girls and plenty of whiskey drinkin' (sounds more like _Cowboy Heaven_ to me!). As you load the game, video clips introduce you to each of your five opponents: a cowboy, a bandito, a riverboat gambler, a city slicker, and my favorite — the ol' miner with his faithful mule companion Bessy (just how close they are is anyone's guess).

From here the cowboy will request, in no uncertain terms, that you enter your name and ante up. There are only four types of poker available — 5-Card Draw, 5-Card Stud, 7-Card Stud, and Texas Hold'em — but these are probably the most popular poker variations anyway. You have control over the house rules, such as ante amounts, maximum bet, minimum bet, raise limits, and initial stake (though if you adjust these once play's commenced, everyone is reset to their initial stake). Clicking on a pair of eyeglasses at the table switches you between two different views of the game; the default view is sort of what you'd see if you were actually sitting in a chair at the table, while the alternate view shows the table from an overhead position.

There are two Help functions designed to help greenhorns learn the rules of the four games. One is a hint book, sitting right on the table; just flip it open with a mouse-click to get a quick tidbit of advice on betting and folding. More help is available from Ace, the bartender. He'll let you know what your odds are of winning the pot, or of improving your hand with the cards still to be dealt.

Now to the action of the game — the live-action video, that is. At the end of nearly every hand, and occasionally during the betting, one of hundreds of video clips will pop up. It says right on the box that these are "five wisecracking card sharks," so you can bet they'll brag, boast and insult you from the get-go.

The cowboy is one tense, mean cowpoke who's quick to wave his six-shooter around, though he'll show a happy side if he's winning. The riverboat gamblers' bourbon-mellowed voice makes his bragging seem almost polite, while the boastful bandito is quick to point out that if you "win the hand, you lose an arm, amigo." The slick city dude is a bit goofy, sometimes insulting himself — and for some unknown reason he's drawn the ire of the cowboy, who'll often shut him up with a hateful stare or gun to the head.

But the best is the ol' miner and his mule: He hopes to use his winnings on nothing more than a bath for himself and a stud for Bessy. Sure, he's just doin' a Gabby Hayes routine, but I'm a sucker for Gabby.

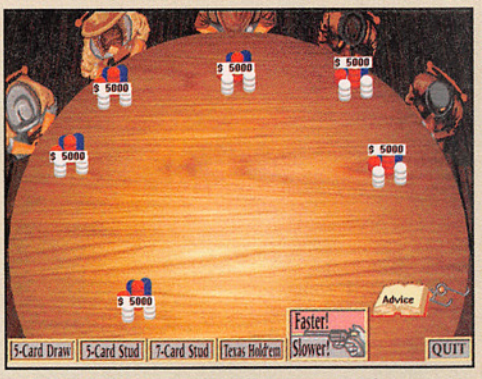
So the live-action video and smooth graphics are fine and dandy, but you're probably asking "Hey, Joe — how good does it _play?_" Well, game speed seems to be peppy enough even on the base system, so there's not much waiting around on the action. But there's one _huge_ flaw in the game's artificial intelligence routines: No matter how good a hand I had, how heavily I bet, or how poor my opponents hands were, I could _never_ bet enough to force everyone out. At least one, and usually two, opponents would stay in 'til the bitter end, no matter what they were holding.

This means two things, neither good. First, there's no possible way to bluff — and it doesn't take a card shark to figure out that really hurts game play. Second, it gave me the feeling I couldn't lose. As long as I folded on dog hands and bet heavy, heavy, heavy when holding a winner, it was a sure thing I'd rake in big bucks from at least one player, and maybe more. And friends, that just ain't poker.

— _Joe Novicki_



"Jes' so you don't get confused, Bessy's the one with all the hair, and I'm the one with all the money."



The overhead view for a different perspective.



The default view shows drawings of your opponents; live-action video will bring them to life during the game.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

64%

HIGHS: The interaction with each character is good for a few hoots and belly laughs.

LOWS: Limited game play, and what's here just isn't very challenging.

BOTTOM LINE: The game's best feature is the live action video. When the novelty wears off, though, you're left with a mediocre game.

Good To Firm

Category: Sports simulation
Developer: New Era Software
Publisher: Wizard Games of Scotland, P.O. Box 498
Wilmington, MA 01887

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286; 580K RAM; VGA	386

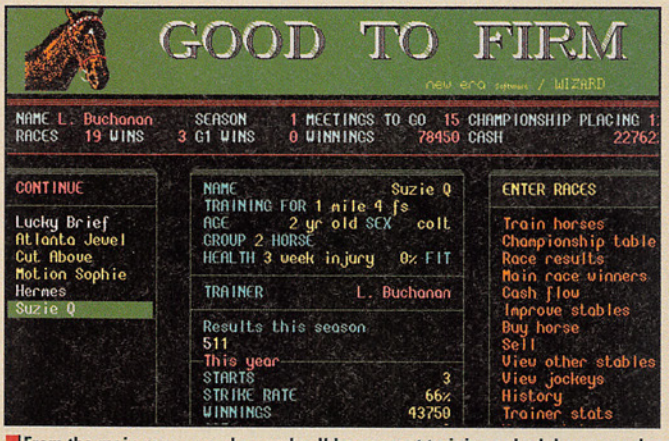
M.S.R.P.: $37.50

Good To Firm gives you a shot at the upper-crust world of English horse racing. But is this a sure-bet simulation?

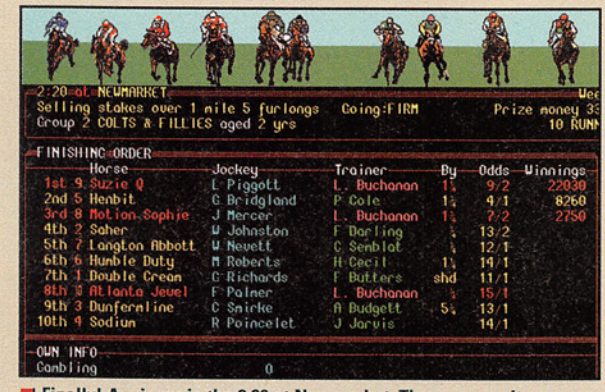
Wizard Games of Scotland (known for its stable of fun, strategy-oriented text simulations) enters the high-brow world of horse racing with *Good To Firm*, an exhaustive simulation of the English "flat racing" season. And you can play through more than just one season: You can actually make horse racing a money-making career.

You start the game with $1 million — a big stake, you might think, but horse racing is a pretty expensive hobby. So you take your fat checkbook and visit the stables to see what's for sale. A promising horse may look like a bargain based on the opening bid, but if your bidding rival really wants the animal, the bid might double once you enter the contest. Performance histories are available for each horse, tracking both season and career statistics, so you have the information you need to make the right decisions. Buy your first horse, then hire a trainer and a jockey, set a training program, and watch the competition.

Then it's off to the races and on to the track to watch the ponies. It's only here that *Good To Firm* fails to impress, because the 16-color racing graphics are crude, flat, and lifeless. And that shortcoming is really a shame, because it needlessly handicaps an otherwise fine simulation. Worst of all, there's no need for the graphics to be so bad. The horses are the only moving elements on the screen, and they all share the same movements. They're numbered 1 through 10 or whatever, from the inside rail outward, and that's where they stay. There's no jockeying for position, no moving to the inside. If you're going to provide graphics at all, Wizard, how about making them a bit more lifelike?



From the main menu, you buy and sell horses, set training schedules, upgrade stables and check out statistics for horses, trainers and jockeys.



Finally! A winner in the 2:20 at Newmarket. The race results screen shows the finishing order and your winnings, both in prize money and all those wagers you laid.

There are no sound effects, an omission that doesn't help the lifeless graphics. But then Wizard Games isn't known for snappy sounds and fancy graphics. Most of Wizard's simulations, including this one, are more strategy and management-oriented.

The races themselves seem to accurately reflect all the behind-the-scenes statistics that make up the game's strong points. Betting and winning on the ponies is no easy task, though. You have to study race histories, the strengths of horses at various lengths, jockey performance, track conditions, and the training regimens of the different horses. Fortunately, *Good to Firm* makes it easy to do all this homework. Just about all the necessary information is contained on a single screen.

The game's only rival at the gate is *Quarter Pole*, which combines a hard-core, strategy-and-numbers game with some lovely on-track graphics. *Quarter Pole* may not offer quite the statistical depth of *Good To Firm*, but it does add lovely graphics to the package. Those graphics come at the cost of performance, though. If you want the pretty picture and have a fast machine, *Quarter Pole* may be a better bet. But if you want quick results and statistical depth — and you aren't too concerned with visually-stimulating graphics — *Good To Firm* is the odds-on favorite.

— *Lee Buchanan*



A tightly-bunched pack gallops down the home stretch. The horses you own are highlighted in white, while the ones you are betting on are in blue.

PCG

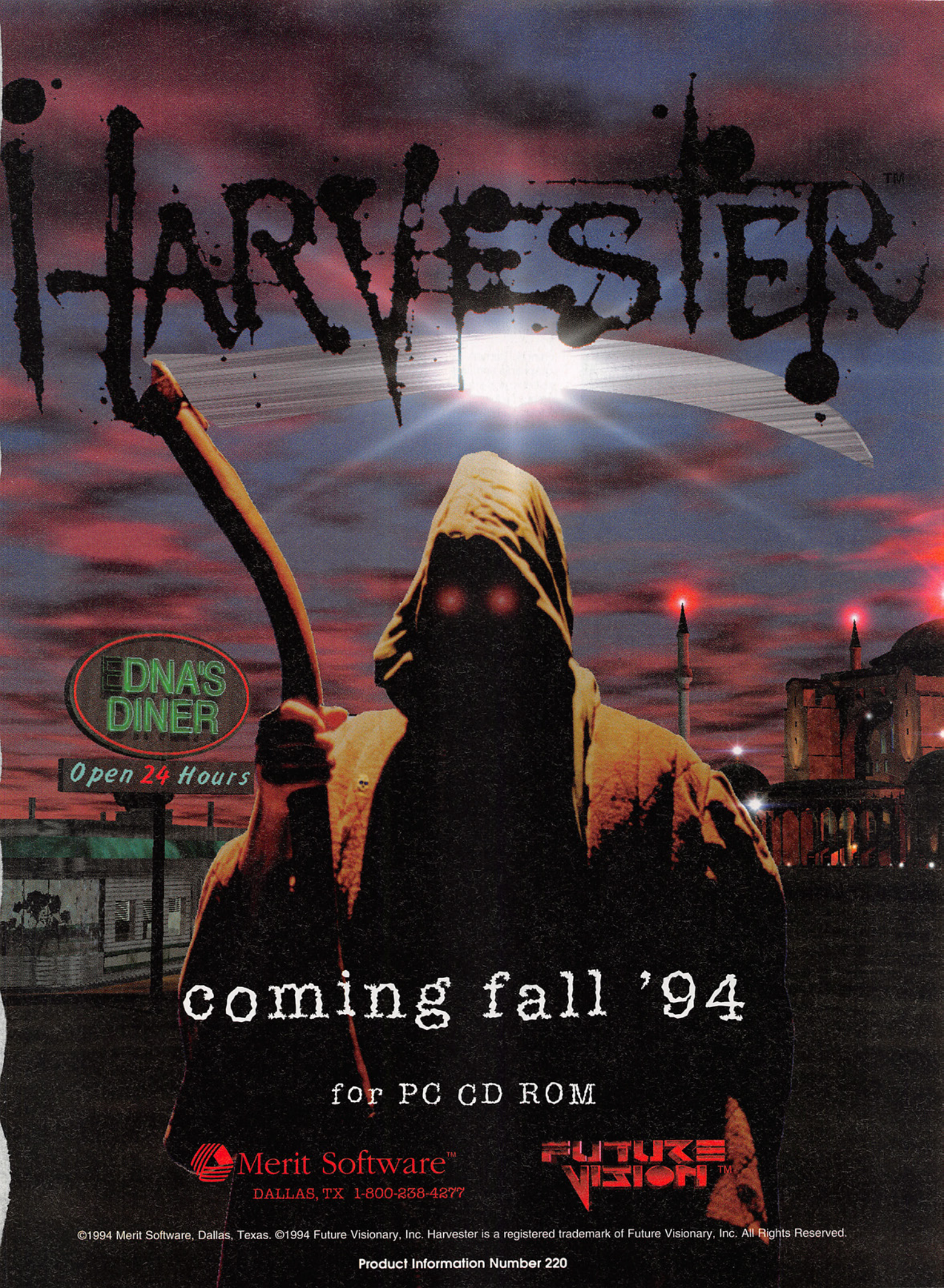
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Loaded with all the statistics and information you need to go horse racing.

LOWS: Primitive graphics and lack of sound effects severely handicaps the racing action.

BOTTOM LINE: A solid horse racing simulation, but a visually weak presentation.



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Product Information Number 220

Pro League Baseball

Category: Simulation
Developer: Micro Sports
Publisher: Micro Sports, One Northgate Park, Suite 103, Chattanooga, TN 37415

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/25; 4MB RAM; VGA	486SX/25; MS-DOS 6.0 or higher; Sound Blaster or compatible sound card; SVGA; Mouse; Printer; Modem

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

Looking for a baseball game with a great combination of statistics and action graphics? This could be it.

My seemingly eternal search for the perfect computer baseball simulation took an expected turn recently with the release of *Pro League Baseball*. Hmmm ... promising action sim from Micro Sports, the company known for slick and solid statistics-based sports games. These guys have done some great work in the past, including pro and college football games where the stats replay value can't be beat. Looks like they've taken a giant graphics leap forward. Hmmm ...

And it's true, all the ingredients are here for a great game: Hig-res(640x480, 16 color) VGA graphics, gorgeous Major League ballparks, real players, modem play, and enough stats to choke an ESPN color commentator. Trouble is, this potential contender for the computer baseball crown left the developer's hands too soon. A lot of the game's features don't work as they should, and the result is a frustratingly bug-filled product.

Micro Sports has an excellent track record for supporting its games, though: listening to gamers' complaints and suggestions, and supporting new releases quickly with fixes and enhancements. They'll need to do plenty of both here, and they were already promising a patch a few days after players took the game home.



The main game screen offers three perspectives: the main field view, a batter/pitcher view, and an overhead stadium shot.

First, the positives — and there are many. The graphics are a major step forward for Micro Sports and its history of stats-based, text-dominated baseball games. Even in the lower-resolution VGA mode, the field and players look great, with the best-looking and most realistic uniforms I've seen. The high-res mode is considerably richer. The players' movements are a little stiff, but all things considered, the graphics are more than adequate.

The stadiums (there are eight included in the game) are beautifully rendered. You never see much of this bit of craftsmanship — the close-up views really limit the amount of ballpark you see, but that's a common problem with computer baseball games.

The on-field graphics window takes up about half the screen, and it can be adjusted down to the size of a playing card to accommodate slower machines. There's a smaller window showing just the batter/pitcher view, and another showing the entire ballpark. Hot keys or a click on the menu bar reveal the information and options you'll need to make the calls as manager; your choices — and the stats you'll need to make them — are all just a simple mouse click away.



The graphics in *Pro League Baseball* hold a lot of promise.

The strength of *PLB*, as was true of past Micro Sports titles, lies in a stats package that may be the best you'll find in a baseball sim. It's satisfyingly deep: How about season best-hitting streaks for every player, or the stolen-base leader among first basemen? The print-outs are outstanding, with type large enough to be legible but small enough to pack plenty of stats on a single page. You can get a hard copy of the top-10 league leaders, or team leaders, in 19 offensive categories.



The main menu gets you into *Pro League*'s many features, including stats leaders, league setup, trades, the draft, and a team editor.

The replay results also are very solid. With the exception of some slightly inflated offensive stats, the numbers seem to add up pretty realistically. And the draft module, where you can release players from all teams and build a league from scratch, performs without a hitch. It's a snap to set your lineups and rotations.

All the other elements you expect in a top-flight baseball sim are here: trades, roster management, league management, team editor, the draft, and modem play. And promised soon is a stats-download feature, to keep you up to date with the current season.

But while all these features would seem to add up to a great game, there are too



Choose your teams, league, and graphics mode in the game setup menu.



***Pro League Baseball* is a stats master, showing you league leaders in 19 offensive categories.**



The stadiums are beautiful, especially Baltimore's Camden Yards — but the only way to see them really well is to scroll around during the game.

many problems with the initial release for *Pro League* to really show its stuff. The game crashes with maddening frequency; player files get corrupted after trades; the interface makes you feel like you're using three or four different programs, instead of one well-integrated sim; and what you see happen on the field often doesn't match the game's stats-based results.

The most glaring problem lies in those graphics, which look so good at first glance. Again, the graphical representation and the stats-based results just don't match up much of the time. A runner attempts to steal second, and he's safe by a mile. He's standing on the bag now as the catcher's throw comes into second. "And that's two outs," says the announcer. What? The same thing happens often in plays at the plate, or at any base. Who beta-tested this, anyway?

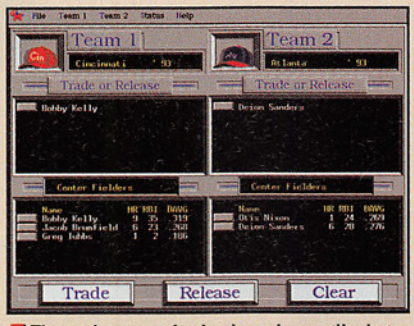
There are a few other bugs that are less offensive, but equally annoying. Try to release or trade players, for example, and you'll find that many of them have switched thier defensive positions!

Sound effects are another strength of the game, but here again, there's a fly in the ointment. The stadium sounds should be a revelation to other developers. The low roar of the crowd provides the ideal ambience for a baseball game, and the crack of the bat sounds pretty good, too. But the announcer seems a step behind (Harry Caray, maybe?): The ball's already back to the pitcher when the announcer exclaims, "what a catch!" Thankfully, the announcer can be turned off (unlike Harry).

Pro League is a demanding game as far as hardware and memory go. In the high-res mode, my 486/33 with 8 megs of RAM wasn't enough to run the game at anything like real speed, at least with the several different configurations I tried. It does offer an easy configuration set-up utility that alters your system files for you and then restores them when you're finished playing ball. Even so, the game crashes often and at different points in the program. Micro Sports is responsive to CompuServe queries about the best configuration, but gamers shouldn't have to jump through hoops to get a fairly simple game to run.

Pro League Baseball shines as a stats-replay game, but it tries to be much more. Get the graphics to match the results, and fix these damn bugs, Micro Sports, and this sim might satisfy lots of hungry computer-baseball fanatics. Until then, I'll keep on looking for the perfect baseball sim. And if you're interested in *PLB*, you should probably wait for a later version of this promising but frustrating sim.

— Lee Buchanan



The trade screen is simple and versatile, but player files tended to get corrupted during trades in the first version of the game.



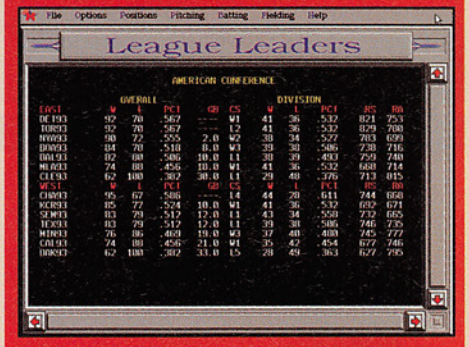
Conducting a draft is a snap, with each team allotted a set amount of time to choose.

Statistics

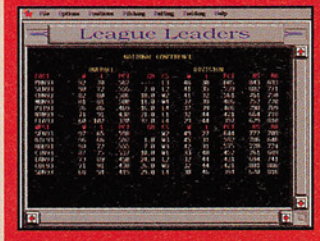
Ask any computer baseball fan, and they'll tell you: The most gorgeous graphics aren't worth a one-run lead at Wrigley if the game doesn't have the statistics to back them up.

How realistic are the replay stats in *Pro League Baseball*? Based on a replay of the 1993 season, the numbers generated by *PLB* are very impressive — about as realistic as you could ask for.

In the National League East, Philadelphia edged St. Louis by two games. San Francisco held off the surging Braves by a single game to win the West. Over in the junior circuit, Detroit and Toronto were tied atop the East standings with 92-70 records, with the Yankees only two back. The White Sox won the West in a walk, with a 10-game bulge over Kansas City.



National League batting: batting average, Tony Gwynn, .343; home runs, Barry Bonds, 51; RBIs, Ron Gant, 130; stolen bases, Chris Carr, 93. Pitching stats: wins, Greg Maddux, 27; E.R.A., Jose Rijo, 2.80; saves, Rod Beck, 47; strike outs, Jose Rijo, 246.



American League batting stats looked like this: batting average, John Olerud, .360; home runs, Juan Gonzalez, 53; RBIs, Chris Hoiles, 150; stolen bases, Kenny Lofton, 100. AL pitching leaders: wins, Jimmy Key, 22; E.R.A., Randy Johnson, 2.91; saves, Tom Henke, 38; strike outs, Randy Johnson, 358.

For some reason, the on-screen league leaders display shows the top save man with only 3 in each league, but the numbers are different on the print-out. Sure, you can find something to gripe about here, but if the results were exactly the same as the 1993 season, it wouldn't make for much of a game, right? If the boys at Micro Sports can tweak their graphics a bit and iron out a few bugs, *Pro*

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

77%

HIGHS: A potentially solid combination of stats replay and action graphics.

LOWS: The game locks up a lot, and the thin manual isn't much help.

BOTTOM LINE: Micro Sports supports their products, so there's a good chance this game could be excellent once they work out the kinks.

Bridge Olympiad

Category: Bridge Simulation
Developer: T-Time and Quantum Quality Productions
Publisher: Quantum Quality Productions, 495 Highway 202, Flemington, NJ 08822

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286; 640K RAM; 2MB hard-drive space; VGA; DOS 5.0 or Later; Mouse	386DX/33MHz; 2MB RAM; Supported sound card

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

QQP's reputation for producing top-notch strategy games gets a boost with *Bridge Olympiad* — another winner.

As you enter the lobby of NBC — that's National Bridge Club, in case you didn't know — the pretty woman behind the counter greets you, and prepares to lead you on your journey. Where, you ask? To the Bridge Olympiad, of course.

That's the name of QQP's new bridge simulator, a product with a very unique capability: *Bridge Olympiad* can take you from novice to olympic contender.

Once you've entered the NBC lobby, you head to either a practice room, a rubber-match room, or — if you think you're good enough — the Olympiad. Oh yeah, you can also check out the Hall of Fame list, but it might be a while before you see your name there.

The layout and graphics are superb, making *Bridge Olympiad* the most visually appealing bridge title I've yet to see. Next to the board is a bar, with icons and buttons for accessing all functions and pertinent information. At first I thought this display might take up too much room on the screen, but fortunately the card graphics don't suffer a bit.

In the practice room, you choose your partner and opponents from 40 distinct players. As you scan through their pictures, each



What a beautiful layout! Everything is as functional as it is attractive. Check out the scratch marks on the bidding pad.

players' abilities are broken down by bidding level, play level, aggressiveness, and cheating. Don't be taken aback by that last category; all it refers to is how often each player is likely to bluff during the bidding phase.

It's the practice room where you can take advantage of all of *Bridge Olympiad*'s features. There's the auto-play mode, where the computer bids and plays for you so you can pick up strategy; a dual-dummy mode which reveals everyones' cards; and a tutor mode, which halts the game when it thinks you've made an improper bid, then offers its own suggestion.

Also in the practice room is a Help icon, where you turn for advice on single plays, as well as a feature to replay or redeal hands. None of these options can be accessed during rubber matches or in the Olympiad.

The manual is also very instructive, providing a history of bridge and a tutorial dealing mainly with bidding strategies. That's a lot of good help for beginning and intermediate players.

The only functions common to all the rooms are the ability to change sound, bidding options, and card backs. You can also access the Score Table and current games' record, or use the Declare or Concede option for the remaining cards in your hand.

After you've spent some time practicing, the rubber room awaits. It's here that you'll play a series of rubber matches with the three players you selected in the practice room. Rubber matches are round-robin events, so it doesn't matter which of the three you choose as a partner — you'll eventually play with each. There's nothing fancy about the rubber room, just hard-nosed bridge play. One caveat: Once you set up a rubber match, you can't cancel it except by signing in at the lobby desk under a different name, so choose those computer players wisely.

Last but not least, there's the Olympiad, in effect the main attraction. When you enter the Olympiad, you're shown a cinematic sequence of a jet flying toward what looks like Athens, certainly a fitting setting for any type of Olympiad. And this time it *does* matter who you select as a partner (opponents are chosen at random). In fact, you've only got 12 partners to choose from — the only ones considered official NBC members. If you don't like one of the players, the tutor — Stan Parker, who bears a striking resemblance to Benjamin Franklin — can be substituted.



Jetting to the Olympiad. Is that the Parthenon?

Whether you're an inveterate bridge player or just getting started, *Bridge Olympiad* is a fantastic choice. It doesn't have quite as many options as *Bridge Baron*, but it does offer the excitement of the Olympiad, along with stellar graphics. There's only one question now: Will Interplays' *Omar Sharif II* top these two programs?

—Joe Novicki



The main lobby of NBC. The girl's not very talkative.

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

86%

HIGHS: Great graphics, and a smooth interface makes for quick play against strong opponents.

LOWS: Playability is slightly hampered by lack of minor features, such as auto-playing forced moves and cancelling a rubber match.

BOTTOM LINE: A really solid program.

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WILD BLUE YONDER

Episode 1: 50 Years of Gs and Jets

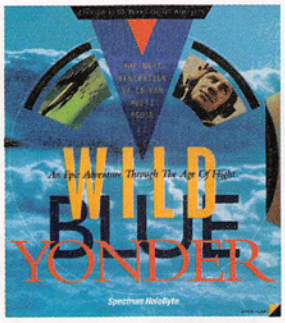
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Raptor: Call of the Shadows

Category: Arcade Shoot-em-up
Developer: Cygnus Studios
Publisher: Apogee Software, 3960 Broadway, Suite 235, Garland, Texas 75043

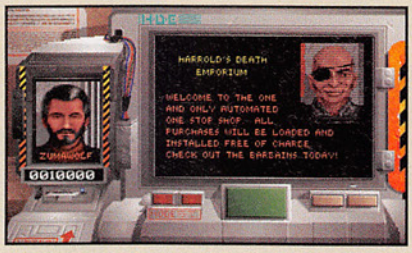
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386; VGA; 2MB RAM; 12MB hard-drive space	486; 4MB RAM; Supported sound card; Joystick or gamepad.

M.S.R.P.: $34.95

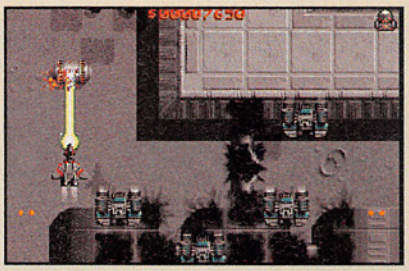
The release of *Wolfenstein 3D* in 1992 proved once and for all that shareware was more than just the abortive attempts of amateur artists who couldn't make it in the big leagues. While *Wolfenstein* partners Apogee and id Software have gone their separate ways, each continues to crank out fine shareware titles that are often superior to full-priced commercial releases (does the name *Doom* sound familiar?).

Apogee's *Raptor: Call of the Shadows* is a stunning arcade-style shoot-'em-up that looks every bit as good as its coin-op cousins. It's a vertically scrolling cavalcade of carnage that's equal parts *Xevious*, *Xenon*, and *Sidewinder*, with narrative sequences and a between-missions hangar interface that rival Origin's *Privateer*. There isn't any real plot here — it's pure mercenary-style killing for cash, with the winnings going to pay for bigger and better weapons.

It's a tried-and-true formula: three sector's worth (in the registered version) of death-spewing waves of enemy aircraft, zooming in from the top of the screen, unleashing some type of weapon, and exiting at the bottom (if they manage to avoid the death you're dealing out, that is). They're not particularly intelligent, but there are an awful lot of them, and as you progress deeper into occupied territory they become increasingly nasty. There are plenty of ground targets and power-ups along the way,



It's a good thing some of the enemy craft you blow up leave cash floating behind. If they didn't, you'd only be able to window-shop at Harold's Death Emporium.



Not happy with the weedy guns you're given at the start of the game? Then press the Backspace key and instantly acquire this Death Ray, and reset your energy level to maximum.

the requisite end-level bosses, and a save-game system that keeps frustration to a minimum.

Raptor is precisely the kind of stylish and mindless fun that PC gamers suffering from Simulation Burnout have been lusting after for years.

— Scott Wolf

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

82%

HIGHS: Satisfies the appetite for destruction and looks good doing it.

LOWS: Like all shooters, it gets a bit repetitive after a while.

BOTTOM LINE: This one's among the best-looking PC shoot-'em-ups around.

Crossword Wizard

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Puzzle
Developer: Cogix
Publisher: Cogix Corporation, 419 Redwood Road San Anselmo, CA 94960

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386; 2MB RAM; 5MB hard-drive space; Windows 3.1 or higher; Mouse	Supported sound cards; Microphone

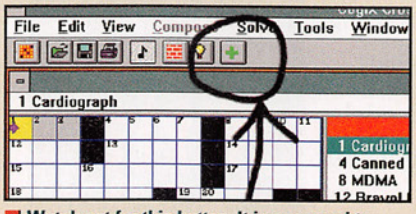
M.S.R.P.: $49.00

Even the most avid crossword fan will be satisfied with Cogix's feature-rich word game, *Crossword Wizard*. You can ask the program to design a new crossword for you each time you play, and even create your own word lists for the program to use. Or you can try creating a puzzle yourself, then challenge friends to solve it. And if you have a microphone and sound card, you can record the clues in your own voice, so whoever solves the puzzle will hear you reading every clue.

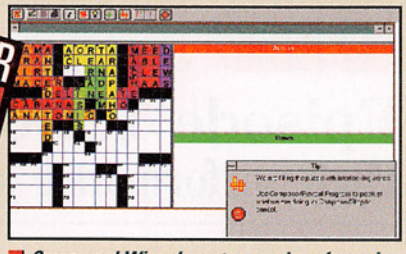
Writing a challenging clue can be tougher than you might think, but don't despair — the included Idea Wizard can help you think through the many ways a clue can relate to an answer. It's basically a dictionary that lists every meaning associated with a the word you enter. For example, when I looked up the word "cry," Idea Wizard showed me a Webster's-style listing of "cry" as both a noun and a verb. From there, you can check out various word relationships, such as similes, antonyms, and a number of others.

For me, the best element of *Cross-word Wizard* is the "Solve" feature. This menu choice allows you to cheat just a little, or a lot. You can choose to have the Wizard show you the whole word, one letter, one vowel, one consonant, and so on.

If you like to take your crossword puzzles with you but don't have a notebook computer, *Crossword Wizard* even lets you print your puzzles. The personalized puzzles can spice up projects like newsletters, meetings or reunions. And thanks to the ability to



Watch out for this button. It is supposed to hide the Crossword Wizard window but you may never find it again!



***Crossword Wizard* creates puzzles of a variety of size and difficulty for your enjoyment.**

add your own clues and words, these personalized puzzles are as much fun to make as they are to solve.

With its many features and powerful puzzle-building capabilities, *Crossword Wizard* lets even old pros experience crosswords in a whole new light. And with the easy-to-use help features, even novices will begin to understand why so many people are hooked on this addictive pastime. Good job, Cogix!

— *Shelli Craig*

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

88%

HIGHS: Easy to use, tons of puzzles, and lots of options to personalize the game.

LOWS: Obviously, if you don't like crosswords, this one won't hold a lot of appeal for you.

BOTTOM LINE: A great way for crossword addicts to get their fix.

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GAME SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: PC CD-ROM • IBM PC 386 sx 25 MHz or compatible recommended • 640K Ram with VGA • Mouse (100% Microsoft Compatible) • CD-ROM Drive (150 KB per second or greater, continuous read,380 ms seek, double speed drive provides better graphic quality • Sound Blaster or 100% compatible card • DOS 3.3 or higher

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Product Information Number 191

Coming soon.

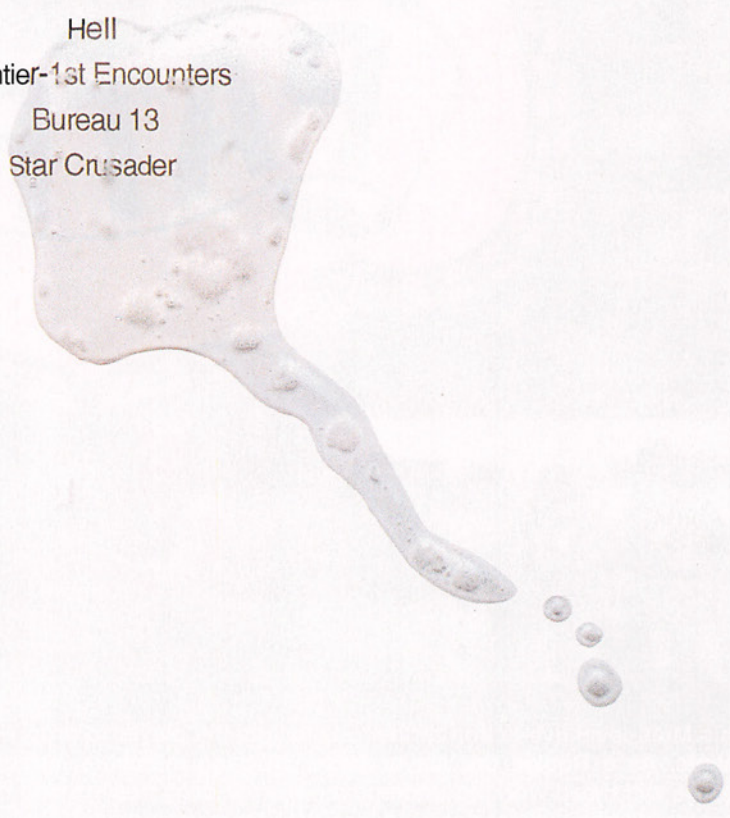
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Product Information Number 242

Spaceship Warlock

CD-ROM

CATEGORY: Interactive movie (uh-oh)
DEVELOPER: Reactor
PUBLISHER: Reactor, 442 West Erie, Chicago, IL 60610

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
CD-ROM Drive; 386; 4MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA; Mouse; Windows-compatible sound card	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX/50; 8MB RAM

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Spaceship Warlock lacks true content, and is yet another reason to beware "interactive movies" — at least for now.

You'll be *amazed*! A game that virtually *plays itself*, without help from the gamer! You'll be *astounded* by the slick and completely uninteresting graphics! You'll be, uh ... *nauseated* by the title song that, I swear to god, sounds like Danzig doing Robert Goulet howling "Spaaaaaaceshiiiiiip WARLOCK!" over and over again at the top of his lungs. Kids, we're talking some very scary stuff here.

Okay, what's this thing called *Spaceship Warlock* all about? Well, it's sort of an adventure game without much interactivity, which is why it's called an "interactive movie." You play, well, *someone* who lands on a planet called Stambul for no discernable reason. It is Far in the Future, and An Alien Race called the Kroll (I thought they were saying "Crow" for the first hour, and kept waiting for Joel and Tom Servo to show up) is running the show. The Kroll kicked butt in the Terran War that lasted a thousand years, and moved your home planet (Terra, of course) deep inside Kroll space. Of course, Terrans are a feisty bunch, and they are whipping up revolution against the Kroll, yadda yadda yadda. You get the point.



This is probably the most memorable scene during your short visit to the planet Stambul. Call me madcap, but for some reason jokes about drunken aliens don't do a heck of a lot for me.

On Stambul, you quickly capture a criminal named Hok Touy without even trying. This is just an excuse to give you a credit chip to get you off Stambul and onto the space liner *Belshazzar*. (You spend maybe ten minutes on Stambul and traverse about three streets, because all the rest have been blocked off to traffic.) Once on the Belshazzar, you quickly meet Captain Starbird (though I could have sworn he said his name was "Starboard") and his bimbo daughter Stella. After a few silly lines of dialogue, the *Belshazzar* is raided by Spaceship *Warlock*, you meet Hammer and his crew, are thrown in the brig, asked to become a member of the crew, given an assignment, and forced to spend the next two hours wandering around really boring graphics as you search for a meaningful plot. Fun, fun, fun!



It's Stella, Captain Starbird's bimbo daughter. The anachronistic text parser ensures you'll enjoy some great conversation with her,

I'd mention the installation — but, oops, there isn't any. You'll have to make your own icon in Windows and play it from there, re-pathing the save destination every time you want to save a game. Thanks, Reactor.

The designers have tried for a slightly tongue-in-cheek, pulp-fiction feel, but they don't seem to have had the right crew to pull it off. There are some okay elements here, but none of it gels together into a cohesive, pleasurable game. As in *CHAOS Continuum*, *Iron Helix*, *Journeyman Project*, and other such CD-ROM undertakings, all the new graphics technology ("created using a Silicon-Graphics Workstation!," as press releases like to blare) ha been used for here is to produce a cold, sterile, wholly uninteresting look and feel. These titles have no soul, no heart.

That's not the fault of the technology, though: Say what you will about *Return to Zork*, *Myst*, and *7th Guest*, but wrapped inside their flashy packages you'll find there is imagination, a flash of inspiration, a *soul*. *Spaceship Warlock* has none. It's just a hollow shell. As the Rush song goes, "All this machinery making modern music can still be open-hearted." [*Tom, don't* ever *quote a Rush song again — Eds.*] The same goes for flashy new CD-ROM games. But unfortunately, as multimedia gaming expands at a rapid clip, you can bet we're going to see more titles like *Spaceship Warlock* — more coldly functional gaming, reduced to the lowest common denominator — than we do games with soul.



An exterior view of the *Warlock* itself, representative of *Spaceship Warlock*'s rendered graphics.

You have been warned.

—*T. Liam McDonald*

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

40%

HIGHS: It doesn't take up any hard drive space. Graphics are okay.

LOWS: Boring, slow, and bereft of imagination; the lack of an install program cost this one about 15 points right off the bat.

BOTTOM LINE: It's a drag, man, a real drag.

Invasion of the Mutant Space Bats of Doom

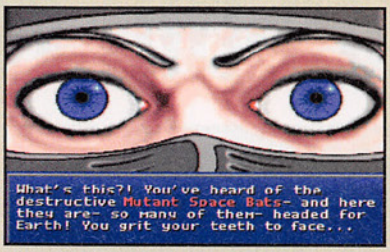
Category: Arcade Shoot-em-up
Developer: Pop Software
Publisher: Pop Software, P.O. Box 60995, Sunnyvale, CA 94088

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286; 1MB RAM; 1MB hard-drive space; EGA	386; VGA; Sound Blaster; Joystick or mouse

M.S.R.P.: $14.00

In apparent backlash against the rising tide of overly complicated simulations, two excellent shareware shoot-'em-ups have appeared almost simultaneously. Pop Software's *Invasion of the Mutant Space Bats of Doom* and *Raptor*, from Apogee (also reviewed in this issue) are remarkably similar in content — vertically scrolling blasters whose only purpose is mass destruction — and miles apart in style.

Raptor takes the high road, reminiscent of coin-op titles like *Twin Cobra* and *Xevious*, while *Bats* recreates the deceptive simplicity of such early arcade shoot-'em-ups as *Galaxian* and *Galaga*. *Raptor* is graphically superior, but *Bats* is the clear winner in terms of highly addictive gameplay and sound quality.



At first glance *Bats* looked like something I'd end up deleting after only a few minutes' play, but several hours and one destroyed joystick later I was still at it, drooling and cursing the bloody alien vermin. I literally could not stop playing this insidious little game!

With your ship nestled in the bottom portion of the star-sprinkled screen, 64 rounds of frenzied Space Bat waves swoop down on you in diabolically wicked patterns. They don't just float down, lob a few bombs and exit gracefully; each wave continues to harass you until you manage to wipe out every last one of the buggers. Power-ups are contained in colored crystals released by some destroyed bats, and Bonus rounds pop up twice during each of the game's three levels.



The red ring around the Lives Left box indicates an available Smart Bomb. Collect 6 purple crystals for an extra life.

Bats is fun, affordable entertainment whose purpose is to let you get in quickly, play for as long as you like, and then get on with your life. Yeah, right — maybe after this next wave.

— *Scott Wolf*

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Cheap, challenging, and runs on almost any system.

LOWS: Gets very hard very fast.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're a shooter fan, there's no excuse not to get this one.

80%

Classics Jackpot! For Windows

Category: Casino game pack
Developer: Impressions
Publisher: Impressions Software, 222 Third St., Suite 0234, Cambridge MA 02142

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386 or better; 2MB RAM; Windows 3.1; VGA; 2MB hard-drive space; sound card; Mouse	386/33MHz

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

There are two criteria for judging a casino games pack: the smoothness and accuracy of the gameplay, and how much it teaches you about the games themselves. *Classics Jackpot!* scores well in the first category — the action here is just as fast as in a real-life casino — but falls short in the second; in fact, it doesn't even *attempt* to teach you strategy.

That sounds like a real shortcoming, but if you look at the games included in this pack — Keno, Roulette, Slots, Video Poker, and Blackjack — it becomes clear that it's not such a drawback after all.



Blackjack plays fast and accurately, but this Double Down warning starts to get old fast.

Take Roulette, for instance. No matter how you play it, the house always has a major advantage. Sure, it'd be nice if the manual made a passing reference to wacky betting schemes like the Martinette system. But if you already know roulette, the action here is fast, smooth, and satisfying.

Keno's another mindless excursion that, in real life, is pretty much a hopeless way of beating the house. The online instructions in *Classics Jackpot!* don't tell you how many numbers you have to hit to do *better* than break even, but there are no flaws in actual gameplay. As far as Slots go, there isn't much good advice to offer anyway.

The only problems I could spot in any of the games in *Classics Jackpot!* were minor. In Blackjack (actually Video Blackjack — there's no option for multiple human opponents), you're always reminded when you double that you're doubling your and that you only get one more card; it'd be nice to turn that off. And because the games are unrelated except that they're in the same program group, you can't use winnings from one game in another one, like you could in a real casino.

If you're looking for expert advice on these popular casino games, pick up *Beat the House*. But if you just want to hop into some quick casino action, *Classics Jackpot!* is a fine choice.

— *Steve Poole*

PCG

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Five fast-playing casino games; perfect for work breaks.

LOWS: Three of the games require little or no skill, and there's no tutorial to help you master the other two.

BOTTOM LINE: A fun — and safe — way to enjoy casino action.

77%

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Product Information Number 152

Warlords II Scenario Editor: The Do-It-Yourself-Empire Kit

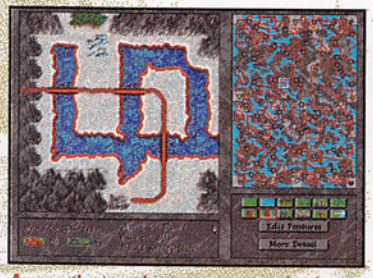




You can edit any unit characteristics in *Warlords II: Scenario Builder*... and even change the icons themselves!

Warlords II has it all: war, diplomacy, heros, precious items, mysterious ruins, bad guys, castles, and, while we're at it, a little *more* war. If you found yourself plowing through the initial scenarios and wondering what SSG is going to do to keep you happy now, look no further: *The Warlords II Scenario Builder* has everything you could possibly want to satisfy those despotic urges. This is an add-on-disk-and-a-half.

Everything you need to build a *W2* scenario is assembled in one easy-to-use series of menus. Mountains, hills, roads, and other terrain types, with variations on each, can be "painted" square-by-square, or in large swatches. Auto-smoothing rounds the edges and adds coasts, straightens roads, and generally cleans up the map image. You can place castles, ruins, and ports just about anywhere you want (though there are limits to how many ruins you can use), and assign castles to any side. Each unit can also be edited, including all statistics and names. There are also image-creating options for castles, ships, and units. Heros' names, qualities, and special items can also be completely edited. In short, every element except for AI is in the hands of the player, and it all couldn't be more accessible.

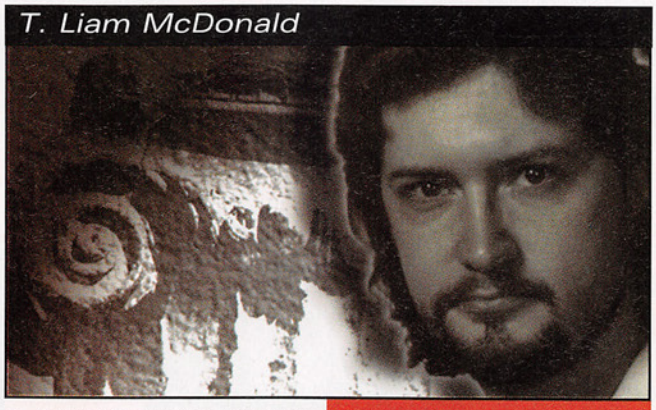


Among the two dozen new scenarios in the *Warlords II* scenarios builder are several set in frozen landscapes.

Two dozen new scenarios are also included, featuring a wild range of styles and approaches. There are numerous peculiar landscapes (star, spindle, wheel, chessboard, etc.) that require unique strategies, but the best are those which use various features of the editor to create a unique landscape or order of battle. Rome, Europe, Britain, America, and other vaguely historical scenarios are given the *W2* treatment. Several maps are comprised of frozen wastes, and one is built around a frozen lake. The funniest is probably the tongue-in-cheek "Warthog II: The Battle for the Sty," in which various classes of hogs, pigs, flies, fleas, and other barnyard animals fight for territory, and a battle for the city among the military, politicians, protesters, and unions. Try sending your county clerk against a long-haired student protestor and just see what you get.

Even better than the maps themselves is the fact that you can access their unique battle sets and city icons for use or modification in your own creations. The designers went to great pains to create wonderful military figures, including the caricatures of "Warthog II," interstellar warriors and war machines, "American" figures (such as Rebels, Yankees, Indians, etc), slime creatures, and other oddball military units. There are also different crests and different castle designs, from pig pens to space ships.

SSG produces the best, most value-packed add-on disks around, bar none. This package opens up whole new worlds to your creative abilities, and there are virtually no limits. Plus, there are all those fresh, innovative scenarios included. Buy it. Play it. Give it to someone you love.



T. Liam McDonald

This month, our T. Liam tells us about warring warthogs, a nerdy, over-sexed guy who finds his voice, and an opportunity to restore "the little paper-hanger" to his rightful place in Impressions' classic *Global Domination*.

Larry Laffer Speaks!

The new CD-ROM release of *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out* is a landmark in PC gaming history: for the first time, we get to hear the voice of that bedraggled lecher, Larry Laffer. All the characters in the game are now played by voice actors, and Larry's creator, Al Lowe, even makes an appearance as Hard Rock.

There was speculation that Lowe himself might play the role of Laffer, but Sierra opted for a more noticeably dweeby voice. Larry is a nasal, nerdy fellow, and he sounds almost exactly as you thought he would — which is a little disappointing. It might have been more interesting if Larry weren't so stereotypically geekish. Still, it is nice to finally *hear* America's favorite lounge lizard.

The voice acting throughout is fairly high-caliber, and the SVGA graphics look terrific. One complaint, though: It seems that some naughty bits may have been toned down.



Gammie gets your visit to La Costa Lotta off on the right foot; she's easy on the eyes, and holds the key to your adventure.

Larry's visit to the High Colonic treatment center, for example, is nowhere near as "explosive" as it was in the floppy version.

IndyCar Racing

We haven't been able to pry Lee Buchanan away from his computer since **Papyrus** released *IndyCar Racing*, and just when we thought there was some hope, along come eight nifty new IndyCar courses to test his mettle. For reasons involving licensing rather than disk space, no doubt, *The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Pack* is available only on its own disk, while seven other courses comprise *The IndyCar Circuits Expansion Pack*.

The exclusion of Indianapolis from the original *IndyCar* had many users crying foul, but they're bound to be pleased by its gorgeous reproduction here. The most famous track on the circuit, the Indy is also the only oval track in the bunch, making it look almost pedestrian. It's anything but, as a few minutes on the curves will soon show. Not only does this disk come with the track, but also with excellent documentation and several new utilities. The paint utility allows you to change the look of your car to just about any color or pattern you want, while the replay editor allows for highlights to be edited from longer replays. A time-acceleration feature and two new print utilities — results and car settings — round out this very impressive package.

With the exception of the paint utility, all these enhancements are also available on the *IndyCar Circuits* disk. The courses on the *Circuits* are a combination of unusual shapes and unique characteristics. Laid out on Australia streets, Surfers Paradise, Queensland (c. 181 miles) is full of turns, but the enemy is often the Australia rains, which can make things hairy. Burke Lake-front, Cleveland (c. 201 miles) is flat and fast (the fastest on the circuit), while the relatively new Belle Isle Park, Detroit (c. 161 miles) is tight and twisting. Road America, Wisconsin is a long lakeside course of 200 miles, but can't touch the sharp angles, long straights, and nasty hills of the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, which is just as long (200 miles) but with shorter laps. Located in the desert, the short oval of the Phoenix International Raceway takes *its* 200 miles in 200, 1-miles laps (!) which makes for a somewhat monotonous course. The same can't be said of Pacific Place, Vancouver (c. 167 miles), which has unusual curves that require more strategy than speed.

All in all, two exceptional offerings from Papyrus, which are must-haves for owners of *IndyCar*.



IndyCar Circuits does a wonderful job of recreating the Pacific Place course through the streets of Vancouver.

"Larry is a nasal, nerdy fellow, and sounds almost exactly as you thought he would — which is a little disappointing."

Bug Patches

Contact game publishers for bug-patch availability

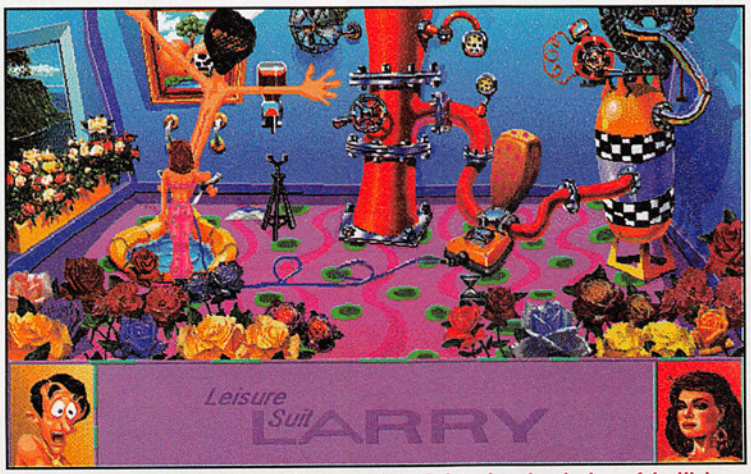
Detroit — For those with a DET001.EXE dated earlier than 5/27/94, this patch handles modem problems; crashes; phantom workers that appear on some machines; interest calculations and general accounting; and numerous other play tweaks.

Fleet Defender v.1.2 — General maintenance patch.

Global Domination — Two patches, one of which is a simple fix for various modem play bugs. The other, however, is a "Hitler Patch" — the strangest item I've had in this column. For those of you who know *GD*, you might have noticed the historical figure of Hitler was replaced with Bismarck in some misguided attempt at either political correctness or historical myopia. Well, this patch puts the little paperhanger right back where he belongs. As Impressions points out, and I'm not making this up: "The original game included Hitler, but was omitted in the release version for fear of offending our customers; subsequently, a number of customers requested that Hitler be reinserted into the game. We apologize if this patch offends anyone, and suggest that anyone likely to be offended not download this patch." Um, yeah, right. Everyone who's offended please raise their hands. Next...

Warlords II v.1.11 — allows users without the Scenario Builder (see above) to use Scenario Builder scenarios (i.e., from fellow *Warlords* fanatics, or via networks).

PCG



In one of the game's most memorable scenes, Larry is introduced to the joys of the High Colonic. The CD-ROM version isn't quite as graphic as the floppy original, though.



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"*Raptor's* voracious gameplay eats other shooters for lunch!"
Chuck Miller -- CGW, June '94

Raptor: Call of the Shadows requires an IBM™ or 100% compatible 386 or better computer with 2 MEG RAM (4 MEG recommended), a VGA graphics card and 12 MEG free space on a hard disk drive. Joystick and mouse are optional. Supports all major sound cards.

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A002PCG

Product Information Number 165

Let's Tell Them What We Want

Software interfaces matter. For games, in fact, they could very well matter more than anything else. If you can't play the thing, you can't possibly enjoy it, and the interface — the way the game handles combat, magic, and basic control of your character(s) — is what makes playing possible.

When I talk to role-playing gamers or read their comments on CompuServe, GEnie, or America Online, I always try to take note of what they're actually discussing. Is it the game's storyline? Atmosphere? Characterizations? Weapons details? Realism? Sometimes, it's all of these things. But usually they're complaining about the interface, even when it seems they're criticizing something else.

Take a look a magic systems, for instance. In the Ultima games, you have to do all sorts of things before you can even cast a spell, including wander the countryside in search of the right herbs and spices. In AD&D games, you have to memorize spells, then take a good long nap so they sink in. Other games forego the whole process, just asking that you have enough magic points to do what you want to do. Which is best? It depends completely on the game, and how well that system blends with the game's other systems.

Combat interfaces are another easy target. The Wizardry series and the Might & Magic (Xeen) series have always had a phased combat system: You decide what each character in the party is going to do, and everything stops while you make that decision. Although it looks different, this is also the basis for combat in the AD&D Gold Box series. Skip to the Eye of the Beholder games, or Ravenloft, or most of the newer RPGs, and you find yourself engaged in a real-time combat system: The battle rages on, even as you mouse from character to character, clicking on their swords or their spell books. Debate continues about which type of combat is better, but the argument is always about *how* that combat takes place, not whether or not you should be forced to beat up on sewer rats and rabid wolves in the first place.

We RPG fans even have an assortment of views to choose from. There's the classic first-person view (you see the action through the eyes of your party) originated in *Wizardry* and adopted by everything from *Dungeon Master* through the Ultima Underworlds. The other major view is from overhead (usually at an angle), found in the newer Ultimas, the much older *Faerie Tale Adventure*, and many others. Whatever the approach, though, the way you view the action has a lot to do with how you interact with the game itself, because you react differently to events in one view than in the other. The question should be about which view fits the story and the mood, but most of the arguments I hear are about which view looks best.

And we won't even talk about inventory management — *my* big pet peeve. I mean, if I have to shuffle items from one character's pack to another more often in future games than I have in the past, I just might stand in front of the designer's house and start unloading a truckload of armor, potions, weapons, and scrolls in *his* front yard.

Although we quibble over the details, let's face it: Interfaces have improved dramatically. RPGs today are far more playable than ever before, and far more enjoyable as well. In the old days we had nothing but an "in-yer-face interface" full of hit points and minutiae, while today things are slicker, smoother, prettier, and just all around better.

Still, I wonder.

The original Wizardry series sold by the ton. In fact, people even bought computers so they could play it. Does anybody buy a computer today just so they can fire up *Betrayal at Krondor*? It's a great game, with a great interface, but have all the graphical advances really made it more attractive to the game player?

The in-yer-face interface had to be learned, but once in your head it was fast and predictable. Today's interfaces hide the nitty-gritty details — all the mechanics behind the scenes, like hit points and armor class and so on — so much that it's difficult to say how your actions affect things. And even though today's games look and sound infinitely better, those slick new interfaces often insulate us from the very things that make role-playing role-playing.

So what I'd like to do is ask your opinions. Which RPG do you think has the best interface? Which has the worst? What are the interface elements you or dislike? How does the interface affect your enjoyment of the game?

Take a look at the table below, and rate each interface element on a scale of 1 (terrible, grody, barf-me-out) to 10 (awesome, wicked, way cool). Then, send me a letter with your responses, or just e-mail them to me. All addresses are shown below.

Game Name

Overall	___
View	___
Combat	___
Magic	___
Inventory	___
Money	___
Travel	___
Non-Player Characters	___
Other	___

When I get your responses, I'll tabulate them (nothing fancy or "official") and report back to you a few issues from now. I'll also send the results to all the various RPG software houses, and try to get some designers to respond as well. If we don't tell them what we want, how will we ever get it?

Mail address:
Alternate Lives
PC Gamer
300 A South Westgate Drive
Greensboro, NC 27407

E-mail addresses:
nrandall@hookup.net (Internet)
73637,1733 (CompuServe)
NRandall (America Online)

PCG

Neil Randall



Neil is trying to lauch a little rebellion, and he needs your help. If all of us say what we like and dislike, the role-playing powers might take heed — and maybe we'll get the perfect RPG.

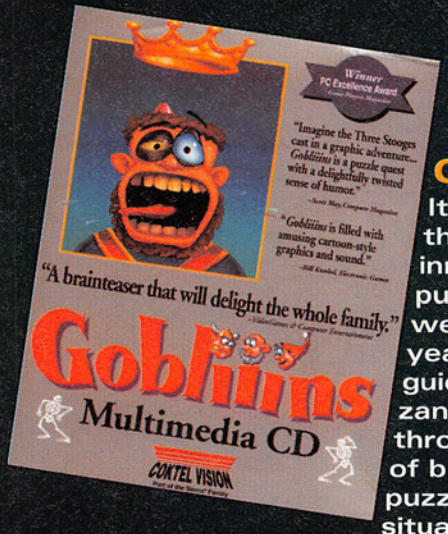
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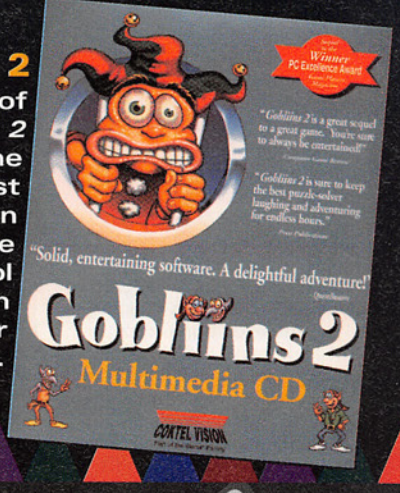
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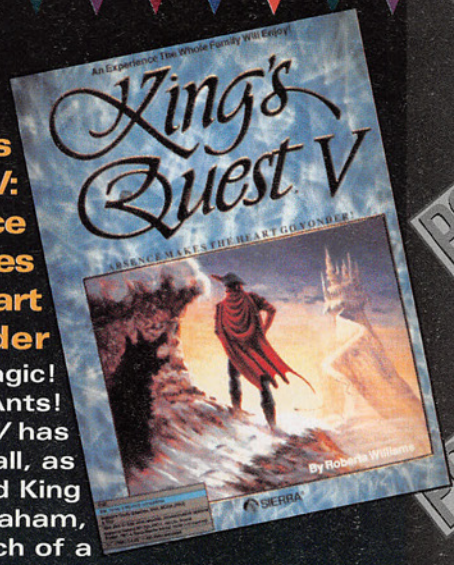
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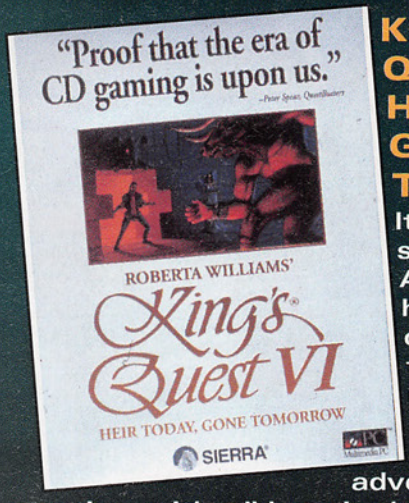
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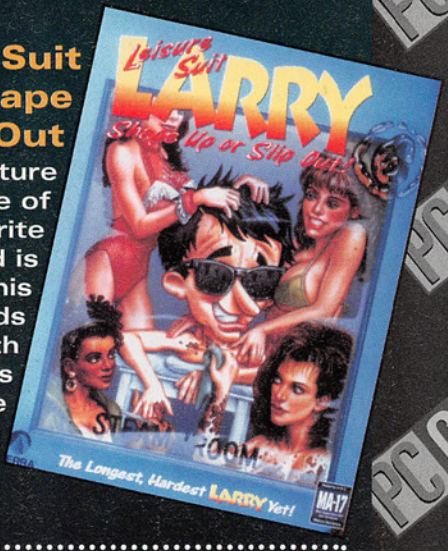
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Requiem for an Odd Grognard

William R. Totter



Like most war-gamers, I was sucked into many of the D-Day documentaries on TV in spite of the fact it meant seeing the same damn five minutes of newsreel footage over and over and over again. 50 years — an amazing anniversary to be sure.

Late one night, after watching one of the longer D-Day programs, I got an eerie feeling, as though something was missing, something else that deserved to be commemorated. Then it hit me: June, 1994, would have been the 50th birthday of my friend Amon Liner — one of the greatest American poets of the 20th Century, and war-gamer *sans pareil*.

Amon was born and raised in Charlotte, NC, only 90 minutes from *PC Gamer*'s editorial offices. He had a congenital heart defect that could kill him at any moment. By the time he reached the age of 12, he'd already outlived his doctors' predictions; from then on every single day beyond that was a genuine blessing.

He led an incredibly circumscribed life: no travel except by car, no sports or other form of physical exertion, no alcohol, no sex. He accepted these ground rules, and compensated for his frailty with mental adventures and intellectual voyages of the farthest range and grandest scope.

His interests ranged from metaphysical poetry to military history. War-gaming was another way for him to enrich his solitary and sedentary life. He could recite the Waffen SS's order of battle from memory, or do an impromptu spoken analysis of MacArthur's New Guinea campaign. He read at a blistering pace, retaining everything for future use in his poetry.

In the summer of 1966, when I dropped out of college for a year (like everybody else in the mid-60s) in order to finish an unpublishable novel of approximately one million words, Amon and I discovered Avalon Hill's *Stalingrad* and *Tactics II* — the avatars of modern war-gaming. Two or three nights a week, for most of Amon's remaining life, we wargamed with each other, gradually expanding from Avalon Hill to other board-game classics (*Confrontation, War in the East, Jutland*, etc.)

I was the macho historian, Amon the frail and sickly poet — but he had the killer-instinct of Genghis Khan and he whipped me more often than not. I was tenacious and imaginative on defense, but cautious and Eisenhowerish on the attack. Amon, by contrast, played war games with the same total, murderous focus as Bobby Fisher had playing chess. He had the audacity of Patton, the tactical smarts of Rommel, and the strategic vision of von Moltke.

When we'd played every possible variant of the published games, we started adapting their mapboards for custom-designed scenarios; we spent days cutting and lettering our own unit markers out of scrap cardboard. Most of these experimental games were ultimately unsatisfying, but occasionally we did everything right and came up with a winner, such as our 1967 adaptation of the *Tactics II* board for a Vietnam-like counterinsurgency campaign. *That* game was better than any of the early commercial Vietnam games, and I wish we'd had enough sense to seek a publisher for it.

One of the nicest aspects of war-gaming with flesh-and-blood opponents, of course, is the fraternization that goes on while the game unfolds. As the months and years rolled by, I came to respect Amon as one of the bravest people I'd ever met. He went to sleep each night literally unsure if he would wake. He taught me the meaning of dedication, and of the simple value of honest human endeavor.

People who knew Amon from his published work were often amazed when they entered his study and saw an entire wall full of military books, not to mention a couple of four-foot stacks of war games. Why, they often asked, do you spend so much time reading about warfare?

He had a ready answer: "Because war is the central fact of this century, and without a knowledge of it no one can make sense out of what's happened. World War Two was the central fact of twentieth-century politics; and the Holocaust was the central moral fact of the age. I intend to write an epic poem one day that uses Auschwitz as its starting point."

Amon was nearing completion of his Masters degree, and putting the finishing touches on his magnum opus, a ten-book epic poem (true to his prediction!) named *Dr. Faustwitz*. We hadn't done much gaming for a year or so, but we gradually resumed in 1974. When I started seeing more of him, I began to see how weakened he was. He walked as slowly as an arthritic old man, and if he tried to move any faster, his breath would turn into gasps and his skin took on a purple cast that was chilling to see.

One night — July 26, 1976 — when we had scheduled another round of the immense WWIII game that covered most of my dining room floor, the phone rang and I learned that Amon had died that afternoon while undergoing a routine blood transfusion.

In a daze, I went back to the gaming room and stood there staring at the gigantic map and its hundreds of cardboard markers. I had been playing the NATO side, and had just gone over to counter-attacks after surviving the shock of Amon's ferocious offensive. Then I noticed that he had hoarded nearly all of his replacement points — feeding just enough fresh units into the line to slow me down and bloody my nose. I peeked into his pile of face-down reserve units and realized that he had been planning a massive armored trap for me, one I neither expected nor had the resources to block.

Amon would have won.

PCG

War gaming consists of cold numbers and abstract strategies. This month, the General reminds us of the genre's human, even poetic side — and recalls a very special friend.

Pacific Strike: Origin of an Explanation

Before I got a chance to see **Origin**'s *Pacific Strike* for myself, I was horrified by the hateful messages about the game on Am-erica Online's Flight Sim Resource bulletin board. Even Origin supporters were crucifying the company for releasing a game whose frame rate resembled a slide show, even on a 486DX2/66 VLB machine.

Personally, I had trouble be-lieving everything I'd read. How could a game from a company with Origin's record of success fall so far short of the mark?

I've since spent many hours experimenting with the game on my 486DX/33 with VLB, and I'm afraid there's truth to those nasty rumors. It took a 90MHz Pentium system with 16 megs of RAM to squeeze an enjoyably smooth game out of *Pacific Strike* — and that didn't fix the game's other problems (I love the Amazing Colossal Landing Signals Officer!).

I wanted to get Origin's side of the story, so I called Eric Hyman, the producer of *Pacific Strike*, to see what he had to say about the overall disappointment players have had with *Pacific Strike*.

SW: I suppose you've already heard that a lot of *Pacific Strike* owners are pretty pissed off at you guys...

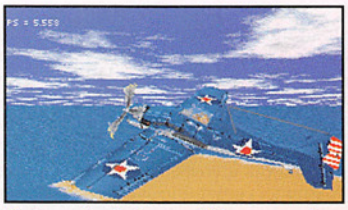
EH: Yeah. We expected some of it because Origin has always been subject to heat for its high-end products, and we knew that *Pacific Strike* is being bought by a very critical audience — die-hard flight-sim fans. We expected a certain amount of negative reaction, especially with the game's realism, but nowhere near the amount we've gotten.

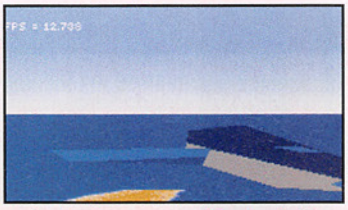
SW: I've even heard it said that you released the game before it was really ready.

EH: That depends on your definition of "ready." Obviously, in hindsight, there were some additional things that could have been changed or fixed or whatever but, you know, hindsight's 20/20.

SW: There wasn't any pressure to just get it out and worry about patches later?

EH: No, there was none of that mindset. You know the flight-sim market as well as I do —*every* game gets patched — and it's something that, at least at Origin, there hasn't been a history of. The team was committed to finishing the game, then being receptive to any problems and trying to fix them as quickly as possible. Someone could turn that around to mean "Well, we knew there were problems and we sent it out without fixing them," but that's really not what happened.





That number in the top-left corner — frames of animation per second — has led to a lot of frustrated flight-sim fans. And while Origin is committed to fixing other problems, the frame-rate question might be resolved only when a new generation of Pentium-based machines is widely available.

Scott Wolf



SW: You weren't afraid of "pulling another *Strike Commander*" and delaying it's release for a year-and-a-half?

EH: No. I mean, certainly there are internal company fiscal pressures and external pressures and all that, and having the Speech Pack out first didn't help us, but that certainly wasn't a deciding factor. When we sent the game out we thought it was good enough.

SW: Realism and frame rate seem to be the major areas of dissatisfaction.

EH: Yeah. Spins, roll rates, trim controls — those are things people have complained about, and we'll probably be addressing them in a future patch. The first patch fixed nine different problems, from the ThrustMaster hat switch to the frame rate when flying over land; sky and water detail were always meant as high-end options. The next patch will center on realism issues and involve longer rewrites.

SW: What about the single-channel digital sound system?

EH: We had a single-channel digital system already in place in the *Strike Commander CD* engine and that's what we used. A four-channel system would have required a major rewrite and a long delay in the product's release. We thought it was good enough — obviously we were wrong.

SW: Yeah, but *Strike Commander* didn't have the same kind of sound problems that *PS* does.

EH: Well, there was less use of digital effects in the *Strike Commander CD* and not nearly as much wingman speech as in *PS*. *Strike Commander* primarily used the digital channel for the engine effects and fly-bys.

SW: Then why not have a menu option to turn off digital effects, like in *Strike*?

EH: That's something we're going considering for a future patch. I think that in the configuration (PS.CFG) there's a "-ds 271" line which tells the game to use the digital system. If you take that out and just leave the "-ma" line you should only get Ad Lib sound, but I'm not sure.

SW: Let's go back to the business of developing for high-end systems. Isn't that limiting your audience?

EH: It's a continual source of internal debate, and very much a double-edged sword. Obviously, we wouldn't be in business if there weren't enough people with high-end equipment, but there aren't as many as we would like. What we're trying to figure out now is how to maintain that cutting-edge feel, but also find a way to include the market segments that our products now exclude. I'll personally be looking into ways in which we can include the lower-end machines and still have a kick-ass product.

A lot of flight-sim fans have complained about *Pacific Strike*, but no one's really given Origin a chance to say what went wrong — until now. Scott gets the facts from *Strike*'s producer.

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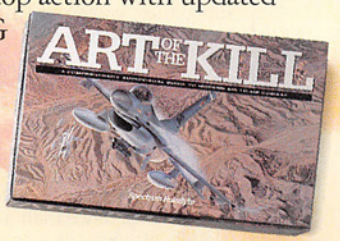
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Portrait of the Artist as a Young Kid

Heidi E. H. Aycock



"Control Central, this is Agent 409 outfitted for duty. I've got my Nirvana T-shirt, my holey jeans, and my electronic dictionary of slang tucked inside my Doc Martens. I'm ready for anything. Prepared for any challenge. I'm certain I can infiltrate that mysterious subculture, known as KIDS. Stand by for my report."

Five minutes later, Agent 409 is recognized for what she is: an adult. The agent's dossier is filed next to the Crosby, Stills, & Nash reunion album in the Old Geezer section of the CD Boutique. Mission failed.

It takes more than a few friendly attempts at teen spirit to corner the market on software for kids and young adults. It takes subtlety. It takes respect, and a close examination of the culture. You can't just drop names or spew out jargon; you have to create a whole environment that reflects what kids like.

For young kids, this is pretty easy. First of all, most preschoolers like what their parents like (except when it comes to food). That's probably because most young children are only exposed to what their parents wish to expose them to. This age group is also pretty transparent, so you can tell quickly where you've hit and where you've missed. They giggle and grin at the good stuff and walk away from the yucky stuff. Still, you have to include the right characters, lots of visual stimulation, and plenty of sound and music.



***Kid Pix 2*'s slideshow module lets you animate your own stories.**

Older kids are a different species altogether. A double agent would have to work long hours to discover the key to this group. Teenagers are too independent to like what older adults like, and they're too cool to gush and giggle over what they enjoy. It's hard to read the child who's declaring his or her independence from parental direction.

In an effort to engage both age groups, three companies have produced graphics software packages that feature more than good drawing and painting tools. **Broderbund**, **MicroGrafx**, and **Microsoft** have all released programs that can hang with the kids for a good long while. Unlike Agent 409, these companies have successfully infiltrated the subculture — and integrated the experience into their graphics programs.

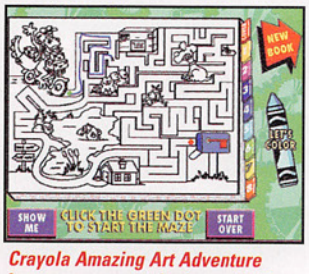
Broderbund's *Kid Pix 2* is an upgrade of the groundbreaking *Kid Pix* program. The biggest difference between the earlier version and *Kid Pix 2* is the Slide Show module, which allows you to display pictures with sound effects and special transitions (screen wipes, fades, and so on). A simpler, but perhaps more important, addition is the Draw Me option, which offers inspiration for art projects. The program suggests such subjects as "a sneakered centipede in a lemonade swimming pool" or "a flying sea otter with a hundred toes and a pickle in my nose and I howl at the moon." Otherwise, the program is similar to the first version.

Like *Kid Pix 2*, MicroGrafx's new Crayola series of graphics programs offers drawing and painting tools. Of special note are the Crayola markers, which leave translucent color on the screen. So you can draw a yellow mark and then a blue one over it, and at their intersection, the mark is green.

As you might expect, the main focus of the Crayola series is on coloring activities. For example, *Crayola Art Studio* gives you a badge-maker, a certificate-maker, and a note-paper-maker, which your kids customize by coloring them to suit their tastes. *Crayola Amazing Art Adventure* features a wide variety of different coloring books, with content ranging from mazes to color-by-number puzzles.

Microsoft's *Fine Artist* aims at an older audience than either the Broderbund or MicroGrafx packages. It places more emphasis on the actual art and craft of drawing, and it includes two tutorials: one teaches how to use drawing tricks to reproduce images, and the other teaches how to use *Fine Artist*'s special tools to create depth and exploit perspective. The program also explains such technical concepts as vanishing points and negative space.

Each program includes special effects. *Fine Artist*, for example, has animated stickers such as a charging rhinoceros that runs across the screen when you click on it. *Kid Pix 2* packs animation in through Wacky TV clips that you can paste into your picture. Both programs allow you to apply musical themes to your work as well and, like the other programs, the Crayola series has associated a different sound effect for each tool.



***Crayola Amazing Art Adventure* features mazes and other activities you can play and color.**

The interfaces are all simple to navigate. Each icon is fairly easy to understand, even though none is common to all programs. For example, the Undo icon in *Kid Pix 2* is a hospital van. In the Crayola series, it's a band aid. In *Fine Artist*, it is a bird hatching out of an egg — something you can't undo. The help features in each program make these icons clear, even when they're meanings aren't obvious.

For all their similarities, however, each program relies on a different strength. *Kid Pix*

Heidi, who moves easily between the worlds of the teenage rollerblader and the educational theorist, takes a look at four graphics packs that break through the generation gap to teach future young artists.



Crayola Art Studio **includes features like this one for designing and printing individualized certificates.**

of the three, and doesn't *require* any creativity at all — though it doesn't actually squelch invention or experimentation, either. The coloring book pages can be embellished beyond recognition, but they don't really cry out for anything more than simple coloring.

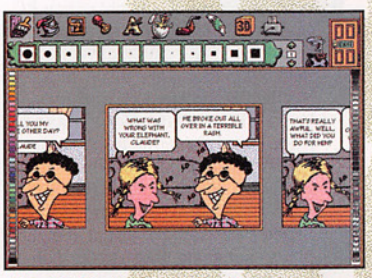
From an educational viewpoint, I've never been that impressed by electronic coloring books — mainly because they don't come anywhere near the experience of coloring in paper books, and the motor skills that activity fosters. If you want the page to look good in a computer coloring book, you just use the paint bucket. And then, the only creative exercise is in choosing colors for the page — and this won't get your creative heart-rate much over its resting pulse. On the other hand, you could use the excellent crayon or marker tools included in the Crayola series but it's almost too difficult to stay inside the lines while coloring with a mouse (at least it was for me). The notion of moving your mouse on a mouse pad to color a far-removed area onscreen can be difficult for youngsters to grasp, and makes coloring hard to enjoy or follow.

In contrast, Microsoft's *Fine Artist* actually helps your creativity blossom. It teaches artistic techniques as well as encouraging you to jump off from where the program's examples end. For example, rather than filling in the blanks that someone else left on a certificate or a coloring book page, you can create comic strips with your own jokes and funny storylines.

Probably the most striking feature of each program, though, is its style. Each program addresses its audience on an appropriate level: *Kid Pix 2* and the Crayola series sit right down on the floor the preschoolers they target, rather than instructing them from on high. They have the right amount of sophisticated humor and cool presentation to hold the interest of elementary-school children, too. The dynamite erasers that explode errors, the rock 'n' roll guitar sounds, and other details make the programs fit into a young child's life as well as Power Rangers T-shirts and fast food restaurant playgrounds.

But, like I said, young kids are pretty easily pleased. It's the teenagers that are *really* tough to convince, and Microsoft has tackled this challenge admirably with *Fine Artist*. The program looks like it was de-signed by artists from Nickelodeon and MTV. McZee, one of the characters who guides you through the program, has a nose that looks like it's on the verge of sneezing up something truly disgusting. The style of drawing — from the characters to the program icons — reminds me of early Matt Groening cartoons, and the language in the pro-mpts and tutorials sounds like something you'd hear if you could be a fly on the wall at the skateboard park. Older kids and young adults will find as friendly an environment here as young kids find in *Kid Pix 2* and the Crayola series.

Of the two programs directed at younger kids, *Kid Pix 2* is the winner. It offers more flexibility and encourages more creativity. Both *Kid Pix 2* and the Crayola series feature a lot more canned art than tools for exploring the blank page, but *Kid Pix 2* is more open-ended. Its tools are also a little more clearly labeled, so you can easily predict what each will do. For a child who likes electronic coloring books the Crayola series would be a treat.



Fine Artist **lets you create your own rad comics and jokes.**

For the kids who wear headphones everywhere they go, Microsoft's *Fine Artist* will be a rad (or is that fresh?) choice. Microsoft should be applauded for its innovative style, its useful tools, and its inspirational modules that teach and provoke older kids to pursue more complex projects from scratch.

All three programs are a study in atmosphere and timeliness. Sure, you could give kids a bare-bones drawing program — just like you could give them generic T-shirts. But they'd prefer something that speaks to *them*. They want a program that takes their interests and tastes seriously, a graphics environment that validates their sense of humor and their sense of creativity — and these companies have devised just such programs. Thank goodness they didn't count on Agent 409 to get the goods on the kids, though. I think her next assignment will be an investigation of the seamy side of Karaoke bars.

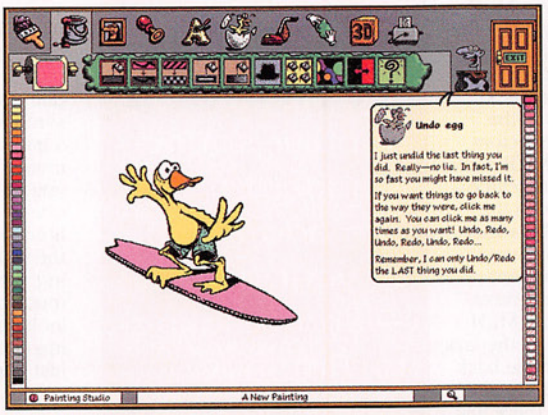
PCG

> **"Sure, you could give kids a bare-bones drawing program — but they'd prefer something that speaks to *them*."**

Broderbund hasn't included the most sophisticated drawing tools, but they may be the most motivational. I found it difficult to reproduce a set of identical squares, but I didn't regret the time I spent trying.

All three programs include pictures that you can color, but Crayola has stretched the idea of the coloring book to the limit with a huge collection of books that you could only find on a computer. Besides mazes and puzzles, some of these coloring books let you mix and match pictures to develop new images. For example, one book lets you choose different heads, torsos, and legs to make your own monsters. In another, you can choose different styles for the front, middle, and back of trucks.

Still, the Crayola series is the most static *2* is a constant inspiration. Because it's friendly and encouraging, a child who might be afraid to draw on a blank page finds all kinds of ways to get started. And the drawing tools themselves are fun to use. Just pick one of the wacky brushes — the one that looks like cracking ice, for example — and you'll wind up having to try them all. And then you'll get these ideas, like how you could draw a picture of Dorothy Hamill after six weeks of eating nothing but chocolate...



Microsoft's *Fine Artist* includes fun icons and engaging, appropriately irreverent text. It's perfectly suited to its target audience.

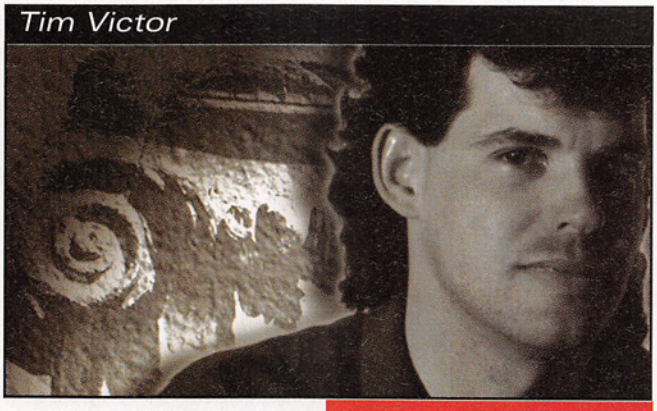
Crazy Little Thing Called MIDI

MIDI is a very successful standard for connecting electronic musical instruments to computers and to each other, and MIDI ports have been a standard part of synthesizers and electronic keyboards for over ten years. Since the original Sound Blaster card, MIDI interface hardware has also been on nearly every PC sound board. But, as important as it is in the musical world, MIDI is still something of a mystery to most PC owners.

If you have *Doom*, take a look at the menus in its setup program (and if you don't have a copy, go download it right now — you won't believe what you're missing!). You'll see two separate menus that control the game's sound — one menu for sound effects and another for music. The Sound FX menu selects a device to play the game's voices, footsteps, gunshots and explosions. The choices include most popular sound cards and the PC's built-in speaker, but no MIDI devices are listed. That's because MIDI simply carries messages that describe the pitch of a musical note, the instrument sound used to play it, and when each note starts and stops. The sound effects come from sampled sounds — true digital audio, which MIDI wasn't designed to handle.

The options that do involve MIDI are found in the Music menu, which controls the device that will play the melodic, musical parts of the game's soundtrack. The sound cards are all listed again, since these cards all have some kind of a synthesizer chip to generate musical tones. But if you choose either "General MIDI" or "Sound Canvas," *Doom* will try to play its music on a separate, external synthesizer, controlling it by sending data through a MIDI port.

Selecting "General MIDI" tells the game that the synth conforms to the General MIDI standard, ensuring that it will translate MIDI program numbers into the correct instrument sounds — something the original MIDI standard didn't cover. Almost every current synthesizer supports General MIDI, whether or not the synthesizer includes a built-in keyboard. (A synthesizer with no keyboard is sometimes called a tone module. Tone modules are instruments that can't be played directly — they can only be controlled via MIDI.) The Roland Sound Canvas is a popular General MIDI-compatible tone module, but it also supports additional instrument sounds and tone controls be-yond the General MIDI spec. When "Sound Canvas" is selected, *Doom* uses the additional features in its soundtrack.



Tim Victor

While practically every sound card includes MIDI interface circuitry, most of them need an extra adapter kit to actually use the MIDI port. Cards usually route the MIDI signals through extra pins in the joystick port connector, and the adapter kit takes these signals to the round, five-pin connectors used on standard MIDI cables. The decision to not include MIDI connectors with the sound card might be a cost-cutting measure in a very competitive market; connectors are probably the most expensive part of the MIDI interface. But with all the jacks and ports found on the back of a PC sound card, it's also a practical matter — there just isn't any room there for more connectors on most cards.

So, to play music on a synthesizer through a MIDI port, a game has to be able to operate the sound-card port's hardware. There are a few de facto standards for compatible MIDI ports, but the most important standard — by far — is the Roland MPU-401 interface. Although some feature-rich music composition programs support dozens of different interface types (including the original Sound Blaster MIDI port), if you want to ensure that a MIDI port will work with the greatest number of games, including *Doom*, MPU-401 compatibility is the ticket. The original MPU-401 card was simply a MIDI interface — MIDI was all it did — but MPU-401 compatible MIDI ports are now found on many sound cards, including some varieties of Sound Blaster 16 and Pro Audio 16 cards.

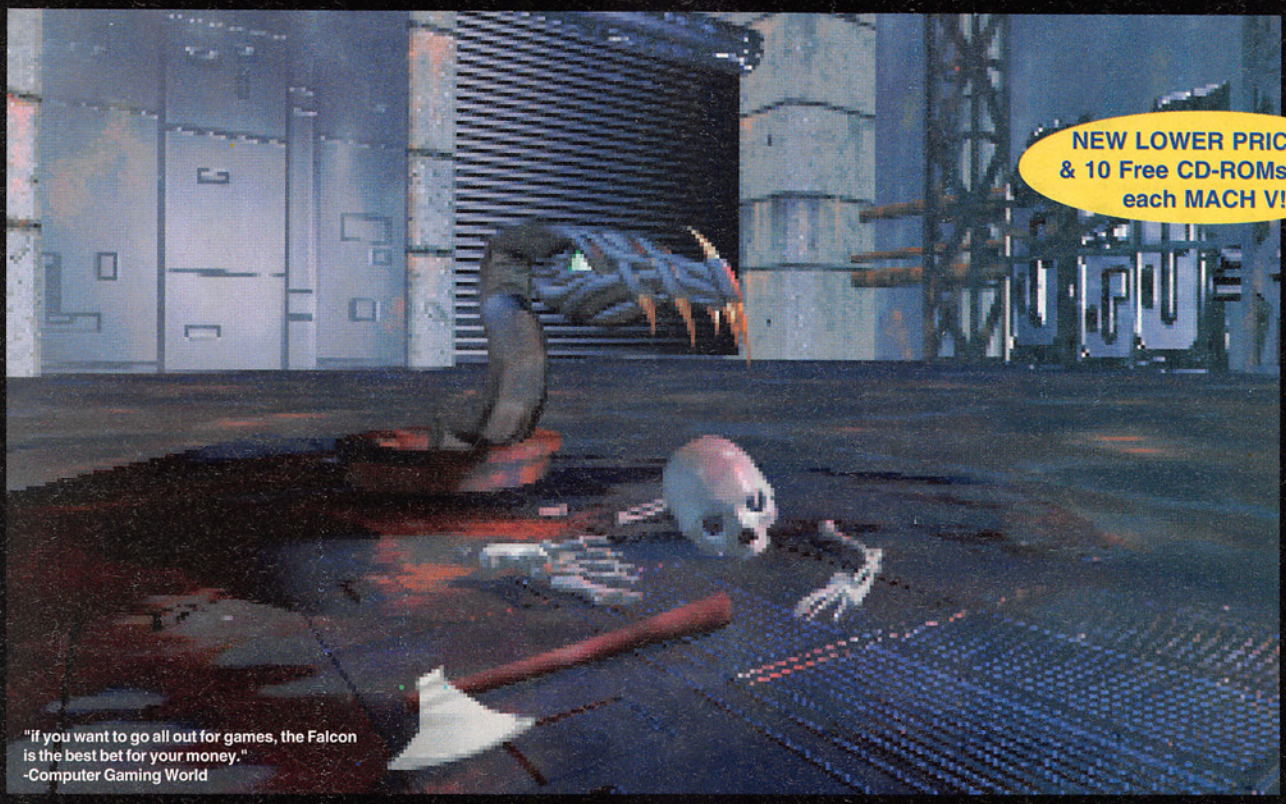
If Microsoft has its way and Windows becomes the standard environment for PC games, it'll certainly make MIDI support simpler. Even when a Windows program is using the music features that are built into a sound card, it still builds MIDI messages that describe the notes to be played. It passes these messages to a MIDI device driver — a software module supplied by the company — that makes the card and the driver either sends the messages through a real MIDI port to a synth or tone module, or it directly operates the sound card's synthesis chip to produce music. The program is none the wiser either way, and a single device driver lets the card work with every Windows program. There are already plenty of education and entertainment programs benefitting from this aspect of Windows, but it'll be a year or two before most games are being written to run under Windows, if indeed they ever are.

PC sound cards have come a long way in the past couple years, and the latest wavetable cards can produce music that rivals dedicated synthesizers. But at this point, true musical instruments still produce less noise and distortion, and have higher-quality instrument sounds than just about any sound card. And since composers often work with tone modules like the Roland Sound Canvas when they're creating computer game soundtracks, a MIDI synthesizer could let you hear a game more like the way its creators intended you to. If you don't listen through high-quality loudspeakers, or if you aren't at liberty to crank up the volume when you're playing, you probably won't notice much difference. But if you're looking for the ultimate gaming experience, MIDI music just might help you find it.

No, General MIDI wasn't the leader of some third-world coup attempt. It's a popular sound standard that can add a lot to your games — and thanks to Tim, now everyone can understand it.

PCG

Slow moving, "choppy" graphics cost lives.



If this guy owned a MACH V, he'd still be here.

It's a cruel fact of computer gaming: better graphics demand more computer power. Smoother animation requires a higher frame-rate. Your eyes can see 30 frames every second. If your computer is doing anything less, your aircraft won't roll smoothly, your axe will miss the dragon right in front of you, and your shotgun won't put a dent in the demons. And if you think today's games are demanding, just wait until you see tomorrow's!

The Falcon MACH V and MACH Vp are not your average computers. They were specifically designed with the needs of gamers in mind: extreme frame-rates, brutal amounts of CPU power, unreal hard disk transfer rates, and all of the multimedia and gaming extras that you'd normally have to add yourself. Sure, they're great for spreadsheets, word processing, and general business -- any computer can do that. When you're ready for something more, you're ready for a MACH V.

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STRATEGY CENTRAL

SOLUTIONS • TECHNIQUES • QUICK TIPS

We're back, with more of the info and strategies you need to beat your favorite games. We've got a whopping three pages of tips on MicroProse's killer strategy game *X-COM* — mainly because Trent's been playing the thing so much, we just *had* to make him do a bit of work for a change. Plus, we'll give you the low-down on *Serf City* and answer a software-winning question about *Companions of Xanth*.

Hope you like this month's enormous strategy coverage — and let's keep those letters coming! We want your questions and tips, and as always, the best letter to *Strategy Central* each month will win its writer a couple of free games!

Write to us at:
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E-Mail — peeceegee@aol.com

Be sure to include address and a daytime phone number with your strategy letter. Sorry, we can't answer each letter personally, but we read all of 'em.

X-Com: Stayin' Armed and Dangerous

If you're having trouble facing down those evil aliens in MicroProse's new strategy hit *X-Com*, don't worry — you aren't alone. As usual, *PC Gamer* is here to give you some helpful hints so you can start killin' those misguided E.T.s, and get on the path to final victory.



Picking a site for your base can be one of the most important decisions you'll have to make. Central Europe will provide quick access to several important funding countries.

The Basic Idea

Despite the fact that your basic goal in *X-Com* is to rid the Earth of the aliens permanently, you must keep the short-term defense of the planet in mind at all times. No matter how much progress you've made in researching the destructive alien lifeforms or in developing new technologies, you *will* lose the game if your benefactors don't feel that you're doing an A+ job of protecting their countries. At the same time, you must always remember that you're fighting a losing battle, and the quicker you uncover vital information about the location of the alien's strongholds and their long-term plans, the more likely you'll be to emerge victorious. The best way to achieve both of these goals is to open enough bases worldwide to be able to monitor and halt UFO activity all over the globe.

Your First Base

When choosing the location of your first base, you have to make the tough choice between quantity and quality. If you place your base in the U.S., you'll keep the biggest contributor to the *X-Com*



Right from the beginning, you should start adding necessary upgrades to your base. An alien containment facility and large radar system are of paramount importance.



Hire a few extra soldiers, but save most of your space for a team of scientists and engineers.

project happy, but will probably only be able to protect that one country. If you start your first base in central Europe, you may upset the U.S., but you will gain the goodwill of many contributing European countries. Either way, your first major goal should be the acquisition of enough money to open *another* base on whichever front you've left unprotected from the alien menace.

These first two bases should be major strongholds, with two hangars containing the latest strike aircraft your engineers can produce, and one with the best transport craft available. One of the first upgrades you'll want to add will be a large radar system, which will enhance your ability to detect UFO activity in your area. Each of your fortresses should also have as many scientists as you can support (I recommend shooting for about 50 at each site), and at least one fully stocked workshop with a complement of engineers. Having alien containment facilities at both centers will enable your scientists to extract vital information from captured foes, and without them you can't win the game. Finally, keep plenty of general storehouses around to hold all of the alien goods that you capture.

Once you have both of your centers up and running at full efficiency, you're ready to start expanding.

Expanding Your Territory

Once you've built your major bases, you'll need to start constructing several smaller strike sites that will expand your radar cover of the Earth. Start by placing your access lift in one corner of the screen, and build one hangar next to it. By keeping these two units close to each other and pushed into one corner of the game screen, you insure that if your base *is* invaded, you'll know exactly where the attacks are coming from. Each base should have one strike craft, a large radar system, living quarters with a small detachment of soldiers, and a general storage space. With these centers, you'll be able to see the big picture, shoot down more UFOs, and (most importantly) keep more countries happy and ensure their continued financial support.

Research and Build

You must keep your scientists working at a fevered pace at all times if you want to have any chance of keeping up with the increasingly difficult foes you'll face. Your first goal should be the production of a decent weapon for your soldiers. Have your scientists develop laser weapons, then laser pistols, and finally laser rifles for a high accuracy weapon that doesn't need reloading. By now you should have taken at least one UFO, so develop alien alloy technology and then immediately start working on personal armor, as it will keep your soldiers alive longer, which means better troops with higher morale.

Once you've taken care of your ground soldiers for the moment, start working on upgrading your aircraft with increased scientific efforts. First, research a plasma rifle taken from one of the enemy troops; next develop the plasma clip, which will give your engineers the ability to manufacture this high powered weapon. With these developments behind you, your scientists should be able to begin researching the plasma cannon, a long-range gun for your interceptors that will lay some massive damage on even your most dangerous foes.

With these resources under your belt, you'll be better equipped on ground missions, and you'll start bringing back some of the more complex alien artifacts. Research the alien power source and its mysterious fuel, Elerium 115. These two developments,



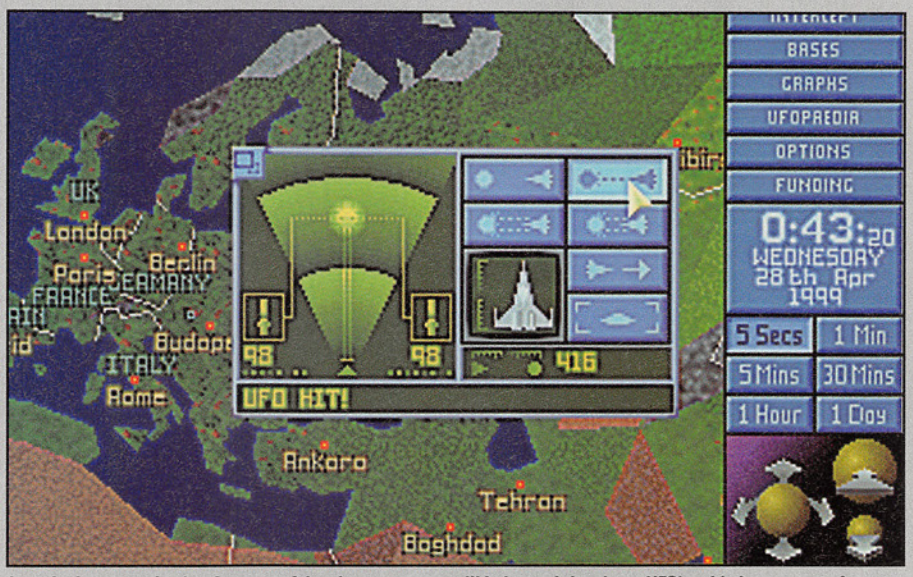
On the field, the best way to keep your soldiers alive is to use the famous buddy system. Pair your soldiers up, and then spread out.



The development of the laser rifle should be your first scientific goal. This quick, accurate weapon will become your pal.



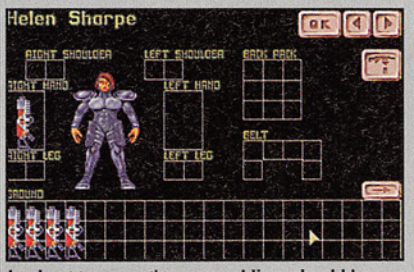
Once you've got a decent weapon, your next goal should be the protection of your soldiers. While it's not great, the personal armor will help keep your fighters strong.



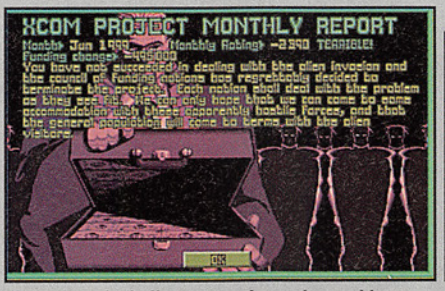
Later in the game, the development of the plasma cannon will help you bring down UFO's with the greatest of ease.



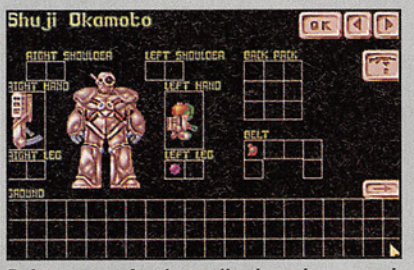
After researching alien origins, you *must* go to an alien base or a large UFO and capture a leader.



In about two months, your soldiers should be this well armed. Success hinges on your ability to run multiple missions without having to buy ammo, and keeping your characters alive long enough to get promotions.



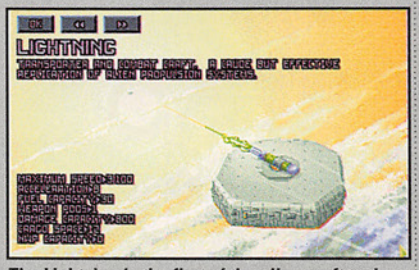
If you drop the ball too many times, the world will decide that dealing with aliens is probably a better bet than depending on you.



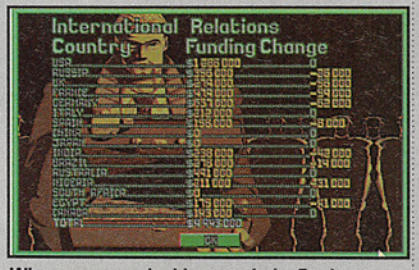
Before you set foot in an alien base, be appropriately armed . This soldier has a flying suit for protection, a heavy plasma gun for basic attacks and blowing through alien walls, and a launcher with stun bombs for capturing enemy leaders.



When your total income starts looking like this, you'd better improve your track record.



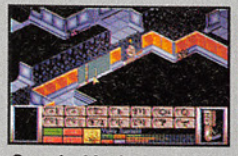
The Lightning is the first of the alien craft technologies that you'll develop. Keep in mind that every time you send it out, you'll burn up some Elerium 115.



When a country decides to quit the Earth alliance, your funding will receive a serious blow. Do your best to keep the other countries happy or you're on your way out.



When all your characters are ready, rush inside and stun anything that moves. If you aren't fast, the aliens will launch a suicide attack that'll leave both your troops *and* your enemies a mere pile of ashes.



Once inside the base, make tracks for this center unit. It should be easy to find, as every alien in the base will be attempting to protect it.



After fighting your way through the front door, go through a small corridor, and mass your troops outside.

along with your earlier design of the personal armor, will allow you to start researching the power suit — an incredibly useful defensive device that will have your soldiers living to ripe old ages — as long as they remain vigilant in battle. If at any time you manage to recover a stun bomb and small launcher from a spacecraft, immediately began research on these items. They'll be vital later in the game, when you're required to capture alien leaders.

After you've developed all of these items, you're on your own — but I recommend making the development of better aircraft a very high priority.

Stayin' in the Black

Keeping your bases properly funded — and making sure you have enough materials to produce the armaments you need — is the single most important continuing goal in the game. While the most effective way to ensure long-term financial success is to secure increased funding from the world's various governments, there are several other ways to generate cash. First off, every year or so start selling off excess alien artifacts and corpses that you've recovered from crash or terror sites. Keep only one of the devices or bodies you can't use: That way you'll get a lot of money, but you'll still be able to research those items when your scientists need the technology. Be careful not to sell any alien alloys or Elerium 115, though — both resources are *very* valuable to your production efforts later in the game, and can be very hard to come by.

Another way to generate cash is to make sure that your engineers are never idle. If you don't need any items produced at a given time, have your engineers start producing an item that doesn't require any special materials (I recommend the laser rifle), and then sell the completed items on the open market. You'll find that you make a handsome profit on each item you manufacture and sell, and it's a good way to ensure that you're getting value for those hefty salaries you're paying your engineers.

In the Heat of Battle

No matter how you play, the game will eventually come down to how well you do in a fight. Here are a few basic tips to help keep you alive on the battlefield.

•**Better Safe Than Sorry** — Be Careful! If you don't think you have enough moves to go around that corner *and* shoot, wait until the next turn. Order your characters to duck at the end of each round, to keep them from being such easy targets. Always remember, the longer your soldiers live, the more likely they are to be promoted, and the better they'll perform in your next fight.

•**Prepare For The Worst** — No matter how good you are, you're probably going to lose a fight sooner or later. By keeping one character on your plane, you can ensure that your loss won't also cost you the time and money of buying a new aircraft. If all of the rest of your soldiers are dead, use the abort mission icon to explore the "better part of valor."

•**Use Opportunity Shots** — The opportunity shot function is extremely useful for personnel you've stationed outside guarding a ship, and for everyone when you're at a terror site. Save a few moves each turn, and try to keep each of your soldiers pointed in a different direction.

•**Know Your Enemy** — When given a choice, try to kill the most dangerous opponents first, then move to the others. For example, when you see a Floater and a Reaper — two aliens that often travel together — try to kill the Floaters first, as they're capable of firing at you from a distance. Anytime that you see a Crysloid, make killing them *quickly* your top priority. If left alone, these fiends will turn civilians and even your own troops into a Zombie army.

•**Stay Well Armed** — As soon as you can, try to develop the technology of plasma rifles and heavy plasma guns. Not only will this make you more damaging in your initial onslaught, but it also increases your chances of picking up weaponry from fallen alien soldiers.

•**Don't Go Overboard** — When using explosives like proximity mines, grenades, alien grenades, or blaster launchers, remember that their area effect may catch your soldiers or innocent civilians in the blast. In addition, keep in mind that blowing up certain areas inside an alien ship may destroy important artifacts that you could have researched for your own benefit.

•**Take 'Em Alive** — If it's possible to use a stun rod or a stun bomb to take an alien alive without endangering your crew, go ahead and do it. You'll get more information from a living example of a species, and you may even gather information about alien ship designs and psionic weaponry.

Companions of Xanth: Mystified by Magic?

Letter of the Month

Now that Legend's *Companions of Xanth* has been released on CD-ROM, we've had a surge of letters asking for tips on getting started in this sometimes-frustrating puzzler.

Dear PC Gamer,

I recently purchased a copy of Companions of Xanth on CD. Though I had some trouble, I found my way into Xanth, and out of the first cavern. Now I'm stuck!!! I know that I have to pour water on those censors, but the lamp covers don't seem to do the trick, and that pail just runs away from me. Please help! I'd like to see more than just the beginning of this game.

Paula Maston
via E-mail

OK, Paula, your answer is a pretty long one, so let's get started. The first thing you have to do is to get hold of that pail. Go to the man standing in front of the village gate, and tell him that you'll help the town out of their troubles. He'll give you a key that opens the gate, giving you access to the dock and ship. Ask Nada to see what's on the end of the rope, and she'll bring you an anchor. Take the anchor back to the stream and use it to pry a log out of the log jam. Carry the log to the woodwright, and he'll fashion it into a plank for you. Now get the rock from in front of the village, and carry all these items to the next screen, to the right of the front of the village. Use the plank on the large boulder you see there, and put the rock on the end of it. Ask Nada to hit the catapult with her tail and the rock will sail off-screen. When you walk to the next screen you'll find the pail unable to move because it has been weighed down by the stone.

Unfortunately, the pail won't immediately solve any of your problems. The next step is to talk to the Fairy Nuff.

Walking down the trail that the pail was on, you come to a door that has a large eye on it. A bit rude, the door won't open and even refuses to tell you much about what's behind it. The door isn't really all that bad, and if you'll just tell it about your mission, he'll let you through his screen. Pick up the golf tee, and then take another step forward and get the large egg that's in the hole. One more step will take you to the booth of the Fairy Nuff. Tell him of the village's problems, and he'll give you a list of ingredients he needs to make a solution. Here are the locations for the ingredients:

- **Eye Scream (2)** — In front of the door with the big eye, to the right side of the screen.
- **Butter** — Pick a buttercup from the log-jam screen, and then pick the butter off of it.
- **Water (3 pints)** — Select your pail, and then fill it three times from the stream.
- **Cough Drops (2)** — Go to the screen with the coughing bush and tangle tree, and ask Nada to get you a drop. After she collects one for you, ask her again.
- **Firefly** — Use the buttercup that's left over from your butter trip, and use it on the fireflies that buzz around the log jam screen.
- **Large Egg** — From the golf course. If you're following these instructions, you have it.
- **Fragment of the Censorship** — This is the piece of sailcloth that you should have picked up from the dock in the village.

When you've placed all of these ingredients into the pail, take the mixture back to the Fairy Nuff. He will tell you to go to the village and douse the censors. Remember to get both of them, and then head back to the woodwright's shop. If you've done everything correctly, you'll be presented with a very useful prize for your troubles. From here on out the game gets a little weird, so save your game frequently and don't place too much trust in any of your companions.



With all of the pieces in place, just ask Nada to smack that board with her serpent tail. The flying rock will end your troubles with the elusive pail.



Sure he dresses a little, umm, radically. But the Fairy Nuff is an alchemist supreme. Pick up the ingredients he asks for, and you'll be able to save the village from certain censorship — always a good idea.



A lot happens in this area. Toward the back is the log jam, where you'll get the raw materials for your board. The yellow blurs to the back-right are the buttercups, and that strange swarm is the fireflies.



He may not be the most humorous guy you'll meet, but the woodwright will be a big help in solving this first problem. Bring him a log, and ask him to shape it into a board for you.



The coughing bush is a pretty easy puzzle to solve. Tell Nada what you need, and she'll be more than happy to dive right over and get some cough drops for you.



By placing all of the different food producers together near the center of your kingdom, you ensure that the all-important food supply is both efficient and well-protected.

Serf City: How to Have a Good Knight's Reap

While ruling your own kingdom may sound like it's all banquets and taxing the peasants, in SSI's *Serf City* it can be a big headache. Those banquets are pretty skimpy when the food is scarce, and if your mines aren't efficient, the peasants don't have any gold for you to take anyway. Just to make things worse, those greedy neighbors of yours want to make your land their own. If it's all getting to be too much, let *PC Gamer* act as your trusted advisor with tips and hints on getting started on the royal road to victory.

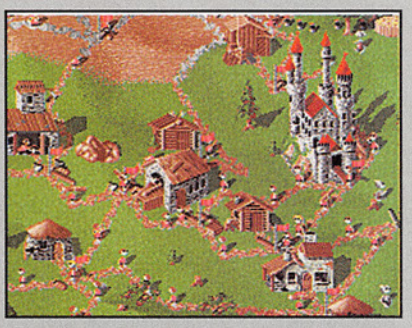
•Pick your castle with care — The initial placement of your castle cannot be undone, so pick a spot that offers everything you'll need in the foreseeable future. Consult the geologist before making your final decision, to find out if the ground has the minerals you'll need to build other structures. Try to find a location that's close to a body of water, so your kingdom can generate some quick food by hiring fisherman. Lastly, make sure that there's a nearby forest or you won't be able to get the wood necessary for building without sending your lumberjacks far from home.

•Watch your base resources — Once they start, your woodcutters take their jobs pretty seriously. After a while, what *could* have been a majestic forest will be reduced to a field of stumps. To prevent this, make sure that for every woodcutter you hire, you also hire a forest ranger. The rangers will roam around planting little trees to ensure that you'll have wood for the future.

•Plan for the future — Things like wheat and pig farms will take a lot of time before they start producing anything, so build them as soon as you can. To keep your miners fed in the meantime, make sure that you have a couple of fishermen working the banks of a nearby water source. When selecting locations for your buildings, try to keep the wheat farm next to the pig farm, and put the mill and bakery on the other side. Build a butcher shop opposite of the pig farm, and you'll be able to move goods from one stage of production to the next very quickly.

•Expand with caution — Each time you place a guard post of any kind, your territory will expand a little bit. Though it may seem like you've just opened up a great expanse of land just ripe for expansion, rushing in isn't a good idea. Try to keep your new structures pretty close to your existing guard outposts; if you build far away, enemies will erect their own posts nearby, and probably send your far-flung structures up in smoke as the other kingdom grows.

•Change your knight setup — Until you start getting into the later levels of the game, you'll want to change the default setting for how the computer sends out attacking knights. From the statistics menu, select the picture of the stampeding knight, and change the default setting on knight menu. From then on, your weaker knights will stay in your buildings, while the stronger knights go out to do battle. This will not only make you more likely to win your fights, but also improve the skills of the knights you leave at home. As the computer opponent becomes more aggressive, you may want to change the setting back and leave some strong knights to defend your fortresses.



Try to keep an eye on your enemy's advancement, and launch preemptive strikes when they get to close to your land.



If your foes build an encampment too close to your land, their territory grows, and they may destroy any of your nearby buildings .



Build your mines as close as possible to a foundry, so that ore can be made into workable steel. If possible, place your toolmaker and blacksmith right next to the foundry.



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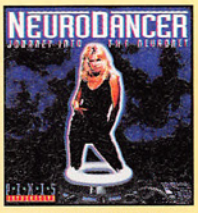


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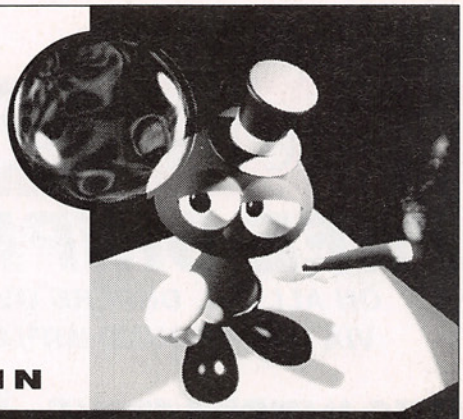
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PC GAMER LETTERS

Most of the letters this month focus on the second issue of PC GAMER, but believe it or not we're still getting feedback on the premiere issue. And it may seem like we've loaded this column down with only letters that praised the mag, but in all honesty we went out of our way to run letters with suggestions and criticisms.

Oh, yeah — if you don't write, you miss out on your chance to be chosen Letter of the Month and win some free games.

So you want a free game?

Write to us at:
Letters
PC Gamer,
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Greensboro, NC 27407
E-Mail — peeceegee@aol.com
(Be sure to include a daytime phone number.)

Letter of the Month

[redacted]

June 5, 1994

PC GAMER
300-A S. Westgate Dr.
Greensboro, NC 27407

Dear PC GAMER:

I recently received issue #2 of PC GAMER.

Can't believe it! Just when I thought PC GAMER was already tops, you outdo yourselves by making numerous changes so that it's even more entertaining!

When I open my mail box to find another new issue, I can't wait to read your great reviews on new software titles. You always hit the mark.

And let's not forget the disk included each month!

Finding the review of MegaRace very interesting, I ran out and bought it the very next day. Practically everything Stephen Poole said about it in his excellent review proved to be true.

Guess you already figured out by now that I enjoy all aspects of your magazine. I'm glad to see it published monthly. That's one reason I'm writing. Read each first letter of every line to see another.

Sincerely,

Sam Dahir

[redacted]

Now that's what we'd call above and beyond the call of duty!

Blinded By The Art

Dear Sirs,

I would just like to congratulate you on the second edition of PC GAMER! All the Scoops, features, and reviews really blew me away, and I'm really excited to know that *Wing Commander III* is on the way.

Just one piece of advice, though: Sometimes parts of your magazine are a bit hard to read because of little illustrations or background designs (see issue 2 pages 39-46, for instance). I know you guys are just trying to be creative, but I'd rather be able to read your great articles about flight sims or whatever than just admire them from a distance.

Keep up the good work,
Ronnie Rivera
Virginia Beach, VA

Thanks for the input, Ronnie. You're absolutely right that the illustrations and artwork should enhance a story rather than dominate it, and that was our intention with the Flight Sim feature. Unfortunately, the intensity of the background image was increased during the printing process, making the text difficult to read. We apologize for the inconvenience and want to assure you that we're doing everything we can to make the entire magazine both imore informative and more attractive.

I Trusted You... And Look What You Did

Dear PC Gamer,

OK, I'd like some free games, so here's my first try for Letter of the Month. I just finished reading issue 2. Great cover! The features and Scoop departments were great. I think it was a terrific move to expand the Eyewitness department as well. One of the main reasons that *PC Gamer* is the only computer gaming magazine I subscribe to is that, unlike your main computer gaming magazine competitor

(who think the world of their publication) you show so many color screenshots of the games you review.

I appreciate your adding a CD-ROM logo to point out CD-ROM games, but how about having a separate section for CD-ROM games? Listing the developer and publisher of each game is very useful information, but how about adding their BBS and phone numbers (especially if they have a toll-free number)? Actually, what would be really neat is if you had an evolving list of publishers with their BBS and phone numbers appearing in each issue. What a reference tool that would be!

One more suggestion before I tell you about my gripe. I think fans would enjoy one monthly, in-depth interview with the likes of Roberta Williams and Richard Garriott. Not necessarily about a specific game, but what they're up to, their views on the industry, their future plans and, oh, alright, maybe a little info on their upcoming games.

Here's the gripe. I bought *MegaRace* on CD-ROM, which was reviewed in issue 2, based on the reviewer's recommendation and the fact that it got a score of 83%. I'm really unhappy with the game. What Mr. Poole failed to point out is that it gets very monotonous very quickly. The salesman at my local software store told me about this, but I didn't listen because my faith was with *PC Gamer*. I've got a suggestion: How about having two reviewers on every game review, just like Siskel and Ebert on movies? That way we would have more than one opinion to base our purchases on.

Keep on gaming,
Jason Wood,
San Marcos, CA

Believe it or not, we've discussed many of the suggestions you've made, and intend to implement most of them. In future issues we'll include the phone number for each company that's mentioned, whether it's in a review, feature story, or the Eyewitness section. As far as interviews go, that's a good idea, and one we've incorporated to some extent in the Scoops! section. Still, up-close profiles are are nice, and you can expect them in future issues.

Regarding the MegaRace *review, we thought it was a fair rating, for a couple of reasons. First, Steve did point out in the Highs and Lows that except for the different tracks, there wasn't much variety in gameplay. Also, he noted that it had a life even after you were through with it — perfect for PC gaming novices to try out. It's arcade-action to be sure, and those types of game usually don't offer a lot of variety. Put it this way — Steve sure didn't get much else done while he was working on that review!*

There are two reasons we don't feel the need for two reviewers for each game. First, we assign reviews according to game type — wargames are reviewed by wargamers, simulations by sim fans, and so forth — and each one is very experienced in their field. Second, we all check out every game anyway, then discuss the final rating. It's almost like having three or four reviewers — you just don't see 'em, that's all.

How Good Is Good Enough?

Dear Editor,

Could you please tell me, in your opinion, what would be the current "dream machine" for playing computer games? I mean the specifications — i.e. motherboard, processor, Cache RAM, VESA Local Bus or PCI, hard drive, CD-ROM, sound card and speakers, graphics card (for DOS & Windows performance), monitor, joystick, modem, etc...? Also, what about a memory manager?

Jared Wills
Riverside, CA

You've probably already spotted our "Dream Machine" feature in this issue. Hope it helps you in making those tough buying decisions!

Is There Life After V-J Day?

Dear PC Gamer,

I just completed *Pacific Strike* from Origin, and I'm disappointed. The graphics were great, the sound good, and the gameplay first rate, but the ending was a let down. After spending a couple weeks' worth of evenings proving my mettle against the Japanese navy and air force, I'm left with an abrupt ending. If you succeed in the game, you see an animated scene of the Japanese surrendering; after that the credits roll, the game ends, and you're left wondering, "What happened to my character?" I feel that if I manage to get my character all the way through the game, there should be more of a payoff at the end. I'm looking forward to playing *Wings of Glory*, but I hope Origin doesn't leave my character stranded once again.

Sincerely,
James P. Altizer,
San Angelo, TX

While a big reward for completing a game is always nice, it's hard to imagine how it would be handled in a game like Pacific Strike. *About all we could think of to tack on at the end of a game like that one is the sort of thing you see in movies — you know, a still shot of a character and some text telling what happened to them later in life. And if Origin did that, it might conflict with the storyline they're working on for your character for* Korean Strike *(just kidding).*

Seriously, you might want to drop Origin a line and tell them how you feel. We know for a fact that they read all the mail on their games, and if they think your complaint is valid they'll surely consider it for Wings of Glory.

The Rebellion Strikes Back

Dear PC Gamer,

I want to start by telling you that I have subscriptions to two other computer game magazines besides yours, and frequently pick up two additional mags from my local Babbages. Yours is my favorite. I love the idea of the cover disk, although I wish you'd put better games on them. (I know this may be just my opinion, but I hated *Theme Park*, and didn't even bother trying *Sink or Swim*. I thought *Pinball Fantasies* was OK.)

I appreciate the fact that you don't lighten up when reviewing games. If a company thinks that they can add something like full-motion video to a game and it'll be a hit, I'm glad that you're there to tell them they're wrong. And I really enjoy your new format. It's easy to read, while providing a lot of thorough, in-depth information about a variety of different games.

Although I do have a lot of praise for you, there's something that's been bugging me for a long time now. The game *Rebel Assault* from LucasArts is so underrated I can't stand it! If you ask me, it's the best game ever made. It surpasses *Doom* for total experience, *X-Wing* for realism, and *The 7th Guest* for graphics. I just don't see how you can continue to talk down such an excellent game. The graphics and sound are simply amazing. I know this could be taken as the biased opinion of a long-time Star Wars fan, but I still can't find any fault in the game, except that the passwords are only given after every third level. I just can't see how you could not love this game.

I know my letter probably won't change your minds, but I hope that *Rebel Assault* at least makes it to your Top 40 list in issue 3. Again, thanks for a great magazine!

Mike Chesnut,
Kentwood, MI

P.S. Just so you know what I'm comparing Rebel assault to, here are my top 10 PC games of all time, in order: *Rebel Assault, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, X-Wing, Doom, King's Quest VI, Return to Zork, MegaRace, Inca, Wolfenstein 3D,* and *NHL Hockey*. These are all games that I've played again and again, long after beating them. I hope to

see them all in your Top 40 list in the next issue!

By the time you read this, Mike, you'll already know that we included five of your ten in our Top 40, with another in our runner-up list (41 through 50, really), so we share at least some of the same tastes. Rebel Assault, *however, isn't one of them. We'll be the first to admit that* Rebel Assault *looks and sounds great, but we feel that it just doesn't cut it when it comes to game play, even without the sort of joystick calibration problems other players have reported. And what's a game without gameplay?*

This Month's Most Blatantly Flattering Letter

Dear crew at PC Gamer,

Browsing through the PC games magazines at my local Software Etc. two days ago, I came across your first issue. It looked lonely somehow, and a bit disheveled, cover torn (beneath the plastic wrapping if you can believe it) and slightly bent, as if people had tried to peek inside the mag by bending the pages within the plastic packaging. Still, I considered it. Having a demo inside only made me think that the magazine was cheap, and needed the software to support it. After all, most of the demos in magazines are (in my opinion) crap.

Taking a closer look, I saw the cool screenshot of the bloody skull from *Harvester*. Now this is a game that I personally can't wait for (I love horror books, games etc.), and hadn't seen any game screens until then. It may seem stupid to some people, but I bought the magazine almost completely because of that preview. Besides, it was the last issue on the rack, so I guessed it must be so popular that it had sold out quickly.

Boy, was I right. Once I opened it and read the first few pages, I knew I was experiencing something much more than any other PC games magazine on the market could offer. THIS MAGAZINE IS THE BEST! You couldn't possibly add anything more — it's that awesome. It topped my old favorite PC games mag, and I thought that was impossible. Owning a wimpy 386SX-25, I found the system requirements key extremely useful, and is something I think lesser magazines should adopt immediately. No one wants to read a review of a great game and still have to ask, "But will it run on my machine?!"

The *Doom* feature was great too, and the Eyewitness section gloriously long. The Scoops were also excellent, and you even introduced me to a new game — *Noctropolis* — that topped my yearning for *Harvester*. What an awesome looking game!

The reviews were the meat-and-potatoes of the mag, as they always should be, and have yet to be surpassed by anyone else. That's about all the praise I an give out right now — after all, I've got to go and mail my subscription in. I'm just sorry I never picked up a copy of *PC Entertainment* (my Software Etc. didn't seem to get it). Anyway, I know who's on top of the gaming scene now.

Yours,
Andrew Acerbo,
Larchmont, NY

Wow! Thanks much, Andrew. We're genuinely excited about this industry, and appreciate your enthusiasm for the book. In fact, letters like yours drive us to come up with even more exciting stories and different angles on games. Stick with us — we're just getting started!

It Doesn't Work That Way!

Dear PC Gamer,

I just bought your May/June issue, and would like to accept your gracious offer of a free game (as per the first page of the letters column, page 115). Thank you in advance! Best wishes, and good luck in the future with the new magazine.

Scott Lee Coward,
Moose Jaw, Sask., Canada

Good try, Scott, but you're gonna have to do a little more than that. Check out our winner this month, for example.

Don't Do Me Like That

Dear PC Gamer,

Well, it's 12:34 am and I've just finished reading through my first issue of your new magazine, and overall I'm real pleased. The appearance, layout, and quality of the various features, Scoops, reviews, departments and so on, including the disk, was very good, and the overall breadth of technical information made it very enjoyable to read. The reviews were excellent, the rating block in the lower right is very good, and I did not seem to have any trouble seeing "CD-ROM" in the upper portion of the appropriate pages. If you can keep this level of quality up, you'll definitely earn my loyalty.

But (there's always one somewhere, huh?) I do have a few constructive criticisms, which I inject only as a friend, and not as some maniac who can't be satisfied no matter what you guys do. I'm already pleased with your work. However, here goes...

You were a little misleading when you said on your cover "Inside: the Complete Guide to Flight Sims." I was left with the impression that I'd find "everything you ever wanted to know about everything that ever flew" inside, but in fact it was mainly a very good historical overview of flight sims, and while some were described in great detail, including run-downs of the quality of the graphics, the variety of play, plane types, add-ons, quirks and hardware requirements, others, like Three-Sixty's *Megafortress* and LucasArts *X-Wing*, got a scant overview mention. Perhaps, with space requirements being what they are, the article was all it could be. But for me it fell just a little bit short of expectations.

Happy gaming!
Jerry Mead
Pekin, IN

When we started work on the Flight Sim feature, we knew it was gonna be a bear — but even we didn't know how many flight sims had been published in the past eight or nine years! Sorry if you couldn't get the info on a couple of products, but as you mentioned the space constraints meant we couldn't go into full detail on every game. If you have a question on a specific title, though, drop us a line (preferably E-Mail), and we'll help you out as much as possible.

The Waiting Is The Hardest Part

Hi PC Gamer,

Being a devoted Star Wars fan, I'm eagerly awaiting the release of LucasArts' *TIE Fighter* — but it seems like it keeps being constantly held back for one reason or other. First the release date was somewhere around the end of March or beginning of April, then it was the end of April or start of May, then May 30, then I heard maybe June 30, and now I just haven't a clue. Can you please explain what's up?

Jason Sarabia,
New York, NY

You must be new to PC gaming, Jason — that's hardly a delay at all in this industry! Seriously, these sort of delays are rampant throughout computer gaming; it's caused us a lot of problems each time we try to plan an issue. For this industry to grow and reach its full potential, companies need to set realistic release dates — and then meet them. That's our opinion, anyway.

Make Mine a Triple

Dear PC Gamer,

I'm interested in buying a CD-ROM drive, but am having problems deciding on whether I should get a double-, triple-, or even quadruple-speed drive. I've been told that triple-speed drives offer only a marginal improvement in game performance over a double-speed drive, so is it worth my spending the extra money for? And what about those new quad-speed drives?

Keneth D. Johnson,
Zachary, LA

Dear Guys,

I've read the first two issue of *PC Gamer*, and basically I think it's the best mag on the market. But enough with the flattery. I wrote this letter to tell anyone out there in the market for a CD-ROM drive to skip double-speed and go for triple-speed. If you already have a SCSI interface (SoundBlaster 16 SCSI, for example), an NEC Multispin 3xi can be purchased for around $439, which isn't much more than a good double speed drive would cost. I bought one in February for $529 (including SCSI interface), and though at first I was really disappointed with the drive's performance (the video was really choppy), I soon realized I had an old, 512K Oak Technologies video card that was causing the trouble.

So I talked to a few people and asked what a good video card would be for me if I played a lot of DOS games. The Hercules Dynamite Pro (VLB version) was recommended, and I picked one up for $159. It's got great DOS performance capabilities, and my 486DX2-66 is now running multimedia games and applications like I never thought possible.

By the way, I noticed that all the letters that've been published so far have come from big cities and towns. Why is that?

Tony Cattano,
Castalia, OH

Hey, Tony — thanks for helping out a fellow reader! There's little question now as to whether or not gamers need to invest in a CD-ROM drive, so this is the sort of advice we can all appreciate. As far as quad-speed drives go, check out the Eyewitness section for news on the latest CD-ROM drives.

And don't forget to enter this month's fantastic contest (see p. 119). You just might win yourself a brand-new, top-of-the-line triple-speed multimedia upgrade kit from Media Vision, complete with everything you need to bring your PC up to the amazing world of multimedia.

The World's Finest, Most Extraordinarily Insightful Missive

Dear PC Gamer,

I was a subscriber to *PC Entertainment*, and I was skeptical about your new magazine. I didn't need a new format, and I didn't want to pay extra for arcade demo disks. What I wanted was content; that is, accurate reviews of current games, previews, pointed exchanges of views, maybe synopses of the adventure game genre (my favorite).

Well, looks like content is what you have delivered, and I am happy to renew my subscription. Consider: Sierra's *Phantasmagoria* appeared in *PC Gamer* before it did in Sierra's own marketing publication, Interaction. You previewed *Harvester* and *Noctropolis* before I had even heard of them. Tim Victor's technical column is an absolute delight, and my favorite regular feature. Not one of your reviews is a softball "puff piece" that read like the back of a game box. And the magazine is packed — hmm, looks like someone's working a little overtime!

Yes, I subscribe to one other game magazine. Frankly, I'm glad there is no longer just one excellent publication in the industry. Your good work ensures two subscriptions here.

One small quibble. Please drop the hyperbole (the greatest, the finest, etc.). Your enthusiasm is already evident, and the material speaks for itself.

Signed,
A.C. Them

Thanks for the vote of confidence! We're glad you've decided to subscribe, and under those circumstances it would be petty to moan about you having a subscription to another magazine. More power to you!

As far as the hyperbole goes, we look at it like this: It gives us something to strive for with each new issue. Besides, it sounds good!

Dear PC Gamer guys,

I would like to start off by congratulating you on your new magazine — it's a big improvement from the old *PC Entertainment*. I had second thoughts about subscribing to your magazine due to a high subscription price, but it was so great — and I got a free game — that it was hard to refuse. This is the first time I confidently decided on a magazine. I first thought of another PC mag, but while it's okay, it doesn't have a good scoring system, it has too many ads, and it doesn't help with hardware.

Speaking of scoring systems, I would like to compliment you on using a 100% scoring system. But I noticed you give games a single rating; why not do what business magazines do, and split the 100 points into different categories — 15% if you enjoyed it, 10% for sound, and so on. It would be great to know where a game's weaknesses are.

Also, you list the top 10 selling games in Babbage's and Software Etc., and in issue three, you're going to have the top 40 games your crew picked. But what about the players? In that other mag, one of their only good points is that they have a players' top 100 list, and the ten most played games. It would be great to know who's playing what out there.

You seem to use a different kind of paper for your magazine. What kind is it?

Keep it going,
Christian Almazan
Rego Park, NY

Thanks for the input! We'd considered breaking up the ratings into categories, but we felt that it was better to have a single, concise rating you could trust than to overload you with a bunch of numbers for different categories. Also, most of the information you're looking for is included in the review, and while the rating is obviously important, it only makes sense if you read the review that goes with it.

What kind of paper do we use? Being from North Carolina and all, we've decided to support our local economy by developing a secret process that allows us to make high-quality paper stock from tobacco plants. We didn't want to admit it, but that's what makes reading PC Gamer *so instantly addictive.*

Another Satisfied Reader

I have read every single game magazine on the market and I have found the Holy Grail of PC Mags — *PC Gamer*! Everything in your mag from cover to cover is absolutely terrific.

I do have one request: Please include a classifieds section in the back. I'd much rather order titles from classifieds than go and chase down the titles in an electronics store.

Keep up the excellent work!

Satisfied,
Buddie Morris III

That's all the space we have for now — but if you keep bombarding us with mail like you have been, we're going to have to increase the letters section again next month! Keep that mail coming in, though: The only way we'll keep growing is with your input!

NR 13

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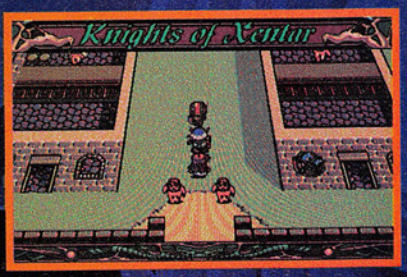
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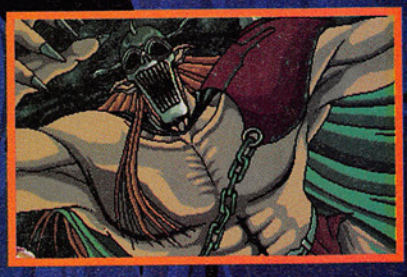
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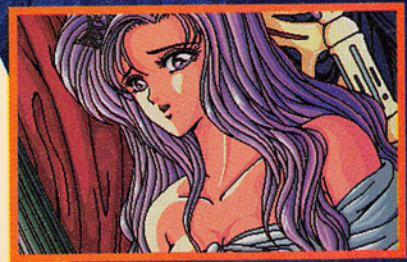
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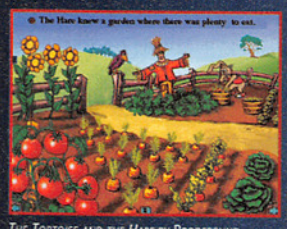


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MEDIA VISION

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Media Vision has been in the computer business for years now. The company is perhaps best known for its Pro Audio Spectrum sound cards, is also a game publisher. Combine hardware expertise like that with first-hand experience in gaming, and you know Media Vision is one company that understands the needs of the PC gamer!

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- *The Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*
- *Mad Dog McCree*
- *Mega Rock, Rap, 'n Roll*
- *Who Wants Arthur?*
- *Always Arthur*

So what do I have to do?

It really couldn't be easier. First, take a look at this phrase, culled from a page in this issue of *PC Gamer*:

...several hours and one destroyed joystick later I was still at it, drooling and cursing the alien vermin.

Now, just tell us where that bit came from — the story title and page number. Write it out and send it to

PC Gamer
Media Vision Contest
P.O. Box 29364
Greensboro, NC 27429

All entries must be received no later than October 1, 1994.

All the entries will go into the *PC Gamer* hat, and the first correct entry we draw wins! Don't forget to include your name, address, and a daytime phone number, so we can let you know if you're our lucky winner.

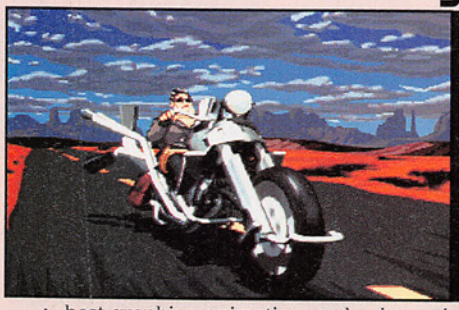
No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. One entry per person. To enter the contest or for a complete set of rules, write your name, address, age and telephone number on a 3x5" card and mail to: PC Gamer Media Vision Contest, P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, N.C. 27429. All entries must be received by October 1, 1994. Winner will be selected at random. The editors' decision is final.

Next time in PC Gamer...

Issue 5 Goes On Sale Sept. 6 Don't Miss It!

You're probably wondering, "Just what have those *PC Gamer* guys got lined up for next month?" Well, here are a few tidbits to whet your appetite...

It's a LucasArts Extravaganza! Dark Forces, TIE Fighter, and Full Throttle



LucasArts' *Full Throttle* will have you convinced that big, mean-looking bikers are some of this country's most misunderstood heros.

If you thought The *Secret of Monkey Island* was LucasArts' crowning achievement, that *X-Wing* just couldn't be any better, and *Rebel Assault* looks just about as good as a computer game can, wait until you see our next issue! We'll finally have that long-awaited *TIE Fighter* review (no kidding, we really will!). Then there's a *PC Gamer* Scoop! on *Full Throttle*, the rockin' adventure game featuring a biker-dude hero and some of the best graphics, animation, and voice-acting we've come across in a while. And don't forget our cover story on *Dark Forces* — the stunning first-person shooter that'll put you up against the Empire's finest in hand-to-hand (or gun-to-chest) combat. You'll hate yourself if you miss it!

Scoops!

As you can tell from our cover story, this fall is going to be one of the most exciting times in the history of PC gaming. And to help you get the jump on the year's very best new titles, we're already lining up Scoops! for some of the biggest games of all. If you want the early word on tomorrow's hits, *PC Gamer* is where you'll find it!

Not One, But Two New Columns!

Matt didn't get around to starting his new column, Peripheral Visions, this issue. What with all the hoopla in Chicago (and making sure you got all the important facts), there just wasn't time. But it'll be here next month and every month thereafter, bringing you all the news on PC controllers, add-ons, peripherals, and more.

And we'll be introducing a second new column (as a direct result of your suggestions!) to cover the rapidly evolving world of shareware gaming. We'll be here for you every month to tell you which shareware titles deliver — and to warn you away from those that don't. Stick with us, and you need never download a bad game again.

And All Your Regular Favorites!

As always, we'll bring you Eyewit-ness — the industry's *best* news column; *PC Gamer* Reviews, the most comprehensive and hard-hitting reviews you'll find anywhere; Strategy Central, where stuck-in-the-labyrinth blues become a thing of the past; and in between we'll pack in all the expertise, fun, excitement, and all-around gaming goodness we possibly can. It's not just our job — it's a way of life!



What do these games have in common? They're both shareware — but not all shareware is this good. Next month, we'll introduce a new column to help you separate the dudes from the duds.

All this and more, coming at you in the October issue of PC Gamer

PC GAMER

August 1994

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Lance Noonan hurriedly glanced over the flotsam bobbing lazily in the wake of the *Lady Luck*, involuntarily shrinking back when the bloody, shattered remains of a German sailor gently broke the surface of the water.

Only seconds before, that sailor had been bearing down on Noonan and his crew, determined to blow the *Lady Luck* out of the water; but someone — or something — had blasted the E-Boat to smithereens, and sent its crew off to Valhalla.

But whoever had deemed the *Lucky Lady* worth rescuing from destruction hadn't finished the job, hadn't even come close. For there was another E-Boat bearing down on the *Lucky Lady*, and the last thing Lance was going to do was wait for another miracle; hell, he wasn't going to wait at all.

"All hands, abandon ship!" he screamed, then took off, feet sliding and arms flailing, toward the *Lady's* puny 20mm gun. Regaining his feet near the gun, he snatched a life preserver and squeezed into it, then grabbed the gun and swung it around to face the E-Boat. He knew damn well the gun's shells wouldn't slow the boat down, but if he could take down a few Jerries with him....

Then all he saw was white, blistering white, before he felt cool water surrounding him. I'll just stay under, I won't come up....

CONTINUED NEXT MONTH!

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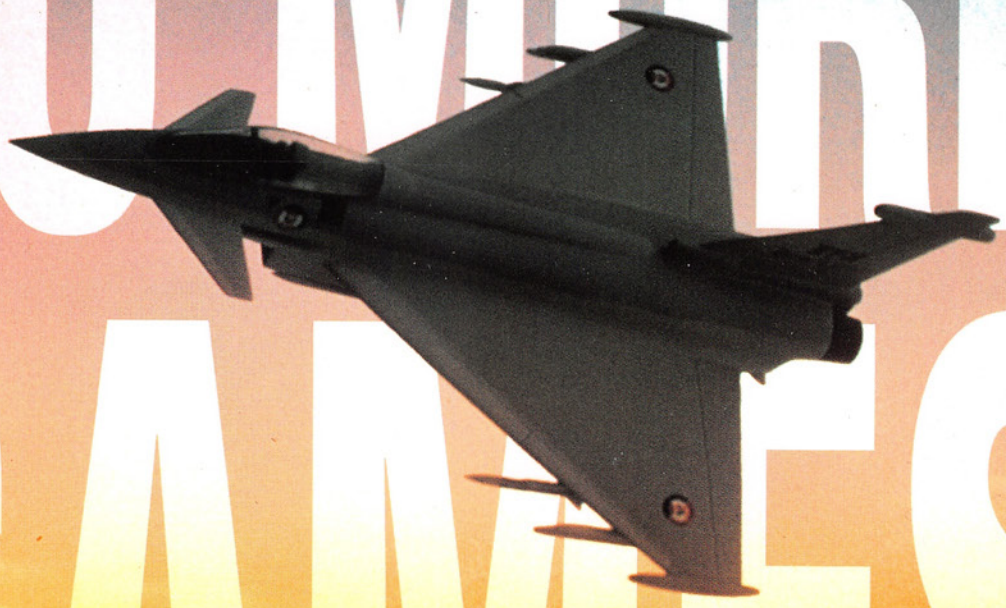
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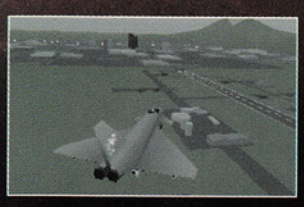
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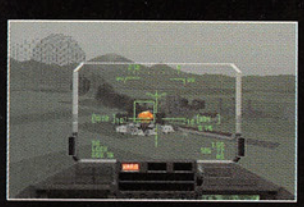
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