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Magic Carpet
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The Multimedia Issue

Is Beauty Enough?

Our 8-page feature separates the flash from the substance

Scoops!

- The American Civil War
- Tank Commander
- Virtual Pool

The *PC Gamer* Guide to Online Gaming

CompuServe, AOL, The ImagiNation Network, and 6 other major services compared - p. 60

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- NASCAR Racing
- Aces of the Deep
- Star Trail
- Panzer General
- Armored Fist
- Menzoberranzan

...and more!

Tia Carrere stars in *The Daedalus Encounter*, the follow-up to Mechadeus' best-selling multimedia adventure *Critical Path*.

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>you some reasons why Magic Carpet soars above all the Doom-style games.>>

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Peter Molyneux

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IBM CD ROM

ELECTRONIC ARTS

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Product Information Number 94

Why Walk When You Can Fly?

>>Flying is truly the
>only way to go.
>>In Magic Carpet you
>rip and dive through
>a 3D fractal world.
>>The landscapes morph in real-time
>while the frame rate stays high.
>>We like it.>>

Why Be A Hall Monitor?

>>The outdoors
>are nice.
>>Wouldn't you
>say?>>

>>With 50 different worlds to romp and
>leave a path of destruction through, you'll
>never get claustrophobic. >Of course, that
>also means no easy corners to protect you
>from the hordes of unrelenting beasts.>>

Why Not Double Your Pleasure?

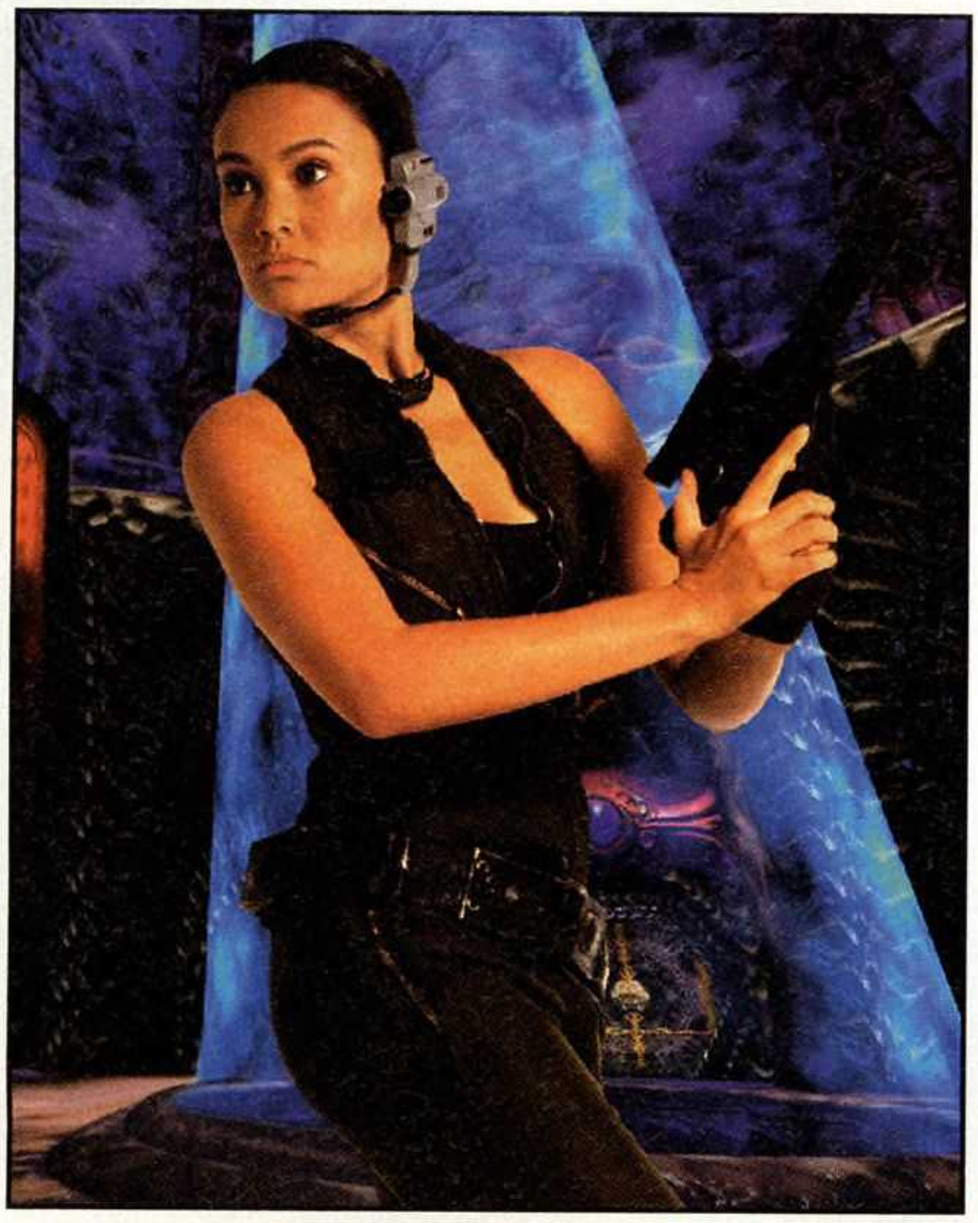
>>And you thought your >company's productivity >was hurt before?
>>Magic Carpet handles up to 8 players on a network.
>>If that weren't enough, >we have a 3D mode that >requires glasses and a >stereogram mode.
>>VR helmets too.>>

Variety Is The Spice Of Life. Right?

>>Doom gives you the >BFG9000.
>>They should've called >it the "B.F.D." >Magic Carpet gives you a >lot of wicked spells. >(24, for people who >like numbers.) >The result is a variety >of imaginative ways to kill things:
>>lightning storms, volcanos, meteors.>>

PC GAMER

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2 • FEBRUARY 1995



Cover Story:

Multimedia & Gaming: Is Beauty Enough?

It's the biggest question to face gamers — and game designers — in a decade. We have the technology to make computer entertainment that incorporates video, 3D modeled "virtual actors," and unheralded graphics and sound. But is all this flash advancing the art of game design, or crippling it? Steve Poole has the answers.

Features

38 **Multimedia & Gaming: Is Beauty Enough?**
Steve Poole takes a look at those flashy multimedia and CD-ROM extravaganzas, and asks the immortal question: Where's the beef?

54 **Lee Buchanan's SportsTime**
There are sports sims available for just about every fan — but which are the good, and which aren't? We separate the best from the rest.

77 **The PC Gamer Guide to Online Gaming**
Some of the most intensely competitive PC games can't be found at your local software shop. You can only play them online — and we'll show you how.

Matt

This Multimedia Stuff is Serious!

In some ways, it's hard to believe that today's PC games are even vaguely related to the ones we used to play three or four years ago. I mean, just look at the things we see these days: games with big-name actors in lead roles, full-motion video that looks... well, most of it doesn't look that good. But it's getting better all the time, continually narrowing the gap between game graphics and full-blown motion pictures.

The flashy 3D modeling and video were dazzling and new a year ago — enough so that many of us didn't notice that we weren't in control anymore. You could watch the video, maybe click a button or two, then watch more video. Beyond that, though, there just wasn't any interactivity — and certainly not the degree of control we had come to expect from our favorite flight sims, wargames, or graphic adventures.

Now, we're seeing a kind of split among the multimedia faithful: There are those who say beginning gamers don't *want* a lot of interactivity (an excuse for taking the easy way out, I think), and those who acknowledge the limitations of multimedia and are trying to bring us the best of both worlds.

I hope the right side wins, the side that wants to build real games first, and spruce them up once that's been achieved. Because if I want to watch a movie, I'll go to the theater; when I want to play *Civilization*, only a PC will do.

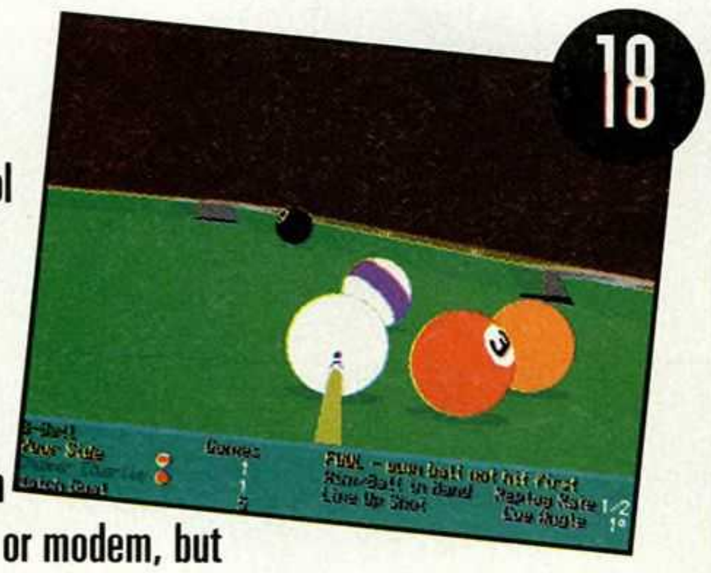
We'll decide who wins, though, with our purchasing decisions. If publishers realize they can make more money by doing *real* games, the other stuff will just fade away, and someday we'll look back on it the way we remember the Pet Rock or mood ring. And we'll laugh.

Scoops!

Tomorrow's top games, today

14 The American Civil War
Although there have been Civil War games before, none has been entirely successful. Empire hopes that this one can change all that.

18 Virtual Pool
Interplay and developer Celeris look to have a huge hit on their hands. This pool title is one of the most impressive sims — of any kind — we've ever seen.



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Domark's upcoming armored combat sim promises multiplayer thrills via network or modem, but doesn't sacrifice realism for action.

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PC Gamer Reviews, just the way you like them — timely, and honest!

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DISC PAGES

INSTALLING • PLAYING • QUICK TIPS

If you just opened to this page, you probably have a shiny CD-ROM disc or 3.5" diskette in hand, and you're raring to go. Well, you came to the right place.

Whichever you have, you're in store for some great gaming — and these Disc Pages will prepare you for it all. If you're a *PC Gamer* veteran, just pop your disk in and get rolling: The Quick Start guides should be all you need.

Our 3.5" demo disk this month features *Cannon Fodder* by Virgin Interactive — winner of the *PC Gamer* Editor's Choice award. You'll find the instructions for this one on p.5.

The rest of the Disc Pages has info for you fortunate owners of our CD-ROM Edition, and The CD. You'll find requirements, tips, game descriptions and other helpful tidbits throughout this section.

And in addition to game demos, there are bug patches from Tom McDonald's "Extended Play" column, new *Doom II* wads, and a *Doom II* shotgun upgrade (makes it fire as fast as a chain gun!). We've also included another version of GameTek's *Quarantine*, since a lot of you had reported problems with it. So enough talk, let's get gaming!

The CD is manufactured by DISCTRONICS, one of the foremost disc duplicators in America. Before pressing, it is rigorously tested, and certified virus-free.

Quick Start: The CD

If you're already familiar with DOS, configuring your system, and all those fun things that make PC gaming such an adventure, getting started couldn't be easier:

1. **Insert The CD, and change to your CD-ROM directory (usually D: or E:).**
2. **Type PCG3, and press Enter.**
3. **Look through the text files and help screens for specific demo requirements, and go to it. Remember, you can run all of the demos directly from DOS, bypassing the front end altogether.**

Getting Started

First, if you don't have the *CD-ROM Edition*, place the 3.5" demo disk in your drive, switch to that drive and type INSTALL. Then switch back to your hard drive, and change to the \CANNON directory (CD\CANNON). You'll need to type SETUP to configure sound options, then type CANNON to load the game.

Now, back to The CD. We've tried to make it as easy to use The CD as possible, and each game includes notes on what it takes to install, run, and play the demos. To get the whole show started, pop The CD into your CD-ROM drive, switch to that drive, and type *PCG3*. In the event that you can't load our front-end, you can still install and run each game demo by going into the games' respective directories, and typing the install or execute commands for that demo. A table of the directories and commands are provided in these Disc Pages.

System Requirements for The CD

Loading The CD

Minimum Requirements: 386SX; SVGA (640x480, 256 colors); VESA driver; mouse.
We Recommend: At least a double-speed CD-ROM drive, capable of 300k/sec data transfer. The CD will work on a single-speed, but very slowly.

Remember, the above requirements are for loading The CD and its front end only. Each game demo will have its own additional requirements — so be sure to read the requirements for each demo carefully! They're on The CD, and in these pages. Often, you'll need to install a game to your hard drive and then reboot to free-up memory, or satisfy other requirements.

If Nothing Works...

Unfortunately, we can't provide technical and customer support for problems you may encounter with the specific demos and patches on The CD. But should your copy fail to run at all, or display error messages that indicate your CD-ROM drive cannot read the disc, return it to the following address for replacement:

The CD #3 Replacement
PC Gamer
1350 Old Bayshore Highway,
Suite 210,
Burlingame, CA 94010

Indicate any error message you receive.

Installation Commands Names and Locations

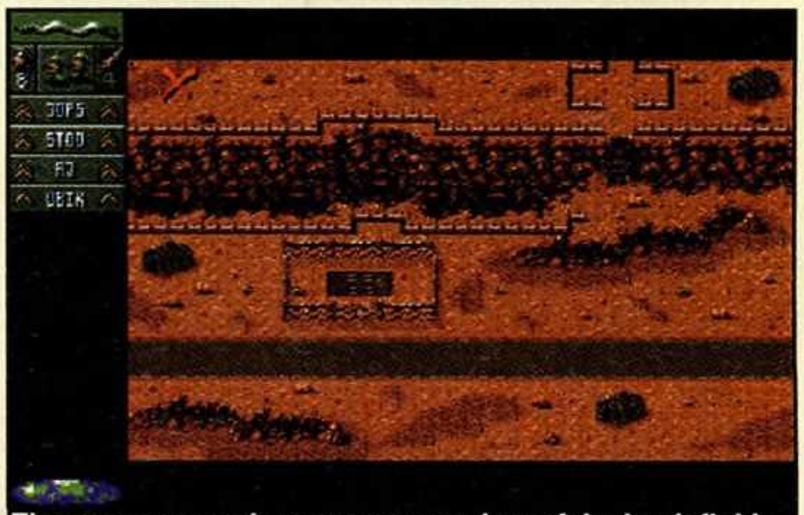
Here's a list of the directories on The CD where you'll find each game demo. They're all located within the \DISCIII directory, unless otherwise noted. For example, typing CD\DISCIII\CANNON on your CD-ROM drive will get you to the *Cannon Fodder* directory.

Game	Directory	Installation Command
Cannon Fodder	*\CANNON*	*INSTALL.BAT*
Magic Carpet	*\MAGIC*	*CARPET.EXE*
System Shock	*\SSHOCK\SSDEMO*	*SSHOCK.BAT*
The Grandest Fleet	*GFDEMO*	*GFDEMO*
Pinball Arcade	*\PINBALL*	*INSTALL.BAT*
Flash Traffic	*\FLASH*	*INSTALL.BAT*
Boppin'	*\BOPPIN*	*INSTALL.EXE*
*Retribution **	*\RETRIBUT*	*(see below)*
Masque Sampler	*\MASQUE*	*SETUP.EXE*
Harpoon Classic	*\HARPOON*	*INSTALL.EXE*
*Novastorm **	**	*NS_USA.EXE*
*Cyberia **	*\CYBERIA*	*INSTALL.BAT*
GEnie Network	*\GENIE*	*INSTGENI.BAT*
Cyberstrike	*\GENIE\CYBERSRIKE*	*INSTCYBR.BAT*
SVGA Air Warrior	*\GENIE\AIRWARRI*	*INSTAIRW.BAT*
ImagiNation Network	*\IMAGINE*	*FUN.BAT*
Quarantine	*\QDEMO*	*INSTALL.BAT*

** Novastorm is located in the root directory, Cyberia is located in a \CYBERIA directory rather than \DISCII\CYBERIA. For Retribution, read the NOTES or README.TXT file accompanying the game for the specific execution command.*

Quick Start: The Cannon Fodder 3.5" floppy

1. Insert the *Cannon Fodder* diskette in your 3.5" drive.
2. Change to your 3.5" diskette drive and type INSTALL.
3. Change to the \CANNON directory on your hard drive.
3. Type SETUP and press Enter.
4. Type CANNON to begin the game



The map screen gives you an overview of the battlefield, minus enemy troops. The "X" marks your squad's position.

Cannon Fodder

Virgin Interactive

Is this what happens when Lemmings go to war? Sure, they're little and cute, but they've got guns. And grenades. And bazookas ....

Virgin's *Cannon Fodder* is an action-strategy game that plays at a breakneck pace. In this two-level demo, your goal is simple: kill the enemy soldiers and destroy their buildings. Hey — it's not called *Cannon Fodder* for nothing.

Controlling your soldiers couldn't be easier: You just point and click with the left mouse button to give them their marching orders, and you press the right mouse button to shoot. You can let fly with grenades or bazookas by holding down the right mouse button while clicking the left — just be sure your soldiers aren't too close to the target, or they're likely to catch a fatal dose of shrapnel. You choose between these heavier weapons by clicking the appropriate icon on the status bar in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. You won't have any as you begin Level One, but you'll find some in crates near a couple of the buildings. Just be careful where you shoot — a crate full of explosives is an accident waiting to happen.

You can split your squad into independent teams by clicking on the name of a soldier in the status bar, then clicking the squad logo at the top of the status bar. If you've picked up any grenades or bazookas, you'll need to determine how they're divided between the teams. Just click on their icons — a solid outline means the new team will get all of that weapon, a dotted line means they'll get half, and no outline means they'll get none. To join two teams back together, just run them into each other. If you need an overview of the battlefield, click on the map icon in the lower-left corner.

That's about all there is to it. One word of warning — you may get through Level One on the first try, but don't get cocky; in Level Two, the bad guys have grenades and bazookas just like you, and they don't mind using them.

The basic requirements are pretty light: mouse, DOS 5.0, VGA, 386/20, and 580K of conventional memory. And if you purchased the floppy version of PC Gamer, you can even play off the diskette. Just switch to your 3.5" disk drive, and type INSTALL to install the game to your hard drive, or CANNON to run it right off the disk.

Cannon Fodder pits your four soldiers against an endless legion of enemies.

System Shock

Origin Systems

Origin's *System Shock* earned an Editor's Choice Award in our last issue — now you can find out why.

System Shock is a first-person adventure in the tradition of Origin's *Ultima Underworld* games — but this time you'll enter a science-fiction world, a space station where technology has gone horribly wrong.

Run the demo, and it'll just about lead you by the hand through the first level of this terrific game. Select "New Game," enter your name and difficulty choices, then choose "Start." The next screen you see points out all the important controls (you can call it back up at any time by hitting {Alt-O}, and you can get a list of keyboard equivalents by pressing the "?" key). The automatic help system will point out useful objects and tell you what to do with them. You can turn this off with {Alt-H}.

This little Serv-Bot is not much of a threat — you can take it out with a couple of good whacks from your lead pipe. Be sure to search it once it's dead.

There's plenty to do in the demo — you'll have to deal with malevolent robots, humanoid mutants, and worse. The dart gun is an effective weapon you'll find early on, but the lead pipe is more satisfying. The sparq beam is even better — *if* you can find it. There's another weapon in the demo that beats them all, but you'll have to plug yourself into cyberspace to get it. Good luck!

Magic Carpet

Electronic Arts

No question about it: This is going to be one of the year's most talked-about games. The graphics are stunning, the sounds are amazing, the play is fast and furious — and as a faithful *PC Gamer* reader, you get to check it out at home! (Now, what's your favorite computer game magazine again?)

Call it the world's first magic carpet simulator — Electronic Arts' *Magic Carpet* puts you on a powerful Persian rug, and lets you fly over some of the most impressive texture-mapped terrain you've ever seen. Your goal: to restore the mystical forces of your land by claiming magical spheres of "manna" as your own. Easier said than done, what with rival wizards, undead warriors, giant bees, and huge, fire-breathing worms trying to ruin your day.

The map/spell screen shows the whole level at a glance.

At least the controls aren't hard to master. You start the first level of our two-level demo just above a few red vases — you'll want to pick these up, since they contain the magical goodies you'll need to win the game. So just push your joystick, mouse, or gamepad forward to tilt your nose down, then press the "up" arrow on your keyboard to start moving forward — you'll pick up the vases as you fly over them. The next thing to do is create a fortress, the base for the hot-air balloon that follows you around and picks up the spheres you've claimed. To build the fortress, press Enter (or both mouse or joystick buttons simultaneously) to bring up the map/spell screen. Choose the icon that looks like a little castle, and you'll return to the action screen. Point your carpet at a clear patch of land, pull the trigger, and you'll see your fortress rise up from the ground.

This giant, fire-breathing worm is tough to kill, but worth the effort. It'll explode into a shower of manna spheres.

Now it's time to claim some manna spheres with your "possession" spell. Go back to the map/spell screen and click on the second icon — the one that looks like a gold ball with a purple aura around it — and start shooting the spheres you find on the ground to turn them to your color. The "radar" display in the upper left-hand corner will help you find them, and your balloon will come along to scoop them up and store them safely at your fortress.

Select your weapons and spells from this bar in the map screen. From left to right, they are the Fireball, the Possession Spell and the Fortress Spell. Pick up more later in the game.

Sooner or later, you're going to be attacked — and if you aren't, your fortress will be (you'll know this is happening when its icon at the top of the screen flashes). That's when you'll want to switch to your fireball weapon; just select it from the map screen and fire away. Any enemies you destroy will turn into manna spheres, so don't forget to mop up after a battle. While you're at it, take a moment to set a stand of trees on fire — you'll enjoy the *Apocalypse Now* effect. And if things ever get slow (not likely), you can try flying the canyon — it's the long, grey curve on your map and radar.

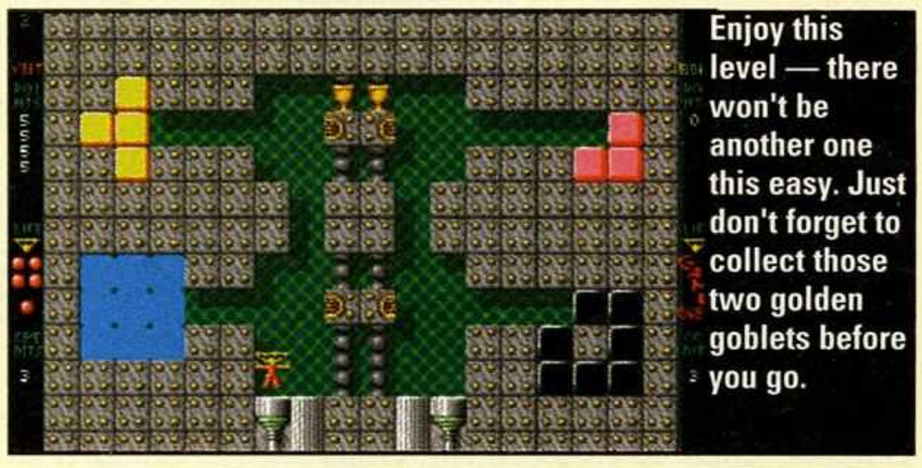
Boppin'

Apogee

If you like puzzle games, you'll enjoy *Boppin'*, the latest title from Apogee. In this shareware version, one or two players (as Yeet and Boik) try to save the world from boredom by freeing all the great video-game villains from captivity. They do this by balancing objects on their heads — gems, flowers, sushi — then flinging them at similar objects to form patterns (what can we say? They're aliens!).

This shareware version includes the first of five episodes, and boasts a full 40 puzzles.

To play *Boppin'*, just install it from The CD and run it. The opening screens will tell you all you need to know about how to play this unique game.



Enjoy this level — there won't be another one this easy. Just don't forget to collect those two golden goblets before you go.

Masque Strategy Games

Masque Publishing

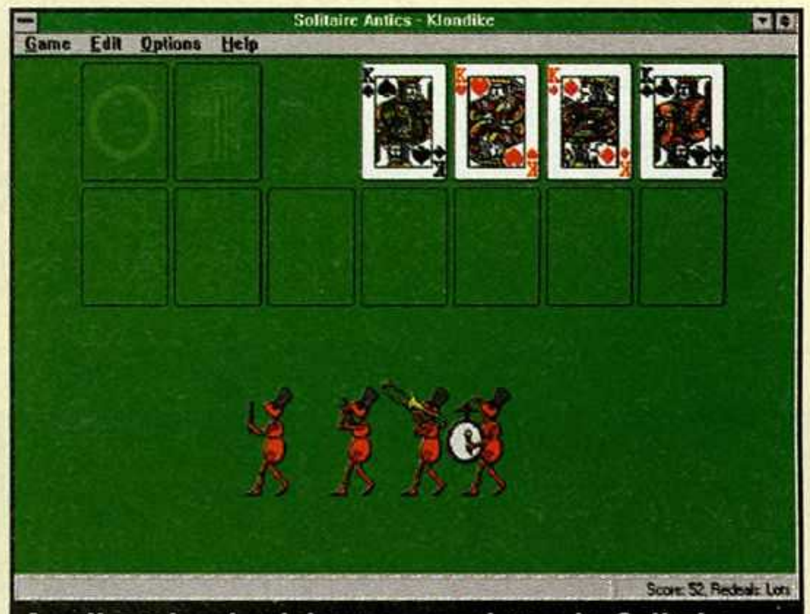
From Masque Publishing come four new games for the Windows environment. For starters, Masque brings a popular casino game home with *Masque Video Poker*. This demo lets you play 20 hands of 5-card draw before repeating — there's a royal flush and at least one full house lurking in there somewhere, so keep your eyes open. The computer will tell you when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em, but you can ignore its advice if you're feeling lucky — and you can turn its recommendations off completely if you want.

If you always follow the computer's advice in *Blackjack*, you'll miss some chances to "double down" and increase winnings.

Masque Blackjack is a Windows version of another Las Vegas favorite. All the options are here; you can hit, double down, opt for insurance or stand pat. And if you don't know what some of those terms mean, just hit the "F1" key for help.

In *Video Poker*, the computer will display its advice at the bottom of the screen — but that doesn't mean you have to take it.

Chessnet 3 may not be the flashiest chess game on the market, but it has more options for network and online competition than any game out there. You can challenge an opponent via modem, direct serial connection, BBS, network — even across the Internet. You've never had more access to your fellow chess fans! And like *Masque Video Poker* and *Masque Blackjack*, this game lets you play your favorite audio CDs right from the menu bar.



An all-ant band celebrates your victory in *Solitaire Antics* (now we know what happened to Adam and the Ants. They got a gig doing computer games!)

Masque returns to cards with *Solitaire Antics*, a collection of Windows solitaire games with a twist. Play either of the games provided in the demo — "Carpet" or the more familiar "Klondike" — and you'll see the animated "Antics" begin. The full version includes 22 different games and 55 animations.

***Chessnet 3* gives you more options for on-line play than you can shake a pawn at.**

The Grandest Fleet

QQP

Gamers can always count on QQP for terrific strategy games, and *The Grandest Fleet* is no exception. It's naval strategy on a truly grand scale — you'll have to keep your eye on the big picture, improving your port cities and building new ships, in order to win.

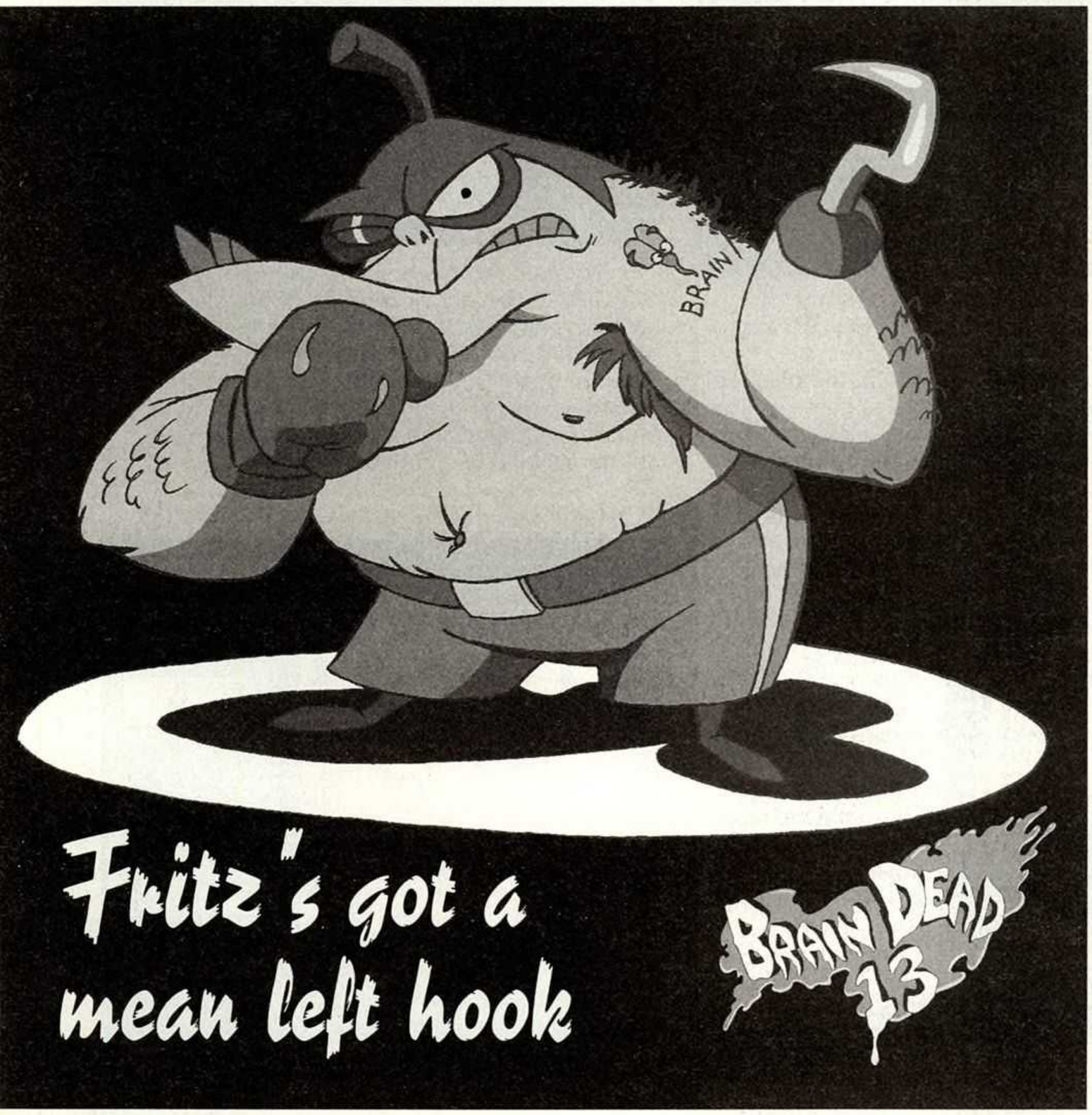
When you first run *The Grandest Fleet*, you'll need to choose "View Officers," then "Create Officer." Once you've done that, you'll be ready for battle. The map offered in our demo is called "The Bismarck-Tirpitz Connection," taken from the full game. Select your difficulty options, then click on "Confirm?" and "Start" to begin the game.

On the Initial Buying Screen, you'll use your starting build points to create a fleet. Hit "C" to cycle through your port cities, and don't neglect the other starting areas available to you — they'll show up as shaded areas on the map. Use your points wisely and go for a varied mix of ships; if you concentrate on battleships, you'll regret it when you find out they can't do any damage against submarines — and if you leave battleships out of the picture completely, you'll end up wishing you had their unmatched firepower.

The rest is simple: Just click the mouse to move a vessel or use its weapons. Move a ship into an enemy city's harbor, and you can lay siege to it and eventually invade. Between turns, you'll be able to make some improvements to your own cities, which will add to their value or increase the effectiveness of your fleet. The Community Assets Menu will explain what's available to you, and what benefits it provides. You'll also get a chance to build more vessels; which ships you build and where you build them will depend on how the battle is going.

A task force of battleships, cruisers and destroyers waits to defend Edinburgh in *The Grandest Fleet*.

This box lets gives you complete control during the movement and building phase — clockwise from top left, the buttons let you 1) ignore a ship and move on to the next, 2) anchor a ship, 3) tell a sub to dive or surface, 4) get information about cities on the map, 5) end your turn, 6) access the scoring screens, 7) access the community assets screen, and 8) get information about the selected ship. The middle button brings up a new box with controls for laying mines, sweeping an area of mines, turning sound on and off and ending the game.



Cyberia

Interplay

Fans of *Rebel Assault* will want to check out our demo of Interplay's *Cyberia*, with its amazing graphics and good old-fashioned shoot-'em-up action. To play, just install the demo, then type "CALJOY" at a DOS prompt to calibrate your joystick. Once you've done that, typing "DEMO" will start a self-running preview of *Cyberia*, and "CYBERIA" will run the playable demo.

You'll have to be quick with your trigger-finger — the idea is to destroy enemy boats and planes before they can shoot you. Don't wait for the computer to acquire each target; blast 'em as soon as they become visible!

Two enemy fighters approach you through a canyon passage in the *Cyberia* demo.

"*Triad* is a truly awesome game!"* But don't take our word for it.

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— Computer Game Review

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— Computer Gaming World

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(body bags not included)

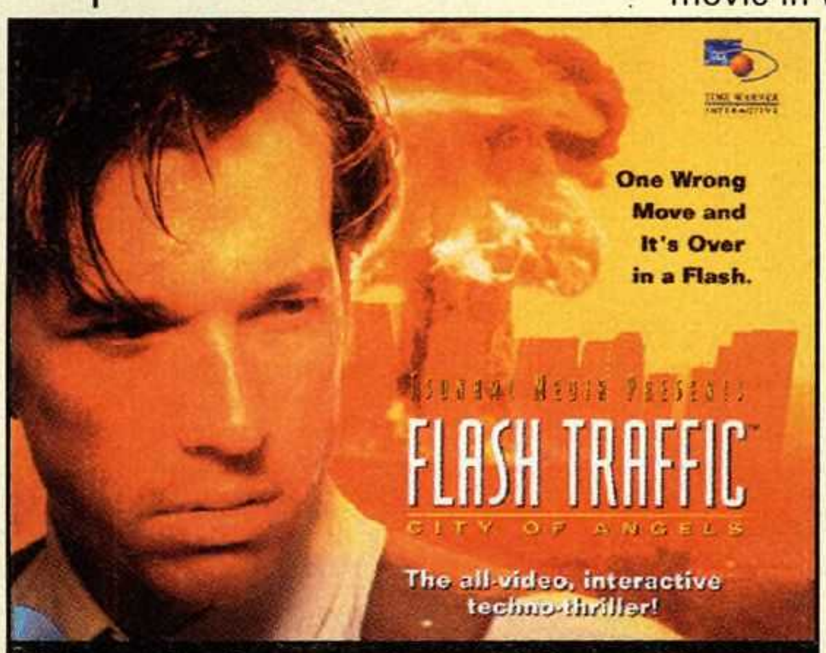
Product Information Number 98

Flash Traffic

Time Warner Interactive

If you enjoyed the action movies *Navy SEALs* and *Hard Target*, you'll be excited to know that Time Warner Interactive's *Flash Traffic* was written and produced by the creator of those two films.

While the words "interactive movie" are being used to describe just about every kind of game on the market these days, *Flash Traffic* may just come closest to fitting that term. It's literally a movie in which you play a major role. Each time the plot reaches a turning point, you'll make a choice that can send the story in a whole new direction. The demo version on The CD features more than 200 megabytes of full-motion video, so you'll have to play it through more than once — trying out different options each time — to see the whole thing.



High-speed action is promised and delivered. When's the movie coming out?

Pinball Arcade

21st Century

21st Century Entertainment, the folks who brought you *Pinball Fantasies* (one of our July 1994 demos), are back with more of everything in *Pinball Arcade*. Our demo features two brand-new tables — at the main menu, just hit F1 for "Ignition" and F7 for "Revenge of the Robot Warriors." The flippers are controlled with the left and right shift keys after the ball is put in play.

What really sets the full version of *Pinball Arcade* apart is its database on the history of pinball. You can search for information on a specific machine by its name, its designer, its manufacturer, or the year it was created. Just hit F9 at the main menu to see a sample of the database, and learn about everything from the bizarre "Revolution VIII" table to the recent "Tommy" machine, based on the musical about the legendary pinball wizard. It's everything a die-hard pinball fan could ask for!

A photo of the classic pinball machine you pick comes spinning towards you before moving on to the game.

Quarantine

GameTek

Kemo City is no place to be, even if you *do* think you're the toughest cabby in town. Well, maybe you are and maybe you aren't - you'll have to prove that on the very mean streets of *Quarantine*. See, a few years back the omnipresent Omnicorps drugged the water supply to dull the senses of the populace. They didn't figure on the chemical reacting with all the pollution in the water, though, and it created a virus that turned average citizens into psychopathic killers. So you probably won't need a lot more motivation to get out of the city.

You must earn money first to outfit your cab so that you can progress to each new level, eventually leaving the festering city altogether. The demo has only one level, but it's more than enough to give you a good taste of this dynamic game. Be forewarned, though; this is no *Doom* clone. Shooting everything that moves is *not* to your advantage.

Only 550K base memory is required, but this game is really picky about upper memory. It does need about 4MB of *extended* memory, and it simply *cannot* coexist with EMM386; if you're running EMM386 (and most of us are), you'll have to REM it out of your CONFIG.SYS.

To load *Quarantine*, just run the install program, go through the setup screens, and type `qdemo' to get moving. The game's controls are fairly simple as you can see by the chart below.

Keyboard Controls

Down arrow.....Brake
Up arrow .....Accelerate
Right arrow.....turn right
Left arrow.....turn left
Z .....Jump
N.....Turbo speed boost
P.....Pause
M.....Map
Space...Fire forward guns, or Uzi in the side view
Alt.....Cycle through special weapons
Ctrl.....Fire special weapon
F10....Insult ("Up yours!")
Return.....Horn
T.....Next target (multiple target mission)
E.....Eject passenger
F1.....Look left
F2.....Look forward
F3.....Look right

These trucks are tough to knock out. Don't waste your ammo on them unless they're harassing you.

CHEAP.

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Three Top Games Included!

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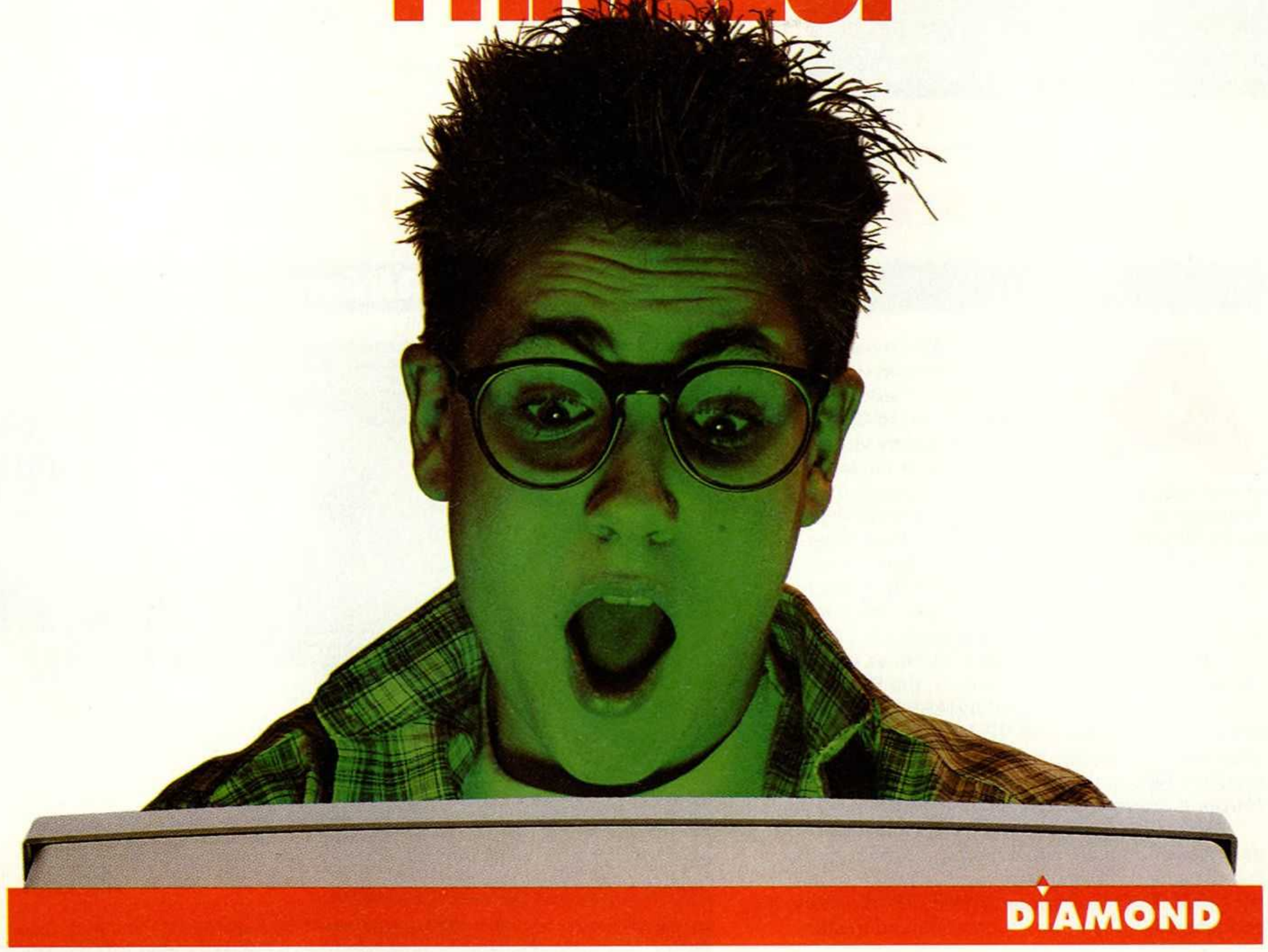
THRILLS.



DIAMOND

ELEK-TEK Since 1970 The Computer Wonderland CDW

Product Information Number 136

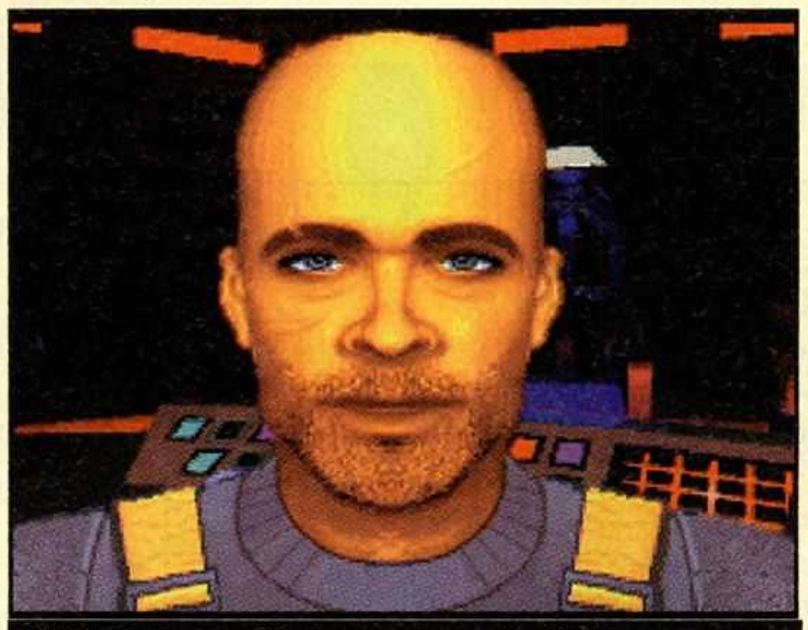
Retribution

Gremlin

The year is 2425, and the human race is flourishing thanks to help from the Krellans, an alien race who saved mankind from self-destruction and starvation. Little did we know they were fattening us up for slaughter ....

An animated cinematic sequence sets the stage for *Retribution*, a far-future shooting match from Gremlin Interactive. This one runs entirely off the CD, so you'll need to start it from the DOS prompt and tell it what kind of setup you've got.

To run the demo, switch to the \DISCIII\RETRIBUT directory on The CD and type RETDEMO4 or RETDEMO8 — the first example is for systems with 4 MB RAM, and the second runs on 8 MB machines. Specify your system's sound and control setup by adding the appropriate options to the command line:



Old baldy here will clue you in on the Krellan threat.

You've locked on to an enemy skimmer — now hit the Enter key to select your guided missiles and fire away.

• JOYSTICK If you want to use your joystick rather than a mouse to control your fighter

• KEYBOARD If you want to play with the keyboard

• SB8 If you have an 8-bit Sound Blaster-compatible board.

• SB16 If you have a Sound Blaster 16 or compatible

• SBAUTO If you want the program to automatically detect your sound board's settings

• SBPORT To manually set your sound board's port address

• SBIRQ= To manually set your sound board's interrupt number

• SBDMA= To manually set your sound board's DMA number

• MIDIPORT= To set the port address for your General MIDI synthesizer

For example, if you have a joystick, a Sound Blaster set at the factory defaults, a General MIDI board at port 330 and a machine with 8 MB of memory, type:

RETDEMO8 JOYSTICK SB16 MIDI-PORT=330

On a 4 MB computer (or an 8 MB computer with most of the high memory used) with an 8-bit Sound Blaster-compatible card at port address 240, IRQ 7 and DMA 3, and no joystick or mouse, you'd type:

RETDEMO4 KEYBOARD SB8 SBPORT=240 SBIRQ=7 SBDMA=3

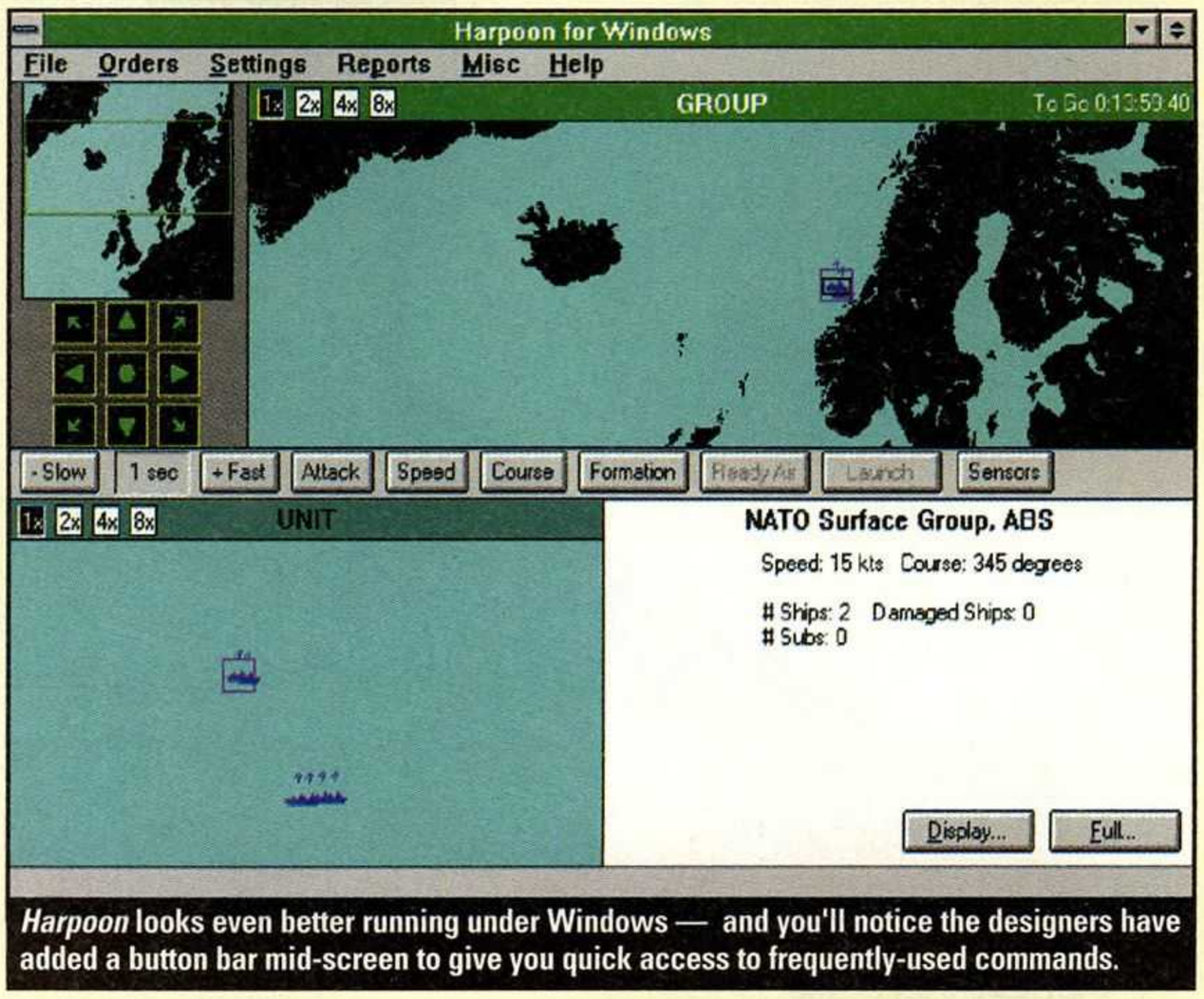
Harpoon Classic

Alliance Interactive

Alliance Interactive has brought this naval warfare classic to the Windows environment — and to CD-ROM, which means they've been able to throw in the whole line of *Harpoon* add-ons. The full version of *Harpoon Classic* includes Battlesets #1-4, the Battleset Enhancer, Post-Graduate Naval Operations & Tactics, and the Scenario Editor. Our demo has Battleset #1, "The GIUK Gap," which should be more than enough to give you a feel for this amazingly detailed wargame.

To install the demo, start Windows and click on "Run" under the "File" menu in the Program Manager, and enter D:\DISKIII\HARPOON\INSTALL.EXE (substitute "D" for whatever drive you have The CD in). The install program will copy the files to your hard drive and create a *Harpoon* group and icon.

Harpoon is one of the most complex wargames ever created, and even our demo is pretty sophisticated, so be sure to read or print out the "README.TXT" file in your "WINHARP" directory. It contains all of the information you need to start.



Harpoon looks even better running under Windows — and you'll notice the designers have added a button bar mid-screen to give you quick access to frequently-used commands.

Novastorm

Psygnosis

Just one more great demo before we leave you for another month — *Novastorm*, a great-looking arcade shooter from Psygnosis. This one will run directly from The CD, but you'll probably want to make a stop at the "Options" menu to set up your joystick. Just use the cursor keys to select "Controls," then hit Enter to switch *Novastorm* to joystick control, then select "Configure" to calibrate the stick. Once you've done that, you're ready to jump in with guns blazing.

The scenery in *Novastorm* is starkly beautiful, but don't let it distract you from your task — shooting everything that moves.

GEnie for Windows with *Cyberstrike* and *SVGA Air Warrior*

GEnie

Not to ignore on-line gamesters, here's the front end for the on-line network *GEnie*. *GEnie* offers e-mail, BBS access, conferencing and, as our readers will be glad to note, multiplayer gaming. To take advantage of the multiplayer games we've included the front ends to run *Cyberstrike* and *SVGA Air Warrior*, two of the most popular games on *GEnie*.

SVGA Air Warrior will have you flying all types of warplanes through several era's of air combat, from biplanes to modern aircraft. The controls are pretty simple and missions challenging. *Cyberstrike* takes you into a futuristic battle scenario where you pilot a battle craft. Your craft will roam around fighting other on-line pilots. Energy runs everything in this game; shields, guns and engines, so stay powered up.

The *GEnie* front end will require Windows, 4MB hard drive space and VGA graphics. *Cyberstrike* will require an additional 2.5MB hard drive space and *SVGA Air Warrior* will require an additional whopping 38MB hard drive space. Each game comes with a README.TXT or MANUAL.DOC file to learn those little control variables.

For basic service including e-mail, multiplayer games and chatting the current rates are $8.95 per month for first 4 hours non-prime time and $3.00 per hour once the first 4 hours have been used. There's an additional surcharge of $9.50 per hour for prime time usage. All rates are for the continental U.S. And you can call the folks at GEnie at 1-800-638-9636 for more information.

Here's an ME109 diving on a pack of unsuspecting bombers — it's like shooting fish in a barrel.

Imagi-Nation Network

ImagiNation Network

Check out *The Imagi-Nation Network*. Where most services have screen after screen of indecipherable jargon, or at best glitzy colors with the same jargon, *ImagiNation* offers an entirely different interface - a town motif where the various utilities and services are couched in friendly, familiar surroundings. The friendliness even extends to your own on-line persona, a graphic representation you can customize to mirror you.

E-mail, conferences, entertainment areas, and the promise of future on-ramps to the Info Autobahn make *ImagiNation* a viable alternative to the millions who don't really want to know the ins and outs of Z-Modem and Wildcat, or learn the lexicon of the Internet...at least not yet. Install *ImagiNation* and get all the info on how to go "on-line."

Running the install program — FUN.BAT — loads *ImagiNation* onto your hard drive, and will require about 15MB of disk space. Then type INN from the DOS prompt to go into the sign-up screens. At the time of this writing rats for *ImagiNation* were:

Basic Plan	$9.95/month 5 hours/month
Gold Plan	$49.94/month 15 hours/month
Platinum	$99.95/month 50 hours/month

You can call 1-800-IMAGIN1 to get the latest rates and other information about getting started.

The opening *ImagiNation* land will take you to all sorts of destinations at the click of a button.

SCOOP!

EXCLUSIVE! BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF THE HOTTEST GAMES

The American Civil

The Definitive Civil War Game at Last?

Empire's recreation of the War Between the States let's you re-fight America's *Iliad* from both the strategic and tactical levels.

by William R. Trotter

The strategic game is suitable vast, but well organized and quite playable.

FYI. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: The American Civil War
Developer: Dagger Interactive Technologies, Ltd.
Publisher: Empire Software, #4 Professional Drive, Suite 123, Gaithersburg, MD 20879
(301) 916-9302
Projected Price: TBA
Percent Complete: 75%

In a nutshell:

Here's a historical simulation that aspires to distill this vast, far-flung conflict into a game that's playable as well as historically accurate.

What's so special?

Good Civil War games have been few and far between. Individual battles have been done justice, but no PC simulation to date has been able to embrace the totality of the conflict without collapsing under the weight of its details.

Why should I care?

ACW is based on an improved version of the *Fields of Glory*, engine and should be one of the handsomest, most colorful wargames of 1995.

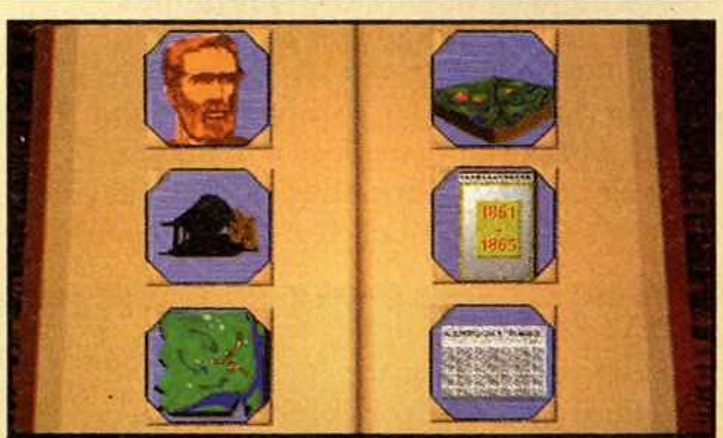
And when's it coming out?

Early second quarter of this year, probably sometime in April.

The surprise hit of the 1992 television season was a nine-hour historical documentary with no big-name stars (except for their voices), no live action footage (other than landscapes), and no "plot" other than a meticulously accurate record of events.

Yet Ken Burn's *The Civil War* not only became the most popular show in the history of Public Television, but it drew mass-audience ratings that made the commercial networks drool with envy. Hundreds of thousands of Americans — including, no doubt, many who had never watched a PBS documentary before — found themselves mesmerized by this intelligent, deeply moving evocation of our nation's greatest trial by fire.

Why is it that the Civil War continues to fascinate and move each successive generation of Americans? It's not merely the epic sweep and drama of the campaigns themselves; it's also the Shakespearian dimensions of the *people*.



An extensive database provides information on Civil War tactics, weapons, and leaders.

Battles take place on handsome 3D terrain models like this one.

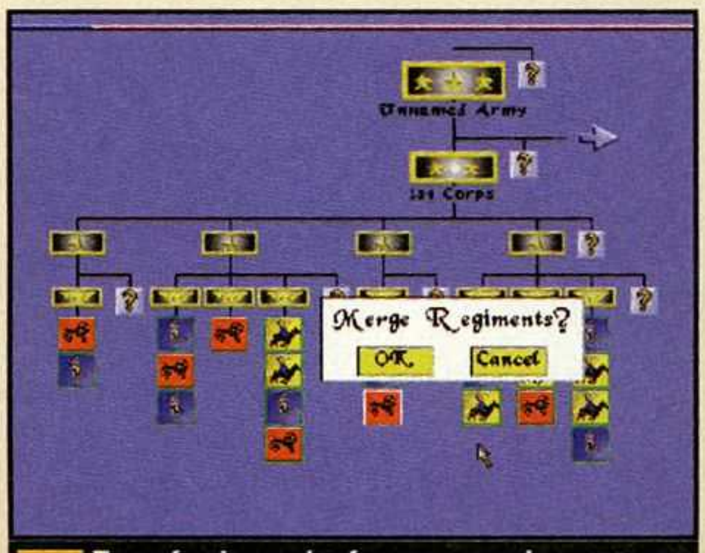
War

"From the educated officers to the barely-literate privates, every soldier who fought in the Civil War knew he was in the hurricane's eye of history."

When Ken Burns made the shrewd directorial decision to let the story of the conflict be told in the actual words of those who lived through it, he tapped into the source of the Civil War's enduring power.

The Civil War has always fared well in terms of board games, and individual battles have been the subject of some respected PC games — but no PC game has so far been able to make the entire conflict both manageable and playable. Only a handful of recent games have even tried, and one long-awaited product (designed by the legendary Sid Meier) has been delayed for so long that its appearance now seems questionable.

Into this vacuum steps British game meister Adrian Earle, with his ambitious strategic-tactical simulation *The American Civil War* (the "American" may be dropped from the U.S. edition, but at least it lets Europeans know that the game isn't about Cavaliers and Roundheads).



Transferring units from one regiment to another is a snap — all you do is just click, drag, and drop.

Earle was one of the chief designers of *Fields of Glory*, the first — and so far, the only — PC game that came close to reproducing the beauty and color of tabletop miniature wargames. While most reviewers (this one included) gave that Napoleonic simulation high marks for originality and graphic sparkle, there were many small complaints about the computer AI — units that suddenly seemed to run amok, and mounted officers who either rode off in mid-battle or inexplicably launched one-man charges on the enemy.

Indeed, much of the labor that has gone into *ACW* has been focused on eliminating the problems found in *Fields of Glory*. Earle remains committed to recreating the "miniatures" genre for the PC, though, as was obvious during my meeting with him in Raleigh, North Carolina.

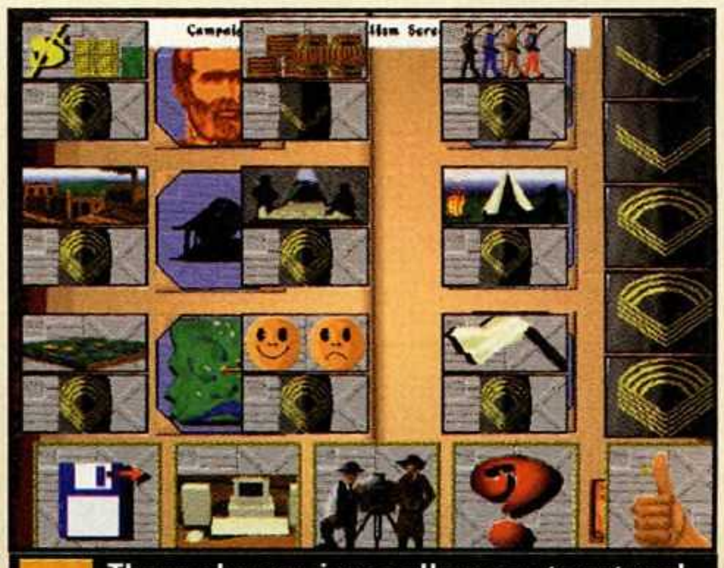
"For twenty years," Earle said, "I was an avid tabletop wargamer. I had more than two thousand miniatures from the Civil War period, and there was something quite grand about seeing them deployed on a huge battlefield with real hills and houses. There's nothing wrong with simply reproducing boardgames on a PC — but the computer is capable of doing so much, much more."

ACW's descent from *Fields of Glory* is immediately apparent when you move into the game's battle mode: the SVGA landscapes are beautifully contoured and Gouraud shaded, with the fences, fields, farms houses, and dirt roads typical of Civil War battlefields. The point of view is isometric, as in *Populous* and a host of other games, rather than the conventional god's-eye view straight down on to the map.

Units are exquisitely modeled, and a lot of care has been taken to make each separately-programmed "sprite" behave in a plausible manner during combat. Smoke puffs from muskets and cannon, solid shot throws up little fountains of earth, shells arc and bang overhead, and soldiers reload after firing, furiously tamping their next shots with little ramrods. Earle hopes that, in the final product, he can also program individual soldiers to thrust with bayonets, slash with rifle butts, fire pistols, etc., but he admits "it all depends on when we start running out of memory as to how much of those details we can squeeze in. There will certainly be more of them than in any previous miniatures-style PC wargame, but at some point we'll have to compromise between the ideal and the practical. We're pushing the limits, now."

You exercise tactical control over your troops by means of a love-it-or-hate-it, European-style interface in which each "attitude" is represented by a graphic icon/button. There are three groups of three possible orders, described as "forward, stand, and backward."

The forward orders dictate how a unit will respond to contact with the enemy; the normal command is simply march (to whatever point you click on with the mouse), and once you spot the enemy you give new orders either to advance cautiously, in a skirmish formation, or to attack as vigorously as morale and physical condition permit.



These chevron icons allow you to set realism and difficulty levels. The interface, she is tres European-looking, n'cest pas?

Once in battle, a unit may be ordered to stand in position and rest until given new orders or attacked; hold a position until enemy pressure becomes too great; or defend as tenaciously as possible.

The three backward orders are also logical: orderly withdrawal, fighting retreat, or every-man-for-himself flight (which can and often does turn into an uncontrolled route).

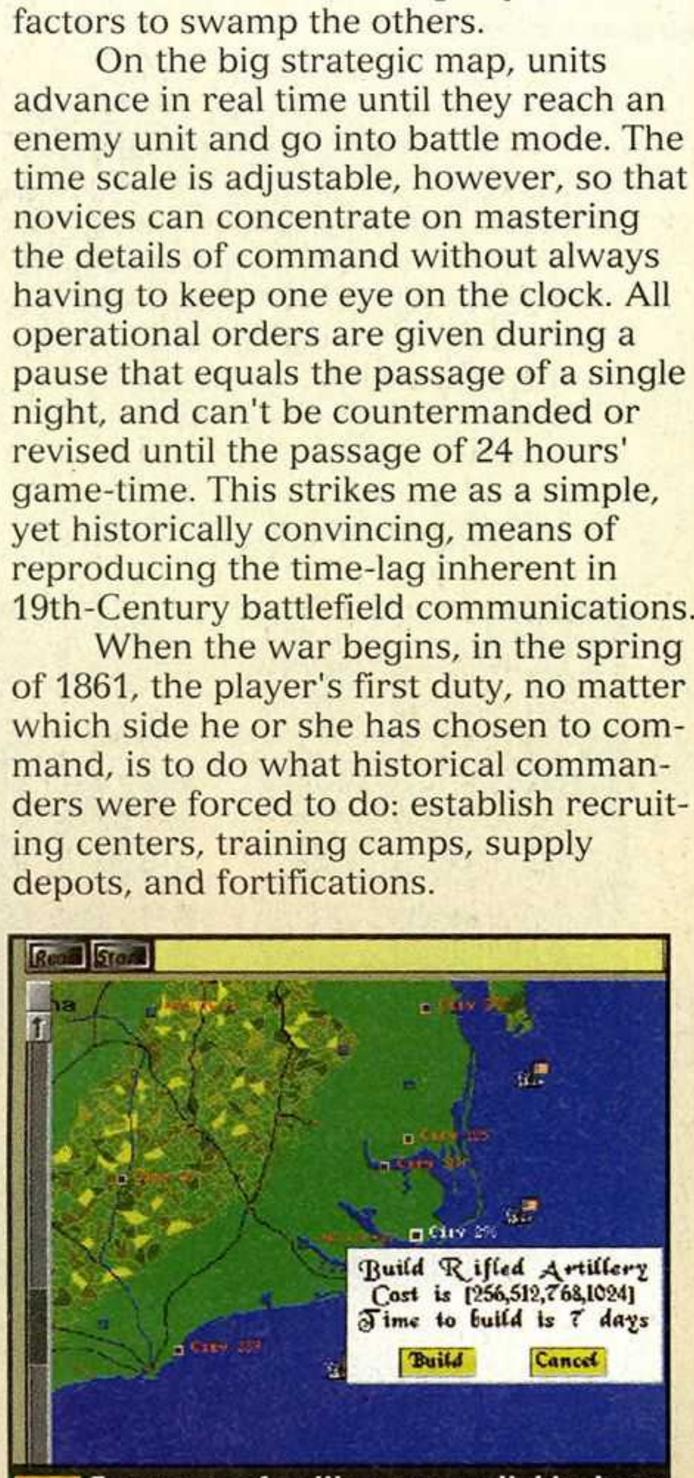
In close-up view, the game's tabletop miniatures origin is clearly apparent. The finished version will have gunsmoke, explosions, etc.

Battles can be fought out in such detail — or, in the interests of time — their results can be left to the computer. Since an entire campaign game can last *200 hours* or more, most gamers will probably opt for computer resolution of minor skirmishes, raids, and backwater encounters, while choosing to fight out the big battles in full.

Aside from its unprecedented effort to achieve and even surpass miniatures-style realism in its battle scenes, *ACW*'s strongest element seems to be the skill with which the battles have been nested inside a strategic game of great scope — one that factors in economics, infrastructure, weapons' technology, naval operations, diplomatic shifts, and political trends — without allowing any of those factors to swamp the others.

On the big strategic map, units advance in real time until they reach an enemy unit and go into battle mode. The time scale is adjustable, however, so that novices can concentrate on mastering the details of command without always having to keep one eye on the clock. All operational orders are given during a pause that equals the passage of a single night, and can't be countermanded or revised until the passage of 24 hours' game-time. This strikes me as a simple, yet historically convincing, means of reproducing the time-lag inherent in 19th-Century battlefield communications.

When the war begins, in the spring of 1861, the player's first duty, no matter which side he or she has chosen to command, is to do what historical commanders were forced to do: establish recruiting centers, training camps, supply depots, and fortifications.



Four types of artillery are available: large and small-caliber smooth-bores, rifled, and siege. It's quality versus quantity.

If there's enough left in the treasury once these basics are taken care of, you may additionally invest in upgrading the railhead capacity of strategically placed locations. While this doesn't have a direct impact on battlefield strength, it makes for improved efficiency when shuttling troops from one front to another, and increases the flow of supplies. A bit of judicious investment in this area will pay special dividends for the Confederacy, although it will surely strain the budget in the short run.

Wisely, I think, Earle and his cohorts have made the decision to end the simulation with the crucial Presidential election of 1864. If the South has inflicted enough loss on the North, McClellan's "Peace Party" will defeat Lincoln and the Republicans, and the war will end in a negotiated peace and European recognition of the Confederacy. This is a realistic and attainable goal of Confederate strategy, whereas an outright military defeat of the North would be unbelievable even in a game.

Battlefields can be rotated 360 degrees, giving you powers of observation that a real Civil War commander could only dream of during battle.

Even today, the Civil War stirs our passions, and it is not likely that any one PC game will satisfy all interested gamers. A wargame that tries to simulate *everything*, down to individual supply columns and commerce raiders, would probably be unplayable. The success or failure of any Civil War game depends on which compromises the designer chooses to make.

From what I've seen so far, *The American Civil War* is characterized by some very intelligent choices. It captures the awesome scale of the big picture, while still offering plenty of vivid battlefield action. This could well be the Civil War game we've all been hoping for, and I for one can hardly wait to implement Longstreet's proposed (and rejected, by Davis and Lee) Confederate plan of strategic defense, and see what happens.

PCG

What Else is Available?

Although individual Civil War battles have been successfully treated as PC games, the war as a whole hasn't. So for gamers interested in the period but new to PC wargaming, here's a run-down on what's currently available — and how I'd rate each title.

The Blue and the Gray
Impressions — (203) 676-9454

Designer Edward Grabowski is also dedicated to reproducing the tabletop miniatures' style for the PC, and in this ambitious product, he comes fairly close to getting it right. The strategic game is well designed if historically shaky in some respects, and the battle scenes are, at least initially, appealing. The animation leaves room for improvement, and in melee battles the little-bitty soldiers appear to be dancing with each other rather than trying to bash each others' brains out.

Rating: C+

Gettysburg: Multimedia Battle Simulation
Swifte International — (302) 234-1740

This is quite a package, including video clips from Ted Turner's epic movie, as well as a documentary account of the historical events narrated by Shelby Foote. The game itself, which is really only half of the product, got mixed reviews — but I enjoyed the hell out of it. A slick educational program combined with a solid, introductory-level simulation.

Rating: B+

Decisive Battles of the American Civil War 3 volumes
SSG — (904) 469-8880

For a long time, these well-conceived games from Australia's most respected game developer ruled the field. They incorporate a Battlefront System that permits you to issue orders, but not to intervene in actual combat. Some gamers liked the realism of that; I never did...much. Still, these are serious simulations and they do provide considerable insight into the war.

Rating: C to C+

From Sumter to Appomattox
Adanac Command Systems Corporation

A hugely ambitious game that struggled valiantly to nail down the whole of the Civil War, strategically and tactically. Unfortunately, the game suffered from crude graphics, countless bugs, an impossibly confused interface, a ponderous system of logistics, and perhaps the worst-written manual it has ever been my displeasure to wade through.

Rating: D

No Greater Glory
SSI — (408) 737-6800

No greater frustration is more like it. The political aspects of running the war are reproduced in such lopsided, infuriating, and distracting detail that it is all but impossible, at least on the CSA side, to develop meaningful strategies. Bizarre design choices abound — the game will allow you to invest resources in ironclads and improved coastal fortifications, for instance, but will not let you choose where to put those assets. The graphics are insultingly crude and cartoony — really inexcusable — and the whole bloody enterprise finally sinks under the weight of its designer's expertise. Educational, to a certain extent, but minimalist in terms of gameplay.

Rating: C-

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Product Information Number 123

SCOOP!
Your first look at...

Virtual Pool

Taking The Hype Out of VR

Interplay and developer Celeris are creating an incredible pool sim — and redefining the concept of virtual reality, too.

by Matt Firme

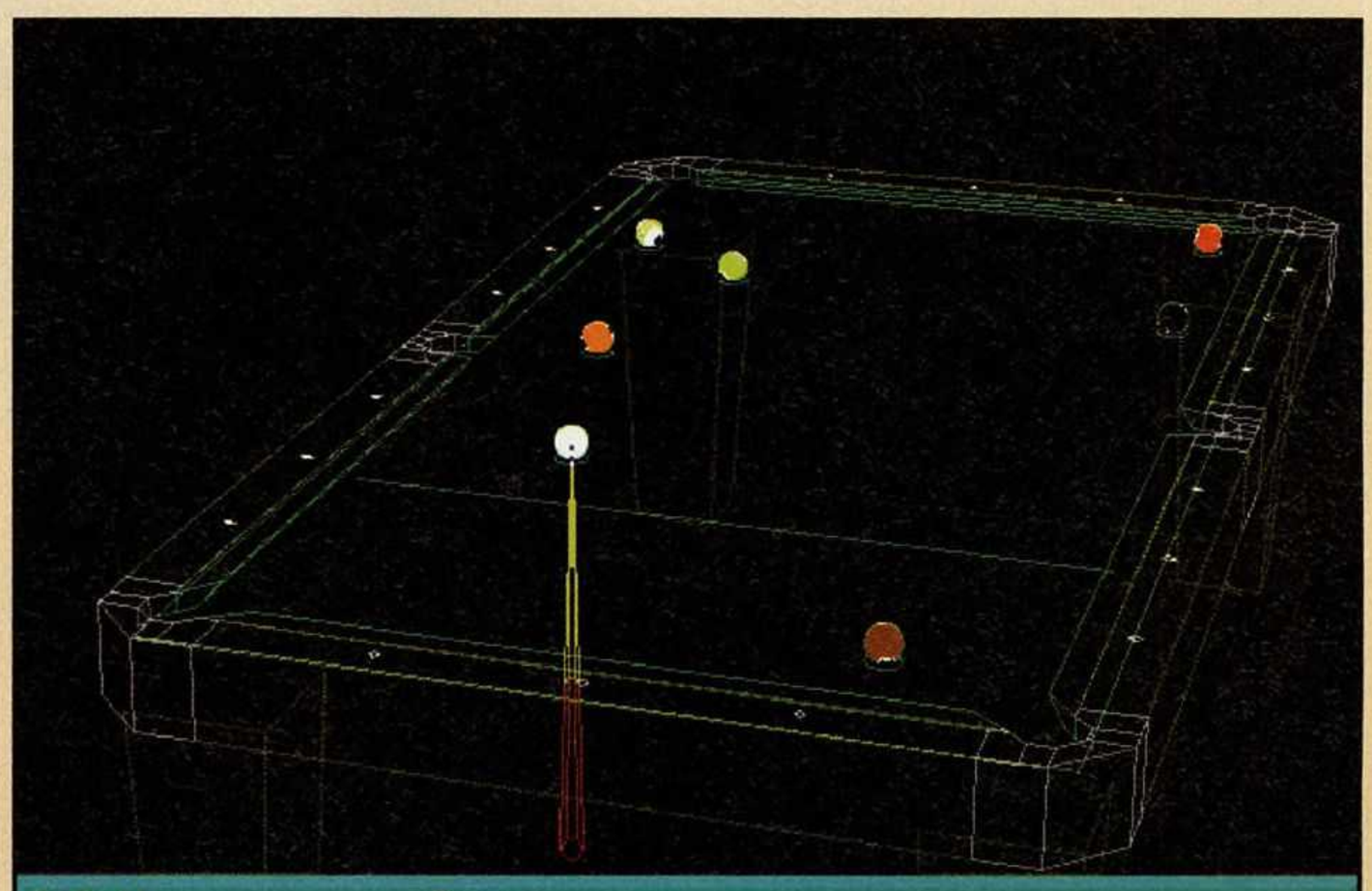
Celeris president Steve Chaplin used to play a lot of pool, and in fact he almost turned pro. But instead, he went into software — military applications, initially. He's worked on anti-submarine warfare programs and graphic display packages for Lockheed, and Celeris was originally founded to work on such no-nonsense stuff as 3D medical imaging and military cockpit simulators.

But if you've ever played pool — and especially, if you've played *well* — you know it's a hard habit to shake. So it's not too surprising to find the high-tech crew at Celeris now pushing the envelope of game simulations and virtual reality with *Virtual Pool* — one of the most impressive titles I've seen in a long, long time.

Why a pool sim, though? After all, you don't see many of them on the best-sellers lists — but Chaplin thinks there's a good reason for that. "When I approached some people about the idea of a pool game, a lot of them said 'ahh, pool games have never sold well.' And I said that's because none of them has ever been playable. That's what was wrong with pool sims. Pool itself is a great sport, and it's played by a number of people. I just felt that if it were done right, it could be like *Links*. No one got rich on golf sims, either, until *Links* came along."

Creating the *Links* of pool is a lofty

Virtual Pool **lets gives you your choice of games, opponents, and even two-player methods. Snooker is available, too.**



Beneath it all, this is the heart of *Virtual Pool*. Celeris spent almost two years making sure that, when textured, the wire-frame graphics would still move as smoothly as possible.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Virtual Pool
Developer: Celeris
Publisher: Interplay, 17922 Fitch Avenue, Irvine CA 92714
(714) 553-6655
Projected Price: TBA
Percent Complete: 65%

In a nutshell:

Virtual Pool **is a 3D pool sim, allowing unprecedented control of the game it simulates and some of the best physical modeling routines you've ever seen. And then there's modem and network play, video enhancement, and some wickedly competitive computer opponents.**

What's so special?

This is one of the most thorough, accurate, and playable sims we've seen. It deserves to be called virtual reality, because it creates a convincing 3D environment that reacts realistically to your manipulation.

Why should I care?

Two reasons. First, because pool is a great game, and no PC title has done it justice until now. And second, because *Virtual Pool* is flat-out impressive stuff. If you're a gamer, you have to see this thing in action.

And when's it coming out?

It won't be long — probably the end of March or the beginning of April

"I just felt that if a pool sim were done right, it could be like Links. No one got rich on golf sims either until *Links* came along."
—Steve Chaplin, President, Cleris

You can get in as close as you want and shift your viewing angle, just to make sure you've got those important shots lined up right.

ambition — and from what I've seen, Chaplin is going to pull it off. Published for Celeris by Interplay, *Virtual Pool* is pretty much what its title suggests: a virtual reality pool simulation. I know, that "virtual reality" phrase has been misused and hyped for a long, long time now. But *VP* deserves the moniker, because it really does give you the feeling that you're in a 3D, computer-generated room with a pool table, and you can do just about anything in this virtual room that you could do if you really were in such a setting — and even some things you couldn't. So if you want to look down on the table to check position for your next shot, you do it. If you want to crouch and look right down your stick to line up on the nine, you can do that too.

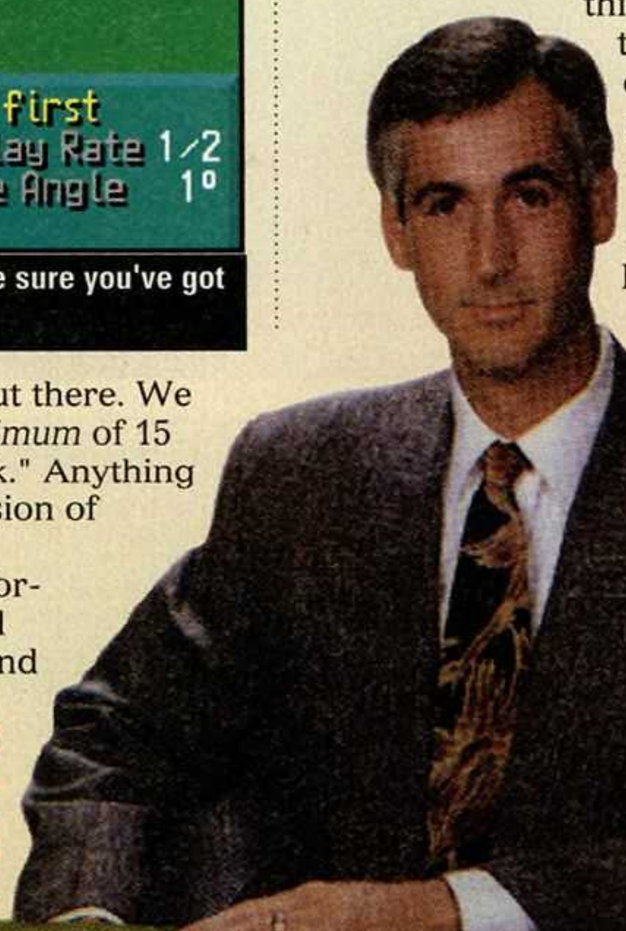
In all honesty, the still graphics you see here just don't do justice to the game in action. Because the entire play area — table, balls, and all the rest — move with unbelievable fluidity, achieving frame rates of 30 or more frames per second at times, and never falling much below twenty. And that's running at a resolution of 640X480, 256 colors, on a 486!

Fluid, convincing animation was a primary objective for Chaplin and the *VP* design team. "One of the really critical factors in creating good VR," Chaplin says, "is having high frame rates. And this thing runs at way higher frame rates than anything else out there. We felt that you needed a *minimum* of 15 frames per second to work." Anything less than that, and the illusion of reality begins to crumble.

To achieve such performance, Chaplin says you'll need at least a 386/40 — and that'll give you great performance, but at VGA resolutions. You'll need local-bus video, either VLB or PCI, to get the beautiful 640X480 stuff.

And to assure that whatever card you're using delivers maximum performance, Celeris took the unusual step of writing video for specific video cards — lots of video cards. "Our goal is to ship the game with drivers for every video card on the market," Chaplin says. "Then we'll put drivers for new cards, or anything we've missed, on Interplay's BBS."

In addition to moving well, a good pool sim has to model the physics of the game perfectly. Because physics is ultimately what pool is all about, and it's here that other pool games have come up short. But Celeris' work on more demanding sims and military software gave the company a real advantage in this area. "We did a tremendous number of studies on pool physics, and I can tell you that the physical model in this game is very, very good. I've had world-championship pool players come in



Steve Chaplin thought of becoming a professional pool player at one time. Fortunately for us, he decided to design games instead.

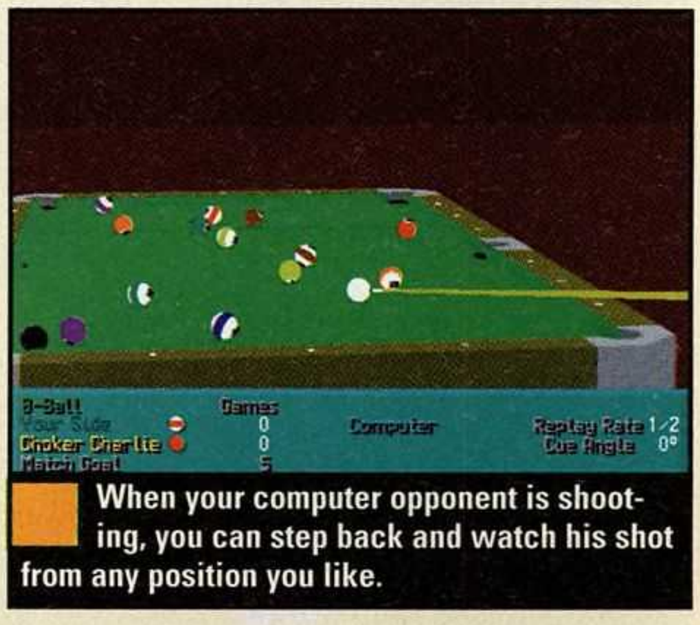
and test the thing, and it plays very close to a real pool table."

Once you play *VP*, you'll quickly realize that Chaplin is speaking the truth here. The ball movements, the action and reaction, are all absolutely life-like. You never have the luxury of blaming the sim for a shot you missed; *VP* is like being at a professional tournament, and playing on an absolutely level, pristine table.

Helping to further the illusion of actually being there is the interface, a mouse-driven system that rotates the table and balls through a full 360 degrees. So if you're looking at a tough shot to win the match, you can use your mouse to "walk" down to the other end of the table or around to either side to get a closer look. The interface lets you interact directly and physically with the environment, quickly eliminating the impression that you're just watching the game on your monitor.

Even more impressively, the mouse gives you direct control of your cue. You draw your cue back by pulling your mouse back, and the speed with which you move it forward again determines how hard you'll hit the cue ball. You also have complete control of where you hit the cue ball (a little english, anyone?), how high you raise the butt of the cue, and more. Celeris had to write its own algorithms to make this degree of physical realism possible; but again, their dedication pays off in the finished product.

By pressing E while moving the mouse, you can adjust the cue tip to put english on the ball. A big help in getting position for the next shot, and the only way to beat some of the computer opponents.

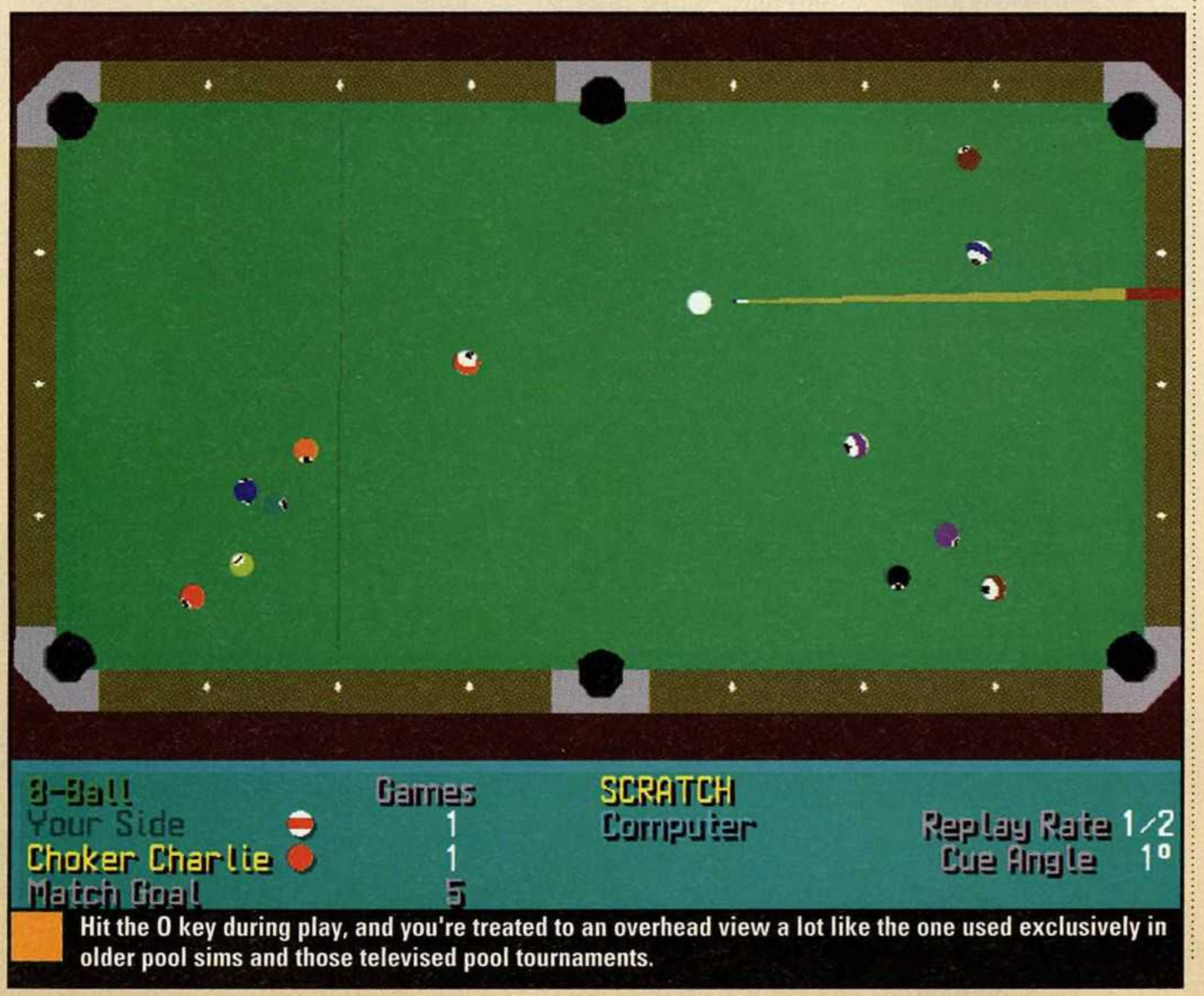


When your computer opponent is shooting, you can step back and watch his shot from any position you like.

When it is finished, *VP* will feature multimedia enhancements, and ship on CD-ROM. I haven't seen that stuff yet, though; the early version I have is pure pool (you can play snooker, too), and so impressive that I began to worry that adding a bunch of multimedia flash would just slow the game down. But Chaplin just laughed at this concern; he very clearly understands that there's a time and a place for video clips. "The idea of introducing multimedia components is to make the product better. Slowing it down certainly won't make it better." So the extras have been designed to supplement gameplay — not to intrude on it.

You'll see video introducing computer opponents, in game intros and between rounds, and in a special trick-shot section that'll feature well-known players (Chaplin couldn't be more specific yet) making some amazing shots, then the sim will kick in to reproduce the shots and let you try them. There may be voice during actual gameplay, Chaplin says, but he thinks video would be too disruptive, and seem out of place.

Rounding out *Virtual Pool* is complete modem, null-modem, and network support. It works incredible well, too; you set up your shot, moving around the table as you like, then shoot. When you're done, you stand back and watch as your opponent shoots — again, just like in real life.



Hit the O key during play, and you're treated to an overhead view a lot like the one used exclusively in older pool sims and those televised pool tournaments.

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Product Information Number 125

Tank Commander

Domark's Multi-Player Battlewagon

Domark is working on a modern tank sim that combines detail, playability, and multi-player action in one red-hot package.

by Dan Bennett

Tank Commander lets you control and issue orders to a platoon of four Challenger II tanks.

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Tank Commander
Developer: Big Red
Publisher: Domark Software, Inc., 1900 S. Norfolk St., Suite 110, San Mateo, CA 94403 (415) 513-9829
Projected Price: $54.95

In a nutshell:

Although there have been sims that deal in modern armored combat, few have been truly satisfying. Domark is hoping that *Tank Commander's* blend of action and accuracy will change all that.

What's so special?

In addition to offering a detailed one-player simulation, *Tank Commander* provides for multi-player action via serial link, modem, or network.

Why should I care?

Big Red is working closely with Vickers, the manufacturer of the British Challenger II tank, on *Tank Commander*. This should yield impressive realism.

And when's it coming out?

Domark is aiming for a March 1995 release, though it may be well into April.

"We wanted to write a nineties version of *Battle Zone*," says Paul Ransom, project manager for Domark's latest sim.

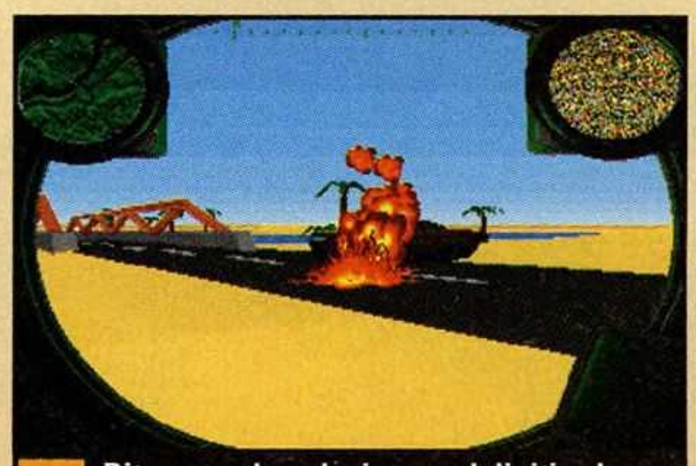
But as Ransom took another look at that Atari coin-op classic (thanks to a recent Windows version of the Atari arcade hits), he soon realized the old games we fell in love with years ago can seem a little shallow in today's 3D-rendered, gouraud-shaded, texture-mapped world. So Ransom's company, Big Red, linked up with Vickers — the company that builds Britain's Challenger II main battle tank — to turn out something a little more in line with the times.

When Ransom and his team found themselves up to their necks in authentic telemetry, three-dimensional computer models, and video footage of the Challenger II, all supplied by Vickers, they realized they had the material they needed to put together a much more sophisticated simulation than *Battle Zone*. But the guys at Big Red hung on to the other part of their original vision — a multi-player "blast-'em-up."

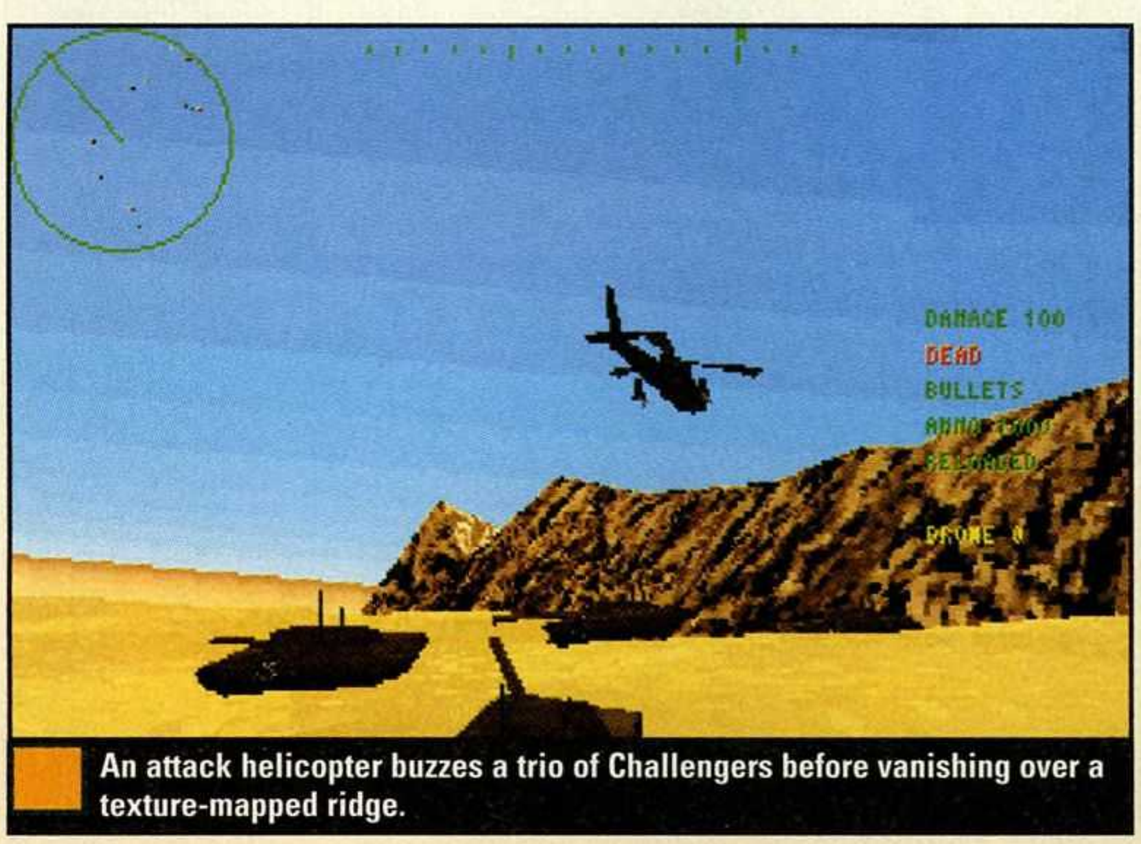
The result is *Tank Commander*, an armored combat simulator that balances realistic detail with fast-paced action for one to four players.

Tank Commander has an impressive pedigree: The design team put in time on Vickers' own Challenger II simulator, based on a powerful Silicon Graphics system, and they're using it as a model for the Domark game. Ransom even managed to down an Apache attack helicopter when he took his turn — much to the surprise of his team and the people at Vickers.

"We've done as best a job as we can at converting their simulation," Ransom



Bit-mapped explosions and digitized sounds taken from an actual firing range create a feeling of real power.



An attack helicopter buzzes a trio of Challengers before vanishing over a texture-mapped ridge.

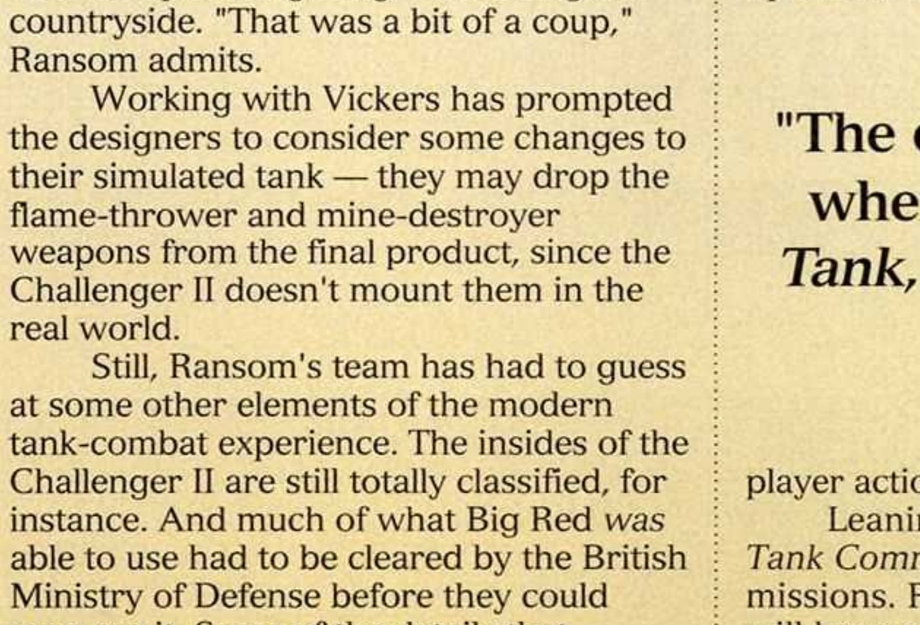
says. In fact, Big Red has gone so far as to incorporate digitized sounds from the Vickers simulator in *Tank Commander* — and those sounds were taken from actual tanks, recorded as their guns and treads chewed up a firing range in the English countryside. "That was a bit of a coup," Ransom admits.

Working with Vickers has prompted the designers to consider some changes to their simulated tank — they may drop the flame-thrower and mine-destroyer weapons from the final product, since the Challenger II doesn't mount them in the real world.

Still, Ransom's team has had to guess at some other elements of the modern tank-combat experience. The insides of the Challenger II are still totally classified, for instance. And much of what Big Red *was* able to use had to be cleared by the British Ministry of Defense before they could even see it. Some of the details that couldn't be released were a bit strange. The team was given information on the Challenger II's weapon systems, for example, but the exact *weight* of the tank is a closely-guarded secret. Other facts Ransom couldn't pry out of his contact at Vickers were available in unclassified reference works like *Jane's World Armored Fighting Vehicles*.

But Ransom and company weren't aiming to make the world's most realistic PC tank simulation; they were after something that would actually be fun to play. As Domark's Brian Walker puts it, "the designers were hoping to strike a balance somewhere between the realism of Spectrum Holobyte's *Tank*, and the multi-player action of Velocity's *Spectre VR*."

Leaning toward the *Tank* side is *Tank Commander*'s AI for one-player missions. Ransom says the final product will have computer-controlled enemies that respond in nine or ten different patterns to any given situation. And the enemy is at least as well-equipped as the player. In addition to the tanks commanded by player and computer, the game promises to be chock-full of support vehicles — attack choppers, scout helicopters, jeeps, motorcycles, microlights, and even foot soldiers. Ransom said Big Red has even thrown in Jeeps and Chinook assault choppers that drop men on the battlefield.



You use the satellite-map view to dispatch scout and attack choppers, and to give orders to your tank platoon.

Those battlefields will be about 3.5 kilometers square, and they'll come in several flavors — desert, snow and ice, green for Northern Europe, and an archipelago of islands linked by bridges. Each of the nine maps in the game will be the theater of operations for about five different missions.

The belly-camera of your scout chopper reveals a panoramic view of the enemy's helicopter base.

In one-player mode, you'll control a platoon of four tanks, a la MicroProse's *M1 Tank Platoon*. A satellite-map view will let the player direct tanks to any part of the battlefield, and you'll be able to jump into the driver's seat — or commander's chair, or gunner's station — of each tank at any time. Digitized video will show crew members responding to your orders.

"The designers were hoping to strike a balance somewhere between the realism of Spectrum Holobyte's *Tank*, and the multi-player action of Velocity's *Spectre VR*." — *Brian Walker, Domark*

Attack choppers will also be available to soften up the enemy ahead of your platoon, and scout helicopters can be sent to act as eyes in the sky for the grunts on the ground. The scout option is handled beautifully — you set two waypoints on the map, dispatch the chopper, and you're treated to a view from a camera mounted between the bird's landing skids. The view can by panned and tilted with the mouse, and is rendered in black-and-white to add to the believability. It's a stirring experience to send a chopper over the mountains and spot a hidden enemy base, complete with choppers, supply huts, and tents. And it's just plain useful to discover an enemy tank lying in wait around the next turn of a twisted canyon pass.

Leaning toward the *Spectre* side of the equation are the game's emphasis on action, its multi-player capabilities, and its graphic style. *Tank Commander* will have serial-port and modem options for two-

player games, and will also feature Novell network support. Ransom says the game will allow for *at least* four players in network mode; more players shouldn't slow the actual simulation down, he said, but matters like synchronizing each computer with the others could make things choppy.

Right now, the game's main graphics are nice, solid polygons. They're well-animated and effective, in keeping with Ransom's emphasis on playability. Bitmapped explosions and fireballs abound, rewarding you for good marksmanship. In the finished game, the polygons will be thoroughly shaded and textured, creating an even more exciting game environment.

The finished product's texture maps will include tank insignia, mountainsides and waterfalls.

And for additional visual flair, the designers used Silicon Graphics stations to create 3D-rendered animations that will appear between missions, and at certain points in the action. And the *Tank Commander* team — Ransom, Graham Mason, Jon Cartwright, Lyndon Homewood, Fred Williams, Peter Ransom, Mark Neesam, Paul Jennings, Peter Clarke and Gez Gourey — was recruited to appear as tankers in video-capture segments. Ransom said the blue-screen shooting session went very well, although "it took a few tuns of ale to get everyone over their nerves."

Tank Commander will also feature a separate multimedia section on the history of armored warfare —which, Ransom says, will incorporate video footage taken from the films Vickers uses to sell the Challenger II.

Finally, the game will have support for major virtual-reality hardware; Ransom was working with the VictorMaxx VR helmet at the time of this interview. He said the biggest problem with adding VR support to *Tank Commander* was the queasiness he felt when using it — and the sneaking suspicion that the other team members were making faces at him while he was immersed in virtual reality.

It'll be interesting to see how *Tank Commander* fares against the disappointing but long-awaited *Armored Fist,* and MicroProse's much-delayed *Across the Rhine;* from what we've seen so far, it looks like *Tank Commander* may well become the tank sim of choice among action-lovers.

PCG

Domark revs up two more for 1995

Domark has more than tanks on its mind these days, with two science fiction extravaganzas planned for early 1995: a combat sim called *Absolute Zero;* and *The Orion Conspiracy,* a graphic adventure.

Billed as the world's first "Sci-Sim," *Absolute Zero* takes place in the year 2374 on Europa, Jupiter's icy moon. The Europan Mining Colony is devastated when an alien race erupts from the moon's frigid core, killing a third of the population and thrusting the miners into a struggle to save humanity.

Michael Anthony Keane, Domark's marketing VP, said *Absolute Zero* was developed in response to fans of Domark's flight sims, who requested a space sim.

Absolute Zero features texture-mapped 3D objects rendered in SVGA — including twelve different vehicles the player can control in combat. Gamers can choose to fight on the side of the humans or the extraterrestrials; either way, Domark promises the game will have advanced artificial intelligence to keep things challenging.

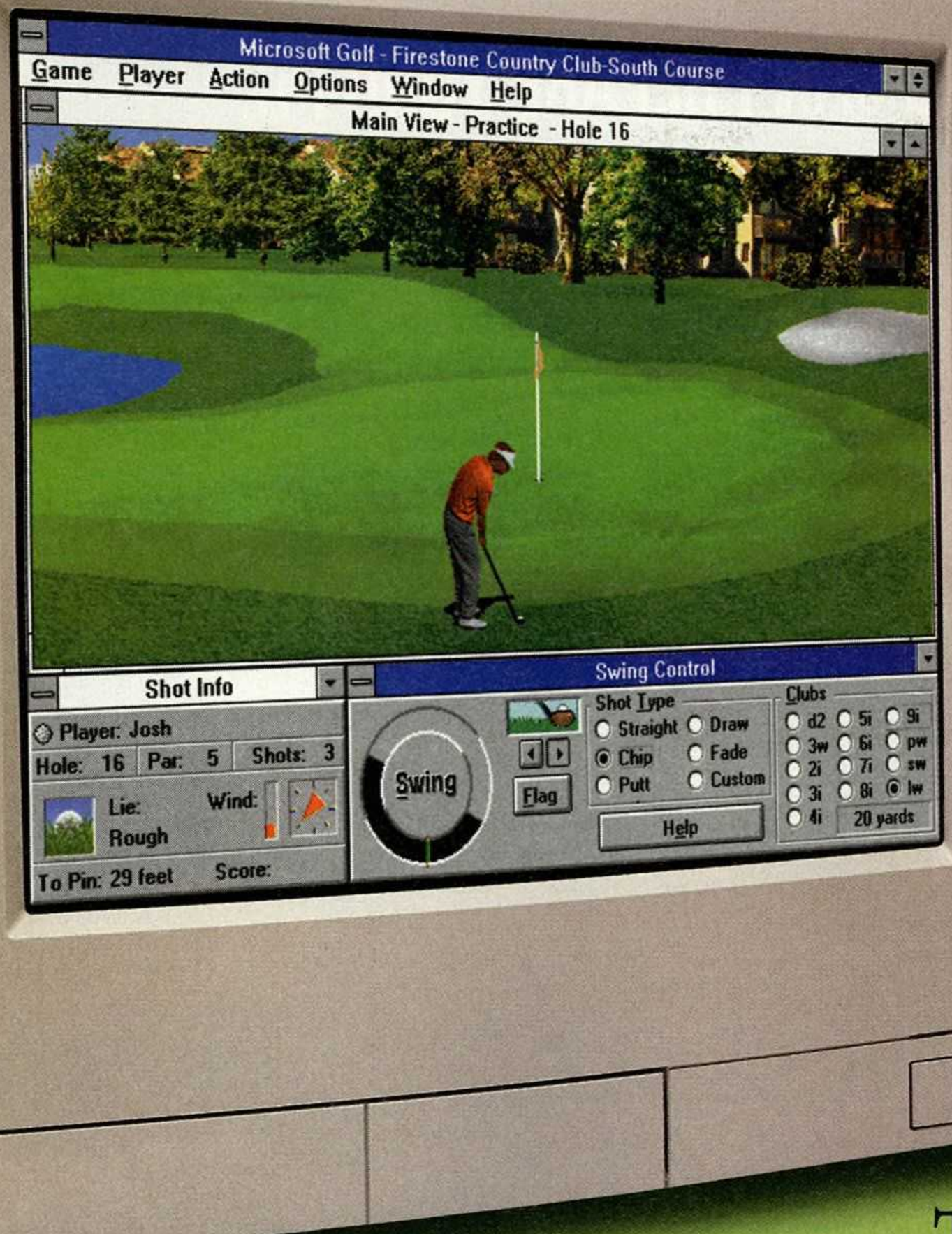
The Orion Conspiracy, Domark's entry into the world of graphic adventures, combines 3D-rendered, full-motion action sequences with gorgeous hand-painted backgrounds for an SVGA visual feast.

A mystery set in a cyberpunk future of greedy megacorporations, *The Orion Conspiracy* drops the player into Cerebus, a space research station where information on a recent murder is scarce. The fix is in, and a conspiracy is afoot. Can you get to the bottom of it all? You're damn skippy you can!

Both products are slated for a March-April 1995 release on CD-ROM.

This image from *Absolute Zero* gives a glimpse of the game's beautiful SVGA graphics.

This sharp-looking shuttlecraft comes from one of *The Orion Conspiracy*'s 3D-rendered animation sequences. The bulk of gameplay will be more like a graphic adventure.



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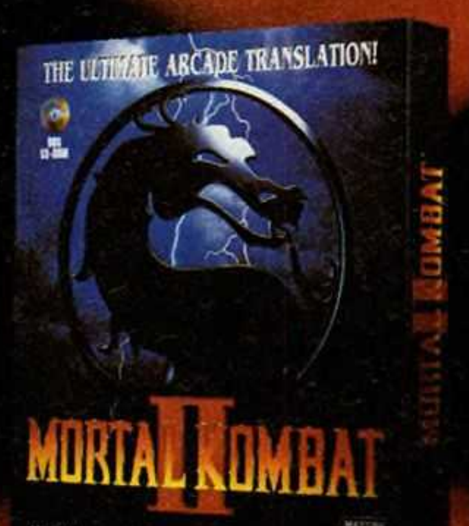

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Product Information Number 81

Windows '95: The Good News

The new interface differs from the current Windows 3.1 by removing mouse double-clicking in favor of a start button, located in the lower left corner of the screen.

The new Windows may actually make it *easier* for gamers to load up their favorite titles.

The long-promised successor to Windows 3.1, titled Windows '95, will soon be making its way to desktops everywhere, bringing with it, the sort of improvements and enhancements you'd expect in a major version upgrade like this. But the big news of '95 isn't in its increased multitasking or networking capabilities: What's really been shaking up the industry is that unlike Windows 3.1, '95 is a true operating system —MS-DOS won't be required at all.

Eliminating the need for new users to learn DOS commands is an admirable goal, as is the promise to make most memory-management problems a thing of the past. But more than few of us in the gaming industry have expressed misgivings about this new operating system that claims to do it all.

Here at *PC Gamer,* our number one concern is, obviously enough, the effect '95 will have on gaming. When it's finally released, '95 will undoubtedly be the default operating system on many new machines, and will also be available as a low-cost upgrade for current 3.1 users. With the number of new PCs sold each year coupled with all those upgrades, it's likely '95 could quickly become the dominant operating system. If it proves to be an OS that's conducive to gaming, great; if not, we may all end up playing '95 *Minesweeper.*

> **Windows '95 is a complete operating system, with no need for a separate MS-DOS — yet it contains the full functionality of MS-DOS.**

From the start, Microsoft's designers recognized that 3.1 had not been designed with the demands of PC games in mind. And because of Windows' limitations as a game platform, nearly all serious software developers ignored Windows — despite the potentially massive gaming market consisting of Windows-only users.

Gamers were therefore left to deal with nearly everything in MS-DOS, and the increasing complexity of game software has meant that there's been plenty to deal with. It's a rare DOS-based game that doesn't require the user to make some type of alterations in their AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files, usually to allocate the correct type of memory, set sound-card parameters, or unload device drivers — a sometimes confusing, often intimidating proposition, particularly for new PC users. Microsoft targeted this as one of the MS-DOS's weakest points as a gaming platform, and set out to offer games an attractive alternative: no more AUTOEXEC.BAT or CONFIG.SYS files.

Microsoft says that many popular games will come pre-supported by way of ready-made *.PIF files (or the '95 equivalent), but more importantly, the software will be automatically optimized for your systems' configuration and installed devices. Detection of installed games is automatic, so you'll be up and running in no time. Example: If you want to play *Doom* (which, by the way, is supported) you only need to install the game.

Sounds good, but we wanted to get more specific information on '95 and what it can mean for PC gamers. So we called the folks at Microsoft and asked them to answer a few questions — which they were more than happy to do.

What if a game isn't supported?

If a game fails to run or isn't supported by '95, Microsoft has included a series of advanced help programs called Wizards. The MS-DOS Wizard it will walk you through a series of choices concerning memory issues, hardware configurations and other options in attempt to create a *.PIF file or configuration for the new game. Microsoft claims this process will be able to handle practically any game that isn't pre-supported.

And if my game still doesn't run?

Windows '95 is a complete operating system, which means it has no need for a separate MS-DOS — yet it contains the full functionality of MS-DOS. If you've been unable to make your game run with the MS-DOS Wizard, Microsoft says you can exit '95 (which will leave only a tiny stub) and operate in a pure MS-DOS environment. When you're done with the game, you can exit DOS and return to Windows '95.

Are there any performance problems associated with running DOS games in Windows '95?

Microsoft says no — game perfor-

Microsoft says multimedia development will be supported in a big way by '95 32-bit architecture.

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CD-ROM CINEMATIC MULTIMEDIA™

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mance should be on par with what you would get under MS-DOS, unless you're attempting to run a game in a reduced window rather than in full screen mode or while multitasking. While it sounds promising, you have to remember the source — and we suspect each game's specific requirements will have a lot to do with their performance.

What about memory? One of the growing problems with DOS-based games has been freeing up enough conventional memory (the first 640K of memory, also called base RAM). No matter how hard you try, if you need your CD-ROM driver, MSCDEX (Microsoft CD-ROM Extensions), SmartDrive (disk-caching), and mouse drivers loaded, it seems many gamers still can't reach the typical requirements of 580K, let alone the 600K+ necessary to play some games. With '95 Microsoft has substituted the real-mode device drivers — HIMEM.SYS, EMM386.EXE, QEMM386.SYS, etc. — with 32-bit protected mode Virtual Device Drivers (VDD's) which use a zero conventional memory footprint. By replacing just those three drivers you can save over 80K of RAM!

This has obvious benefits, but we *were wondering* if these protected-mode drivers will conflict with games running in the popular DOS4GW protected mode. The answer to this is a not-too-reassuring "maybe." Depending on the sort of demands the game place on the system's hardware, it's possible these VDD's won't work. You'll always have the real-mode drivers as backup, but then you're back where you started in terms of conventional memory.

How will '95 handle configuration of peripherals, in particular sound cards? Say you've just bought a new sound card? Well, if it's supported by '95's Plug and Play feature, you'll no longer need to worry about configuring things like IRQ's, DMA's, or port addresses. Just put the card in the right slot and reboot, and '95 will recognize it automatically and adjust all those settings for you. And one of the least-heralded features of '95 — joystick support — could be a real boon for gamers experiencing calibration problems.

Installing games under Windows 3.1 — especially CD-ROM titles, which often want to install and configure other applications like Quicktime, Video for Windows, or MCI Audio — can often be just as confusing as doing it in MS-DOS. Will '95 address these problems? Windows '95 has a feature called AutoSpin, which reduces the installation of a game to simply putting a CD-ROM in the drive. '95 will spin the disc and begin the game/application installation automatically. This is a manufacturer-supported feature that will work with MS-DOS based games or 3.1/'95.

Some games limit my saved-game descriptions to a measly eight characters. Help! An annoying drawback to MS-DOS and Windows 3.1 is 11-character limit on file names. Searching through directories for the correct .EXE, .BAT, or .COM file when you don't know what you're looking for can sometimes be maddening. With '95 Microsoft, file names can be up to 256 characters long and don't need extensions, so users and manufacturers can use "Bob's really important stuff" or "This is the install file" as filenames.

Plug and Play has the potential to make those hardware installation blues disappear.

Overall, we've found there's plenty to like about '95. The new interface, networking, and multitasking improvements over 3.1 are certainly reason enough to want a copy. For gaming however, the proof is in the puddin', so we're waiting for our chance at getting a real copy of '95 and putting it through its paces. With DOS compatibility guaranteed to be on par with MS-DOS 6.3, '95 seems to offer gamers the perfect safety net, allowing us to see what the next level of gaming may offer without abandoning a proven — although sometimes challenging — operating system.

Under Construction

It never fails — just as we're going closing out an issue we receive press releases, screen shots, demos, and other important information on games you've been wanting to read about. While it's great finding out more about release dates, new features, hardware specs, and so on, it's not usually enough to do a full-fledged Scoop! That's why, with this issue, we're introducing Under Construction to our Eyewitness section, where we'll give you the latest word on all the new developments we can dig up and bring 'em piping hot and fresh right to your door. From the latest in 3D shooters to awe-inspiring adventure games, here's what we gathered for you this month.

The Dig/LucasArts

It's been quite a while since we've heard anything on the Steven Spielberg-inspired *The Dig,* so we decided to give LucasArts a call. A spokesperson from LucasArts says that development on *The Dig* is fully underway, adding that many of the techniques and advances being pioneered in their soon-to-be-released *Full Throttle* will likely be used in this sci-fi thriller. ETA: Fall '95.

Prisoner of Ice/ Infogrames

The sequel to *Shadow of the Comet* is based on another of H.P. Lovecraft's spooky tales. *POI*'s developer, Infogrames, is planning to add some notable refinements in control and animations for the second installment in its Call of Cthulhu series. ETA: Late Spring '95.

Flight Unlimited/ Virgin

Hoping to unseat Microsoft's *Flight Simulator 5* dominance in the amazingly large civilian flight-sim arena, *Flight Unlimited*'s developers, Looking

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Product Information Number 140

Glass Technologies, have concentrated on creating photorealistic graphics for craft and terrain. Fortunately for serious PC pilots, Looking Glass is also dedicating a lot of work into ensuring accurate real-world physics for the five light aircraft featured in *Flight Unlimited*. ETA: Spring of '95.

Bureau 13/ Gametek

Remember the picture of the bikini-clad girl in the exo-suit from our September issue? It's not the sort of thing you'd easily forget, so in that regard it was a good ad for *Bureau 13*. Unfortunately, Gametek didn't have much to say about the storyline of *Bureau 13* back then, and they're still just as tight-lipped about it now. But just a look at some of the still-shots from the game is enough to get our interest piqued. ETA: Spring '95.

Oh, Give Me a Home, Where the Evil Wraiths Roam....

Infogrames goes west for the next installment in its Alone in the Dark series

We're not sure whether or not this Indian is on Carnby's side, or if he has fallen under an evil spell.

French development house Infogrames must have a budding fascination with the American West. After moving from the somewhat-French atmosphere of Louisiana in the original *Alone in the Dark* to a cliffside California mansion in *Alone in the Dark II*, the ever-popular "detective of the supernatural" Edward Carnby now finds himself in a Western ghost town in *Alone in the Dark III*. We're not sure why Infogrames settled on the American West as the site of Carnby's next adventure, but if that's where his sleuthing and fighting talents can be best put to the test, all we have to say is "Saddle up, partner!"

This time, the drama begins with a mysterious phone call to Carnby's office, leading him to Slaughter Gulch — a dusty, not-so-deserted town crawling with more evil spirits than you can shake a shooting iron at. Emily Hartwood, the other optional character from *Alone in the Dark,* is now being held captive by an evil force. As Carnby you'll need quick reflexes, nerves of steel, a lightning-fast trigger finger, and a keen detective sense if you hope to find Emily. Puzzle your way through the life-threatening challenges, and Carnby will ultimately uncover a threat so dire it could destroy the entire state of California.

If you found *Alone in the Dark II* emphasis on combat appealing, *Alone III* certainly won't disappoint. The wild-west backdrop lends itself to plenty of fast-paced shootouts against ghostly gunslingers.

To complement the distinctive 3D polygon characters and fluid animation that have made the *Alone in the Dark* games so popular, Infogrames asked French comic-book artist Joel Mouclier, author of "The Bastions of Scum," to create over 270 beautifully rendered backdrops for *Alone III*'s western theme.

In addition to the handsome artwork, *Alone III* will feature voice acting and a complete soundtrack of Western melodies. The game is scheduled to be published this spring by I•Motion (800-443-3386), at a suggested retail price of $59.95.

Fans of the original *Alone in the Dark* will definitely get a sense of *deja vu* when they reach this scene in *Alone in the Dark III*.

Product Information Number 121

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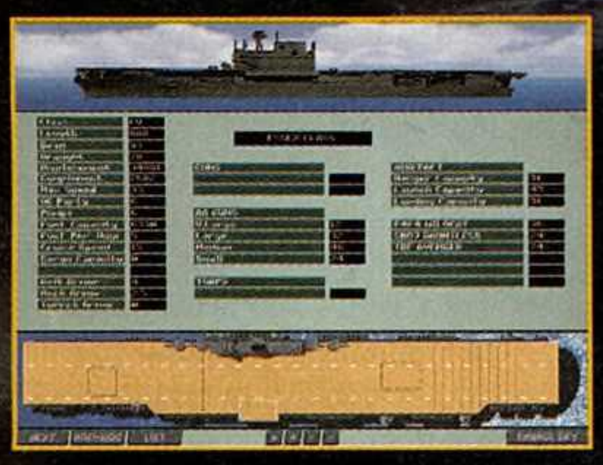

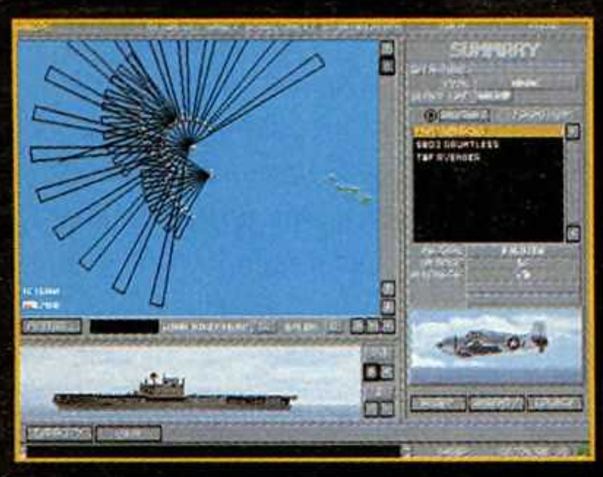

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Product Information Number 129

SimIsle /Maxis

Formerly known as *SimRainforest, SimIsle* is the first Maxis *Sim* title to be developed by an outside developer. *SimIsle* puts a fragile ecology and man's economic desires at odds in this twist on *SimCity.* Featuring full-motion video, intriguing scenarios, and lots of challenging gameplay, *SimIsle* looks like it might be as much of a productivity-thief as last year's *SimCity 2000* was. ETA: Spring '95.

Pizza Tycoon/ MicroProse

We never thought tomatoes and pepperoni would be key ingredients for a good computer game, but then again we never considered that MicroProse would be doing a strategy simulation called *Pizza Tycoon.* Considering the lessons the company's learned about the back-bit-

V for Lawsuit

Legal wrangling over *V for Victory*

Accusations of copyright infringement, missing funds, and a forged signature are among the elements of a bizarre set of circumstances concerning the ownership rights to the CD-ROM version of the *V for Victory* computer game series.

Keith Zabalaoui, president of *V for Victory* series developer Atomic Games, is asserting, among other things, the following:

— The publisher of the floppy-disk version of the series, Three-Sixty Pacific, appears to have granted CD-ROM rights — rights it did not legally have — to a Pennsylvania-based publisher, Mainstream America, which then issued a CD-ROM featuring the game series.

— Atomic had actually withdrawn the games from Three-Sixty Pacific and had made a deal with Avalon Hill to repackage them on CD-ROM under a new name. Three-Sixty retained the name, *V for Victory*, and the box art — but not the rights to the games.

— A signed contract between Mainstream America and Three-Sixty Pacific, shows the signatures of Three-Sixty President Tom Frisina and Zabalaoui. However, Zabalaoui is adamant that he never signed such a document and that the signature on the contract is not even a close copy of his signature.

(See accompanying interview with Zabalaoui.)

To further complicate matters, when Florida-based game publisher Intracorp took operational control of Three-Sixty Pacific at the time of the latter's bankruptcy, part of the deal was to include the rights to the *V for Victory* name and box art. However, Mainstream America has already used the name and box art in its CD-ROM package in the belief that it had rights to those elements.

Mainstream America President Craig Boyd says that his company believed it was dealing in good faith with Three-Sixty Pacific.

"We'd done stuff with Tom [Frisina] in the past, and he said he could move [*V for Victory*] as well," notes Boyd. "It turns out he was not quite on the up and up there. Right now, we're just pulling all the product. It's a mess, and we definitely wish we'd never got into it. We just want to wash our hands of it and get out as fast as we can."

Asked how Intracorp will respond to the situation, the company's general counsel, Miyoshi Smith, said only, "We are in the process of investigating it, and I can guarantee you one thing: If our rights have been infringed upon or we have been involved in any kind of misrepresentation, we will pursue it."

The story first broke when a gamer called to say he'd just bought the first three *V for Victory* games on three CD-ROMs from Mainstream America for a total of $20 at a Pennsylvania computer show. But when we subsequently spoke with Atomic's Zabalaoui, he indicated that his company had made no deal with Mainstream America for the CD-ROM rights.

According to Mainstream's Boyd, his company negotiated the rights transaction by dealing primarily with Three-Sixty business intermediary Lawrence Norman. Despite repeated attempts to reach Norman and Frisina, we were unable to get a response.

The fact that money was paid to Three-Sixty for the *V for Victory* rights raises additional legal issues, since Three-Sixty appears to have been in bankruptcy at the time the contract was signed. Revenues from such a deal would normally be reported through the creditors' committee of the bankrupt company — and it appears that this was not the case.

As we went to press, all parties involved were considering their legal options. The story is far from over, and we'll bring you the latest in next month's Eyewitness section.

Zabalaoui Speaks

We had an opportunity to speak with a frustrated Keith Zabalaoui, and he offered the following details about his dealings with Three-Sixty Pacific.

PCG: Can you give a brief summary of your relationship with Three-Sixty Pacific, and why it ended?

KZ: We went to Three-Sixty in 1991 with our first program, *V for Victory: Utah Beach.* At first, we were wary, but generally thought we had found an honest publisher. When our second game was released, Three-Sixty's president, Tom Frisina, asked if he could delay payment of half of our royalties for one month because he was in a "cash crunch." He even offered to pay us interest on that

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amount. So we said sure. But after three months, we still didn't have our money.

We began to see a pattern of Tom "robbing Peter to pay Paul." He repeatedly told us he'd be able to pay us after the next (non-Atomic) product came out. By the time our third game, *Market Garden*, came out, we knew that Three-Sixty was over $2 million in debt and Tom was talking about selling the company. We should have been long gone by then, but he had our money and we had no place to go. We finally got some of our *Market Garden* money, but *none* of our *Gold, Juno, Sword* money. Not a penny. Despite repeated attempts to negotiate with Tom, and repeated promises from him that he would send us our royalties, I found myself with $30 in my account. So, we retained an attorney who sent Tom a letter.

From that point on, Tom would not speak to us, meet with us, or negotiate with us. So we hired an accountant to audit his books. The most significant and tangible thing she found was over $400,000 of foreign royalty advances that Three-Sixty had received but never reported to us. Tom claimed that none of that money was for any of the four *V for Victory* products. Two months later, we were able to freeze Three-Sixty's corporate assets. It was *then* that Tom decided to talk to us (after he went on a trip to London). The result was a settlement agreement which confirmed that the publishing agreement for *V for Victory* was, in fact, terminated and that Three-Sixty could not sell any Atomic products after January 31, 1994. After that, Tom and his employees would frequently try to talk us into "bargain distribution" deals for *V for Victory*. We turned down every such deal. We'd had quite enough of Tom and his schemes for "free money."

PCG: What rights related to the *V for Victory* series did Three-Sixty Pacific retain when you parted company?

KZ: Three-Sixty retained rights to the name *V for Victory*, the logo, and the general look of the packaging (the "trade dress"). We retained all rights to the program code, including the overall look and feel of the games.

PCG: What did you have planned for the future of the four original *V for Victory* titles?

KZ: Atomic Games has just concluded a contract with our publishing partner, Avalon Hill. We plan to release the Mac and PC versions of all four of the games on one CD-ROM (under a different name and with different packaging.)

PCG: Did you sign any contract with Mainstream America for the production, distribution and/or sale of the *V for Victory* games on CD-ROM?

KZ: No.

PCG: Is the signature on the contract with Mainstream America your own?

KZ: No. Its not even close.

PCG: Would you care to speculate on how your signature got on that contract?

KZ: Clearly, someone else put it there.

PCG: What efforts are being made to resolve this issue?

KZ: I'm making every effort to nail the son-of-a-bitch that forged my signature. Interstate forgery, copyright infringement, and grand theft: all federal felonies. I simply can't believe the stupidity of this forger, to imagine that I wouldn't find out, and that I wouldn't prosecute.

ing, big-money world of *Transport Tycoon* and the imperial motif of *Colonization*, we expect this to be a very interesting game, to say the least. Just remember to make ours with extra cheese. Oh, yeah — No Anchovies!. ETA: Spring '95.

Theme Hospital/ Bullfrog

With the growing tensions and misunderstandings over health care legislation overflowing in the capital dome, it's nice to see someone taking a lighter view of the subject. After deciding to leave out the possibility of death due to mechanical failures in Theme Park, could Bullfrog be ready to face the Grim Reaper with a grin on its face (which will no doubt have tongue planted firmly in cheek)? ETA: Summer' 95

Mechwarrior II/ Activision

Last year about this time, Activision was saying that it was putting the final touches on *Mechwarrior II*, and that we'd all be playing it by the end of the spring at the latest. But those big 'Bots from the Battletech universe are still undergoing some major repair work. It seems that the earlier version just contained to many user-unfriendly glitches to be acceptable. With a new design team to bring it around, *Mechwarrior II* is slated for a Fall of '95 release. Perhaps the company is taking the old "We want to see *your* robotic combat game first" approach: From Sierra/Dynamix, *Earthsiege* and *Battledrome* are two such titles already on the retail shelves. (look for the reviews next issue), As for Virgin's *MechaMander*, it's in the works with no set release date.

X-COM: Terror From The Deep

Get ready for the sequel to one of 1994's best games

An Extraterrestrial Combat Unit soldier stands ready to fire as an alien comes ashore.

The folks at MicroProse know what to do when they have a hit on their hands: they make a sequel. And gamers who couldn't get enough of *X-COM* couldn't be happier. The sequel is called *X-COM: Terror From the Deep*, and it'll take your UFO Defense forces to a whole new level — below sea-level, to be exact.

As *Terror from the Deep* opens, the aliens from the original game have changed their strategy and initiated a second line of attack in the war for Earth. They've contacted a hidden army of their alien brothers, hibernating for ages in the shadowy depths of Earth's oceans — and now, those monsters are awakening, Japanese movie-style. Looks like a job for the Extraterrestrial Combat Unit....

Of course, in the sequel to a classy project like *X-COM*, a new battleground has to mean more than new maps. *Terror* will also introduce new aquatic creatures and a whole new world of undersea technology, not to mention new graphic effects to depict an undersea environment.

X-COM: Terror from the Deep is being developed by MicroProse UK, and it's tentatively slated for a Summer 1995 release here in the states.

A member of the *X-COM* team prepares to search the remains of a passenger jet, wrecked on the ocean floor.

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Product Information Number 96

Top Ten Lists

This past holiday season will probably impact the next few Top Ten lists, and 1994's last big releases seem to be doing pretty well against the old, established favorites. From the roleplaying of SSI's *Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager* to EA's hip-checking *NHL Hockey '95*, new titles were drawing plenty of attention.

But the star of the show, topping the heap on both Babbage's and Software Etc's lists, is id Software's sequel *Doom II: Hell on Earth*. We're not surprised, either — except perhaps by the speed with which it climbed to the top. Obviously, there were plenty of pre-orders on this one!

Games don't have to offer the firepower of a small army to make the charts, either. There's plenty of interest in good strategy, and MicroProse seems to be reaping the rewards with *Colonization* and *Masters of Magic*.

LucasArt's space combat extravaganza *TIE Fighter* was the only title to span all three lists — although we thought it odd that it fell so low on the lists as quickly as it has. But two other Star Wars games, *X-Wing* and *Rebel Assault*, continue to turn in respectable showings. And our old friends *Myst* and *The 7th Guest* are back, both of them long-time Top-Ten residents.

Outer space is a top destination for gamers, with *Wing Commander Armada* catching the number two spot on the Babbages's list, and Microsoft's *Space Simulator* checking in at number five.

Interplay must be particularly happy these days, with *Castles II*, *The Lord of the Rings Bundle*, and *Battle Chess* all appearing on Software Etc's list. We're pretty sure these three will have even more company once *Virtual Pool* ships.

We're pleased to report that *Coaster* is nowhere to be seen this month.

Babbage's Top Ten List (November)

1. *Doom II*/id Software
2. *Wing Commander Armada*/Origin
3. *Myst*/Broderbund
4. *Colonization*/MicroProse
5. *AD&D Wake of the Ravager*/SSI
6. *Microsoft Space Simulator*/Microsoft
7. *Master of Magic*/MicroProse
8. *NHL Hockey '95*/Electronic Arts
9. *TIE Fighter*/LucasArts
10. *The 7th Guest*/Virgin

It's good to see that we weren't the only ones who loved *NHL '95*....

Software Etc.'s Top Ten List (December)

SimCity 2000 — still ranks strong after almost a year on the retail shelves.

1. *Doom II*/id Software
2. *Colonization*/MicroProse
3. *Lord of the Rings Bundle*/Interplay
4. *Castles II*/Interplay
5. *Front Page Sports: Football '95*/Sierra On-Line
6. *MetalTech: Earth Siege*/Sierra On-Line
7. *SimCity 2000*/Maxis
8. *TIE Fighter*/LucasArts
9. *Master of Magic*/Microprose
10. *Battle Chess (Windows)*/Interplay

PC Data's Top Ten List (September)

1. *Myst*/Broderbund
2. *TIE Fighter*/LucasArts
3. *5 ft 10 Pack*/Sirius
4. *Outpost*/Sierra On-Line
5. *SimCity 2000*/Maxis
6. *Rebel Assault*/LucasArts
7. *The 7th Guest*/Virgin
8. *Microsoft Flight Simulator*/Microsoft
9. *Best of MS Entertainment Pack*/Microsoft
10. *X-Wing*/LucasArts

The PC Gamer Playlist

Is there such a thing as too many god games? Matt certainly thinks there is, as he kept repeating "Quit screwing around and get to work" so often that it began to sound like some sort of mantra. Funny thing is, he'd chant like that as he sat glued to a few unassigned favorites.

Another big crowd pleaser was the arrival of Interplay's *Virtual Pool* beta. We've seen billiards on the PC before, but nothing like this. The designers at Celeris have created a wonderful representation of one of our favorite past times, and it's gonna be an absolute must have for all pool fans.

And finally, in a manner befitting the Desktop General, William R. Trotter's first few days as *PC Gamer*'s senior writer were spent taking fire from SSI's latest wargame creation, *Panzer General*.

1. *Magic Carpet*/Bullfrog — Everybody
2. *Virtual Pool*/Interplay — Everybody
3. *Panzer General*/SSI — Bill, Joe
4. *Ecstatica*/Psygnosis — Dan, Shelli
5. *MetalTech: EarthSiege* Dynamix — Dan, Todd
6. *Bioforge*/Origin — Steve, Dan, Todd
7. *One Must Fall:2097*/ Epic MegaGames — Matt, Todd, Dan, Joe
8. *Transport Tycoon* (demo)/MicroProse — Joe, Scotty, Dan
9. *Novastorm*/Psygnosis — Matt, Joe, Steve
10. *Doom II*/id Software — Dan, Matt, Joe

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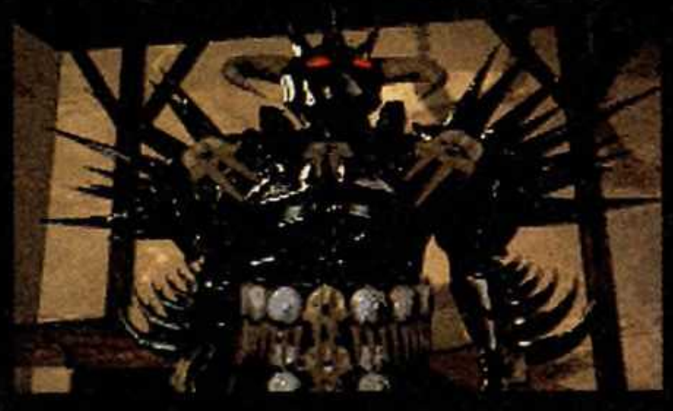

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Product Information Number 112

Is Beauty Enough?

Multimedia & Gaming

There's no doubt that professional actors, a high-quality soundtrack, and live-action video clips can be valuable components of a PC game. So why do we see games that look great, sound wonderful, but just aren't much fun to play? by Steve Poole

The world of computing is often largely defined by buzzwords, and the biggest one of them all might very well be "multimedia." Rarely has a concept had such an immediate and powerful impact on the growth and development of a major industry — and what's most amazing of all is that there's little or no agreement as to exactly *what* constitutes multimedia. Some insist that a product isn't truly multimedia unless it has digitized video; others say that the use of audio — music, speech, and/or sound effects — along with any type of graphics make for a multimedia presentation.

But most people would agree that the most critical ingredient to multimedia is CD-ROM. The 600MB+ capacity of a CD-ROM makes possible the use of live-action video, digitized speech, 3D-modeled graphics, CD-quality music and sound effects, and other goodies that are simply too big to store on floppy disks.

It's easy to see how these things are ideal for applications like an electronic encyclopedia: Instead of reading about The Beatles, for instance, you would instead click on a digitized photo of The Fab Four and see a video clip of the 1966 Shea Stadium concert, or hear excerpts from *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

The arrival of CD-ROM marked a breakthrough in software, providing a leap in visual and audio quality that had the potential to convince millions of new users that computers looked as good — and were as easy to use — as a VCR.

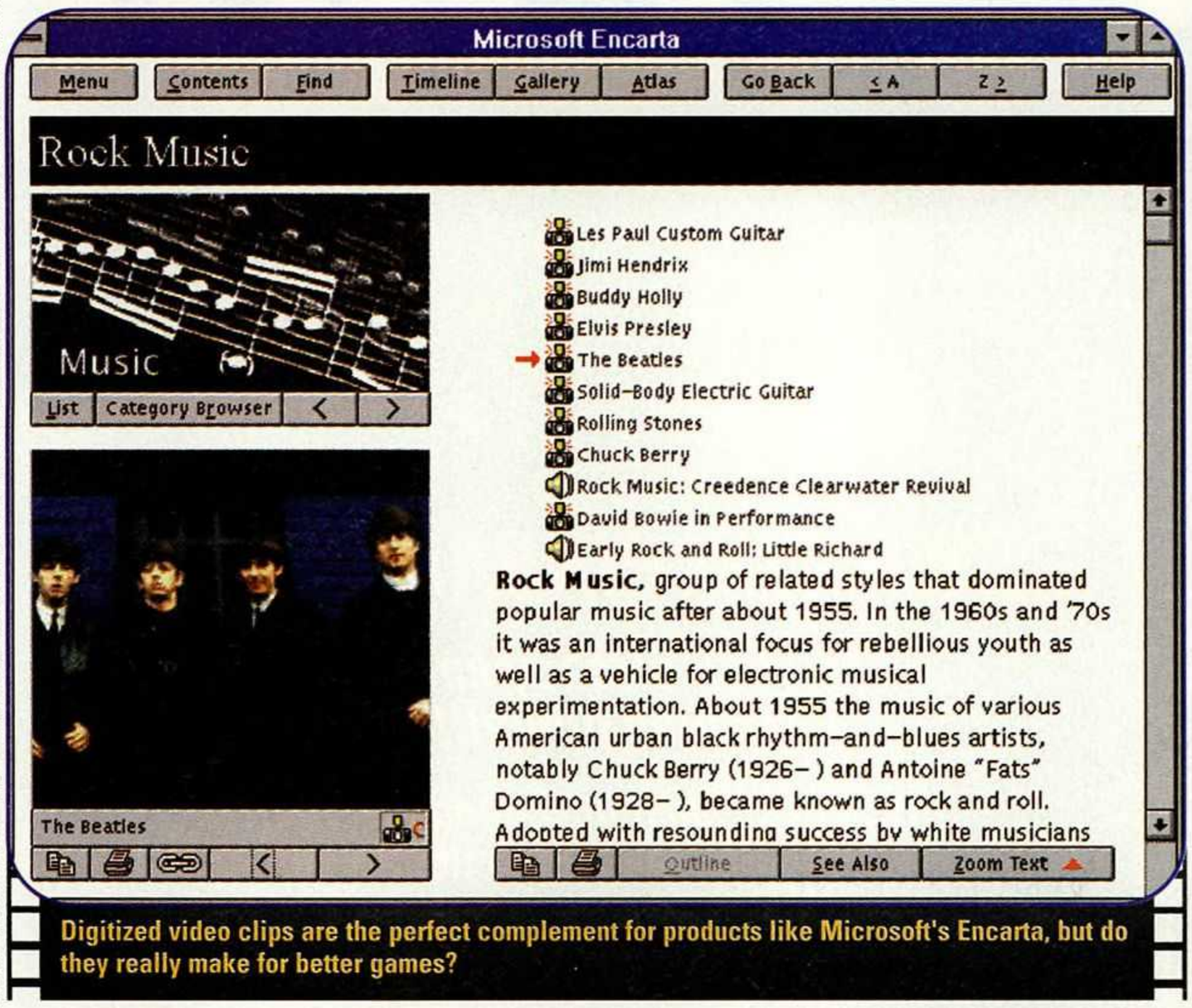
Birth of a Notion

Many game publishers were excited, too. Wouldn't it be great, they thought, if instead of controlling a cartoon-like character in a game, you could see high-quality video footage of a real actor? Why, it would be almost like a movie — except it would be a movie in which *you* were the star and director, rolled into one! It was this notion — that computer games could look as good as film and TV — that gave birth to the whole idea of multimedia games. And some would say that's where the trouble started.

As almost any PC gamer will tell you, the key ingredient to the success of computer games is interaction. Regardless of the genre, computer games give players the chance to control, to varying degrees, their entertainment environment. Listening to dialogue and watching characters interact in a movie can be satisfying, but the ability to *become* a vital part of that environment is potentially more rewarding.

Digitized video — whether it's normal film footage or actors shot against blue screen and superimposed on rendered backgrounds — can look impressive in a game, but let's face it: How much interaction can you have in a game based on pre-recorded sequences? By its very nature, video footage limits open-ended exploration; it's impossible to record video footage to reflect every action a player can take, at least in most games. Designers have used several techniques which we'll talk about later to mask this fact, while others have opted for highly detailed rendered images and animations instead of video.

But all this raises several questions: Is it worth all the fuss? Has multimedia made for better games, or is it simply a handsome facade for ultimately shallow products? If it is, are there ways that multimedia *can* be used to truly enhance interaction, to create a more visually and aurally



Digitized video clips are the perfect complement for products like Microsoft's Encarta, but do they really make for better games?

Pretty Is As Pretty Does

With *The Daedalus Encounter*, Mechadeus is set to prove that multimedia gaming isn't an oxymoron after all

Even though it was released almost a year ago, *Critical Path* still ranks as one of the most handsome multimedia adventures yet developed. It was created by filming actors on blue screen then superimposing them over backgrounds created primarily with 3D Studio, and the subsequent Quicktime Movies that made up *Critical Path* — though framed in a fairly small viewing window — were extremely convincing. A strong performance by Ellen Weisinger as Kat, the heroine, lent the game an impressive cinematic air, as did the dynamic soundtrack. At first glance, it looked as though newcomer Mechadeus had a winner on its hands.

Unfortunately, *Critical Path* shared one other quality with movies: It was a very passive experience. And even players who *accepted* the game on those terms didn't leave the game happy, because it simply didn't last long enough. Just as you were beginning to feel involved in the story, it abruptly ended; reports of veteran players finishing the game in an hour or less weren't uncommon.

Mark Giambruno, Creative Director on

Mechadeus has a strong reputation for producing exceptional graphics; will *The Daedalus Encounter* prove they can top the great looks with solid play?

Critical Path, freely admits that the game wasn't long enough — but points out that it wasn't a problem in the design of the game. "The main reason for the various problems with *Critical Path* was that we just didn't have enough time to do a fully realized game. After Mondo Media [a company specializing in point-of-sale retail demos for companies such as Compaq, IBM, and Prodigy] formed Mechadeus in order to get into the gaming market, we basically had a four and a half month deadline to come up

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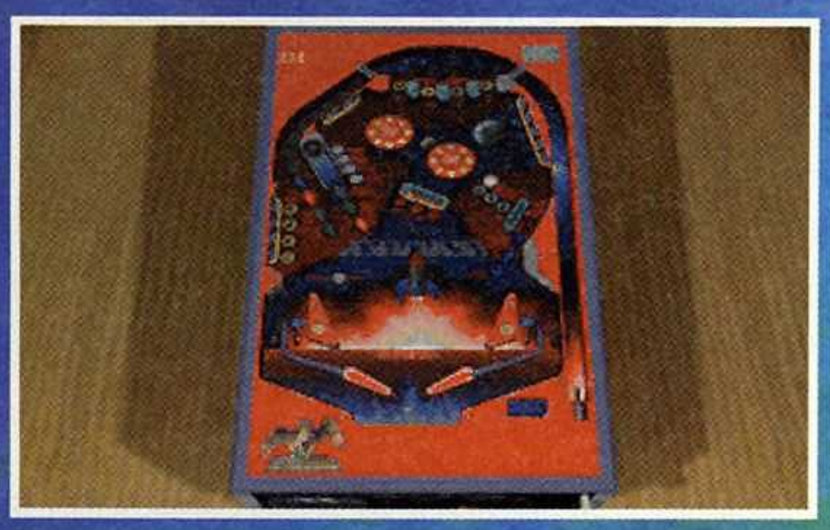

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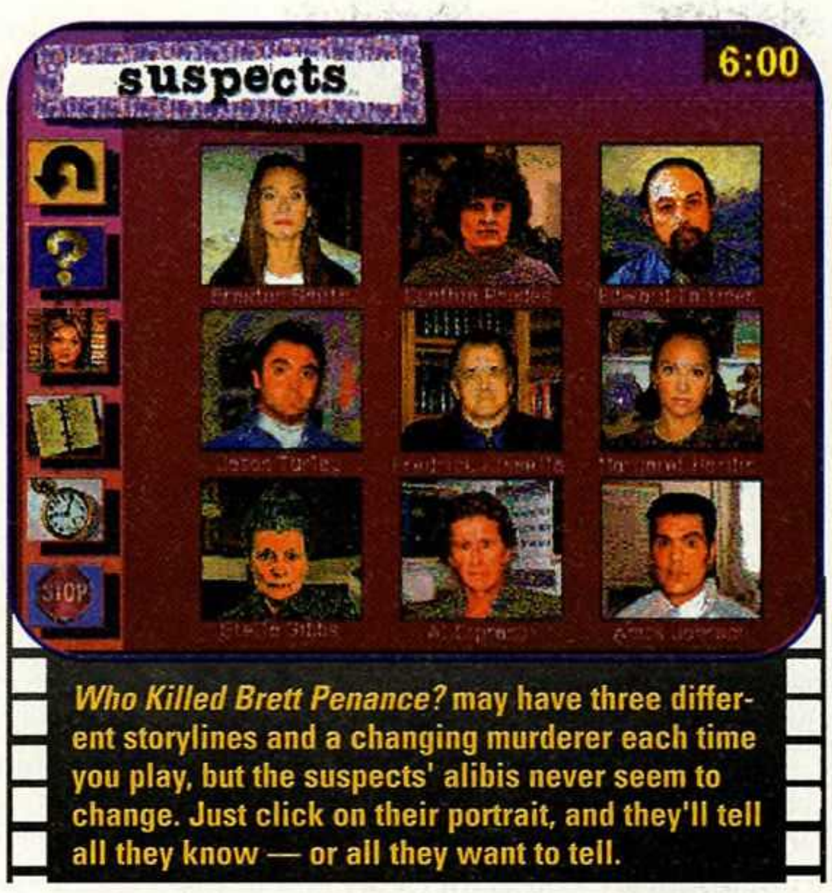
convincing game world while allowing for a high degree of involvement on the part of the player?

We're going to answer these questions by looking at the various types of "multimedia games" to see which techniques work and which ones don't, and try to puzzle out just what we can expect from this nebulous — but potentially amazing — art form.

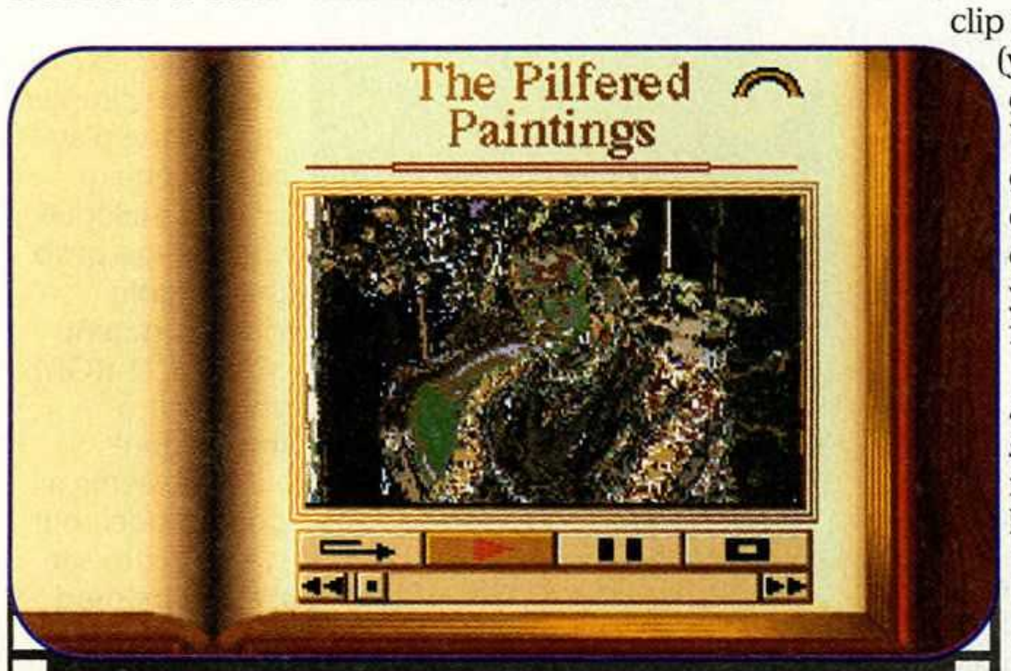
That's a Print

The games that are most instantly recognizable as multimedia products are ones in which *all* the action is depicted with video footage. From a development standpoint, live-action video undoubtedly cuts down on the length of production schedules, but it brings problems, too. There's the question of which video standard to support — MPEG, Indeo, RealMagic, Qucktime, etc. — and there's also the expense of hiring professional actors, filming on location, and more. Oh, and let's not forget the most important problem — how to make it interactive.

The game that led the way for the other all-video-based products was ICOM Simulation's *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective*, due largely to the fact that it was bundled with many of the first wave of CD-ROM drives sold. While minor enhancements in video quality were made to *SHCD II* and *III*, gameplay remained basically the same. After viewing an intro video sequence setting up one of the three cases in each game, you're presented with a screen with icons for a notebook, phone directory, The London Times, a horse and carriage for traveling, etc. Using all available information, you choose where to send Holmes and Watson; select an important location, and you're shown a video clip giving you more leads (you aren't able to interrogate witnesses, however). When you think you've gathered enough evidence, you can "bring the case to court" and see if you managed to correctly fingered the culprit.



Who Killed Brett Penance? **may have three different storylines and a changing murderer each time you play, but the suspects' alibis never seem to change. Just click on their portrait, and they'll tell all they know — or all they want to tell.**



The quality of the video in the *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* games is outstanding. Now, if they could only make that viewing window a little larger....

From this screen, you can have Sherlock read the paper, visit a suspect, read notes on various folks in London, and more. Too bad that once you find someone, you have to sit back and passively watch a video clip.

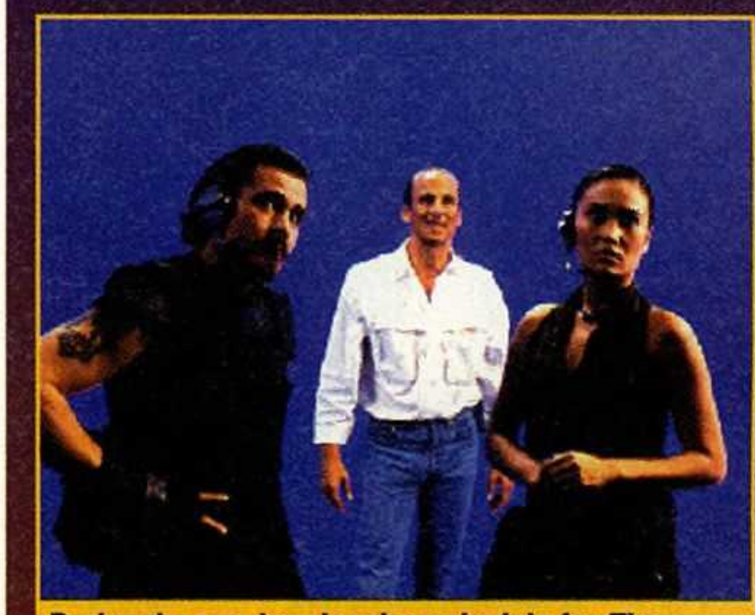
The problems with *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* are common to many other video-based games — there isn't much interaction, and there isn't enough gameplay. While the video quality is very good, the acting respectable, and the sets believable, all but the most inexperienced gamers will breeze through any of the installments in less than eight to ten hours. The designers tried to give the game replayability by basing your score on how many places you had to visit to accumulate an adequate amount of evidence, but come on — who's going to replay a mystery game they've already figured out just in order to get a better score?

Creative Multimedia Corporation must have realized that, for they set up *Who Killed Brett Penance?* with three different

...continued from page 39

with something entirely new, different, and exciting — and we'd never really done a game before. *Critical Path* was designed as what I'd call a demo; unfortunately, it was marketed as a complete game."

That concern for creating a "complete game" is probably the biggest reason for the delayed release of *The Daedalus Encounter*, which was originally scheduled to ship before Christmas of 1994. The game puts you in the role of Casey, a 22nd-century soldier so severely wounded during the First Inter-Galactic War that his consciousness has been placed in a flying probe by buddies Ari (played by *Wayne's World* star Tia Carrere) and Zack (Christian Bocher). At the end of the war Ari, Zack, and Casey start up a spaceship salvage business — but on their very first outing they become entrapped inside an object that's part ship, part living creature that's on a collision course with a star. Your goal: Discover how to navigate the ship in time to avoid being fried to a cosmic crisp.



During the ten-day shooting schedule for *The Daedalus Encounter*, stars Tia Carrere and Christian Bocher had to be on the set almost continually.

To make the puzzles more varied and challenging than the one-dimensional offerings in *Critical Path*, Mechadeus turned to Scott Kim, who designed the puzzles in Disney Software's *Heaven and Earth*. But Giambruno's keenly aware that there's much more to interaction than coming up with a lot of puzzles.

"Naturally, the quality of the puzzles is important," he says, "but truly integrating them into gameplay is equally crucial. We want the cinematic sequences to gradually flow up to the puzzles, so that when players start working on one they won't feel as though they've left the drama and action of the story behind."

Another way to create more involved and absorbing gameplay is to base success on more than simply solving puzzles. Giambruno says that besides puzzles, there are also "other, more subtle things that affect the course of the game. Your whole attitude toward learning things as you're moving through the game, whether or not you're paying attention to certain events rather than trying to charge through them as fast as you can — these are the sorts of things that will determine which of several possible endings you'll see."

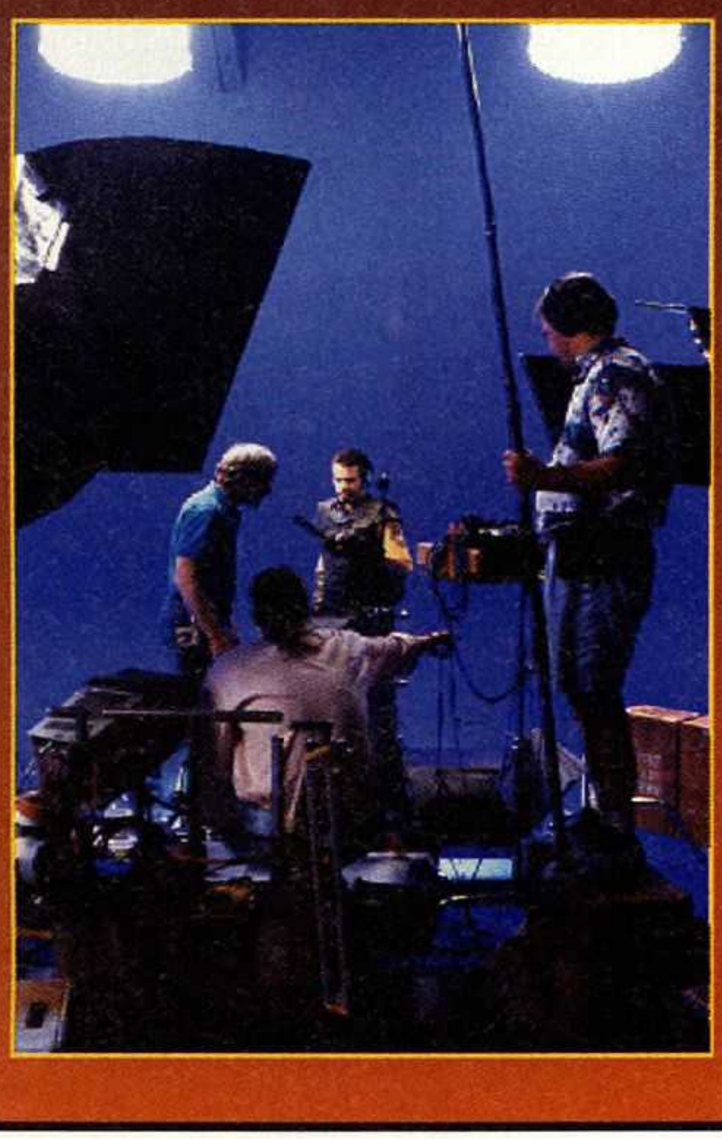
Giambruno's also aware that hardcore

...continued from page 41

gamers are difficult to please — and unlike some industry pundits, he's not one to discount their importance. "To me, the hardcore gamer *is* the market, at least for now," he say "But we're aware that there's a growing number of users who may not want a hardcore experience, who are totally happy to enjoy what I'd call a 'pseudo-interactive' experience. To address the needs of those folks, we're including a feature to either reduce or completely eliminate the puzzles, so that people who don't want to get stuck trying to solve a puzzle can still have a branching, interactive experience."

Pleasing two wildly different groups of gamers is a tightrope act at best, but unlike some designers, at least Giambruno and *The Daedalus Encounter* design team know what they're up against. "The biggest challenge is creating a well-balanced game in terms of interaction versus visuals. We're very good with the visuals; we're trying to be very good with the interactivity."

No one said multimedia was easy, as Tia proves by menacing imagined aliens with a Super Soaker 30 (right). Seriously, multimedia productions pose special challenges, such as being forced to imagine settings and enemies.



storylines, and the murderer is different each time you play one of the three. Gameplay in *Brett Penance* bears some resemblance to *Consulting Detective*, but is more involved: You must visit the crime scene, examine (but not collect) physical evidence, visit witnesses, and even verify alibis. Once again, you never really ask questions — just clicking on a suspect's photo causes them to spill their guts. The video window is obscenely small, the footage grainy, and even though the murderer is different each time you play one of the stories, almost all of the peripheral stuff — in particular, everyone's alibis — remain unchanged. In the end, it has about as much replay value as the Sherlock Homes games, but doesn't look quite as good in the process.

One live-action video game players won't beat in a few hours is *Dracula Unleashed*, ICOM's much-hyped thriller from last year. The game casts you in the role of Alexander Morris, a Texan who's come to London to unravel the mystery of his brother's death. The quality of the digitized video in *Dracula Unleashed* is very good, and the addition of an inventory system gave the game the feel of a traditional adventure game. At first glance, it looked as if someone had created a game based entirely on live-action video that was really interactive.

***Dracula Unleashed* provides hours of gameplay. How much fun it is, however, depends on how much you like overacting.**

But like the Holmes games, *Dracula Unleashed* doesn't let you question the characters you meet, so success is based mostly on being in the right place at the right time in order to see the right video clip — a drawback that can be traced directly to limited interaction. Oh, there are some vague clues where you should go, but rarely can you know *when* to go there.

And about that inventory system: To use an item, you must go to the inventory screen and put an object "in hand" before entering a scene, a maddening requirement that could have been avoided if the developers had provided an option to access your inventory halfway through a video clip, then continue on with video appropriate to your decision.

Worst of all, however, is the acting. It's almost uniformly stagy and hamboned, often evoking laughter rather than suspense or fear.

Can I Ask You a Few Questions?

In the all the games, the inability to really talk to the characters you meet severely limits interactivity; instead of your actions affecting the characters you meet in the game, they merely determine *which* characters you meet, and when. It's a format that seems suited more for a laser-disc player than a high-end PC, and in fact both the Holmes games and *Dracula Unleashed* were ported to Phillips' CD-I system completely unchanged.

So developers intent on creating all-video games tried a different tack. Since the demise of text-based adventures, many adventure games use dialogue trees — you know, where you choose one of several questions or responses during conversations, with the selection determining the computer-controlled character's response or action. So why not use the system in video-based games? It would be simple: Just let the player pick one of several dialogue choices, go grab the suitable video segment off the CD-ROM, and *voila* — interaction!

It seems a good model, but we've yet to see it implemented in a satisfying manner in games that are based *solely* on live-action video. One of the first attempts, Tsunami's *Man Enough*, may have been the worst. The premise of the game is that you have to date — and hopefully "score" with — one of five ladies from a dating agency. Each meeting runs the same course: You receive a phone call from the head of the service telling you to meet one of the women at a gym; from there, you do nothing more than pick a line, wait for a response, pick another line, wait for a response, and so on, *ad nauseum*. Make the right dialogue choices, and you get to go on a date and choose more lines; if you're really smooth, you're teased into thinking something "naughty" might happen — but something always crops up to postpone the hanky-panky.

After going through this mind-numbing routine with six dates, you learn it's all been a big joke (how appropriate). *Man Enough* does almost nothing well. For starters, there's no video during the con-

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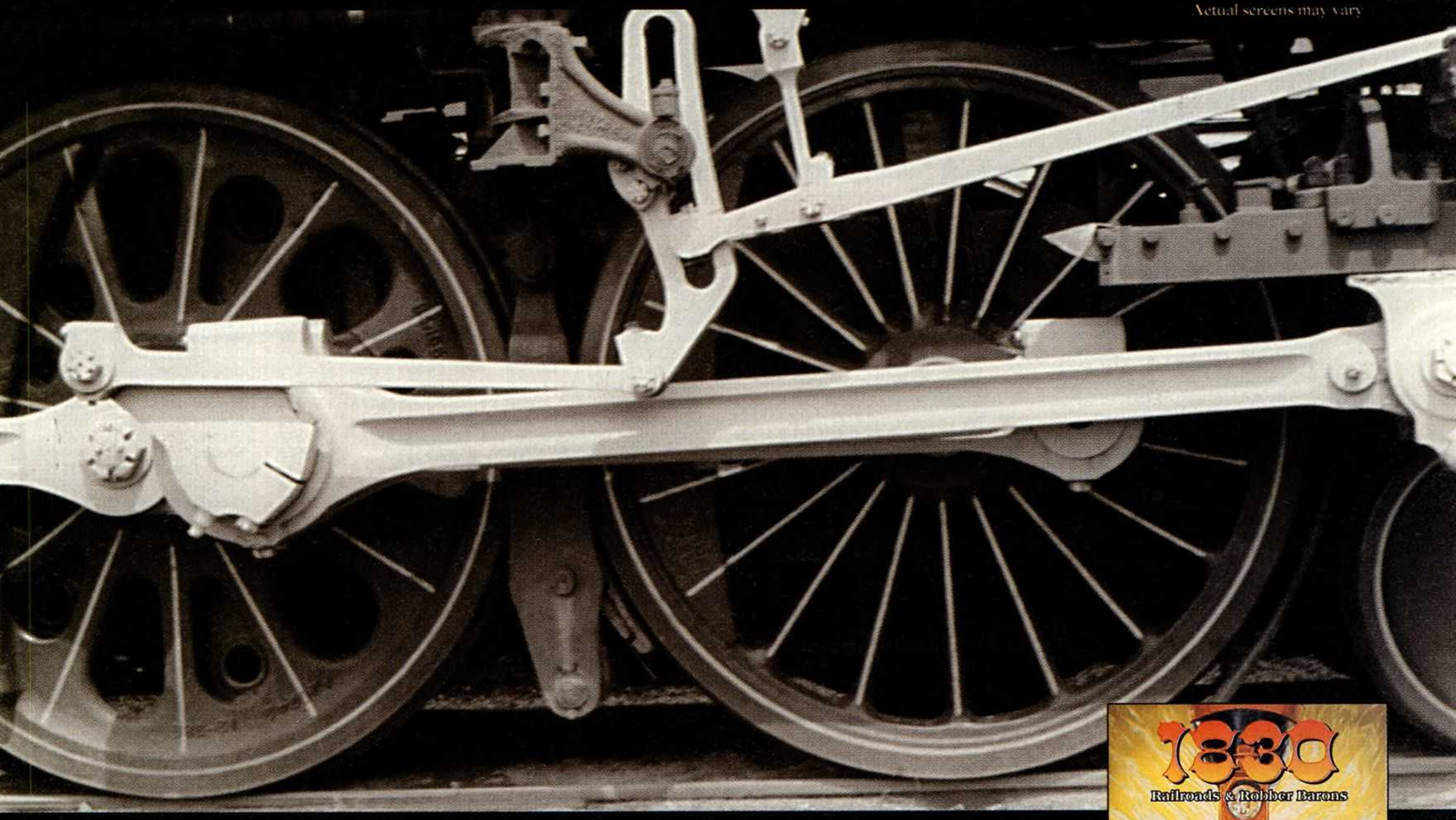

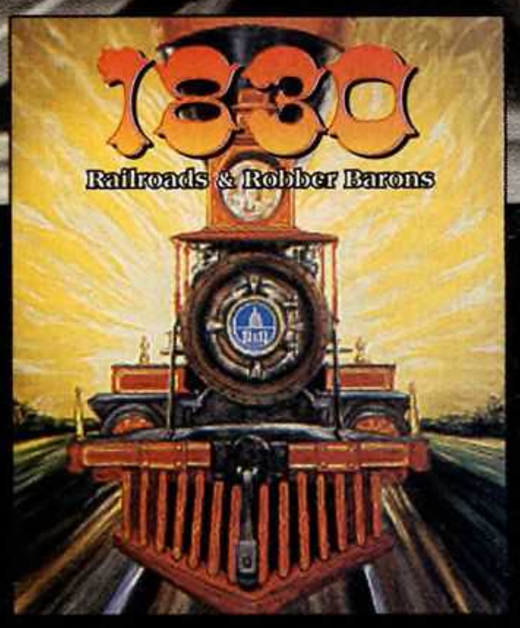

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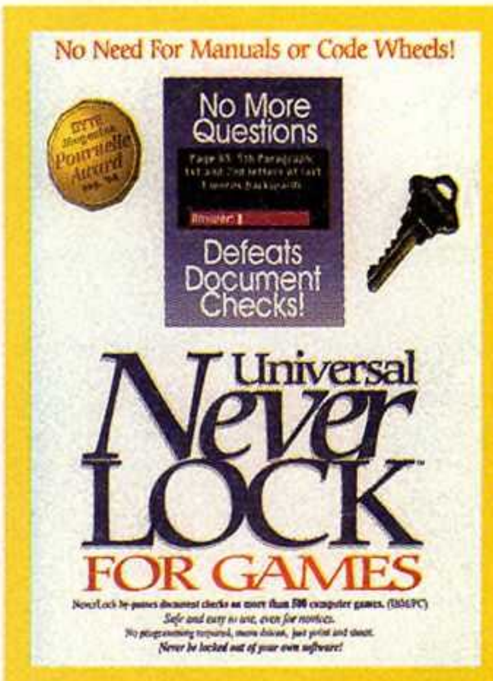

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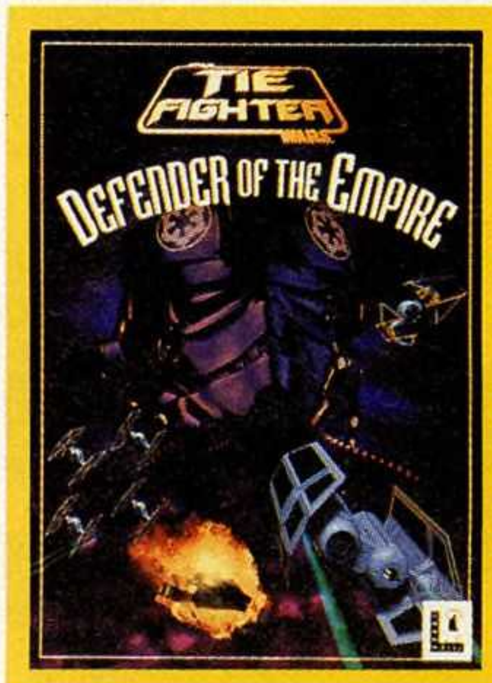

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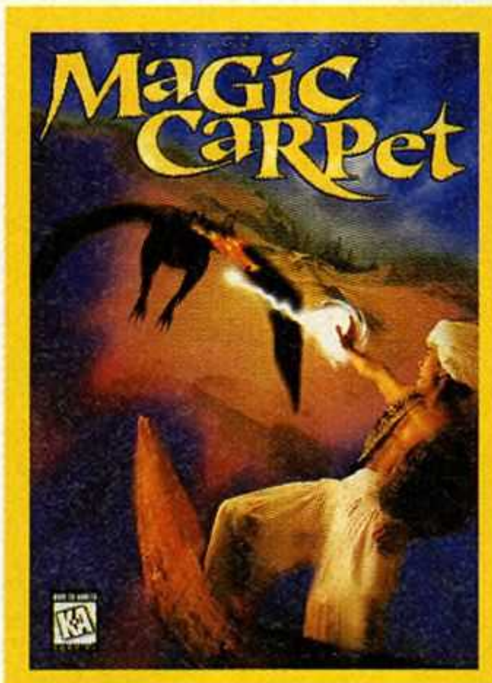

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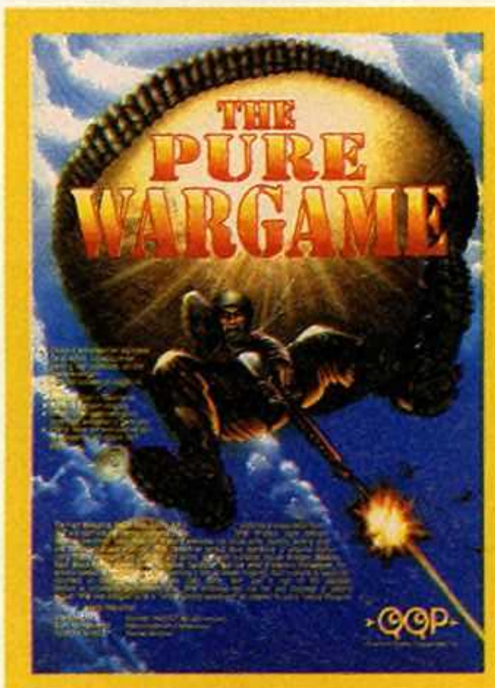

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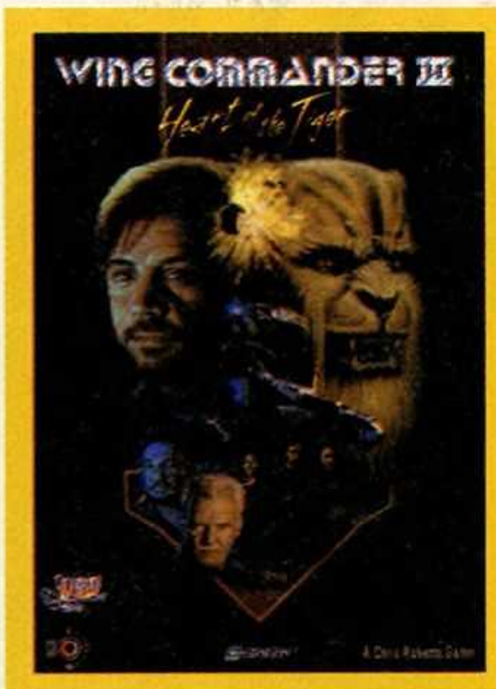

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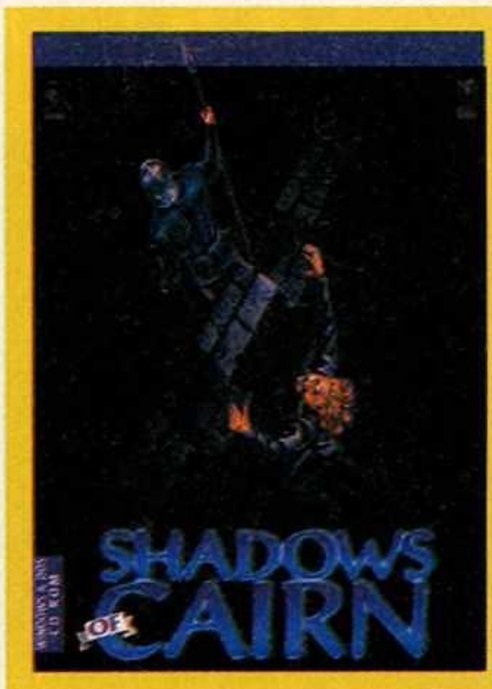

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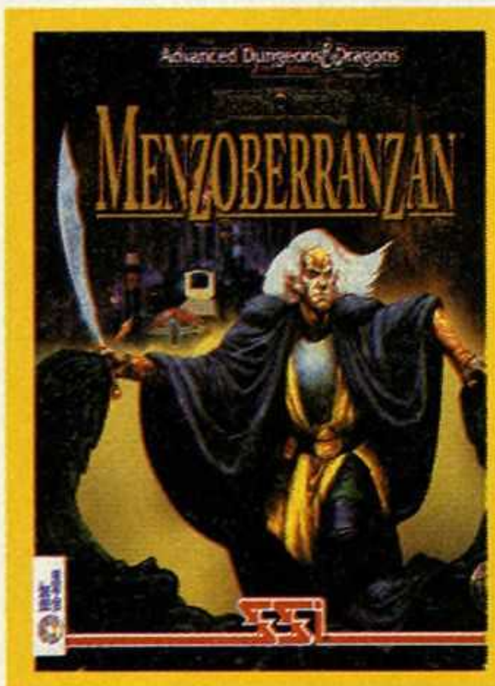

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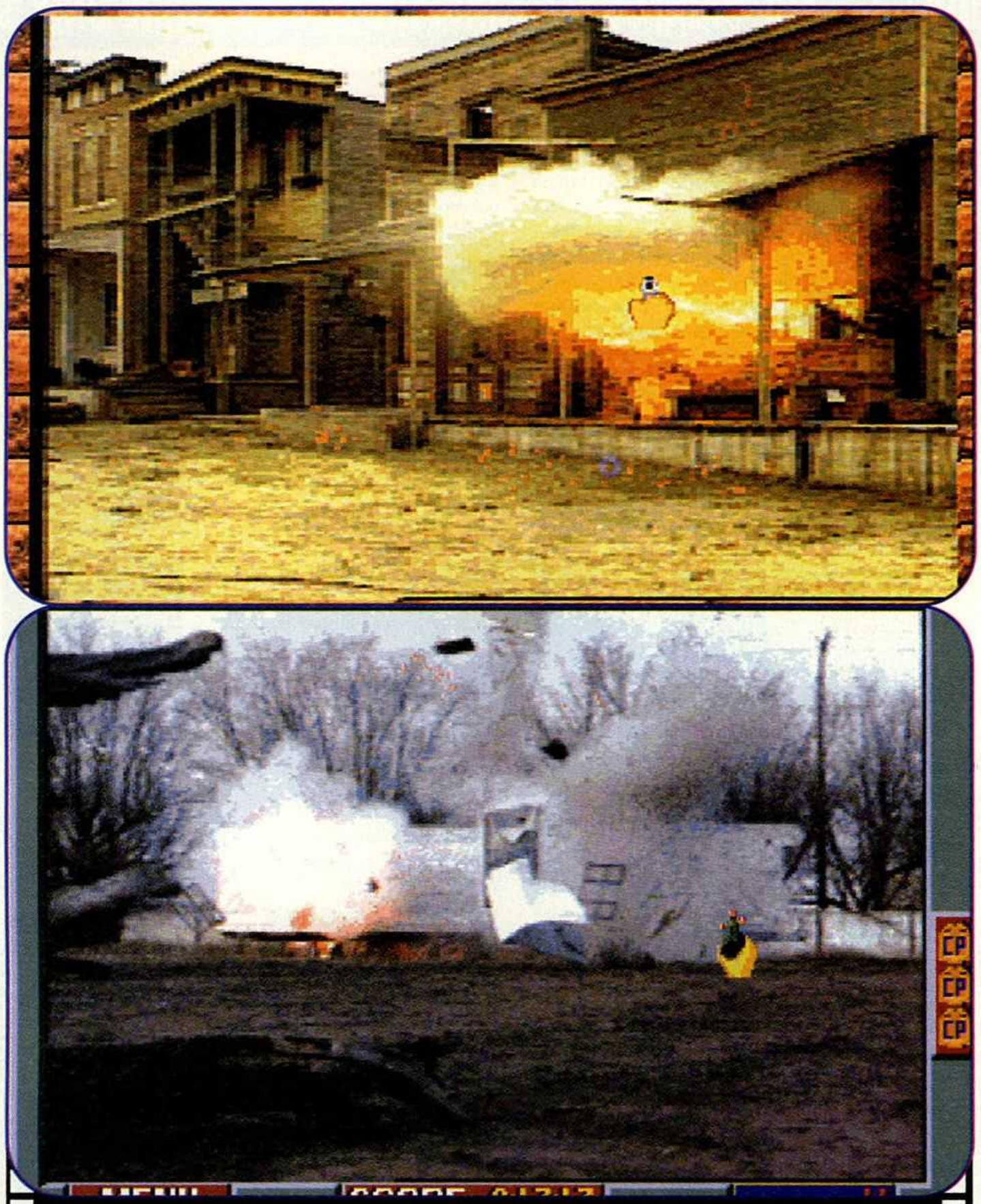
Product Information Number 101

versations, just static digitized photos. The video footage shown during the "dates" — a bike ride, a parachute jump, a game of paintball(!) — is sub-par, and the lines you're forced to choose from on the static screens are so sophomoric that you feel embarrassed being forced to select one.

Tsunami's next all-video effort, *Flash Traffic*, fares considerably better. You play as an FBI agent in Los Angeles, trying to track down a nuclear bomb before it's mushroom-cloud time. Again, interaction consists only of choosing questions and responses, but now you're shown actual

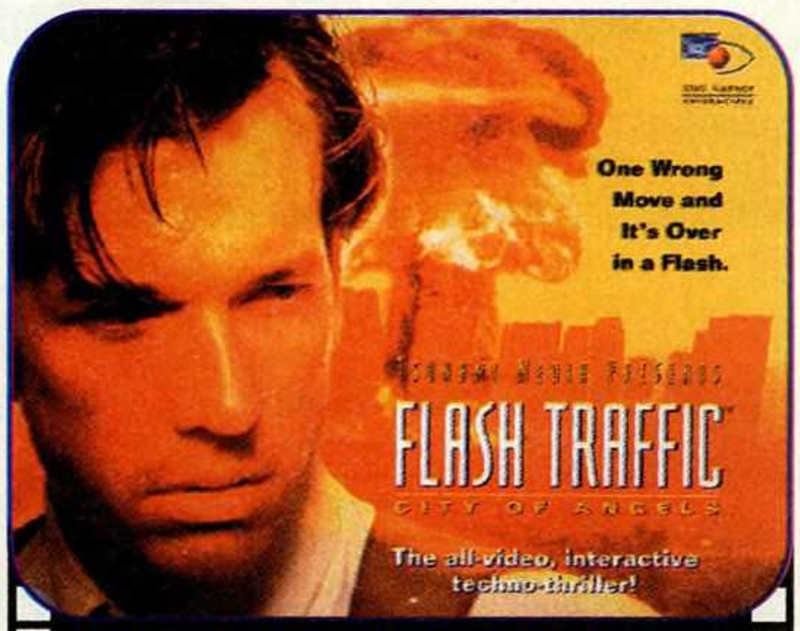


Games like *Mad Dog McCree* and *Crime Patrol* may be brainless fun, but at least they are fun, even if for a short time.

video clips of the people you're talking to.

We've not played a lot of *Flash Traffic* — it arrived as we were well into this issue — but at least the dialogue choices are realistic, and the acting is above-average throughout. (If you have the CD-ROM edition of this issue, you can try *Flash Traffic* on the demo disc.) The only noticeable flaws are that the voice that's used for *your* character sounds like Hoyt Axton on goofballs, and the full-screen video segments are muddied severely — it looks like someone's placed a piece of gauze over the screen.

But even if the video looked great, you still have limited options when it comes to exploring the game environment. In a traditional graphic adventure, you can



Flash Traffic is one of the latest all-video games to hit shelves. While it benefits from an exciting plot and good acting, the video quality could stand some improvement.

look at objects, pick them up, talk to any character who doesn't run away (and sometimes try to chase down ones who do), and then use the information in creative ways to solve puzzles. That just isn't possible when you're dealing with digitized video.

The Psychotron, from Merit, bills itself as an "interactive mystery." The game puts you on the trail of a stolen device that can channel psychic power (or something like that). The video quality in *The Psychotron* is better than in *Man Enough* or *Flash Traffic* because it's a Windows-based product, and some of the actors turn in decent performances. But the game is fatally crippled by a linear structure: You can only visit scenes in a certain order, and you can never revisit a place you've already been.

Perhaps the best video-based games are the ones that are the least ambitious — arcade shooters. American Laser Games' *Mad Dog McCree, MDMII: The Lost Gold*, and *Crime Patrol* (the last one is reviewed in this issue) are all basically shooting galleries, with actors in live-action video footage serving as the targets. There's no need for exploration here; the only thing you need to puzzle out is whether the person popping up on-screen is a good guy or a bad guy.

These games don't last a long time — somewhere between four and eight hours, tops — but the acting is solid, the action fast-paced, and the system requirements fairly minimal. They're especially good for parties: Just get the game up and running, and let your friends try their luck at out-gunning the villains.

Linear gameplay fatally cripples *The Psychotron*

The Best of Both Worlds

While some developers will continue to forge ahead with games consisting of nothing but digitized video, the majority of designers, have opted for either a mix of digitized video and rendered backgrounds, or for using applications like Silicon Graphics workstations, 3D Studio, and

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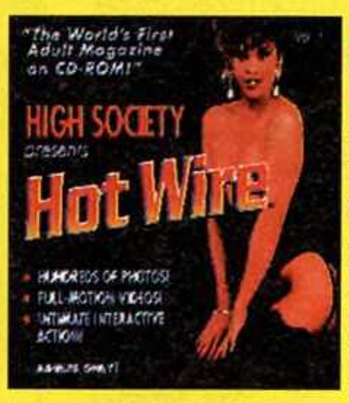

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Autodesk Animator to create photorealistic characters, backgrounds and animations.

One of the earliest of CD-ROM adventures — and one of the best-selling — was Virgin's *The 7th Guest*. The game takes place in the mysterious mansion of evil toymaker Henry Stauf; the player is one of seven guests who've been invited to the house by Stauf. Thing is, the other guest are all ghosts, and you've got to solve a series of puzzles to learn their stories and discover Stauf's secrets.

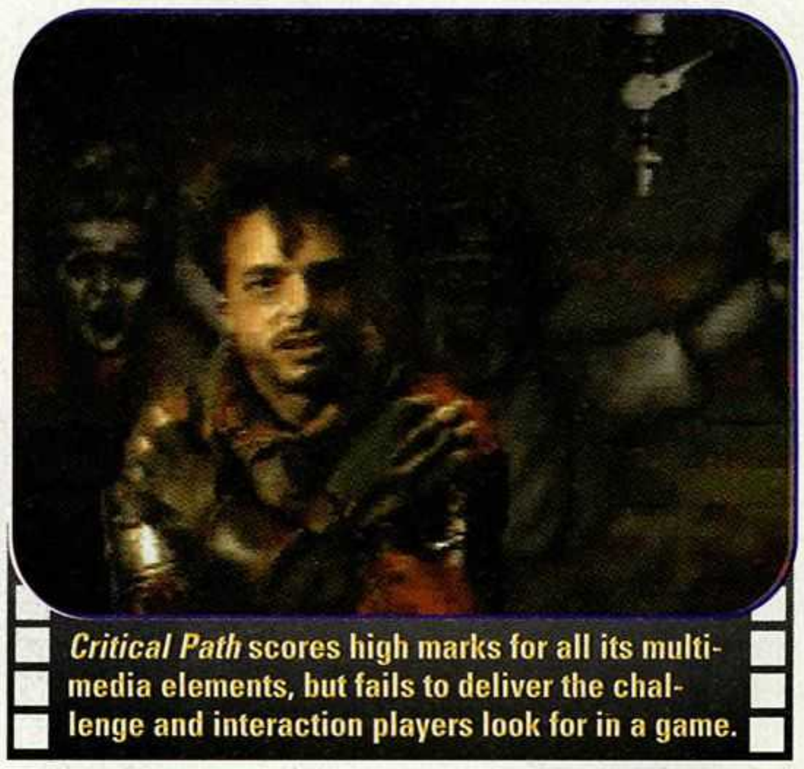
The 7th Guest **took a few hits for its disjointed gameplay, but its technological achievement inspired a new generation of game developers.**

All the rooms in the house were lovingly rendered in SVGA, and represent some of the best graphics work ever done for a PC game. But there's much less agreement on how *7th Guest* rates as a *game*. The rooms, while hauntingly beautiful, can't be explored in the conventional sense — you simply click in a direction and are taken to a new scene. And the gameplay is contrived, consisting of a series of old puzzles ladled on top of the graphics like so much gravy. Last but not least, the acting is bad with a capital "B" reminiscent of a high-school play (and a poor one at that).

Similar in structure to *7th Guest* is IVI Publishing's *Blown Away*. Although you're supposed to be playing as a bomb squad expert trying to track down an explosives freak, the game is basically a series of puzzles connected with video sequences, and only in that regard is it a multimedia game. Check out the review in this issue for the complete rundown.

Return to Zork, on the other hand, is the perfect example of how multimedia elements can add tremendously to the wonder and thrill of moving through a game world. While the interface is unique in presentation, it still allows you to perform actions like talk, pick up, use, look, open — you know, *interact* with the game world. All the characters in the game were filmed against blue screen, then the video was superimposed on rendered backgrounds. The result? A realistic look and feel, but not at the cost of depth of play. With excellent performances throughout, *Return to Zork* stands at the forefront of products calling themselves multimedia games.

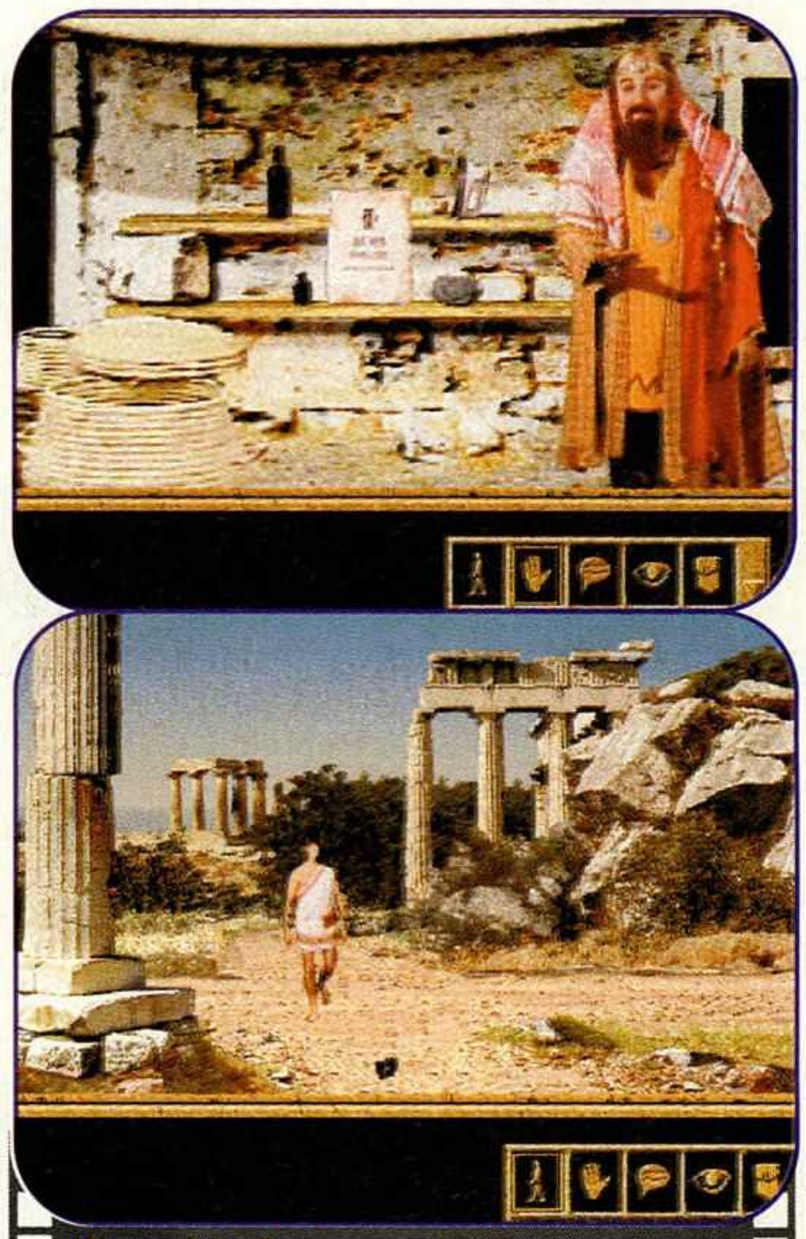
Activision knew that players would judge ***Return to Zork*** **just as much on the performance of the actors as on the quality and depth of the game itself, so every role cast was filled by a Hollywood veteran. The effort paid off.**



Critical Path **scores high marks for all its multimedia elements, but fails to deliver the challenge and interaction players look for in a game.**

An initially promising entry from last year was Media Vision's *Critical Path*. You play as a helicopter co-pilot who's crash-landed on an island ruled by an insane drug dealer. After an intro scene, you're placed in a control center with a monitor, where you can see your friend Kat, the 'copter pilot, trying to locate you. Your mission: to save Kat from various dangers by deriving clues from a diary, then using the info to operate machine guns, electric chairs, sirens, and more.

Despite its voyeuristic nature, *Critical Path* succeeds on several levels important



Wrath of the Gods **proves that if you aren't going to do multimedia well, you may as well not do it at all. The digitized actors look strangely out of place in the postcard-style scenery.**

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in a multimedia game: the Quicktime video is crisp and fluid, the music and sound effects work to build tension, and the actors turn in first-rate performances. But it was all for naught, since gameplay was limited to punching in keycodes, then sitting back and finding out if you made the right choice. The good news is that Media Vision listened to the critics, and is determined to give its next multimedia game, *The Daedalus Encounter*, much more play value (see sidebar).

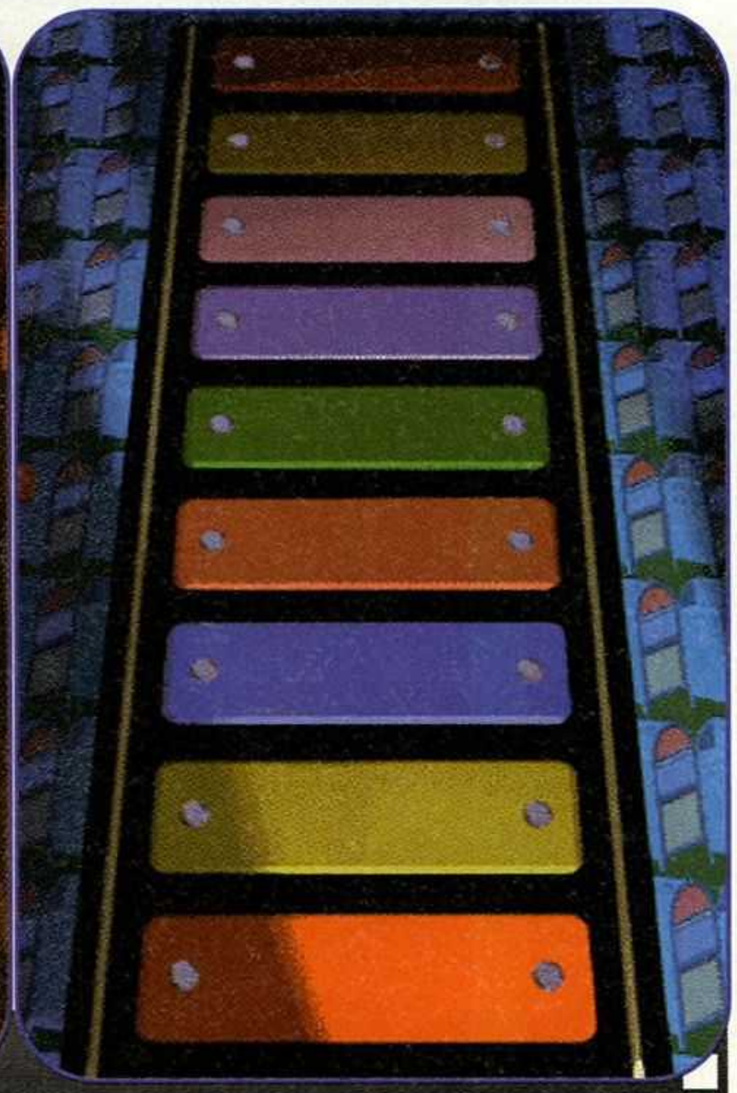
Wrath of the Gods, by Luminaria, avoided that trap by using standard adventure game conventions. Based on an amalgam of Greek myths, *Wrath* has plenty going for it: a timeless storyline, a legion of interesting characters, interesting puzzles of varying difficulty, and a simple yet effective set of command icons. In fact, Luminaria probably should have opted for traditional graphics, for *Wrath*'s biggest problems are in its attempts to be a multimedia game.

Digitized photos of modern Greece are used, so the scenery looks more like what you'd see in a postcard than in a game set over 2000 years ago. The animation, most of which is painfully slow, consists of digitized actors (and some rendered monsters) moving against the unconvincing backgrounds, and does little to suspend your disbelief. In one scene — a closeup of a beggar woman — the designers use a still photo of everything *but* the face, so her head moves but her shawl doesn't. It looks like she's stuck her head into a beggar-woman cardboard cutout, and proves that trying desperately to make multimedia fit where it doesn't belong can be a big mistake.

***Millennium Auction* is one of the few multimedia strategy games yet to be released.**

One of the most interesting and unique multimedia games of the past year is Eidolon's *Millennium Auction*, a futuristic art-auction simulation that combines 3D-modeled characters, stunning digitized art (both real and fictional), and a fair amount of strategy. The multimedia elements have been carefully crafted so as to become a vital part of gameplay: You read papers, watch TV news reports, and chat with fellow auctioneers, all with the goal of deciding which pieces of art coming up for sale will increase in value.

Except for new items up for bid, there isn't a lot of variation in play from game to game, but the clues you receive are vague enough to make each outing a challenge. And when you talk to or eavesdrop on other characters, you're treated to some fairly surreal cutaway sequences that actually affect gameplay. Perhaps the most important aspect of *Millennium Auction* is that it's obviously a game crafted *around* the concept of multimedia, rather than arbitrarily placing multimedia elements into a traditional game structure. It's also one of the few multimedia entertainment titles that isn't an adventure game.



Load up *Blown Away* on a Pentium with an accelerated video card, and you'll be treated to some of the most impressive video clips (left) ever to grace an entertainment product — but gameplay is reduced to a series of tired puzzles (right) crammed in between Quicktime video files.

Practice Makes Perfect?

Looking over the track record of multimedia gaming to date, you might think that multimedia and gaming just aren't a great mix, frequently failing to provide the rewards of "regular" computer games. But it merely proves what we've known all along: It takes time for developers to learn how to best take advantage of new technology. A good analogy can be made to the 16-bit Super Nintendo (stop laughing!) — it took nearly two years for videogame developers to learn the potential of that platform and start making games for it that were as good as the ones for the 16-bit Sega Genesis. The same thing's happening here, just on a more ambitious level.

A great example of how multimedia can be used effectively is Access Software's *Under a Killing Moon*, winner of a *PC Gamer* Editors' Choice Award last issue. As in many of the games we've mentioned, you interact with the characters in video sequences by selecting from a dialogue tree (though here you select an "attitude" rather than a specific line), and the acting is extremely good. It should be, what with actors like Brian Keith and Margot Kidder in the cast.

But what makes *Killing Moon* so spe-

cial is its unrivaled level of interaction when you aren't engaged in dialogue. From a literal first-person point of view, you have unheard-of ability to explore each scene in the game. If you want to look into a desk, for instance, you don't place a hand icon on the desk and click, as you might in a traditional game; instead, you must walk over the desk, look down at the drawer, open the drawer, then look inside. It creates a level of realism that is unrivaled in computer adventures.

You'll need a high-end machine to appreciate just how much *Under a Killing Moon* creates the sense of actually exploring a game world.

And while we haven't had a chance to play the final version, Origin's *Wing Commander III* is another step in the right direction. It too features big name stars — almost a prerequisite for multimedia games, since gamers will automatically compare the acting they see in the video segments of a game — and by interweaving the consequences of both dialogue choices and performance in stunning SVGA combat

One of the most talked-about games of the year, *Wing Commander III* shows how digitized video can be used to foster the player's sense of involvement. This is the way it *should* be done.

scenes, Origin has created a game that truly makes you feel as if *you* are the central figure in a very compelling drama.

So it's clear that multimedia doesn't necessarily limit the level of interaction in games, and in fact can make our favorite games even better. But there's one other issue that's even more critical: Do the next wave of computer gamers — folks who've just bought multimedia PCs, and who've never played a computer game before — really *want* games that are deep and challenging? Or will they be happy to sit back, press a few buttons, and watch video footage? Only time — and sales figures — will tell.

PCG

Better Than Plugging The Psychic Hotline

When digitized speech first started cropping up in games a couple years back, most developers seemed to have the attitude that, well, speech was speech — it didn't really matter *who* was reading the dialogue. If someone in the office had been in a high school play, or was a drama major in college, it was assumed they had the stuff to do voice-acting for a computer game. Despite the lofty claims in press releases of the high drama brought to PC games by the addition of digitized speech, there was an unspoken sentiment that the voice-acting was just gravy, more of a value-added feature than an essential component of gameplay.

But it didn't take long for players and reviewers to start bitching in unison about the poor quality of voice-acting in most computer games, and for a while it seemed that maybe it would be better to just let players *imagine* how the dialogue sounded rather than suffer through the stiff, wooden deliveries that were becoming the trademark of interactive entertainment products. For developers serious about the possibilities of speech in games, the only remedy was to do what producers of cartoons and animated features had to do — hire professional actors, people with the training, experience, and inclination to bring a character to life using only their vocal talents.

And so a sub-industry was born. Actors who'd had little luck lining up "regular" gigs now had a place turn for work (albeit a small one at the time), and to their credit the voice-acting in games showed dramatic improvement. Then came "multimedia," and live-action video.

Developers had learned the hard way that consumers weren't going to accept amateur voice-acting, even if it *was* in a computer game, and it didn't take a marketing genius to figure out that they wouldn't put up with sub-par performances in video clips, either. Like it or not, gamers were certain to compare the performances of actors in digitized video sequences of a game to what they saw in movies and on television. Once again, the answer was clear: Hire professionals. And thanks to the fact that gaming software is one of today's hottest and fastest-growing industries, acting in computer games has now become more important, more profitable, and — thanks to some deft PR work — decidedly more noticeable.

But despite the increasing number of roles and fairly impressive salaries made possible by interactive entertainment software, there's still a nagging sense that computer games are the place where actors go as a last resort — sort of a "Love Boat" of the 90s, if you will. To be fair, there's no question that we've seen some good performances in PC games; but even the most considerate of us have to admit that there are quite a few actors who are no longer marquee names (or, to be brutally honest, never really *were* marquee names) earning top billing as stars of PC games. Here's a look at some of the ones who've made the jump from film and TV to multimedia PC games.

The Old Pros

Actor	Best Known For	Most Embarrassing Vehicle	PC Game
Ginger Lynn Allen	Various adult movies	Those adult movies	*Wing Commander III*
Robert Culp	"I-Spy"	"The Greatest American Hero"	*Voyeur*
Mark Hamill	*Star Wars* movies	*Black Magic Woman*	*Wing Commander III*
Jason Hervey	"The Wonder Years"	*Police Academy II*	*Return To Zork*
Dennis Hopper	*Easy Rider*	*The Last Movie*	*Hell*
Sam Jones	*Flash Gordon*	*Flash Gordon*	*Return To Zork*
Brian Keith	"Family Affair"	*World War III*	*Under a Killing Moon*
Margot Kidder	*Superman* movies	*Sisters*	*Under a Killing Moon*
Dana Plato	"The Facts of Life"	Las Vegas Video Store	*Night Trap*

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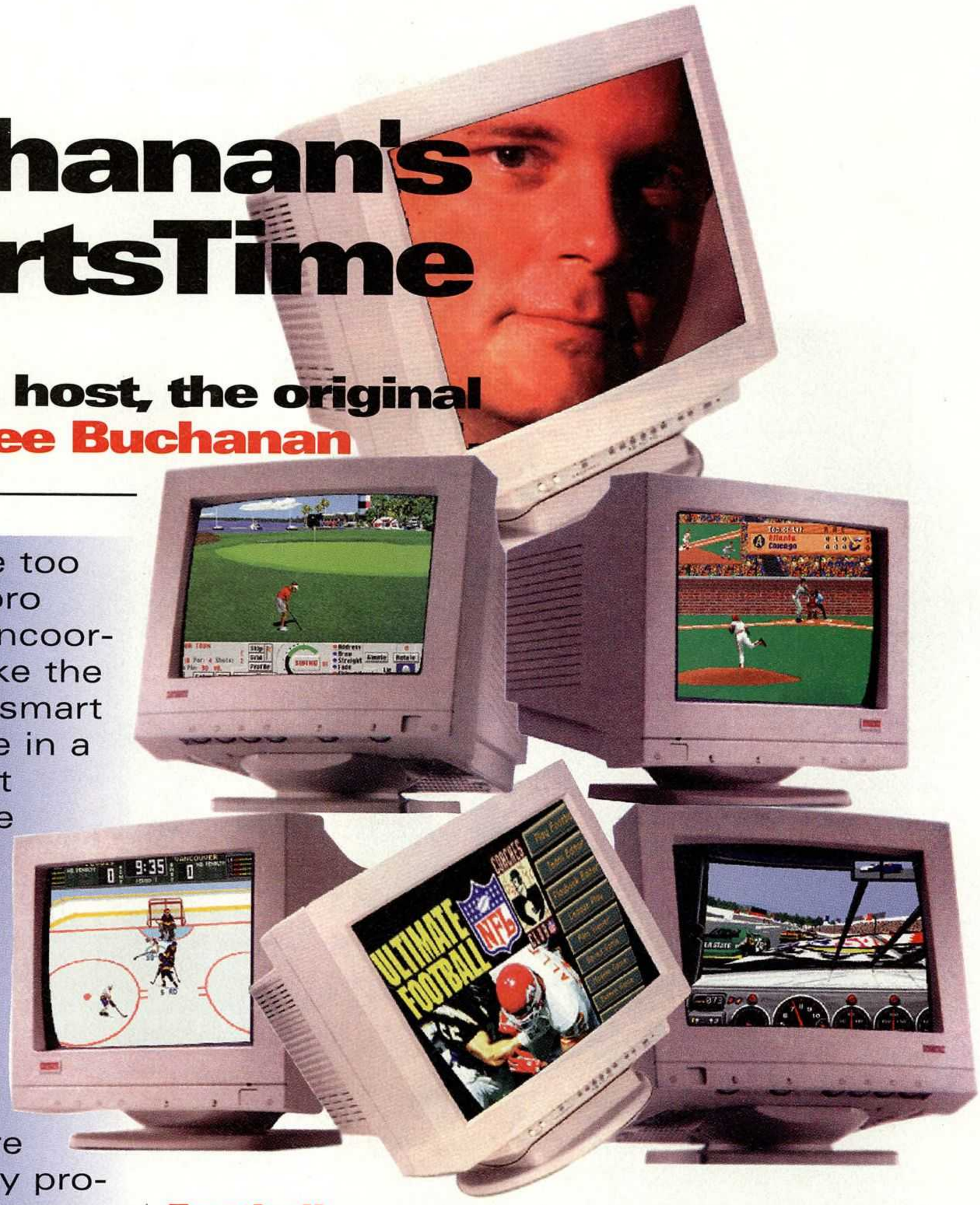


You say you're too small to play pro football, too uncoordinated to make the PGA, and too smart to risk your life in a race car? Don't worry, because you can still be a sports hero in front of your computer. There are now so many sports sims, in fact, that you're sure to find a quality program that re-creates your favorite game (except maybe curling and badminton). So put those cleats in the closet and get your golf clubs ready for the yard sale, because here's a look at the best sports simulations money can buy.

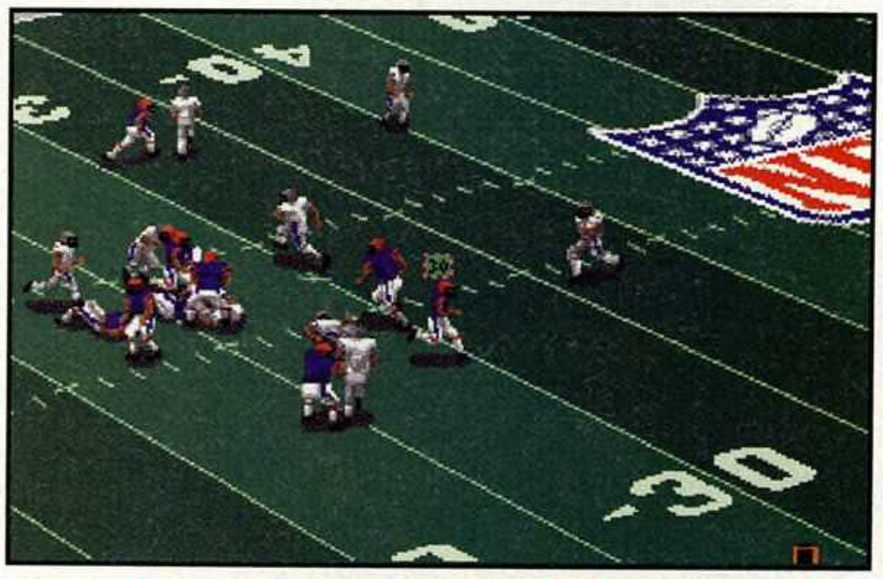
SportsTime

Football

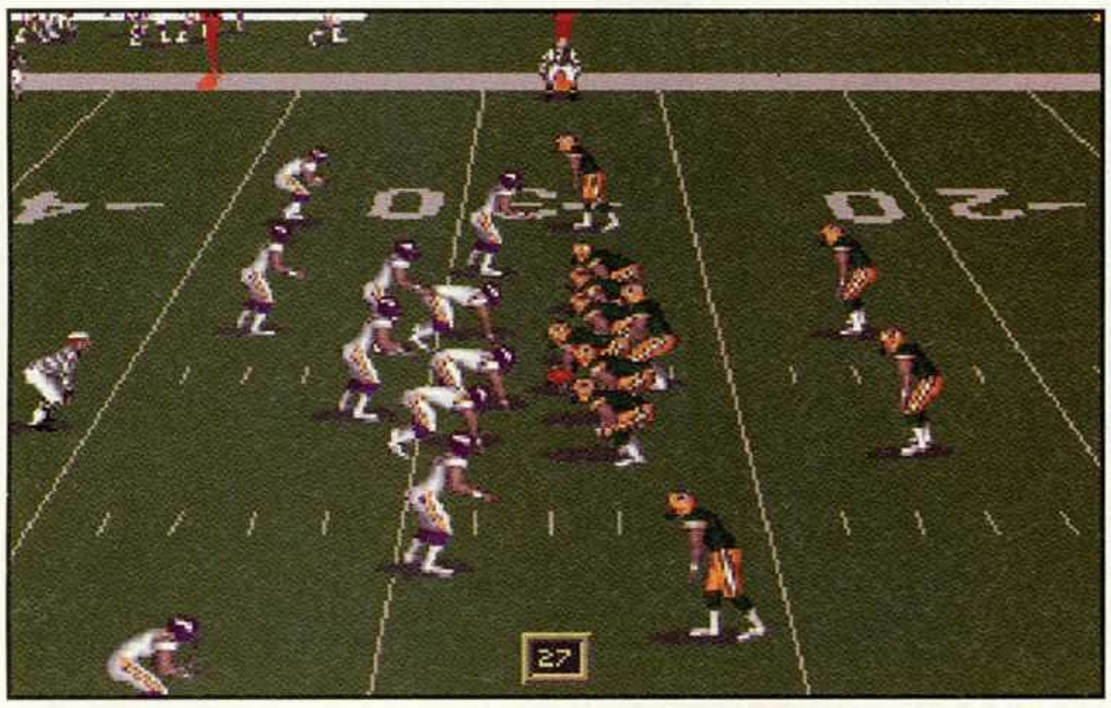
There are probably more simulations of football on the PC than any other sport. And there are several good ones, such as *Front Page Sports: Football Pro, Ultimate Football, Unnecessary Roughness, Tom Landry Football,* and *Pro League Football.*

These games offer the essentials — arcade play and coaching mode, real NFL players and teams, season play, statistics tracking, and injuries. But we're looking for the best here, and what separates the men from the boys on the computer gridiron are accurate game and season statistics, combined with outstanding graphics and sound.

Gamers want to manage real players — and when they do, they expect realistic stats and results. But apparently, produc-



Buffalo's Thurman Thomas finds some running room against the Dallas defense in *Front Page Sports: Football Pro '95.*

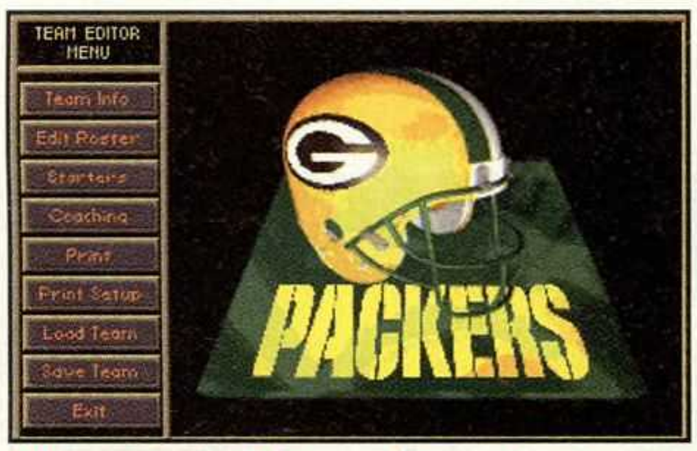


The graphics in *Ultimate Football* make it a real threat to *FPS:F Pro*.

ing realistic results and stats isn't as easy as it might seem. Few sims manage to do this well, and companies are constantly issuing patches to adjust the numbers their games produce.

If you demand realism as well as playability from your sports sims, it's a two-team race for the computer Super Bowl title — Dynamix's *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* and MicroProse's *Ultimate Football*. My vote still goes to *FPSF Pro*, but *Ultimate Football*'s much-improved latest version makes it a much closer race between these two excellent sims.

The latest version of *FPS, Pro '95*, updates the game with the NFL's rule changes for the 1994 season, including the two-point conversion. This is an unbeatable package, complete with career play that requires you to trade players and draft prospects from the college ranks.



Ultimate Football lets you edit your favorite team, so hopefully I can do something to boost my beloved Packers' offensive capabilities.

Your players age, their skills improve and then decline, and they finally retire. As coach and general manager, your challenge is not only to win games, but to build and maintain your franchise. And it's all brought to life with first-rate graphics and sound.

Ultimate Football is a serious challenger to Dynamix's football crown. The most recent edition matches *FPSF Pro*'s career play, and the graphics may be a touch better. *Ultimate Football* scores big for optional modem play, too, which Dynamix hasn't yet offered.

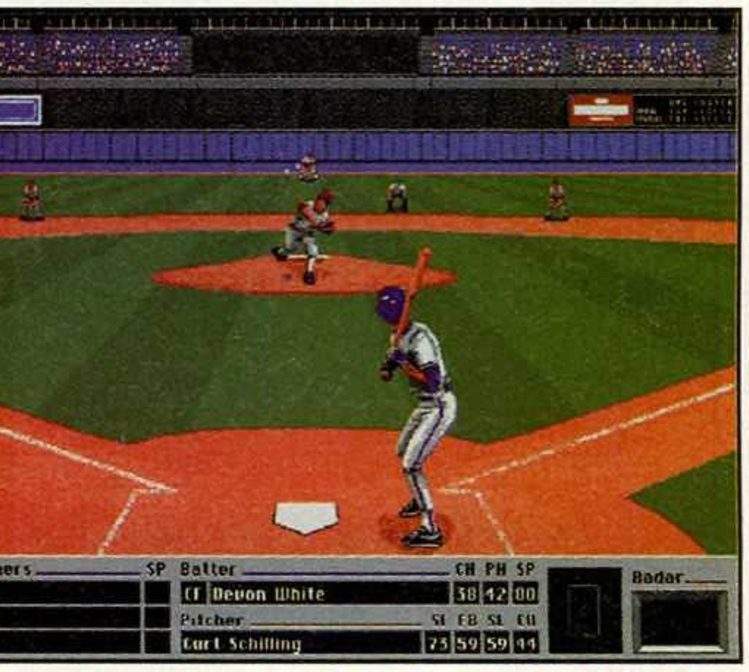
If you prefer the college game, your only choice is Micro Sports' *All-American College Football*. And it's a good choice, too, complete with all the major conferences and top 20 rankings. The graphics aren't much, although Micro Sports is working on an upgrade. Watch for this company's new *Pro League Football* as well, which should be on store shelves by now. This promising sim boasts NFL league play, classic teams from the past, and gorgeous graphics.

It's still a little early to tell, but what we've seen of *Brett Hull '95* looks promising.

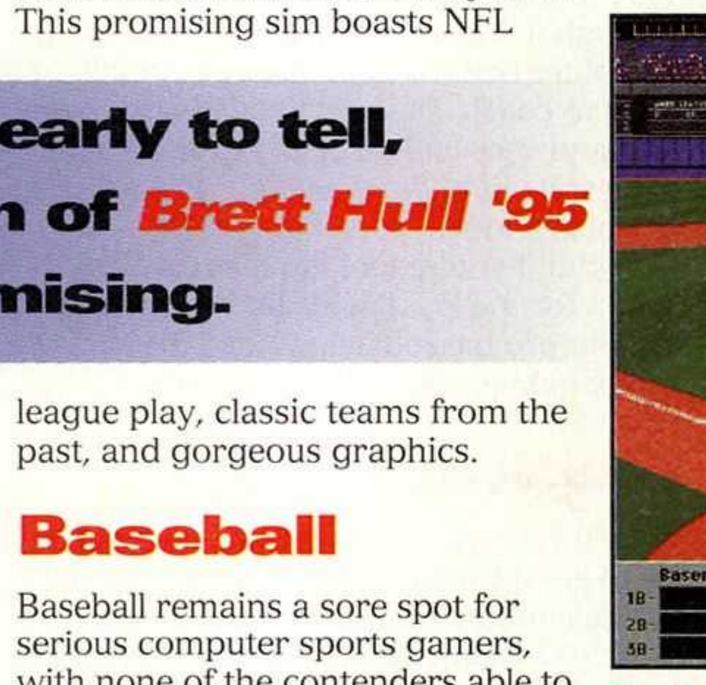
Baseball

Baseball remains a sore spot for serious computer sports gamers, with none of the contenders able to deliver a *totally* satisfying simulation of America's pastime. As in any sports title, wacky statistics can ruin even the best-looking baseball simulation. And realism-minded players don't want their league's home-run king to hit 80 taters, now do they?

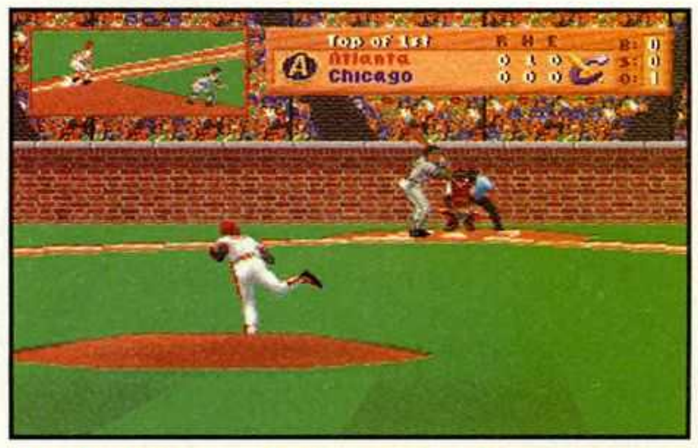
Tony LaRussa II, from SSI, has been the reigning king of baseball simulations, and with good reason. But the king is getting a bit gray now, and not even this sim is free of weaknesses. *LaRussa II*'s graphics are still adequate (if a bit dated), and the game produces acceptable season results and statistics. SSI issues updated rosters every year, and offers all the National and American League stadiums, each rendered in lovely detail. Still, the game suffers from bone-headed decisions by the computer manager, such as letting a pitcher bat while behind late in the game.



The batter/pitcher view in *Front Page Sports: Baseball* is the best of the bunch.



The graphics in *Tony LaRussa II* look a bit dated, but this sim still offers the best mix of baseball action and statistics around.



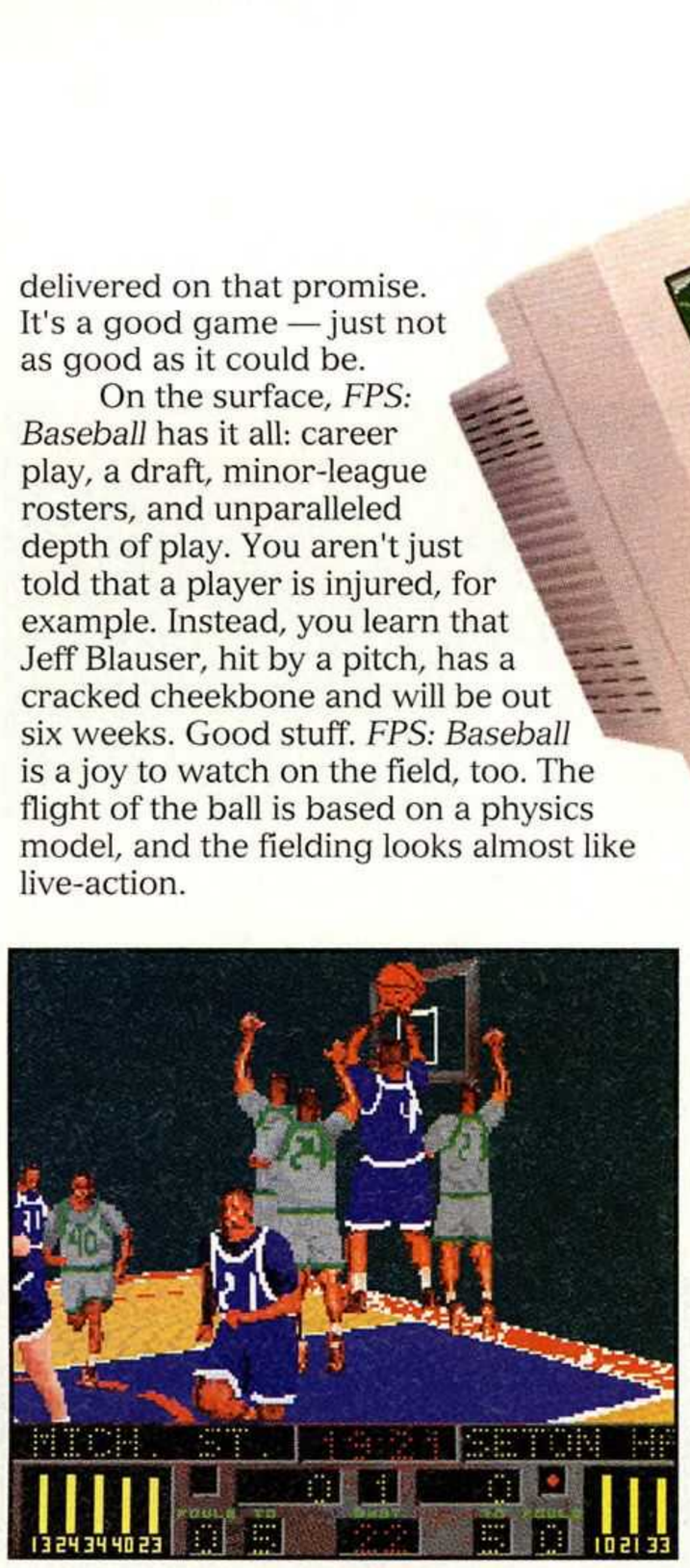
Hardball III is weak on stats, but the upcoming Hardball IV promises to be a big improvement.

The Hardball games from Accolade have always been the best-looking baseball simulations, with graphics that are consistently a cut above the competition. That's certainly true of the latest in the series, *Hardball III*. The emphasis in *Hardball III* is looks and not statistics, a definite turn-off for serious gamers. The numbers aren't realistic, and the game doesn't track enough statistics to satisfy more strategy-minded gamers. *Hardball IV*, due out by Christmas, will surely boast the best graphics once again — but it remains to be seen how well the game will handle stats. But if the on-field action is more important to you than the post-season numbers, *Hardball III or IV* might be your best bet.

Lots of gamers, myself included, hoped Dynamix would manage to bridge the frustrating gap between graphics and stats with its new *Front Page Sports: Baseball*. Dynamix had already produced the best football sim, and I hoped it would do the same for baseball. Unfortunately, though the game holds enormous potential, *FPS: Baseball* hasn't yet

delivered on that promise. It's a good game — just not as good as it could be.

On the surface, *FPS: Baseball* has it all: career play, a draft, minor-league rosters, and unparalleled depth of play. You aren't just told that a player is injured, for example. Instead, you learn that Jeff Blauser, hit by a pitch, has a cracked cheekbone and will be out six weeks. Good stuff. *FPS: Baseball* is a joy to watch on the field, too. The flight of the ball is based on a physics model, and the fielding looks almost like live-action.

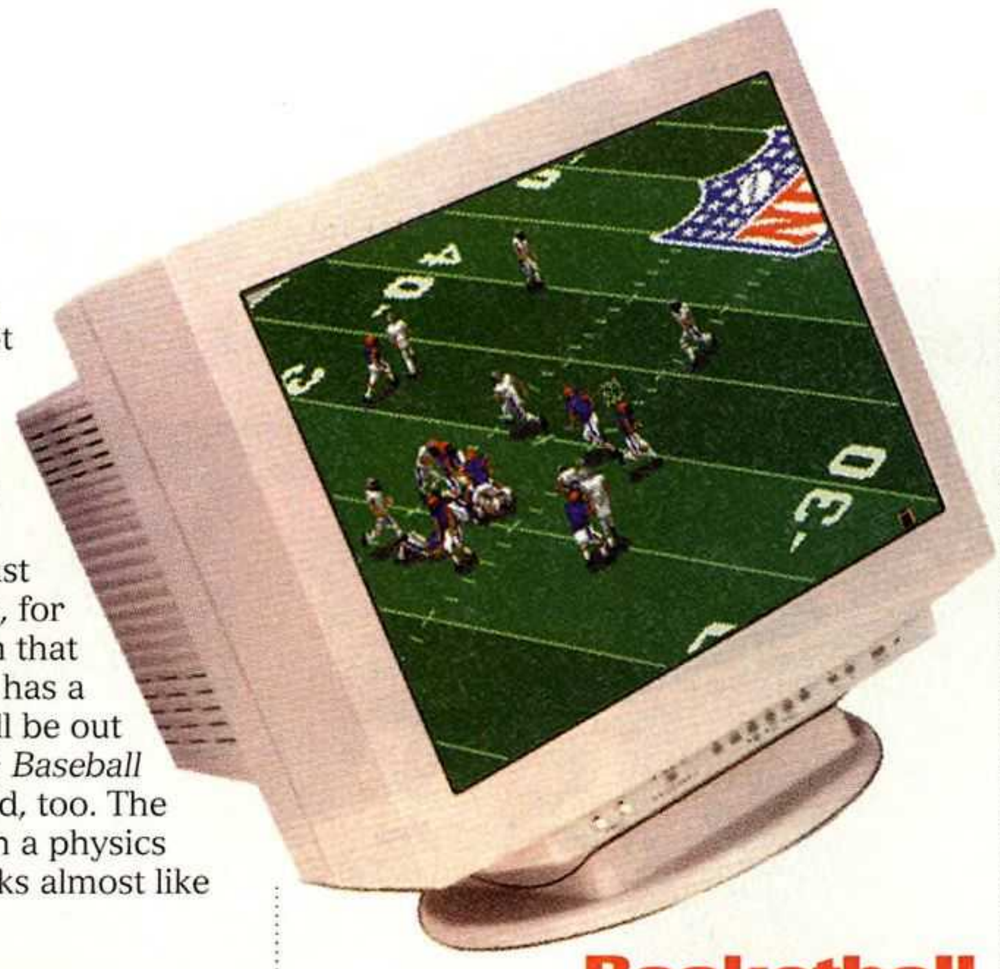


Almost by default, Bethesda's *NCAA: Road to the Final Four 2* wins the competition for best PC roundball sim. Oddly enough, there just aren't very many basketball sims available.

The trouble comes (you guessed it) in the statistics. Ridiculously high home-run numbers and inflated earned run averages serve to undermine what otherwise would be the clear winner in this category. Dynamix is promising to adjust the stats, and the company has an excellent record of supporting their games with patches until they're right. I've got my fingers crossed.

If Dynamix can modify the stats produced in *FPS: Baseball*, then this sim will get my vote. Until then, though, I have to give the nod to the veteran, *LaRussa II*. It looks a bit old, and it doesn't offer career play, but *LaRussa II* still offers the best blend of graphics and stats.

A new contender to watch is *ESPN's Baseball Tonight* from Sony, which promises the long-awaited marriage of good-looking graphics and realistic replay statistics. In addition, Micro Sports is reworking its *Pro League Baseball*, which has been justifiably criticized for its poor stats.



Basketball

For a graphical simulation of five-on-five basketball, Bethesda's *NCAA: Road to the Final Four 2* is really the only game in town. This sim focuses on the NCAA college basketball tournament, and it delivers some pretty intense hardcourt action. You get all 64 teams from the 1991, 1992, and 1993 tournaments, and you can race through a tournament quickly, having the computer resolve the games you don't want to coach. Despite an awkward interface and very limited stats-keeping capabilities, *Road to the Final Four 2* is definitely worth a look.

But if you're looking for real NBA action for the PC, I'm afraid you're out of luck. In pro basketball, at least, the cartridge games are where the action is.

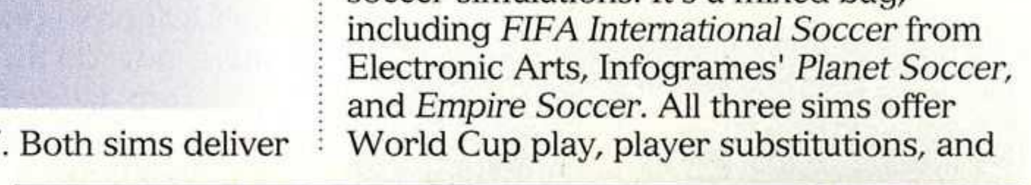
Hockey

Even if you aren't a fan of real-life hockey, there are a couple of computer simulations that just might convert you — Bethesda's *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3* and *NHL Hockey '95* from Electronic Arts'. Both sims deliver the beautiful and punishing world of hockey almost to perfection, with excellent graphics and sound. Both games offer real NHL teams and players, injuries, penalties, fights, full-season play, complete statistics tracking, and even the Stanley Cup tournament.

NHL Hockey '95 is a flashy, all-action simulation of the rough-and-tumble world of hockey.

Each sim has different strengths, and so picking the better of the two will depend on you. Arcade-minded players will prefer *NHL '95*, with its lightning joystick control and polished interface, graphics, and sound. *NHL '95* also offers a complete package of real teams and rosters, season play, and statistics. *Gretzky III*, while it also offers arcade play, is a bit more focused on strategy and team management. It's an older sim, though, and it looks it. So the choice is yours — and you can't really go wrong with either of these great games.

A newcomer to watch for is Accolade's *Brett Hull Hockey '95*. It doesn't carry the NHL license, but it does have the endorsement of the players' association. So you'll play generic teams, but with real rosters.



Although we've only seen a preview of the game, Accolade's *Brett Hull Hockey '95* looks like it might have all the right stuff. Even in the early version we're playing, the animation and control are impressive.

Most gamers won't be satisfied with *Empire Soccer*'s cartoonish graphics and simple play.

***Planet Soccer* looks great, and its perspective gives you a good view of the action. But controlling the players is just too much of a chore.**

Soccer

When the World Cup came to the United States in 1994, it brought with it a bevy of soccer simulations. It's a mixed bag, including *FIFA International Soccer* from Electronic Arts, Infogrames' *Planet Soccer*, and *Empire Soccer*. All three sims offer World Cup play, player substitutions, and

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***Strategy Plus** (September 1994)* observed, "...massive improvements on both graphics and sound fronts."

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Product Information Number 127

Text-Based Sports Sims

If you're more interested in results and statistics than pretty graphics, text-based sports simulations might be more to your liking. Though they aren't as flashy as the graphical sims, these numbers-crunching games generally produce more accurate stats, and they can race through an entire season in a few hours.

The best text-based sports sims cover baseball, using a universe of statistics and coaching options to put you on the bench as manager. *Pursue the Pennant*, *Strat-O-Matic*, *APBA Baseball for Windows*, and *Lance Haffner's Full Count Baseball* all rely on a text play-by-play description to bring the action to life. *Baseball for Windows* and *Strat-O-Matic* provide a backdrop of stadium graphics, but the emphasis is still on results, not cosmetics.

***Strat-O-Matic*, *Pursue the Pennant*, and *Full Count* are solid, if not spectacular, baseball simulations, letting you play games in a few minutes and whip through a day's schedule even faster. If speed is a priority, any of these games is a good choice.**

***Baseball for Windows* looks nice and has a handsome interface, but proves clumsy for re-creating an entire season. The game actually requires the player to create his or her own schedule, which ruins it as a useful tool for season replays.**

If you're looking for text simulations of other sports, your choices are more limited. Lance Haffner offers sims of just about every sport, including NBA and college basketball, football, and boxing. They're all solid sims, with minimal hardware requirements.

A new entry in the sports sim category, *Nothing But Net: Pro League Basketball*, uses fictional players, but offers a wealth of coaching options. And Wizard Games of Scotland markets a bevy of text-based titles, simulating Grand Prix racing, horse racing, and soccer. There are shareware versions available of these games, and they can be found on many bulletin boards.

Even if you enjoy high-end graphical simulations, you might find these fast and detailed sims a welcome break, whether it's on an ancient 286 computer, on a monochrome monitor at work, or on a laptop on the road.

a bit of strategic control in the choice of alignments. But unless you need a game that can run from the floppy disk, forget about *Empire*; its cartoon-like graphics and childishly simple play won't hold your attention for long.

The choice, then, is between *FIFA* and *Planet Soccer*, and neither sim is close to ideal. I love the 3D perspective of *Planet Soccer* — you can actually see downfield action, so you have some idea in what direction to move the ball. But *Planet Soccer*'s controls are so screwy that basic dribbling and passing become challenging maneuvers.

***FIFA International Soccer* looks great, and is about the best soccer sim we've seen. It's not perfect, but its damn good.**

***NASCAR Racing* leads the pack of auto racing simulations. Even in VGA, this game recreates racing like no other.**

The winner by default is *FIFA*, which offers superb graphics and outstanding play-by-play commentary. It has its problems, though. Your teammates don't appear to know what they're doing, so you find yourself engaged in a series of one-on-one encounters instead of pressing a planned attack. And the controls can take a bit of getting used to. So *FIFA*'s the best sim available now, but you may want to wait to see if someone comes up with a more faithful soccer title.

Auto Racing

Just a couple of years ago, there were no decent auto-racing simulations. Now there are three that warrant my unqualified endorsement: *NASCAR Racing* and *IndyCar Racing*, both from Papyrus, and *World Circuit* from MicroProse.

Papyrus set the standard for motorsports sims last year with *IndyCar Racing*, then surpassed that lofty plateau late this year with *NASCAR Racing*. *NASCAR Racing* (reviewed in this issue) will blow you away with its beauty, intensity, and depth of play. You'll need a helluva machine to run it, though — at least a 486DX/33 for just VGA action — but this sim brings the high-speed thrills of stock-car racing to the computer with astonishing realism. If you own a Pentium (a fast Pentium), the SVGA version is even better.

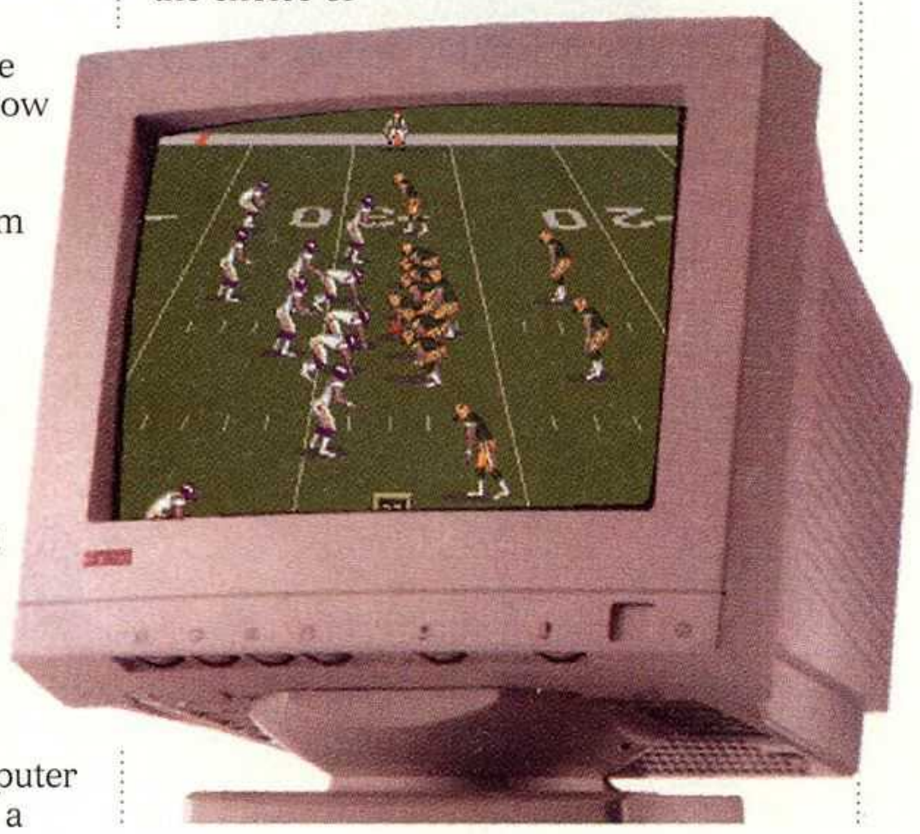
If you prefer racing the open-wheeled Indy cars, *IndyCar Racing* is a sure bet, too. Like *NASCAR, IndyCar Racing* is so sophisticated and realistic that you'll need to become a master mechanic and chassis expert if you expect to win the race.

World Circuit, while about two years old, is still worthy of consideration — especially if you're stuck with a slower computer. A simulation of Formula One Grand Prix racing, *World Circuit* brings home an exhilarating re-creation of big-time auto racing, with all the tracks and a season-long chase for the world driving championship. And watch out: *World Circuit II* is on its way.

Golf

After winning the Super Bowl or screaming to victory in a 500-mile race, you're ready for a relaxing round of golf, right? Well, then you're in luck, because you have a handful of excellent choices in golfing simulations.

Links 386 Pro, from Access, remains the choice of



SportsTime

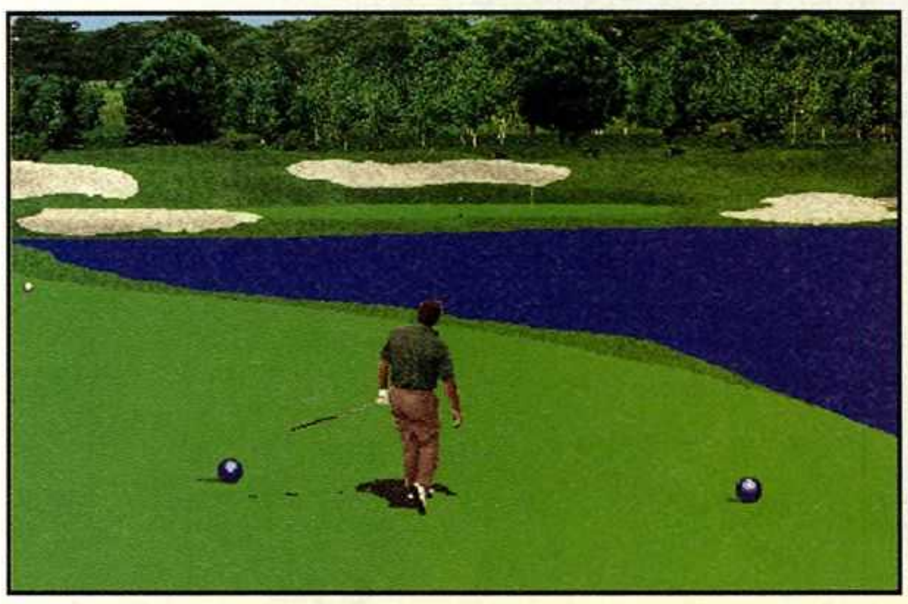
International Tennis Open, which looks better than it plays, is the only tennis game to be introduced in the past

World Circuit still looks good, and the upcoming World Circuit II should be even better.

Tennis

most computer golfers. With its photo-realistic graphics and the wide selection of courses available, *Links 386* remains the standard by which other golf sims are judged. Crafted with stunning visuals and an unwavering dedication to the game of golf, it's perhaps the finest sports simulation of all.

What *Links 386* doesn't offer — and what its players have been begging for — is tournament play against computer-controlled golfers. *PGA Tour Golf*, from Electronic Arts, answers that demand, and the new *PGA Tour Golf 486* has upped the graphics ante enough to now be a serious challenger to *Links 386*. *PGA Tour Golf 486* gives you nine videotaped pros — to play with or against — in 72-hole tournaments, match play, or a skins competition. Though lovely, the graphics still aren't quite a match for *Links 386*. But the thrill and pressure of tournament play makes *PGA Tour Golf 486* my current choice for computer golf. Keep in mind, though, that *PGA* is a CD-only game, and it's a little more demanding of your computer. And remember — you'll need at least a 486/33 to play.

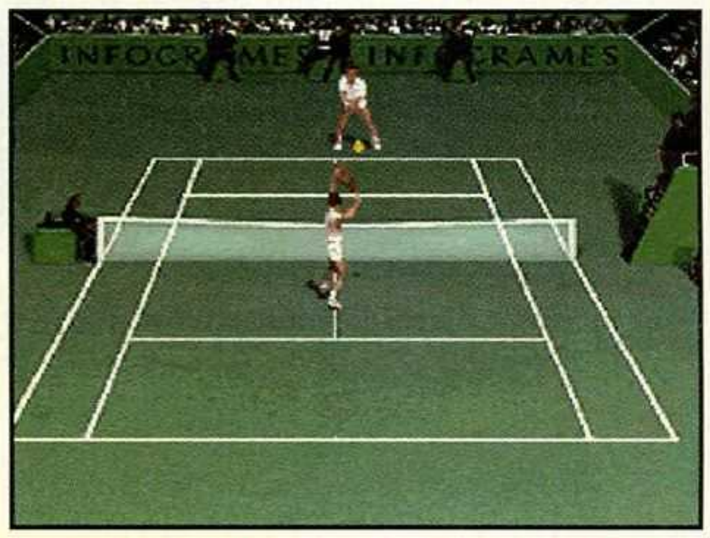


Fuzzy Zoeller lands his tee shot on the green in PGA Tour Golf II, a new sim that offers tournament play against real pros.

Lost in the links shuffle and overshadowed by its more modern competitors is *Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition* from Accolade. Its graphics are out of date, but *Jack*'s excellent course designer keeps this game alive for many players. Look for a new Nicklaus sim in the spring, with much-improved graphics and an even better course-architect feature. And Access is working on its next generation of Links, this one designed to take advantage of the Pentium chip. So this promises to be a banner year for golf simmers.

Now two years old, *Links 386* still boasts the best-looking graphics of any sports sim around.

Unfortunately, there's not much to talk about here. The only recent tennis simulation, *International Tennis Open* from Philips Interactive, is long on looks but short on strategy. At first glance, the game is very impressive, with video profiles of your opponents and audio commentary during play. There are three tournaments on three surfaces — clay in Paris, hard court in New York, and grass in Wimbledon. You start each tournament in the quarter-finals, since you have only four possible opponents. The on-court action looks terrific, and the sound effects add a nice touch of realism.



***International Tennis Open* looks good, but doesn't have as much depth as you might like.**

But the thrill of winning a volley or hitting a perfect passing shot was missing, as the game quickly settled into a monotonous pattern. It's almost impossible to hit a ball out of bounds, and your selection of shots is curiously limited — no top-spin shots or slices. While it looks great, this game just doesn't offer enough. In today's world of ultra-sophisticated simulations, *ITO* doen't track any statistics, rankings, or prize money.

Trouble is, there's no competition. Blue Byte's *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*, now at least a few years old, still offers more tennis for the buck. Look for it in the bargain bins at your local software store.

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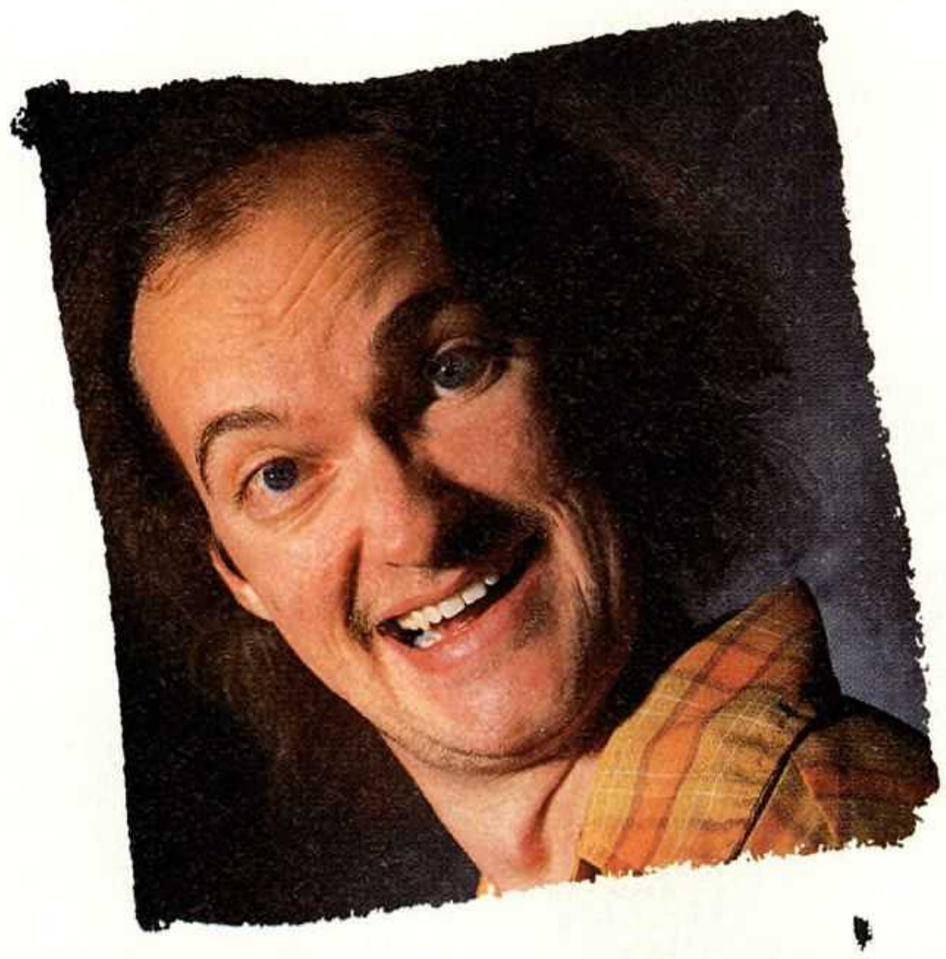

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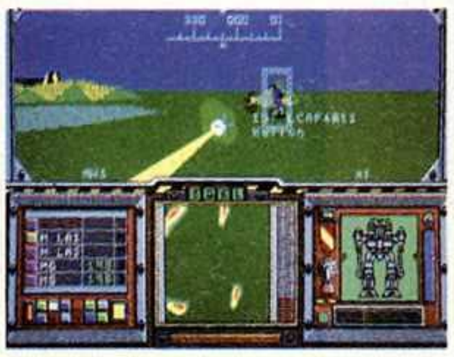

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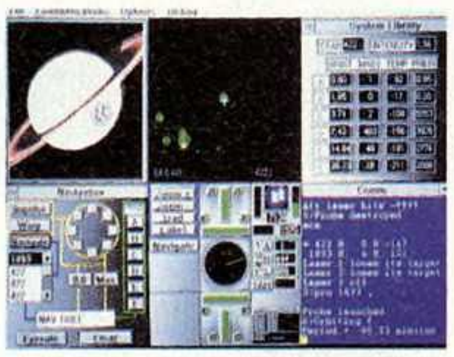

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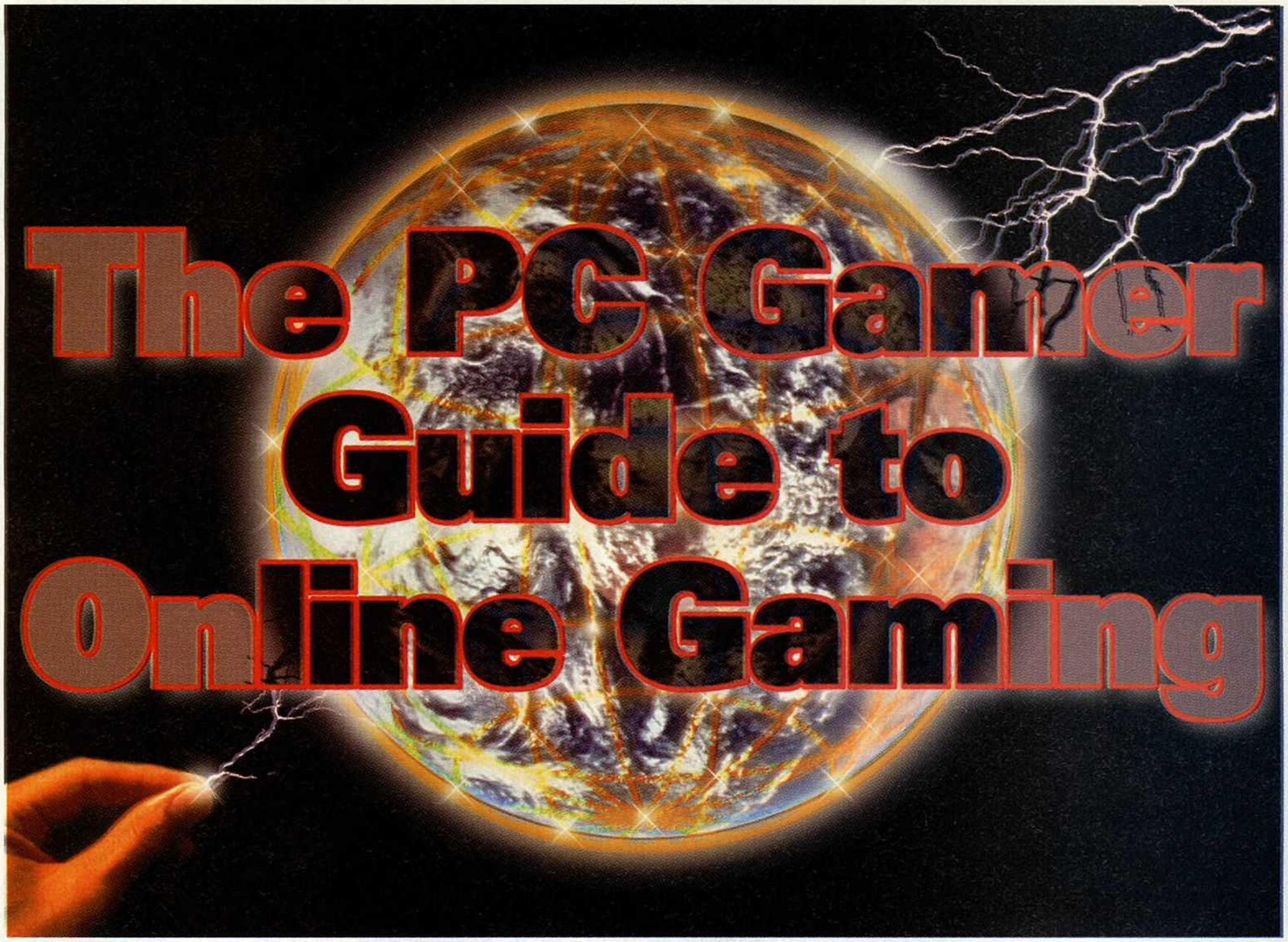

The PC Gamer Guide to Online Gaming

You hear us talking about them all the time: the online services. They're often the sources of invaluable information, tips, news — and best of all, *interaction*.

So join the Lupine Online for a guided tour of online services with a lot to offer the PC gamer — including live, head-to-head action you won't find anywhere else.

—Scott Wolf

You've got to stop playing with yourself. No, really — all those hours spent alone, soaking in the impassive glow of your monitor screen, are bound to take their toll. Sooner or later you'll lose the ability to relate to other thinking, feeling human beings — and *then* where will you be? In political office, that's where!

If you want to avoid that gruesome fate, come along with me. I'll show you some cool places where you can play games live, online, *with* (and, of course, against) other humans who aren't so much different from you and I.

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America Online

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I wish that every online service was as attractive, user-friendly, and easy to use as America Online — especially with the brand-new Windows multimedia front end (version 2.0). The only problem with AOL (besides the fact that its phenomenally growing subscriber base sometimes causes interminable delays in the system's response) is that there aren't a whole lot of multiplayer games to be found there.

RabbitJack's Casino provides four

In Broderbund's *MasterWord* on America Online, players take turns trying to figure out each other's secret word, either one letter at a time or by guessing the whole word. No Vanna White, though....

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simple games for the social gambler in you: Five-Card Stud Poker, BlackJack, Bingo and Slot Machines. The Casino Lounge serves as a meeting place and entryway into the Casino games, where you can chat with other players, four of whom may participate at Poker and BlackJack tables; up to 22 at Bingo and the Slots.

Two to eight players at a time may also compete against each other at Broderbund's *MasterWord*, a fast-paced game where you take turns guessing each other's secret words. All of these games go to DOS from Windows to provide a simple but effective graphic display.

America Online offers only one multiplayer RPG — *NeverWinter Nights* — a Forgotten Realms Adventure in the tradition of SSI's Gold Box AD&D series. You can tough it out alone, or join forces with up to 7 other players as you explore the vast and dangerous Sword Coast.

The Casino Games, *MasterWord* and *NeverWinter Nights* all require additional graphics software, which is available for free downloads online. But you won't need anything extra for the nightly, real-time games in The Trivia Forum (text only), though.

One of RabbitJack's friendly hosts greets me at the Bingo board. Here you can play against as many as 22 opponents.

CompuServe

Phone Number: (800) 848-8990
Rates: $9.95 per month for Basic Services; an additional $4.80 (2400 baud) to $9.60 (9600 and 14.4) per hour for Extended Services.

It's not quite as user-friendly as AOL, although CompuServe has gotten a lot easier to use since the introduction of WinCIM, the graphic CompuServe Information Manager (tm) for Windows. Compuserve is probably the largest online service around — and quite possibly the most expensive. But you *do* get a lot for your money.

Aside from the popular forums and comprehensive libraries, many of which cater specifically to gamers, CompuServe has a large selection of multiplayer games, most of them available at no extra charge in the Basic Service area. Unfortunately, these tend to be of the text-based variety — and let's face it, kids, this is the 90's. If you're still fascinated by text-only games, you're probably sitting in front of one of those old Royal-typewriter-attached-to-a-TV-with-a-magnifying-lens contraptions from Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*.

Still, classic FRPs like *Island of Kesmai* and *British Legends* remain quite popular, as do *Air Traffic Controller*, and the sci-fi adventures *StarSprint* and *MegaWars I & III* — not to mention traditional board games such as chess, checkers, and backgammon. And then there's *SNIPER!*, a head-to-head version of TSR/SPI's World War II board game which is kind of like playing Virgin's *Cannon Fodder* while watching old reruns of Combat! on TV.

GEnie

Phone Number: (800) 638-9636
Rates: This fruitful bounty will cost you $8.95 per month for the first 4 hours, then a standard $3 an hour at 2400 baud, $6 at 9600, and a primetime surcharge of $9.50 an hour.

Like Delphi, GEnie has recently given in to their members' demands for a GUI, and their GEnie front end for Windows is only slightly clunkier than CompuServe's WinCIM.

GEnie is the original Home of the Heavy Hitters when it comes to multi-player games: Kesmai's *Air Warrior* has been a staple there for years, with thousands of fanatical flight-sim fans a week burning up the phone lines to participate in its huge air combat arena. And I mean *huge* — there can be up to 100 planes in the sky at once!

Add to that Simutronics' *CyberStrike*, a cross between Activision's *MechWarrior* and NovaLogic's *Ultrabots*; the expansive medieval roleplaying strategy of *Hundred Years' War*; and the Grande Dame herself, *Multi-Player BattleTech*. Each of these games uses its own impressive graphic front end, and is so addictive that you can almost see your telephone budget being sucked through the modem and out the phone jack.

GEnie's beautiful Windows front end for *The Hundred Years War* — wargame Guru James Dunnigan's own creation.

Also available are the text-based *Dragon's Gate, Gemstone III, Orb Wars, Federation II, Galaxy I, Stellar Emperor*, and *Stellar Warrior*; *NTN Showdown Trivia* and *QBI* (as played in bars and hotel rooms around the country), and RSCARDS — simple graphic games of chess, checkers, blackjack, poker, backgammon, bridge, and Reversi.

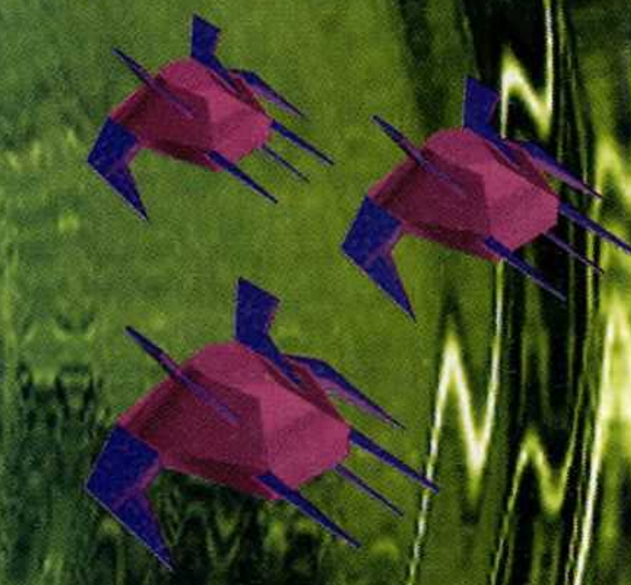
Delphi

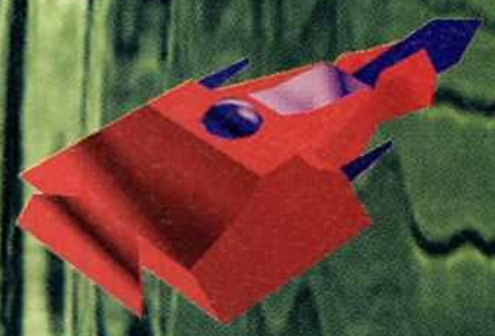
Phone Number: (800) 695-4005
Rates: $9.95 for 4 hours per month, or $19.95 for 20 hours per month. Additional time is just 96 cents per hour for multi-player gaming (14.4 supported)

While most of the other online services are rapidly adding Internet access to their packages, Delphi's been a full-service 'net provider all along — although not an easy one to use. Two Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) are currently in development that make surfing Delphi a lot less intimidating: InterNav, the official front end; and D-Lite, developed by enthusiastic users, are both available for download.

Delphi's games area is called

"THE PERFECT COMPUTER GAME."
- STRATEGY PLUS





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Product Information Number 134

Electropolis, and from there you can access everything from the two-player game of *Flip It!* (you may know it as Othello or Reversi) to multi-player versions of *Poker Showdown!*, *Quest* (an FRP), the SCRAMBLE Word Game, *Stellar Conquest*, and *TQ Trivia*.

The big news is that Delphi is now offering some of the most popular multi-player games around at some *very* reasonable rates. You can now play Kesmai's *Air Warrior*, *Federation II*, *Island of Kesmai*, and *Stellar Emperor* right along with players on other networks.

The ImagiNation Network

Phone number: (800) IMAGIN-1
Rates: Membership is variable, and ranges from at $9.95 per month for 5 hours (1200 to 9600 baud) to $99.95 for 50 hours. Additional time is charged at the rate $3.50 an hour.

Formerly The Sierra Network, The ImagiNation Network (INN) is unique among online services. It exists *solely* for the purpose of providing fun and games in a sunny, friendly atmosphere. In fact, INN's two serious FRPs — *Shadows of Yserbius* and *The Fates of Twinion* — have an almost carefree air about them, even when you're virtually being torn to shreds by your cyber-opponents.

There's something here for every age group, from the Leisure Suit Larry-inspired goings on in *CasinoLand* to the board and card games in the Clubhouse and the simple but clever games in SierraLand. A few clicks of your mouse and you can be playing *Paint Wars*, *Boogers*, *SneakATac*, *Mini-Golf*, *NTN Trivia*, *Rocket Quiz*, *Graffiti*, *Stratego*, *3D Golf*, and multiplayer *Red Baron* (YES!). And coming soon to INN, you will even be able to play *Front Page Sports: Football*.

The INN main menu is a colorful, graphic map of the many available areas, which actually changes with the seasons of the real world. When you enter INN and many of the game areas, you design a cartoon-like portrait of yourself which is how the other players see you; this lends a real, personal feeling to the proceedings. If you don't feel like playing — or don't know how — many of the areas will let you drop in on a game in progress and watch (with the players' permission, of course). Or you can simply hang out in the lobby and chat with the other INNsiders — a *very* popular pastime.

Boogers plays a lot like the microscope game in *The 7th Guest*, but it's a lot easier and a lot more fun.

It was October during this visit to INN, so the map shows ImagiNation in its fall colors.

The Kingdom of Drakkar on MPG-Net. Don't ask me what that little fruit-shaped thing on the menu bar is, though.

MPG-Net

Phone Number: (800) 245-0317
Rates: Access through most national communications networks costs $4.00 per hour; connecting through a PSI-Net link costs $2.00 per hour.

The Multi-Player Games Network started out as a tiny 5,000 watt radio station in...oops, wrong story.

MPG-Net actually started in 1991, and has been gaining momentum ever since. They're not very big yet, but they're very, very good at what they do.

Currently, MPG-Net offers three very sharp-looking games: *The Kingdom of Drakkar*, a 16-color VGA RPG; *Empire Builder*, an SVGA entrepreneurial challenge; and *Operation Market Garden*, the two-player wargame, also in SVGA.

Each game operates from its own independent front end, but all that will change when MPG-Net's new 256-color SVGA System Interface goes on-line. Like the one used for INN, the new graphic interface provides players with a realistic "physical" environment in which they can connect with people all over the world, and it's *really* slick.

Drakkar uses both graphics and text to tell its story.

Along with the new System Interface, MPG-Net plans to have four new games up and running — hopefully, by the time you read this. They are *Fiefquest*, *MUD II*, *Starweb* and *Warlords of the Apocalypse*.

"What's that, Warden? Why no, I don't have a monkey-hunting license. I didn't know you needed one to take monkeys on MPG net!"

NovaLink

Phone Number: (800) 274-2814
Rates: $9.95 per month for five hours of daytime access, with additional hours at $3.60 each. No extra charges for high-speed access, up to 14.4.

Inner Circle Technologies, who operate NovaLink, was born in a spare bedroom less than three years ago, the brainchild of Jon Radoff — a then-19-year-old computer whiz — and his wife Angela Bull. It's now a multi-million dollar operation, and one of the ten largest online services in the U.S.

NovaLink's *Cyber Corps* has a new graphic front end and stereo sound.

NovaLink provides full Internet access, including sound and graphics capabilities, but they're probably best known for *Legends of Future Past* — a text-only multiplayer science-fiction/fantasy RPG. *Cyber Corps*, an arcade/strategy game pitting teams of "'borgs" against each other in a frantic quest for valuable illithium nodes, recently got a graphics overhaul and now has its own 256-color VGA front end, complete with digital stereo music and sound effects. There's also The Virtual Cafe, an online community where users interact in an Atlantic City-type boardwalk environment.

Prodigy

Phone Number: (800) 776-3449
Rates: $9.95 a month for 5 hours a month, plus $2.95 for each additional hour, 2400 through 9600 baud.

Ah yes, Prodigy. What was once the slowest, ugliest, and most advertising-ridden service on the planet has come a long way since its inception. But if you're the type of person who changes channels the instant a commercial comes on your TV,

The Galaxy of Games — gateway to Prodigy's on-line gaming center. You can choose from several types of games to play, or check out the games Bulletin Board for some tips.

Prodigy will still drive you crazy with its intrusive advertising at the bottom of many service screens.

Still, those who like it (about 2 million people) seem to like it *a lot*. And thanks to its policy of editing the message boards, it's ideal for the kids. There are plenty of things for them do, but very little in the way of true, real-time multiplayer games. You can download a course from *Jack Nicklaus Golf & Design: Signature Edition*, play it off-line, and then upload the results — but that's not quite what "online gaming" means to me.

On the other hand, there are plenty of quick-and-dirty games to play online

***Rebel Space*, a Custom Choice game on Prodigy costs 24.95 for a 25-turn game.**

against the computer, and some familiar titles like *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*, Fantasy Baseball and Football, and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*.

Prodigy is a good family-style service with much to offer, including a new feature called Game Point, which provides you with the software to connect with The ImagiNation Network outside of Prodigy. It actually makes sense, since each service specializes in what the other lacks.

Total Entertainment Network

Phone Number: (800) 867-8446
Rates: Tentative pricing is set at $10 a month with 5 free hours online; $3 per addition hour. Access speeds of 9600 baud and up an no additional charge.

The Total Entertainment Network (TEN), an "online service with an attitude" is still in Beta test and only in the San Francisco Bay area as I write this, so I haven't actually logged on to it or anything. But according to Daniel Goldman

The Total Entertainment Network's *Wiz War*, a pretty bit of on-line Wizardry.

and Janice Linden-Reed, President and Creative Director (respectively) of Optigon Interactive, TEN will "satisfy the demands of a new generation of progressive computer users and, together with its subscribers, will be creating a new form of interactive entertainment."

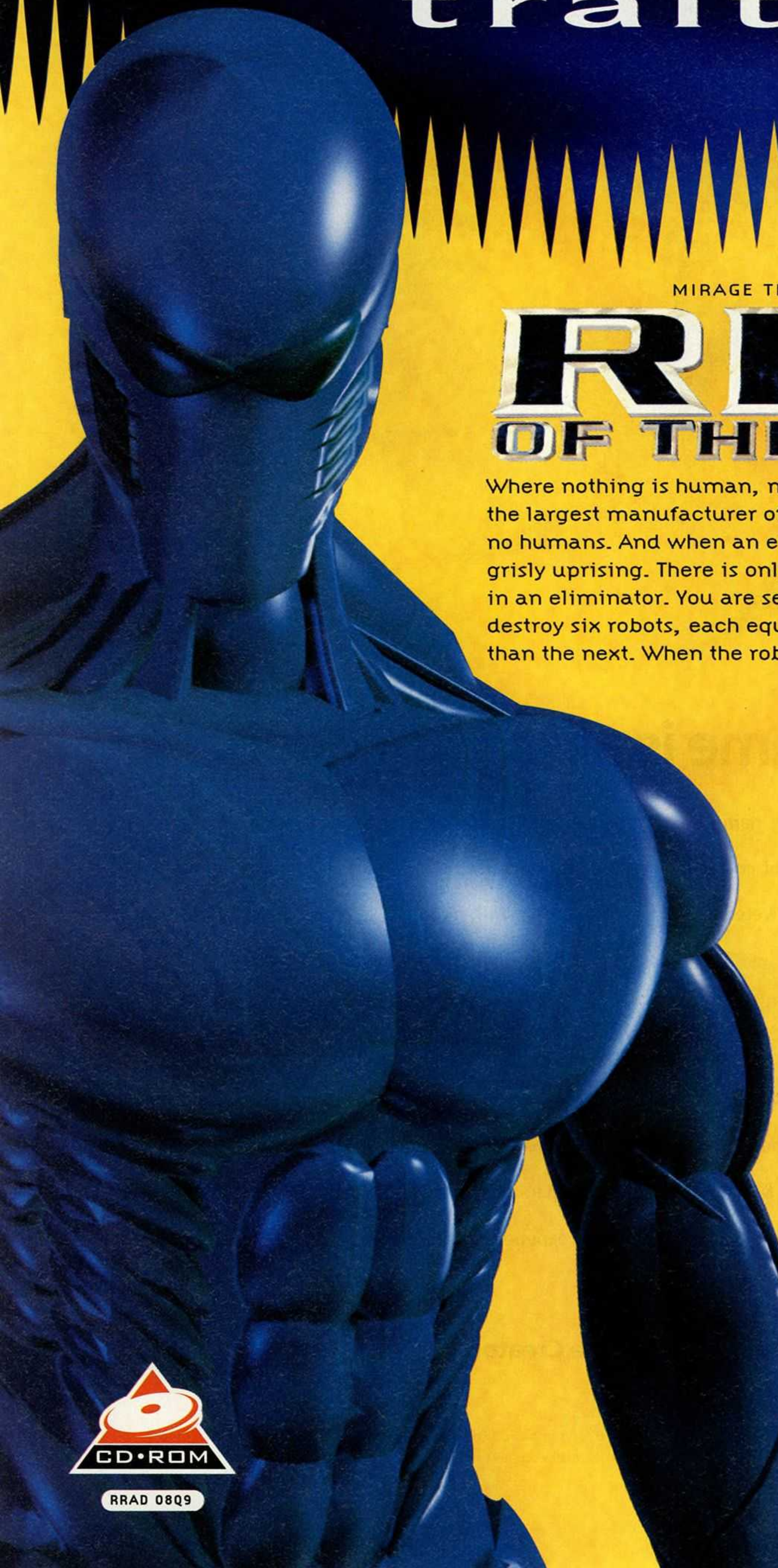
Sounds pretty good — and judging by the screenshots, it looks pretty good, too. Its 640x480 graphics are the easy equal of MPG-Net's upcoming System Interface. They'll be debuting with a multiplayer version of Maxis' *SimCity* at a minimum baud rate of 9600. Keep an eye out for TEN — no, keep *both* eyes out for it.

The End of Our Trip

So there you have it, a tour of some of the major online networks and their multiplayer game offerings. There really is a lot of fun to be had out there — as well as a whole community of gamers just rarin' to talk about the hobby. It's all old news to those of us who're already online — but a whole new opportunity if you're still unplugged.Check it out. Do the math. And above all, have fun.

PCG

MERCY is a human trait.



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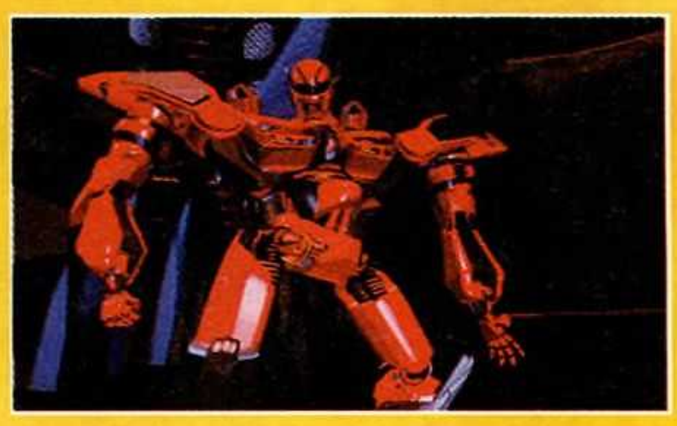

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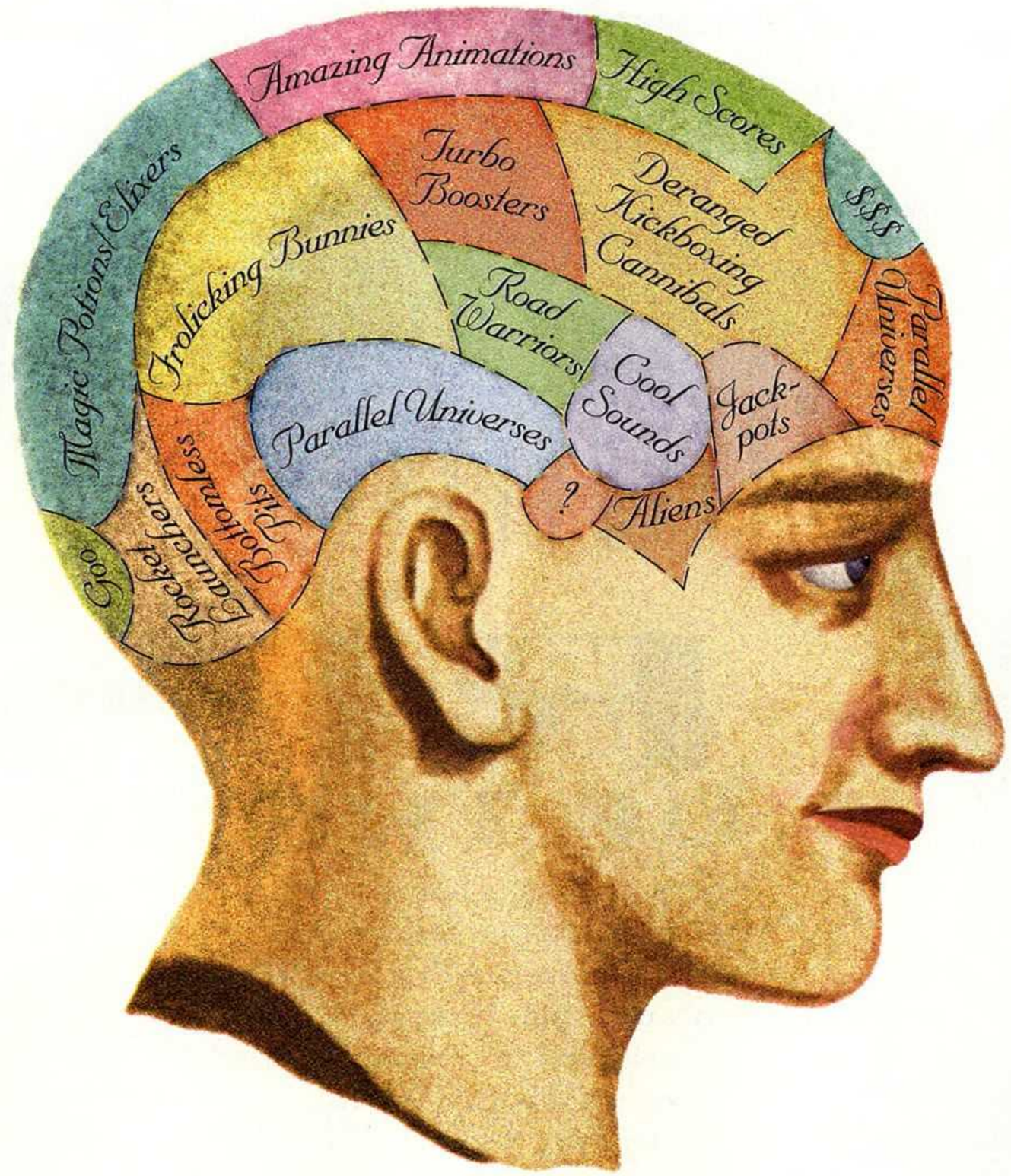

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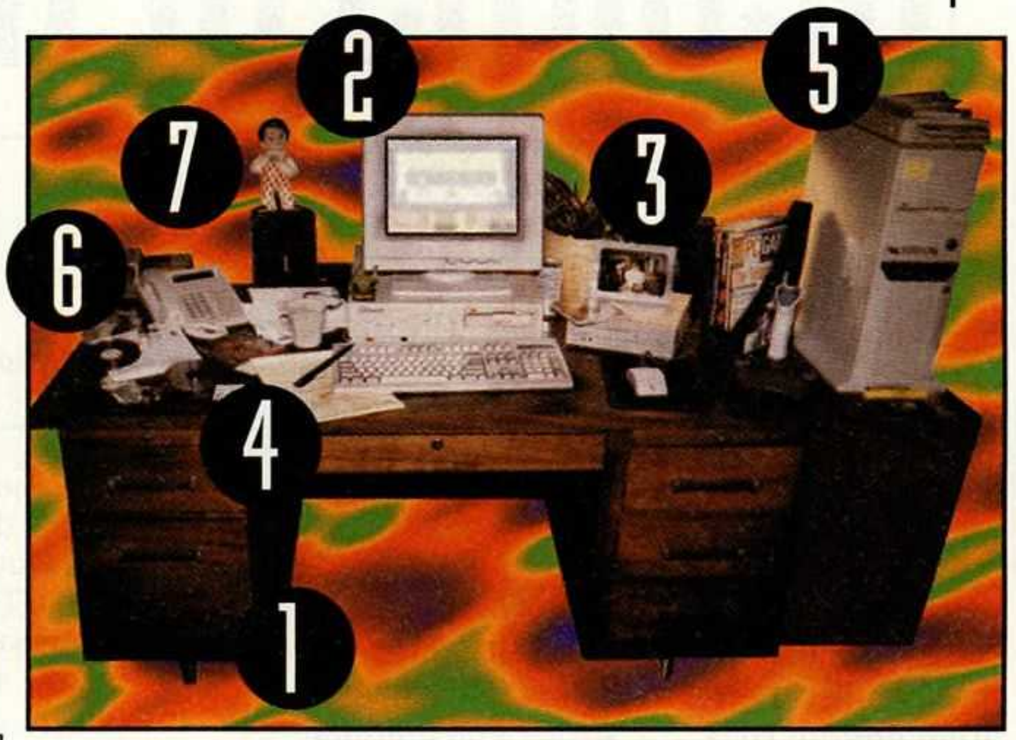
How we rate the games — the *real* story



Look carefully at this picture. This is a *PC Gamer* work station, the most sophisticated computer entertainment unit anywhere. It's fully configured with everything a game reviewer might need to achieve maximum evaluative performance. Let's take a closer look at this space-age entertainment center....

1. First, and most importantly, we start with a solid desk made of genuine wood. Mere particle board couldn't possibly bear the weight of all the fist-pounding excitement we experience each and every month!

2. No single computer will do! We need several systems, configured a number of different ways, to determine our recommended and minimum system requirements.

3. Pictures of loved-ones are a must — especially around dead-line time, when you begin to forget what they look like.

4. The always-handy pen-and-paper, for jotting down passwords and codes. Most of the time, though, Matt's already stolen the pen — you get the idea, though.

5. Back issues of *PC Gamer* are a never-ending source of inspiration and reference for reviewers.

6. The Hotline — our link to the outside world, and take-out Armenian food.

7. Big Boy, the official mascot of *PC Gamer*. He's always in our thoughts.

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.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

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

79%-70% 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 a few significant flaws.

59%-50% Fair

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not a very good 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 say we didn't warn you!

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 Editor's Choice award. Some months (like last time, for instance) there'll be more of these than others. But rest assured, any game thus honored will be well worth your money and time.

CD-ROM

Realms of Arkania: Star Trail

Category: Roleplaying

Developer: Attic Software

Publisher: Sir-Tech, Ogdensburg Business Center, P.O. Box 245 Ogdensburg, NY 13669 (315) 393-6633

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM Drive; 486SX/25Mhz; 4MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; Mouse	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/50Mhz; 8MB RAM; Full installation (70MB hard-drive space); Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $79.95

Star Trail isn't for beginners. This is a roleplayer's roleplaying game — and maybe the best RPG of the year.

Over the past few years, fantasy gaming has grown into several splinter genres that now include interactive movies and books (*The Horde, Betrayal at Krondor*), strategy games (*Warcraft, Dominus*), and graphic adventures (The King's Quest series) — and of course, the classic roleplaying game. But while those other fantasy offshoots get plenty of attention, it has seemed that the pure RPG has been somewhat neglected. There haven't been many RPG releases lately, and some companies are actually moving traditionally hard-core roleplaying series in new directions, as Origin did with *Ultima VIII*.

But thankfully, Sir-Tech — a company that helped develop the RPG in its early days — has released a game that has everything diehard roleplaying enthusiasts have been waiting for. Developed by the German team Attic Software, *Star Trail* is filled with the stats and combat that define the classic RPG, all woven into a traditional Tolkien-esque tapestry.

As the second installment in the Realms of Arkania, *Star Trail* follows the storyline started in the original game. Despite the recovery of the mystical Blade of Destiny, the marauding Orcs are still terrorizing the land of Arkania. Using the bickering of the Elves and Dwarves to their advantage, the foul Orcish armies now threaten several of the realm's major cities. The game begins as a mysterious elf approaches your party and describes the one item that could end the ancient conflict. Lost for ages, the legendary Salamander Stone is a symbol of friendship between the two races. In order to bring the two groups back together, you must return the stone. Unfortunately, you soon learn that there are several competing interests that would pay dearly to get the stone for themselves.

These detailed closeups keep you up-to-date on just what's going on. Pay attention: The game is tough enough to follow without missing anything!

With the skewed viewing angle and multiple fighting options, it may take a few battles to get used to the combat interface.

Unlike *Blade of Destiny*, *Star Trail* uses a *Might and Magic*-like graphic engine that gives you a 3D view of your surroundings. The backgrounds and characters in the townships and dungeons are well-defined — although a bit bland and repetitive. One exception to this are the incredible, full-screen images that are displayed when areas or people of interest are encountered. Combat images are fair, with middle-of-the-road graphics and good animation detailing the action.

The tavern is an excellent location to pick up advice on how to proceed. And it looks fun, too, judging by these party-goers.

And yes, as in any *real* RPG, your characters will spend a fair amount of time fighting. But unlike a lot of games that force you to sit through scores of moves in each battle, *Star Trail* gives you four different options to allow you as much or as little control in battle as you desire. The Computer Fight/Computer Fight option puts the entire battle in your processor's hands, and gives you an instant combat result based on the relative strengths of the two combatants. The Computer Fight/Whole Party does the same, but lets you watch as the battle unfolds. Other options will make the computer take control of just one character, or let you fight the entire battle yourself.

Combat effectiveness is determined by a set of skills (in such areas as unarmed combat, edged weapons, two-handed weapons, and more) that can increase as the character wins more battles. You can then determine which weapons are best

suited to which characters, choosing from a list of over sixty weapons — including exotic arms like the Bec de Corbin, skrajas, and even trident. Unlucky (and unskilled) characters will discover that the combat engine also has full rules for weapon fumbles that'll leave your fighter open for attack as he tries to recover his weapon.

The overhead map lets you take in the whole country at once. Careful marching is required near Orcish encampments.

Star Trail was designed to give gamers the ability to play just about any type of character they could imagine. In order to do this, the development team came up with a character sheet listing over 20 different user-changeable scores, and even more that are pre-set and stored. Although there is an option that allows you to have an acceptable character created for you from any class you select, the computer won't generate a team member with positive attributes over 12. If you decide to tackle creation on your own, you'll have to come up with seven positive attributes (strength, wisdom, courage, etc.) and seven negative attributes, such as necrophobia, violent temper, and claustrophobia — a real treat when you need to go into a dungeon. You'll also have to choose from twelve different classes (including jester, witch, and warrior), and establish your character's height, weight, and even which god he or she worships!

Obviously, all of these stats and options can make *Star Trail* pretty confusing at times — perhaps too confusing for newcomers, or anyone else not well-versed in traditional roleplaying. In fact, while they go a long way toward making this the true roleplayer's dream come true, the stats and character creation can be daunting even to roleplaying veterans. So this isn't the RPG to cut your teeth on; its many complexities can take a bit of practice to master.

One of the more enjoyable complexities of *Star Trail* is its huge and innovative magic system. Instead of every mage being able to cast every spell, magic-using characters are bound to certain colleges of magic, and can use some spells more effectively than others. The more unusual colleges include demonology, illusion, and even transmutation. Spells are more than your everyday fireballs, too, and include hexes that can summon up elementals, rust an enemy's weaponry and armor, allow the caster to move through sand and other terrain without being detected, and even turn into an eagle.

All things considered, *Star Trail* is a must for every diehard RPG enthusiast. This title will take you back to the golden age of gaming, when you could spend thirty hours in front of your machine knowing that you weren't even close to exploring all of the game world. But again, be warned: *Star Trail* will frustrate and even anger newcomers — or anyone else who doesn't invest enough time to master its wonderful subtleties.

—Trent C. Ward

A Touch of Class

Your choice of character class will determine how successful you are in the dangerous world outside the temple. Take a minute to get familiar with a few of your choices.

The jesters are expert at staying alive. With its natural dexterity and agility, this is the perfect character for those who plan on using guerrilla tactics.

The hunters are not only pros at replenishing your food stores, but their proficiency with missile weapons can also kill your foes at a distance.

Warriors are the shock troops you need if you want to survive a tough battle. Keep them well, rested or you'll come up short in your next fight.

Rogues will keep your party well supplied with other people's gold, and will get you into places you couldn't normally go.

Thorwalians are a Norse-like tribe, and they take no crap in a fight. Good to have around.

Dwarves can fight, they can carry heavy things, and can tell you a lot about the world around them. Keep 'em happy, though....

Warlocks and witches are adept at both slinging magic and understanding people and animals. Keep them by your side at the bargaining table.

They're unable to use any metal weapon or armor, but Druids can use their knowledge of the darker spells to keep their enemies down.

Magicians are very wise, and can master spells from many different colleges. Don't let them spread their power too thin, though.

Elves come in many varieties, but all of them share a natural ability to use magic and deal with nature. Woodsmen supreme.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

88%

HIGHS: Incredibly detailed roleplaying; tons of options and a crisp interface.

LOWS: Complex play will most likely turn off newcomers to the genre. Graphics can get a bit repetitive.

BOTTOM LINE: A great title for those who're tired of adventure games masquerading as RPGs — but not for the uninitiated.

Operation Body Count

CD-ROM

Category: First-person shooter

Developer: Capstone

Publisher: Capstone, 501 Brickell Key Drive, 6th Floor, Miami, FL 33131 (305) 373-7700

Required	We Recommend
386/25Mhz; CD-ROM drive; 2MB RAM; 2.5MB hard-drive space; DOS 5.0; VGA	486/33Mhz; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 4MB RAM; 6MB hard-drive space; Supported sound cards; Joystick or gamepad

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

That old *Wolfenstein-3D* engine just keeps a-chuggin' along. Next stop, the U.N. building — now known as Terrorist Towers.

In Capstone's latest first-person shooter using the *Wolfenstein-3D* engine, you're a member of the Elite Forces thrown into a hostage-rescue operation — and as the name implies, you'll tally a huge body count as you dispose of your foes. Who are these madmen who dare to stand in your way? They're Grade-A, turban-clad, middle eastern militant terrorists, of course — the new Bad Guys of the 90's.

You see, the terrorists have taken the U.N. Building, and hold hostages on the top floor. But can your Elite Force land on the roof to rescue them? Nope, you have to start in the sewers beneath the building and fight your way to the top, floor by floor. Forget the fact that you control the elevator — you still go up only one floor at a time. And forget that you've seen this all before. There's plenty of killing ahead so, as that rapper Iced Tea would say, "on with the Body Count."

In the bathrooms, you can really catch these guys with their pants down — an all-too-rare attempt at humor.

At first you might think *Rat Count* would be a more appropriate name for the game, as rats are nearly all you'll fight in the sewers of the first levels. They're easy to kill (what chance does a rat have against an Uzi?), but the little nippers can hurt you if they get at your heels. A rare terrorist or swamp creature may come along to break up the monotony, but there's not much to do down here except find a ladder upward. And if you think the sewer levels look samey, just wait until you see the 30 or more floors of the U.N. Building!

Ah, the warm glow of the flame thrower. The most enjoyable weapon in the game by far, if you ask me.

You'll no doubt be ready for some action once you reach the U.N.'s first floor — and you'll get it, or at least a good taste of all the action you're gonna get. A couple of cardboard-cutout terrorists run stiffly toward you yelling something about Allah, a robotic security machine gun crawls along the ceiling — all easy targets. Then you get more of the same. Floors and floors of the same.

These games usually promise high powered-weaponry to wreak havoc with, and this is one of *Body Count*'s bright spots. Though the large machine gun isn't much better than the Uzi you're issued, there is a flame thrower (always a fun weapon). It's not effective against ceiling robots, but quite nice for toasting everyone else. Eventually, you'll even get to the prized weapon: the rocket gun. This thing can actually take out walls! You can also shoot up the walls and windows for that nice destructive feeling — but for some reason, none of the weapons will kill anyone standing in a doorway. Surely, this was an unintentional safety zone.

In a very nice, fresh twist on the whole first-person premise, you'll often enter a level with several peace-keeping comrades to back you up. True, they'll normally just run along a corridor, shooting at whatever moves, until they hit a wall and come to a stop; but you can jump into any one of their bodies and take control of them. In fact, if your man is about to die, you can switch into one of your comrades and continue the game from there.

There are the usual secret rooms, and the occasional beefier terrorist to kill, but even with mines and (well marked) booby traps, there aren't enough surprises to lift *Body Count* very far above average. The enemy graphics are flat and uninteresting, and the corridors and walls are often dark and grainy, making it difficult to tell what's going on. *Corridor 7*, an earlier and very similar game from Capstone, was a little more attractive, with its colorful alien enemies and smoother, better-defined wall textures.

If you liked *Corridor 7*, you'll probably want to check out *Body Count*. But don't expect major changes — or better graphics — in this latest variation on the *Wolfenstein* engine.

—Joe Novicki

We don't know if these swampmen are in league with the terrorists, or if they just hate all humans. They *are* New Yorkers, after all.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

64%

HIGHS: Having comrades that you control is nice, and one of the best ideas we've seen.

LOWS: The flat, cardboard-cutout enemies are bad enough, but why does every floor have to look so much alike?

BOTTOM LINE: Check it out if you're a fan of the genre, but there's really nothing new here.

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Product Information Number 138

Impressions

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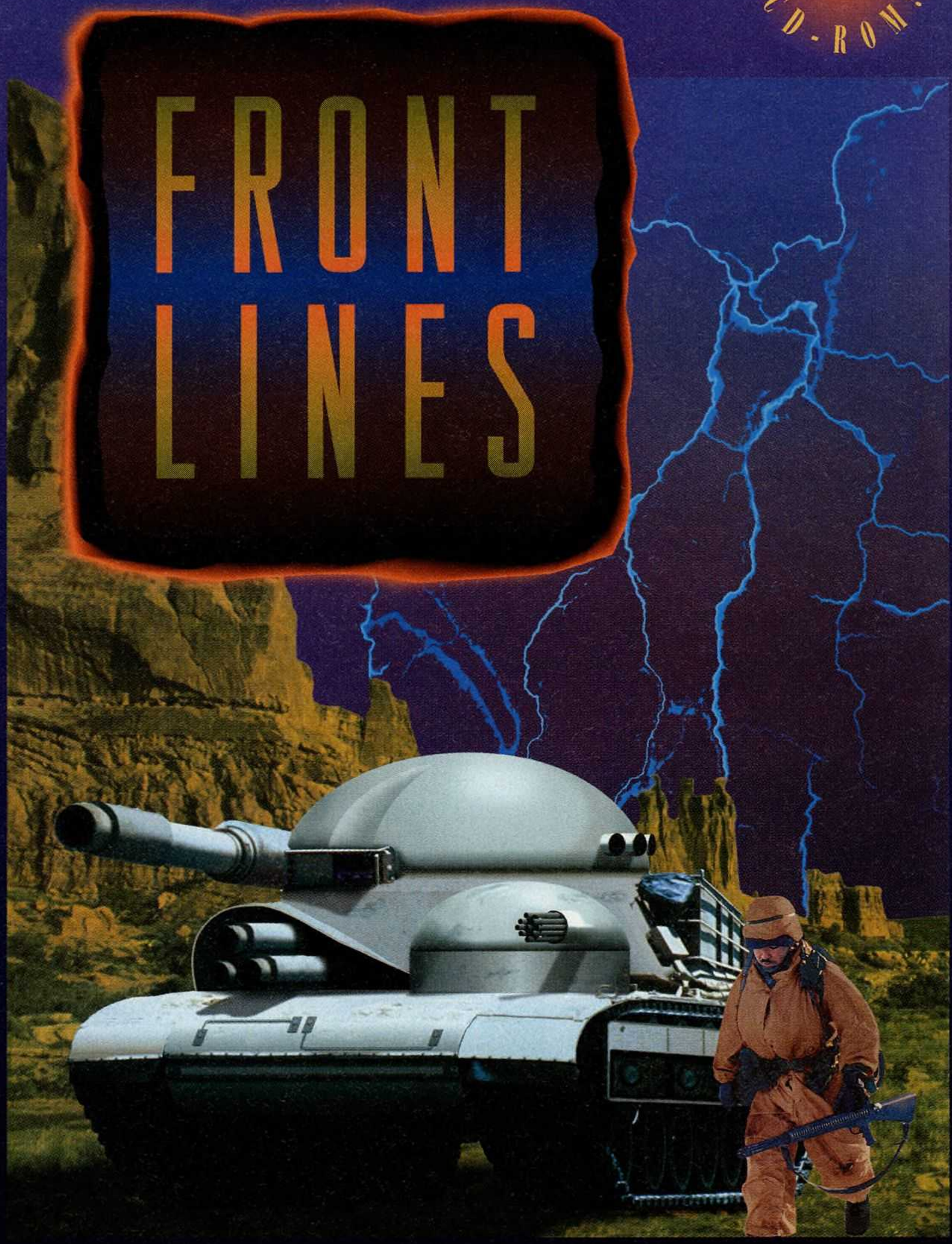

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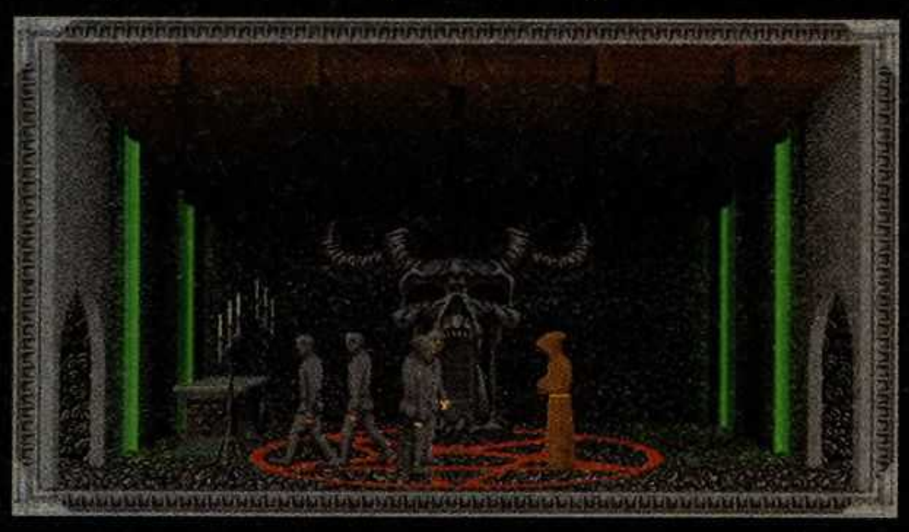

The wizard's tower is not a friendly place.

Unfortunately, neither is his hedge maze.

Shadows of Cairn is the story of a young thief named Quinn, who has a serious problem. He's too honest to steal anything. Worthless to his guild, his own master has set him up to take the blame for the murder of the Duke of Cairn. His only hope for survival is to make sure the assassination fails.

In order to help Quinn save himself, you'll have to guide him through slimy sewers, a trap filled dungeon, an evil wizard's tower, and a monster filled hedge maze (not to mention guards in the streets and buildings) to save the Duke in his palace at the top of the city.

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Product Information Number 103

CD-ROM

Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf

Category: Arcade action

Developer: Electronic Arts

Publisher: Gremlin Interactive, Carver House, 2-4 Carver St., Sheffield S1 4FS, England (0742) 753423

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 386; 1MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; MSCDEX 2.1 or later; VGA	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 386/33; 4MB RAM; Supported sound cards; Gamepad

M.S.R.P.: $39.95

Desert Strike is a perfect example of why PC games are often so much better than their videogame counterparts.

Like most of the PC crowd, my first experience with gaming (outside of an arcade) came from the long-dead Atari 2600. I still consider many of those 2600 games classics, even though their graphics and sounds are primitive by today's standards. So when I learned that *Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf* was originally a Sega Genesis cartridge game, I saw an opportunity to relive some fond memories of my videogaming days. Unfortunately, *Desert Strike* did more to point out why I moved on to the more sophisticated fare of the PC.

My favorite line from the game: "He will start World War III, or even worse..."

The premise here is strictly juvenile (even by videogame standards), falling somewhere between the real-life Persian Gulf war and the Rambo movies. For example, during the introductory sequences you'll learn that you're out to stop a "psycho-madman" (isn't it bad enough that he's psycho?) whose plans may include starting "World War III or worse!" Your mission is to fly a lone Apache gunship into heavily defended territory somewhere in the Middle East and destroy this threat.

Yet the poor storyline is only the beginning of *Desert Strike's* problems. You view the action from a three-quarter, top-down perspective, and in flight your chopper sits pretty near the center of the screen. But when you stop to blast a target, the view floats to place your Apache near the edge of the screen, leaving any enemies behind you hidden as they blast away at you. The view-shifting is very annoying, and led to more than a few early deaths.

Once you adapt to the drifting, you'll realize a few more limitations in gameplay. You can't change the altitude or speed of your chopper, making quick getaways and the kinds of evasive maneuvers helicopters are made for all but impossible. You might as well be driving a truck into battle.

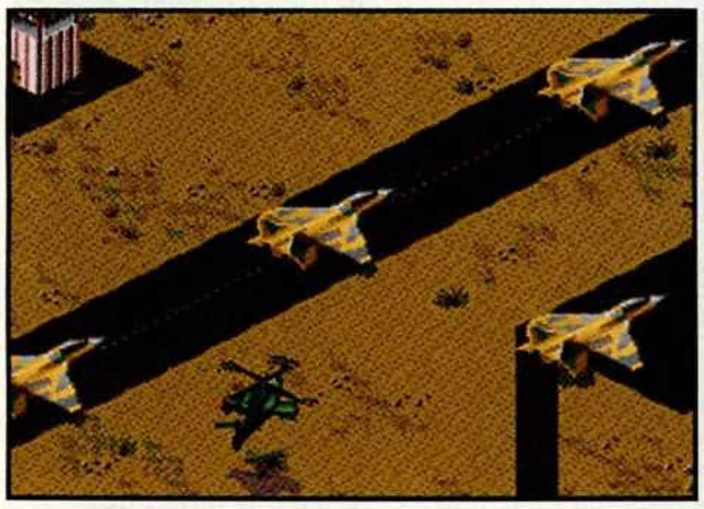
Even with the terrific firepower bristling from the Apache, it can take three to four shots from your slow-firing chaingun to kill a single enemy soldier! The two types of missiles (Hydra and Hellfire) onboard inflict more damage, but judging the range to your target is tough — and made more difficult by that viewpoint-shifting. And why should you have to cycle through your weapons with the spacebar, when only one of your joystick or gamepad buttons is being used?

Crawling from the wreckage of your Apache, you can be heard to mutter "Why didn't they send reinforcements?"

The graphics are pretty good for a shooter, and give you a close view of the terrain below — although if the viewing area were expanded a bit, it would be a lot easier to see what's going on around you during combat. The sound effects can only be described as mediocre.

Despite these complains, I did find a few things to like. Rescuing little MIA's and downed pilots is fun, as is nabbing enemies who are trying to flee. And the need to refuel and gather ammo adds a bit of strategy to each mission. None of this is enough to overcome the game's more serious flaws, though. I'm afraid that even if you loved the Genesis version, you won't think much of *Desert Strike* on PC.

— Todd Vaughn



You're coming in low and slow, when suddenly a warning obscures your view of the game!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

61%

HIGHS: The graphics are decent, and the missions are varied.

LOWS: Childish story, ticklish control, and some truly annoying sound effects.

BOTTOM LINE: If you wondered if you should have bought a cartridge system instead of a PC, this title will convince you that you made the right call.

Noctropolis

CD-ROM

Category: Graphic adventure

Developer: Flashpoint Productions

Publisher: Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Boulevard, San Mateo, CA 94404-2064 (415) 571-7171

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM Drive; 386/33MHz; 4MB RAM; 1MB Hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33MHz; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Sure, *Noctropolis* has its flaws, but beneath them is a solid adventure game with gorgeous graphics and an involving story.

I have to admit, I was a bit partial to *Noctropolis* even before I put the disc in my CD-ROM drive. I've been a big fan of comics since I could read, so any game about a guy who's thrust into the boots of his favorite superhero is bound to interest me. I mean, who wouldn't want to try being Batman for a day?

Noctropolis owes a lot to Batman — its hero, Darksheer, is a shadowy, mysterious figure who defends a dank, depressing city from an endless string of twisted psychos. But that's where the similarity ends. Darksheer gets his power from an ancient, mystical brotherhood, and he doesn't prowl the city with a "boy wonder;" his faithful sidekick is a beautiful blonde named Stiletto — and she didn't get that name from her high heels.

As the game begins, your character, Peter Grey, is wandering around alone in his used-book store. His wife has left him, the telephone's been disconnected, the electricity is next, and — worst of all — Cygnus Publications has just canceled his favorite comic book, *The Adventures of Darksheer*.

It's always darkest before the dawn, but things are going to get even darker for Peter. The weirdness begins when a package arrives at Peter's door — turns out he's won the "I Want to Be Darksheer" Sweepstakes. If only he'd known what he was getting into when he entered that contest ....

Soon Peter finds himself transported to Noctropolis City, where Darksheer has retired and his archenemies are running wild under the control of a shadowy new villain named Flux. Someone has to take Darksheer's place — and you've probably already guessed who it's going to be.

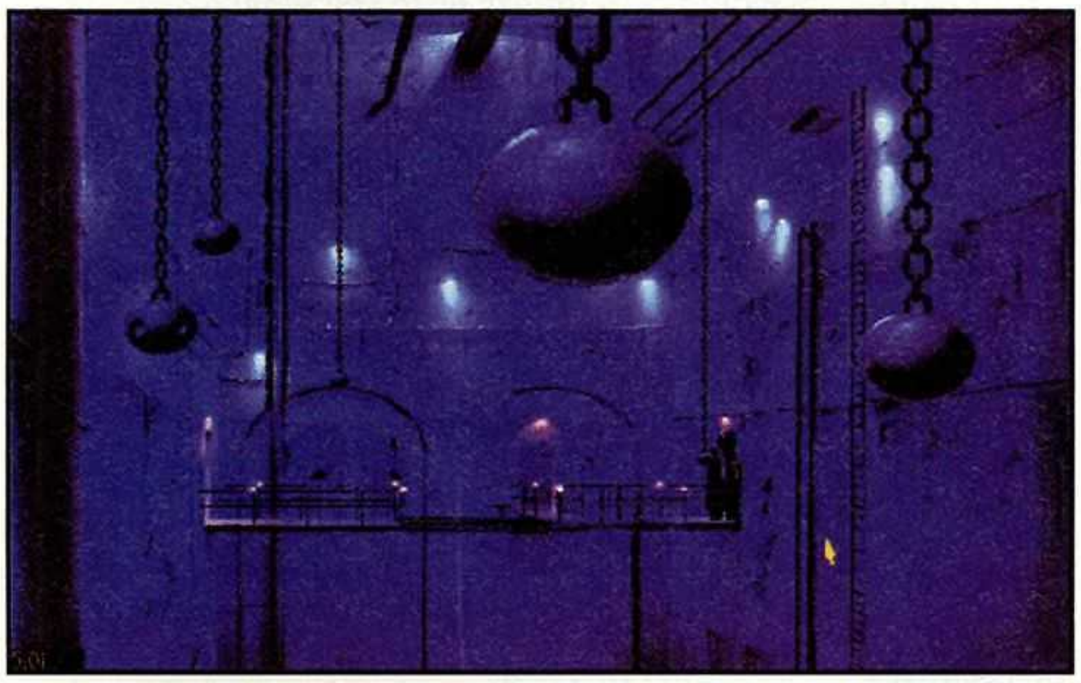
You can open and read the final issue of "The Adventures of Darksheer" — but are Noctropolis City's problems really over?

There *is* classic, comic-book potential here: Unfortunately, too much of it goes unrealized. For the most part, *Noctropolis* is traditional adventure-game fare, which means your character spends most of his time solving problems with his brains rather than his fists. That's fine for most graphic adventures, but it's not what a dark, avenging superhero is supposed to do. You'd never catch Batman saying "If I fix your air conditioner, will you get me an appointment with your boss?" The Caped Crusader would just scare some sense into anyone who got in his way — and after you've tried reasoning with Leon the maintenance man, you'll wish you could rough him up a bit.

Every good superhero comic has at least one knock-down, drag-out fight, but Peter Gray as the new Darksheer barely gets his knuckles bruised. Most of the time, he seems content to stand back and watch Stiletto do what little head-busting needs to be done.

Still, if *Noctropolis* doesn't feel much like a good old-fashioned comic book, it has all the trappings of a good, new-fangled graphic adventure. The hand-painted SVGA backgrounds of Noctropolis City are nothing less than beautiful; it's clear from the start that the designers know — and love — architecture. They mix and match styles with abandon, and the result is a sense of urban decay and paranoia that comes off like a cross between the Batman movies and *Hellraiser*.

The game's plot is nicely drawn, too, with a comic-book style "shocker" at the end (although you may figure out the secret long before it's revealed). Electronic Arts shouldn't count on selling a lot of *Noctropolis* hint books; the game's designers have done their job so well that only the most impatient players will need



The giant iron balls really don't have anything important to do with the game, but doesn't this room just give you chills?

If you find the right item, you can climb this tower like another beloved super-hero — Spider-Man. (That's a little hint for you, by the way ....)

Noctropolitan Nasties

Every good superhero needs a rogues' gallery of bizarre villains to keep him busy, and Darksheer has more than his share.

The gal in the revealing lace is Succubus. Her advances would be hard to resist even if she *wasn't* possessed by a demon — but if you steal a kiss from her, she may just steal your life away.

Tophat is another lovely lady with a rotten personality. She's a stage magician who likes to make people disappear — permanently.

Greenthumb is your basic half-man, half-plant mutant. Venomous vegetation is his specialty — like 20-foot Venus Flytraps.

Here's a face you don't want to see above your hospital bed. Master Macabre is a former surgeon who decided homicide was more fun than healing.

His name is Drealmer, and that's not a typo. Run into him in the realm of your own dreams, and you may just die before you wake.

Uniting all these maladjusted miscreants is Flux, a mysterious newcomer to Noctropolis. His secret makes him the most dangerous enemy of all.

one. *Noctropolis* isn't *too* easy, but even its toughest puzzles can be solved with a little perseverance.

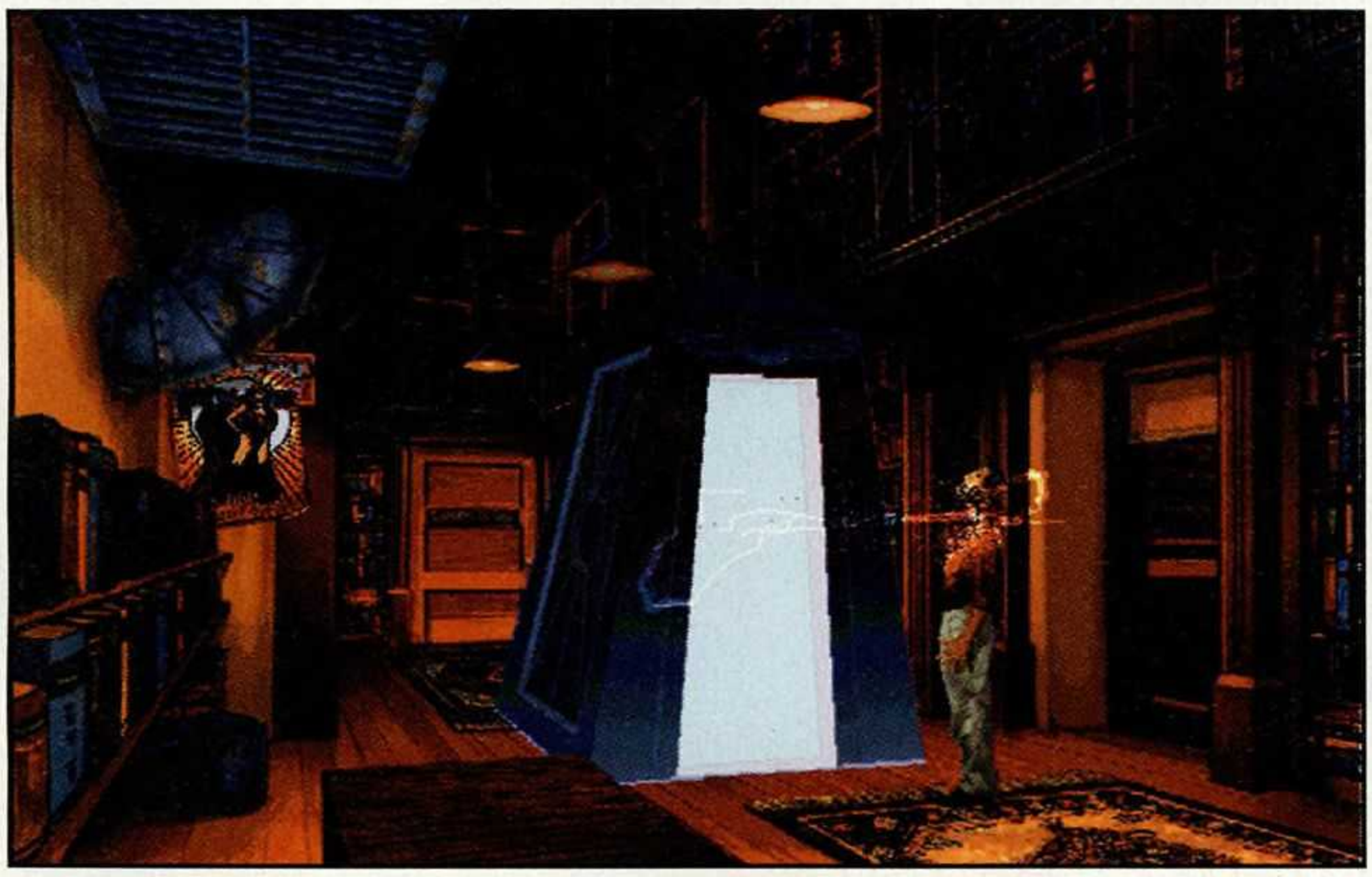
It's a shame that such a nice package had to be saddled with weak dialogue and weaker acting, though. It's the same problem that still plagues so many games that use digitized video and speech — bad performances can drag an otherwise excellent game into the mediocrity zone. The women in *Noctropolis* are all very pretty, but as soon as they open their mouths to speak, they become rejects from those late-night TV commercials for 900 numbers. The men — well, most of them are so wooden they'll give you a new appreciation for Gil Gerard, the star of that "Buck Rogers" TV show from the 1980s.

It doesn't help that the actors have such cornball dialogue to read, from painfully stilted bits like the villain's final speech to leeringly suggestive lines like Stiletto's "I just *love* a man who'll show me his gun." The "bloopers" that play during the game's end credits say it all — if an actor can't speak a line with a straight face, the dialogue probably needs work.

But I'm only being so hard on *Noctropolis* because it comes so close to being a really excellent adventure. The game leaves plenty of room for a sequel, and there's so much here to like that we can only hope they get the details right next time.

An important note — *Noctropolis* is not intended for young gamers. It's not nearly as racy as the advertising suggests, but there are a couple of gratuitous glimpses of topless actresses, and there's plenty of violence and gore.

—Dan Bennett



A sense of foreboding, a buzz at your door, a strange package — and suddenly you're swept into the world of your favorite comic-book hero.

In the dream sequence, you'll learn a whole new meaning for the words "down in the mouth."

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

82%

HIGHS: Gorgeous SVGA graphics, and challenging but fair puzzles.

LOWS: The dialogue could have used another pass through the typewriter, and the acting is strictly amateur.

BOTTOM LINE: *Noctropolis* is a solid adventure set in an intriguing and visually stunning world.

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Product Information Number 113

Blake Stone: Planet Strike

Category: : First-person shooter

Developer: JAM Productions/Apogee

Publisher: FormGen, 7641 E. Gray Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
(602) 443-4109

Required	We Recommend
386; 8MB hard-drive space; VGA Supported sound cards; Mouse	386/33MHz; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 4MB RAM; Supported sound cards; Gamepad

M.S.R.P.: $49.95

You'd better grab your gun and hit the floor, 'cause Dr. Goldfire's back for more. It's FormGen's *Blake Stone: Planet Strike*!

In a rare third-person scene, Blake Stone breathes vacuum.

Blake Stone: Planet Strike from FormGen is here, just in time to fill that momentary void in the first-person shooter market. (What do you mean, you didn't notice it?) In this one, you — as top British intelligence agent Blake Stone — are out to stop the evil Dr. Goldfire from unleashing his monstrous minions on the universe. You've tangled with Goldfire before, and although you put a stop to his plans, the doctor managed to get away. But you can correct that oversight now. Recent reports indicate that he's using an abandoned STAR Institute Training Complex on the planet Selon to produce his genetic monsters. So it's lock-and-load time, shooter fans.

It all boils down to this: You've got to battle your way through 20 monster-filled levels, each with a transporter that has been disabled by Dr. Goldfire. So you have to find the fission detonator on each level, and carry it to the security cube (which you must also locate). After you've destroyed the security cube with the detonator, you can use the transporter to proceed to the next level. To help you along the way, you have an automapper with three levels of magnification, as well as six different weapons — ranging in power from something like a rubber-band gun to a bazooka.

The graphics throughout are satisfactory, with plenty of different wall, ceiling, and floor textures — although I prefer the dark, forbidding look of *Doom* and *Doom II*. But this game doesn't look bad, almost reminiscent of *Wolfenstein 3D*, and the mangled remains of the mutants you've blown away are suitably gruesome.

The background music heightens the mood in a few spots, but overall it's fairly bland. The sound effects are better, although not perfect: Your initial weapon, for instance, is the autocharge pistol — which sounds like a popgun, even though it's supposed to be silent. But the other digital sounds are actually pretty good, and the voice samples are clear and understandable.

There are four skill levels: the higher the skill level, the more monsters you'll encounter. The enemy AI isn't very impressive, though; the mutants will converge on you if the alarm is given, but at times they are completely oblivious. I was disintegrating doors with the anti-plasma cannon (which makes a great deal of noise) and didn't see a soul. Either the AI wasn't smart enough to alert the monsters, or the monsters are smart enough to know not to mess with a man carrying an anti-plasma cannon.

But the AI is good enough, and does its job. You can't afford to walk around, blithely ignoring your surroundings, because if you do you won't live long. Goldfire's critters may not be very smart, but there are plenty of them and they are well armed.

Don't stand too close or the cannon blast will catch you.

This is where the action begins. You need go grab all of the bonuses in this room, and talk to the bio techs. Some of them will help you beat Goldfire.

Game control is good. You can use the keyboard, mouse, or joystick — and I recommend using *both* the keyboard and mouse.

If you are looking for a *Wolfenstein 3D* type of game then you will be interested in this title. If you are looking for a game with a bit more to offer, like network/modem play, then you should check out *Doom II*.

—Monroe Bosher

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

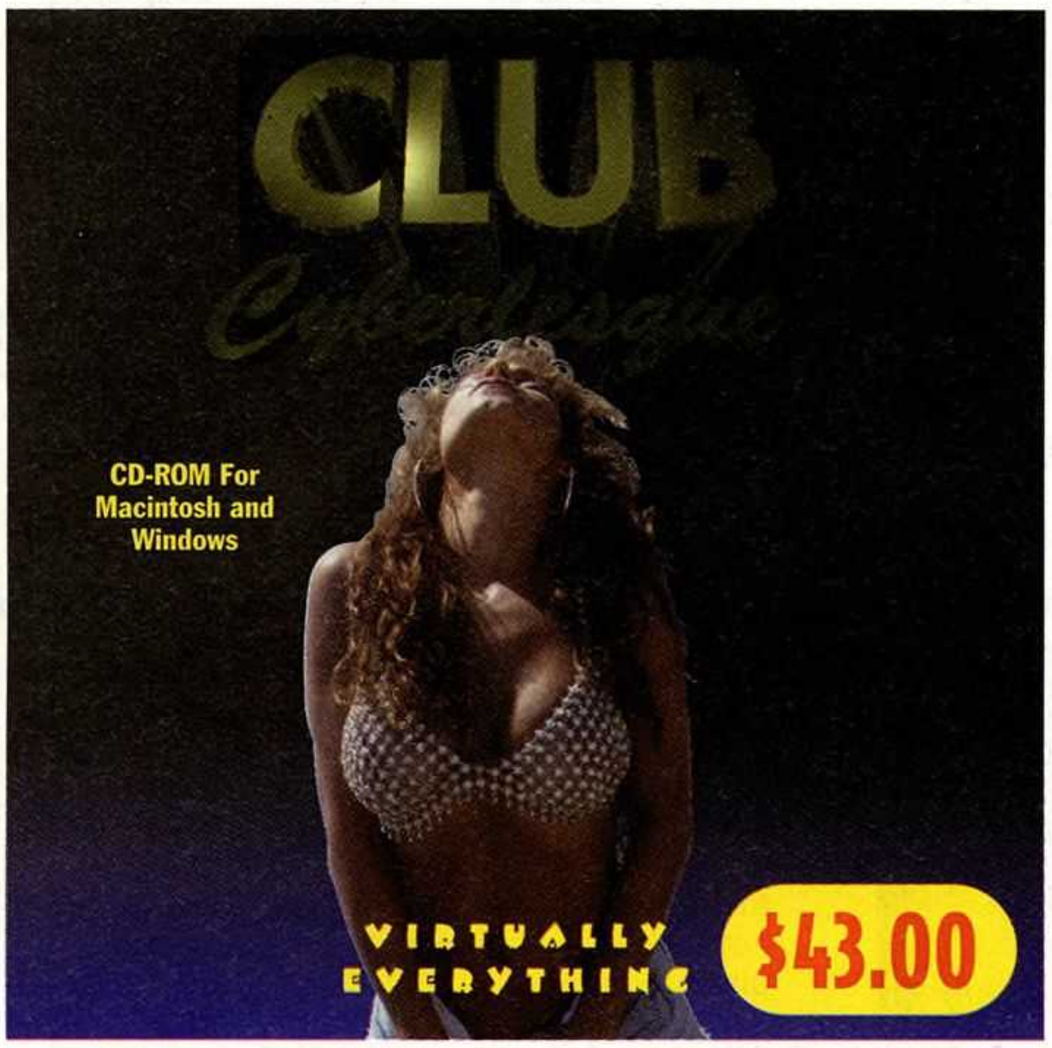
75%

HIGHS: Four skill levels, some mighty mean monsters, and impressive firepower.

LOWS: It can get a bit repetitive, the graphics are only average.

BOTTOM LINE: Not a bad game — in fact better than a lot of the first-person stuff we're seeing. But it's no *Doom*, though.

Our Multi-Media CD-Roms Speak For Themselves...



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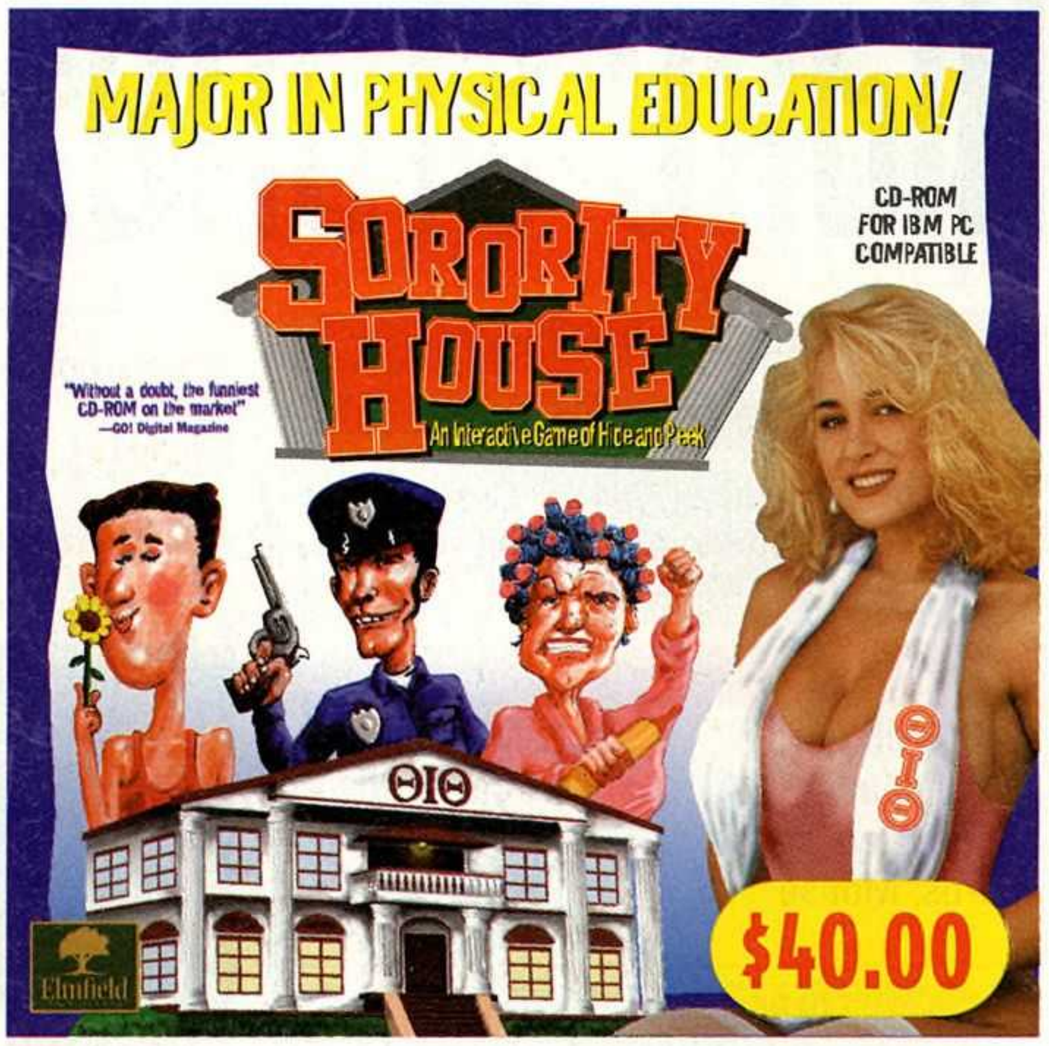
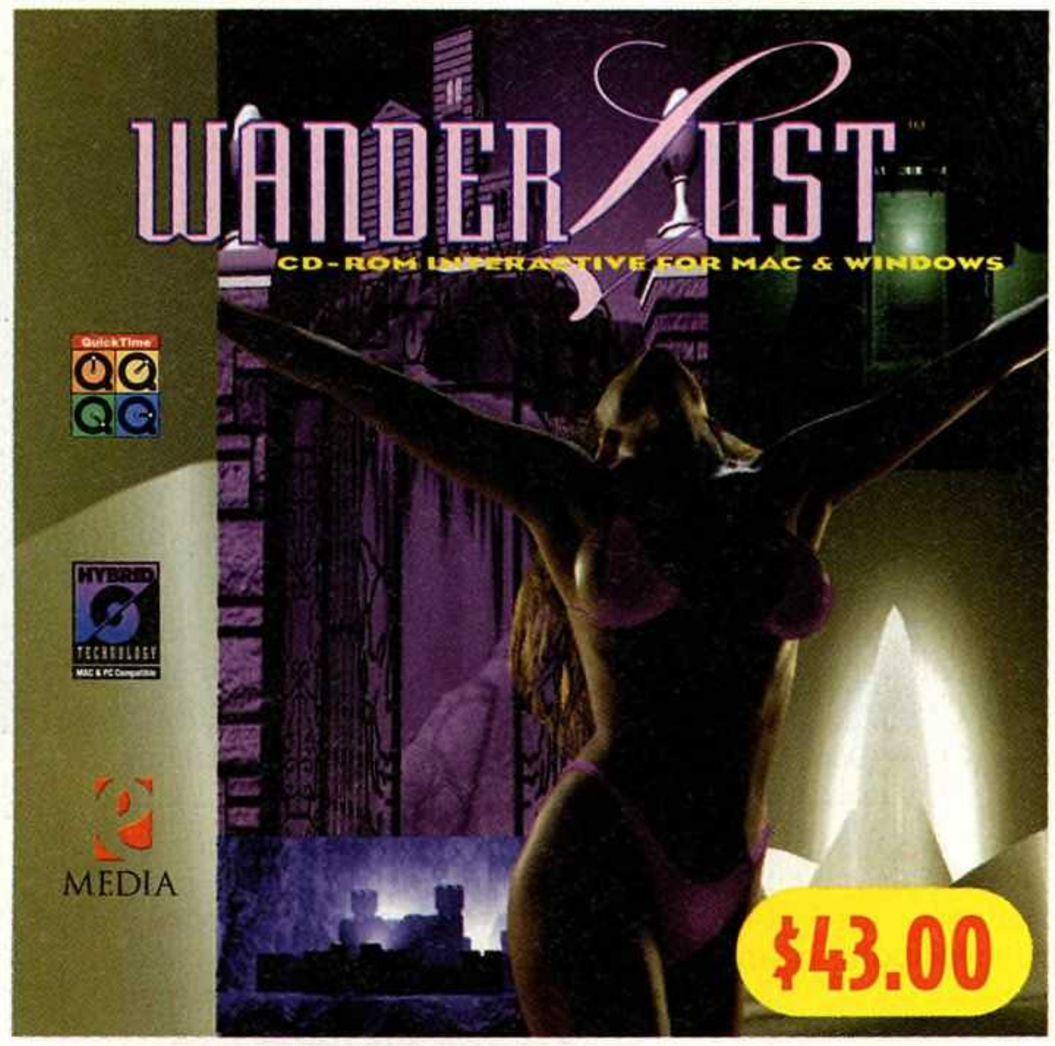


An Interactive Game Of Hide And Peak



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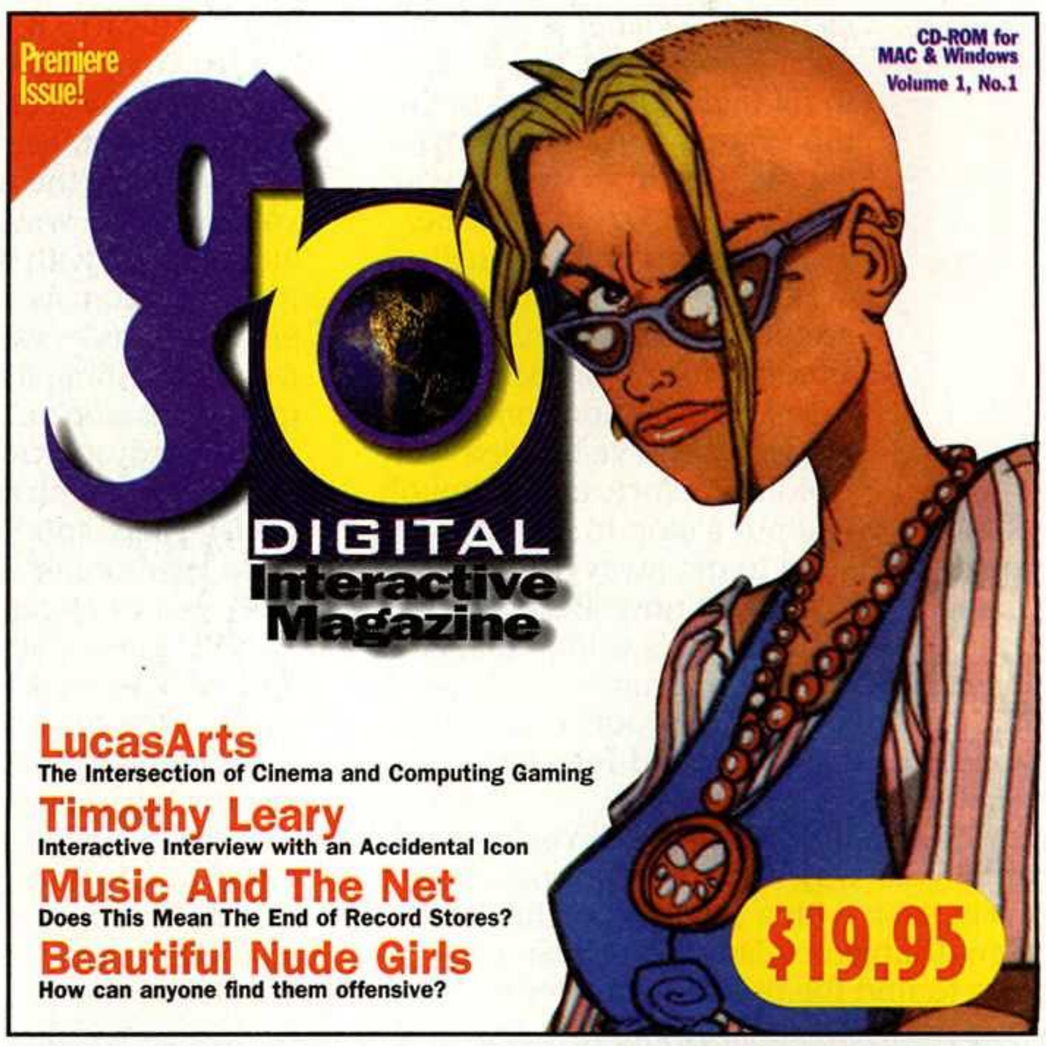

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Product Information Number 110

MISSION CONTROL

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Menzoberranzan

CD-ROM

Category: Fantasy roleplaying

Developer: DreamForge

Publisher: SSI; 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901 (408) 737-6800.

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM Drive; 386/40Mhz; 4MB RAM; 13 MB hard drive space; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; Mouse	486/33Mhz; 8MB RAM; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $70.00

This is the best first-person RPG SSI has produced since *Eye of the Beholder* — and at times, it's even better than *EOB*.

Independent developer DreamForge, creators of the involving *Ravenloft* and its slick engine, have been doing some top-flight programming work for SSI lately. Now they have produced what, in all likelihood, will be the last SSI Advanced Dungeons & Dragon's title: *Menzoberranzan*. In many ways it's the best AD&D title yet, featuring inspired graphics, an involved storyline, and an intuitive interface. At the same time, it also points up the problems and limitations involved in producing any game in an AD&D world.

Menzoberranzan is based on R.A. Salvatore's best-selling "Forgotten Realms" novel *The Legacy*, which explores the mysterious culture of the Drow. A race of nocturnal, subterranean, dark-skinned elves, the Drow are known for their sadism and their worship of dark creatures. Unwary surface dwellers in the Forgotten Realms are often snatched by the Drow, and nobody has been able to stop them.

A Vreebeeg Giant whacks you with his club.

One night, as your group of companions celebrates the slaying of a nasty dragon in Icewind Dale, a Drow raiding party strikes. They raze the town and kill all who try to oppose them, dragging dozens of innocent citizens off to their underground lair. The villagers immediately turn on a kindly Drow named Drizzt, blaming him for the raid. Though uninvolved, Drizzt is determined to set right the evil his people have perpetrated, and he agrees to lead your party to the mysterious Drow town of Menzoberranzan to rescue the kidnapped villagers. As you journey deep into dark and evil lands, you slowly learn more about the complex culture of the Drow, solve puzzles, and of course, fight.

Encounters with NPCs—at least those who don't try to kill you right away—are accompanied by full voice support.

The story opens with some terrific animation sequences, moving straight to a unique, fully animated character creation screen. You are guided through the creation of two characters with some handsome 3D visuals: a novel but time-consuming approach, which might have been more welcome if you had the option to skip it and create characters the old-fashioned way.

These two characters begin the game with the somewhat laborious and pointless task of fetching water to put out a fire in the town's food storage building. Some lingering Drow fighters are mere blade-fodder before you start battling your way across the Icewind Dale Plains to find the entrance to the Underdark, lair of the Drow. A druid named Vermulean provides some enchanted gems to help in the quest, and several other new characters appear and offer to join your party, including Drizzt. This is all just a prelude, however, to the journey through the Underdark — and it's here that the game temporarily runs aground and becomes mired in endless combat at the expense of more meaty elements.

A Drider lurks in the shadows.

These levels are all beautifully created and, to some degree, challenging. There are even a few characters to meet along the way, and some nasty surprises. But there is a curious absence of puzzles and an ultimately wearisome emphasis on fight, fight, fight. I love hacking and slashing as much as the next person, but it helps when it's broken up a bit more with some character interaction, story, and puzzles. And for too long, that just isn't the case.

Fortunately, all of these elements come to the fore later in the game. As your party gets deeper into the Underdark and eventually to Menzoberranzan itself, they become involved in the politics of the Drow, who are controlled by

Out on the Icewind Dale Plains, there are plenty of nasty bats to fight. Combat is well-handled, though.

The Monsters of Menzoberranzan

No roleplaying experience would be complete without some nasty new enemies to slaughter, and *Menzoberranzan* has plenty of 'em:

A Drow Priestess is a powerful magic-user with a snake-headed whip.

Hooked Horrors may look terrifying, but they're really pussy cats.

Drow Fighters are found both on the surface, and on the way to Menzoberranzan.

Drider's are part spider and part Drow, and retain the classes they held as Drow (ie, mage, cleric, etc.)

The Leucrotta has a mean bite, but a lethal kick.

The Violet Fungus lives in the dark, and can rot flesh with a touch. Nice party trick.

Fungi Skeletons are found in Myconoid territory, and can be dangerous in number.

Umber Hulks are just *so* cuddly! They can also burrow through stone, and crush a man with their bare hands.

Rust Monsters have a nasty habit of turning all your metal to rust.

The Derro Dwarf (left) is mean, but the Derro Savant is mean *and* a skilled magic-user.

A Cloaker Lord guards the darkened corridors of the Underdark.

The six-legged pig on the right is an Osquip. Ain't he cute?

a series of noble Houses, all vying for more political power. As you're forced to help some Houses defeat others, you begin to upset the balance of power among the Drow, possibly enabling one House to unleash an ultimate destruction on the world. The emphasis shifts from standard combat to story and character interaction, weaving a complex tale of people and power that goes beyond traditional hack-and-slash heroics. I'm just afraid that all this comes in too late in the game, and that many will be put off well before the story can kick in.

The *Menzoberranzan* engine is, aside from a few niggling points, almost perfect. The entire party can strike at an enemy with a single mouse click, and spell-casting is a relatively easy affair. The simple, real-time engine brings most fights to a speedy resolution, which means that long stretches of combat don't interrupt the flow of the game much. Inventory and character accoutrements are handled in a stylish screen that lays out all information cleanly and efficiently. Clothing and arming a character is done with funky little mannequin-like figures, and you can easily see how armor classes are altered as you change armor. If you could place an item in inventory without opening the character screen each time, the system would be flawless.

An entire bevy of new monsters haunt the darkened lands you must traverse, and new weapons, spells, and prayers are available to help defeat them. The first-person perspective and lush graphics give you a front-row view of some hair raising critters as they either kill you, or suffer a gruesome death. Add in an extensive soundtrack, elaborate cut scenes, countless sound effects, and spoken dialogue, and you have one of the most complex and fulfilling roleplaying games in this series. I can't think of a better AD&D game — and that includes the watershed *Eye of the Beholder*, which had a weaker narrative and a less efficient engine. *Menzoberranzan*'s dramatic story is underplayed to a disappointing degree at points, but it still lifts gameplay above the level of most first-person titles.

Animated deaths are a high-point of *Menzoberranzan*: note how Derro Savant kind of implodes.

Though a somewhat flawed game, Menzoberranzan is so well crafted overall that it's easy to overlook its shortcomings. If this weren't a TSR AD&D game, it's likely we would have seen more of an emphasis on story. As it is, the AD&D line is still being designed for teenage males, who, we're led to believe, expect more action and less talk. *Menzoberranzan* skirts this line, though, trying to have both — and for the most part, it succeeds. Any fan of first-person RPG's will find a lot to enjoy here.

—T. Liam McDonald

Even the frogs are deadly in the Underdark.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

85%

HIGHS: Good graphics and sound, and, eventually, a good plot.

LOWS: Hack, slash, hack, slash. Are we having fun yet?

BOTTOM LINE: Features excellent production, a solid engine, and a good premise, but is combat oriented in early levels and takes its sweet time getting to the narrative elements.

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Product Information Number 130

The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki

Category: First-person shooter

Developer: Maelstrom/Future vision

Publisher: Merit Studios, 13707 Gamma Road, Dallas TX 75244 (800) 238-4277

Required	We Recommend
386/33MHz; CD-ROM drive; DOS 5.0 or higher; 8MB RAM; VGA	486/50 MHz; Full installation (32MB hard-drive space); Supported sound cards; Mouse

M.S.R.P.: $69.95

The Doctor's goofball forces definitely win the competition for best comic performance in a death-dealing shoot-'em-up.

The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki isn't the best title in the growing field of first-person shooters (*Doom* still holds that honor in my book). But it's certainly not the worst, either. In fact, *Radiaki* seems to intentionally defy comparison to its run-and-shoot cousins by placing the emphasis on comedy, rather than gunplay.

In *Radiaki*, you're a super agent sent to penetrate the good doctor's fortress and stop Radiaki before he can loose nuclear vengeance on the world. His fortress — a multi-level affair, with him at the top and you starting out at the bottom — is guarded by a cast of zanies that gives *Radiaki* its uniquely comical qualities, and sets it apart from all the other first-person shooters out there.

Among the funny characters you'll meet and kill are Castro-loyal guards that look just like Fidel, complete with beard and cigar. And when you blast them, the Cubanos moan "Madre de Dios!" or "Ayiiee! Mi cabeza!" There are big alligator-men, who make a cute little sound like a sneezing Yorkshire Terrier when they attack. And then there are the sneaky Ninja, who mutter "The Horror!" and "Rosebud..." when you off them. Really good stuff!

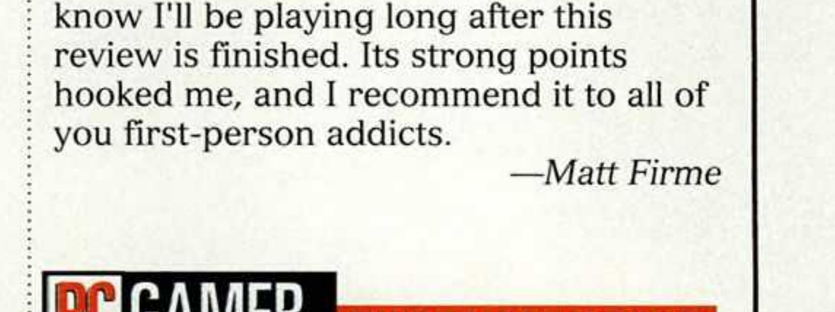
As you can see, some of the wall and floor texturing is a bit boring. It's tough to spot that ammo crate, even though it's right in front of you.

Here's Dr. Radiaki himself, all covered in shiny metal and ready for action. See, he had this accident with some radioactive stuff....

The humorous baddies look terrific, too. Unlike the enemies in *Doom* and most other first-person shooters — which tend to chunk out into big, fist-sized pixels at close range — the villains of *Radiaki* look even better close-up than they do from a distance. And they're plenty deadly, rushing you in droves sometimes and pounding through ammunition like it's going out of style.

The problem is, though, that *Radiaki*'s levels don't really give you much room to enjoy the gunplay. Most levels are full of narrow corridors and smallish rooms, really limiting your ability to fake out an enemy, maybe take a shot at him and then spin off, run toward cover, and turn back to finish him off. And so too many confrontations feel like toe-to-toe slugfests, with no opportunity for strategy.

Making the level architecture even more confusing (and a bit tiresome) is the fact that there's no real variety of wall textures. Most of the time, you're in an all-green, mossy-looking area, or an all-grey stone area. There's very little mixing of wall textures, and so areas tend to look the same, with few useable landmarks to help you figure out where you are. You'll be referring to the automap a lot in this game.



The Dynamic Duo of the East, the Samurai and the Ninja. Defeat the Samurai, and he'll fall on his own sword in shame.

But action is the backbone of any shooter, and *Radiaki* serves it up generously — although there's no two-player option. There *are* plenty of neat weapons (my favorite is the grenade launcher), and surviving all those comical-yet-deadly villains is a real challenge. You control everything with your keyboard and mouse, by the way — no joystick support is included. It took me a while to get used to this, and I never stopped wishing I could use a gamepad; still, the mouse\keyboard arrangement worked well.

I liked *Radiaki* in the end, and I know I'll be playing long after this review is finished. Its strong points hooked me, and I recommend it to all of you first-person addicts.

—Matt Firme

The Ratmen are as cuddly and cute-looking up close as they are at a distance. And when you kill them, they thank you!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

81%

HIGHS: Good character graphics and a great sense of humor; Plenty of action.

LOWS: The level graphics and architecture leave a lot to be desired; No joystick support.

BOTTOM LINE: *Fortress of Dr. Radiaki* may not be the best shooter around, but it's definitely worth a look.

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Double Talk

Category: Arcade

Developer: Boyle and Elggren Games, Inc.

Publisher: Boyle and Elggren Games, Inc.
77 W. 2nd S., Salt Lake City, UT
84101 (800) 634-8255

Required	We Recommend
286; 2MB RAM; 5MB hard-disk space; DOS 3.3 or higher	Mouse; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $21.95

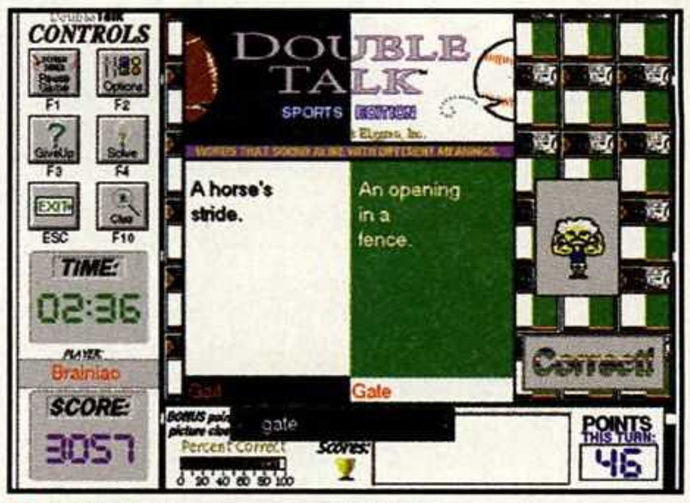
Trivia games, whether they're board games, game shows, or computer games, fascinate most of us. And sports trivia nuts can be especially devoted. So here we have *DoubleTalk: Sports Edition* (I don't know of any other editions), which would seem to have a lot going for it right off the bat, since we all know a sports nut who seems to remember every stat there is about every baseball, football, or basketball season. But that really won't help here, because *DoubleTalk* is more word game than sports trivia game.

Here's how the word game works: You're given two clues, which each relate to a separate word or phrase that sounds like the other word or phrase. For example, if the clues are 1) a weight-lifting implement, and 2) a waitress in a saloon, the answer would be Barbell or Bar Belle. Cute, huh?

You're not just racing to see who can answer the most of these; there's an element of the classic game Concentration involved, too. Your screen is made up of 54 blocks, or clue cards, each of which holds the two clues you have to use to solve that little puzzle. And once solved, the block is removed. The 54 blocks cover two big pictures, you see, each of which relates to a word or phrase which sounds alike — just like the word puzzles do. You receive points for each right answer, but basically the first to guess the hidden pictures related meaning wins.

That's about all there is to the game. Well, there are little animated characters that do silly things at the end of each question. But they serve no other purpose than to slow the game down, and there's no way to turn them off. Even with add-on clue packs available, these word puzzles wear thin pretty quickly. I don't think you'll find yourself playing *DoubleTalk* for any extended period of time.

—Joe Novicki



This little character is letting you know your answer was correct.

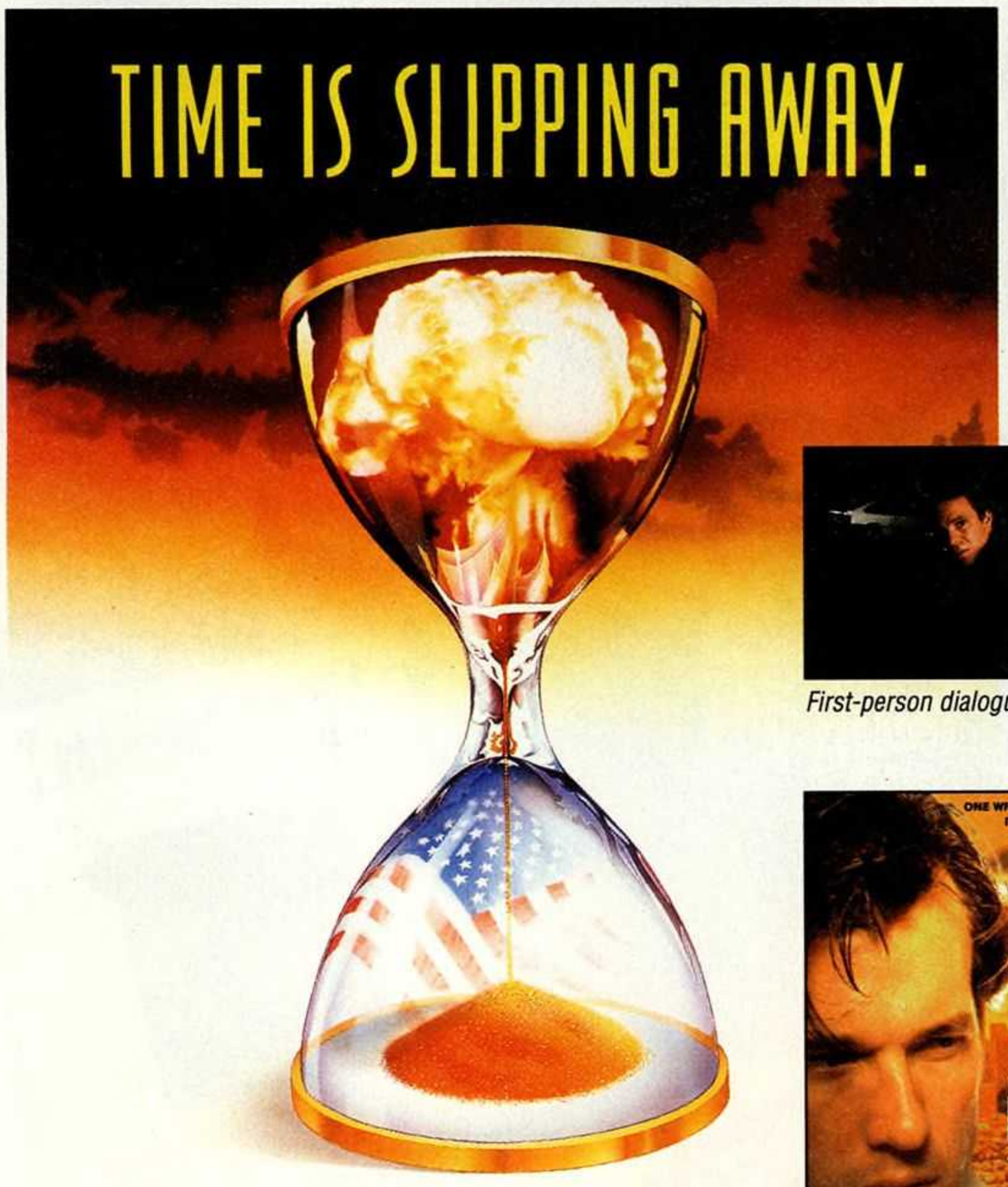
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

54%

HIGHS: One plus: The PC acts as a convenient timer

LOWS: There's only so much of these word puzzles one can stand.

BOTTOM LINE: Not a very successful mix of sports trivia and word game, or ...ah, it's just disappointing, that's all.



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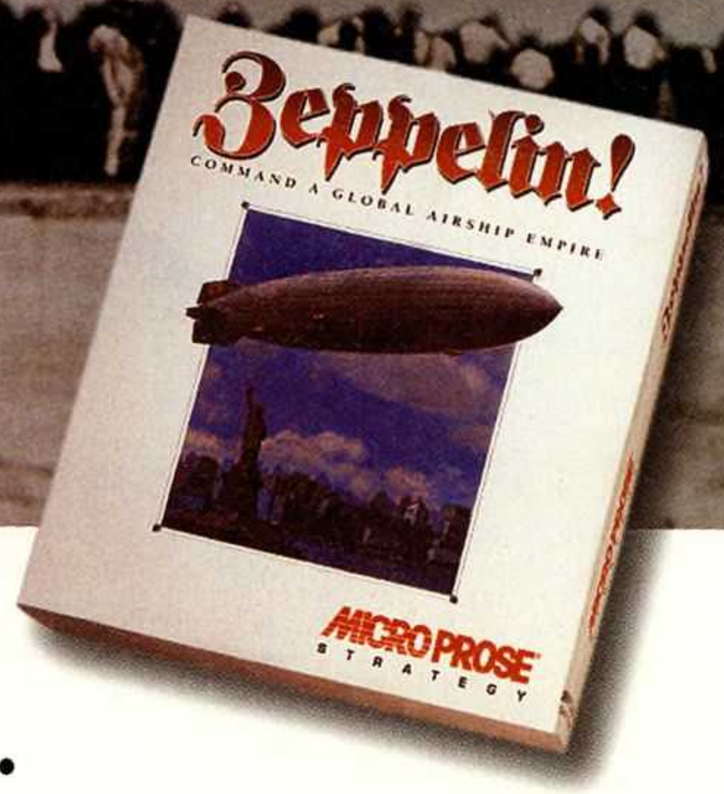

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Product Information Number 107

Blown Away

CD-ROM

Category: Multimedia puzzle

Developer: Imagination Pilots

Publisher: IVI Publishing, 7500 Flying Cloud Drive, Eden Prairie, MN 55344 (800) 432-1332

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive 486/33Mhz Windows; 8MB RAM; SVGA; Sound card	Windows-accelerated video card

M.S.R.P.: $63.95

If you like watching video clips interspersed with timed puzzles, *Blown Away* will certainly deliver the goods.

I feel like PC gaming is approaching some kind of crossroads — and that rather than making a decision to go one way or the other, the whole concern will have to split in two, with each side going its chosen road alone.

I'm thinking specifically of the new games, often lumped together as "multimedia category," that seem to place a greater emphasis on flashy presentation and full-motion video than on creating an emersive, fully interactive gaming experience. These things are springing up everywhere, and from such long-time game publishers as LucasArts (*Rebel Assault*) and Interplay (*Cyberia*). So there must be an audience for them; I just can't figure out whether that audience includes most of us gamers.

Take *Blown Away*, for example. This new title — loosely based on the movie of the same name, I guess — concerns a bomb-squad cop (you) who's in pursuit of a crazed bomber. The story is told through video clips, which then pop you into some nicely rendered "virtual rooms" full of hot spots. Click on a hot spot, and you might get to play a little game.

The games within *Blown Away* aren't bad at all, kind of a mix of logic puzzles that reminded me of 7th Guest. Not many have much replay value, though. But there are number puzzles, word puzzles, and even a recreation of the old Labyrinth maze-and-marble game that works surprisingly like the real thing. A nice variety.

A typical puzzle. Click on the squares until every row — up, down, and on the diagonal — adds up to your hospital-room number. Not too tough....

***Blown Away* includes this handy practice screen, which lets you play the puzzles without having to wade through video clips.**

And then there's the video — which, like the puzzles, isn't bad at all. It's full-screen stuff, and runs nicely on a windows-accelerated video card. And the starring villain (a scruffy dude named Jimmy Scaggs) turns in a memorably creepy performance.

So there you have two components — puzzles, and video — that are fine by themselves. But when you try to tie them together, the whole affair becomes mind-numbingly boring! You watch a video, click a button, play a game (usually by clicking more buttons), and then watch more video. The video and puzzles have such a tenuous relationship to one another that the whole affair adds up to considerably less than the sum of its parts.

This is the mad bomber you're after. Hard to believe a guy who can't figure out how to brush his teeth could come up with so many clever puzzles!

I almost think that IVI knew people would get tired of the video/puzzle combo, because they included a practice mode that lets you hop right to any game you choose and play it on its own. I certainly came to appreciate the feature, anyway; if I want to see the movies, I can always access them through the built-in Windows media player.

Blown Away is good, as these kind of games go. It's pretty, it contains some good puzzles, and it all works as advertised. I can't recommend it to veteran gamers, because they've come to expect a lot more depth and sophistication. But if multimedia games do veer off and become a separate kind of PC entertainment, *Blown Away* will probably be among the better offerings in the new genre.

—Matt Firme

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

79%

HIGHS: Good full-screen video, and some really nice puzzles.

LOWS: The video and puzzles are a lot better on their own than combined; Not very interactive.

BOTTOM LINE: Another "multimedia" game. There's just not enough interaction here to satisfy most gamers.

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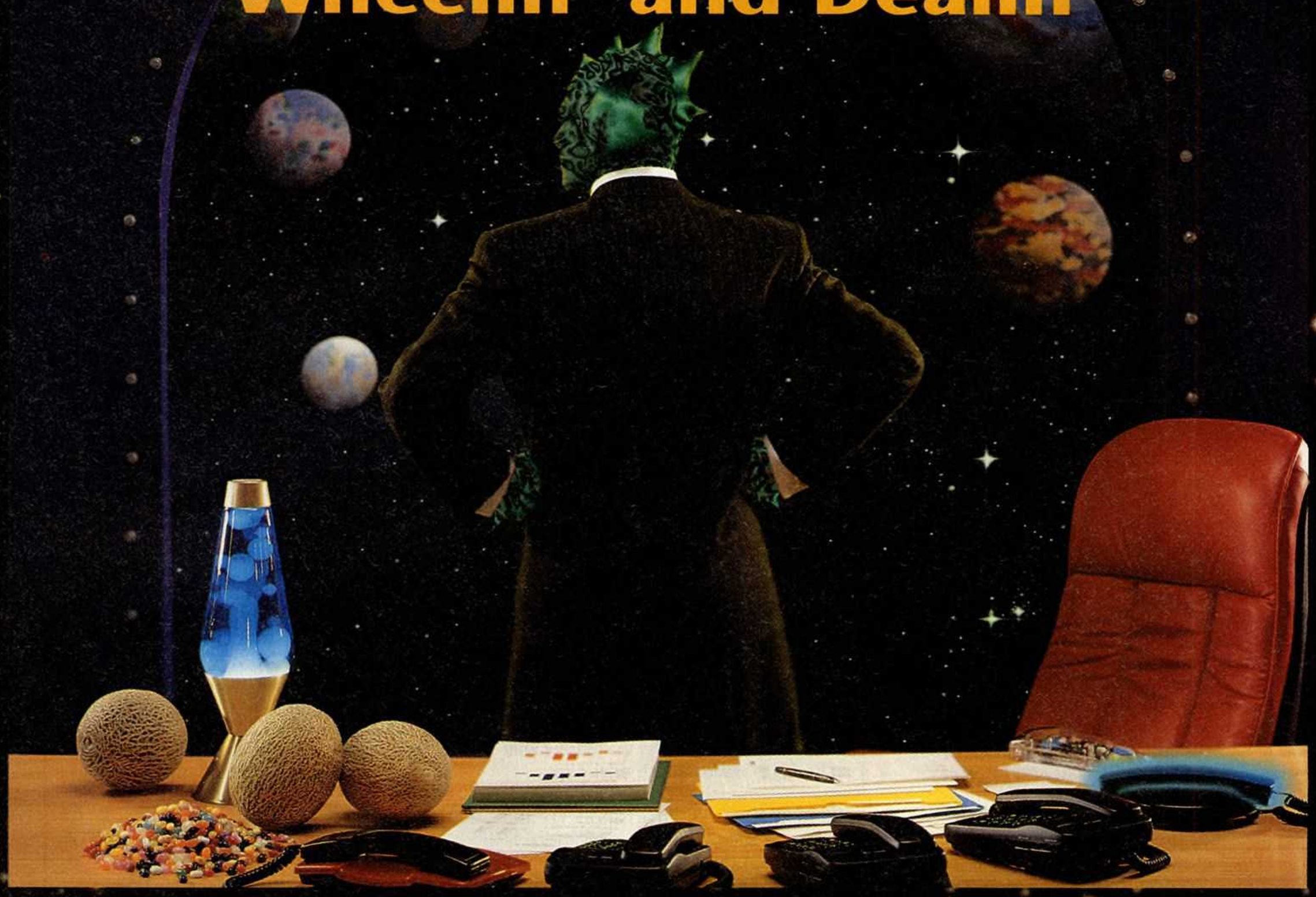

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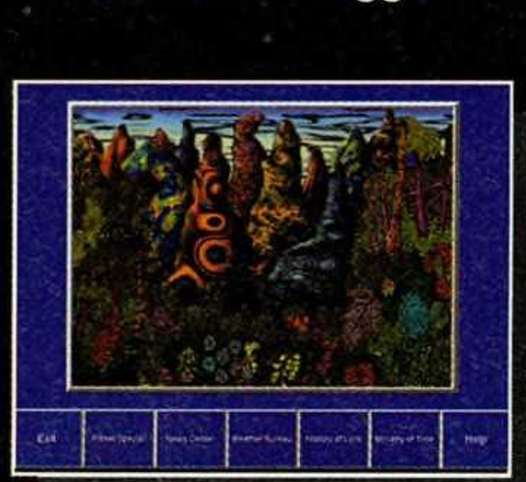

Created by LavaMind

Published by Spectrum HoloByte

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Product Information Number 128

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Novastorm

CD-ROM

Category: Shoot-em up

Developer: Psygnosis

Publisher: Psygnosis, 675 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge MA 02139 (617) 497-7794

Required	We Recommend
486; CD-ROM drive; 4MB RAM; DOS 5.0; VGA	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Supported sound cards; Joystick or gamepad

M.S.R.P.: $59.99

Now *this* is refreshing. *Novastorm* is a CD-ROM product. It features plenty of great CD sound and little digitized intro sequences. But it doesn't rely on these tricks to try to create some flashy, multimedia experience; *Novastorm* is just a straight-forward shooter, with lots of extras thrown in.

Like most shooters, *Novastorm* takes place in the future, and puts you in control of a lone space ship hurtling toward whole squadrons of enemies. In this case, the bad guys represent the evil SCARAB — one of those pan-galactic, evil-doers unions. So you pilot your jaunty Scavenger 4 space fighter, blasting everything you see, and knowing that the fate of your race hangs in the balance.

Really, though, the storyline doesn't matter much here. The star of the show is action — pure, unabashed, arcade-style shooting. *Novastorm* delivers action by the truckload, and it'll remind you of those arcade shoot-'em-ups of your youth.

The memory lane stuff won't last long, though, because I'll bet you haven't seen many shooters that look as good as this. You'll soar through the void of space, over alien landscapes, and toward vast, futuristic space-stations. It all looks great, and the hope of seeing what landscape the next level might hold kept me playing for hours. The sounds and music are good, too — as you'd expect from a CD title.

Novastorm's weaknesses aren't major, but they are annoying. The biggest of these to me was the inability to save your progress; it can get pretty tiresome having to replay the game from the beginning when you lose that last ship. A password feature would have been awful nice. There aren't quite as many enemies — or as much variety of enemies — as I'd like to see, either. But these are small potatoes, and don't change the fact that *Novastorm* is a hell of a good time.

—Matt Firme

Like any good shooter, *Novastorm* has big bosses that you'll have to beat before you get to the next level.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: A good shooter; Uses CD-ROM enhancements instead of being limited by them.

85%

LOWS: No save feature; Not everyone likes shooters, and that's all this is.

BOTTOM LINE: A refreshingly simple and effective CD-ROM title.

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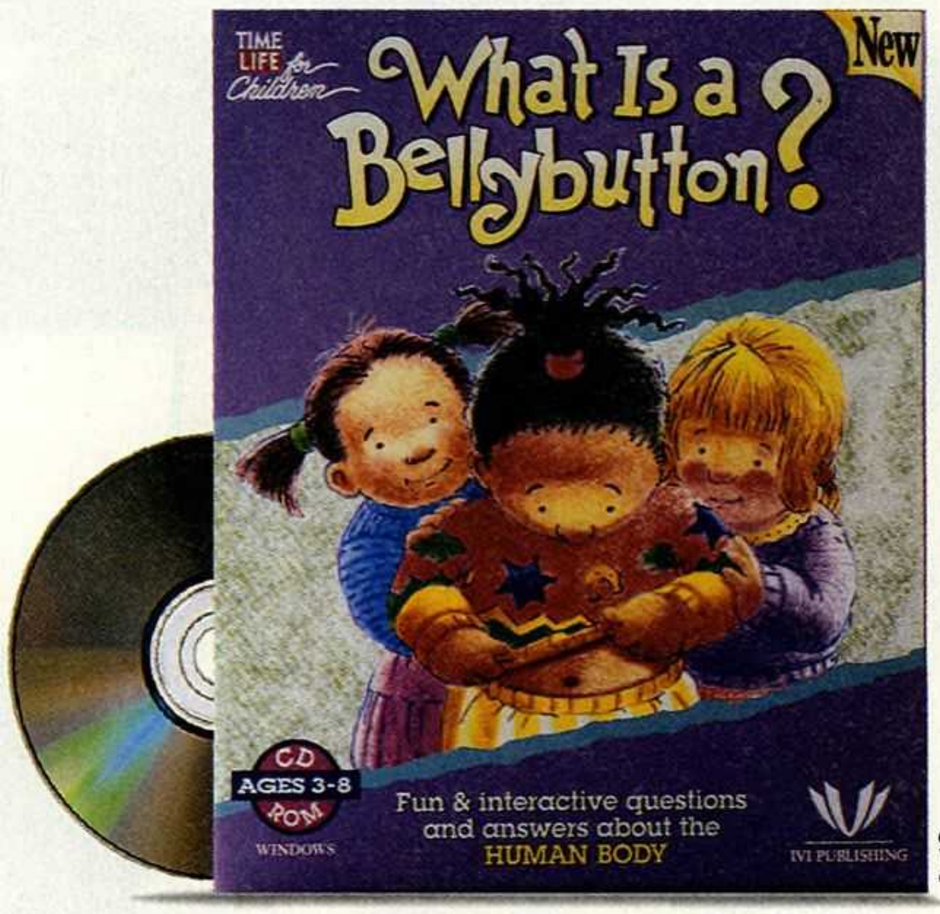

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PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CD-ROM

Category: Graphic adventure

Developer: Andrew Spencer

Publisher: Psygnosis, 675 Massachusetts
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 497-7794

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM Drive; 486SX\25Mhz; 4MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; Mouse	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486\50Mhz; 8MB RAM; Full installation (70MB hard-drive space); Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Where else can you have so much fun getting the hell beat out of you while playing as the opposite sex?

Empty streets. Not exactly the greeting you'd anticipated when you entered the village of Tirich, but you soon discover that those empty streets are not nearly so vacant as they seem. A short walk into the heart of the village plunges you into a mystery, and a frantic battle for your life and your sanity. Dark forces suddenly blanket the village — forces you must defeat if you hope to leave Tirich.

So begins *Ecstatica*, a graphic adventure that just may change all your notions about the genre. This game is a marvel from the first screen, full of the kind of innovation that engenders a sense of awe. And amazingly this awe in no way diminishes as you play further into the game. You're constantly rewarded with fresh new scenes and situations that will keep you playing to the exclusion of all else; I say this from my own experience (just ask Matt!).

Until you've got a weapon to fight with, it's in your best interest to avoid barging in on this little disagreement.

The graphics are beautiful, but what's really breathtaking is the way your character, and others, move in this virtual village. The perspective scaling, body movements, and varying viewpoints are so engrossing that words can only hint at their impact.

Ecstatica lets you choose whether to play as a male or a female. The choice is a subjective one, with no advantage or penalty assigned to either sex. Controlling your character is utter simplicity, with relatively few controls to worry about and no special commands for particular weapons.

Essentially, what you do is explore the hamlet and wait to see what happens. You won't wait long, either, as you immediately discover that this deserted village is far from empty. Strange creatures — by-products of magical meddling gone awry — roam the streets, performing whatever mayhem they can. Some, such as the little creatures who resemble maniacal versions of Piglet, can do a little damage to you, but they're more nuisance than threat; other creatures can, and will, do you mortal harm. So finding a weapon is of utmost importance, although there are some creatures, such as the ape-like monster who constantly stalks you, that can't be dispatched until late in the game.

One warning, though: *Ecstatica* is an *extremely* violent game. Fight scenes are very realistic, almost surrealistic, in their impact. You can almost feel the blows, and when your character does happen to bite the big one, the death throes are painful to see and hear. And this pales in comparison to the more bloody deaths you can suffer! There's some nudity as well, with one especially grisly scene where women have been stripped and skewered. This is definitely an adult game — and more pointedly, not a game for the squeamish, whatever their age.

Lots of creatures try to stop you but this guy's the most persistent. You can't kill him until you've concocted the special weapon described in the old wizard's magic book.

Watch that last step! That's not the best way into the dungeon anyway. You'll need a special household item to get further than this.

What *Ecstatica* is, above all else, is a real joy to play. Along with *Relentless*, it points to a strong new European presence in the U.S. gaming market. There are a few minor flaws, such as your character's occasional ability to step through solid objects, but for the most part the sights, sounds, and especially the action, make *Ecstatica* a game to be reckoned with.

— Gary Meredith

I guess anyone would become rather boring if they were made of stone and spent all day just standing around, but listen to the stones anyway.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

93%

HIGHS: Ultra-realistic character movements, near-perfect perspective scaling, and fantastic graphic vistas.

LOWS: Extreme violence and a touch of nudity may offend some.

BOTTOM LINE: A game that will delight and consume you in one fell swoop.

CD-ROM

NASCAR Racing

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Simulation

Developer: Papyrus Design Group

Publisher: Papyrus, 35 Medford Street
Somerville, MA 02143
(617) 868-5440

Required	We Recommend
VGA: 386DX/33Mhz; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 4MB RAM (reduced detail); DOS 5.0 or later; 15MB hard-drive space. **SVGA:** 486/66Mhz; 8MB RAM	486/33 for VGA, Pentium 90 for SVGA; 8MB RAM; Supported sound cards; Joystick or driving wheel

M.S.R.P.: $50-$60

NASCAR Racing takes the checkered flag for incredible, fender-banging realism.

NASCAR is far and away the fastest-growing and most popular form of motorsports in the country. Besides offering the most competitive, wheel-to-wheel racing you can find, the drivers and cars are more familiar to fans. These guys aren't European playboys, driving machines more akin to space craft than the car in your garage. This is Chevy vs. Ford, Dale vs. Rusty.

I live in the heart of NASCAR country, and for as long as I can remember I've dreamed of a stock-car racing simulation. I've designed it many times in my head — real drivers, all the tracks, drafting at the super speedways, and bangin' at the short tracks. Thanks to Papyrus, that sim is here — and I can't imagine how it could've been done any better. When the program loads, former champion Ned Jarrett announces "This is NASCAR Racing." And ol' Ned ain't just whistling Dixie, either (although he probably does that from time to time). If racing action on the computer was any more realistic, they'd have to pay you prize money to play.

The Paintshop lets you customize and create cars.

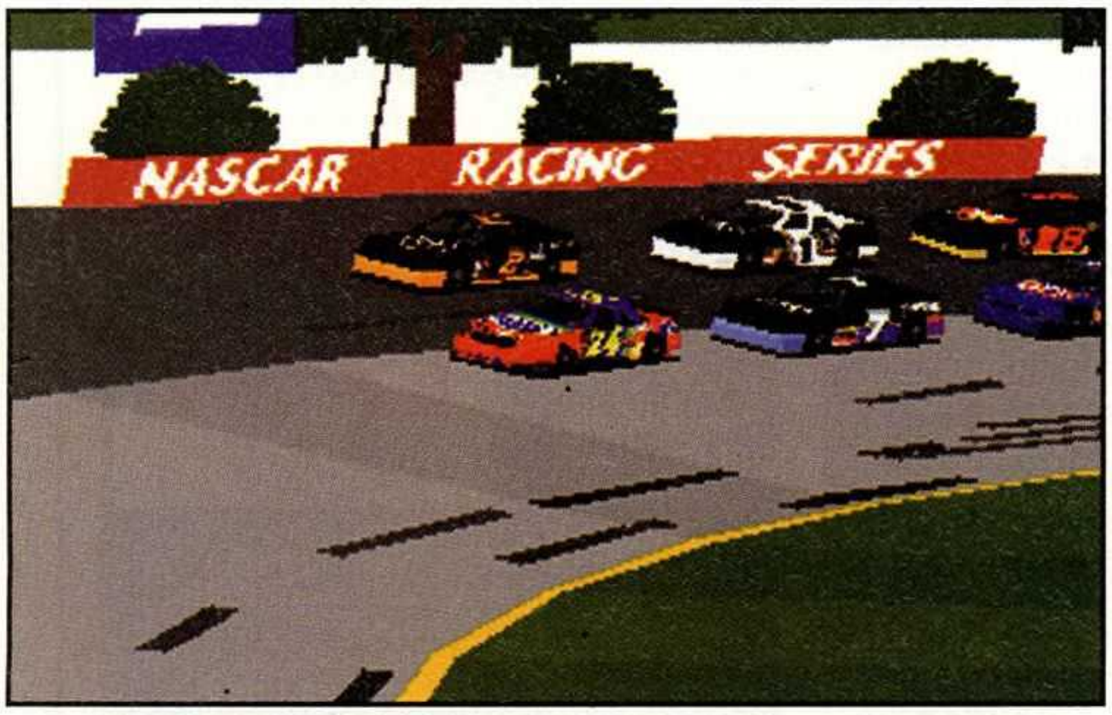
Like its predecessor, the excellent *IndyCar Racing*, *NASCAR Racing* lets you run single races, practice at any track, or run for the season championship. There are nine tracks (Papyrus promises more circuits later): the 1.5-mile Atlanta oval, the Watkins Glen road course, the 200-mph super speedway at Talledega, the flat Phoenix one-mile oval, the lightning-fast half-mile at Bristol, the wide and smooth two-miler in Michigan, the tricky Darlington oval, the tight half-mile of Martinsville, and the one-mile track at Loudon, New Hampshire.

It's easy to edit driver names and information.

A welcome and easy-to-use editor lets you modify the specs of any team, including your own. Choose your car make — Ford, Chevrolet, or Pontiac — and then it's off to the races. You also have a choice of tires, and just like on the real circuit, the Goodyears last longer and the Hoosiers are a bit faster.

This isn't a game; this is a simulation. So naturally, you can't just unload your car at the track and outrun Rusty Wallace. Each track requires a different setup, and the random weather conditions are a definite factor. So the setup you used to lap the field at Bristol in the spring might put you at the back of the pack for the August race.

To find the right race setup, or "dial the car in," as the NASCAR boys say, you'll have to test different combinations of many settings — gear ratios, spoilers, shocks, camber, tire pressure, and more. It's a process of trial and error that takes time — and demands patience. The folks at Papyrus have graciously included three race setups and one qualifying setup for each track, though, just in case you can't wait to hit the track. These set-ups are good enough to put you in the race, but you'll have to adjust them to better suit your driving style.



Even in the low-res version, with asphalt and grass texture turned off, *NASCAR Racing* looks great.

As good as the foundation of the game is, *NASCAR Racing* moves to yet a higher level when you pull your car onto the track. If you're used to darting your Indy car anywhere on the track and making it stick, you're in for a big surprise here. These stock cars weigh about 3,000 pounds, and you'll feel like you're driving an 18-wheeler at first. On most tracks, you'll have to ease off the throttle or tap the brakes as you enter a turn. It's impressive stuff, and feels just like it should — and yes, I have turned a few laps in a stock car, down at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

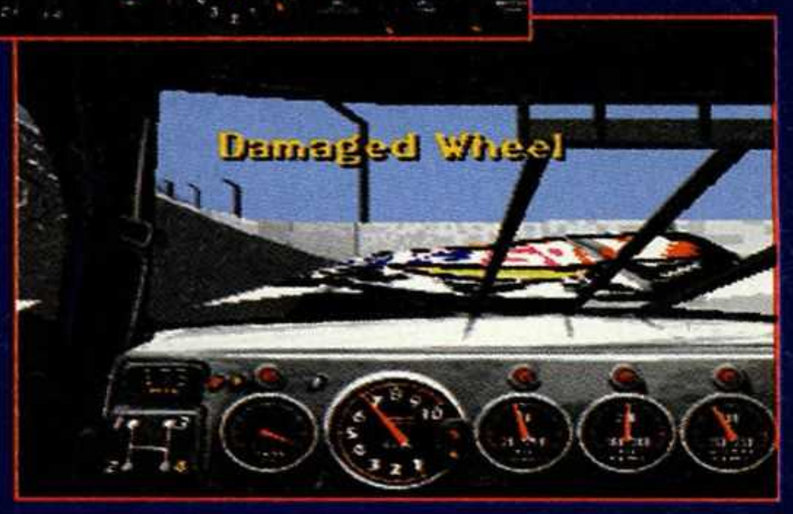
The available SVGA graphics are incredibly crisp — if your machine has the horsepower to run them. Even on a 90Mhz

Beautiful — But at a Price

The CD-ROM version of *NASCAR Racing* includes the option to run the game in SVGA. And it looks great that way, as these shots clearly demonstrate. But to really *play* the game at that resolution, you're gonna need every bit of a Pentium 90Mhz processor. Keep in mind, though, that this game *rocks* VGA — the SVGA stuff is really just a thoughtful bonus, and guarantees that you'll be playing long after the 486 goes the way of the dinosaur.

Accidents are tough enough in VGA (left), but that high-res SVGA makes 'em seem even more bone-jarring.

From the cockpit, everything in your car looks just like it does in real life. SVGA (below) is an obvious improvement, though.



The rest of the field benefits from those SVGA graphics (on the left), too. But don't expect the action to be as smooth, or as life-like, in SVGA.

Pentium, the game isn't too smooth in SVGA with all the detail cranked up. In fact, a 486DX\33 is just about the minimum platform I'd recommend to run even the VGA version at a decent frame rate. You can toggle graphic options to get the frame rate you want, though — stuff like texturing, the number of opponents, their strength, how many other cars you can see on the track, and even how many you can hear. I played the game — and evaluated it — in VGA, as I think most people will; to me, the SVGA option just assures that I'll be playing for years, and enjoying the game even more on my next computer.

But no matter which res you're running in, watching the other cars move around the track is nothing short of stunning. Some drivers are aggressive, while some are more patient. Some will just flat-out cut you off in a turn — though I won't mention any names. And one of the most thrilling aspects of real NASCAR racing — bumping, or frammin' and bammin', as Earnhardt says — is brilliantly recreated here. That was my biggest concern about a stock-car sim, but Papyrus has pulled it off beautifully. You can put the bumper to the guy in front of you, turn him sideways, and get beside him. Hit him too hard, though, and he might spin in front of you and send you both into the wall. The wrecks are thrilling, by the way, and the replay feature is great for watching a pile-up or admiring a nice pass.

It's up to your pit crew to repair that front-end damage.

Another impressive detail is car damage. Get involved in a minor wreck, and you'll have the option to repair the damage in the pits. More serious collisions, of course, may put you out of action for good. And you can actually see the damage — a slightly crinkled fender or a crumpled hood — from both inside the car and in the camera replays. Pit stops are also handled thoughtfully. Hot keys give you radio communications with your crew, so you can tell them what to do on the next stop — 22 gallons of fuel, change right-side tires only, and bump the rear spoiler up two degrees.

I've found only a couple of bugs, the most annoying of which is that the computer-controlled drivers don't show much intelligence concerning pit strategy; often, several cars will dive into the pits as the green flag waves following a caution period. Papyrus is promising a quick fix for that glitch. But forget that. *NASCAR Racing* blows the doors off every other racing game there has ever been. Computer simulations just don't get any better than this.

—Lee Buchanan

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

94%

HIGHS: Great graphics, stirring sound, hair-raising action.

LOWS: A mid-range 486 is barely adequate to run the game, even in standard VGA mode.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're a race fan with a fast computer, your life simply isn't complete without *NASCAR Racing*.

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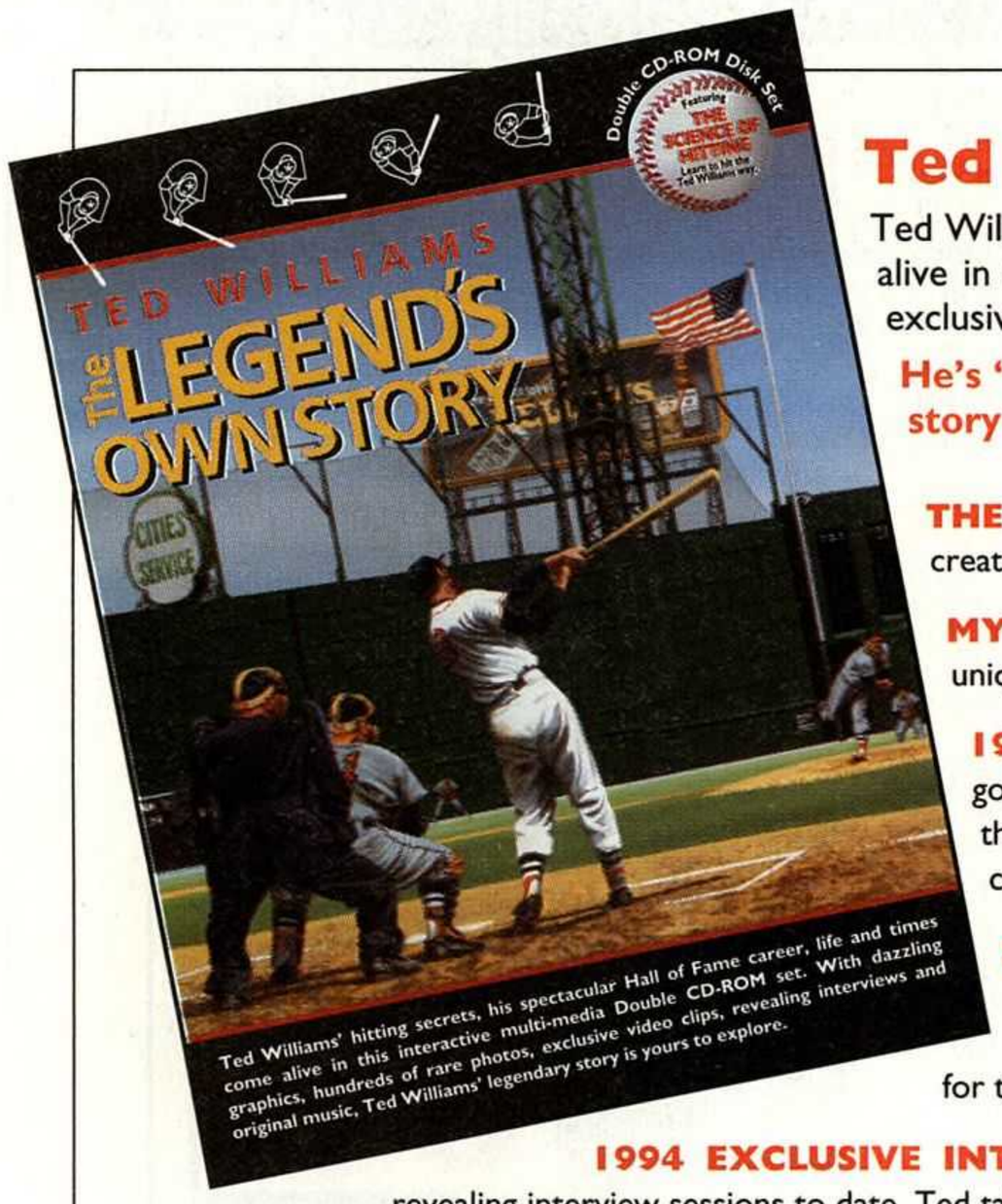

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ROBERTA WILLIAMS

PHANTASMAGORIA

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"It's addictive." PC Gamer

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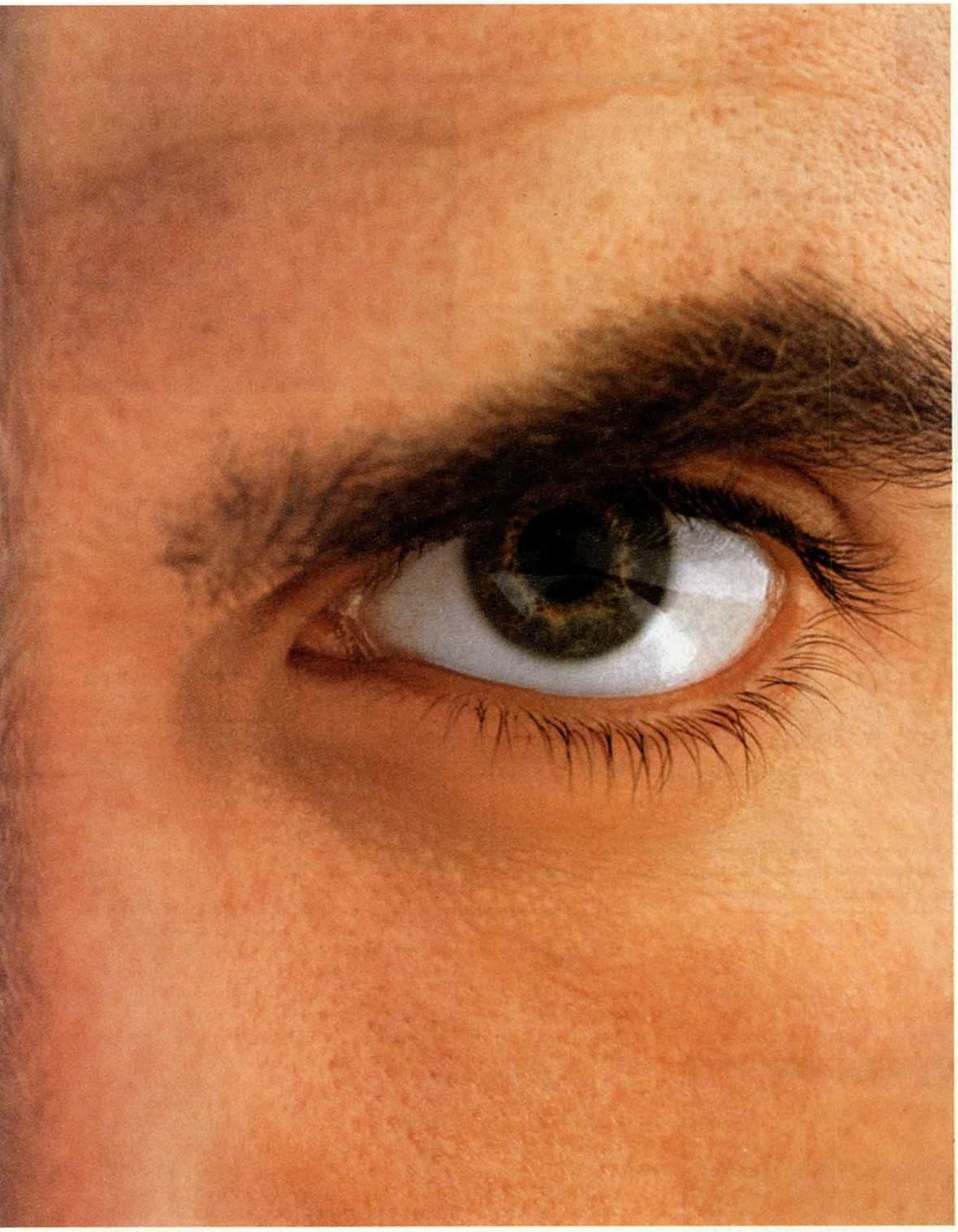

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Product Information Number 124

CD-ROM

Panzer General

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Strategy/roleplaying

Developer: Strategic Simulations, Inc.

Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Avenue, Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA., 94086-2901

Required	We Recommend
Double-spin CD-ROM drive; 386/33Mhz; 4MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space (uncompressed hard drive required); DOS 5.0 or later; 1MB SVGA card; Mouse	486/33Mhz; 8MB RAM; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $69.95

A classic wargame for players who've never tried a wargame, and for those who've tried 'em all!

Generally speaking, it's unwise for software reviewers to traffic in superlatives — but in the case of *Panzer General*, nothing less will suffice. This is the sweetest, slickest, best-looking, and most obsessively playable war game since *Empire*. It's detailed enough, accurate enough, and respectful enough of history to gratify all but the pickiest grognards (the kind who complain if all the algorithms aren't reproduced in the manual), but it's so easy to play, and so much cotton-pickin' *fun*, that it will surely attract thousands of newcomers into the wargame genre.

General Rommel as role model — the very image of the modern panzer general, but you can do better!

Panzer General's designers drew on SSI's expertise not only in wargames, but in roleplaying adventures, and skillfully blended the most appealing features of both traditions. The premise is one that appeals to the megalomaniac in all of us: can you be the greatest panzer commander of all time? Can you conquer *everybody*?

All significant WWII land, sea, and air units — from all sides — are represented (yes, even the Polish TK-3 tankettes and the Norwegian Fokker DXIII interceptor). When units do battle, brief animated sequences vividly portray the action and destruction. These mini-clips are simply the best of their kind, ever. In the hours and hours I've spent with this game, I have never wanted to turn them off — and that's a rare occurrence.

You start your career in 1939 (Poland), 1941 (western or eastern front) or 1943 (ditto). You begin with a number of "core" units which become, in effect, your private army. As these units go from battle to battle, they gain in experience, initiative, and steadiness.

The roleplaying element is powered by a system of "prestige points" (symbolic of your reputation and your clout at OKW in Berlin), which are used, much like currency, to purchase new or more powerful units, or to upgrade the equipment of veteran troops. Victory, efficiency, and low casualties increase your prestige, so it's quite possible, after a string of victories, to find yourself commanding an elite force with its own integral air, artillery, and even naval support.

Single-battle scenarios cover a huge range, including three different versions of Operation Sealion, Crete, and the Balkans.

At the start of each new battle, you receive orders detailing your objectives and the time limits headquarters has set for capturing them. Cities and airfields *not* listed as objectives are still worth extra prestige points, but no matter how many of them you overrun, you must capture your assigned objectives or face disgrace and the possible termination of your career.

Land, sea, and air units are all fully represented — even those of minor nations.

Strategic maps show the entire area of operations, with objectives highlighted. Tactical maps are hex-based, but the scale of the hexes varies from scenario to scenario. Only one unit, plus air support, may occupy a hex at any one time. Each round of fighting uses up strength and supplies, or weakens fortifications if you're on the defensive. You must withdraw a unit from contact in order to fully reinforce or resupply it, and a wise commander will check unit status after each engagement — tanks with no gas don't move, guns with no shells can't shoot, and planes that loiter too long away from their bases simply vanish from the screen.

All of the details are handled through several rows of menu buttons. Click to move; click to attack; click to resupply. If you're not sure what a given button does, just put your mouse over it and its function appears at the top of your screen.

Before committing to battle, the probable losses are displayed in the lower-left of the screen. This data is roughly analogous to an intelligence briefing and shouldn't be taken as gospel, if only because it tends to impose caution. Units don't always respond as these estimates might lead you to expect: A seemingly beaten enemy unit may rally, mount a "rugged defense," and disembowel one of your tank regiments. Likewise, an audacious attack can sometimes crack an apparently strong defense with one hammer blow.

In general, though (and true to the implications of its title), *Panzer General* tends to reward boldness, initiative, and drive. The time constraints on some operations are very demanding, and grinding

The little animated battle scenes add charm and visual excitement to the proceedings.

battles of attrition are to be avoided whenever possible. The 1939-1941 scenarios, in fact, give as vivid a demonstration of *Blitzkrieg* tactics as one could ask for.

While the heart of the game lies in its roleplaying campaign mode, it also offers an astonishing array of individual battles, affording the utmost variety of terrains and technologies. Included are such fascinating theaters of operation as Crete, Norway, the Balkans, Sevastapol, Kiev, Budapest, and *three* versions of "Operation Sealion," the proposed invasion of England.

Evolving campaigns take their own paths, which may or may not adhere closely to the historical record. If you conquer North Africa, for example, the Allies may never invade Italy. And if you're successful in Operation Sealion, D-Day simply doesn't happen; if you fail, on the other hand, you might find yourself defending Berlin as early as 1943. There's even a grand finale campaign, involving a German assault on Washington D.C.!

Amphibious operations are risky, but easy to mount — just click to load or off-load a transport. Airborne ops are also easy.

I was consistently impressed by the quality of the computer opponent, even on the "easy" setting. With the exception of the tutorial attack on Poland, none of these battles is a walk-over. I often found myself surprised — suddenly outgunned, or thrown off balance by an unexpected enemy counterpunch or a stubborn defensive stand. The level of challenge is quite high once you progress past the easiest settings, and you'll find yourself fighting and refighting battles, using different ideas, different mixes of equipment, different axes of advance, striving for that elusive "Major Axis Victory" accolade that rewards you with maximum prestige points. This game is so addictive it will break up marriages.... Graphically, *Panzer General* is a real feast. The SVGA maps are a joy to work with, and there are a number of dramatic and effective newsreel vignettes serving to bridge the scenarios. Sound effects are plentiful, ultra-vivid, and LOUD — even when reproduced through an internal PC speaker.

Put simply, *Panzer General* is a masterpiece of accessible, playable wargaming. If you've never played a wargame before, this is the perfect game to start with. If this game doesn't make a true believer out of you, nothing will.

— William R. Trotter

Use elite paratroopers to seize objectives deep in the enemy's rear.

The Invasion of England

One of the greatest might-have-been campaigns of World War Two was the proposed German invasion of England, "Operation Sealion." The fascination this speculative campaign holds for wargamers is attested to by SSI's inclusion of *three* Sealion scenarios in *Panzer General*.:

September 1, 1940: The campaign, as it almost happened in reality.

June 6, 1943: The Germans make one last, desperate attempt to drive England out of the war.

Sealion Plus: This one also starts on September 1, 1940, but presupposes that an Axis offensive from Spain has captured Gibraltar and thereby freed major units of the Italian fleet to support the invasion.

Gamers will relish the nuances and variety of all three scenarios, but Sealion Plus surely gives the Axis its best chance to scrub Old Blighty once and for all. The added naval resources enable the invasion force to seal both ends of the English Channel, and pour land and air forces into the fray without significant interference from the Royal Navy.

The 1943 scenario has its attractions, too, for the Germans can, by this time, field units of Tigers and other hi-potency armor. On the other hand, although no American ground units have appeared (at least not in the games I've played to this point), American air power is present in sufficient quantities to make air superiority a very difficult goal for the Germans.

England was never invaded, of course, because the RAF held off the Luftwaffe and sank many of the invasion barges Hitler was hoarding. But what if England had been invaded...and conquered? *Panzer General* gives you not one, not two, but *three* different ways to see what might have happened. Now that's good gaming!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

93%

HIGHS: A beautiful, superbly balanced, hyper-addictive war game.

LOWS: May be deemed too populist by the crustier grognards. Their loss.

BOTTOM LINE: The best wargame since *Empire* — and I certainly can't think of any higher praise for a game.

Armored Fist

CD-ROM

Category: Tank sim

Developer: NovaLogic

Publisher: NovaLogic, 19510 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Tarzana CA 91356, (800) 245-4525

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 386/40; 4MB RAM; 3MB hard-drive space; Mouse; VGA	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; joystick; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Is the latest sim from the creators of *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* the definitive modern tank sim? Sadly, no.

ncoming pixels!
Yellow smudge at 12:00!
Hostile brown blurs in the area!
Oh, sorry. I was just flashing back to my hours of playing *Armored Fist*, the long (*very* long) awaited tank simulation from NovaLogic. Using the same Pixel Space — um, er, I mean "Voxel Space" — technology they used in their helicopter "simulator" *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*, NovaLogic now takes on another element of the modern battlefield: mechanized armor.

I'll be honest. I thought *Comanche* had some nice graphics, but flew terribly and let you take absurd amounts of damage before crashing. Both sound effects and exterior views were awful, and in the end the game just didn't work for me. These are important issues, because the same technology is employed in *Armored Fist* — to generally deleterious effect.

The view through your night vision sights.

Fist takes on four armored vehicles: the American M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank (MBT) and M3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), and the Russian T-80 tank and BMP-2 IFV. Tanks are the heavily armed and armored, highly maneuverable unit of the modern fighting force, used to project heavy firepower forward with speed and agility, while IFV's are fighting vehicles mainly used to transport infantry into a warzone, and not normally a match for a standard tank.

Taking out a chopper with a machine gun is an easy affair when they hover conveniently in place for you.

The four vehicles tackled in *Fist* are some of the most prominent armored fighting vehicles on the modern battlefield, and combined they form the forward spearhead of any fighting force. Employing armor-piercing shells, high-explosives, machines guns, and, in some cases, missiles, these tanks are indeed an "armored fist" used to punch a hole in enemy lines.

Armored Fist itself offers numerous campaigns and missions involving each of these vehicles, playable from either the Russian or American side. Each mission has a series of objectives to be met for victory, and though they feature some recon and attacks on "soft" targets such as ground installations and infantry, the game is mainly a slugfest between Western (American) and Eastern (Soviet) technologies, with armored vehicles and attack choppers figuring in almost all the scenarios. This lends a certain degree of redundancy to missions after a while, with strategy reduced to finding the best approaches and covering positions for an attack, and then blasting away.

Controlling both single vehicles and entire platoons, as well as calling in artillery attacks and air cav forces, the gamer is in the unenviable position of juggling numerous roles at once. He is at once strategist, platoon leader, tank driver, scout, and gunner. The only automated function is loading — and here we come to the first of many problems with *Fist*.

While *Comanche* was an arcade shooter dressed up like a helicopter sim,

Using the map, you can edit waypoints or create new missions.

Fist has substantially more meat, but less playability. Being in control of numerous tanks means you can edit waypoints and set up strategic approaches to missions, but there's no real finesse required here, because it all boils down to brute strength. Armor charges forward, picks the closest target, and fires fast. You might think that IFV's should attack soft targets while MBTs are reserved for opposing armor, but unless you're driving each tank at each moment, this isn't going to happen. The AI routines for the tanks you're not actually driving aren't particularly inspired, and I have a sneaking suspicion that part of the AI routine is to give your computer-controlled tanks the ability to take more damage than user-controlled tanks. You *can* jump from tank to tank, but

Full-screen mode means you can see the enemy pixels even better. Looks good, huh?

this can be maddeningly confusing in combat, and will ultimately lead to defeat as you lose critical time getting your bearings and redirecting the vehicle.

There is simply too much to do in *Armored Fist*. Unlike MicroProse's *Tank Platoon*, there's no option to automate either the gunner or driver position. You have to do both simultaneously, driving and steering the tank while spinning the turret, locking on a target, and firing. Without an extra set of hands, this is wellnigh impossible. Worse, it's painfully unrealistic, since no one person would be asked to fill all those roles in the thick of combat. That's why there are five men in a crew! You can't scroll through a series of target locks, nor can you set the turret to auto-rotate to keep a target in view.

Exterior views of your tanks are worse than those in *Comanche*, and the terrain and unit graphics themselves are poor at best. The Voxel Space technology that worked from 100 feet up in *Comanche* doesn't work at all from 10 feet away in *Fist*. Everything is heavily pixelated and muddy, making gameplay a frustrating endeavor.

Something explodes in front of you. In a bid for super-unreality, you can blast a tank at point blank range and not suffer damage.

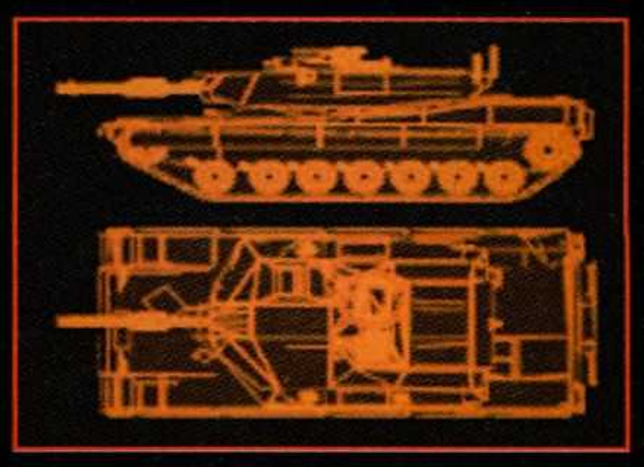
On the plus side, there's a simple and effective built-in mission editor. And with the extensive control it provides over the missions, there's much more depth here than in *Comanche*, and some good shooting action at times (if you can juggle all the controls).

Sadly, it looks like we'll have to wait for a definitive attempt at a tank simulator that's as good or better than the now-ancient *Tank Platoon*. More control options and automated roles, plus some better graphics, would have made *Armored Fist* a much better title. As it stands, it's a frustrating exercise in what might have been.

— T. Liam McDonald

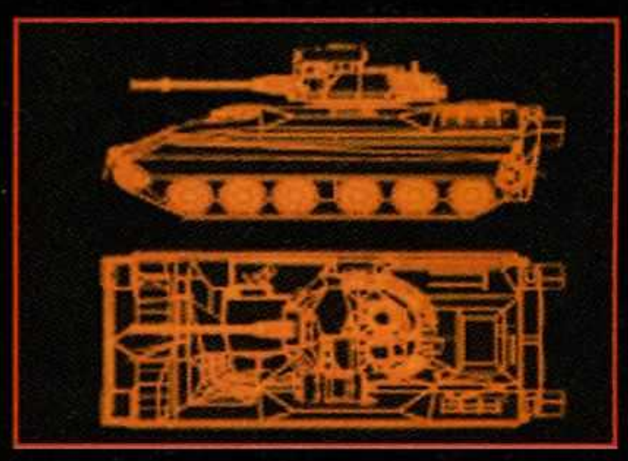
The Armor of *Armored Fist*

M1A2 Abrams (American)



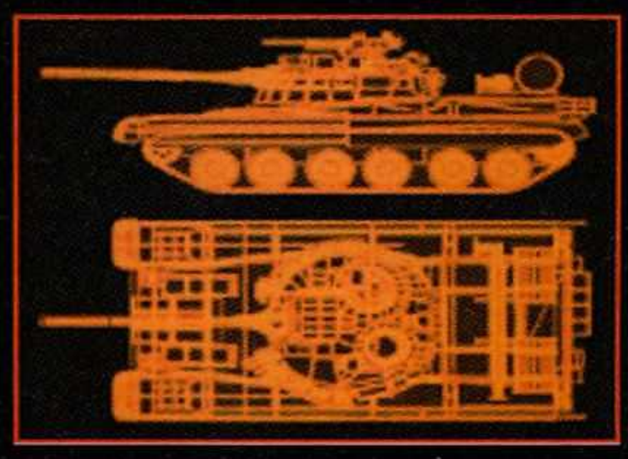
The Abrams is easily the most formidable tank deployed by the West, with the new M1A2 model featuring improved speed and loadout. Its revolutionary turbine engine gives it speeds up to 55 MPH (10 MPH faster than the M1A1), while its depleted-uranium/chobham armor gives it a thick skin. Packing a 50 caliber machine gun with 2000 rounds and 120mm smoothbore main gun (firing a combination of 40 armor piercing SABOT, shaped-charge HEAT, and smoke grenades), the Abrams is one of the most dangerous beasts on the battlefield.

M-3 Bradley IFV (American)



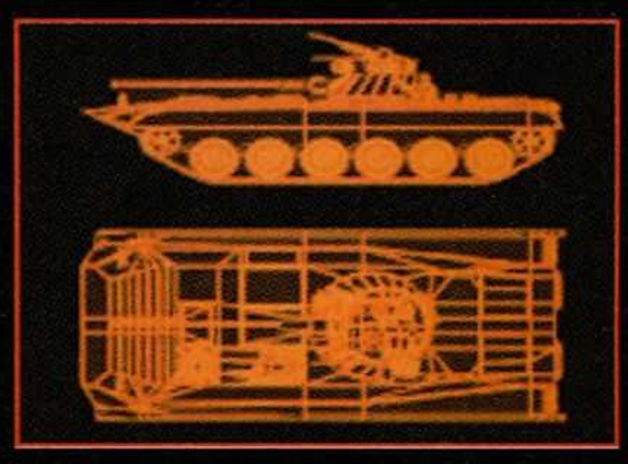
The Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle is designed to get infantry to the front quickly and safely, and while it is certainly not designed for armored offensive, it does have a formidable suite of weapons. Like the Abrams, is has a 50 caliber machine gun with 2000 rounds, but its main gun is a 25mm piece firing a combination of 900 anti-tank and high-explosive rounds. More impressive is it compliment of 12 TOW and 2 Stinger missiles, giving the Bradley excellent guided stand-off capabilities. The Bradley won't square-off at close range against a T-80, but can be used effectively against other IFVs and soft targets.

T-80 (Soviet)



As a Russian response to the Abrams, the T-80 is makes up for in loadout what it lacks in speed and agility. Like its counterpart it features a turbine engine and improved armor, but neither of these quite measure up to the Abrams. Featuring a 12.7 mm machine gun and a 125mm main gun, loading a combination of armor-piercing, shaped-charge, and high-explosive rounds, the T-80 is somewhat weaker than the Abrams, but you can count on it to overwhelm with sheer quantity of units deployed.

BMP 2 (Soviet)



More numerous than the Bradley, the BMP is a tough, well equipped IFV that will give you some real headaches. It's not only fast (50 MPH), but has a knockout weapons suite featuring launchers for both Spandrel and Gremlin missiles, a 12.5mm machine gun with 2000 rounds, and 30mm main gun firing a combination of armor-piercing and high-explosive rounds.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

65%

HIGHS: Good mission editor and some entertaining shooting action.

LOWS: Spotty graphics, lack of important options, frustrating play.

BOTTOM LINE: Controls are much more difficult than they should be. Graphics cripple the play so much that *Armored Fist* doesn't work as either a detailed tank simulator or as an arcade shooter.

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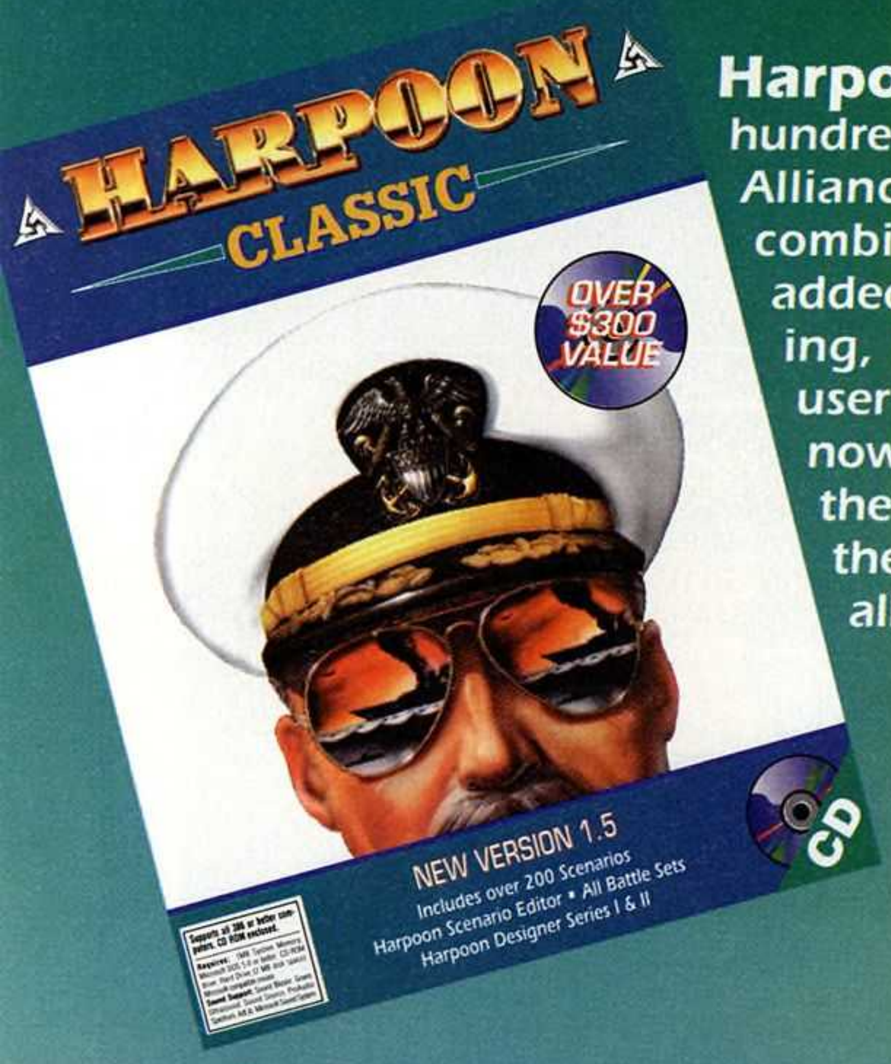

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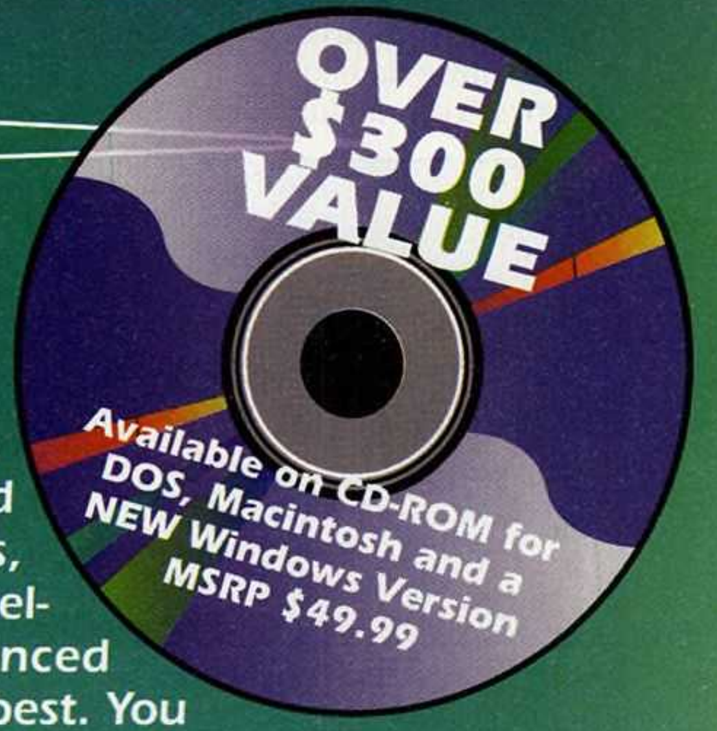

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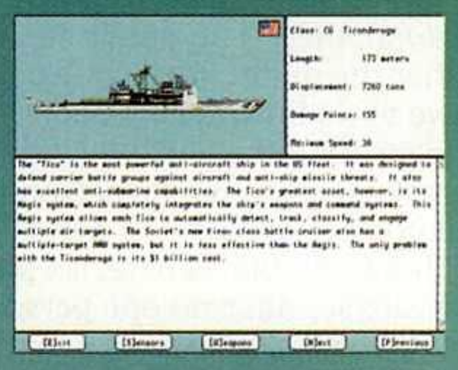

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Aces of the Deep

Category: Simulation

Developer: Dynamix

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, 3380 146th Place SE, Suite 300, Bellvue, Washington, 98007, (800) 757-7707

Required	We Recommend
386DX/33Mhz; 4MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; Mouse	486/33Mhz; 8MB RAM; SmartDrive; Supported sound cards

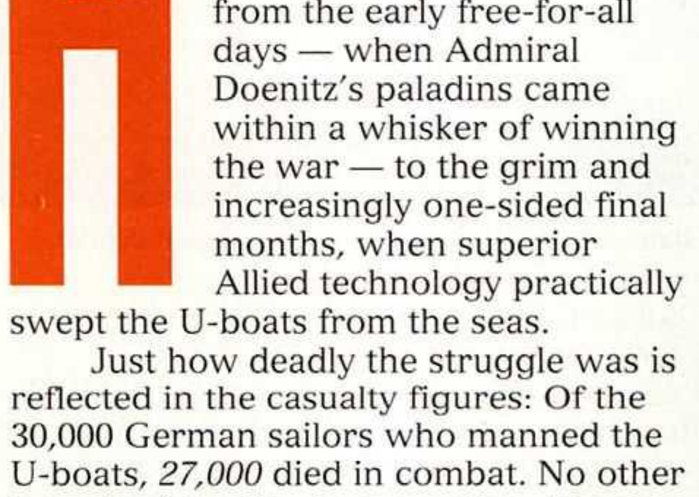
M.S.R.P.: $54.95

There's never been a dearth of sub sims, so for gamers who find this lethal form of warfare to be gripping, there's always room for one more.

Aces of the Deep is the most ambitious U-boat simulation ever published. It strives to recreate nothing less than the full, sweeping arc of the Battle of the North Atlantic, from the early free-for-all days — when Admiral Doenitz's paladins came within a whisker of winning the war — to the grim and increasingly one-sided final months, when superior Allied technology practically swept the U-boats from the seas.

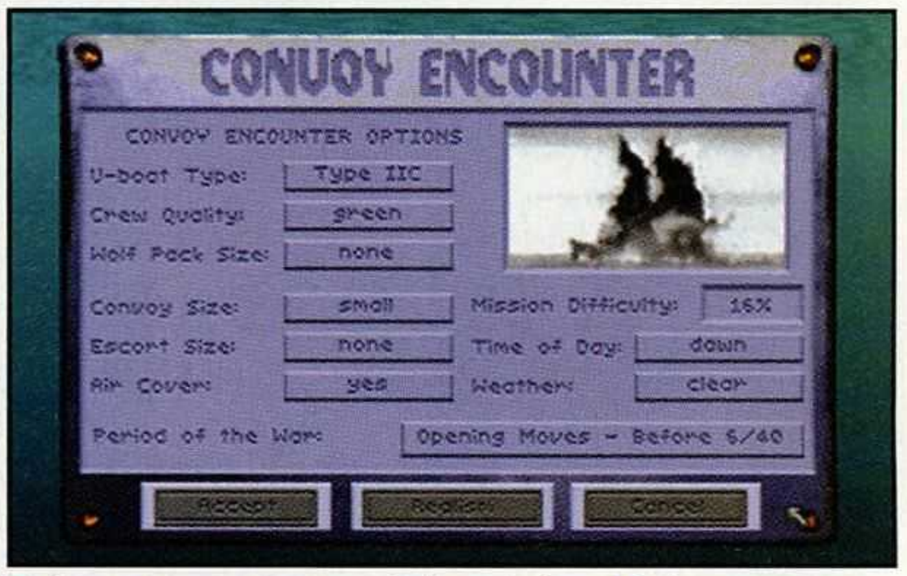
Just how deadly the struggle was is reflected in the casualty figures: Of the 30,000 German sailors who manned the U-boats, *27,000* died in combat. No other branch of service, in any nation, has ever suffered such appalling losses. And yet even in the final days, when each departing U-boat crew knew it was embarking on a virtual suicide mission, the morale of this elite force never wavered.

Those who grow queasy at the thought of playing a Nazi submarine skipper — those who might balk, for example, at "virtually" torpedoing their own grandfathers — should seek their entertainment elsewhere. But those who, even while acknowledging the evil of the German cause, remain fascinated by the bravery, devotion, and professional skill of the shark-skippers who served it, will find *Aces of the Deep* a very intense experience. At its best, when the whole carefully-structured *gestalt* kicks in, it provides white-knuckled drama and a powerful sense of historical verisimilitude.



The graphics in ***AOD*** are a mix of the terrific and the ho-hum. "Average" sums it up.

If you've played previous Dynamix/Sierra simulations, you'll find the interface familiar. As was true in *Red Baron* and its estimable descendants, you can select single missions or enlist, at various stages of the war, for a full-scale career. Available single-mission categories include recreations of historical actions, convoy encounters (in several varieties and sizes), and warship encounters. I recommend playing a few warship battles, just for variety's sake; in the career mode, you rarely (if ever) encounter any warship larger than a destroyer, and there's something deeply satisfying about putting a spread of "tin fish" into a battleship.



Convoy encounters are nicely varied, and their parameters can be changed to suit the players' mood.

In the career mode, you navigate to your assigned patrol area and take what comes. You may run into a straggling merchantman that you can engage with your deck gun (*very* enjoyable!), or any sort of convoy imaginable. Although there are, naturally, *generic* similarities between one convoy battle and another, the set-up, weather conditions, number and competence of the escorts, and so on are always different, always presenting you with new challenges and opportunities.

Quite often, the combat scenes are powerfully cinematic. During the first half of the war, for instance, you stand a fifty-fifty chance of successfully engaging a single aircraft, and the scene when you do is riveting: tracers curving out from your conning tower toward the approaching plane, its wings stuttering flame, waterspouts snapping the sea in a deadly procession, a flash when your 20mm shells strike home, and a long, smoke-trailing plunge into the sea when the stricken plane goes down. This is heady stuff.

From the control room, you can access every other active station on the U-boat. Consult the charts often.

Dynamix has made sound choices in terms of modeling the complex, touchy physics and mechanics of running a U-boat. The fussy business of maintaining trim is handled by the computer, and tactics are plotted on an animated chart (time-scale is adjustable) which shows the relative positions of sub and convoy, their speed and course, and the path of launched torpedoes. No such visual aid was available to real U-boat skippers, of course, but its inclusion makes the game playable without recourse to complicated and highly technical procedures that took months of training to master in real life.

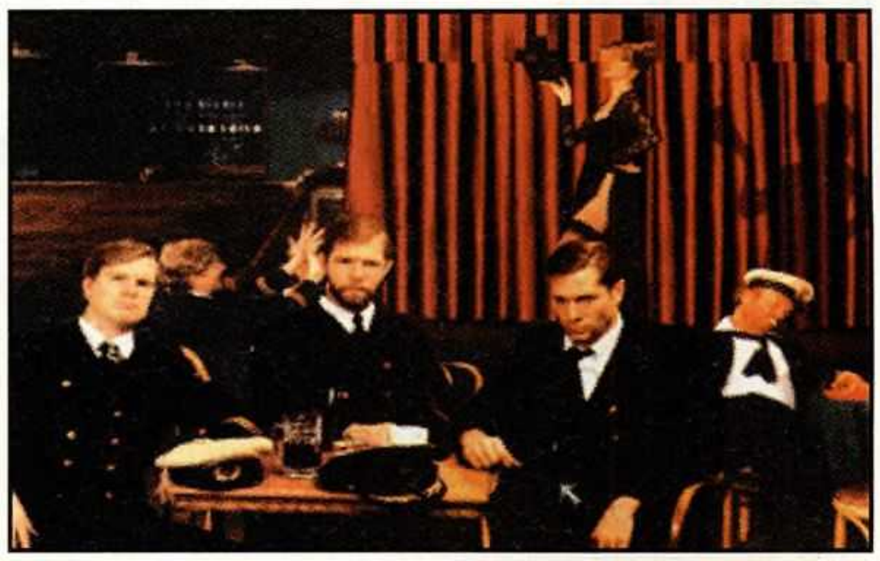
If you get good enough to seek maximum authenticity, simply go to the Realism Menu and crank the settings up

to Expert. Dynamix promises that, if you do, you will find "no fuller realism is possible," And I take their word for it, after being humbled time and time again.

Throughout the program, sound has been put to superb use. Your crew, for example, responds to commands in either German or English — your choice. The eerie, nerve-ratcheting "ping" of probing sonar, the throaty "whoosh!" of a launched torpedo, the crisp click-whir of a rising periscope, the terrifying sound of straining plates and popping rivets when your sub exceeds its recommended depth — the soundscape is clean, vivid, and richly atmospheric.

The manual is superb (the norm with Dynamix products), and lavishly illustrated with many rare photos — some of which will be new even to the avid military-history buff.

Graphically, *AOD* is a mixed bag. Some effects are splendid — the wash of spray that films your periscope in rough seas, the heave and swell of waves, the torpedo explosions — but others are surprisingly plain. Enemy surface ships are at times polygonal to a retrograde degree, not nearly as realistic as those found in *Silent Service II* — and that, by PC standards, is an *old* game. Some of the close-up interior graphics are bafflingly coarse, too; it is almost impossible to read the different settings on the engine telegraph.



In between patrols, visit the night club to learn war news, pick up gossip, and to talk shop with your comrades.

Realistic wave action blurs the images in your periscope when the weather is rough. You may actually feel queasy.

I also came to believe that Dynamix may have erred too much on the side of realism in its handling of the final year of the war. Yes, the U-boat casualties were horrendous, but there's little point, from the gamer's side, in setting out on what is almost guaranteed to be a suicide mission. Playing much beyond the spring of 1944 becomes an act of masochism.

I played this sim on two computers: an old 486/33 with a clone soundcard, and a brand-new Pentium with a genuine Sound Blaster. On the 486, fully forty per cent of my missions ended in locked-up screens, loss of mouse control (and swift death when I was rammed or depth charged before the computer could respond to my input), and graphic anomalies such as ghost cursors — not what you'd expect from Dynamix. I don't pretend to know *why* I ran into so many problems, but I know from a number of online messages that I wasn't the only one. It worked fine on the Pentium, though.

These caveats aside, *Aces of the Deep* in its totality provides a gripping experience and honors the brave sailors, on both sides, who fought in the cold and pitiless arena of the North Atlantic.

— *William R. Trotter*

Navigation is a snap — just click to plot each leg of your course.

The Super Boat That Came Too Late

Had the ground war in Europe lasted another six months, there was a real possibility that Admiral Doenitz's U-boat crews might once again have turned the tide in Germany's favor. By the spring of 1945, a new and extremely advanced model of U-boat was starting to enter service.

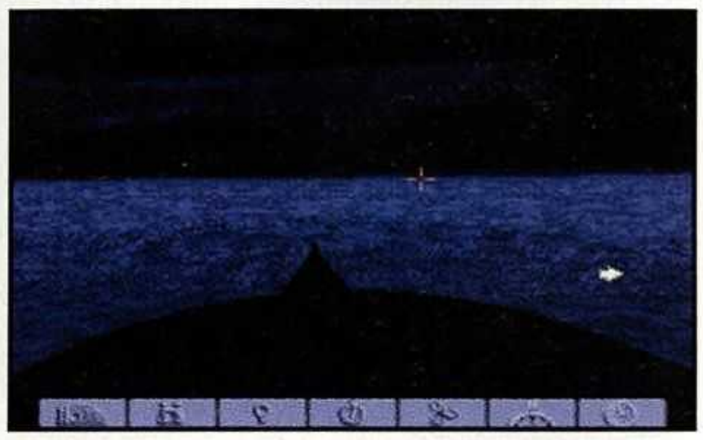
Designated the Type XXI-C, these submarines took full advantage of the latest technology. They were constructed from eight pre-fabricated modules, so the finished boats could be launched from distant Norwegian bases, where they were relatively safe from Allied bombing. They mounted an improved "schnorkel" device that enabled their batteries to recharge while they were submerged, and Allied radars weren't sensitive enough to pick up the tiny blips given-off by the schnorkels.

Their cruising radius was an amazing 11,000 miles, and when running on their diesels, they attained a speed of 16 knots — fast enough to outrun many escort vessels. Even rigged for silent running, they could still make 5.5 knots underwater.

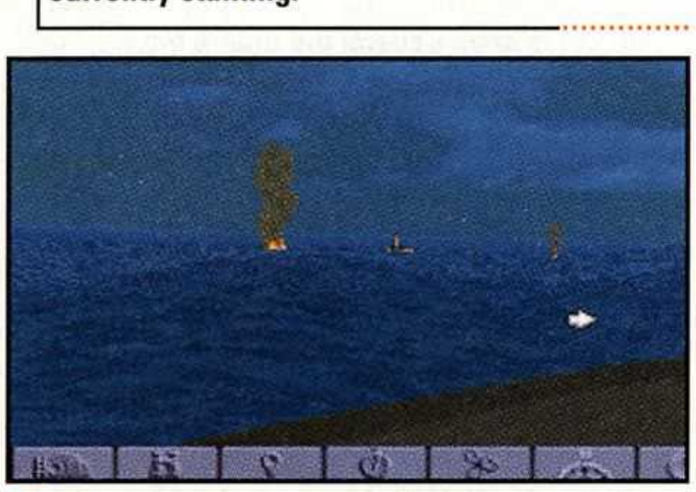
Eighteen torpedo tubes were carried: six on the bow and a dozen amidships, just forward of the conning tower, which discharged their missiles at an ideal offset angle of 30 degrees. And they were armed with the latest and deadliest homing torpedoes.

If by some chance a Type XXI-C did get jumped by an Allied aircraft, it stood a fair chance of surviving a shoot-out, since the boats were also armed with two twin-mount 30mm turrets whose weapons were both fully automated and radar-controlled.

A handful of these super-ships did get to sea in the final weeks of the war, and although they didn't sink a huge number of ships, they otherwise performed very much as their designers had intended. Had sufficient numbers of them been available, the war's outcome might have been very different.



The view from the bridge at night: Orange cross hairs denote the convoy ship you're currently stalking.



Ah-hah! A burning convoy! A sight to gladden the Fuehrer's heart!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

82%

HIGHS: When everything works right, *AOD* is dramatic and convincing.

LOWS: Everything might not work right all the time; In places, the graphics are disappointing.

BOTTOM LINE: *Aces of the Deep* is a worthy, ambitious, and detailed submarine simulation.

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U.S. Navy Fighters

CD-ROM

Category: Flight simulation

Developer: Electronic Arts

Publisher: Electronic Arts, PO Box 7875, San Mateo, CA 94403-7578 (415) 571-7171

Required	We Recommend
486DX/25MHz (320x200); DOS 5.0 or higher; 4MB RAM; Single-speed CD-ROM drive; Microsoft Mouse; 5 MB hard-drive installation.	486DX2/66MHz (640x480); Pentium (800x600); Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Sound card; 17MB hard-drive installation.

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Think you can just jump into a carrier jet and go for a joyride? Here's a sim that'll set you straight in a hurry.

The roar is deafening as the single engine spools up to full power. The deck crew scurries away from your plane as you watch the cat boss for his signal to go. All of a sudden it dawns on you; strange canopy, old analog instruments, odd engine note — you're in an old F-104 Starfighter! Your mind quickly searches its dim recesses. What was that about the Starfighter having one of the longest takeoff rolls of any jet in history? You begin to bang on the canopy, but too late: The catapult has already released, and you're hurtling down the deck. You go vainly to full afterburners, but a slight rise in pitch of the already screaming J57 is the last thing anyone hears before the Starfighter does a header into the dark, deep ocean.

Some way to start a game, huh? You should have probably gone with the Tomcat after all. Okay, so historical accuracy isn't the strongest suit of *U.S. Navy Fighters*. But this is still one hot flight sim — assuming you've got the horsepower to run it. More on that later.

If you've ever wanted to get into the minutiae of carrier flight duty, this sim should satisfy your every wish. From the moment you set foot on the deck, you're immersed in the intense world of naval aviation, from the sink-or-swim approach to basic training to the complex missions that are the meat and potatoes of carrier duty. This is not a flight simulation for the casual player: Real success in *U.S. Navy Fighters* entails a rather steep learning curve. Sure, you can pretty much hop into the cockpit and go Flanker hunting, but you'll probably be nailed before you can get off a shot. Even those with a lot of flight sim experience may find the going a little tough at the outset, mostly because of the attention paid to the subtleties of carrier regulations and procedures, and the depth to which the game designers have gone into the intricacies of flight envelopes and aircraft management. It is, in other words, not a seat-of-your-pants flying experience.

The extensive database is carried over to mission mapping which provide info on all waypoints, any refueling rendezvous, and contingency planning.

The briefing room scenes provide a substantial taste of carrier ops. You might just learn a little more about your mission if you listen carefully.

Each mission is laid out for you in almost obsessive detail, just as in real carrier operations. Take notes, please.

Once you've got the basics down and begin to play a campaign, you'll be further treated to some nice video sequences showing mission planning and flight briefings.

From there you go to the flight deck, where you pick the best plane for the particular mission and arm it appropriately. The game will give suggestions, but you can override them if you like. Aircraft selection for the individual missions is one area where I'm a bit puzzled as to the choices offered. You've got the usual Tomcat and Hornet, along with the A-7 Corsair, the not-yet-operational F-22, and (oddly enough) a Russian Sukhoi Su-33 Flanker. But why the aforementioned Starfighter? Considering that the F-104 never even came close to being a naval fighter, it's an odd choice. If the designers wanted to offer the choice of an obscenely fast, eminently dangerous fighter from the 1950's, why didn't they choose something like the Chance Vought Cutlass or the

In the higher resolution modes you can fly sans cockpit. The view's much better, but it does diminish the realism factor considerably.

Douglas Skyray — both actual naval fighters from the 50's and every bit as controversial as the Starfighter?

Once you're in the air, though, you'll quickly forget these minor complaints — if your computer is fast enough to take advantage of the game's breathtaking SVGA modes of 640X480, 800X600, and even 1024X768. To run in anything over 640X480, though, you'd better have a Pentium. And when I say Pentium, I don't mean the 60MHz or 66MHz variety: This sim requires all the processing power of a 90MHz *with* a fast video card. Any less, and the flight animation is too choppy to enjoy. You can run it in VGA mode, too, but at that res it really doesn't look all that special.

But for those with the power to play it right, this is a nice simulation, with smooth handling and more cockpit information than you'll probably ever need. The HUD (Heads Up Display) is fairly easy to read and gives you plenty of info, but if you need more you can activate windows that reside in the screen's corners.

The overall view from the cockpit is great, aided by 360-degree viewing. There's no fussing with function keys to get those side and rear views that are never much help. Just hold down a cursor key and you see a full, scrolling vista, all around and above you. So no more excuses about losing a bogie in your blind spot!

The sim does a good job of taking into account the gross and subtle differences between the various aircraft available. And that's a good thing, because what sets *U.S. Navy Fighters* apart is its emphasis on the details of carrier operation, and especially carrier landings. Other sims have covered the same territory, but few if any have come close to conveying the overwhelming task of setting an airplane down on a tiny carrier deck. You'll come away from this sim with a new appreciation for the skill involved in making a perfect "3 wire" landing. I particularly liked the communications from the LSO (Landing Systems Officer), who's the difference between you having a hot cup of joe in the officers mess and a rather colder and much more final drink 150 fathoms lower.

If you don't have that Pentium 90, you might want to hold off on this one; it excels only when allowed to show all its strengths at once. Factor in a very fast Pentium, though, and you've got a very good sim, beautiful to look at, with an emphasis on strict procedures and regulations. It's as accurate a representation of the skill and nerve required to be a navy-fighter pilot as you're likely to find. You can't just jump in and fly with any great success, but if you're willing to put in the extra effort, you'll be amply rewarded.

—Gary Meredith

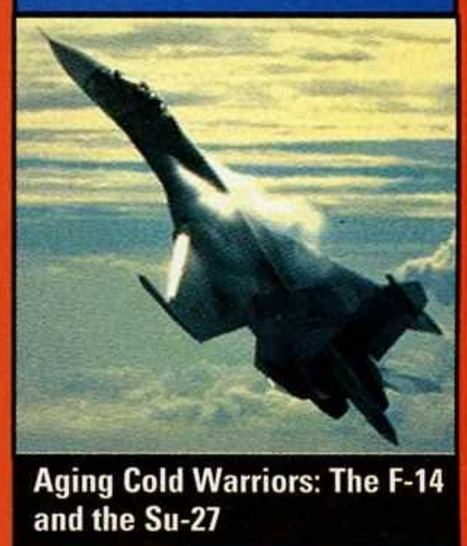
Okay, so a defenseless freighter is not much of a challenge for a really hot fighter jock — but everyone's got to start somewhere, right?.

The Jet Fighters: Past, Present...and Future?

For many it's hard to believe the Cold War is over, since so many relics from it continue to ply the skies. In fact it was the Cold War, along with the Korean War, that did so much to advance aviation technology after World War II. In 1950, many Air Force and Navy units still relied on piston-engined Mustangs and Corsairs for frontline duty. But once the aerial dueling was taken over by F-86 Sabres and MiG-15s, jet-fighter development began to soar. The 50's were the halcyon days of jet development, with a seemingly endless stream of new fighters coming on-line in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. It may surprise many the what remain the fastest jet aircraft of all time, the Lockheed SR-71/YF-12 Blackbird and the MiG-25 Foxbat, were products of the 50's.

In contrast, new fighters appear much less frequently these days. The mainstays of America's arsenal, the F-14, F-15, F-16, and F/A-18, were all designed in the late 60's or early 70's — and up until recently, no successor was forthcoming. That may have changed with the Lockheed F-22 Lightning II, if it can keep it's funding and escape the bureaucratic bungling the plagued its supposedly all-purpose predecessor, the TFX, which ultimately became the bloated, mediocre F-111. On the other side of the equation, it remains to be seen whether a new and cash-poor Russia can continue to develop and support the outstanding MiG-29 Fulcrum.

Icons from the Golden Years: The F-104 and the MiG-21



Aging Cold Warriors: The F-14 and the Su-27

The Future: An Unknown Quantity vs A Proven Commodity — the F-22 Lightning II and the MiG-29 Fulcrum.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

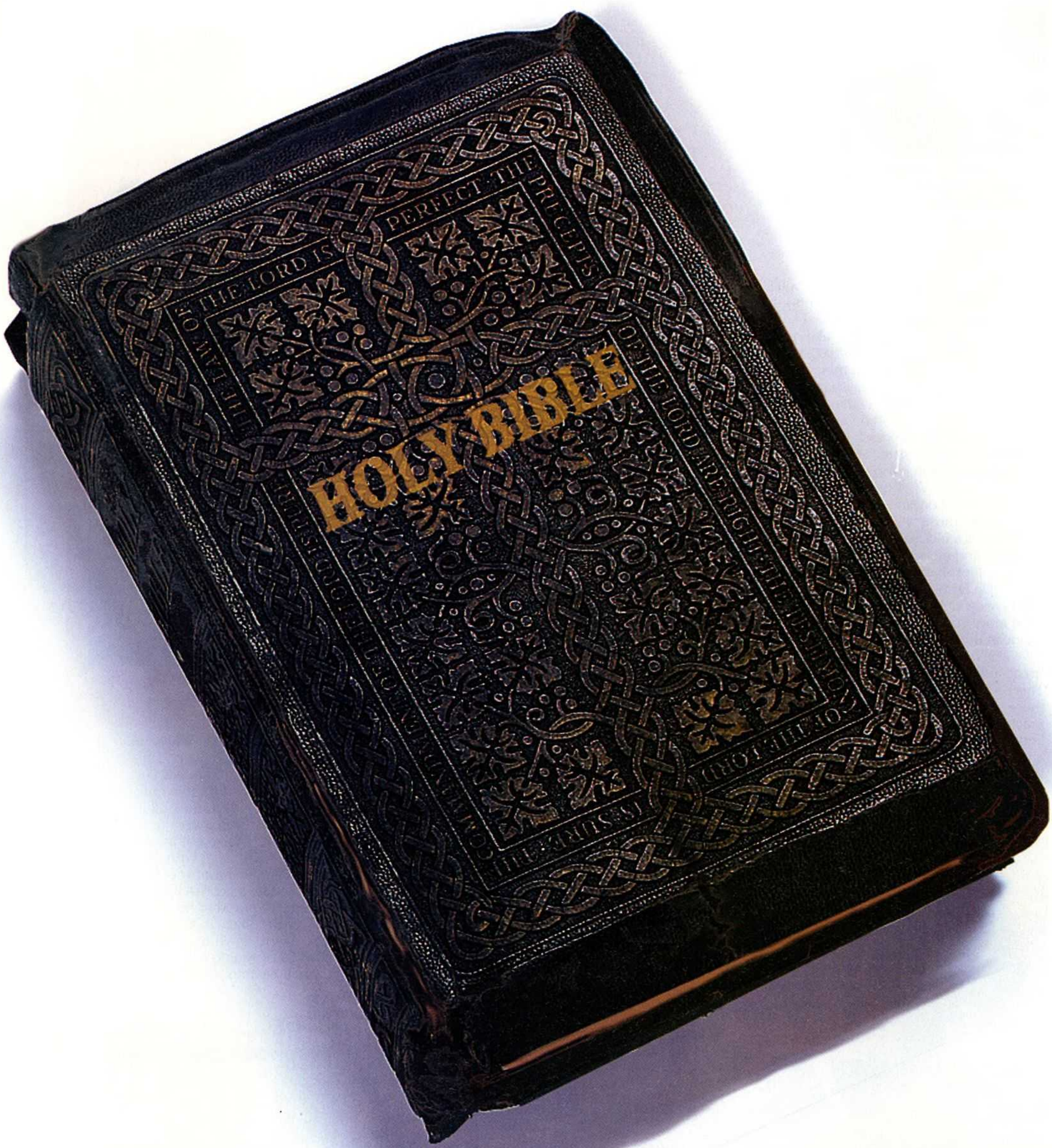
82%

HIGHS: Great attention to the details of naval flight operations.

LOWS: A couple of minor techno-gaffes, plus a dire need for the fastest CPU in existence.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got the horses, this sim will show you what being a naval aviator is *really* all about.

This is a Bible.



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Product Information Number 111

One Must Fall: 2097

Category: Arcade

Developer: Diversions Entertainment

Publisher: Epic MegaGames, 10406 Holbrook Drive, Potomac, MD 20854 (301) 983-9771

Required	We Recommend
386SX; 4MB RAM; 20MB hard-drive space	486/33; Supported sound cards; Gravis GamePad(s)

M.S.R.P.: $39.00

Like I always tell my opponents, if you'll join me in the ring, I might let you wash and wax my 'bot when we're done!

I have a confession to make: *One Must Fall* really surprised me. Even before I had finished installing the game, I'd just about convinced myself this would be a huge waste of time. Because with the notable exception of *Mortal Kombat*, fighting games just don't work on the PC. Why should this one be any different? Why bother?

Yet just as I prepared myself for the worst, I found that *One Must Fall* wasn't quite what I expected. Not at all. I'd seen a little bit of the shareware version (though I didn't play it), and thought the graphics were uninspired. The robots seemed kind of blocky, unrefined, and even unappealing — definitely not the sort of thing you'd expect to find in a 21st century fighting arena, and certainly not something I wanted to play.

Just a few minutes into the game, though, I'd completely overcome my initial dislike of the graphics. After all, my character was moving smoothly, responding quickly through a wide range of movements, and tearing up the competition. After a half-dozen rounds, I was hooked.

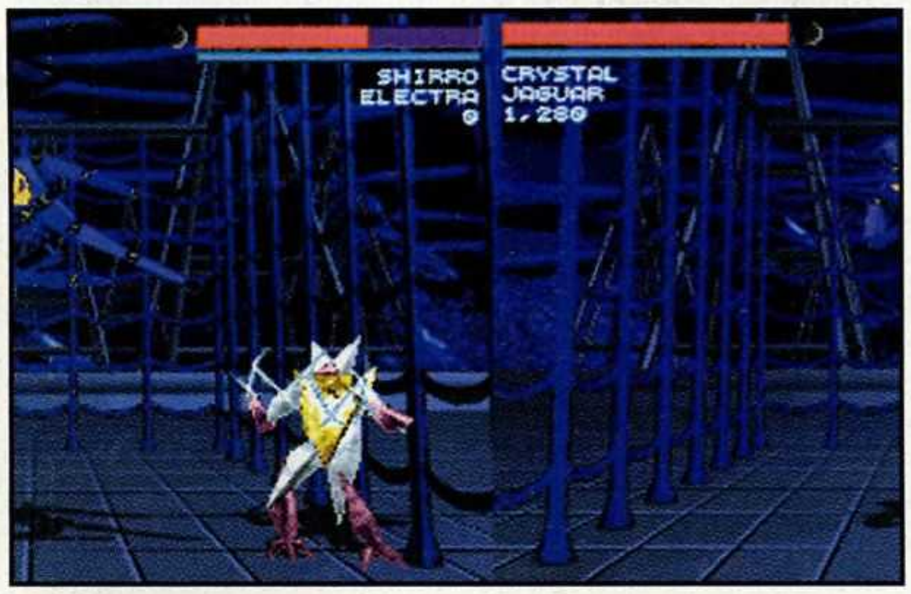
The designers no doubt studied what makes arcade fighting games successful, since they chose to give each of the ten robots in *OMF* different strengths, weaknesses, and agility levels, ensuring a unique battle just about every time you fight. Combine that with seven basic punches, seven basic kicks, and four special moves, and you've got the makings for a great game. The icing on the cake is the easy configuration of up to two Gravis-style gamepads (you will use a gamepad, right?).

The tournament screen is full of options, from training courses and upgrades on your 'bot all the way down to the color of it's eyes.

If you just want a quick round of fighting, it as easy as selecting one- or two-player mode, choosing one of the ten characters provided, then a battle 'bot. No elaborate cutscreens to bypass, and no laborious loadtimes. Once in the ring, the bloodless clanking and crashing of the robots, coupled with the subdued dance-music soundtrack, gives the game a unique atmosphere that's upbeat and entertaining.

When playing in one or two player mode you'll choose your character from this selection screen.

But the real action of *OMF* starts in the tournament mode, where four different tourneys have been included to let you "test your metal." Starting with limited funds and Jaguar armor, you'll need to win the purse just about every time, pooling money to repair, upgrade, or trade your 'bot, if you hope to win a title. How you spend your winnings introduces a nice little strategic element to the game, and adds some meaning to your struggles.



A Jaguar takes a flying kick at an Electra.

Between rounds, the anime-looking characters will exchange odd insults with you ("You may wash my 'bot when I've beaten you!"), and a newscaster comes on to show highlights of the match. There's a distinctly Japanese feel to these sections, and they can get tiresome after a few rounds. But you can skip through all of it if you want.

The quality of action in *One Must Fall* is the real star of the game, though, and it really goes a long way toward making up for any graphic shortcomings. But to get the most out of the game, I'd recommend at *least* a 486/66; it's a bit sluggish even on a 486/33. So if you've felt the need for a little computer combat, *OMF* might be just what you've been looking for.

— Todd Vaughn

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

84%

HIGHS: Excellent moves and variety. Just the thing for bloodless carnage.

LOWS: Repetitive commentary following each bout; The graphics aren't particularly exciting.

BOTTOM LINE: Grab your gamepad and buy yourself some band-aids, because your thumbs are gonna get sore!

NCAA: Road to the Final Four

Category: Sports Simulation

Developer: ADI Development

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks, 1370 Piccard Drive, Rockville, MD 20850-4304 (301) 926-8300

Required	We Recommend
386SX\16Mhz; 2MB RAM; 8MB hard-drive space; MS-DOS 4.01 or later; VGA	486; 4MB RAM; SVGA; Supported sound cards

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Looking for a decent hoops sim? Well, it ain't perfect, but *Road to the Final Four 2* is easily the best game in town.

Winter can be a quiet season for fans of computer sports simulations. While football and baseball are well represented with good sims, both seasons are past, leaving only hockey and basketball. Hockey is also well represented sim-wise, but when it comes to roundball, fans have been left out in the cold. There just haven't been any good basketball sims — until now. *Road to the Final Four 2* fills that void, bringing that glorious March Madness of the NCAA college basketball tournament to your computer.

Road to the Final Four 2 is a fast break ahead of any other PC basketball sims to hit the market. This game has it all: digitized players, rotating camera angles, real college teams and players, and the excitement of tournament play. Marred only by a clumsy coaching interface and a few bothersome bugs, this new version of the original *Road to the Final Four 2* is definitely a keeper.

Here you can change the rules, start a tournament, or play a single game.

You get the entire 64-team NCAA tournament field — from the Arkansas Razorbacks to the Liberty Flames — for the 1991, 1992, and 1993 seasons. You can play exhibitions or head straight into the tournament, and you can go with the historic seedings or set them randomly to shake things up a bit. The result is very a satisfying taste of college basketball.

The digitized players look good — both of them. See, there's one Black guy and one white guy. At various heights, these two represent every player in the NCAA tournament. That shortcut doesn't really detract from the game, though, and the players are effective in action. Too bad their animation is not of the same quality. You can play in SVGA or VGA, but even at its fastest, the action is still a bit choppy. And while the players run downcourt, the referee seems to do the Michael Jackson moonwalk as he follows them.

I guess Terry and the ball are having relationship trouble.

There are two ways to play *Road to the Final Four*: Arcade mode, and Coaching mode. In the arcade mode, you can choose who shoots and when, and the controls are pretty easy to learn. The revolving camera angles can be disorienting, but most players will want to take over on the court — especially after your 7-foot center makes a couple of three-pointers. I think arcade mode is the most enjoyable way to go. It's exciting, and effective enough to help mask the game's other flaws.

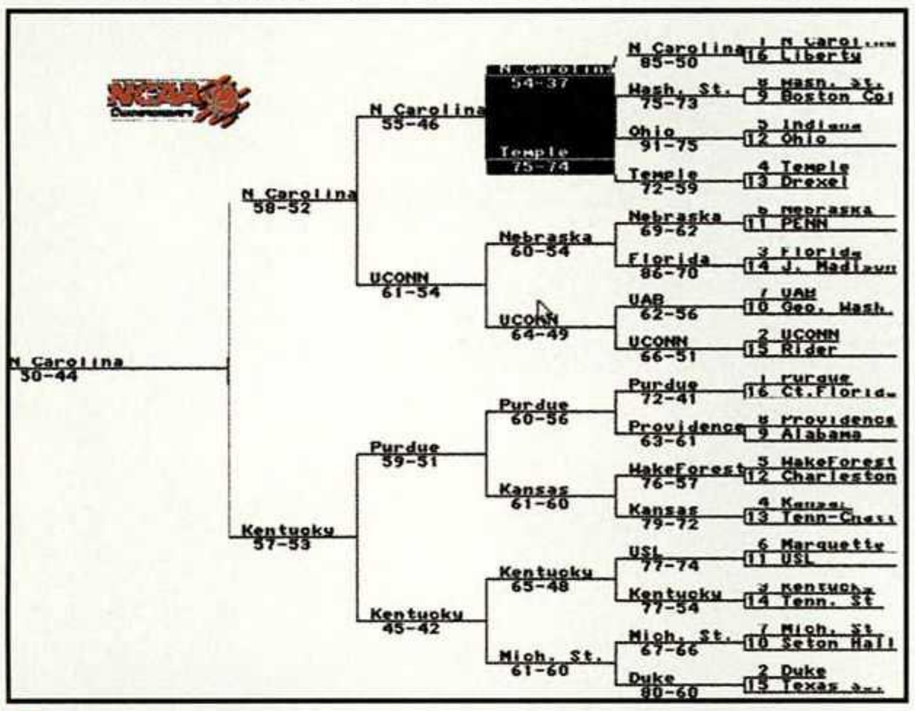
In the coaching mode, you can let the players have free rein while you set the offensive and defensive plays. The game doesn't make it easy, though — especially on offense. To call a play, you have to hit one key to bring up the play menu, then scroll down to pick the play. All this while your players are pushing the ball up court. By the time you finish selecting, the play may be over — and you've missed it. There's got to be a better way to handle play-calling! On the other hand, player substitution is very easy. Fatigue is shown as a bar for each player in the main game screen. When players get tired and their effectiveness begins to decline, just go to the coaching screen and get some subs off the bench.

The jump-shooter should remind his teammates about offensive rebounding. These guys are already headed down court!

Road to the Final Four 2 is a fast break ahead of any other PC basketball sims. This game has it all: digitized players, rotating camera angles, real college teams and players, and tournament play.

Aside from its cumbersome interface, the play-calling is a bit limited. On defense, you can play man-to-man, three zones, double team, play tight or loose, or foul immediately. That's OK. But on offense, you're limited to a scant few plays: pick and roll, give and go, and fast break. You can't stress the inside play, or the passing game, and you can't order a three-point shot or identify a "go to" guy. Coaching is a huge factor in the college game, and *Road to the Final Four 2* just doesn't give you the feeling that you're in charge. This feels more like the NBA, where it seems strategy is sometimes limited to making substitutions.

Actual gameplay is quite nice. For the most part, the players act as they should — crashing the boards after missed shots, moving to the right spot on defense, and finding the open man for a pass. There's also a good variety of shots, from tomahawk dunks and finger rolls to short and long jump shots. Everyone seems to have the same repertoire of shots, though, and in coaching mode the players don't pass the ball often, resulting in far too much one-on-one play. You can solve that problem easily by opting for arcade mode.



Watch your team advance toward the Final Four using this chart.

Despite The VoxFX multi-layered sound bragged about on the box, the sound effects are pretty thin, and don't add much to the atmosphere of the game. You hear the squeak of shoes, dribbling that sounds like machine-gun fire, and an occasional "come on, come on!" from the players. Crowd noise, which pumps a lot of excitement into college basketball, is reduced to an indistinct roar. It's all very ordinary.

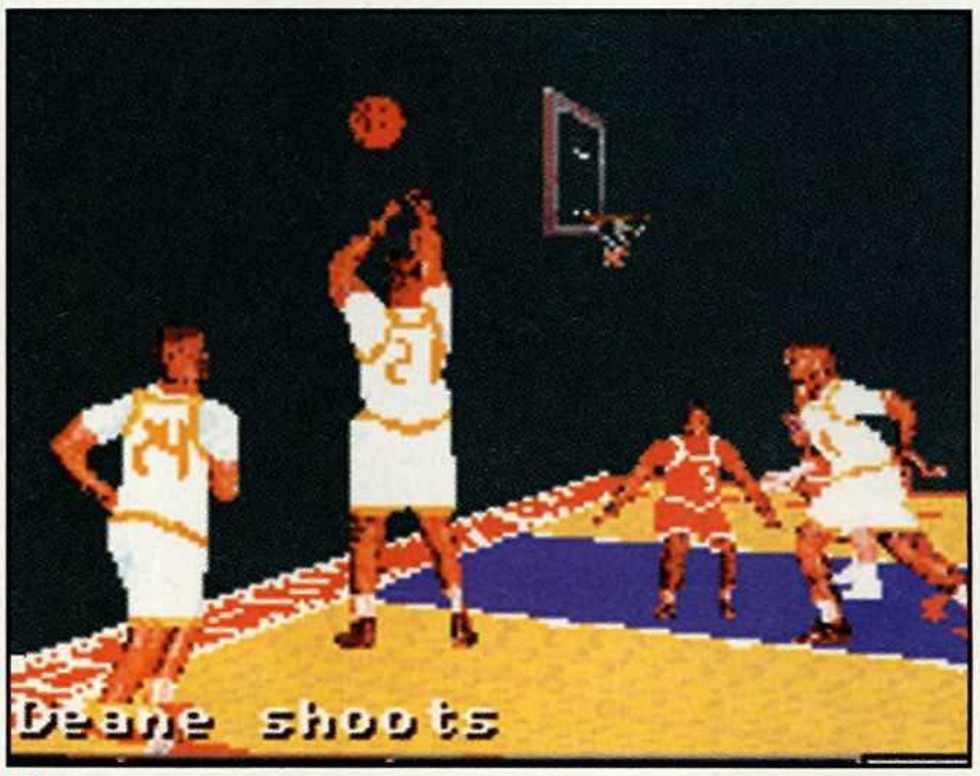
The game keeps track of some bare-bone statistics, both for single games and overall play. While stats-keeping certainly isn't the game's strong suit, *Road to the Final Four 2* provides enough numbers to satisfy all but the most stats-crazy players.

It's the tournament play, naturally, that makes *Road to the Final Four 2* truly worthwhile. The games which you decide not to coach are simulated automatically — and very quickly. And the results in both simulated and coached games, are thankfully realistic. Top-seeded teams usually go deep into the tournament, but there are enough upsets to keep things interesting.

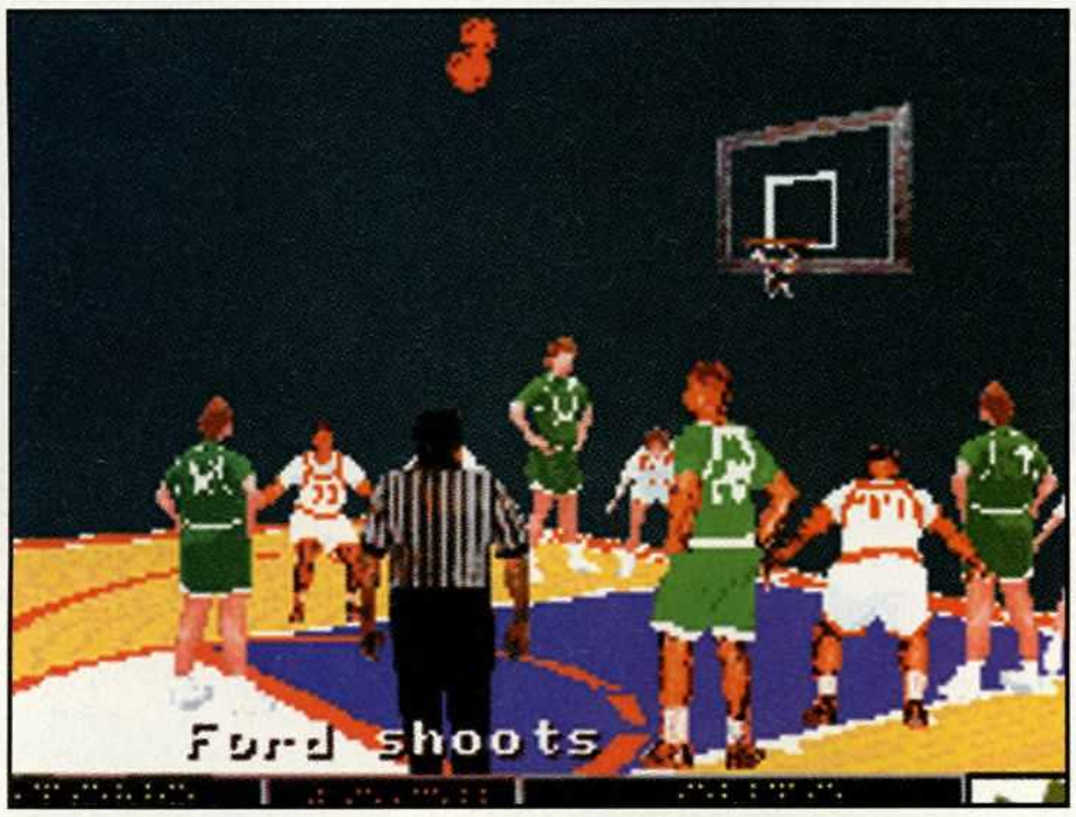
Like most sports sim I've played recently, *Road to the Final Four 2* — at least the first version — had enough bugs to start an ant farm. The interface — clumsy to begin with — often gets reversed, so that `yes' means `no' and `no' means `yes' in several menu prompts. Statistics sometimes get corrupted, too, making boxscores and statistical listings suspect.

Let's hope these frustrating flaws are fixed quickly. When they are, *Road to the Final Four 2* should have the basketball sim market all to itself. Come to think of it, it already does; this is one sport, at least, where the cartridge games still have an edge over PC sims. My wish list: Give me season and conference play, top-20 rankings, better stats, and smoother animation. While I'm waiting, though, I'll be playing *Road to the Final Four*.

—Lee Buchanan



He shoots...but it don't look like he's gonna score. He can get his own rebound, though, since all players have the same face.



You've gotta make the free-throws to last long in the tournament.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Three seasons of NCAA tournament fields; handsome graphics and exciting action.

LOWS: Choppy animation; awkward coaching interface.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've been waiting for a good basketball sim, *Road to the Final Four 2* is definitely worth a look.

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Product Information Number 89

Cyclemania

CD-ROM

Category: Sports/Action Game

Developer: Compro Games

Publisher: Accolade, Inc.; 5300 Steven's Creek Boulevard, San Jose, CA 95129 (408) 985-1700

Required	We Recommend
386DX\33MHz or better; Double-speed CD-ROM Drive; 4MB RAM; 1.5MB hard-drive space, SVGA.	486DX\33MHz or better; Analog joystick.

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

Accolade's new super-bike game starts with a great concept, but it doesn't quite have the muscle to carry the race.

Accolade's *Cyclemania* is one of those Marlon Brando, *On the Waterfront* games — it coulda been a contender, if only someone had looked out for it better.

The basic concept is great — a motorcycle racing game played against a backdrop of full-motion video. It's something that could only have been done on CD-ROM, so it's an idea whose time has definitely come.

Unfortunately, the game's execution isn't quite up to the concept behind it. In full-screen mode, the graphics suffer from an advanced case of the jaggies; an oncoming car or truck is just a blob of color until it's right on top of you, and a tight group of motorcycles is one big cluster of random pixels even as you try to pick your way between the bikes.

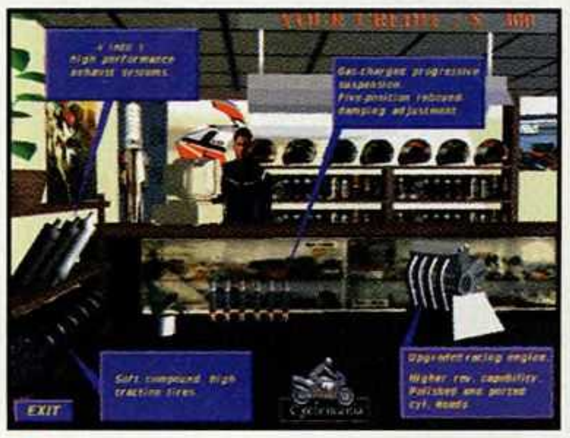
Cyclemania's biggest selling point is that the races take place on real roads, videotaped and digitized as full-motion video. But at standard VGA resolution, the tracks just look like reasonably good computer-generated art. It's only in the hi-res, Super VGA mode that the scenery begins to look photo-realistic. And the tracks *do* look good at this resolution — the one called "Forest Shadows" is especially nice, as you zip in and out of the shade on a wooded mountain road.

Problem is, the only way to view the tracks in SVGA is to choose the "overhead radar" screen, which gives you a map of the track and a quarter-screen view of the action. The map is certainly useful, but the small size of the race window cancels out the added quality of the graphics. The game could have been really impressive if there were an option for a full-screen SVGA view — a fast 486 machine or a Pentium should have plenty of muscle for that — but for some reason, the designers chose to leave that out.

In Super VGA, the full-motion tracks look a lot better, but the action window is so small you'll think you're playing on a GameBoy.

That's not the only disappointing design decision that shows up in *Cyclemania*. There's also the bizarre perspective, apparently borrowed from the arcade games of yesteryear. The game starts out with a first-person point-of-view, looking out over the gauges and handlebars of your monster bike — but who's that just ahead of you? It's you, on your cycle!

What? Are you going so fast you can see yourself from behind? This kind of perspective is a throwback to arcade games like *Pole Position* and *Turbo*. The difference is that those games put the player behind and slightly *above* the vehicle they were driving, so they could see what was in the road ahead of them. *Cyclemania* puts you directly behind your motorcycle, so you're actually blocking your own view of the track. That makes it really tough to avoid a crash as you try to work your way through the pack, and if an opponent manages to get his bike just behind yours, you can't even see what you're doing.



With a couple of wins under your belt, you can afford to customize your ride at the cycle shop.

The game isn't completely devoid of good qualities, though. The track graphics *are* nice in the high-resolution mode, even as small as they are. The cows and horses you'll occasionally have to dodge are good for a laugh, and an option to improve your cycle at the performance shop keeps things interesting. There's also digitized video footage of some of the worst motorcycle wipeouts in history, played every time you crash — but these scenes don't have much connection to the actual race, and they're repetitive enough that you'll probably end up turning them off.

Ultimately, *Cyclemania* isn't terrible, but it's less notable as a game than as an indication of what *could* be done with full-motion video in a racing game — and a reason to look forward to the next attempt.

—Dan Bennett

At standard VGA resolution, there's a whole lot of pixels going on — the motorcycles and riders are just too blocky to do justice to the digitized video backgrounds.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

66%

HIGHS: Full-motion video backgrounds look pretty sharp in high resolution mode.

LOWS: The graphics are blocky in full-screen mode, and the odd perspective can be frustrating.

BOTTOM LINE: *Cyclemania*'s nifty backgrounds just aren't enough to make up for mediocre gameplay.

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Product Information Number 85

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AMERICAN™ LASER GAMES, INC

Crime Patrol CD-ROM

Category: Shooting game

Developer: American Laser Games

Publisher: American Laser Games, 4801 Lincoln Road NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109 (505) 880-1718

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 286/12Mhz; DOS 3.3 or later; Supported Sound Cards; VGA; Mouse	Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 386/33Mhz

M.S.R.P.: $59.95

American Laser games does one thing: live-action shoot-'em-ups. The company's titles are popular in the arcades, where players blast the bad guys from afar, using a light pistol. But in the PC versions of their games — including the latest, *Crime Patrol* — you do your dirty work with your mouse, clicking it occasionally near the bottom of the screen to reload.

Basically, *Crime Patrol* has you playing as a rookie cop, showing your prowess and earning promotions by shooting criminals at crime scenes. The action can get pretty heavy, especially as you work your way up the *Crime Patrol* ladder, and there are usually dim-witted bystanders all over the place to make your job even tougher. You watch what's going on in the scene, blasting gunmen as they pop out before they get the chance to blast you.

In a game like this, the quality of video (full-screen video, mind you) is important — especially when you're expected to spot perpetrators far off in the distance. And while the video in *Crime Patrol* isn't the laserdisc-quality you get in the arcades, it looks pretty good. A lot of this is due to the fact that *Crime Patrol* features plenty of bright, well-lit locales; other ALG titles, such as *Who Shot Johnny Rock*, were so dim as to be almost unplayable. The sound and music are good too, by the way, but in a sort of B-movie way.

***Crime Patrol* is full of fun stunts, like this exploding trailer home/drug lab.**

Crime Patrol is one of those watch the screen, move your cursor affairs, so don't expect a lot of interaction. But it is good, mindless fun, entirely competent if not inspired. And if that's the kind of game you're looking for, I say give it a shot. No pun intended.

— Matt Firme

It all boils down to this: Spot the bad guys and blast 'em before they blast you. And don't get distracted by the stage show!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

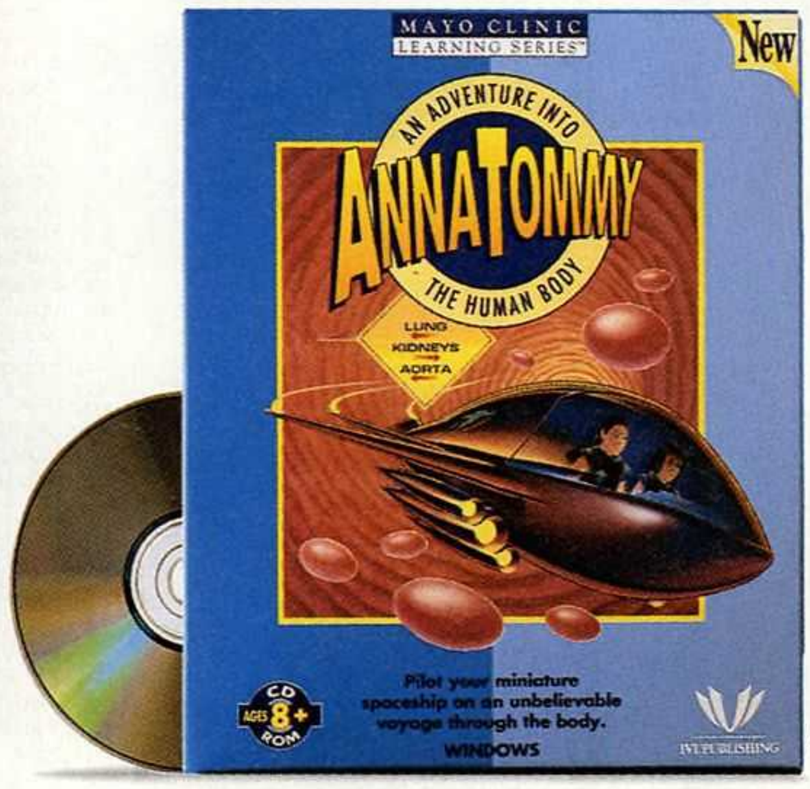
78%

HIGHS: Nice, bright video; Good B-movie soundtrack

LOWS: Some truly cheesy acting; Low on interaction.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the best titles from American Laser Games, and a fun arcade romp. Don't expect a lot of strategy, though....

ONE WRONG TURN AND YOU COULD BE LUNCH.



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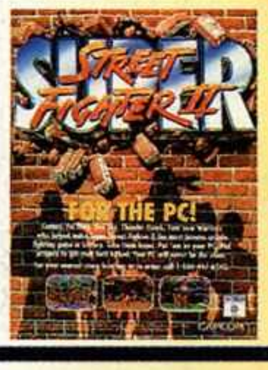

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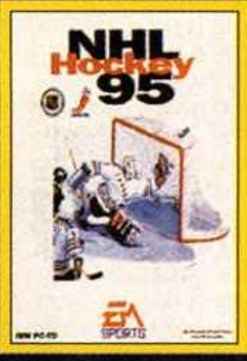

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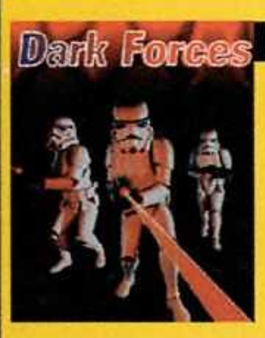

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A Full House

Most CD-ROM programs are like big old English estates. Some small family moves in and occupies the West Wing of Mistwood, while the rest of the house gets draftier and dustier. Why not put some of that space to use? If we're going to have these big mansions of storage media, just brimming with potential, I say move bigger families into them. Bring on the grandparents, the sisters, the cousins, and the aunts.

In the past, I've asked for CD-ROM software that delves more deeply into its subject matter. This month, I've been looking at three programs that do a good job of really digging into their topics, filling the old homeplace with a little more sunshine and human activity. Marketed as series, the first package offers a collection of reading primers on one CD-ROM; the second offers a series of several CD-ROMs on art history; and the third offers a series of simple but gorgeous puzzles in three separate volumes.

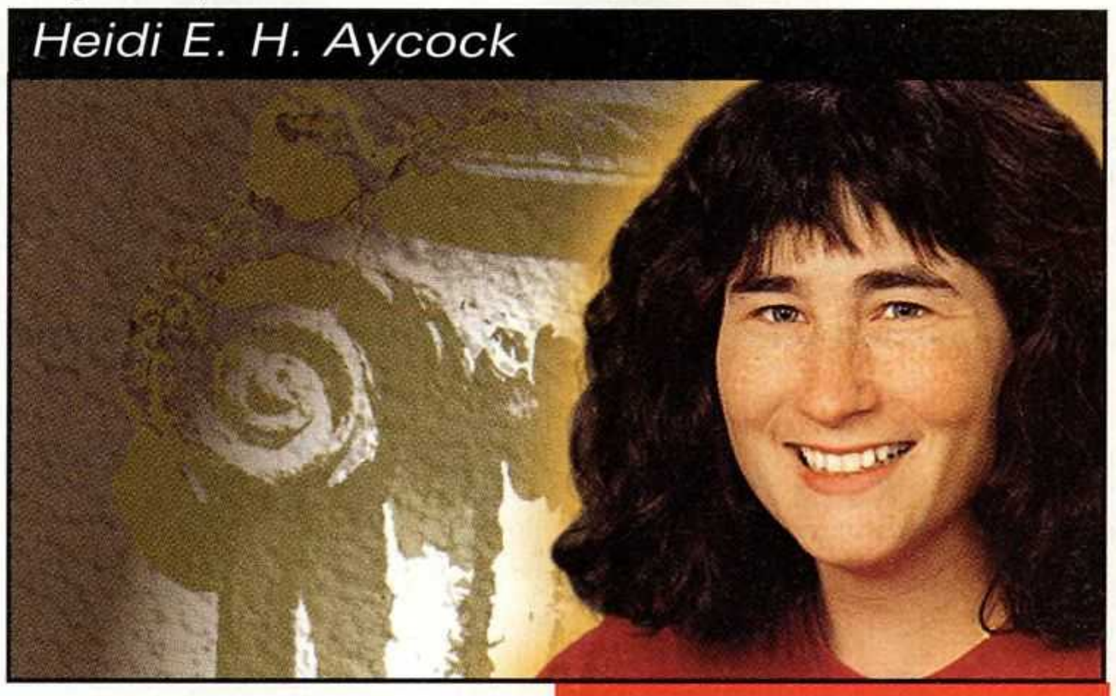
Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey

The Learning Company says their new release includes everything you need to teach your kids to read. Certainly Sam the Lion finds everything he needs, as he travels with Reader Rabbit down the old Reading Road. Along the way, they find various kinds of exercises, including word-recognition drills, phonics practice, and hidden items associated with featured letters. The program wraps these exercises in a friendly, colorful landscape.

The program revolves around 40 electronic reading primers, and the reading exercises are closely related to these stories. You can hear them read aloud, or switch off that feature and read the text to yourself. The package also includes printed versions of the books — a nice touch, and quite helpful.

In *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey*, new readers click on objects whose names start with featured letters — like tiger tails and turtle shells in T Land.

Heidi E. H. Aycock



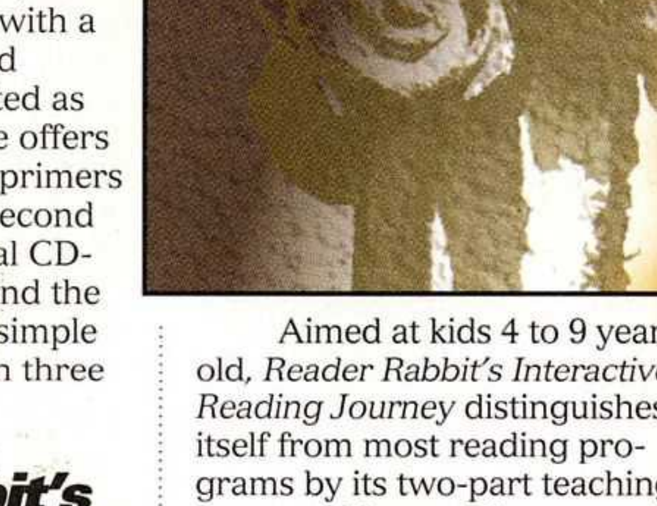
Aimed at kids 4 to 9 years old, *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey* distinguishes itself from most reading programs by its two-part teaching strategy. Most reading programs focus on reading drills — such as word recognition, fill in the blanks, comprehension quizzes, and so on. Otherwise, they engage children in the process of reading without the drills. *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey* combines both approaches and relates them to each other. The drills use words from the books, and, of course, the book uses words practiced in the drills. This double-edged strategy makes the program a more complete teaching tool — assuming you think children need both edges.

Technically, the program works almost flawlessly. The only glitch I found was the dubbed-foreign-film syndrome, where the characters' lips don't quite match what's being said. Otherwise, the program ran error free.

As for educational design, *Interactive Journey* is impressive. The drills are simple enough for any reading-ready child to conquer. They'll be challenged enough to keep learning, but not so challenged that they fail. The books use a few simple words at first, loads of repetition, and gradual addition of new words. The plots even become more entertaining as kids progress to the more challenging texts.

Particularly important in a reading program, the speaking voices are clear and friendly. Children can hear precisely how a word sounds, and each character has a distinct vocal personality. The graphics are also well done, sharply drawn and very colorful. I especially like the way you can click on the black-and-white line drawing illustrations in the reading primer and watch the color flow in. What a nice way to show that you've finished reading a page.

At $99, you should only buy *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey* if your child is truly interested in learning to read — I mean *formally* learning to read. Its value is in its well-designed teaching approach, not in the lyric beauty of the text or the humor of the stories. If you believe your child would learn to read better by exposure to well-written books, a pleasant reading environment, and a warm,



Roc Fish drills players on word recognition while chowing down on some tasty minnows in *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey*. The smaller fish escape through Roc's gills in the end.

World-famous book reader, art historian, and finder of lost things, Heidi Aycock, takes a look at an impressive new reading title, a nice art-history series, and a delightful line of lost-and-found games.

fuzzy feeling about language, this may not be a good value for you; the text of the reading primers will seem contrived and stiff compared to Dr. Seuss or Eric Carle. But to a child who's itching to read and can learn independently, this may be just the thing.

In PowerCD's *History Through Art*, the high quality of the images even tolerate a close-up view of Pointillist George Seurat's paintings.

Power CD: The *History Through Art* Series

Reader Rabbit delves deeper than many reading programs, but if you really want to see depth, check out the PowerCD series. Published by ZCI, some of these packages take up several CD-ROMs — although none is completely packed.

History Through Art, for example, is a nine-disk series. Breaking up civilization's creative tenure into classic ages, such as the Pre-Modern era and the Twentieth Century, the series offers a thorough introduction to art history. I learned more about 19th and 20th century art in a few hours than I had learned in a whole college semester (granted, I paid attention this time).

Each package features a lecture (usually less than 30 minutes), delivered clearly and succinctly. Some people may run away screaming at the mere thought of a lecture, but I found the speaker engaging and the information fascinating.

During the lecture, the program flashes paintings, sculptures, architecture, and photographs. These visual aids are reproduced beautifully, not the least bit grainy or blurred. They are certainly sharp enough to let you compare Pointillist George Seurat's early study of a park scene with his final, smoother version of *Sunday Afternoon on the Grand Jatte*. And the choice of works is quite varied, ranging from very familiar pieces (Vincent Van Gogh's Starry Night, for example) to less well-known pieces (Why Are You Angry by Paul Gauguin, for instance).

Besides following along with the lecture, you can carve your own path through PowerCD's information. You can look up a favorite artist in the index and start accessing images and related texts as they grab your interest. Those related texts include information about science, history, literature, and philosophy.

Although the program cries out to be explored, I found the interface tough to master, and the Help feature wasn't very useful. It's hard to grasp the overall structure of the thing, although after some time spent studying the interface — rather than the content — I found my way. Still, interfaces should be more transparent and friendly than this one.

Despite the complexity of the interface, *History Through Art* is a very satisfying presentation on an interesting topic. The information sheds light on the artists, the times and events that shaped their works, their techniques, and their influence on the future. For people 13 years old or older, who like art — or just like to learn for learning's sake — this series is a good choice.

The game screens in *Lost and Found* are colorful, sharp, and intricate photographs of everyday items.

Lost and Found

On a very different note, GTE has released a series of games called *Lost and Found*. Each of the three volumes is packaged separately, but they all run under the same engine. Compared to *Reader Rabbit's Interactive Reading Journey* and *History Through Art*, *Lost and Found* may seem trivial. But it's beautifully produced and fun to play, so it deserves mention.

The program is a collection of electronic "I Spy" games. Each disc features 12 puzzles — colorful, detailed photographs, jam-packed with magnets, toys, office paraphernalia, and other everyday items. Through rhymes, *Lost and Found* then tells you which items to click on. Sometimes the rhymes are clever, sometimes clumsy. Various characters read these rhymes, with wacky voices and weird accents. Although the puzzles are challenging, most kids will be able to solve them. Younger children may need an older child's help, though, since some clues can be a little tricky.

If you need a hint, there's a flashlight, which highlights a small area of the picture where an object can be found. For a closer look at the puzzle, you can use a magnifying glass to enlarge portions of the picture as you pass over it. The enlarged view sacrifices nothing in visual clarity, by the way, maintaining the high quality of the image. As software gimmicks go, this magnifying glass is a beauty. It's clever and indispensable.

Besides the beautiful presentation of the *Lost and Found* discs, the games offer good replay value because each puzzle has a different set of clues each time you play. In addition to the entertainment value, *Lost and Found* offers some important educational benefits, too, exercising your powers of concentration, observation, and memory.

Because of the beauty of the images, the simplicity of the rules, and multiple possibilities of play, the *Lost and Found* series should hold a child's interest for longer than many more complex programs. Any (or all) of the *Lost and Found* discs would be a good value for any family.

Still Looking for More . . .

More depth. That's what CD-ROM technology should offer to the educational market. These three series show how companies are beginning to capitalize on the mass storage capabilities of CD-ROM, but even they haven't filled their media. Software companies are moving in the right direction, though, down into the details of their topics. But there's more to do. Besides focusing on the quantity and quality of their content, for instance, software developers need to use that disc space to hold more tools for manipulating the content. The more we can get our cyber-hands on the information and feel it, pull and mold it, the better we can learn.

PCG

"The more we can get our cyber-hands on the information and feel it, pull and mold it, the better we can learn from it."

SimCity 2000 Comes to Windows

I admit it: I'm a Windows user. I'm a victim of the Microsoft propaganda machine that says Windows is the ultimate computer environment, despite hard-drive space, memory issues, and those nutty error messages. I fuss with my configurations and tidy my little windows and arrange my icons, and you know what? I love it. I *like* being able to download while I word-process and screen capture. I live to multi-task.

I also love Windows gaming: *Civilization for Windows* and *Empire Deluxe for Windows* are permanent fixtures on my hard-drive. Now they have some new company. *SimCity 2000 for Windows* brings one of my favorite games to my favorite environment, and does so quite effectively.

Check out the hot spots on these maps for information on the Atlantic Campaign.

SC2K is a natural Windows game, since it encourages twiddling here and there while you should be, say, working on spreadsheets or writing game reviews. This is a fairly straight port to Windows, with only a few minor changes. Windows file naming protocols are observed, information windows now stay open once clicked, and multiple windows can stay open at once. You can create a *SimCity* "desktop", but I didn't notice any way to save this as the default.

The best new feature is a fourth zoom level, bringing the view in quite close. This is a particular boon to people with large monitors and high resolutions (such as 800x600 or above). Even at the top resolutions, though, buildings have some jaggies — but overall, everything looks quite clean.

I was a bit bothered that only 256 colors are supported: more or less, and the program will bomb out. I usually run much higher than 256 colors, so I found this an inconvenient and silly exclusion. This is picking nits, though.

***SimCity 2000 for Windows* has a new fourth zoom level to get in really tight on those irritating sims.**

SimCity 2000 for Windows is the *only* way to play *SimCity*.

CD-ROM Mania!

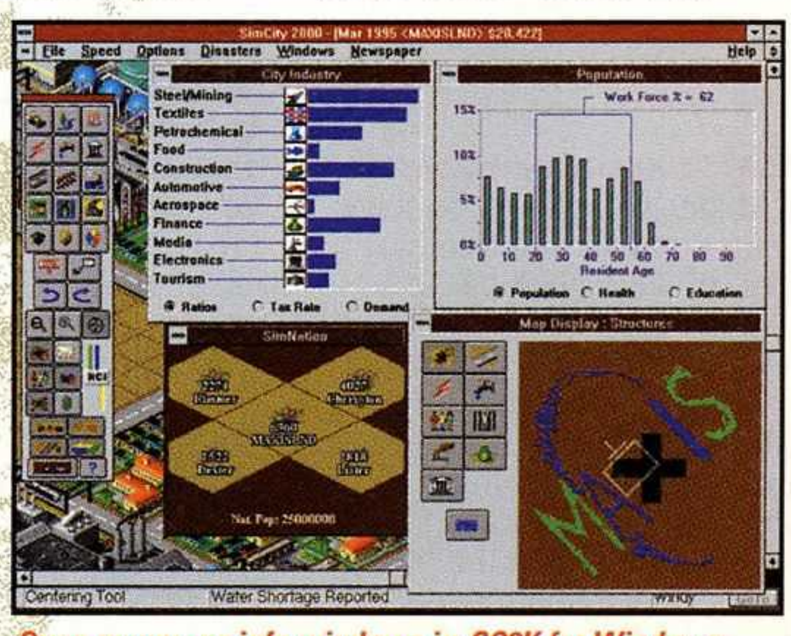
Dynamix/Sierra On-Line is getting into CD-ROM with a vengeance. Last issue we looked at their exceptional ports of the "Great Warplanes" flight sim series, and now they outdo themselves with the new *Aces of the Deep* CD-ROM. I know, a lot of people sneer at online reference guides and other such supplemental material being added to CD-ROM games. But I find that they are not only fascinating but, in the case of Dynamix, have an appeal wholly outside of the game itself. The reference section for *Aces of the Deep* is a case in point. Not only is the entire detailed historical manual now online, but it has been substantially enhanced with original video clips.

Dynamix actually went out and conducted original interviews with eight of the top surviving U-Boat aces for the video. Otto Kretchmer, Eric Topp, Reinhard Hardegen, and five others provide insight into the history of the U-boat war, what life on the submarines was like, and even their U-boat tactics and advice. This material is pure gold, not just as it fits into to the game, but in and of itself. You might even find yourself coming back to it more than you play the game. Best of all, the supplemental material is integrated into the game program rather than in a separate Windows engine, as with the previous Dynamix titles, and there's a button to

Entries on various aspects of the war come with photos and video "hot spots."

T. Liam McDonald

In this month's shocking new episode, Tom McDonald reveals a secret love affair with Windows, touts the virtues of the new *SimCity 2000*, praises the *Aces of the Deep* CD-ROM, and more!



Open numerous info windows in *SC2K for Windows*.

"SimCity 2000 for Windows brings one of my favorite games to my favorite environment and does so quite effectively."

Interviews with top aces make *Aces of the Deep CD-ROM* a great package.

drop straight to the game from the reference manual.

Gameplay itself now features enhanced sound with voice support in both English and German, and a new animated introduction. All in all, this is the best of a series of exceptional CD-ROM ports by Dynamix.

Unlike *AOD CD, The Journeyman Project Turbo* from Sanctuary Woods doesn't include any new material: it just processes the old stuff faster. Originally, this program was irritatingly slow, but Sanctuary Woods has optimized it to run "300% faster" — their claim. It does run faster, but even on a Pentium with 24 megs of RAM and a double speed CD-ROM, it was still more like running a marathon than a sprint. So, yes, the program is definitely faster than it was, but it's still not as fast as some other titles.

Just when the Zork madness was beginning to ebb a bit, Activision has come up with a clever way to put *Return to Zork* back in the spotlight. *The Zork Anthology* is a CD-ROM featuring IBM and Mac versions of the original Zork text adventures from Infocom: *Zork I, Zork II, Zork III, Beyond Zork,* and *Zork Zero*. Activision even threw in *Planetfall* as a bonus — or perhaps just to get people familiar with this title in time for the all-new *Planetfall* CD-ROM title. It runs $19.95 when bought individually, but is free to anyone who buys *Beyond Zork*. Not a bad deal, actually, and good trick to goose sales.

The Journeyman Project runs faster with a new *Turbo* version.

Still More *Tanks!*

Those nutty guys at Novastar just keep pumping out the scenario disks for SSI's *Tanks!* like there's no tomorrow. Apparently you folks are responding enthusiastically, and now there's a whole new batch of titles out to satisfy your *Tanks!* hunger. Here's a quick run down of the latest:

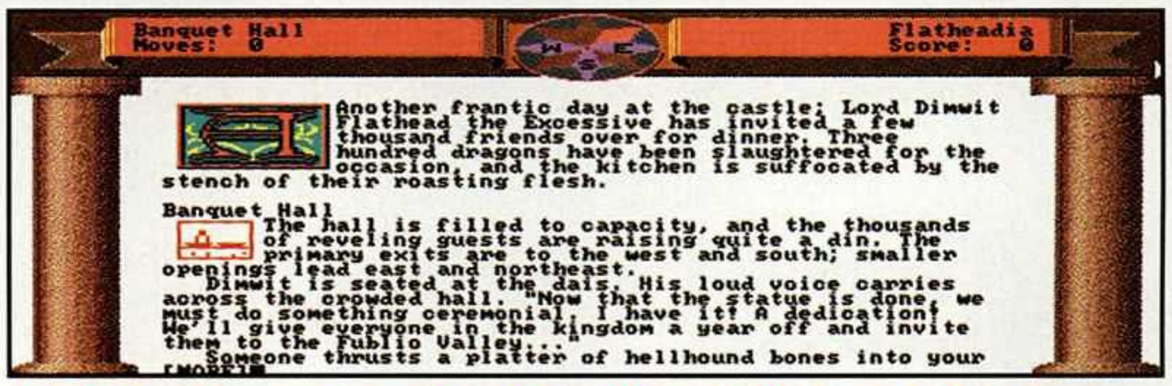
#2: The Fall of France 1940: The German army foiled some of France's best plans (as though France had any good plans) as they struck in the Netherlands and then into France. It took about a month for the Germans to defeat the French, but there were some thick battles and valiant stands during this time. Hannut, Arras, Flavion, Sedan, and Seelow are included on this disk, and three extra Sedan scenarios covering several days of the battle, with new starting positions and reinforcements for each day. An Arras variant brings the 25th Panzer Regiment in four turns earlier.

#4: Normandy Campaign: Now we're cooking! Several aspects of the D-Day battles are covered in some detail here, in numerous scenarios and variants. In fact just about every scenario has a variant, and one has four! Along with the oddball free-for-all Authie scenario, there are three Caen, two Sword, two Gold, three Bieville, five Berniers, and two "Nightmare" (Gold Beach with German tanks!) scenarios. Novastar has played with a lot of elements here, altering morale values, objectives, and other elements of play. One of their most inventive titles.

#10: The Bridge at Remagen Campaign: Whew! This is a very detailed shot at that tactical chestnut spanning the Rhine River, the Bridge at Remagen, and the Allied/Axis struggle for the bridge in March of 1945. There are six Remagen variants, five Assault scenarios, and an attack on the town of Singling, France. The usual "what-ifs" are thoroughly explored.

#12: Israel: You don't see many computer games covering the Arab/Israeli conflicts of the 1960s and '70s. But disk twelve covers the Yom Kippur War, with numerous and intriguing tank scenarios, featuring the Purkan, Tasa, Firdan, Romani, and Geneifa battles (with alternates, of course), and a set of five armored battles involving the struggle over supply paths and roads. An interesting set for me, since I know very little about this area of military history.

Altogether, this is a very detailed, carefully created, and thoroughly documented set of games from Novastar. Get in touch with them at 3505 Midas Ave., Rocklin, CA 95677 — (916) 624-7113.



Wow! A *Zork* game with a graphical frame! Obviously this must be *Zork 0*, from the *Zork Anthology*.

Bug Patches

Contact game publishers for patch availability — or watch for them on The CD in *PC Gamer*: CD-Rom Edition.

SimCity 2000 for DOS 1.1 Updater: This long-awaited patch fixes crashes, and makes some purely cosmetic fixes to the game.

Star Trail: Blade of Destiny "Kid Faces" Test Patch: This patch corrects the "Little Kids" faces on imports of certain *Blade of Destiny* parties.

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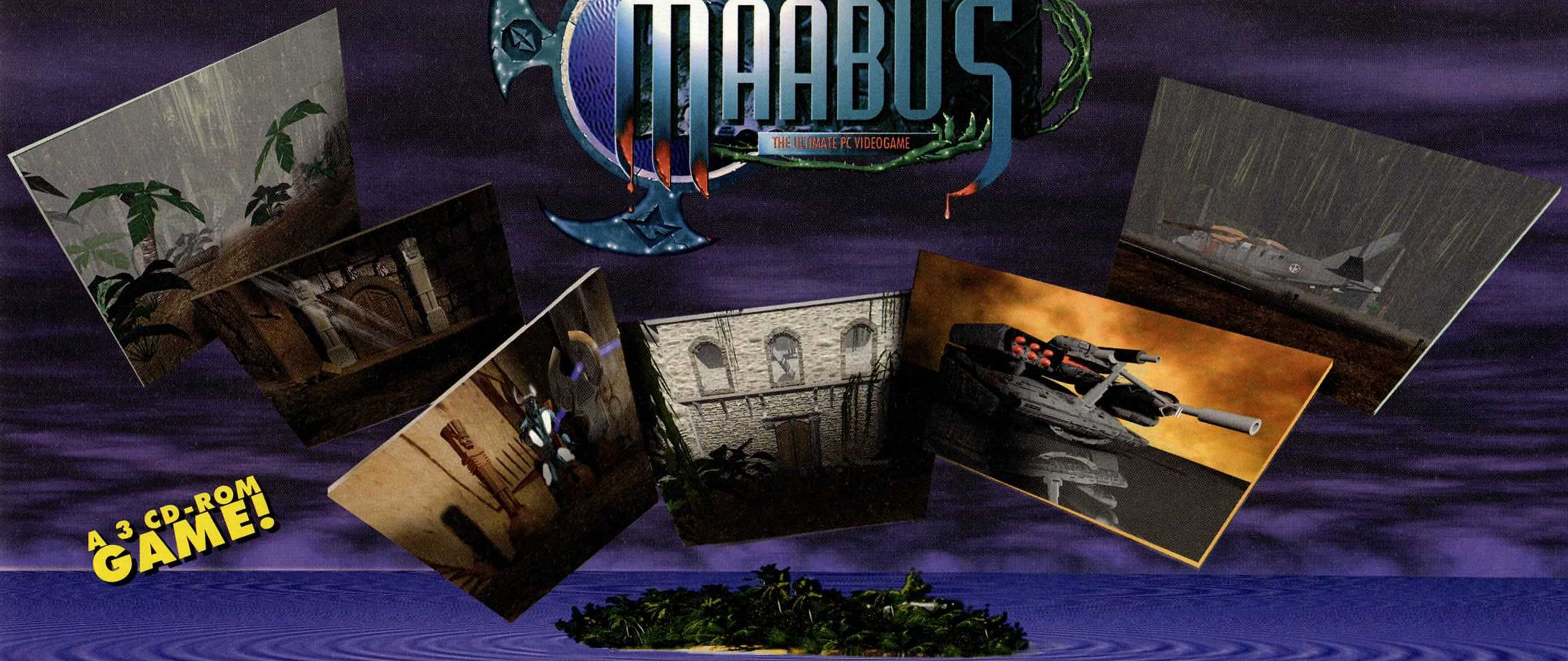

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Dooming and Zooming, Driving and Jiving

Scott Wolf

Hi y'all. If my e-mail on America Online is any indication, a whole lot of you are just dying to play the *Alien Doom* patch I mentioned a couple of months back, but either couldn't find the CD-ROM edition of PCG (it's selling out all over the place), don't have a CD-ROM drive, or were having trouble finding the FTP site on the Internet. Of course, the fact that I didn't give you the filename didn't help either. Hopefully, we can get it all straightened out this month.

First of all, the FTP site, infant2.sphs.indiana.edu, has been abandoned and it's files moved to ftp.orst.edu until a more permanent site can be established. The magic filenames are ALIENS_A.ZIP and ALIENS_B.ZIP, and they're located at ftp.orst.edu:/pub/doom/themes/aliens. Two other internet sites you can try are wuarchive.wustl.edu and ftp.uwp.edu.

And if you *still* can't find it, I've got some good news. The Aliens Patch Crew is hard at work on *Aliens Doom* (note the name change) version 2.0, and it should be out by the time you read this (at the ftp.orst.edu site).

According to Marc Gordon, who's heading up the project, if you liked *Alien Doom*, then version 2.0 will *really* blow you away. A few highlights: Cacodemons have been replaced by Dropships, while the Spiderdemons have mutated into APCs (neither will attack you, but you can still blow 'em up). The face hugger will be walking instead of flying, and all weapons except the pistol and shotgun have been improved and replaced. Marc also promises a number of other additions and enhancements that'll blow the pants off the old version.

Another *Aliens*-inspired Doom patch, called the Aliens Total Conversion Episode by Justin Fisher and Richard Love, contains 11 levels, new graphics, sounds, weapons, monsters, and a few new rules as well. Moving through locations from the movie, you'll be searching for colonists, sealing off the Med-Labs and Operations, going into the Atmosphere Processor to search for Newt, and battling the Queen in a Power Loader. I found it on AOL in the Doom software library, listed as ALIEN-TC.-ZIP. OK, on to new business.

Out for a Moonlight Drive — Jim Morrison meets Lance Boyle.

F-18 No Fly Zone

Now here's something pretty unusual — a shoot-'em-up arcade game for Windows that doesn't move like a slug on Seconal. In DOE Entertainment's *F-18 No Fly Zone* v2.05, you find yourself in the middle of a huge Democracy-defying aerial assault, as enemy aircraft race head-on toward you in the amber glow of a Middle East sunset.

In the tradition of *Afterburner*, you fly "into" the screen, targeting bandits with a never-empty cannon and a limited supply of missiles, collecting bonuses from the debris to replenish your missiles and repair damage to your Hornet. Control is by joystick, mouse or keyboard (or any combination thereof) and the game is incredibly fast.

The title screens and background graphics are really beautiful, but the actual game sprites in action are sometimes a little confusing; it took me a while to realize that the passing clouds were actually clouds, and not Ed Wood-inspired flying saucers.

Those wacky Iraqis are at it again. Why can't they just say No?

You can find it on CompuServe in the Action Games section as F18NFZ.ZIP, or write DOE Entertainment, 2412 Desert Oak Drive, Palmdale, Ca. 93550.

SkyRoads

SkyRoads by Creative Dimensions may look like a pleasurable little deep-space joyride, but in reality it's a wicked 3D obstacle course whose deceptive simplicity will drive you absolutely insane. I guarantee you'll be smashing the table top and cursing, "It's so bloody simple! Why can't I do it?!?!"

You control a jaunty little spacecar over six roads and two levels in this shareware demo (30 roads and 10 levels in the full registered version). Accelerate, decelerate, steer left or right and jump as gaps, obstacles and tunnels appear on the color-coded sections of the spaceways, all to the accompaniment of some charmingly hypnotic music. There's no shooting in this one, though — except maybe at your monitor when you dive off the road into the void for the thousandth time.

SkyRoads will be available for download on America Online and CompuServe as SKYRDS3D. ZIP. The versions posted at this time — SKYROADS.ZIP (AOL) and SKY. ZIP (CS) — are actually European, the only real difference being that the sales screen at the end directs you to Blue Moon Software in Estonia, of all places. If you want to go straight to the source, just contact Creative Dimensions at P.O.Box 20157, Castro Valley, CA 94546 (510) 317-0292.

More next time.

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He did it again, leaving the net just long enough to send us his column and bark out something about a new Alien Doom patch. Then, as quickly he'd come, he was gone....

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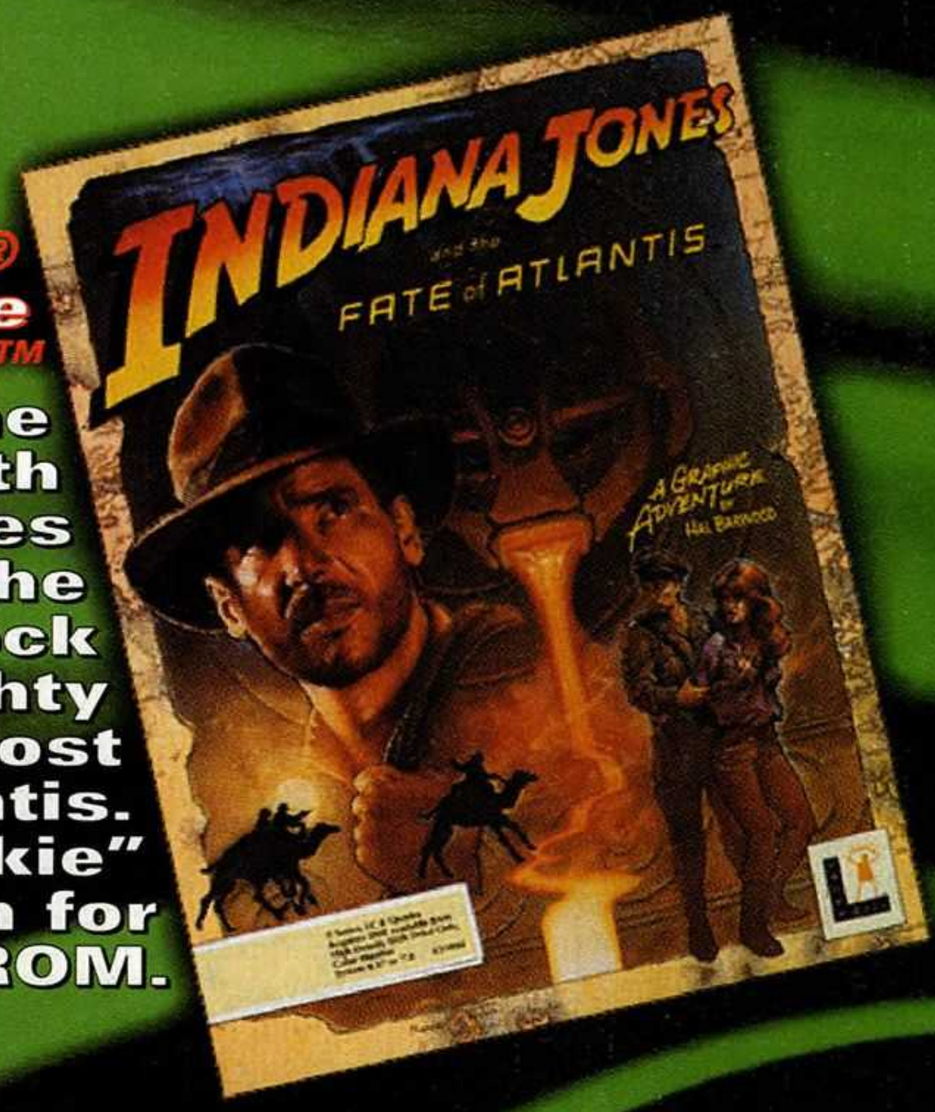

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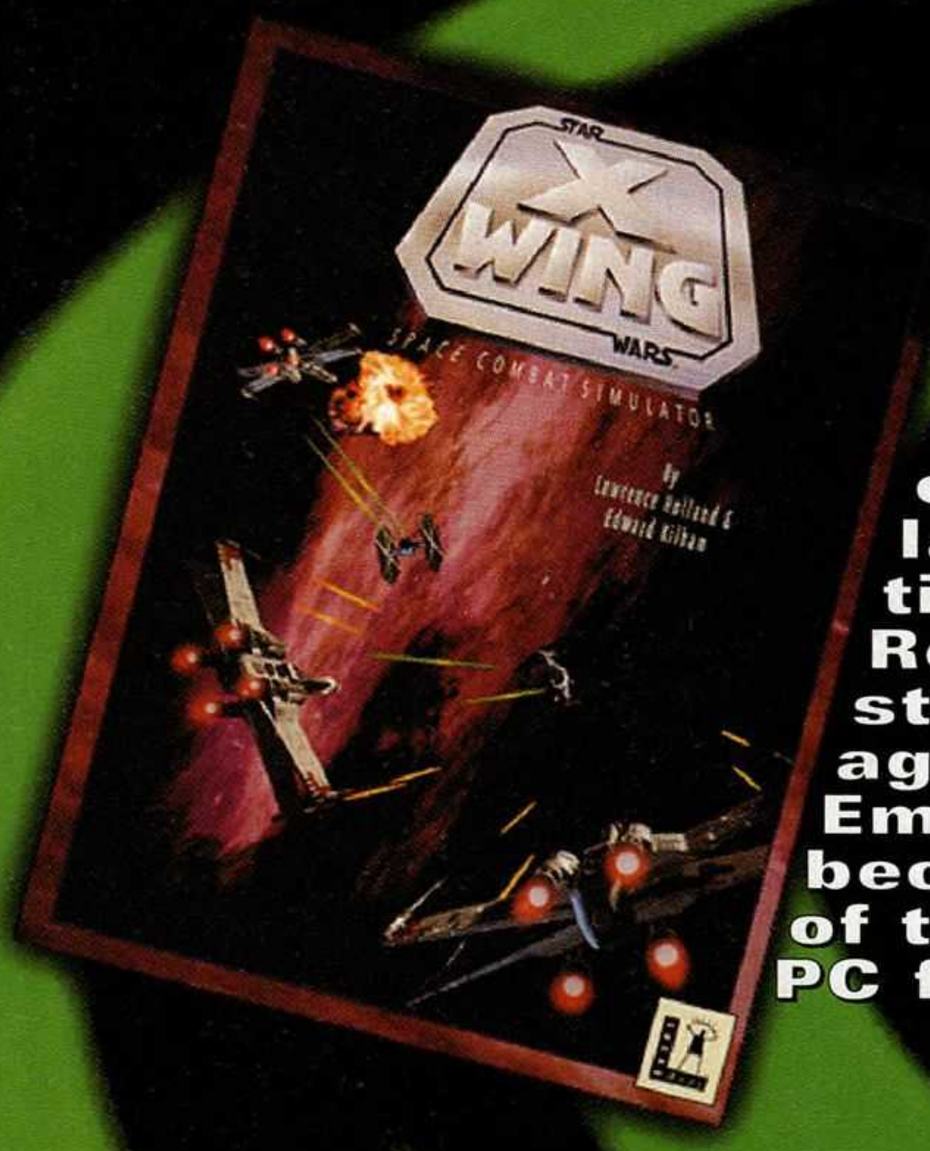

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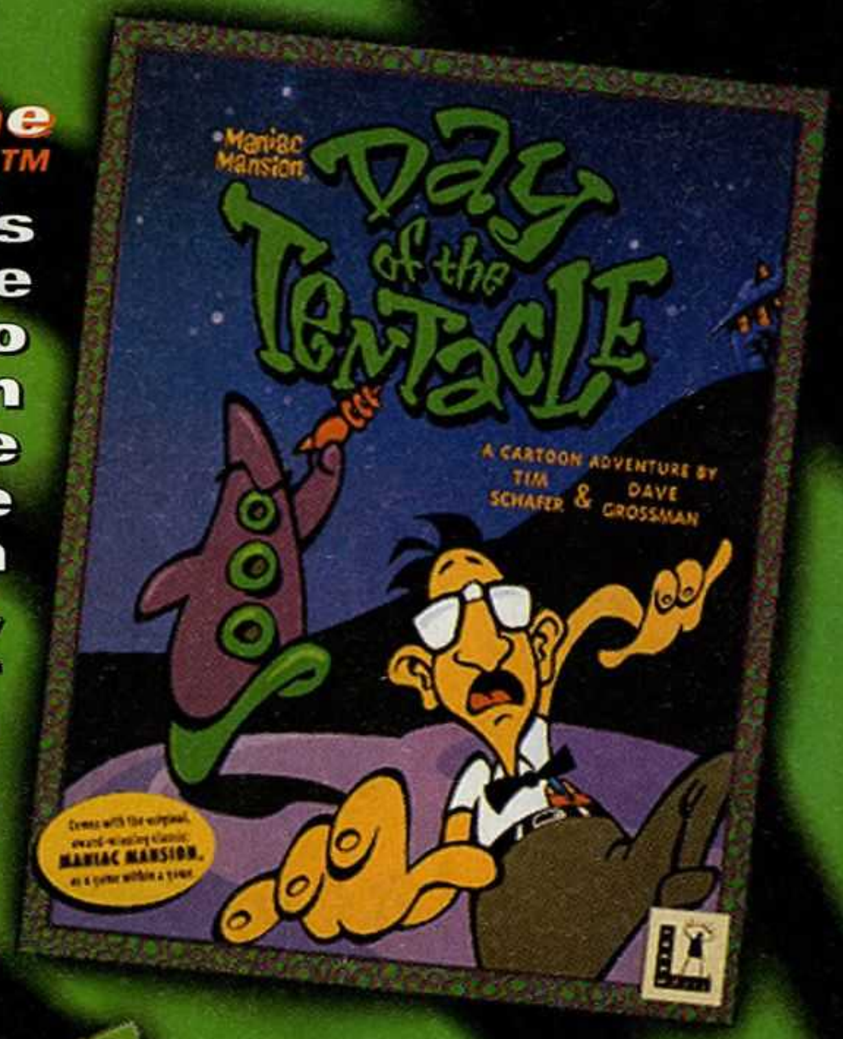

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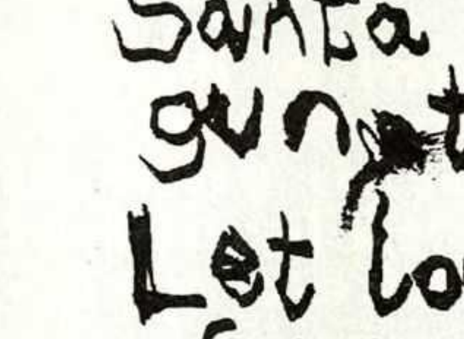
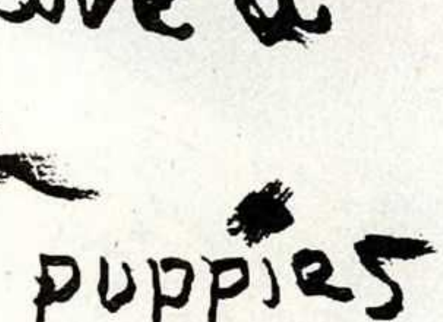
DreamWeb

~~Sunday April~~
Monday April 9
The clock keeps going round.
It won't ~~stop~~ tell me the time.
Santa Claus gave a gun to me.
Let loose the puppies of War.
I died last night.





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Product Information Number 95

Caching It In

There are lots of different types of memory in a PC. Some memory is fast, but scarce and expensive, like the 8 kilobytes of cache RAM built into every 486 CPU chip. And some of it's cheap and plentiful, but slow, like the several hundred megabytes of space on hard disks and CD-ROMs. The different levels of memory form a kind of pyramid, from quick and pricey on top to cheap and slow below. So the memory hierarchy would go: internal cache RAM on the CPU chip; external cache RAM on the PC's motherboard (about 256K); 4-16 megs of actual system RAM; several hundred megabytes of space on the hard disk; and a CD-ROM drive that can hold as much as 650 megs of data.

A memory cache is a trick that makes memory at a lower level seem faster, by using a small amount of memory at a higher level. Caches work because of a phenomenon known as locality of reference: most computer programs spend 80% of their time working with 20% of their data, or maybe 90% on 10% of the data (depending on the program, and on which computer guru you're quoting). But whatever the exact numbers may be, a caching system speeds up access to RAM or disk memory by keeping a copy of the hottest data in faster memory, where it can be accessed more quickly.

When the next chunk of data that the program needs is sitting in cache memory, that's called a cache hit, and that's what's supposed to happen most of the time. The program gets the data in a tenth or a hundredth of the time it would take without caching, because the data comes from fast memory at a higher level in the pyramid; from system RAM instead of off the hard disk, or from the CPU's own super-fast L1 RAM cache instead of the slightly slower L2 cache built into the motherboard.

But if the data isn't in the cache — a cache miss — the result is worse than not having a cache at all. The system doesn't even start to read the slower memory until after it checks the cache and fails to find the data in there. A cache's effectiveness depends on several things: the relative speeds of the two types of memory, the data access patterns of the program that's running, the amount of memory available to hold data in the cache, and the set of rules that it uses to decide when to move data into and out of the cache — the cache replacement algorithm.

Tim Victor

The most popular replacement algorithm is least-recently used (LRU): Each chunk of data in the cache carries a time stamp, recording the last time that the block was accessed. When a cache miss occurs, a copy of the data that's needed goes into the cache, replacing the least-recently used data, which would be the block with the oldest time stamp.

When it comes to caching hard disks, you could get a caching controller card, which includes caching hardware plus several megabytes of cache RAM. But even a fast hard disk is pretty slow compared to the speed of a modern CPU, so disk caching utilities can do as good a job in software at a much lower price. Cache programs are found in toolkits like PC Tools, Norton Utilities, and the PC-Kwik Powerpak, and Microsoft's Smartdrive cache program is included free with both MS-DOS and Windows.

About the time that multimedia software and games on CD-ROM started catching on, CD-ROM caching utilities also showed up. By now, most popular hard disk cache programs have also been upgraded to work with CD-ROMs, including version 5.0 of Smartdrive which comes with MS-DOS versions 6.20 and higher. Technically, these utilities skip a level in the memory hierarchy, jumping over the hard disk by using extra system RAM to cache the CD-ROM drive.

One dedicated CD-ROM cache program, CDT Incorporated's D-Time10 (800-692-0492), can use both RAM and hard disk space to cache the CD-ROM drive. A hard disk doesn't offer the same thousand-fold speed advantage over CD-ROMs — it's more like 5 to 10 times — but what it lacks in speed, it can make up for in size. Using Smartdrive, most PCs give their best overall performance when the cache uses around 2 megabytes of RAM. But if you can spare the space, you can dedicate 20MB on the hard disk for D-Time10's CD-ROM cache.

D-Time10 also takes advantage of a special feature of CD-ROM game software to improve on the basic LRU algorithm: by identifying the disc in the CD-ROM drive, it can usually tell which game is running. D-Time10 keeps a "timelog" for each CD-ROM game, tracking the disc's data-access history. Since it knows how often each block of data gets accessed, and how big a delay that access causes, D-Time10 can optimize its caching decisions for that particular game.

There are only a couple ways to improve the performance of a hardware RAM cache. You might be able to put more cache memory chips on your PC's motherboard, particularly if it has less than 256KB of cache RAM installed. And it never hurts to check the BIOS setup screens to make sure that the cache is enabled. Software caches are generally more tweak-friendly.

Besides trying different cache utilities, you can add system RAM and allocate some of the extra to the cache, or move to a larger hard disk if you're using D-Time10 to cache CD-ROMs. Many CD-ROM games also have an installation option that copies more of the game onto the hard disk, where it runs faster. It isn't automatic like a true cache, but it is one more way to get the most performance out of your PC.

PCG

Are CD-ROMs the wave of the future? You bet. But they're not the fastest or most efficient storage media around. You can speed things up with caching, though — as Tim explains...

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Product Information Number 86

The Best and the Worst of 1994

William R. Trotter

On the whole, 1994 has been a very good year for wargames — remarkably so, for a genre that was considered marginal (if not moribund) as recently as 1992. One of the most important trends I've noticed has been a realization that wargames don't *have* to be hermetically complex, rule-heavy, and jargon-laden in order to satisfy reasonable standards of historical accuracy. For two prime examples of games that combine realistic detail with seductively easy mechanics, see the reviews elsewhere in this issue of *Panzer General* and *Aces of the Deep* — both of which certainly qualify for any reviewer's "Best of the Year" list.

And in addition to those two, it has been games like these — The General's Favorites, listed in no particular order — that have made 1994 a memorable year:

Fields of Glory (MicroProse/Spectrum Holobyte): Yes, I know the AI was screwy, and inexplicable things happened in various corners of the battlefield. But this Napoleonic-era tactical game came closer than any other (so far) to realizing, on a monitor screen, the color and pageantry of tabletop miniatures. A landmark game, if not a 100% successful one.

Tanks! War Game Construction Set (SSI): Every kind of military unit from 1916 to 1995 was packed into this game's data base, allowing you to roll your own scenarios in any of twelve historical time periods. The construction system is easy to use, and the maps are often beautiful. Very high re-play value: I kept this one on my hard drive for six months before burning out on it, and I'll probably play it again in the future.

Defend the Alamo (Incredible Simulations): Here was an unheralded, made-in-the-basement game (it came in a zip-lock bag, no less) that focused on a single battle and thoroughly explored all the tactical might-have-beens. In this era of big, corporate products, it's refreshing to see a homemade program of such high quality. Incredible Simulations, buoyed by the word-of-mouth success of *Alamo*, is now working on a Little Big Horn simulation — watch for it in early 1995.

Operation Crusader (Atomic Games/Avalon Hill): The first fruit of this designer/publisher alliance was mightily impressive. The much-lauded V-for-Victory engine was here applied to the North African campaign of November-December, 1941 (Tobruk besieged, and Rommel poised to drive on the Suez Canal), with splendid results. *Operation Crusader* captured all the sweep, fluidity, and sudden reversals-of-fortune that characterized the desert war.

Rounding out my picks are some top-shelf naval sims. *Harpoon II* (Three-Sixty Pacific), of course, belongs on every best-of-the-year list. It is not a beginner's game — the learning curve is very steep, and the technological detail can be overwhelming — but it is hands-down the richest and most realistic simulation of modern naval warfare ever developed. The new edition does feature more, better, and clearer tutorials than the original issue, so that now the system can be mastered by anyone willing to invest some time and concentration. Replay value is virtually limitless. A classic.

QQP Productions continued to publish high-quality games that were easy to learn and tough to master. *The Grandest Fleet* is an abstract (rather than specifically historical) strategy game governed by its own idiosyncratic conventions and concepts. If you like lots of high-seas action, *The Grandest Fleet* offers plenty, along with a strategic element of considerable subtlety.

Avalon Hill's PC conversion of *5th Fleet*, its best-selling board game covering modern naval combat in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean region, stands as a paradigm for how this sort of thing ought to be done. A wonderfully clean, elegant design, fully complimented by crisp, eye-pleasing graphics, it builds on the board game's strengths rather than trying to gussy-up an already solid design with techno-frills.

Never one to withhold his true feelings, Bill looks back on the wargames of 1994 and names his favorites — as well as a few that just couldn't quite pass muster.

Gobblers and Gong-Show Games

I shall pass in silence over a number of decent-but-mediocre war games — but I can't resist a parting shot at the year's biggest clunkers:

Campaign II (Empire): A spectacularly unsuccessful game that attempted to combine strategy, tactics, and arcade shoot-em-up action and managed to fail dismally in all three areas. In the battle sequences, the tanks scooted along at Indianapolis-500 speeds, the "strategy" elements were incoherent, the tactical screens were the *ugliest* I've ever seen and the interface was antediluvian. The game came complete with a badly-reproduced booklet of tank, gun, and plane photos, *perforated for framing*, which nobody at Empire even bothered to identify with captions. No doubt about it: this is a dog's breakfast.

Hannibal (Starbyte/ MicroLeague): Beautiful maps, but gameplay bogged down in a logistical system of elephantine detail. And the complete absence of any tactical battle-screens airily tosses aside the main reason anyone would want to play a Hannibal game in the first place. About as much fun as a simulation of certified public accounting.

Sabre Team (Krisalis Software/MicroLeague): Yet another special forces-versus-terrorists simulation that grabs your attention with dramatic intro screens, then leaves you struggling through the gaming equivalent of molasses. Jerky, disjointed game-play and a fire-and-movement points system that made me gnash my teeth — why the hell should it require three precious "action points" to look to the left?

Farewell, then, to 1994. The new year should bring some long-awaited titles, including MicroProse's *Across the Rhine* and Avalon Hill's *Third Reich*.

Happy New Year!

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Your Turn, Folks

For the past few months, I've been posting my e-mail address with this column. Usually this is a really stupid idea, because people start writing with stuff like, "*Might of the Ultima Holder XXXVIII* does not work when I use expanded memory on my 386 expansion card and simultaneously activate my generic fax-modem to download files while accessing my hard drive. Tell me how to fix it." Then, when I don't answer, the next message goes, "Thanks for nothing. I'm not going to buy your magazine any more." Jeez, like I need this!

Happily, my call for responses has been oodles more humane than that. In fact, I've received some downright thoughtful responses. First there was my call to rate the RPG interfaces, and you told me that you're reasonably happy with them (although my sampling was too small to take seriously). Then I asked you to tell me what you'd like to role-play as, rather than orcs and princes and that stuff. And the response was *big*. So this month, I'll turn the column over to you, and your thoughts on why RPGs should expand on their currently limited scope of characters and situations. This is just a sampling of a lot of very interesting mail, and I think it makes the point that the RPG concept has *plenty* of room to grow.

First, from Brody Peddle, who called my November column "the most extensive and honest piece of writing I've seen in *PC Gamer* yet." After passing the comment on to the editor (who treated it with precisely the seriousness I expected), I stopped admiring myself and turned back to the message. "What I'd love to play," writes Brody, "is not the usual sorcerer or fighter, but the bad guys. I'm talking about any one of the perhaps hundreds of other races featured in computer RPGs. That's why I prefer pencil and paper RPGs to computer RPGs; you can be whatever you want, and the system will usually allow it. In PC games today, the hero is almost never a non-humanoid. How about playing one of those 'wimpy' goblins and showing the 'heroes' who's boss? Or maybe an ogre, or a dragon, or *anything*?"

Good point. Why can't I play a bad guy? The reason, obviously, is that these games have to be designed to have a predictable outcome, where paper RPGs do not. Even the most inept dungeon master (and, believe me, I've encountered some inept ones) has more creativity and brains than a 486 or even a Pentium.

Mark Walker would like to role-play as a politician. Now, arguably politicians are doing nothing *but* roleplaying, and I thought of asking why he didn't just go out and run for office instead, but he made it clear that it's not local politics he's interested in. Nor, it would seem, does he want to spend years working his way to the top. He wants to role-play a full series of campaigns, including developing a platform and a campaign strategy: "It would be great to move your way up the political ladder, taking a few bribes along the way, and eventually running for president."

Sure there are strategy games that let you do this, but nothing in the role-playing line. In an RPG, you'd have to deal with both strategy and personal interaction, and that's what would make it fun.

And now for the best message of all. Jon Helin has obviously done a lot of thinking about what would make a good RPG; I know this, because his answer is so unique. See, Jon wants to play as none other than Socrates. Strange choice, you might say. But think about it. Socrates didn't just live in ancient Greece; to a large extent, he *made* that civilization what it became. Or, as Jon puts it:

"I picture a nation, government, city, neighborhood, or individual, struggling to cope with all the things that make modern life so complicated. Moral issues, economics, the way individuals fit into the societal whole — these are just a few of the concepts to deal with. You would start off as a little-known philosopher and, through conversation alone, argue, agree, convince others, and be convinced by them. Your reputation would increase as your views became more accepted.

"You would also cultivate relationships with others. Some would be friends with whom you could argue just to improve your arguments; others would be in political positions, and convincing them would give you a chance to influence government. Each conversation would open and close other options to you, insofar as you must refine your positions — not change them completely — so that you're taken as a thinker and not a flake. The people in the game world would change attitudes slowly and subtly, and new problems would arise with new positions demanding your attention. Now *there* is a role-playing experience!"

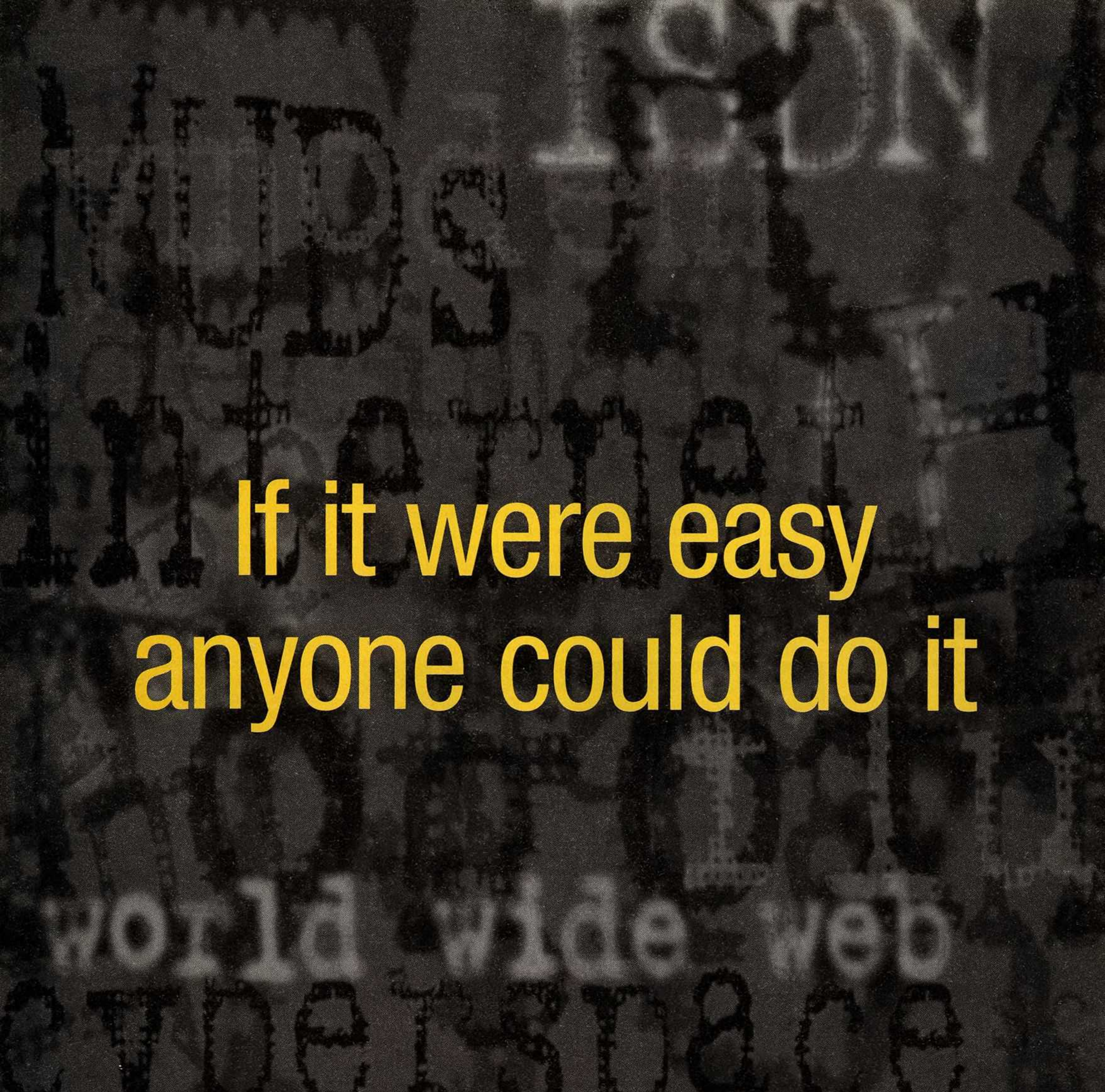
Hard to argue with him. As a big fan of things ancient and Greek, I'd do almost anything to have a game that lets me play the great philosopher, letting me experience Greece as he would have, changing society, culture, the entire world with my words. A stunning idea, and one I doubt will ever come to market.

A shame, isn't it? So many of these ideas won't see the light of day, simply because RPGs have become so rigidly programmed. I'll leave the ending of this column to Justin Davis, who offers an excellent summary of exactly what must be done. "Computer RPGs," he says, "are currently dominated by a puzzle-sensitive approach. This monotony will only be purged when these games shift to a *player*-sensitive approach. Because once that is accomplished, *who* we play as will matter little: Each of us will bring *ourselves* to the experience, and each experience will be *unique*."

PCG

Neil Randall

Remember when Neil asked you what you'd like to roleplay as? Well, the early results are in, and it would seem that Neil isn't the only roleplaying fan who's looking for something new in RPGs.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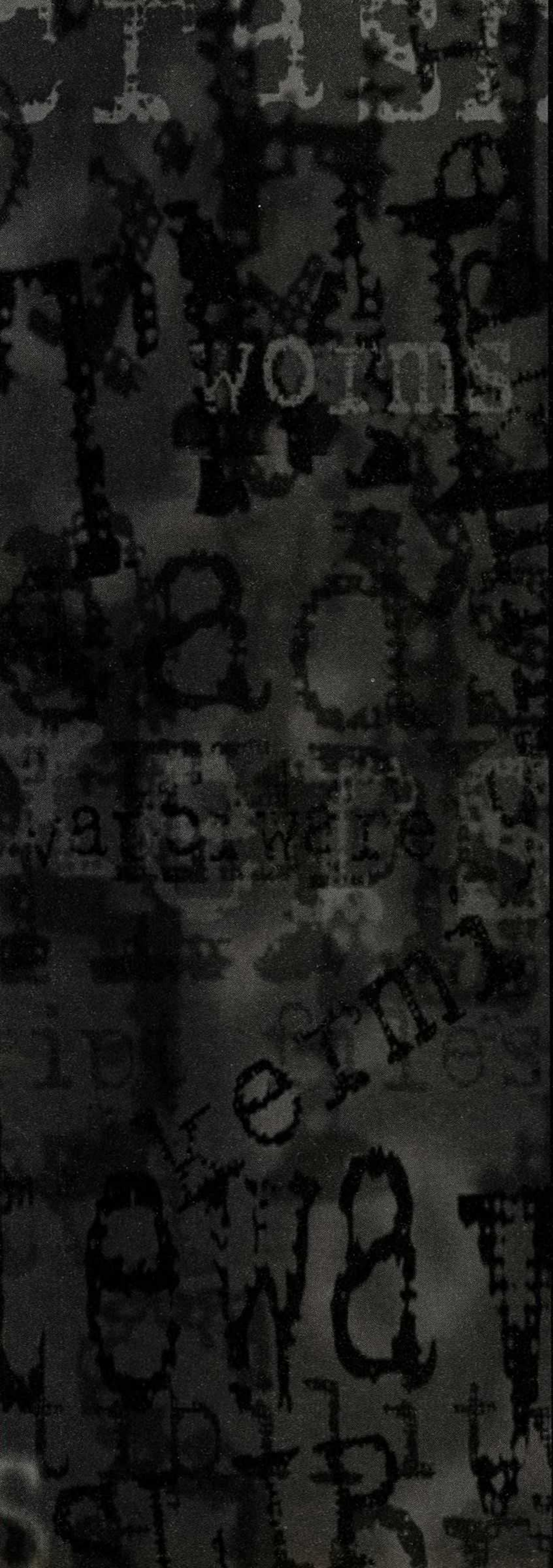

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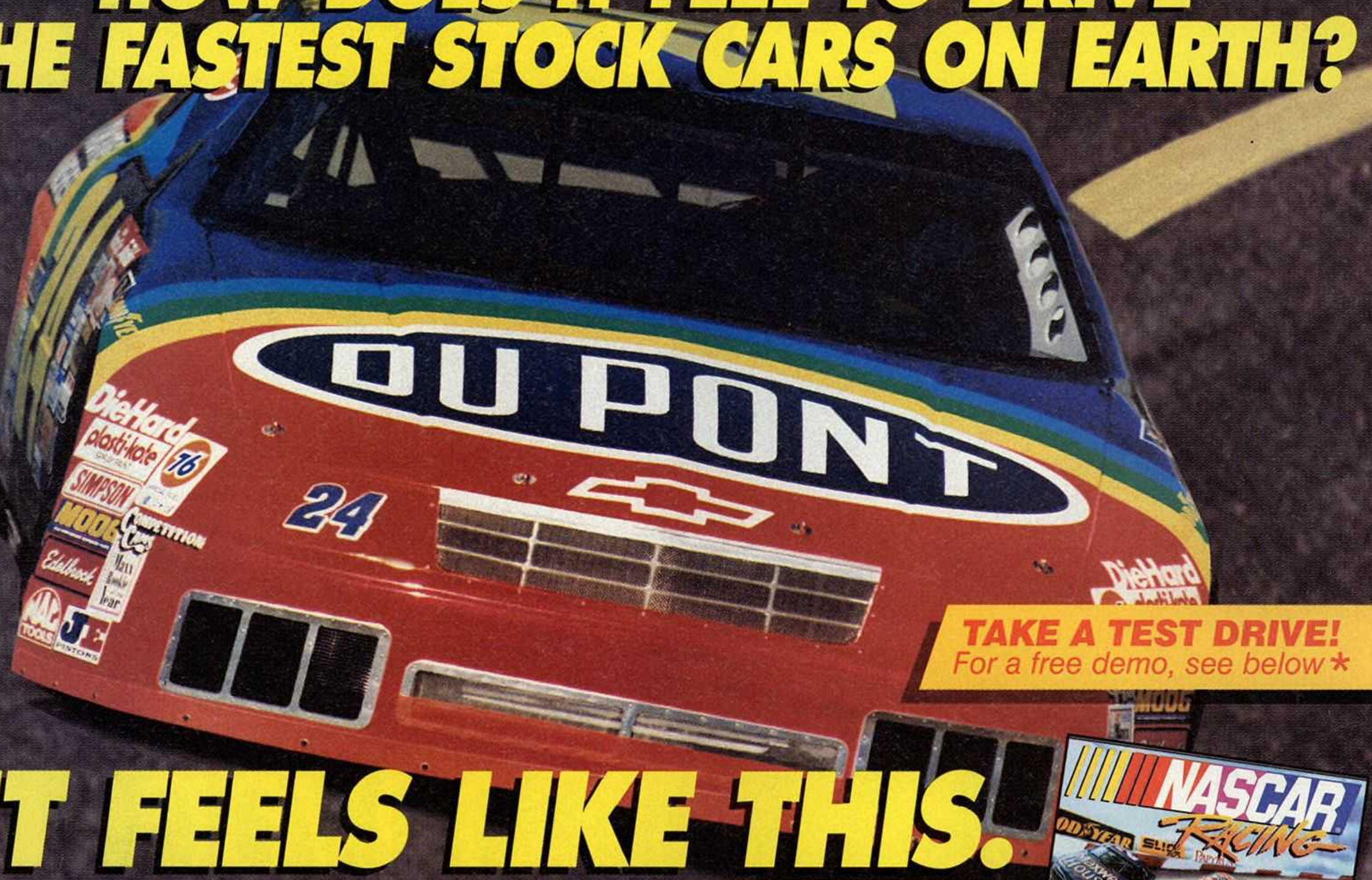

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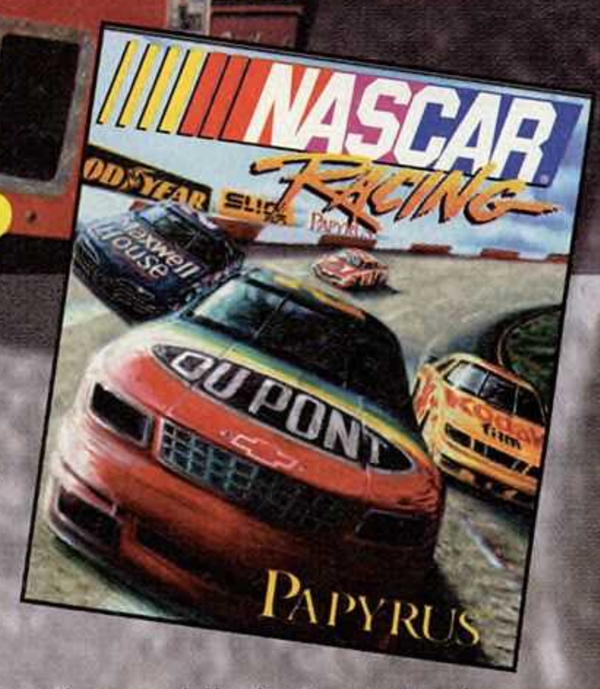

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Product Information Number 116

Lee's Year-End Wish List

So I'm gazing at my bookshelves full of games, looking for something to play. There are plenty of great simulations there, but I need something new. See, sims are like potato chips to me, and I just can't settle for a handful. Rare is the computer game that can hold my interest for long.

Front Page Sports: Baseball is great, but I'm waiting for someone to fix the screwy statistics before I really throw myself into it. I just bogied three straight holes in *PGA Tour Golf 486*, so I've called it quits for the day. I'm sulking because my poor old 486 can't run *NASCAR Racing* in Super VGA. *Colonization* still disappoints. I've played *TIE Fighter* so much that I'm beginning to battle B-wings in my dreams, and my beloved Packers are 0-4 in *FPS: Football Pro*.

What's a bored computer-game addict to do? Rake the leaves, finally? Fix that leaky toilet? Clean up the kitchen? Shave? No way. I'd much rather dream about the sims I'd like to see. So here's my wish list for 1995 — from me to game designers everywhere.

How about a boxing simulation? Yeah, Electronic Arts' *4D Boxing* was good. But that was years ago! I realize that the sweet science has fallen on hard times, so the market for a serious fight sim is probably pretty small. But, hey, designers, I'll make a deal. Make a boxing game, and I'll buy three copies. I want all fighters, all classes — from Jack Johnson to Mike Tyson. Give me scheduling, training, negotiating, strategy, and tactics — all with digitized sound and graphics.

There are some other sports sims I'd like to see. Tennis, anyone? Please? This is a natural sport for a computer simulation — just two players, a small field of play and simple scoring. Philips' *International Tennis Tour* was good, but I want more. So be sure to include real players, rankings, real tournaments, statistics, and a variety of shots. Oh, and great gameplay, too.

And while I'm at it, what's the deal with basketball sims? *Road to the Final Four* is the only serious contender, and while it's not bad, there's plenty of room for improvement. Give me serious stats and fluid motion, rankings for the college game, and playoffs for the pros.

Lee Buchanan

As for baseball, when will the true promise of computer gaming finally be realized? There's so much potential: the stats, the parks, the players, the grind of a half-year season. There have been plenty of good baseball sims, and Dynamix might be able to tweak *Front Page Sports: Baseball* into a champion, but I'm still waiting for the simulation good enough to make me *want* to play 162 games. If I could have only one perfect sports sim, I'd want baseball.

Game companies have the waterfront covered in flight sims, so my wish list is pretty short. From World War I to Desert Storm, flight sim fans can already strap themselves into the cockpits of aircraft from any era. Other aspects of warfare, however, don't get as much attention from game companies. I'm still waiting for a World War II squad-level ground combat simulation. And I'm sure it would be a big seller!

And isn't it about time for Maxis to come out with *Sim Nation*? Call me boring, but I can't get enough of those sims based on economic models, like *Railroad Tycoon* and *Sim City*. I can't wait for *Transport Tycoon*!

I know, I know. I'm asking for a lot, and I sound pretty greedy. But don't get the idea that I'm unappreciative of all the good stuff we've seen in '94. In fact, I'd say last year's crop of simulations was the best ever in the short history of computer gaming. Whether you're into flying, racing, swinging, or passing, 1994 had something almost everyone.

World War II flight buffs got a first-rate sim — the only one that comes close to challenging Dynamix's Aces series — thanks to MicroProse and *1942: Pacific Air War*. In my book, the best flight/combat simulation was *TIE Fighter*. Topping *X-Wing* was no easy task, but LucasArts somehow managed it.

Many players argue, with good reason, that *TIE Fighter* and other space combat games aren't simulations at all, since the crafts and tactics they simulate don't really exist. So for those of you who demand total realism, Microsoft's very serious *Space Simulator* offers the opportunity to travel the entire galaxy —without firing a single laser blast.

On the playing fields, it's no surprise that football got most of the attention from developers in '94. That's been the case for the past few years, so you'd expect that the best sports sims take place on the gridiron. Dynamix continued to polish its *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* sim with a '95 edition that solidifies that game's status as a sports dynasty. MicroProse's *Ultimate Football* mounted a strong challenge, though.

It was a banner year for racing sims, thanks to Papyrus, which got '94 off to a roaring start with *IndyCar Racing*, then topped that ground-breaking sim with *NASCAR Racing* in the fall. An impressive year's work!

Still, I need some new sims. Fortunately, as good as '94 has been, it looks like 1995 holds at least as much promise for us sim freaks. On the horizon are the next generations of *Links* and *Jack Nicklaus, Hardball IV*, and *World Circuit*.

Hmm... it's definitely time to go for that Pentium.

I sure hope Santa is reading this....

Now that the 1994 gaming season is over, Lee looks back on the past with an eye to the future. There were plenty of good sims last year — but Lee's looking for more and better in1995.

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Blood 'n guts action gaming seems to be the major subject on the minds of our Strategy Central contributors this month. So here are some tips and hints for a couple of your favorites, the futuristic fighting game *One Must Fall* (reviewed this issue), and the down-and-dirty *Doom* and *Doom II*. And for you RPG lovers, we've got a couple of great tips for *Betrayal at Krondor* — and, first off, the always popular *Ultima 7*.

Questions? Tips? Send 'em to:
PC Gamer Strategy Central
300-A South Westgate Drive
Greensboro, NC 27410
or Email us at:
peeceegee@aol.com
74431,3433@compuserve.com

Ultima 7: The Black Gate

It's may not be very virtuous, but Rob Peterscheck's cheat for *Ultima 7: The Black Gate* can help the Avatar get out of some especially sticky situations. If you didn't finish the game the first time around, now maybe you can!

Dear Strategy Central,

I want you all to know about a cool secret I discovered in *Ultima 7: The Black Gate*. I read in the November issue that you were looking for a few more tips and tactics: Well, this is a *juicy* one!

About a year ago, I found a secret area within Trinsic by accident. I stacked crates on the dead forger's house so I could kill guards without them hitting me. After stacking the crates, I attacked a guard and I didn't move the crates in time, so he chased me onto the roof. On the roof I ran until I went behind the chimney. For a moment I almost thought the game had locked up, but I realized I had warped to a special area of the game, containing eight chests filled with magic armor and supplies. Among other things in the chests, you'll find two weapons called Death Scythes that aren't available in the actual game, except for the one the boatman to Skara Brae carries. In the corner of this area is an invisible chest which holds a few objects you'll need to finish the game.

There's a warp zone in the center of this area, too. After you enter the zone, you come to a winding hallway that leads to the first teleport area. If you continue, you see even more teleporters. They'll take you to various areas all over the game, and the teleporter with the skeleton takes you to the very end of the game. Experiment, and you'll find all kinds of neat things here!

Enjoy the game,
Rob Peterscheck

Thanks a lot, Rob! This is *a juicy one! We hope your tip will make gamers load up* The Black Gate *again and take another look at this great game.*

One Must Fall: 2097

If you played the *One Must Fall* demo on our January CD-ROM and read the review in this issue, then you know that *OMF* will definitely give your reflexes a hefty workout. No problem, you say? All you'll need is a little practice and you'll be dancing on their heads. But you've chosen your pilot, picked out your 'bot, and made your way to the arena — only to get pummeled (repeatedly) by one of those brash young robot pilots with some very fancy moves. What to do?

Try using this list of moves compiled by our CompuServe buddy Diskman, and soon you'll be turning those shiny machines into scrap metal!

One trip to the arena against a Shadow 'bot, and you'll give your last 100k for a chance to own one.

It's sleek and agile but lacking in power, so the Jaguar is probably best suited for early-round combat. You'll want to save for an upgrade as soon as you can afford it!

Diskman's Moves List

Jaguar

Jaguar Leap: Down, Forward + Punch
Shadow Leap: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Cannon: Down, Back + Punch
Overhead Throw: Jump, Down + Punch when over enemy
Scrap: Down, Down, Up + Punch

Shadow

Shadow Punch: Down, Back + Punch
Shadow Kick: Down, Back + Kick
Shadow Grab: Down, Down + Punch
Shadow Dive: Jump, Down, Forward + Punch
Scrap: Forward, Up, Back, Forward, Up, Back + Punch

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Product Information Number 118

QQP
Quantum Quality Productions, Inc.

Big, ugly, and extremely powerful, the Thorn is capable of some pretty astonishing moves.

Thorn
Spike Charge: Forward, Forward + Punch
Diving Spike: Jump towards wall, Down, Forward + Kick
Speed Kick: Down, Forward + Kick
Shadow Kick: Back, Down, Forward + Kick
Scrap: Back, Back, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Up, Down, Up, Down + Punch (repeat until completed)

With its tough exterior and flame attack, the Pyros is an excellent choice for a tournament robot.

Pyros
Fire Spin: Down, Punch
Thrust: Forward, Forward + Punch
Shadow Thrust: Forward, Forward, Forward + Punch
Jet Swoop: Jump, Down + Kick
Scrap: Forward, Forward, Down, Down + Punch
Destruction: Up, Down, Up, Down + Punch (repeat)

Get too close to an Electra and you'll be burned in a shower of sparks.

Electra
Ball Lightning: Down, Back + Punch
Rolling Thunder: Forward, Forward + Punch
Super Rolling Thunder: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Electric Shards: Down, Forward+ Punch
Scrap: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Forward, Back, Down, Up, Forward + Punch (clockwise 360 degrees)

Katana
Rising Blade: Down, Forward + Punch
Triple Rising Blade: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Head Stomp: Down + Kick while over enemy, can be done repeatedly
Forward Razor Spin: Down, Forward + Kick
Backward Razor Spin: Down, Back + Kick
Scrap: Forward, Down, Back + Punch
Destruction: Back, Down, Forward + Punch

Shredder
Headbutt: Down, Forward + Punch

Mix two parts Samurai with one part WWF wrestler, and you've got a tough mamma jamma named the Katana!

Shadow Headbutt: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Flip Kick: Down, Down + Kick
Shadow Flip Kick: Down, Down, Down, Down + Kick *(?)*
Flying Hands: Down, Back + Punch
Scrap: Down, Down, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Down, Up, Up + Punch

With its speed and agility — not to mention the Flying Hands attack — The Shredder can stun even the most experienced opponent.

Flail
Spinning Throw: Forward, Forward + Kick while in throwing range
Charging Punch: Back, Back + Punch
Swinging Chains: Down, Punch
Slow Swinging Chains: Down, Kick
Scrap: Forward, Forward, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Forward, Back, Forward, Back + Punch (repeat)

Gargoyle
Diving Claw: Jump, Down + Kick
Flying Talon: Down, Forward + Punch

The Flail is as tough as it looks. The five-ton chains seem to be specially designed to tear your opponents apart.

Meet Gargoyle, a winged abomination with the moves of Bruce Lee.

The Chronos can stop time, transport himself, and kick your sorry tail all over the arena.

Shadow Talon: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Wing Charge: Forward, Forward + Punch
Scrap: Back, Down, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Down, Up, Down, Up + Punch

Chronos
Stasis Activator: Down, Back + Punch
Fast Stasis: Forward, Down, Back + Punch
Teleportation: Down + Punch

Product Information Number 121

(can be done in mid-air)
Scrap: Down, Forward + Punch
Destruction: Forward, Back, Forward, Back + Punch (repeat)

Nova

Earthquake Slam: Down, Down + Punch
Missile: Down, Forward + Punch
Air Missile: Jump, Down, Forward + Punch
Mini-Grenade: Down, Back + Punch
Chest Slam: Jump, Down + Punch
Scrap/Destruction: Being the biggest, baddest, and most mysterious robot in the game, you'd expect Nova to keep at least a few secrets. I'll let you figure this one out on your own!

Hope these help. Happy gaming!
Diskman
via CompuServe

This is the one, the King Daddy of *One Must Fall*. Nova is the biggest 'bot in the game, and just full of crafty (and painful) surprises.

More Betrayal at Krondor

Chapter passwords, potions, and everything else you'll need.

Dear Strategy Central,

Here are two tricks for *Betrayal at Krondor* that'll let you beat the game in rapid fashion:

1. On the overhead map, hold down the alt-right shift-~ (the key next to the `1') for about three seconds, and a chest will appear. Each chest contains the items needed to finish that chapter, and an option to heal all characters.

Just use the chest trick, in conjunction with these level codes, and you can beat every chapter:

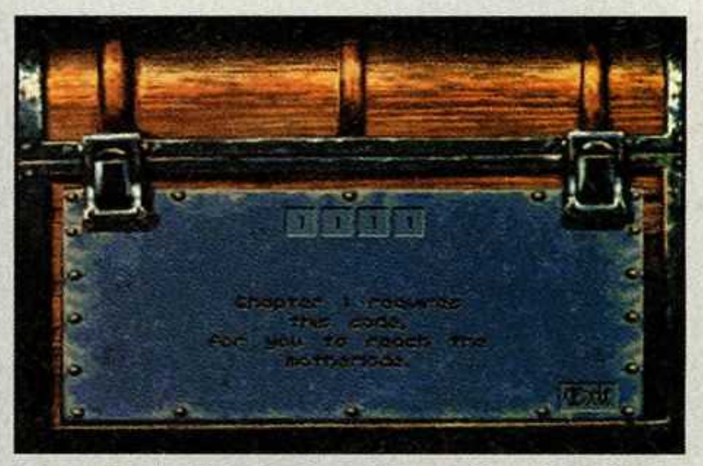
Chapter 1:	**6478**
Chapter 2:	**9216**
Chapter 3:	**7702**
Chapter 4:	**2132**
Chapter 5:	**5052**
Chapter 6:	**0680**
Chapter 7:	**0194**
Chapter 8:	**4743**
Chapter 9:	**9995**

2. To strengthen yourself a bit, here's another trick. On your way to Elvandar in Chapter 6, there's a well which, when you add Fadamor's Formula to it, can increase your characters' strengths by three points — permanently.

To find it, follow the main road to Elvandar. Just before the road dead-ends, you should find the well (use the spyglass of Ishap). The trick is that when you use the well with the formula, it takes all of the formula you have with you so that you can only do the strengthen trick once. But if you place all but one dose in a bag in front of the well, use the well, then take another dose from the bag, you can use the well again. Every time you repeat this process, both Owyn and Gorath's strengths increase by three.

Adrien de Tray
Jakarta, Indonesia via AOL

When you want to invoke Adrien's *Betrayal at Krondor* cheat, simultaneously use the alt, right-shift and ~ keys to bring up the chest.



By typing in the cheat codes you'll unlock the fairy chest and gain all of the items you'll need to complete each chapter.

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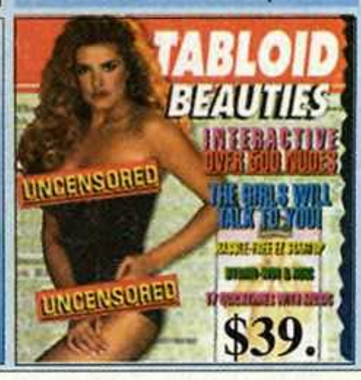


Product Information Number 97

From Birmingham, With Love

And finally, for you frustrated *Doom II* lovers, Johnathan Tigner in Birmingham, Alabama writes in with these cheats. They'll all work with *Doom*, too — except as noted.

To input any of these codes, simply type it while playing the game. If you make a mistake, just retype the code.

iddqd
God Mode. Complete invulnerability until you toggle this mode off.

idkfa
Very Happy Ammo Added. Gives all weapons, full ammo of all types, 200% armor, and all keys.

idclip
Clipping mode on. Walk through walls! Toggle this mode back off to pick up items or use switches and doors. This one only works with *Doom II*. Type **idspispopd** for *Doom*.

idchoppers
Get the chainsaw (and a cryptic message).

iddt
With the AutoMap showing, cycles between normal map, fully revealed map, and a full map showing the objects and enemies.

idbeholds
Get beserker pack.

idbeholdv
Get temporary invulnerability.

idbeholdi
Get temporary partial invisibility.

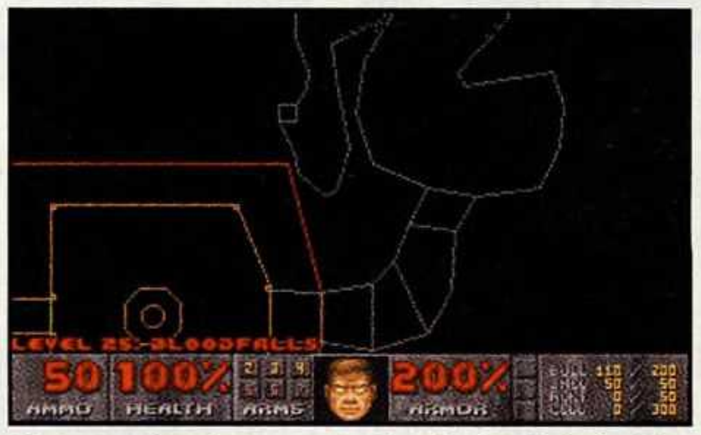
idbeholda
Get full AutoMap.

idbeholdr
Get antiradiation suit.

idbeholdl
Get light-amplification visor.

idclev
Followed by episode and level number, warps to that level.

idmypos
Display coordinates and heading.



If you get lost just use the handy-dandy beholda and you'll get a full automap.

Look! It's id's old buddy, Commander Keen!

As if the forces of hell weren't enough, id decided to bring in a few ringers on the two "secret" *Wolfenstein* levels.

If the flood of hell's minions has been keeping you from seeing the ending of *Doom II*, use the idclev cheat.

Once you're on the last level, you can use the idclip cheat to see the cause of all your suffering. Why, it's id's John Romero!

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LETTERS

If you've never written us before, go ahead and put pen to paper now. See, we're particularly keen to hear from you on two issues. Most importantly, there's the First Annual *PC Gamer* Reader's Choice Awards. This will be *your* chance to speak to the PC gaming industry, to tell them which products you feel were the best of 1994.

We're already compiling the nominations you've sent us, but there's still time for you to send us your picks. We'll put them all together, and print up a ballot sheet to run in next month's *PCG*. So watch for the March issue, and don't miss your chance to make your voice heard! We'll have all the results for you in June.

The second thing we'd like is your feelings on this whole ratings thing. Whether you love 'em or hate 'em, it looks like they're here to stay. By the time you read this, most games on the shelves will carry ratings labels — and we want to know what you think of them. Are they helpful? Do you think people will be drawn to games with high sex and violence scores? Do the ratings really help you to make better purchasing decisions? Fire off that missive, and let us know where you stand. We can't print 'em all — but as always, we'll read 'em all.

So Let's Hear From You!

Write to:
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74431,3433@compuserve.com

Feeling a Little Left-Out

Dear PC Gamer,

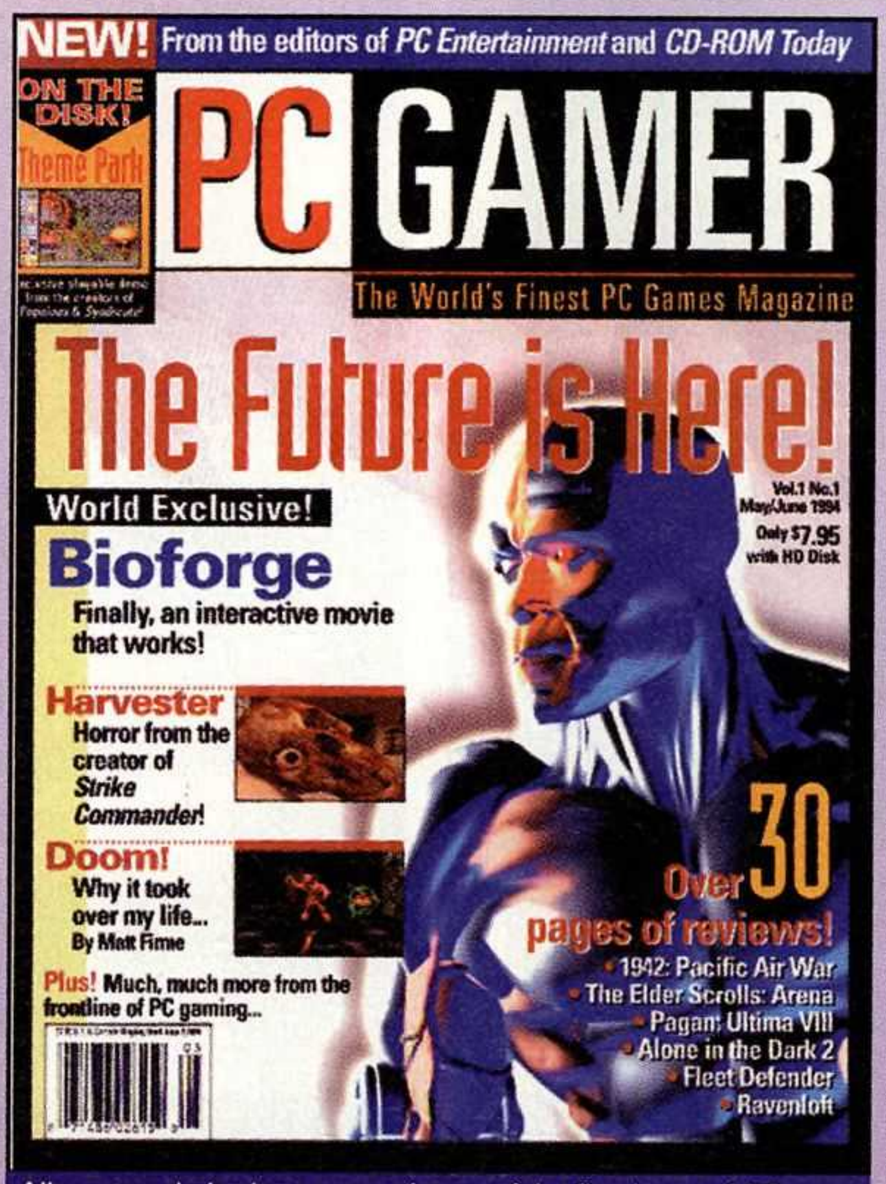
After my first glance at the Disc Pages section of Vol. 1 No. 7, I'm trying to decide whether or not to renew my subscription to *PC Gamer*. My first impression was that the rest of the magazine wouldn't have anything to do with me. You said, "If you don't have a CD-ROM drive (or, worse yet, decided not to try out the CD-Edition)...the rest of this good stuff won't apply to you, except maybe to point out all of the fun you're missing. But hey, it's your money. We're not going to tell you that you should go out and buy a CD-ROM drive." You go on to say a little more about the disk version. I felt like you were rubbing it in about how wonderful the CD-ROM Edition is.

To me, it looks as if within the next few issues you will have nothing to do with any disk games. Therefore, since I don't have a CD-ROM drive yet, I don't know how much longer your magazine will apply to me.

Dismayed subscriber,
Kyle Blaney
Omaha, NE

Sorry, Kyle. We certainly don't want you to feel like the mag's not for you. In fact, many of the demos we carry on The CD are of floppy-based games. It's just that we obviously can't cram as many demos on the floppy as we can on The CD. So there'll always be more of The CD Pages devoted to covering The CD, because there are more demos on The CD to talk about. But we'll continue to offer the 3.5" floppy disk to those readers who either don't have a CD-ROM drive, or aren't interested in getting all the demos the CD Edition offers.

The Disc Pages are only a small part of the magazine, though, and the rest of the book applies to you as much as to any PC gamer. Will we cover more CD-ROM games in the coming year? Yes — but that's because the gaming industry on the whole is moving toward CD and away from floppies. As we've been saying for quite some time, you're gonna need a CD-ROM drive soon if you want to keep up with the big new releases — like Under a Killing Moon *and* Wing Commander III *— that'll be shipping on CD only. There'll still be a few floppy releases, and we'll continue to cover them as we always have. But as more and more publishers go to CD-ROM, floppy games are bound to decrease. All we can do is warn you that the gaming industry is quickly heading in that direction.*



All we can do is show you a picture of the first issue of *PC Gamer*. The Premiere Issue sold out in record time!

Missed it by That Much

Dear PC Gamer,

Sorry to say, I started to buy your visually stimulating magazine one issue too late. Would Vol 1. No. 1 (June '94) disk and magazine still be available? New or used, beggars can't be choosers.

Bill White
Live Oak, Florida

Glad you like the magazine, Bill. But unfortunately, the first issue and demo disk are sold out. We only have about three of them here! You might go online and see if one of our readers has a copy they can be prompted to part with. Good luck in your search!

Building Your Own

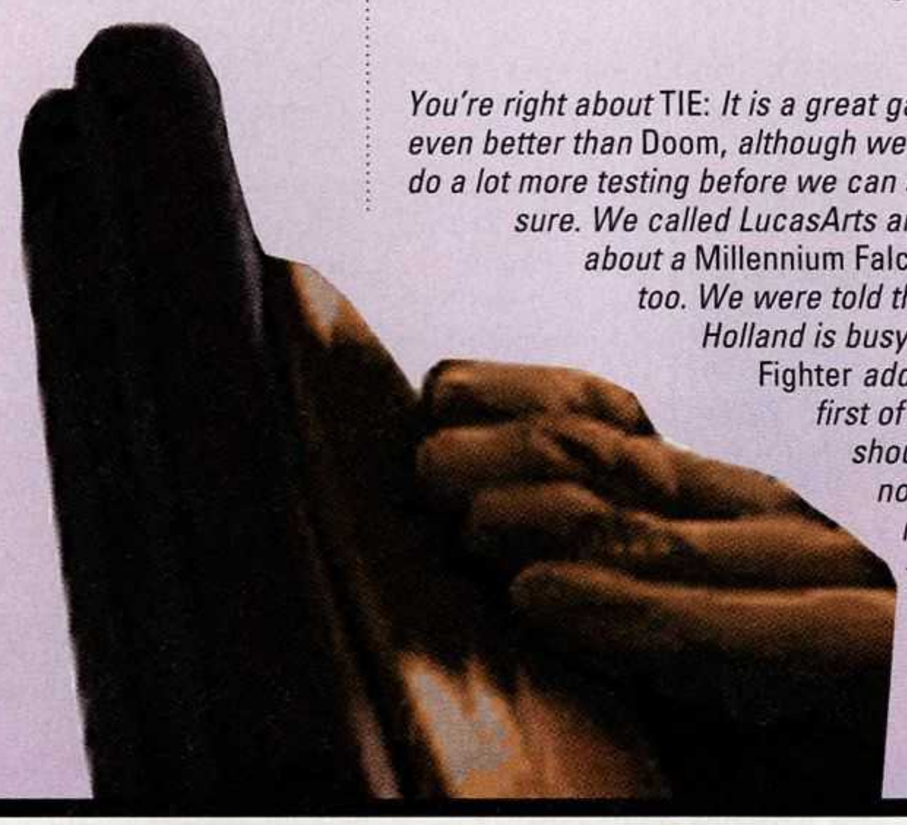
PC Gamer,

I think your demo disks are a great idea. The only reason I bought Vol. 6 was because it had a free demo. After I had played *Blackthorne* (which is a great game), I remembered the magazine. After reading it, I decided to write to you.

I agree with you when you said *Doom* is "The Best Game of All Time." After playing for only a few minutes I was hooked, and two weeks later I'd beat the spiderdemon. But I won't be deleting *Doom* from my hard drive anytime soon. I keep playing, trying to get 100% on Knee Deep in the Dead.

I was surprised when, in Vol. 6, you said that you can make your own levels. Will you please tell me how? Also, I've heard rumors that there are some codes for *Doom*. Is this true?

Thanks,
Logan Harper
IL



There are all kinds of Doom *editors (look for them on any of the major online services) which let you alter levels and even build your own levels from scratch. It's tough work, but very rewarding. And yeah, there are plenty of* Doom *codes, too. Check out Strategy Central for details.*

And as Long as We're Talking About Doom...

Dear PC Gamer,

I'm writing about the input from everyone saying *Doom* is the greatest game of all time. Of course it *is* a great game, but you just can't compare it to *X-Wing* or *TIE Fighter*. OK, maybe *TIE* was kind of easy even on the hardest setting, but it's still the best. *Doom* is a little tougher and it's addicting, but it just doesn't have the depth or storyline of the *Star Wars* sims.

Also, I was wondering if LucasArts might come out with a game based on the Millennium Falcon. It could be like *Privateer*, but with the *TIE Fighter* engine for much smoother gameplay.

Tan Singchareon
Colton, CA

You're right about TIE: *It is a great game. Maybe even better than* Doom, *although we'll have to do a lot more testing before we can say for sure. We called LucasArts and asked about a* Millennium Falcon *game, too. We were told that Larry Holland is busy with* TIE Fighter *add-ons, the first of which should be out now. So no new games — yet.*

Doom II much?

PC Gamer,

Is it just me, or does anyone else think *Doom II* is a disappointment? It's almost seventy bucks for what are really just add-on disks. For the cost of a new game, we should have seen some real enhancements rather than just superficial changes. I had hoped for an optional targeting crosshair, grenades, mines, flame weapons, vertical panning, vehicles, jumping, etc. The first-person shooter that accomplishes all of this and still runs *smoothly* will push *Doom* and *Doom II* off my hard drive.

The new levels in *Doom II* aren't even as well-designed as some of the home-made levels I've seen. If *Doom*'s architecture never gave you reason to worry about the limitations of its 3-D (really 2.5D) engine, *Doom II*'s stadium sized rooms and terraced skyscrapers will remind you over and over again that you can't look up or down, and you can't select targets along the vertical axis. I was never frustrated while playing *Doom*/ But *Doom II* is a different story.

I think I'll stick with *Doom* and DEU and wait for *Quake*. Hopefully, id

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Product Information Number 92

will get up off its laurels and start thinking by then (but perhaps I'll be too busy playing *Dark Forces* to care).

Michael Bell
Bow, Washington

We were a little disappointed that there weren't more new additions to Doom II. *But all in all, we think it's a pretty good sequel. It gives you more* Doom *and plenty of challenge and adds greatly enhanced Deathmach play.*

As for Dark Forces, *it'll certainly grant some of your wishes for new movement capabilities and a truer 3D engine. You can look up and down, crouch, and jump across chasms, lending the game a much more realistic feel. It does all this very smoothly, by the way, and looks fantastic.*

As for Quake, *the latest word from id (and we're not allowed to say much) has us convinced that you'll be scrambling to get your hands on the game as soon as you possibly can!*

Dark Forces may have what it takes to be one of the first serious challengers to *Doom*.

Memory Nightmares!

Dear PC Gamer,

I just got done reading your first issue of *PC-Gamer: The CD-ROM Edition (Vol. 2 No. 1)*. It was your best issue to date, and I loved it and The CD. But it did raise one annoying problem for me.

I'm starting to notice a trend in games these days that I really dislike — especially after fidgeting with the *WC3* demo included with PCG *CD-ROM Edition*. I spent well over an hour trying to get the demo to work on my Pentium-90 with 16 megs of RAM, a Sound Blaster 16, and Diamond Stealth 64 with 2 meg VRAM. I was a bit dismayed by all this, but I decided I'd order the game anyway.

The way I see it, there are too many games out there that require different configurations. Until now, I only needed two: one for CD-ROM with Extended Memory, and the other for games that require Expanded Memory. Trying out the *WC3* demo, though, I soon realized that it didn't like my regular configuration (Extended memory, using the NOEMS call with EMM386). So I removed NOEMS and made it RAM, but then the demo complained that I didn't have enough high memory! I finally built a third system configuration, and even then the demo locked up too often. So I finally gave up and copied it to my HD, and then it ran fine. I hope the actual game will not be this picky!

All in all, I love the demo — and as I said, I ordered the game direct. It's just that I'm getting sick of games that either use expanded memory, or don't run in protected mode. Not that expanded memory alone ticks me off. But it gets a bit trickier when a program requires expanded as well as lots of conventional memory. If a program requires lots of conventional memory, then use extended memory — or better yet, run the game in protected mode like, *Doom*. In terms of memory requirements, *Doom* is the most versatile game I've ever seen. If companies can keep up with other technologies, like all the new sound and video cards, why can't they come up with a memory standard?

Thanks for listening,
Jason Box
via e-mail

Jeez, you're not the only one wishing for a little memory standardization! We get calls every day from new gamers who're pulling their hair out over all this memory mumbo jumbo. That's partly why we ran our "DOS for Gamers" feature in last month's issue — but in truth, your suggestion is really the best one. Programmers have got to get together and agree on some standard for memory usage, or potential customers who're new to gaming will just give up.

We're hoping that the new Windows '95 will help, though. Unlike past incarnations of Windows, '95 is actually an operating system unto itself. So it'll be able to run most games with just the click of a button, and handle memory management in the background. For more, check out this month's Eyewitness section.

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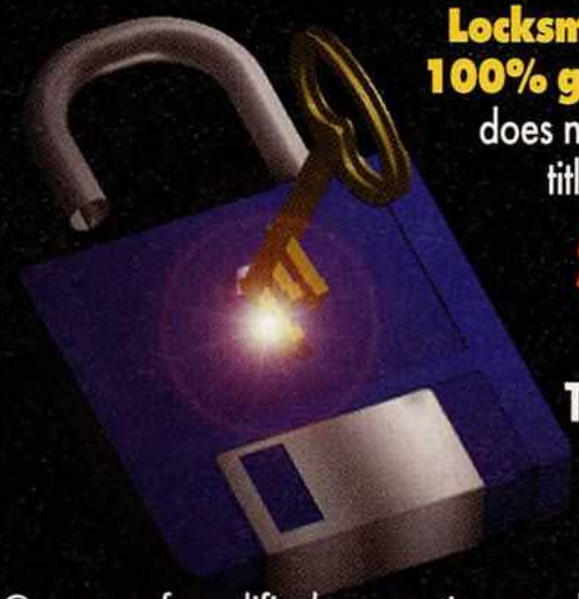

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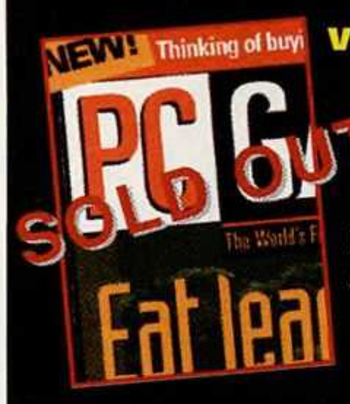
Back Issues

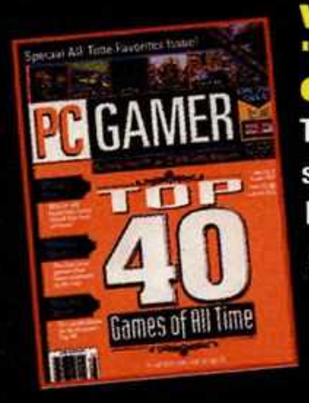


Volume 1, Number 1 (May/June 1994)
"The Future is Here"
On the disk: *Theme Park*

In our first issue, we took a trip down to Austin for a close-up look at Origin's *Bioforge*, and Matt began his 12-step program by confessing his hidden addiction to *Doom*. Scoops! on *Noctropolis*, *System Shock*, *Front Page Sports: Baseball*, and

Volume 1, Number 2 (July 1994)
"Eat lead, Fritz!"
On the disk: *Pinball Fantasies* and *Sink or Swim*

We celebrated the 50th anniversary of D-Day with an extensive behind-the-scenes report on MicroProse's stunning WWII tank sim *Across the Rhine*, as well as reviews of *Tanks!*, *M-4 Sherman Tank Simulator*, and two pages of Tom McDonald's expert strategic tips on *V for Victory: Gold•Juno•Sword*. Looking to buy a multimedia upgrade kit? Our CD-ROM buyer's guide in this issue is just what you need!



Volume 1, Number 3 (August 1994)
"The Top 40 Games of All Time"
On the disk: *Detroit*

This is it — the list of the Top 40 games of all times that generated so much mail, so much controversy, so much outrage that we can hardly wait to do it again! Check out our story on Virtual Reality gaming and Forte Technology's incredible VFX-1 VR Helmet; pick up some killer tips for *Master of Orion*, *Quest for Glory I*, *Ultima VIII*, and *Mortal Kombat*; and read the best *Wing Commander III* story until *the* December 1994 issue came along!

Volume 1, Number 4 (September 1994)
"The Year of the PC"
On the disk: *CyClones*

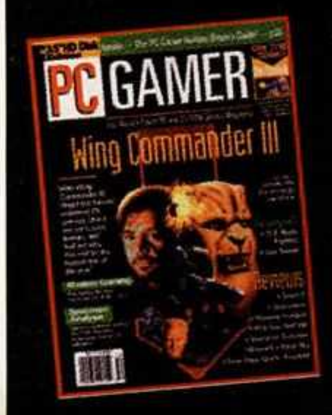
Not everyone gets to go to the Consumer Electronics Show, but thanks to our stunning 18-page report you don't need to. We also detail what hardware you need to run these high-end juggernauts — and reveals that a great PC gaming system isn't as expensive as you might think. Great Scoops! on *NASCAR Racing*, *Wolf*, and *The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki*, plus two pages of *X-COM* strategy make this one a collector's item!

Volume 1, Number 5 (October 1994)
"Dark Forces"
On the disk: *Master of Magic*

Here's the definitive story on *Dark Forces*, a first-person shooter with a new Star Wars story, plus the first Scoop! on the biker adventure *Full Throttle*. And don't forget the review of *TIE Fighter*, which earned our highest rating ever! You want *real* previews? How about Scoops! on *Zephyr*, *Menzoberranzan*, *Dust*, and *Warcraft: Humans and Orcs*? Come on, order it — you know you wanna!

Volume 1, Number 6
"Cyberia"
On the disk: *Blackthorne*

We journeyed to Interplay's offices to preview the multimedia action-adventure *Cyberia*, and came back convinced that it has the potential to challenge *Rebel Assault* as one of the best-selling CD-ROM games ever. Strategy fans will love Bill Trotter's roundup of wargaming magazines, and once again we beat everyone to the punch with Scoops! on *King's Quest VII*, *Hell*, and *Dragon's Lore*, The Software Toolworks' groundbreaking FRP. Oh, and let's not forget the first of many bi-annual review indexes.



Volume 1, Number 7
"Wing Commander III"
On the disk: *Star Crusader*
On the CD-ROM: *Wing Commander III*, *Dawn Patrol*, *Relentless*, *Quarantine*, *Ultimate Football*, *Rise of the Robots*... and many, many more!

Say you're a Wing Commander fan? Then this is an issue you'll treasure forever! Bill Trotter went to Austin and took Chris Roberts' newest game for a test drive, and came back with a five-page feature. Tom McDonald assesses Spectrum Holobyte's plans for '95 and beyond, and explores the rapidly growing world of modem gaming. One of our best ever!

PC GAMER

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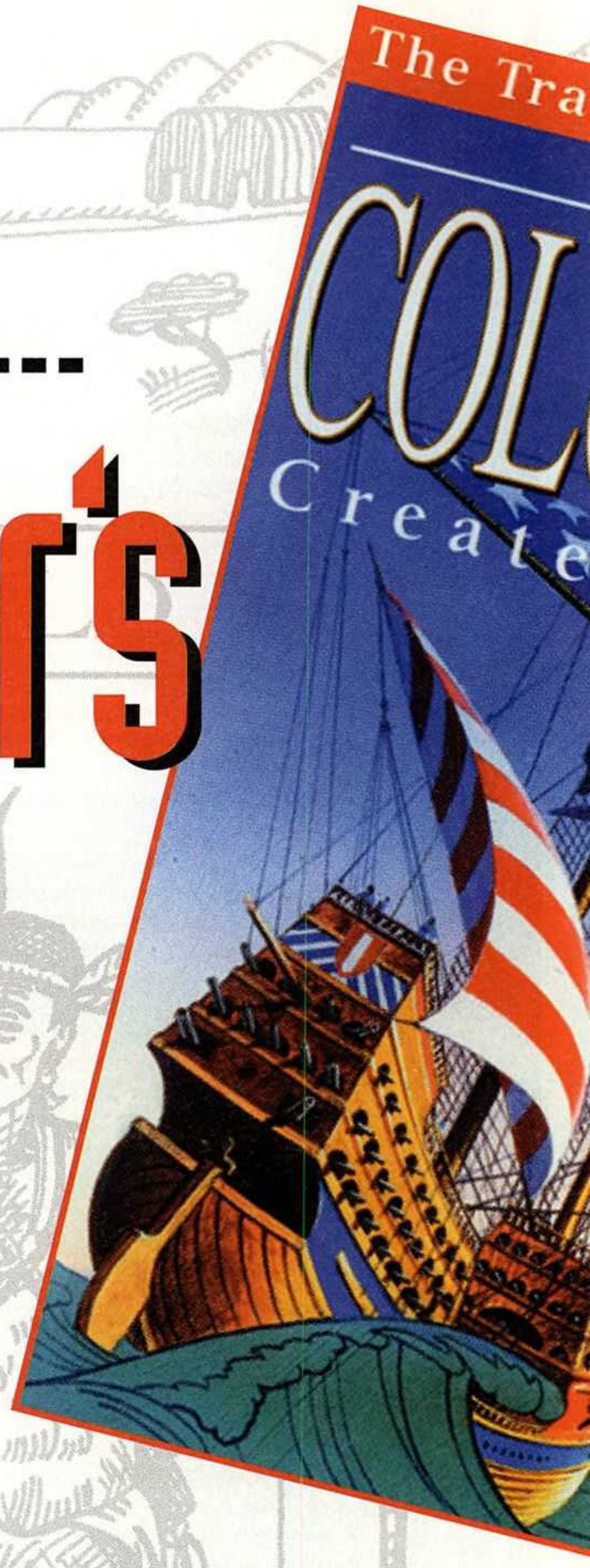

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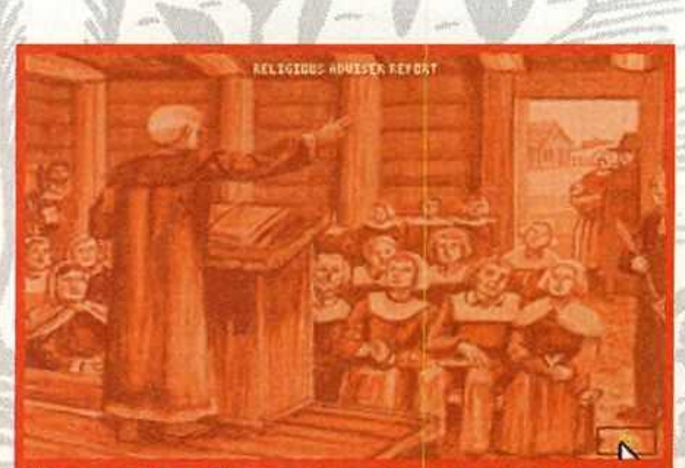
Maybe you've heard of Sid Meier. He's the guy behind *Colonization*, the game that challenges *you* to conquer the New World — and build a nation. And as *Colonization* climbs the best-seller charts, we've teamed up with MicroProse to give you a chance at what may be the most unique contest prize we've ever offered....

Come on, admit it. We've all dreamed of single-handedly shaping the face and course of our own little nation. And even if you haven't dreamed it before, you will once you start playing *Colonization*! In the grand tradition of *Civilization*, *Colonization* put the birth of a nation in your hands. You assemble a party of explorers, sail to the New World, and stake a claim for king and country.

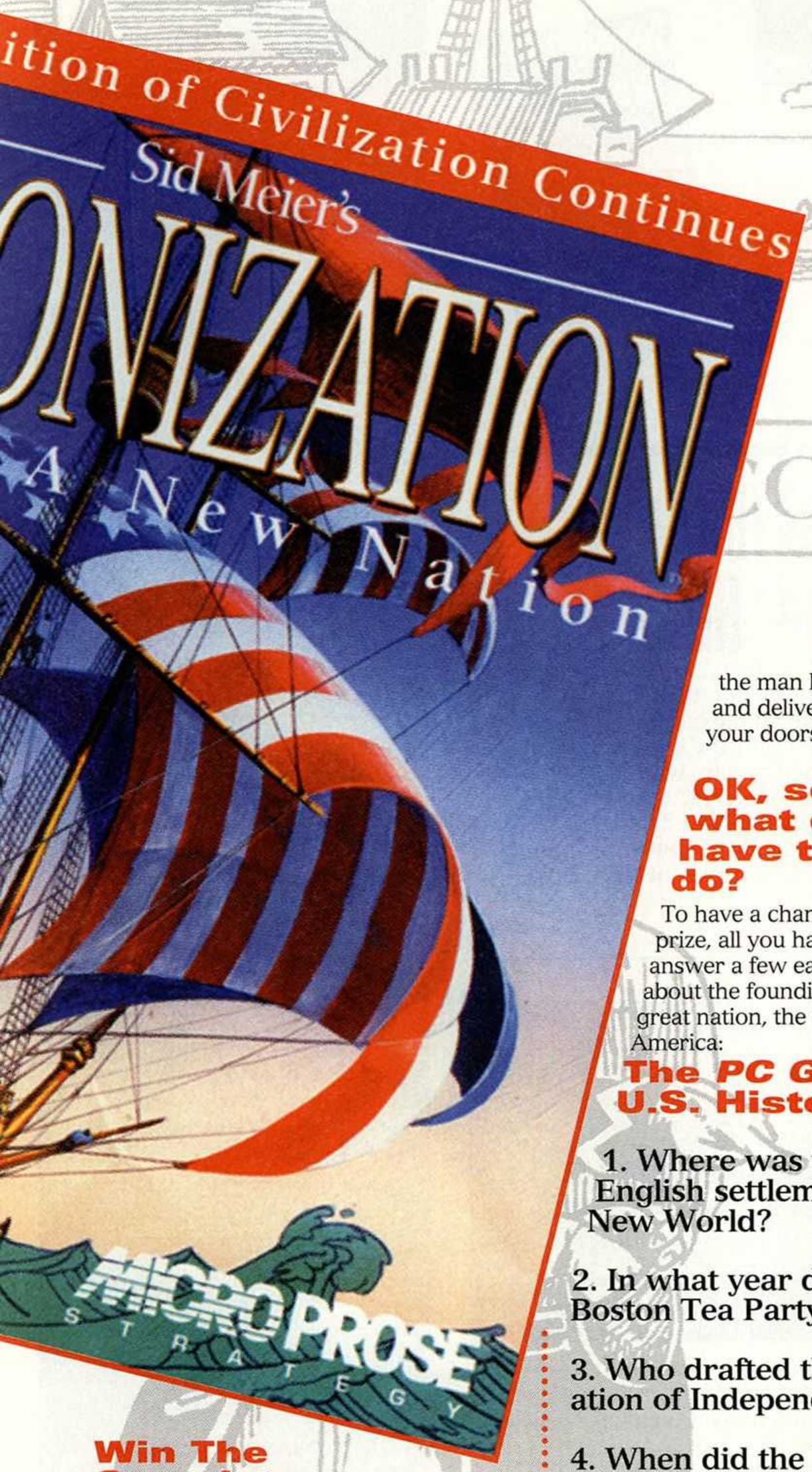
But your job doesn't end there. You've got to settle your new lands with colonists, striving to make them self-sufficient, and build an economy. You'll have to decide how to deal with the natives, and keep an eye on competing nations and their fledgling colonies. And eventually, you'll help your colonists establish themselves as an independent new nation.

Colonization is only the latest in an amazing string of hits from Sid Meier, one of the pioneering forces in PC entertainment. His early titles, like *Hellcat Ace*, *Pirates!*, and *Solo Flight*, were the foundation on which MicroProse was created over a decade ago — and Meier's work continues to be among the best and most eagerly awaited in PC gaming.

But enter this month's contest, and you just might get the chance to appreciate the scope and importance of Sid's work first-hand. Because MicroProse and *PC Gamer* are giving you an opportunity to....



"Do not deny it, Goodman Trotter. For Goody Craig *saw* thee dancing in the woods thus!"



With a blast of trumpets hailing him, Sid Meier announced *Colonization* at last year's Summer CES. One of Sid's closest friends even made a statement — none other than God himself!

the man himself, and delivered to your doorstep!

Uh-oh. Looks like the Spaniards are on that "convert the heathens and enrich our sovereign" kick again....

OK, so what do I have to do?

To have a chance at this great prize, all you have to do is answer a few easy questions about the founding of our own great nation, the United States of America:

The *PC Gamer* U.S. History Quiz

1. Where was the first English settlement in the New World?

2. In what year did the Boston Tea Party take place?

3. Who drafted the Declaration of Independence?

4. When did the Revolutionary War end?

5. Who was the first vice-president of the United States?

And there it is! Just write down your answers, drop them in an envelope, and mail them to:

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ONE ENTRY PER PERSON! All entries must be received no later than March 1, 1995.

We'll wait 'til all the entries are in and then, on March 2, we'll reach into the old Entries Barrel. The first entry with all the right answers wins!

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OK, who re-ordered the names on this map?!? Wasn't Roanoke Island south of Norfolk and Corolla?

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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* Colonization Contest, P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, N.C. 27429. All entries must be received by March 1, 1995. The first randomly-selected entry to answer all the questions correctly wins. The editors' decision is final.

Next Time in PC Gamer...

Everyone thought it'd be neat to do an Ides of March pictorial, with the whole crew stabbing some poor slob. But Scotty wouldn't wear a toga, so here's what we came up with instead....

Volume 2 No. 3 Goes On Sale **Feb. 3** Don't Miss It!

These guys are probably wondering which titles won the *PC Gamer* Awards. But they'll just have to wait.

The First Annual PC Gamer Awards

Now that we're well into the new year, it's time to look back on the games of '94 and honor the very best of the best. And that's just what we'll do next month, with the announcement of our first annual *PC Gamer* Awards. All the editors got together and, without U.N. intervention, managed to come up with this list of the very finest games of 1994. Don't miss it!

The First Annual PC Gamer Readers' Choice Award

Also next month, we'll be printing the official ballot for the *PC Gamer* Readers' Choice Awards. This is *your* chance to pick the best games, packages, advertisements, and accomplishments of 1994, and promises to be one of the biggest events in PC gaming. The game publishers are already trying to get us to tell them who the winners are, but we'll keep quiet until we've heard from *all* of you. So watch for the March issue, and make your opinions known!

Who'll take top honors in the Readers' Choice Awards? *X-COM* is being mentioned quite often....

The Review Crew...

...is taking a look at some of the year's biggest releases, and we'll give you all the info you need to make the right purchases. So watch for our no-holds-barred reviews of Electronic Arts' *Magic Carpet*, New World Computing's *Zephyr*, Blizzard's *Warcraft*, Sierra's *King's Quest VII*, Origin's *Wing Commander III* ...and more. Many, many more.

***Warcraft*, reviewed next month, is a sad reminder of continued Human/Orc hostility.**

And don't forget, we'll bring you a whole new crop of Scoops!, Eyewitness, columns (including an important announcement from "Alternate Lives" guru Neil Randall), and some special surprises. Oh yeah, we'll also have a new issue of The CD, packed with as much gaming satisfaction as is humanly possible.

You'll get all this and more in the March issue of PC Gamer!

PC GAMER

February 1995

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Chip Elko consulted the Passaic Yellow Pages and found but a single entry under the heading Antiquities: "Antiques, Oddities, Thingamabobs — Honest Appraisals and Fair Prices." The names of the place was "The Eldritch Curiosity Shoppe" and the proprietor was one Prof. Diomides Kyriakopopoulos.

Business hours were from six to midnight. Damned curious, thought Chip, but then, this was Passaic.

He glanced at his watch: five hours until the shop opened. Sighing, he turned again, for the hundredth time, to the yellowed scrap of paper he'd found in the wooden box given him only yesterday by a dark, stooped, whizened, malodorous stranger. He was stumped: whatever language the writing was in, it didn't look as though human tongues were intended to speak it.

"Ng'lha't! Cthulhu R'yleh spfagn'tyleh!" read one of the more pronounceable fragments. Maybe Prof. Kyriakopopoulos could decipher it. Chip needed the dough, but he wasn't in the habit of accepting odd jobs from unwashed gnomes in greasy fedoras.

Behind the film of dust that covered the shop windows, Chip discerned many strange and curious objects. He recognized a steam-driven aeopile and a nice pair of matching Moebius strips, but the other items were enigmatic, if not faintly sinister.

When he showed the writings to Prof. K., the man's face contorted in horror. "It's a fragment from the P'nakotic Manuscripts!" he gasped. "Shun the one who gave you this!"

CONTINUED NEXT MONTH!

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"After playing this game for hours I have confirmed my worst fears and highest hopes all in one game: this game is spooky, involving and downright suspenseful, but it's so good that it might affect the rest of my responsibilities in life." - Chris Harding - online gamer

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