18 **REVIEWS:** Wing Commander IV • Terra Nova • Warhammer

PC GAMER

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CD-ROM Edition

ON THE CD

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The complete shareware version of this true *Doom*-killer

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- Killer hints, tips, and cheats for *Duke Nukem 3D*

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Product Information Number 111

PC GAMER
VOLUME 3 NUMBER 5 • MAY 1996

Cover Story

THE Future OF GAMING

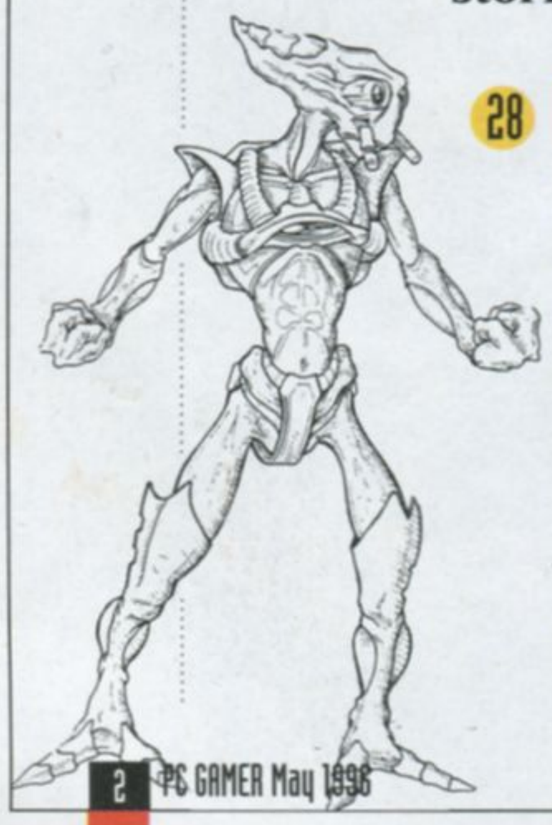
Online gaming is poised for takeoff, fueled by new multi-player services, the hottest games, better performance, and an explosive growth in the Internet population. Meanwhile, the first virtual reality gear designed for the gaming public is finally available — but how much of it is still more virtual than reality? Get an in-depth look at the contenders and the pretenders before you take the plunge into cyberspace.

64

Cover and feature photography by Aaron Lauer

Scoops!

We braved lawn darts, a Twister board, and a troop of flying monkeys to give you the inside stories on these hot titles.



28 Prey

Sure, you've heard about *Quake*, but what about *Prey*? This new *Quake* rival comes from the same twisted talents that brought us *Duke Nukem 3D*, and it looks like the upstarts at 3D Realms could give the action kings at id Software a serious run for the money.

34 Callahan's Crosstime Saloon

Science fiction, comedy, the mysteries of time and space, and a pint of a Guinness — what more could you ask for? Take a sneak preview at this tavern at the end of the universe.

40 Betrayal in Antara

What made *Betrayal at Krondor* such a great role-playing game? Was it the top-notch game design, or the rich settings of fantasy author Raymond E. Feist's Riftwar novels? Sierra attempts to answer that question with a gorgeous new RPG.

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Informed, definitive, and forged from molten steel.

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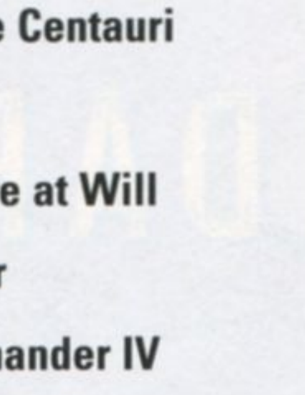
It just keeps getting better and better!



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Out on that wacky web, Heidi finds that a little searching and a lot of patience can uncover some good stuff for the kids.

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One small step for man, one giant leap for motherboards: Dan tackles a big do-it-yourself upgrade.

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Once again, censorship takes a wild ride down the wrong side of the info-highway.

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"Those alien bastards" are *really* gonna pay, now — we've got tips and cheats for *Duke Nukem 3D*. Whoa, that's gotta hurt!

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Faxes, E-mail, or letters on truck-stop napkins: so many ways to vent your spleen.

184 **Next Issue**
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Nine out of ten mailboxes prefer the tangy taste of *PC Gamer*. Subscribe now!

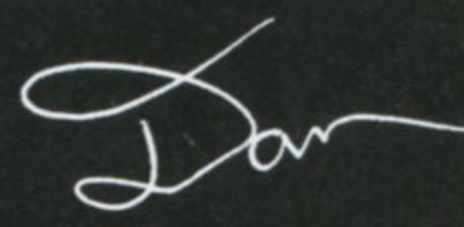
Things to Come

Oh boy, do the movers and shakers in PC gaming love to hit us with the old hype-stick. We've been hearing for years about how virtual reality and the information superhighway were going to change the face of gaming; frankly, we've been bombarded with so much big talk that it was starting to bounce right off.

Movies like *The Net* and *Disclosure* have done a pretty impressive job of getting it all wrong, but no technologies as cool as these can remain Hollywood sci-fi for long.

Now we're finally starting to see evidence that it's not all talk; the first working VR headsets are on the market, and 1996 will bring a crowd of new online gaming services to the Internet. The hype is becoming promising reality, and the implications for the future of gaming are significant. Imagine playing a game in a three-dimensional world that seems to completely surround you, or finding a truly worthy opponent for any kind of PC game at any time of the day or night. That'd be fairly cool, wouldn't it?

Well, it's all closer than you may think. Flip over to page 61 for the whole story.



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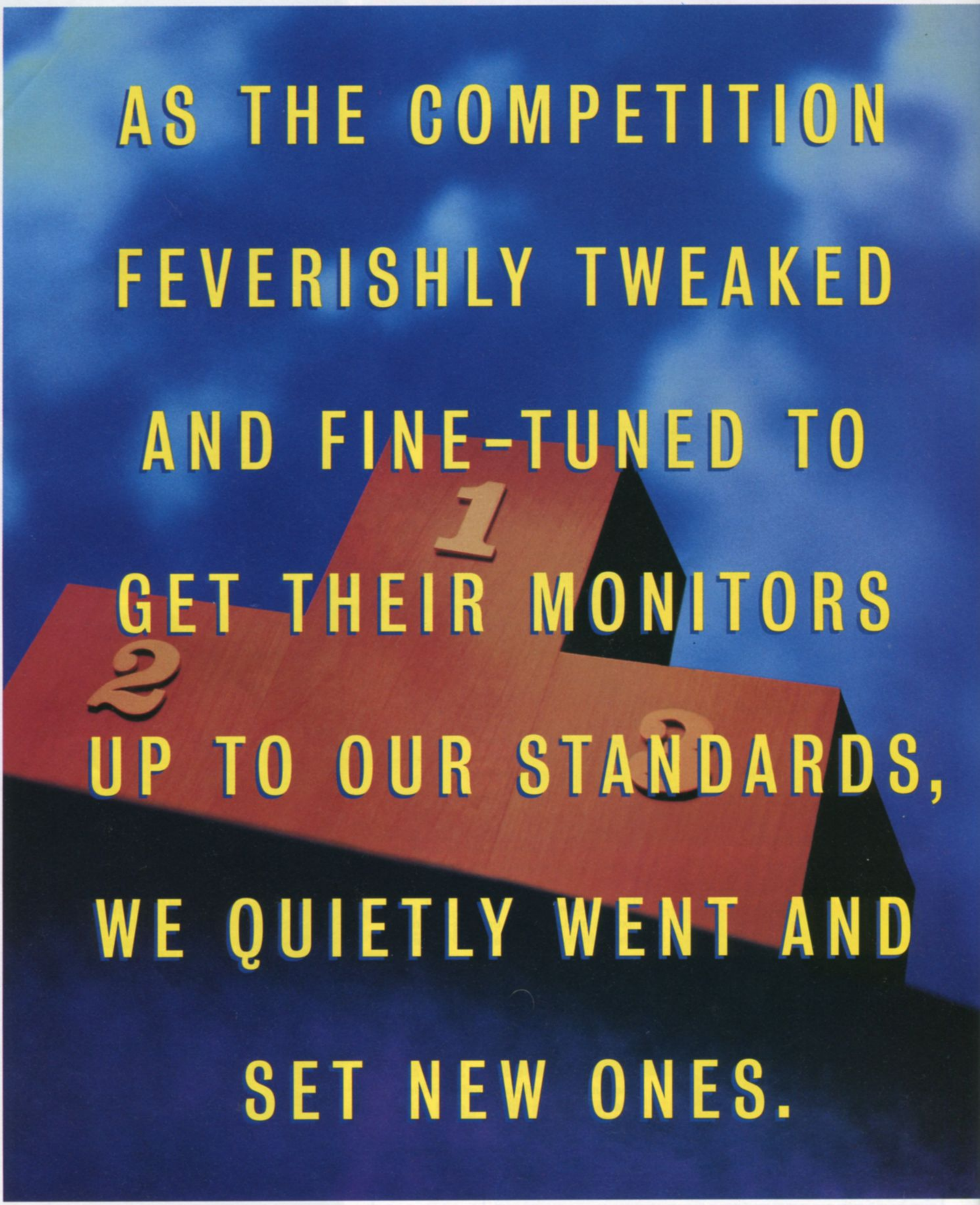

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Key #27551.

Ass-stompin' aliens have landed

in futuristic Los Angeles, and

the humans suddenly find

themselves atop the endangered

species list. The odds are

a million-to-one, just the way

Duke Nukem likes it!

DUKE NUKEM™ 3D

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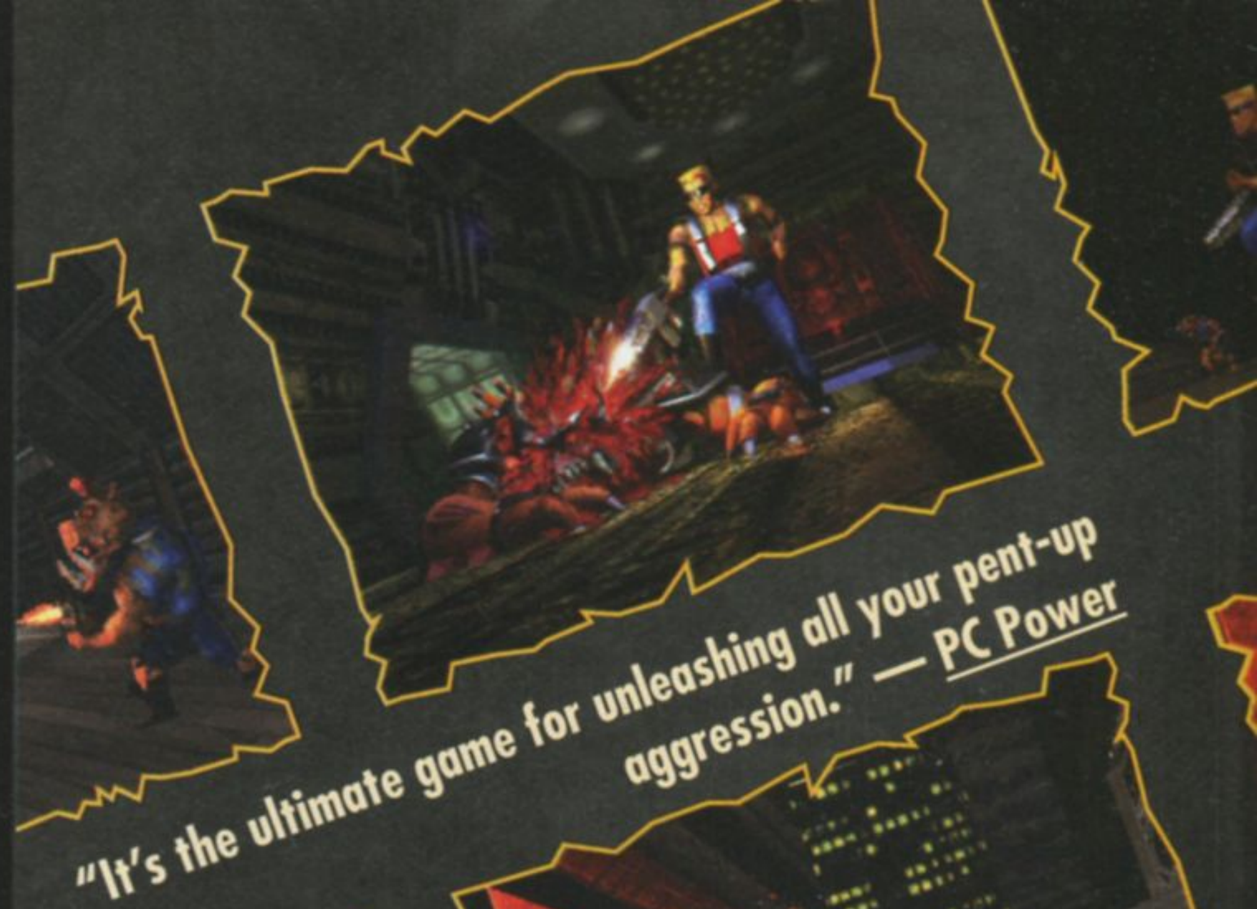
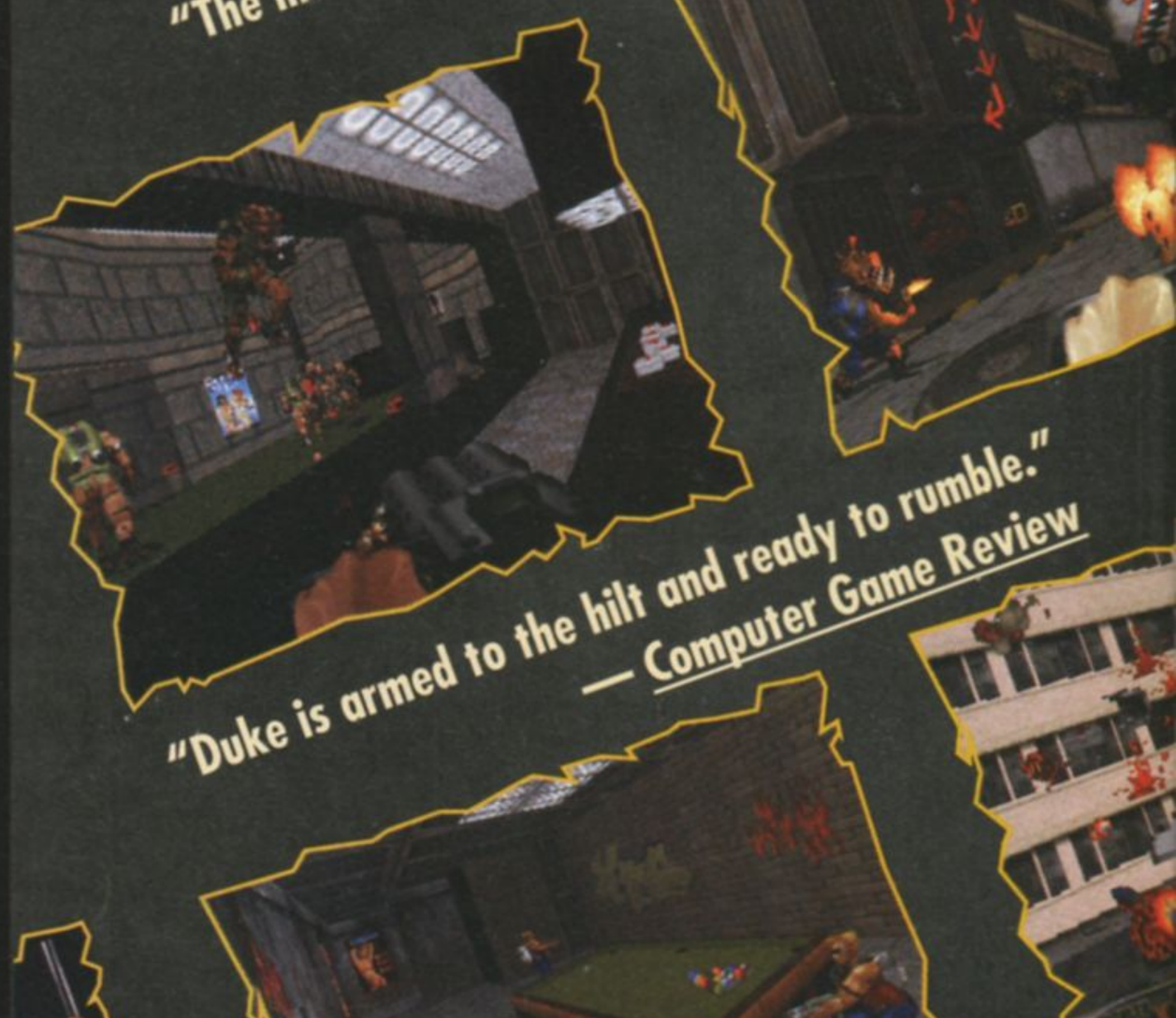


"It's the ultimate game for unleashing all your pent-up aggression." — PC Power

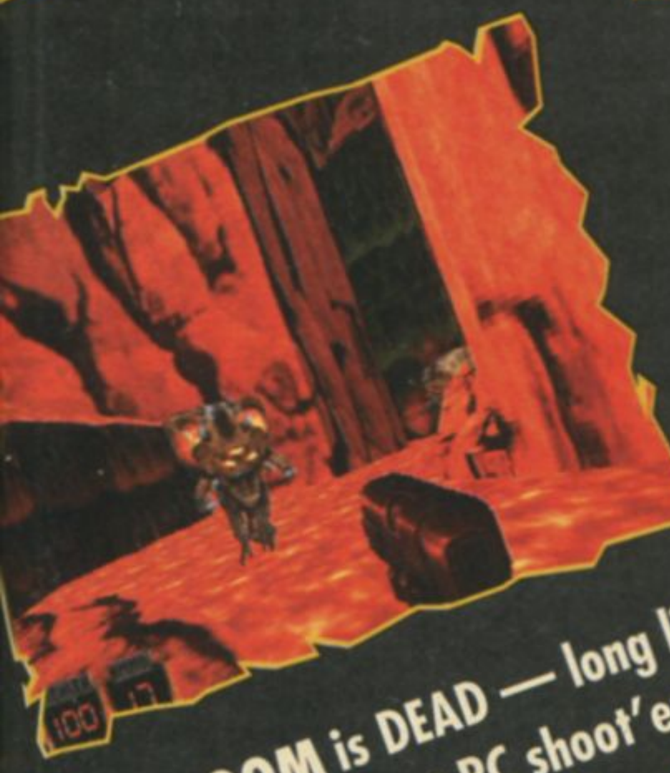
"The most astonishing game we've laid our eyes on for ages!" — PC Gamer



"Duke is armed to the hilt and ready to rumble." — Computer Game Review

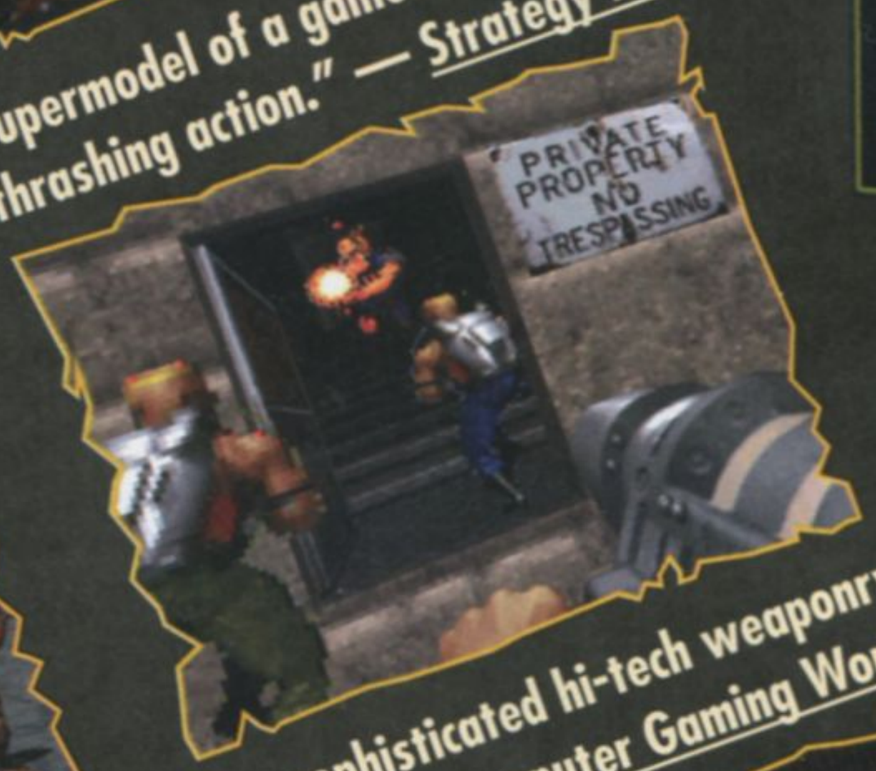
"The Build engine's flexibility means that pretty much anything goes in Duke Nukem 3D." — Edge Magazine

Well, what are you waiting for?

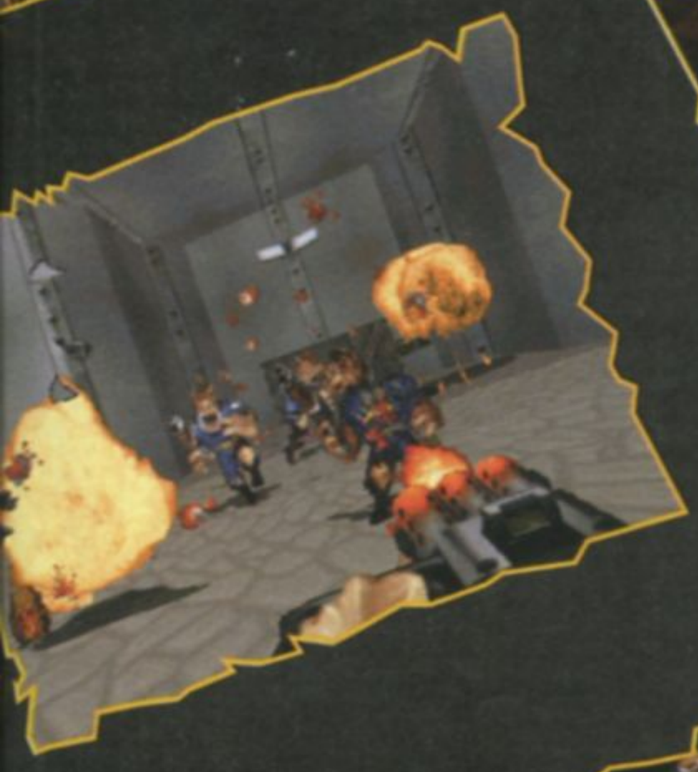


"DOOM is DEAD — long live Duke Nukem 3D, could this be the greatest PC shoot'em-up ever?" — X-GEN / Next Generation

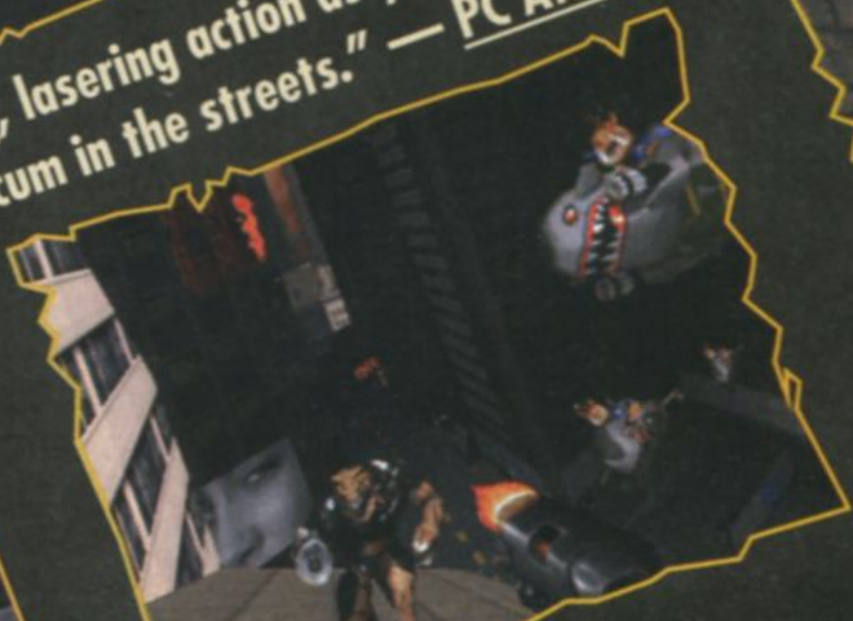
"Duke Nukem 3D truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy, and gory with lead-thrashing action." — Strategy Plus

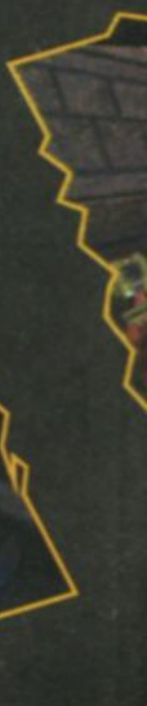


"The BFG was a pop-gun, (it's) got nothing on the sophisticated hi-tech weaponry at Duke Nukem's disposal." — Computer Gaming World



"Nowhere is safe from Duke's pounding, lasering action as you fight the alien scum in the streets." — PC Attack





Complete Version

For more details, make tracks to your local software retailer!

Shareware Version

THE CD

INSTALLING • PLAYING • QUICK TIPS

All is not lost ...

With the loss of Rikits, the *PC Gamer* monkey, things have been rather quiet around our offices. Dan went on a banana-eating binge in honor of our kidnapped mascot, and now everyone has to wear cleats to keep from slipping on the peels. And Joe, well, we still can't get him to join us in the "beat-the-new-boy" games he used to revel in. He just keeps mumbling, "No one could swing a tire-iron like Rikits."

At least we've got some great new games to play. With the release of *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Terra Nova*, and *Descent II* (the demos are on this month's CD), we've been able to take our minds off the kidnapping, at least for a little while.

Still, it's rough trying to put out a monthly magazine without a monkey, so the search continues. If you come across anything on *The CD* this month that might help us in our search, jot it down. Pretty soon, things will come to a head, and we'll need your notes to help us catch the swine who brought these dark days to *PC Gamer*. There's a reward in it — the kind of reward only a hard-core gamer like you could imagine.

Entering Our World

You begin in the secluded alley that leads to the hidden *PC Gamer* elevator. Move your mouse pointer around the screen until it turns into an arrow. Click, and you'll move in the direction of the arrow.

Click on the door handle to open the elevator, then click forward to step inside. Turn around until you're facing the front of the elevator and click on the button. Connect the two loose wires.

Once you're in our offices, you can move around using the mouse. To check out the game demos, click on the jukebox. When you're ready to leave, move your mouse to the top of the screen, and a menu will appear with an exit option.

Quick Start for The CD

Our new front end is Windows-based, so setup couldn't be easier:

1. Insert the CD and load Windows.
2. From the RUN option (found under the File menu in Windows 3.1 or under Windows 95's Start menu) type X:SETUP (where X is the letter of your CD-ROM drive).
3. This will create the *PC Gamer* icon group. Click on the icon, and *The CD* will launch.

After you've visited our offices, this jukebox will appear in the alley. It's a shortcut that'll let you bypass the elevator and go directly to the game demos in future sessions.

This is the elevator. Click on the handle to enter.

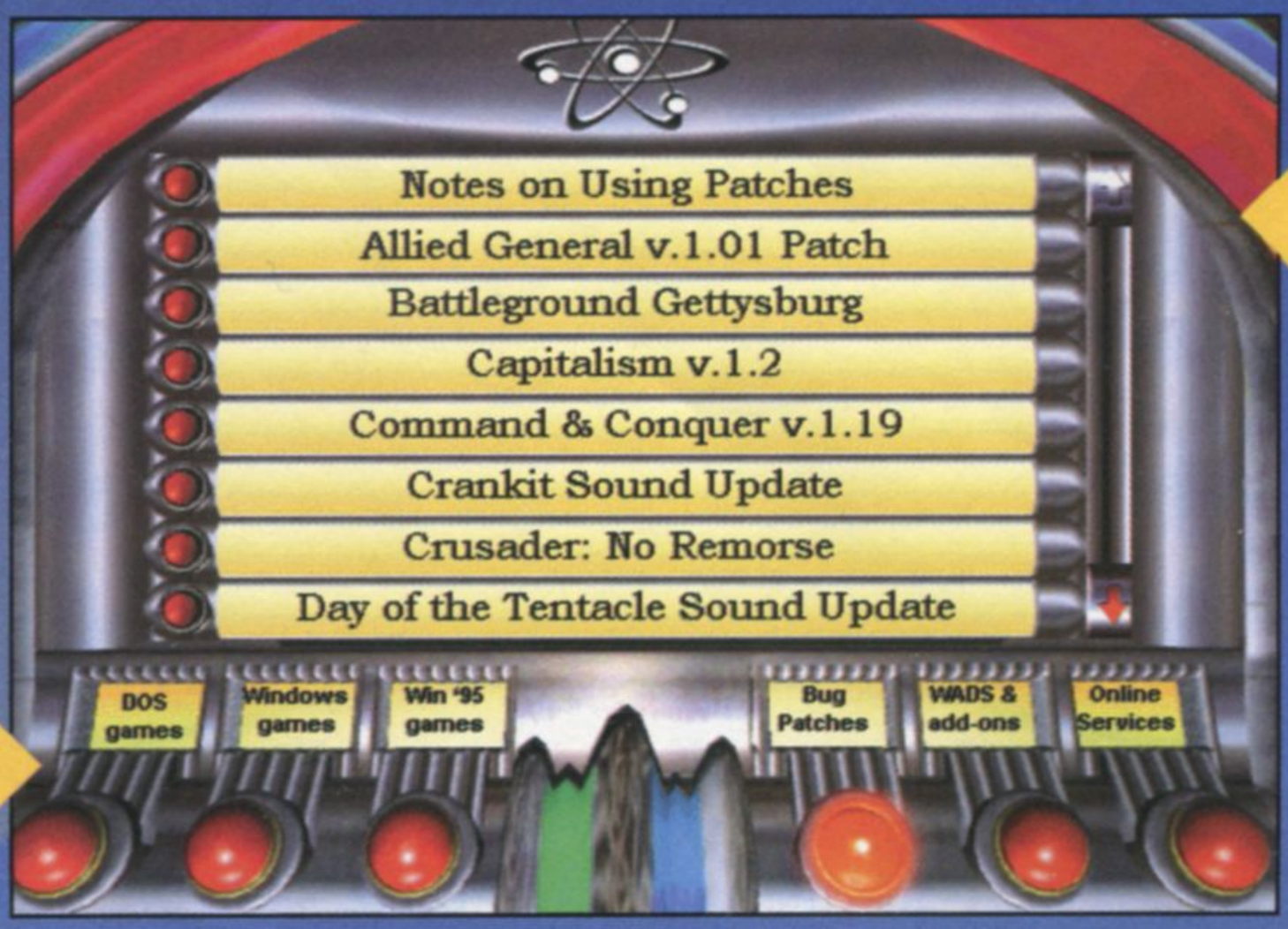
Using the Jukebox

System Requirements

486/33; 4MB RAM; 8MB hard-drive space; Mouse (Win 3.1 users will need to be sure they've got the SHARE.EXE utility loaded)

These requirements are for loading our front end program only. Each game demo will have its own additional requirements, so be sure to read them carefully.

Click on one of the six category buttons, and the demos in that category will appear on the monitor.



Click on the name of the demo you're interested in, and you'll receive installation info.

Attention Win95 Users

The new *PC Gamer* front end should work fine with Windows 95. To install and run some DOS game demos, you may need to reboot into a DOS session. If the videos appear as full-screen sequences, you should enter the Control Panel's Multimedia option and set it to View in Window.

Free Demos

Newsstand buyers now have the choice of purchasing either the CD-ROM Edition of *PC Gamer* for $7.99, or *PC Gamer* without a CD-ROM for $3.99. If you purchase the edition without a disc, you can still get free game demos because all *PC Gamer* readers have the opportunity to get demos and other goodies in a couple of different ways:

1. You can download demos and check out *PC Gamer*'s new look at our World Wide Web site at *http://www.pcgamer.com* on the Internet. Our Web site also features a special Strategy Plus section, links to other hot Web pages, and gaming news.

2. You can call our Customer Service department at (415) 468-4684 (between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. PST) to have *The CD* mailed to you for only $7.95 shipping and handling.

Disc Editor's Note

This month, we've added a new feature to *The CD* that Windows 95 users have been requesting: AutoPlay. All you need to do is slip *The CD* into the drive, and it'll automatically install and run our front-end program. We hope you enjoy this little feature — it took a whole case of King Cobra and a whipping post to get it working on time.

Installation Shortcuts

In the event our front end doesn't load or run properly on your machine, you can still install each demo, bypassing our front end altogether.

To manually install a demo, take a look at the Command Box located to the right. This box contains a list of demos along with their directories and installation commands.

To get up and running using the Command Box, first switch to your CD-ROM drive and change to the appropriate directory by typing CD\DIRECTORY, where DIRECTORY is the one listed in the Command Table next to the game you're trying to install. Once in the appropriate directory, type the Install Command, then press Enter. For example, to install the *Terra Nova* demo:

Type **CD\TERANOVA** and press Enter
Type **INSTALL.EXE** and press Enter

The demo of *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* will then be installed on your PC.

** on chart at right = Must install through Windows.* Chaos Overlords *and* Warbirds *requires Windows 95.*

Contents/Manual Installation Commands

Demo	Directory	Installation Command	Disc Page
Duke Nukem 3D	\DUKE3D	INSTDUKE.BAT	11
Terra Nova	\TERANOVA	INSTALL.EXE	13
Descent II	\SOWSTUFF	INSTALL.EXE	15
Virtual Karts	\VKDEMO	INSTVK.BAT	15
Battleground: Gettysburg*	\BGG_DEMO	SETUP.EXE	16
VR Soccer	\VRSOCCER	INSTALL.EXE	16
Azrael's Tear	\ATDEMO	INSTAT.BAT	19
Rise 2: Resurrection	\RISE2	RISE2.EXE	19
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Whiplash	\WHIPDEMO	INSTALL.EXE	20
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Descent HOGs	\DESCENT		24
Warcraft Levels	\WARCRAFT		24
Warcraft 2 PUDs	\WAR2PUD		24

Introducing Descent II.

10 new weapons, 30 new levels.

Toggle beam floodlights.

Afterburner speed doubler.

Twice the 360-degree insanity.

You're going down.

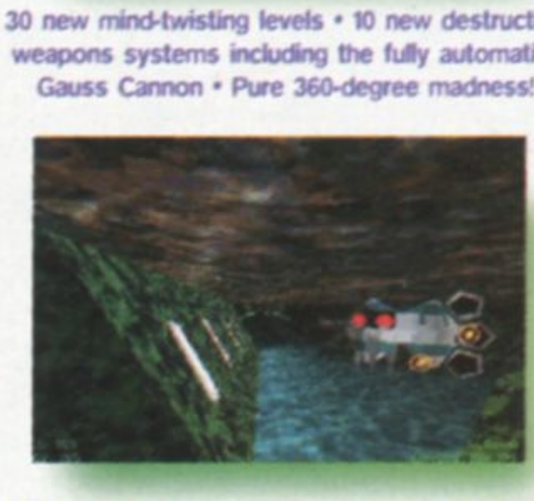
Again.

DESCENT™ II

Download the 3-level demo at http://www.interplay.com

New "guidebot" ally leads you through levels. • Toggle beam floodlights that turn on and off. • Afterburner that doubles your speed.

30 new mind-twisting levels • 10 new destructive weapons systems including the fully automatic Gauss Cannon • Pure 360-degree madness!



30 new robot enemies with advanced artificial intelligence. • They learn your moves, react and kill. • Modem and 8-player network play with player-controlled surveillance cameras.

"Sequel of the year!"
Computer Game Review

Interplay™

BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Developed by Parallax Software

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Product Information Number 125

Duke Nukem 3D

Company: 3D Realms
Tech Support: (602) 443-4109
Release Date: April '96
Category: First-Person Shooter
Required: 486/33; 8MB RAM; 13MB hard-drive space; VGA
Install: \DUKE3D\INSTDUKE.BAT

What's this? Yet another *Doom* clone? Well, prepare to be shocked, because this could be the best first-person shooter yet. Enter a world where invading aliens must be destroyed, and the weapons at your command could blow even a space marine to smithereens!

The game starts in a post-holocaust Los Angeles. Right from the beginning, you'll need to learn an important aspect of *Duke Nukem 3D* — if you think you can blow it up, you can. In fact, the only way you can get down from the top of the building is to shoot the tanks in the corner — they'll blast a hole in an air vent that leads to the ground. From then on, you'll need your wits and a quick trigger finger to take out the aliens that attack from all sides.

The keyboard controls are similar to those in most *Doom*-style shooters, and you can customize them from the setup menu. For default controls, take a look at the keyboard keys listed above.

Control Keys

Turn Left	←
Turn Right	→
Move Forward	↑
Move Back	↓
Fire Weapon	Ctrl
Strafe	Alt
Run	Shift
Toggle Run Mode	Caps Lock
Fly/Swim Up	A
Fly/Swim Down	Z
Look Up	home
Look Down	end

For the squeamish or the young, the parental control setting saves innocent eyes from witnessing the game's considerable gore. To activate it, go to Options in the game and select Parental Lock.

There are several weapons and items in *Duke 3D* that the average *Doom* player will find new and different. For example, the jet pack will let you fly through the air with the ease of a bird. The pipe bombs are deadly explosive devices — throw one, and you can set it off at your leisure by hitting the detonation trigger. Scuba gear will let you swim underwater unhindered, and Holodukes are decoys that can trick the enemy. This shareware version of *Duke 3D* contains the first episode of the game, with six levels of mayhem to explore.

Here's a trick — walk up to some flowing water, and hold down the spacebar. Your health will gradually increase until you're at 100 (full health) again!

This game gets so involving, even the enemies are caught in compromising positions! Kinda reminds you of *Pulp Fiction*, doesn't it?

JUST FOR FUN

The full, registered version of *Duke Nukem 3D* will come packaged with its own editors to let you personalize the game. With this shareware version, you can experiment with some of the things you'll be able to do — simply use a text editor to edit the USER.CON file. You can adjust the power of weapons, and even change the names of the levels.

SHIVERS™

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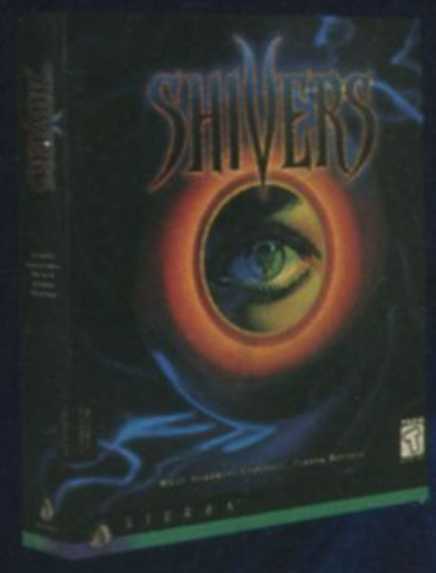
73304,2767@CompuServe.com



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Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III, *Designers – Star Control and Star Controll II*

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Product Information Number 84

The pirates of *Terra Nova* can't hold a candle to you and your PBA (Powered Battle Armor), but in enough numbers, they can cause some trouble.

Terra Nova

Company: Looking Glass
Tech Support: (617) 576-3310
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Action
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 22MB hard-drive space; VGA; Mouse
Install: \TERANOVA\INSTALL.EXE

When you encounter the enemy, make sure you've got a lock on him, then open fire.

Looking Glass, known for some of the best games to hit the market (*Flight Unlimited*, *System Shock*, and *Ultima Underworld I* and *II*, to name a few), has done it again. Take a look at *Terra Nova*, and you'll see that the folks at Looking Glass just keep getting better.

Terra Nova throws you into the role of Nikola ap Io, a fighter for Strike Force Centauri, formed to battle the pirates attacking Centauri society. As squad leader for SFC, you'll need to be more than proficient at battling the enemy in your powered battle armor (PBA); you'll have to be a good leader, too.

Controlling your PBA is as simple as using the keyboard and the mouse. Take a look at the keyboard commands listed to the left for details — and for an explanation of what you'll see on screen in your heads-up display, just smack the H key during the game.

Our demo contains three original missions that don't appear in the full game. These are the missions Nikola cut his teeth on, before his transfer to Strike Force Centauri (where the full game starts). They're not easy, and you'll need to keep your wits about you if you want to succeed where others have failed. The full version will not only give you tons of new missions to accomplish, but you'll get some well-crafted full-motion video cutscenes presenting the ongoing story of *Terra Nova*, three different combat suits (Scout, Standard, and Heavy), and a random scenario builder that lets you create an endless series of new missions.

Control Keys

Turn Left	A
Turn Right	D
Move Forward	W
Move Back	X
Sidestep Left	Z
Sidestep Right	C
Look Up	R
Look Down	V
Center View	F

Fire Weapon — Left Mouse Button

Lock Target — Right Mouse Button

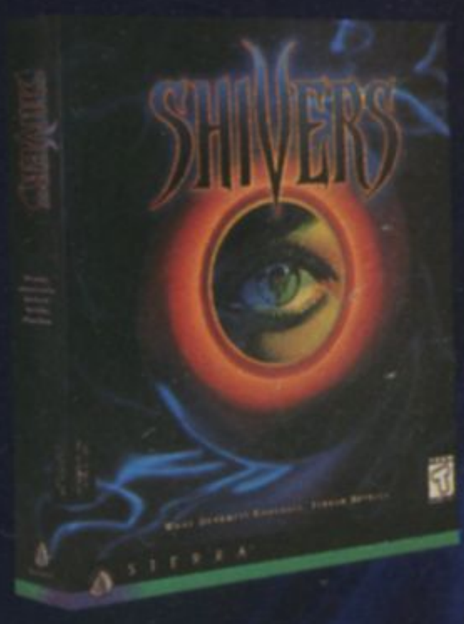
HINT

In *Terra Nova*, it pays to know the pros and cons of all your weapons. In the last mission, there are a lot of pirates running around, not to mention a light tank! It's a good idea to let fly with a few smoke grenades — they'll foul up the enemy's vision, and they're an especially good defense against those pesky gun turrets.

SHIVERS™

"I just picked up Shivers as an exchange for 11th Hour and I'm delighted with the replacement."

-mayland199@aol.com



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Product Information Number 148

Descent II

Company: Interplay
Tech Support: (714) 553-6678
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Action
Required: 486/33; 8MB RAM; 15MB hard-drive space; VGA
Install: \SOWSTUFF\INSTALL.EXE

A whole slew of new and dangerous robots are waiting to take you on in Interplay's *Descent II*.

If you're one of those people who couldn't get enough of *Descent* the first time (and who could?), get ready to immerse yourself a world of three-dimensional warfare once again. The masters at Interplay have finally brought us *Descent II*, and it's even better than the original.

Among other things, the improvements include missile cameras, Super VGA resolutions up to 800x600 (in the full version), guide-bots to lead you through the twists and turns of the space mines, thief-bots that sneak up and steal your goods, guided missiles you steer yourself, and — of course — a whole slew of new robot enemies. Whew!

The controls are the same as in the original *Descent*: you can use a joystick, keyboard, or mouse to turn interstellar robots to dust. If you're using the keyboard, the arrow keys will steer your fighter up, down, left, and right. To move forward, press A, and to back out of tight situations, hit the Z key. Holding down the Alt key while pressing an arrow key will let you sideslip back and forth, while hitting the spacebar fires your guns and the Enter key unleashes missiles.

Right from the start of any given level, you'll want to watch out for the guide-bot: It'll be in a prison, usually somewhere close to the start; spring it with your guns, and it'll move ahead of you, locating the next thing you need to find, such as a key or the mine's reactor. If you like, you can specify a certain target for it — just hit the F1 key to see a list of the possibilities. There are lots of other keyboard commands and tips than we can't cover here, so take a minute to read the README.TXT file, located in the \GAMES\D2DEMO sub-directory created on your hard-drive when you install the demo.

Virtual Karts

Company: MicroProse
Tech Support: (410) 771-1151
Release Date: Available now
Category: Racing Sim
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 13MB hard-drive space; VGA; Mouse
Install: \VKDEMO\INSTVK.BAT

Always known for their hard-hitting simulations, MicroProse has thrown its might into the world of go-cart racing (it's a real sport, believe it or not — we saw it on ESPN).

The controls are configurable from the main menu; we suggest a joystick for those subtle corrections you'll have to make around corners.

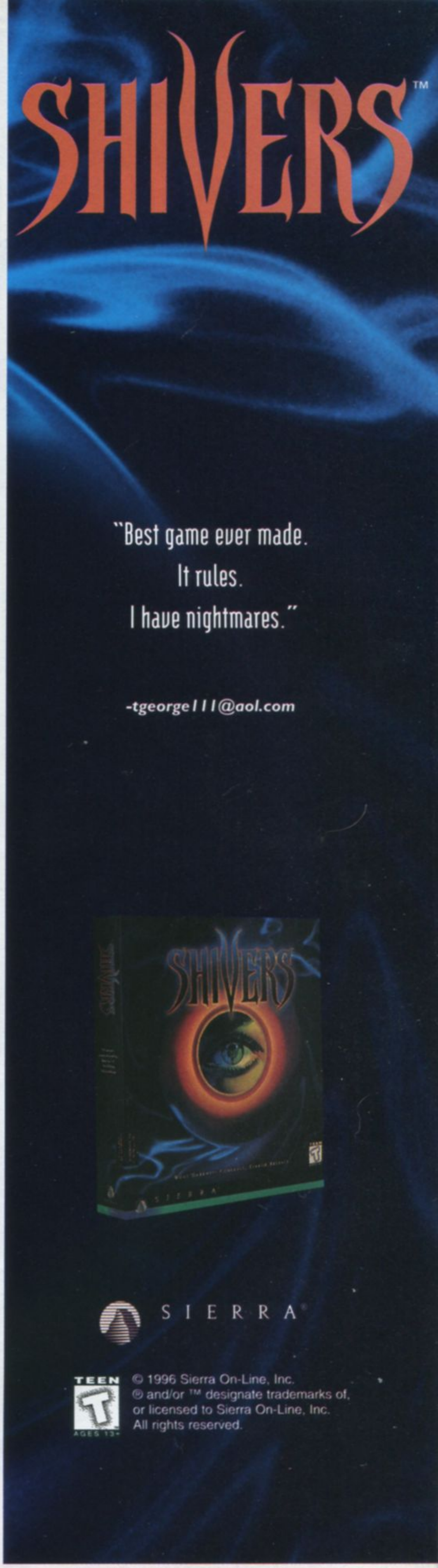
The "virtual" in *Virtual Karts* comes from the different views you can use. Take a look at the control keys below to get a list of possible viewing angles. Be careful, though — if you take your eye off the road in front of you for too long, you'll become one with a wall.

The full version of *Virtual Karts* allows you to make modifications to your cart and change the color and number of your team. If you have a sound card, you'll be able to hear the competition as they attempt to distract you from your goal by slinging epithets and curses at you. Don't worry about it though — they'll get over losing eventually.

Virtual Karts takes the world of sims into the go-cart arena. You've got multiple views, but this one is the best.

Control Keys

Left View	F1
Forward View	F2
Right View	F3
Reverse View	F4
Low View	F5
Behind Camera View	F6
Reverse Camera View	F7
Director View	F8
Resolution Select	F9



Product Information Number 145

Battleground: Gettysburg

Company: Talon Soft
Tech Support: (410) 521-7282
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: 486; 8MB RAM; Mouse
Install: \BGG_DEMO\SETUP.EXE

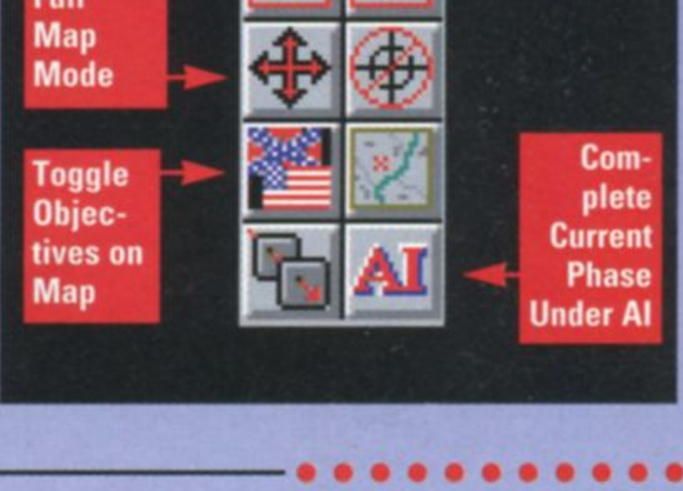
A few months ago we brought you an intense strategy game for the Windows environment: *Battleground: Ardennes*. Now Talon Soft has done it again, but this time they're throwing you into the greatest battle of the Civil War. *Battleground: Gettysburg* has all of the hard-hitting strategy elements of its predecessor, as well as the video cutscenes and detailed graphics that made *Battleground: Ardennes* stand apart from the crowd. (If the video cutscenes get tiresome, you can shut them off under Options on the menu.)

The sharp graphics are stunning, and the detail precise. You can zoom in or out on the main map.

Battleground: Gettysburg won't be easy to play — the detailed strategy elements are for hardy souls, and take some getting used to. The diagram on the right explains some of the more salient points of the handy toolbar, but for truly detailed information on playing the game, check out the online help. And you might want to watch the computer play against itself for a while, just to get a feel for what you're up against.

The full game features many more scenarios and every possible twist on the battle at Gettysburg. In this demo, you'll get to fight as either the Union or the Confederacy. Either way, you'll need to think quick to keep the enemy at bay. When in doubt, you can always hit the AI button on the toolbar — that will tell the computer's artificial intelligence to make your move for you, but only for the current phase of the game.

Civil Tools



VR Soccer

Company: Interplay
Tech Support: (714) 553-6678
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Sports
Required: 486; 4MB RAM (8MB RAM for High-Res); 27MB hard-drive space; VGA; Mouse
Install: \VRSOCCER\INSTALL.EXE

VR Soccer puts you in control of (what else?) a soccer team fighting its way to victory. The action is hot, and the SVGA graphics are hotter (if you don't have a powerhouse of a machine, though, you might want to stick to the lower resolutions).

As with most good sports games, we suggest using a gamepad for that all-important player control. The computer is a tricky opponent in this soccer sim, so you'll need all the help you can get to keep the ball moving in the right direction. When you start the demo, you'll see a menu with several options. You can select a joystick or gamepad by clicking on the Controllers option.

You'll have five minutes to play against the computer or a friend in a post-Cold War match between the U.S. and Russia. The player you currently control at any given time has a special symbol under his feet. The symbol is normally a circle, but other shapes will indicate variations: If it turns into a triangle, the player you control has the ball. If it's a star, that means you can press the kick button (without a direction command) to have the player perform a special move. These moves vary with the situation, so don't always count on the player doing what you'd expect!

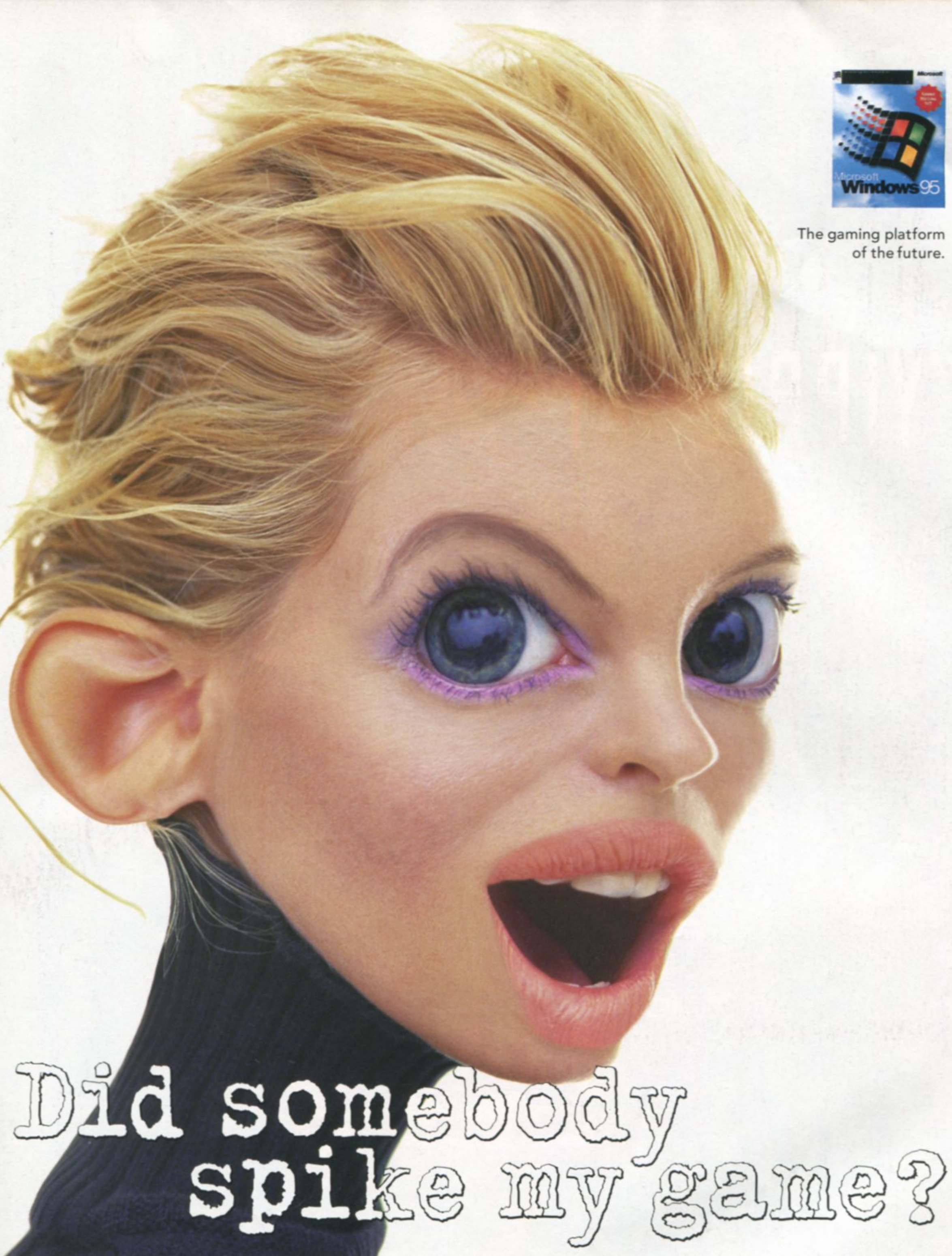
Playing against the computer can be tricky — you'll need a lot of practice to outmaneuver it.

There are several views you can use to watch the action — punch the number keys (1 through 8) to check them out. The options include an overhead view and some constantly moving camera angles, so you're sure to find one that suits your viewing pleasure.

When you get your hands on the full version of this one, you can expect a bunch of real-world teams to play against, each with updated stats, and multi-player options — we all know it's more fun to win when you're humiliating a good friend, but *VR Soccer* will let you take on a whopping 20 of your buddies! Now *that's* what we call some real multi-player support!

CHALLENGE

One thing you'll notice early on is that the computer is a pretty tough opponent. It took us some time, but in the five minutes allotted, we were finally able to beat the computer 2 to 1. Can you do better? Sure you can!



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Product Information Number 81

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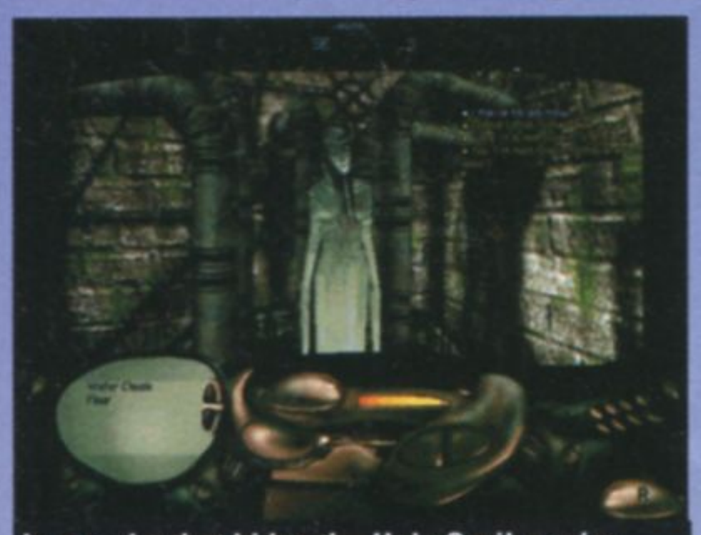
Azrael's Tear

Company: Mindscape
Tech Support: (415) 898-5157
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Graphic Adventure
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 11MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \ATDEMO\INSTAT.BAT

What do you do when you find an ancient ruin hiding that object of so many legends, the Holy Grail? Why, you send a high-tech, heavily armed thief in to retrieve it, of course!

Azrael's Tear features high-resolution, SVGA graphics in a 3D rendered environment. As you might have guessed, it needs a pretty high-powered machine — anything less than a 486DX2/66 won't cut it. But if you have the horsepower, it's well worth the effort.



In a realm that hides the Holy Grail, you're bound to meet a ghost or two.

You are, of course, the thief sent in to explore the hidden realm created four hundred centuries before. There are a few shortcut keys you'll want to keep in mind, but for the most part, you can do everything with the mouse. Hold down the right mouse button and move the mouse to look around. Holding both buttons down moves you in the direction you're facing. For more detailed information on what you can do, hit the H key, and you'll get a help screen that'll explain everything.

HINT

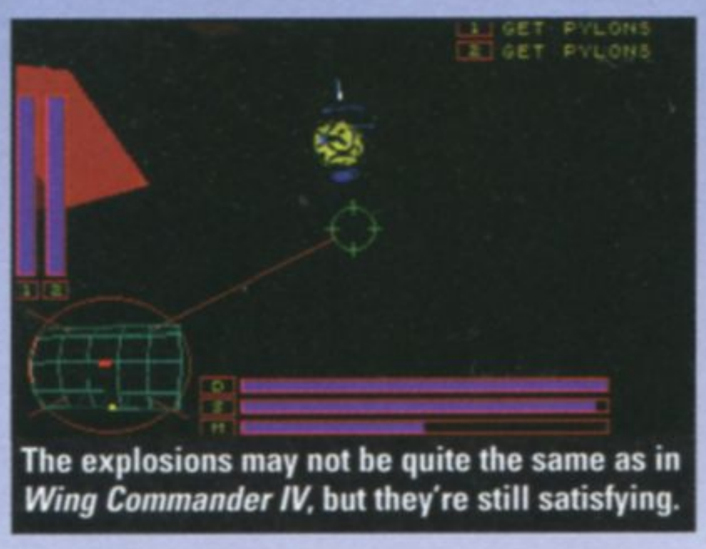
To finish the demo, you'll need an object hidden in one of the baths in the baptistery. To drain the water from the bath, you'll need to match the plaque hanging over the bath with the water pipes in a different room. Line up the pipes right, and a prize will be uncovered.

Cylindrix

Company: Goldtree Enterprises
Tech Support: *http://www.goldtree.com*
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Combat Sim
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 5MB hard-drive space; VGA
Install: \CYLINDRX\INSTALL.EXE

In the tradition of *Spectre VR* and *Pyrotechnica*, *Cylindrix* will challenge your hand-eye coordination in three-dimensional combat. Flying as the leader of a team, your job is to take out the competition in a no-holds-barred battle to the death of timing and skill. Your wingmen will back you up, but it's ultimately your orders and decisions that keep you alive.

You "tag" pyramids to gain strength and upgrade your weapons. Knock out the competition's radar base,



The explosions may not be quite the same as in *Wing Commander IV*, but they're still satisfying.

and their weapons will be completely useless. You can choose from four ships to play on four different cylindrix arenas. You can also choose your wingmen and your competition.

There are two ways to move around: on the surface of the cylindrix arena, or in the air. To toggle between modes, hit S. If you're on the surface, the arrow keys will accelerate, decelerate, and turn left and right. When you're in the air, the arrow keys will determine which way you face, and A will accelerate, while Z decelerates. It takes a while for you to get used to the controls, so you might want to fly a few training battles before taking on the computer in direct combat. If you happen to get killed before your wingmen do, however, don't despair; you'll stay in the game, automatically taking over for one of your remaining teammates.

HINT

Controlling the pylons on the surface of the cylindrix is imperative. The more pylons that are polarized with your team's color, the more damage your weapons will do. It's not a bad idea to send your wingmen to charge the pylons right from the start.

Rise 2: Resurrection

Company: Acclaim
Tech Support: (516) 656-3925
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Fighting
Required: 486DX/33; 8MB RAM; VGA
Install: \RISE2\RISE2.EXE (RISE2W95.EXE for Win '95)

Get ready to punch and kick your way through some mechanical mayhem with Acclaim's sequel to their robot-bashing fighter, *Rise of the Robots*.

Rise 2: Resurrection brings you even more robots, more special moves, and some pretty killer exterminations (the equivalent to *Mortal Kombat's* Fatalities). In this demo, you'll get to play as two of the eighteen robots in the full version — Sentry and Chromax. We suggest using a gamepad, but you can use the keyboard, too; just take a look at the keyboard commands below. The controls for player one are listed, but if you want to play against a buddy, make sure you check the keyboard layout in the Setup menu for his keys.

The demo runs directly from *The CD*, so you don't have to worry about freeing up tons of hard-drive space. When you start up the demo, you'll see a control screen where you can set hardware options, controls, and video resolution. There's an option for playing in high-res SVGA, but you'll need 16MB of RAM on your machine to use it.

TECHNICAL NOTE: Although *Rise 2: Resurrection* has an AutoPlay feature that will automatically load and run it under Windows 95, you'll get much better performance if you reboot and run it in an MS-DOS session.

Control Keys

Up	Q
Down	Z
Left	A
Right	S
Punch 1	E
Punch 2	R
Punch 3	T
Kick 1	D
Kick 2	F
Kick 3	G

Allied General

Company: SSI
Tech Support: (408) 737-6850
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 32MB hard-drive space; Windows 3.1 or higher; Mouse
Install: \ALLIED.EXE

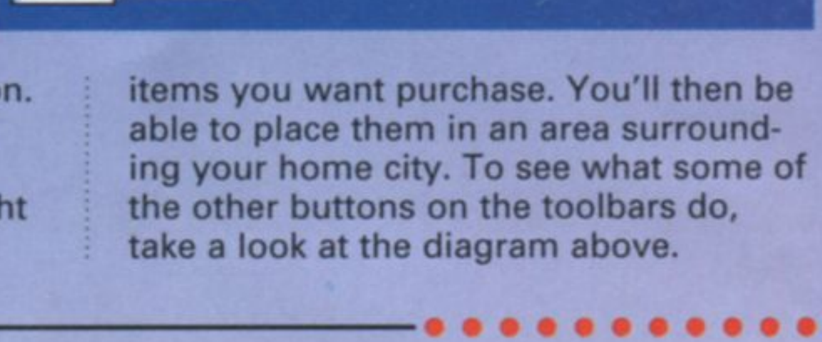
SSI knew they had a hit on their hands with *Panzer General*, so they improved on that award-winning game with *Allied General*, a strategic challenge that puts the Allied forces in your control during the most heated battles of World War Two.

Don't let the simple interface and attractive graphics fool you; there's a lot of depth to *Allied General*.

The interface is very similar to that of *Panzer General*; almost purely mouse-driven, you can point and click your way to victory. The demo contains two scenarios that test your strategic know-how. In both of them, the basics are simple: to move or attack with a unit, click on the unit, then click on its destination. As soon as you select a unit, the hexes within your range will be highlighted; if you're close enough to fire on an enemy unit, you'll see a highlight around it. This is of special note for the artillery units, which have a long range of fire. Once you've moved a unit, it will change to a darker color, so you can easily keep track of what's been moved and what hasn't. With many units, it's possible to move and attack in the same turn, so watch out for opportunities to inflict extra damage on your opponent or gracefully retreat from a sticky situation.

You buy new units with prestige points you earn by vanquishing the enemy. Click the dollar sign on the right hand side of the screen to select the items you want purchase. You'll then be able to place them in an area surrounding your home city. To see what some of the other buttons on the toolbars do, take a look at the diagram above.

General's Commands



Whiplash

Company: Interplay
Tech Support: (714) 553-6678
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Racing Sim
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 8MB hard-drive space; VGA
Install: \WHIPDEMO\INSTALL.EXE

When you load up the demo of *Whiplash*, your first reaction may be "great, another arcade racing game" — but once you get to the Tsunami Twister, you'll realize this is racing like you've never seen before.

Whiplash features daredevil stunts the likes of which legends are made. In this demo version, you'll be able to test your stunt-driving skills on one of the sixteen challenging tracks found in the full game. This track, the Million Plus, has a ramp that will toss your car into a mid-air barrel roll — go too fast or too slow, and you'll end up on your head. Either way, it's quite a trick to determine exactly how fast is fast enough.

The corkscrew jump will make you catch some pretty major air; if you're not careful, you could end up landing on your head. Don't try this in a convertible!

Controlling your car is a breeze — hit the T key to accelerate, the F key for brakes, and Z and X will steer left and right, respectively. You can also choose to use a joystick or steering-wheel system, which we recommend.

The texture-mapped 3D low-res graphics run surprisingly smoothly, even on 486 machines, and we're sure you'll never experience racing excitement quite like this. So load it up, and take an exciting, daredevil drive even Evel Knievel would balk at...

HINT

The Tsunami Twister featured in this demo can be pretty tough to survive. After hours of intensive study and experimentation, we discovered that the trick is to hit this section of track at just the right speed, which is about 150. Keep in mind that you're going uphill before the jump, so it's easy to lose too much speed. Another thing to keep in mind: most times, you can ignore the announcer's warnings that you're going too slow or too fast — he's not the one behind the wheel!

These lions aren't from your pride, but if you're stealthy enough, you can still steal some of their food.

Savage

Company: Discovery Channel Multimedia
Tech Support: (800) 780-6044
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Wildlife Sim
Required: 486; 8MB RAM; VGA; Windows 3.1 or higher
Install: \SAVAGE\SETUP.EXE

Run with the lions in Discovery Multimedia's take on wildlife roleplaying. Rather than using the top-down perspective seen in Sanctuary Woods' wildlife sims (*Wolf* and *Lion*), this one is completely three-dimensional; you can even change your viewpoint to look through the eyes of the lion or watch the action from an over-the-shoulder angle.

To kill another animal, such as a gazelle, you'll have to run up to it and hit the Control key to take a swipe with your claw. Don't try that with some of the bigger animals, though — creatures like giraffes can be deadly, even to a lion. Also, it's possible to swim in the river, but watch out for the hippo; a lion is no match for that watery behemoth. Looks like being king or queen of the jungle isn't as cushy a job as it's cracked up to be!

Control Keys

Walk Forward ↑
Walk Backward ↓
Turn Right →
Turn Left ←
Run Shift + ↑
Use Claw Ctrl
Special Z
Change Viewpoint F1 F2 F3 F4
Change Resolution F5 F6 F7 F8
First-Person Perspective On F11
First-Person Perspective Off F12

Wooden Ships and Iron Men

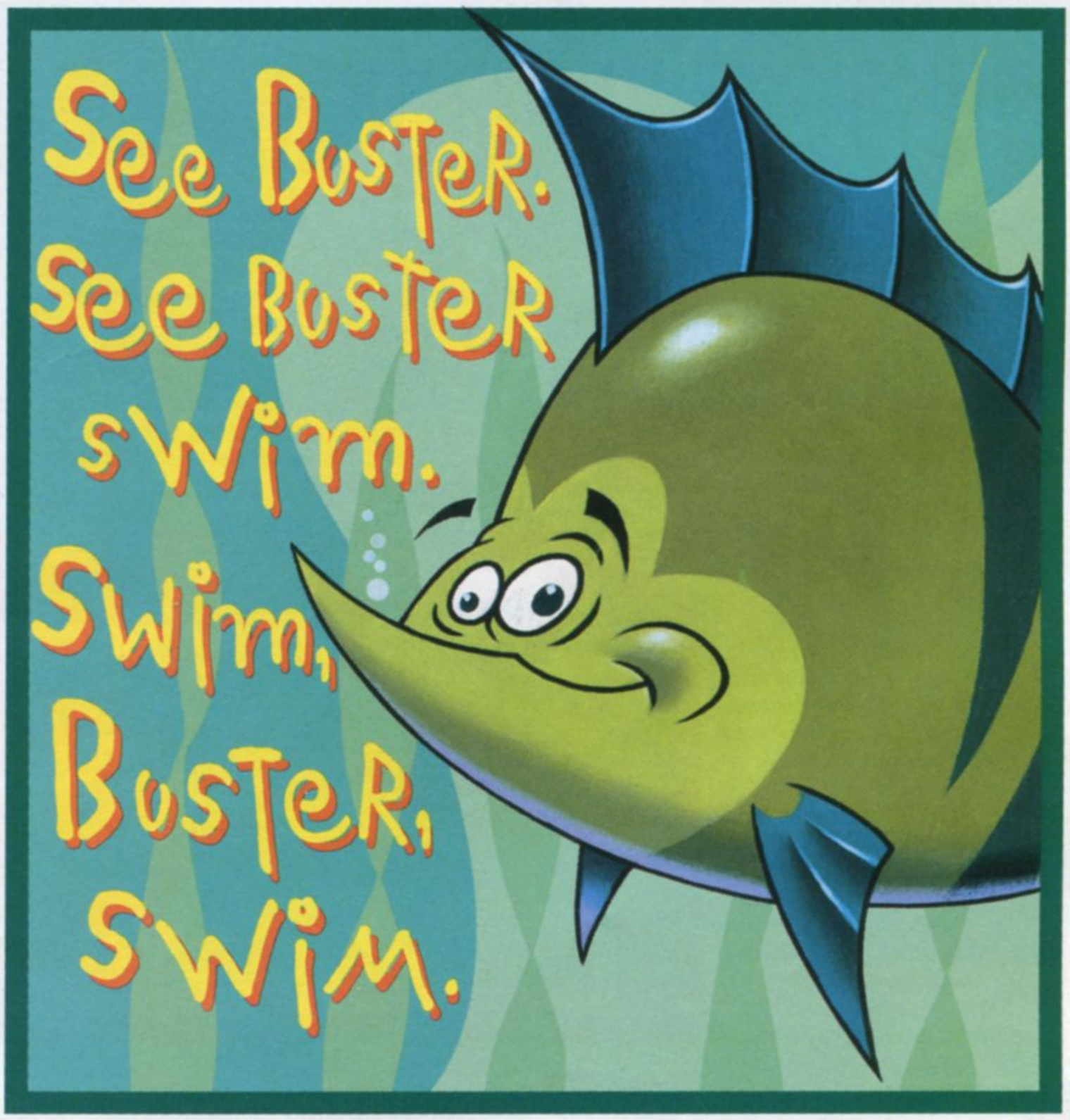
Company: Avalon Hill
Tech Support: (410) 426-9600
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: 486; 8MB RAM; 23MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \WSIMINST\INSTALL.EXE

You've been waiting for it, and now it's finally here. *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* is a naval wargame from Avalon Hill that recreates the excitement and challenge of seagoing combat in the age of sail.

This demo will give you a sneak peek at what you can expect from the full version; you'll wage war against another ship, and only the decisions you make will determine whether you suffer capture or victory. The full version includes many more historical scenarios, but it will also have a campaign mode, play-by-E-mail features, and its own scenario builder.

Take a look at the diagram below to find your way around your ship. When you're navigating, keep in mind that your ship won't actually move until you click on the End Turn icon. Until then, you can modify your orders until you're satisfied with them. Also, you can click on the ship icon to the right of the screen to control your crew and their placement. To move crew from one position to another — say from gunnery to a boarding party — you first click on the crew members you want to move, then on their destination. A right click increases the number of crew you'll move by 5, and a left click increases it by 1. By hitting the spacebar, you can change the values you work with from actual numbers of crew members to percentages of the crew.

Shipping Manuevers



Battle Isle 2220

Company: Blue Byte
Tech Support: *http://www.bluebyte.com*
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 2MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Windows 3.1 or higher
Install: \DEMO50\INSTALL.EXE

Ready for a strategy game you can sink your teeth into? Then chomp down on *Battle Isle 2220*, because it's about as intense as they get.

With multiple windows you can size and place, a simple mouse-driven interface, and some beautiful rendered cutscenes that deptict the battle as it happens, BI2220 is a definite improvement over its predecessor.

Let the mouse rest over the buttons, and you'll see short descriptions of their actions. Learning the interface could't be easier.

TECHNICAL NOTE: Make sure you read the README file — simply double-click the icon for it after you install the demo. It has a lot of technical information that will help you get the demo running properly on your system.

HINT

Here's a slick move: Place a Robot unit in your Hovercar, then place the Hovercar in position to reach the enemy repair/construction depot that sits by the bay, protected by a Cruiser. Damage the Cruiser, and when it enters the depot for repairs, rush the Hovercar up and grab the depot with your Robot unit. The depot, the enemy Cruiser and anything else inside become yours.

It looks confusing at first, but the interface in *Battle Isle 2220* is really quite simple.

It takes time to uncover the new world, but as you explore, you'll find majestic mountains, deep rivers, and even friendly (or perhaps not-so-friendly) natives.

Conquest of the New World

Company: Interplay
Tech Support: (714) 553-6678
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 37MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \CONQUEST\INSTALL.EXE

Ever yearn for the unknown? Ever want to uncover majestic sights and awe-inspiring locales? Now you can, with *Conquest of the New World*, a game from Interplay that puts you in the role of the first explorers and conquerors of North America.

The demo contains the tutorial scenario from the full version of the game, leading you though the actions necessary to ensure a successful journey. You'll be financed by the King of England to begin with, but if you fail him, he won't care if you end up as target practice for the local natives or fodder for the French.

Follow the instructions you'll get along the way, and you'll be carving out an empire to rule before you know it. The tutorial starts with the initial landing and exploration of new territory and takes you all the way to recruiting soldiers and leading a war. You can check out the battle interface by clicking on Combat Demo from the main menu.

HINT

If you try out the combat demo, you might find the computer a pretty tough competitor. Remember that not only are you out to kill the enemy; you're also trying to defend your flag. Hold some reinforcements back for those pesky native horsemen — they tend to sneak up on you if you let them.

Chaos Overlords

Win95

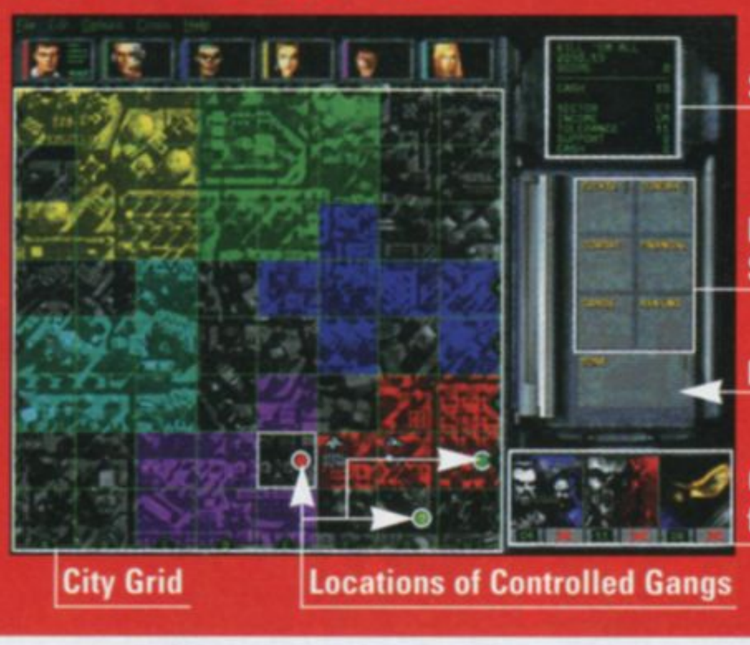
Company: New World Computing
Tech Support: (818) 889-5650
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Strategy
Required: Windows 95; 486; 8MB RAM; 11MB hard-drive space; SVGA
Install: \CHAOS\SETUP.EXE

Here's a strategy game with a twist — rather than battling tanks with infantry or orcs with sorcerers, your job is to take over a city from its seedy underside. You'll need to manage gangs in a sprawling metropolis, extort cash from the innocent populace, and rule by fear and power — just like our very own beloved politicians!

The demo lets you try sixteen turns in three different scenarios: Kill 'em All, in which your goal is to destroy the opposition; Siege, where you want to take control of all the opponent's headquarters; and Big Man, where you want to seize certain sectors in the center of the city. The full game will give you these plus many other senarios, as well as multiplayer modes so you can plot against your best friends.

The entire game is controlled with the mouse. Take a look at the diagram below for a brief description of the main interface, and check out the file called QS3.TXT for more details about how to manipulate your underground empire.

KEYS TO CHAOS



Things can get a bit hairy when hordes of mutants come after you. Fortunately, you'll find a few power-ups that can even the odds.

Operation Carnage

Company: Beaucomm
Tech Support: (509) 662-3281
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Action
Required: 386DX; 4MB RAM; 4MB hard-drive space; VGA
Install: \OCDEMO\INSTALL.EXE

When aliens take over the planet, what's a disgruntled human slave to do? Enter *Operation Carnage*, an action game reminiscent of *Smash TV* or even the classic arcade game *Robotron*. You'll battle hordes of robots, mutant humans, and the occasional giant guardian monster in an attempt to rid the world of the invaders.

When you start the demo, you'll see a screen describing the keyboard controls available. They're quite simple, but you may want to use a joystick or gamepad to move your character around. Note that when you fire and move at the same time, the direction you face does not change — that can come in handy, but be careful not to let the enemy in behind you. Also, keep in mind that you can switch between weapons. Sometimes it's a good idea to save the powerful stuff for those critical moments and tight situations.

There are three stages in the demo; at the end of each one, you'll have to face the boss monster. Keep your cool, and don't despair if you get killed — you can continue your game indefinitely. If you decide to exit and come back later, write down the password that will get you back to the last level you played. There's a lot of gaming action here, and it'd be a shame to miss any of it!

HINT

Beating the boss monster at the end of the last stage can be tough. You might want to save up some scatter-bombs for him. If you set a couple off in the right places, you should have no problem finishing the big, bad beastie off.

TNN Bass Tournament '96

Company: American Softworks
Tech Support: (800) 474-7595
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Fishing Sim
Required: 486; 8MB RAM; 22MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \TNNBASS\INSTALL.EX

If you thought your PC fishing choices were limited to *Gone Fishin'* and *Trophy Bass*, think again. *TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '96* creates a whole world of professional angling on your computer that you won't soon forget.

You can do some relaxing free-fishing, or — if you perform better with a little competition — you can try to beat the best in a tournament. Reel in the big ones, and you can advance to the next level of competition.

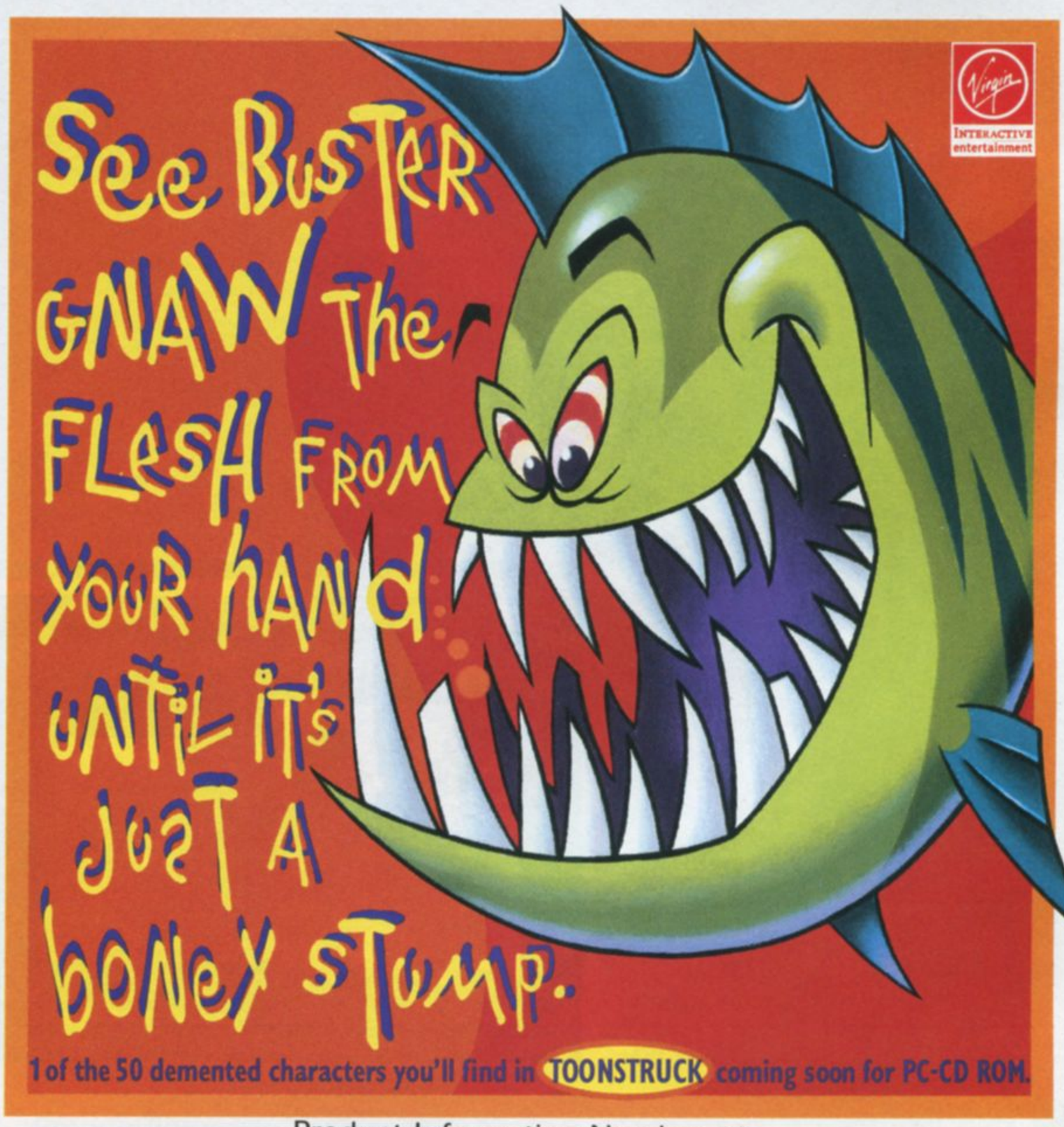
When you start off from the dock, just maneuver your boat using the arrow keys. Once you spot some fish on your depth finder, hit the spacebar to cut your engines. To cast, click and hold the right mouse button. Watch the power meter — the longer you hold the mouse button, the further you'll cast your lure.

Once you've wet your lure, you'll be presented with an overhead view of your line and any fish in the area. Clicking the left mouse button will slow down the rate at which your reel in the lure; the right mouse button will increase it. When you've hooked a fish, you'll have to fight it with finesse; too much power, and the fish will break the line; not enough, and you're likely to lose it, and your lure as well.

HINT

When you start off in a tourney, your equipment is rather limited. Make sure you make a stop at the Pro Shop to get some heavier line, more lures, and a better rod. The trick to catching fish isn't entirely in what you're using, but it sure can help.

This is the interface you'll use to cast your line. The bottom right corner has a sonar chart, and the bottom left is your casting meter.



Product Information Number 161

Warbirds

Win95

Company: ICI
Tech Support: *http://www.icigames.com*
Release Date: Available Now
Category: Flight Sim
Required: Windows 95; 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 18MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Modem (for online play)
Install: \WARBIRD\SETUP.EXE

If you've already read this month's online gaming article, you're probably intrigued by the multi-player air combat simulator, *Warbirds*. Here's your chance to check it out.

Warbirds is simple to use and easy to install. The only tricky part is that you'll need a full-access Internet connection to play it online; services that provide limited gateways to the Internet, like America Online or CompuServe, won't work. On the other hand, if your Internet provider is Concentric Network, you'll get a small discount on the fee for *Warbirds*. For more information on Concentric Network, as well as detailed instructions on how to fly any of the nine aircraft, click on the Online Help icon.

Although online play with other pilots is the big attraction in *Warbirds*, it is possible to fly offline. You'll be all by yourself in the game's big world, but you'll get a feel for the aircraft and figure out the controls. Just click on the Warbirds Offline icon, rather than Warbirds Online.

The fees, not including those for your Internet access, are $10 a month for five hours of flight time, and each additional hour is $2 ($1.75 with Concentric Network).

Once you hook up to the *Warbirds* service, you can fly as part of a team or in a free-for-all.

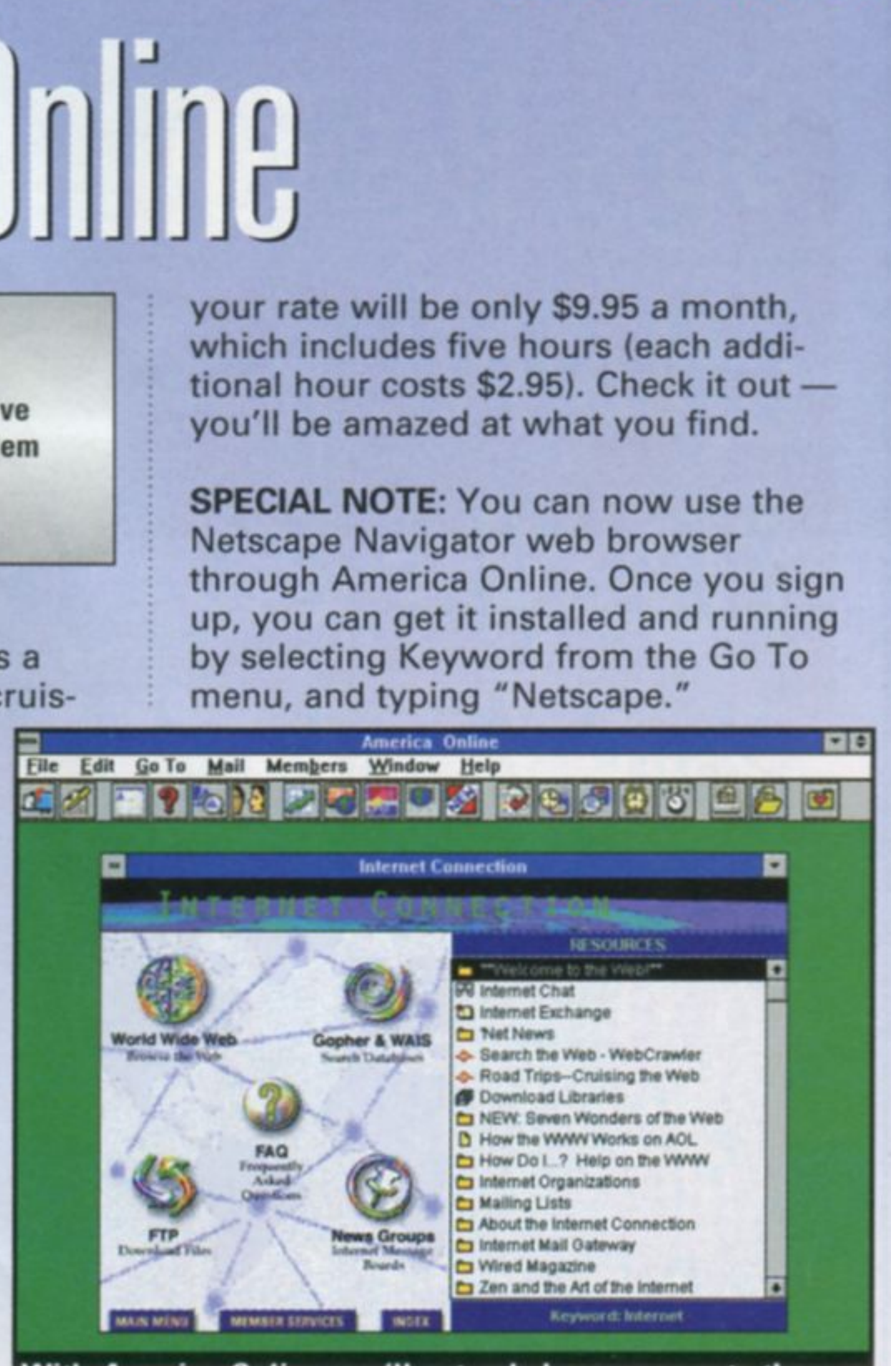
America Online

Tech Support: (800) 827-3338
Required: 386/33; 4MB RAM; 4MB hard-drive space; VGA; Windows 3.1 or higher; Modem
Install: \AOL.EXE

One of the leaders of online services, *America Online* offers a complete array of utilities for cruising down the Information Superhighway. You'll be able to send E-mail all over the world; participate in live conferences with celebrities and leaders of the scientific community; and get access to a world of files to download, people to chat with, and information to enrich your life, from the latest football scores to stock market reports.

Packaged along with *The CD*, you'll find an account number and password that'll let you try out *AOL*. By simply installing the software and typing in the account number and password, you'll get ten hours and your first month of service free. After that, your rate will be only $9.95 a month, which includes five hours (each additional hour costs $2.95). Check it out — you'll be amazed at what you find.

SPECIAL NOTE: You can now use the Netscape Navigator web browser through America Online. Once you sign up, you can get it installed and running by selecting Keyword from the Go To menu, and typing "Netscape."



With *America Online*, you'll not only have access to the Internet, but a host of features that only *AOL* can give you.

The first level of the Heroes 2 .WAD for *Doom II* gives the spooky impression that these lost souls are rising from their graves to challenge the stealthy space marine.

Add-Ons and Patches

There's so much new Gaming Goodness on this month's CD we had trouble deciding where to start. But at least when the choices start to overwhelm us, we can always count on those wonderful additions to the games we already know and love.

This month, we have a complete 32-level replacement .WAD for *Doom II*. Called Heroes 2, it's by the same author who put together March's 36-level replacement, Heroes, for *Ultimate Doom*. Be warned: these levels are for expert *Doom*-ers only! Also, if you read last month's issue about the Marines playing *Doom II*, we managed to get them to part with the .WAD they've been using for field traning. Check it out in the \DOOM2 directory.

We've also got some fine additions to *Heretic*, *Hexen*, and *Descent*, along with some great save-games for *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*. And, of course, we would never forget to throw in some .PUD files for the ever-popular *Warcraft II*. We just can't get enough of that one.

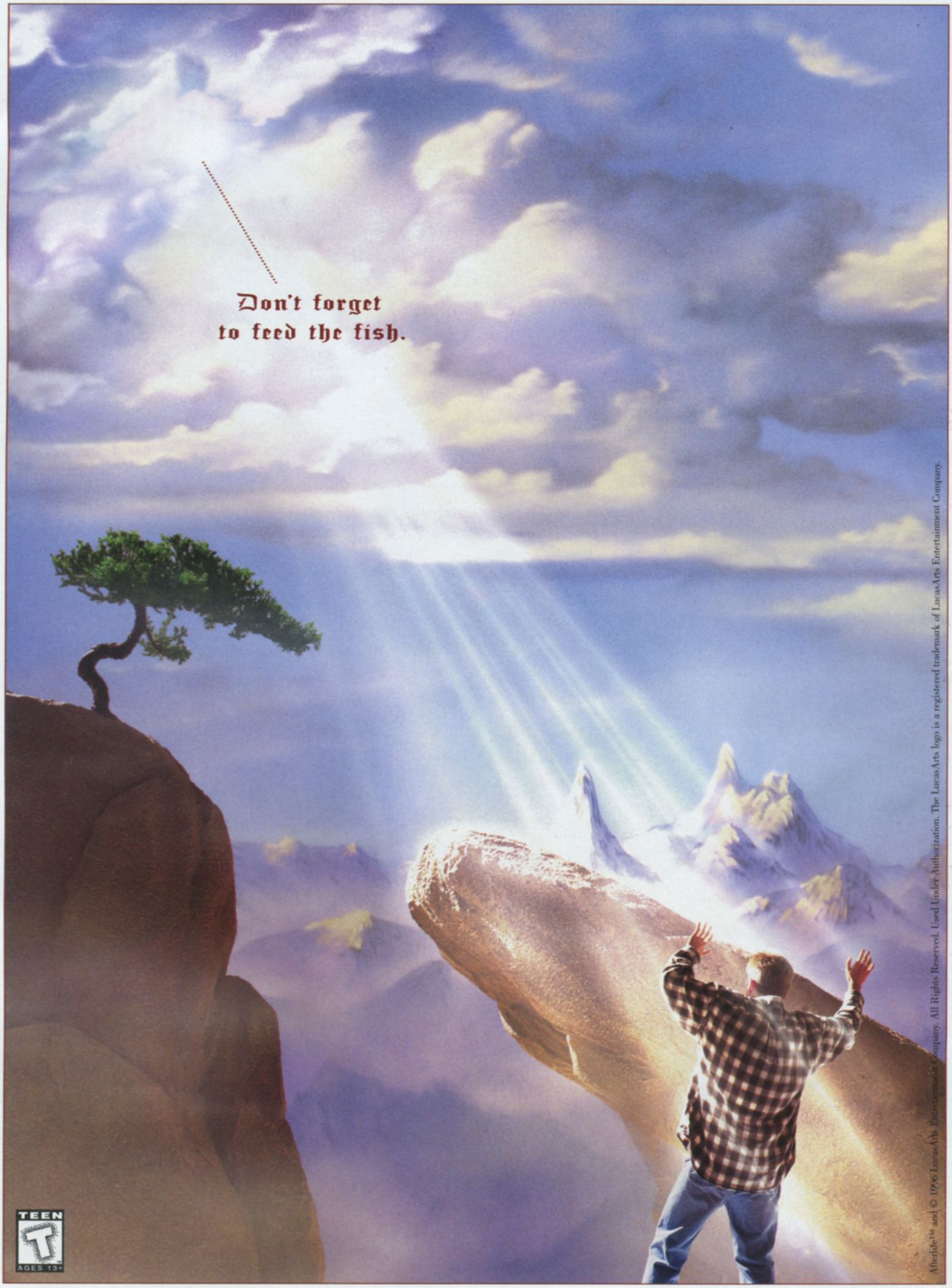
SPECIAL NOTE: In last month's review of *Allied General*, Tom McDonald mentioned an editor that would allow you to modify saved games in *AG* as well as *Panzer General*. We were unable to put the editor, Brass Polish 2, on our CD last month, but we managed to track it down for you, and you'll find it in this month's \PATCHES directory. The filename is BRASS23.ZIP.

If Nothing Works...

We cannot provide technical support for problems you may encounter with the demos on *The CD*. Please use the tech support numbers listed with the demos. Should your copy fail to run, with error messages that indicate your CD drive cannot read the disc, return it to the following address: *PC Gamer, The May CD Disc 2.4 Replacement, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005*. Please indicate any error message you receive.

nd on the 8th day,
He split to Maui.

Product Information Number 130



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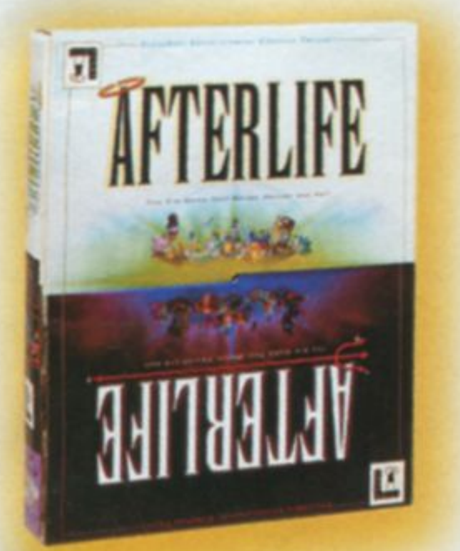

WINDOWS 95, DOS AND MACINTOSH CD-ROM

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Product Information Number 130

SCOOP!

EXCLUSIVE! BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF THE HOTTEST GAMES

Prey

Could this be the *Quake*-killer?

You are the hunter and the hunted, you are *Prey* — here's an early look at a hot new game from the makers of *Duke Nukem 3D*.

—Jason Bates

The *Prey* engine allows real-world architectural features, such as the rafters shown here. With this kind of technology, amateur game designers will be able to create almost anything.

FYI

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Prey
Developer: 3D Realms
Publisher: Apogee, P.O. Box 476389, Garland, TX 75049; (214) 271-2268 *http://www.3drealms.com*
Projected Price: TBA
Percentage Complete: 25%

In a nutshell:

If 3D Realms accomplishes all they've set out to do with *Prey*, it could set new standards for first-person action and multi-player gaming.

What's so special?

Try single player action that plays like deathmatch, a true 3D engine, and a built-in specs and level editor: *Prey* will be as much a gaming system as it is a game. But best of all, it's been designed for the Internet, allowing you to travel between servers and jump to other user-created *Prey* levels at will.

Why should I care?

There's really only a couple of other games in this league. If the early descriptions of id Software's upcoming *Quake* had you drooling, or *Duke Nukem 3D* floored you, you can get just as excited about *Prey*.

And when's it coming out?

Possibly Christmas, but early 1997 is more likely.

3D Realms, a division of Apogee, has really come into its own with the release of *Duke Nukem 3D*. In many ways, *Duke* is the first true successor to *Doom*; it's a game that doesn't just imitate the king-daddy of first-person shooters, but actually brings a lot of intriguing new elements to the table — like high-res graphics, dynamic lighting effects, moving areas, underwater action, and a host of other technical innovations.

Meanwhile, the development team working on 3D Realms' *Prey* has started from scratch, writing a next-generation game engine that promises to be more of a technological leap than even *Duke*'s "Build" engine was. This is a true 3D graphics engine, letting designers create levels with multiple floors, elevated walkways, and other architectural treats that earlier game engines didn't allow. In addition, there can be light sources and shadows that move and change naturally, rather than merely strobing on and off — all this, with a planned frame-rate in the mid to high twenties, which translates into very smooth animation without the need for a 3D accelerator card.

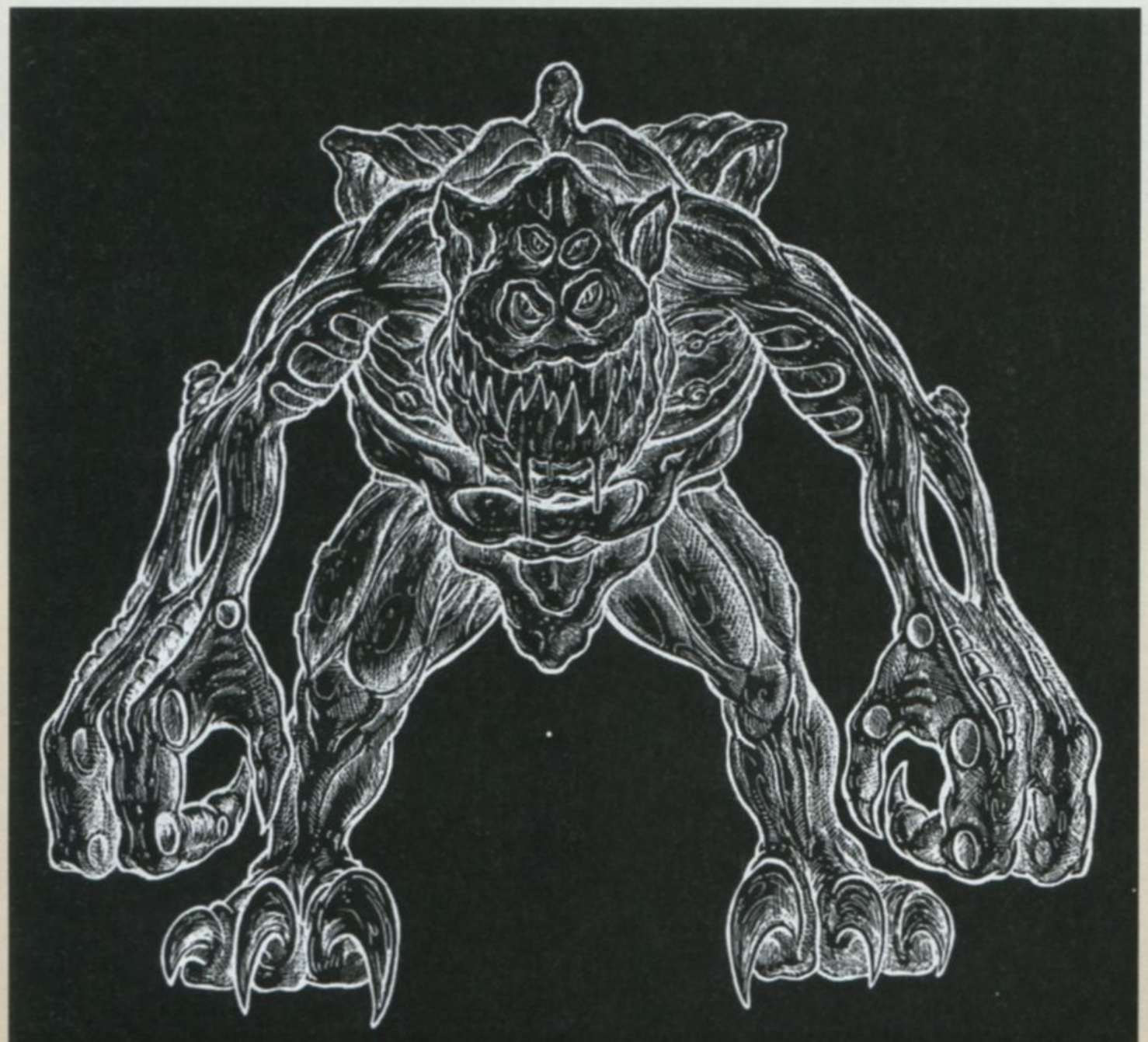
Each level is designed around one of the six disciplines of the Warrior Wheel.

"What our technology does is more than what those cards do," said Tom Hall, designer and driving force behind *Prey*. "If we had just had an environment where there was no lighting, no shadow and brightness, then they'd be a lot more useful — but the stuff we have to do is basically more advanced than those things will let us do."

The game's story is simple: A race of extraterrestrial overlords kidnap various alien warriors, pitting them against each other in gladiator-style combat. You play the human captor, with a biotech suit hardwired to your nervous system to make you a

"A single game can accomplish what the corporate online services never could. *Prey* will be to games what the World Wide Web is to a BBS — a true virtual community."

— Jim Dosé, programmer



The Beast of Rhek'en: Potential *Prey* villain, embodying the discipline of might.

more efficient fighter.

The objective of the abductors seems to be to study the fighting styles of various warrior cultures. They have defined six martial disciplines, aligned in what they call the "Warrior Wheel" and based on the three primary traits of might, agility, and wisdom. Blending those traits creates the other three disciplines: stealth, control, and balance.

But these disciplines aren't tied to character statistics, as in standard role-playing games. Instead, they're styles of fighting you will learn to use, based on your choice of weapons and tactics. Your opponents will be embodiments of a discipline: in order to defeat a disciple of might, for example, you would do well to adopt opposing tactics, such as stealth, and snipe away at him. In the endgame, you'll enter a "Citadel of Unity" and take on the masters of all the disciplines at once.

Since *Prey* uses 3D, polygon-based enemies rather than the flat, bitmapped bad-guys of *Doom* and *Duke*, there must be fewer monsters for the sake of game speed — maybe only a dozen or so on any given level. But what they lack in numbers, these bad boys will make up for in fierceness.

"The enemies in *Prey* will try to think like a human player," said Mark Dochterman, the game's lead programmer. "They share the same weapons systems, and therefore can use the same ammunition as you. They require health and energy the same way you do, and they have the ability to ambush, chase, and retreat, just like a human player."

Single-player mode is being designed in imitation of a good death-match battle, with enemy artificial intelligence that should result in longer, more intense conflicts. They won't be as smart as living, thinking opponents, but a lot of hard work is going into making them appear to be.

"We're going to do some things to give the appearance that they really, really, really understand their parts of the levels, which should be interesting," said Tom Hall.

Hall also hinted briefly about the weapons and special items you'll find in *Prey*, which will go beyond traditional weapons. One weapon under consideration would be similar to a tractor beam, which would let you pull enemies or objects toward you. Other interesting goodies, like flashlights and zero-gravity areas, promise to offer a truly complex environment.

Programs like DeHacked and DEU, which gave *Doom* fanatics so much power to alter the game's appearance or even design all-new levels, are being built into the design of *Prey*.

The team wants to give the user as much practical control over the game's mechanics as possible, so that *Prey* — though an intense action game in its own right ¨— will also be a gaming *system* you can build on.

"We're going to try to make it as easy as possible to customize," said Hall. That might mean a utility that breaks the original game's elements into separate files and directories. By replacing the graphics, sound, and configuration files that contain the combat stats and other parameters, it should be extremely easy to design your own game worlds.

This creates a situation much like

Off the drawing board and into the game. The *Prey* engine is flexible enough that designers can sketch what they'd like to see, then translate their ideas into working levels.

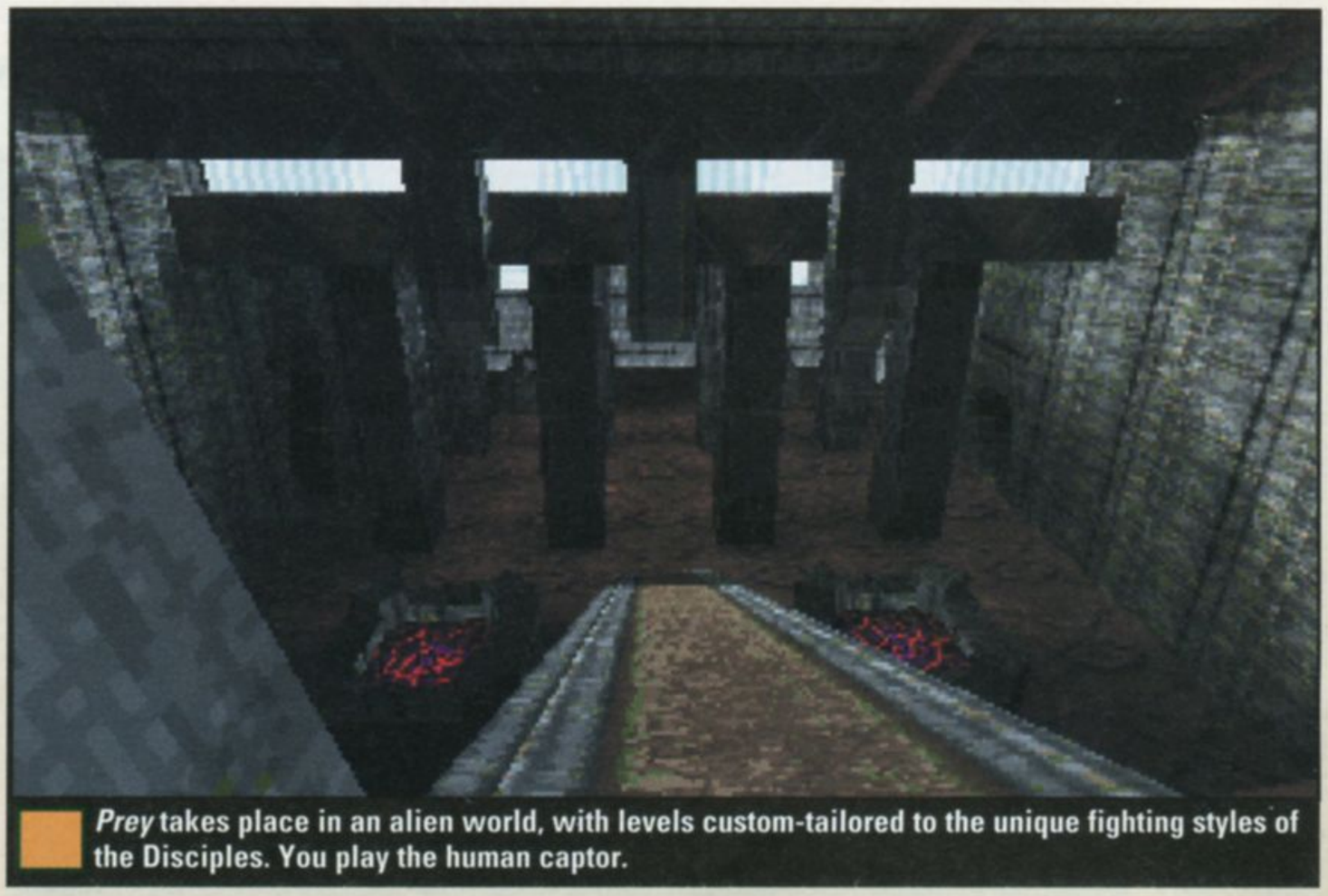
Product Information Number 98

SCOOP!

Your first look at...

"*Prey* will be the most user-modifiable game to date. This flexibility makes *Prey* as much a game development system as a game."

— Jim Dosé



Prey takes place in an alien world, with levels custom-tailored to the unique fighting styles of the Disciples. You play the human captor.

you have in a pen-and-paper roleplaying game, where you are free — and even encouraged — to change rules and build a whole world of your own.

"*Prey* will be the most user-modifiable game to date," said Jim Dosé, one of the programmers. "The actual game portion of *Prey* is written in a scripting language that is interpreted in real-time during gameplay. Not only does this allow users to redefine any aspect of the game, but it lets them design a complete game using the *Prey* graphics, sound, and network engines. This flexibility makes *Prey* as much a game development system as a game."

A Windows 95-compatible level editor will come with the full, registered version of the game.

The concept of *Prey* players trading their home-grown levels online is inevitable — *Doom* fans are already doing it with that game's .WAD files. But this game will have another, more intriguing online element, letting gamers use live Internet links to bind their custom worlds together. When a level of *Prey* ends, it doesn't just load the next level in a sequence; it jumps to a new level indicated by an Internet-style address. Even in single-player mode, the game has a client-server network model built in, the level addresses simply pointing to files on the player's hard-drive. But with the ability to specify an Internet address to a user-made *Prey* level, series of linked, virtual worlds that span the Net can be created.

3D Realms has even suggested that their companies may run huge *Prey* servers, where hundreds of gamers can meet and chat, or join a battle cooperatively, in teams, or in free-for-all deathmatches.

The Pharikus Hunter is an early concept of a *Prey* enemy. None of the actors have been rendered in the game world yet.

"This may sound like the standard online service," said Dosé, "except that it is all done *within* the *Prey* environment. The people you talk to are polygonal 3D models. The rooms you enter are *Prey* levels. Even the lobby can have the same dramatic lighting that is seen in the game. A single game can accomplish what the corporate online services never could. *Prey* will be to games what the World Wide Web is to a BBS — a true virtual community."

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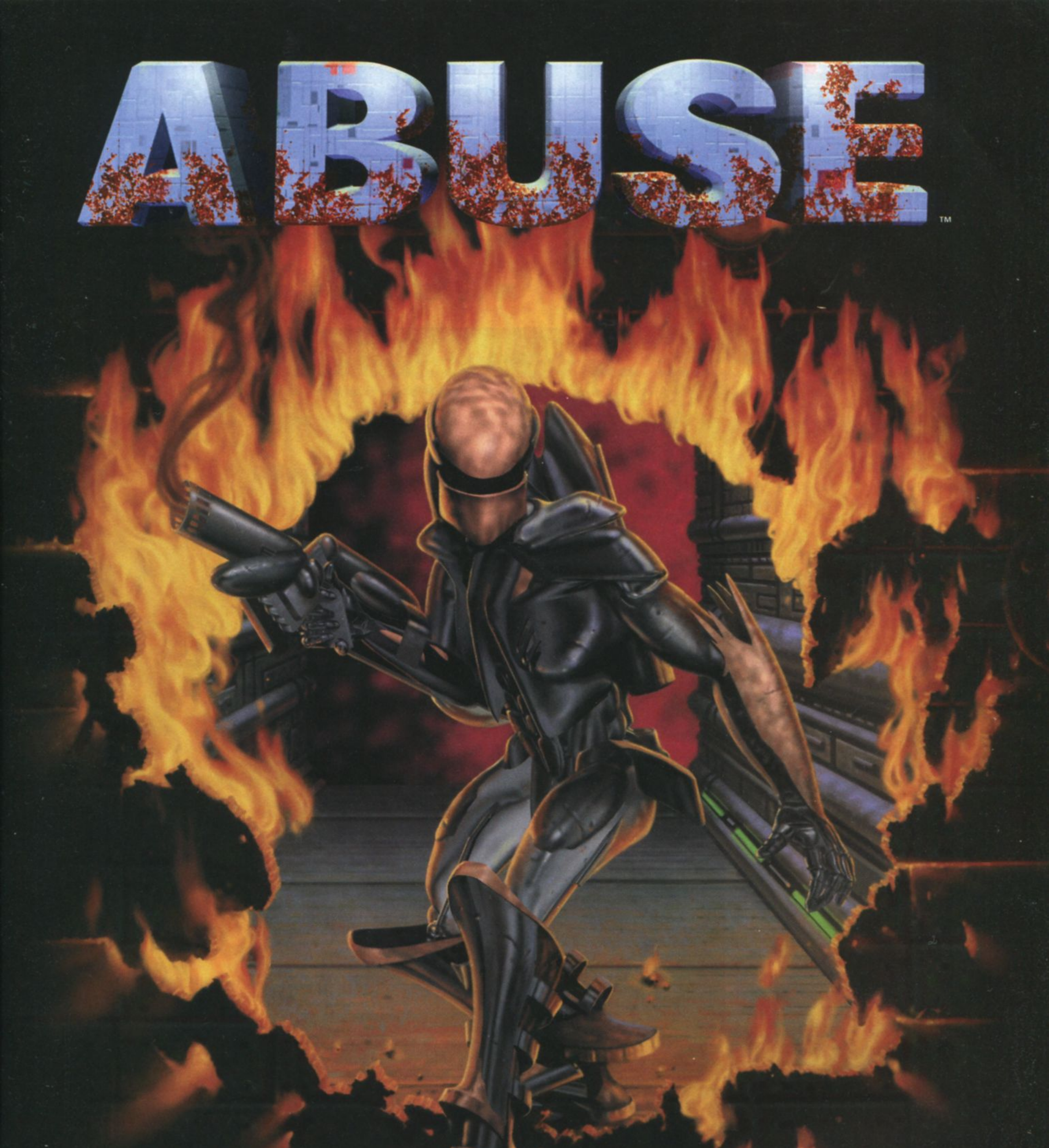

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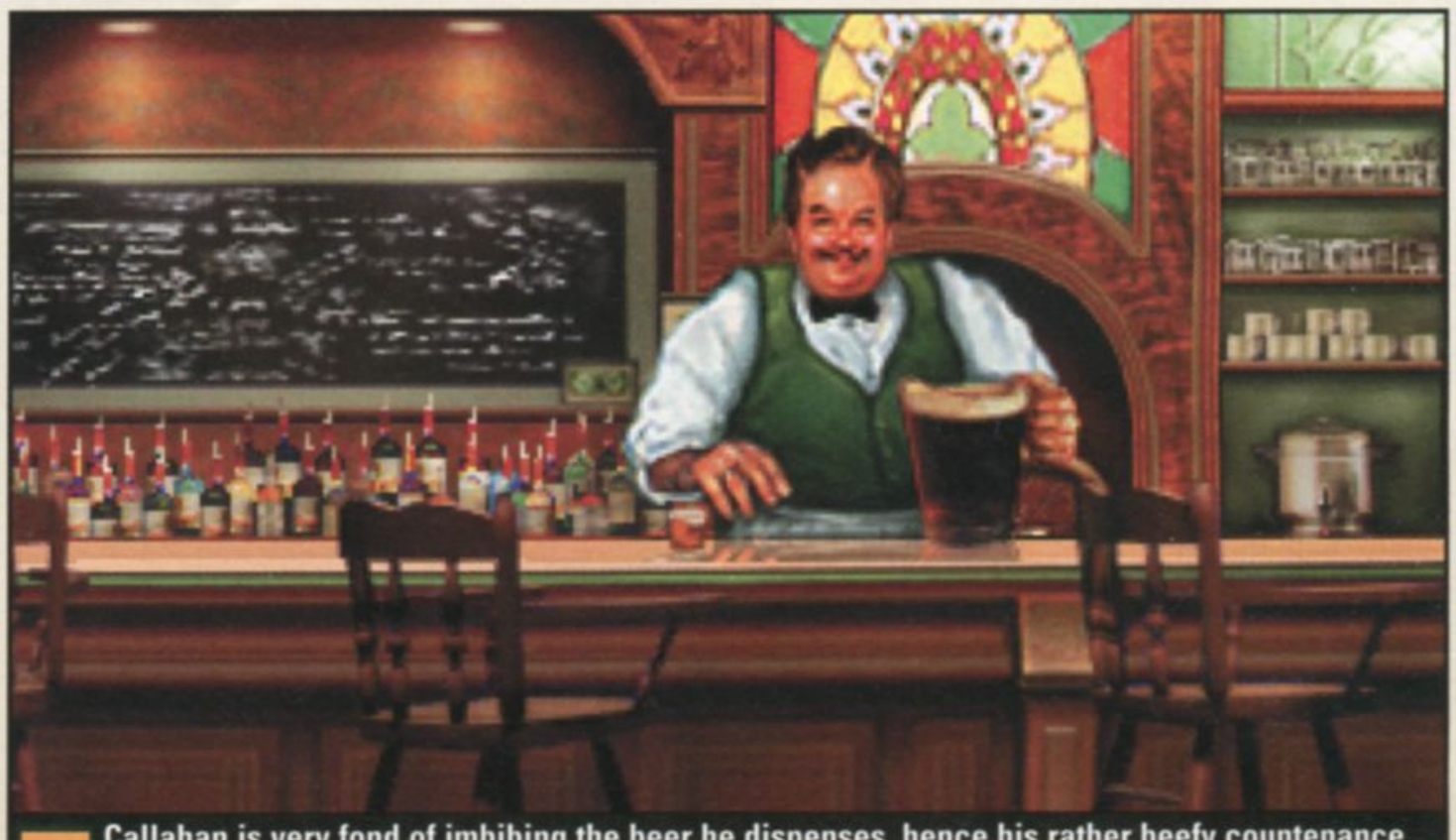
Product Information Number 138

Callahan's Crosstime

Sci-fi satire in a place where everybody knows your name

Callahan's may look like an ordinary bar, but its clientele is anything *but* ordinary: aliens and humanoid critters from all over Space and Time come here.

—William R. Trotter



Callahan is very fond of imbibing the beer he dispenses, hence his rather beefy countenance. It's easy to see why Spider Robinson objected to a "skinny" Callahan!

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Callahan's Crosstime Saloon
Developer: Legend Entertainment
Publisher: Legend Entertainment, P.O. Box 10810, 14200 Park Meadow Dr., Chantilly, VA, 22021 (703) 222-8500
Projected Price: TBA
Percentage complete: 20%

In a nutshell:

Imagine a cross between the long-running TV show "Cheers!" and the cantina scene in *Star Wars*, then add a double shot of madcap humor and a dash of provocative philosophical concepts.

What's so special?

The Callahan series is the most popular work by science fiction writer Spider Robinson, who has won every significant award in the genre. These stories and novels have a devoted cult following, and this game should multiply that number of fans exponentially.

Why should I care?

It's almost like a collection of some of Robinson's most popular stories. And, while it packs plenty of zany, pun-spiced humor, it also offers lots of depth in its storytelling, along with some fairly provocative concepts.

And when's it coming out?

September 1996

There are many obvious parallels between Callahan's Place — a friendly little bar located in the New York suburb of Suffolk, Long Island — and Cheers!, the Bostonian bar that was the setting of the amazingly long-running TV sitcom of the same name.

It's the kind of warm, tolerant watering-hole where a diverse and regular clientele gathers to unwind after work, drown their sorrows, celebrate their little victories over life's adversities — every big city neighborhood has such a special place, or needs one.

But Callahan's is, well, *very* special. It exists outside the normal space-time continuum, and its patrons drift in from all over the universe.

As the game's designer, Josh Mandel, pithily puts it: "Yes, it's a place where 'everybody knows your name'...even if you're from another time or another universe."

Callahan's is the creation of science-fiction writer Spider Robinson, who wrote the first volume in the Callahan's Place series back in 1977, and who has since garnered every award the genre has to offer, including three Hugos and a Nebula.

The continued popularity of the Callahan's stories is based, I think, not only on Robinson's wicked sense of humor and amazing wealth of plot-ideas, but on the special, magical, ambience he conjures — his deep conviction that the most unique trait of the human species is its ability to kick back with a few drinks and observe its own foibles with the saving grace of laughter.

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, in this incarnation as a PC game, starts from the premise that the Curator of our universe has come to the depressing conclusion that the whole bloody place has so far failed to produce any thing, or any species, worthy enough to warrant its continued existence. The Gods may have reached the same conclusion and are considering pulling the Cosmic Plug on things.

One of the special things about Callahan's is that people (or entities, in this case), somehow always manage to stumble into the place at precisely the time when they most need a friendly audience, or a bit of spiritual or philosophical healing.

And so, when the Curator of the Universe — who's almost ready to concede that the Gods might have a pretty good point — wearily drops by for a

Saloon

Nobody can pronounce this creature's name or the name of the race he comes from, so everybody just calls him "Squish." He doesn't seem to mind.

drink, nobody is surprised: customers find Callahan's when they're *ready* to and *need* to.

The Curator finds a curious clientele indeed, including a vampire, a talking dog, assorted aliens and robots, a traveling salesman, itinerant musicians, and a couple of guys from the Suffolk County Bomb Squad. Everybody has a story to tell, and the game is structured in five "chapters," each one centering on a particular character and each one ushering the player into five distinct sub-games.

Doc is a rotund and jovial regular at Callahan's; he's the guy who introduces you to the bar, thus setting in motion one of the main elements of the plot.

You can play these games in any order, but you must successfully complete all of the puzzles and plot challenges in each before being granted access to a sixth, climactic game.

For example, there's the story of Ralph von Wau Wau, a talking German shepherd (inspired by *Venus on the Half-Shell* by Kilgore Trout — a.k.a. Philip Jose Farmer — in turn based on the works of Kurt Vonnegut). Ralph's been nabbed by government agents and taken to a top-secret facility called Mount Weather. There, a team of slightly demented scientists intends to unlock the secrets of Ralph's intelligence, even if they have to vivisect him to do it. The player's task— in the role of Jake Stonebender, a dynamite guitarist and super-

A Few Drinks with the Game Designer

Josh Mandel is perhaps best known for his work on the comic western adventure *Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist*, one of the most off-the-wall products Sierra ever released (and a long-time favorite of the *PC Gamer* editorial staff). It's obvious from the first time you speak to him that Mandel shares Spider Robinson's sense of humor as well as his warmly humanistic view of the human race.

PCG: Exactly how big an audience do you think this series has?

Mandel: Surprisingly small in terms of numbers, but fanatical in loyalty. There's even a "virtual pub" on the Internet where fans congregate. Robinson's more conventional SF has a much wider readership, and, of course, it's very fine work, but there's something very special about the Callahan stories — they deserve to be more widely known than they are.

PCG: How closely did you work with Robinson in developing the game?

Mandel: Not much at all. He's not much of a computer person — he just sort of signed-off on the concept and told me to run with it. Actually, the only really thing he was really adamant about was: "Make sure Callahan's not skinny!" Turns out that one of the paperback covers, obviously done by an artist who hadn't bothered to read the book, depicted a skinny Callahan.

PCG: Obviously, you're a long-time sci-fi fan. When and how did you discover the series?

Mandel: I was in an airport somewhere and just picked up a copy of *Time Travelers Strictly Cash*. I saw a passage about this bar on Route 25-A on Long Island, and I used to hang out on Route 25-A! So I picked up the book and got hooked right away. That was about fifteen years ago, and I've been an avid fan of the series ever since.

PCG: You've come up with a rather unorthodox structure for the game — an anthology approach. How did you make that decision?

Mandel: It grew naturally out of the original format. The concept just works best, in my opinion, in short story form. Maybe that's because so many of the best stories are driven by dialogue and character interaction, rather than big, novelistic scenes. The series became popular on the strength of its short stories, and I certainly don't want to disappoint the fans. I was a little wary at first, though, because the anthology format just isn't used in PC games.

PCG: I've always wondered why. Too many games are structured in exactly the same way.

Mandel: Yes, exactly! And I'm hoping that's one of the things that will attract newcomers. I'm also hoping this game will be appealing to women, because it's not about killing huge numbers of orcs or blowing up things. It's about characters relating to one another, about internal feelings. It's not a typical guy-game. It all comes down to how people *treat* each other, and that in turn relates to the main storyline: is our universe worth saving?

PCG: Definitely a big question. It sounds like your game offers an optimistic answer.

Mandel: I hope it succeeds on that level, and that it provides a really engrossing adventure as well. I don't know of another game out there that tries to do what this one does, and I've really put my heart and soul into it.

"The game is about characters relating to one another, about internal feelings. It's not a typical guy-game. It all comes down to how people *treat* each other, and that in turn relates to the main storyline: Is our universe worth saving?"

— Josh Mandel, game designer

Casimirs, the Transylvanian equivalent of Callahan's, where Pyotr the vampire hangs out when he's not in New York.

New York: "This is the city...there are a million stories waiting to be told, and some of the strangest are told at Callahan's."

empath — is to infiltrate the base and rescue his canine buddy.

And then there's Pyotr, a vampire who is also the bar's designated driver, and who succumbs to terminal boredom after centuries of loneliness. He heads back to Transylvania in search of his lost great love, Sasha. This time, Jake's task is to track him down and reunited the star-crossed lovers.

Once the gamer has solved all five basic adventures, a hitherto silent patron of the bar (the Curator) steps forth and reveals himself, announcing that here, in Callahan's, he's found something unique and worthy of preserving: the shared joy, pain, and laughter of all creatures. The bar is then magically transported to a place Outside the Universe, where — in an adventure Mandel promises will be "equal in scope to all the other five rolled into one" — Callahan's clientele must confront the mysterious Board of Directors and convince them that the Universe is worth saving.

With its warm, appealing mixture of whimsy, pathos, and killer jokes (not to mention Legend's sensational graphics), *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon* looks to be one of the most original and engaging sci-fi games ever designed. Fans of the series have a real treat in store, as do gamers who have not yet discovered Robinson's delightful concoction.

PCG

Brazil, where Jake and Josie (a "Humor Groupie" and member of the Time Police) venture into the rain forest to rescue a rare cacao tree — one that produces an especially delicious and intoxicating brand of chocolate — from the depredations of the Evil Pencil Conglomerate, Faxon-Casderoga.

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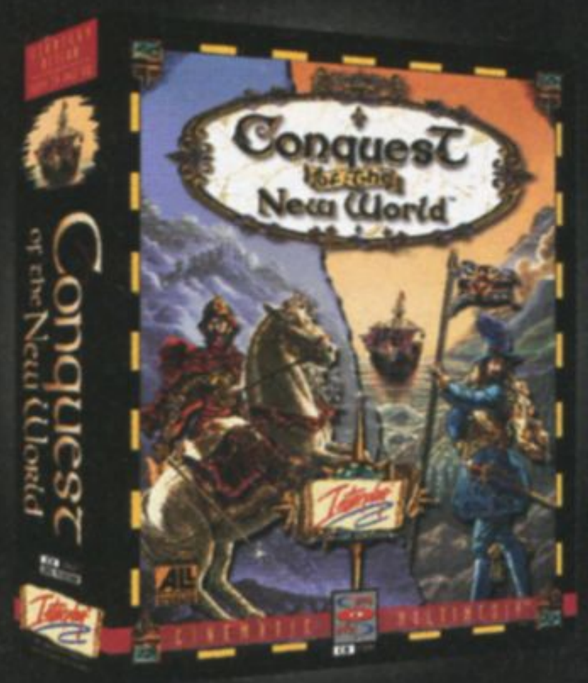

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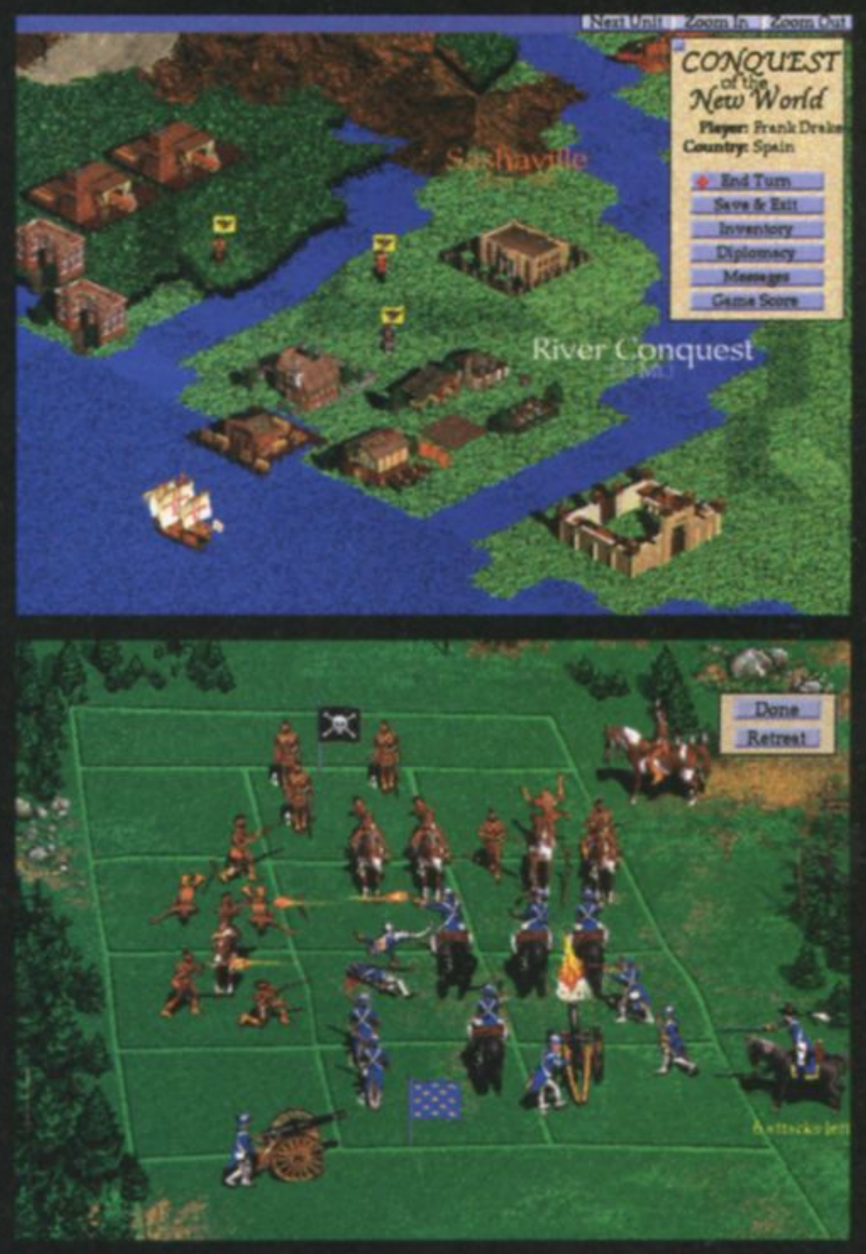

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CQP2

Product Information Number 126

SCOOP!

Your first look at...

Betrayal in Antara

Sierra's acclaimed *Krondor* finally gets a follow-up

Betrayal at Krondor, based on fantasy author Raymond E. Feist's works, was a great role-playing game. Can Sierra create a worthy successor without the Feist name?

— Todd Vaughn

Character interaction sequences undergo an impressive transformation in *Antara*, with crisp, high-resolution animated SVGA characters and backgrounds replacing *Krondor*'s digitized actors and blockier VGA art. Full speech should accompany most of the major characters as well.

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Betrayal in Antara
Developer: Sierra
Publisher: Sierra, 3380 146th Place SE, Suite 300, Bellevue, WA 98007 (800) 757-7707
Projected Price: $59.95
Percentage Complete: 60%

In a nutshell:

As a sort of anti-sequel to *Krondor*, *Antara* uses many of the same elements that made *Krondor* such a hit: a rich story line, slick interface, and innovative graphics.

What's so special?

Despite a well-publicized split between Sierra and Riftwar author Feist, *Antara* won't lack thoughtful storytelling or interesting interaction. And with its if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it approach, *Antara* should deliver traditional roleplaying that anyone can enjoy.

Why should I care?

Like *Krondor*, *Antara* offers deep interaction, exploration, and good, old-fashioned fantasy adventure. It's a traditional computer roleplaying epic, something in desperately short supply these days.

And when's it coming out?

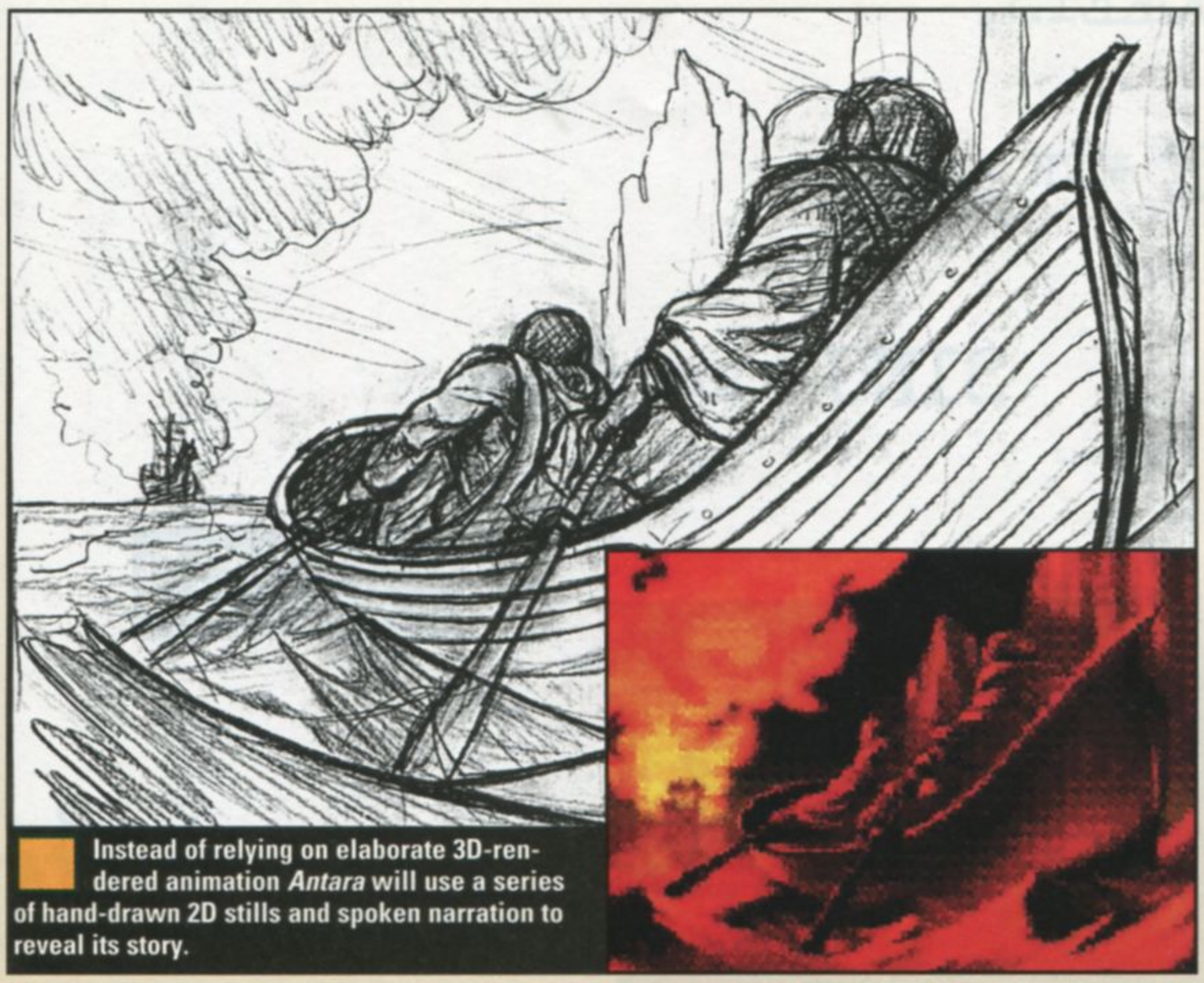
Fall 1996

In late 1993, Sierra journeyed into unknown territory with the release of their first true roleplaying game, *Betrayal at Krondor*. Based on the Riftwar series created by best-selling fantasy writer Raymond E. Feist, and developed by Sierra's then-newly acquired Dynamix team, *Krondor* remains one of the most successful attempts to incorporate the rich and elaborate works of a well-known author into a compelling *and* playable computer game.

Surprisingly, though, none of this was apparent when the game first came out. Released initially on floppy disks, *Krondor* was met with apathetic looks from hard-core roleplaying fans who scoffed at the idea of Sierra — known for their long history of light-hearted graphic adventures — moving into this specialized corner of the gaming world. The mass market, on the other hand, simply wasn't aware that the product existed, since the game hadn't received the sort of publicity you might expect from a title attached to such a well-known name.

Based on this less-than-stellar start, Sierra was faced with their first dilemma — but not their last — concerning the fate of future Krondor titles. Would they extend the contract signed with Feist to produce another Riftwar game, or would they drop the notion of doing more RPGs altogether? The final decision was to end their association with Feist and reissue *Krondor* in an enhanced CD-ROM version, in hopes of capitalizing on that medium's newfound popularity, while Feist took the Riftwar license elsewhere (ultimately, to 7th Level, which is currently developing *Return to Krondor*).

The rest, as they say, is history. Within a few months, the enhanced



Instead of relying on elaborate 3D-rendered animation *Antara* will use a series of hand-drawn 2D stills and spoken narration to reveal its story.

CD-ROM version of *Betrayal at Krondor* became a huge success, drawing in hundreds of thousands of gamers with its compelling story line and diverse styles of play — first-person exploration and interaction; traditional, turn-based combat; and an easy-to-use magic system. Key among those loyal fans was Sierra's senior software engineer, Peter Sarrett.

After becoming hopelessly addicted to *Krondor*'s blend of gameplay and storytelling, Sarrett went to Sierra founder Ken Williams and suggested a *Krondor* follow-up. Williams gave the go-ahead for the project, and so began Sierra's second RPG dilemma: how to produce a follow-up that capitalized on the success of *Krondor* when the basis for the original — Feist's works — couldn't be used.

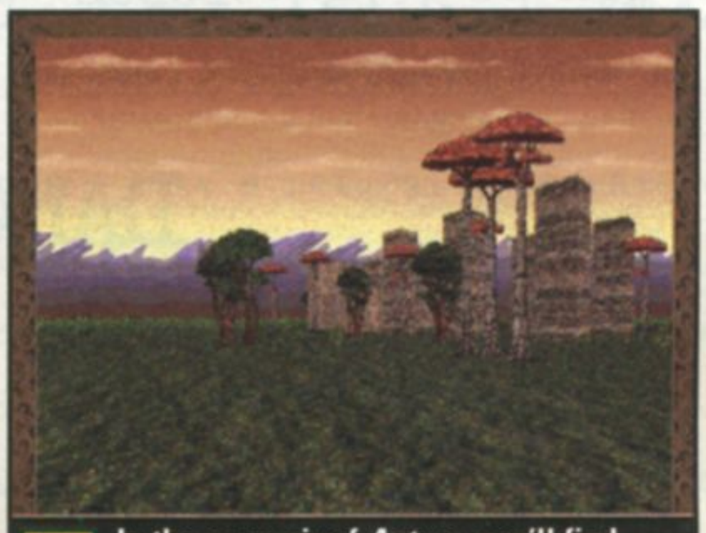
Sarrett's first goal was to create a story that would be just as rewarding as the Riftwar saga, with a greater emphasis on character interaction, mini-quests tied to the larger story and, of course, many twists and turns.

As in *Krondor*, players won't take on the role of one central character; instead, they'll control a cast of characters as they explore the new fantasy world of *Antara*. Among the characters you'll meet: Aren Cordelain, a young fisherman startled by his newfound magical abilities; William Escobar, the victim of an attack by strange magical creatures; and Kaelyn Usher, a young huntress, unwittingly thrust along with the others into a world of political intrigue. Sarrett designed *Antara*'s plot to reveal itself slowly and subtly, like a good novel, giving the player time to identify with each character.

With characters and story firmly in place, Sarrett's attention turned to the gameplay itself. He believed, as do many *Krondor* fans, that the basic design of the original was an almost perfect one; it had a smooth, friendly interface, and it's chapter-based structure allowed for a well-paced story line. So, beyond the obvious technical advances that allow the new game to have high-res SVGA graphics and CD-quality audio with full speech throughout, *Antara* will play in much the same way as *Krondor*.

There *will* be some subtle improvements, of course. The magic system in *Krondor* was much simpler and more accessible than the complex combinations of runes and elements found in other RPGs. *Antara*'s system will retain that simplicity, but it will be updated a bit to include more spellcasting options. You'll still need to locate scrolls for the magic users in your party, but you'll also be able to gain knowledge from other magic users and possibly purchase spells as well.

The user-friendly character screen lets you outfit your party with armor or weapons, check the status of your characters, or examine inventory items with ease.



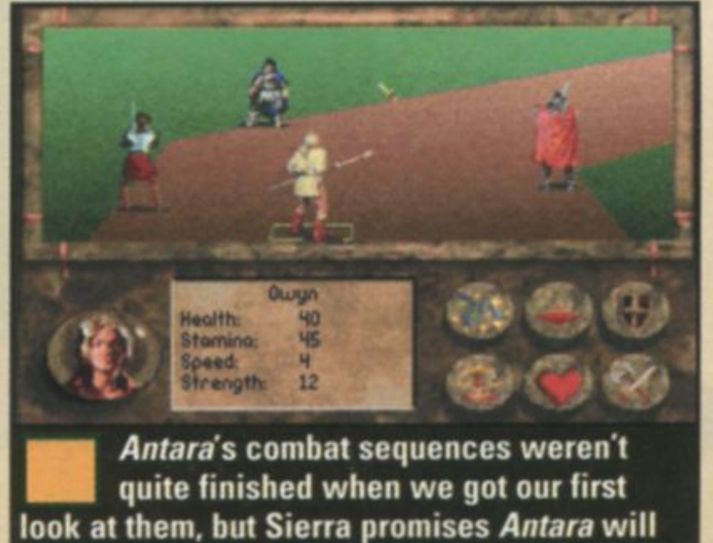
In the open air of *Antara*, you'll find more lush scenery than ever before. Although this scene is taken from a very early version of the game, the detail of this new world is already exquisite.

Krondor's tried-and-true combat system also makes its return no worse for wear, with a similar top-down, miniatures-style perspective and simple mouse-driven movement and attack commands. But it, too, benefits from improvements, including a greater range of attacks your characters can deliver. And, in a move to keep the game challenging, Sarrett also made a deliberate decision to limit the experience levels that characters can achieve within each chapter.

"In most RPGs, you'll find that the player can roam around on the first level, kill everything in sight, and gain lots of experience — then the rest of the game presents little challenge," Sarrett said. "We've put limits on how much experience you can build up in each chapter, to keep the pace of the game challenging throughout."

With improvements in graphics, sound, and gameplay — plus the same thoughtful design and attention to detail that made *Krondor* a success, *Antara* is poised to be a hit with hard-core roleplayers and casual fans alike. Perhaps more importantly, its traditional approach to roleplaying is another subtle indication that computer RPGs may yet return to the values that once made them one of PC gaming's most successful genres.

PCG



Antara's combat sequences weren't quite finished when we got our first look at them, but Sierra promises *Antara* will use the same tried-and-true combat system as *Krondor*, allowing you to view the entire battle and to move your party in turn-based combat.

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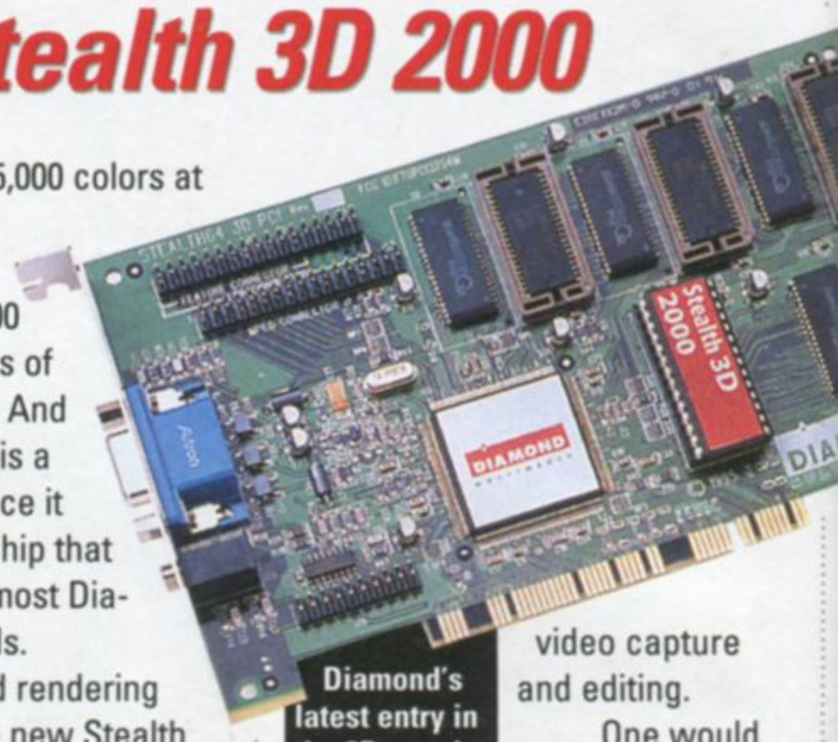
3D Marches On

Hardly a week goes by without another major announcement in the 3D graphics arena. 3D accelerator cards are the most talked-about new upgrade in PC gaming — but how will you know what to buy, and when? With the world's computer chip industry running at full capacity, the ability to bring chips to the market can become even more important than the ability to design faster chips. And 3D Accelerators are still a chancy thing. Many in the industry — including a lot of game developers — are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

Diamond's Latest: Stealth 3D 2000

Back in March, we filled you in on the ViRGe chip, an interesting new 64-bit 3D accelerator chip from S3 that was ready for use with third-party add-in cards. Now Diamond Multimedia, one of the biggest names in graphics cards, has released their Stealth 3D 2000, a new 3D accelerator incorporating the S3 ViRGe chip.

Retailing for around $270, the Stealth 3D 2000 has some interesting features: A PCI-only card, it sports 2MB of fast EDO DRAM memory (an economical compromise between fast, expensive video RAM and slower, standard DRAM) expandable to 4MB. Its supported graphic modes are impressive: up to 65,000 colors at resolutions as high as 1152x864, and more than 16,000,000 colors at resolutions of 800x600 or 640x480. And its 2D acceleration is a known quantity, since it uses the same S3 chip that currently ships on most Diamond Stealth boards.



Diamond's latest entry in the 3D accelerator market is the Stealth 3D 2000.

The advanced rendering engine onboard the new Stealth provides state-of-the-art 3D features like bi-linear filtering and tri-linear MIP-mapping that eliminate the flashing pixels and blockiness of software-based 3D. (For more information on 3D graphics acceleration, see our January and February 1996 issues).

Where Diamond's previous accelerator, the Edge, was a Windows 95-only card and used the Nvidia chip, the Stealth 3D 2000 supports DOS, Windows 3.1, Windows NT, *and* Windows 95. The Edge had a built-in sound card and digital support for joysticks and Sega Saturn controllers, but the new Stealth lacks these features. Instead, it has room for hardware expansion, including modules for playback of MPEG video (it already supports software MPEG) and the Diamond DTV 1100 TV tuner, which uses one 16-bit expansion slot and converts a video signal from cable or TV into a live picture on the PC screen, allowing video capture and editing.

One would also expect more games to be available for the Stealth 3D 2000 than the Edge, since its S3 chip doesn't require rewriting a game to support the Edge's quadratic texture-mapping, a process that means many more weeks of work for developers. Bundled games at press time included *Descent II*, *Terminal Velocity*, and *Destruction Derby*, and many game developers have agreed to support the 3D 2000, including Electronic Arts, Sony Interactive, Spectrum HoloByte, and Virgin Interactive.

In addition, when Microsoft's Direct3D APIs are ready, Diamond will provide its customers with the appropriate drivers. At that point, any title designed around the Microsoft standards will see improved performance with the Stealth 3D 2000, or any other 3D accelerator that supports the Direct 3D APIs.

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Controller: S3 ViRGe chip

Bus: PCI 2.0 compliant

Memory: 2MB or 4MB EDO DRAM

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Microsoft Ships Direct3D

If you haven't been impressed with the quality of Windows 95 games that have been released to date, that's more the fault of the games than the operating system itself. Those first titles couldn't take advantage of all of the Windows 95's game-related features, since Direct3D was not available. But now Direct3D has shipped in its beta version, and games that take full advantage of this software are just around the corner.

Direct3D offers game developers standardized access to 3D acceleration features, taking advantage of whatever 3D hardware is available in your machine without forcing you to worry about whether or not your particular video card is supported. This should help bring an end to the current phase in 3D acceleration, where some games run only on certain 3D cards, fragmenting the marketplace and sabotaging the potential of the PC to become the premiere gaming platform of the future.

Rendition's Vérité Surges Ahead . . .

Rendition Inc. has announced that their new Vérité 3D chips will have full support for Microsoft's Direct3D. Perhaps more importantly, Microsoft has given a significant nod to Vérité, designating it the "3D hardware acceleration design reference platform" for Direct3D. This means that Microsoft believes the Vérité does everything that it wants it for Direct3D, and that Vérité device drivers are available on the beta release of Microsoft's Direct3D SDK — a distinction sure to give Rendition a competitive edge in this fierce new market.

Quake, from id Software, is one game that should benefit from 3D accelerators.

That's not to say other chips won't be compliant with Direct3D; everyone plans to be, since Direct3D promises to offer a universal interface between hardware vendors and software programmers, creating a standard for 3D graphics technology and turning the PC into a high-quality 3D graphics machine. The Rendition Vérité is only one of many chips being readied for this new market.

The Vérité chip does 3D graphics processing, 2D Windows and digital video acceleration, and plain-vanilla VGA. Accelerator cards using the Vérité are in the works from Number Nine, Fujitsu, and Creative Labs.

The next implementation of Creative's 3D Blaster will use the Rendition Vérité. This time around it'll be a PCI card, unlike the original 3D Blaster, which uses the GLint chip and is designed for the VESA local bus found in most 486 machines and very few Pentiums.

Rendition has also worked hard to garner support among software developers, trying to line up a number of titles that will be "Rendition Ready" when the Rendition cards come out. Among developers who are currently working on games to support the Rendition are: id Software, Looking Glass Technologies, Mindscape, and Domark.

"Rendition's collaborative efforts with developers have resulted in the highest performance of any accelerator we've seen, coupled with the most complete feature set," said John Carmack, technical director at id.

. . . But Here Comes the PowerVR

Back in March of 1995, the Japanese electronics giant NEC and a small UK multimedia firm, VideoLogic, announced a joint partnership to develop the PowerVR 3D accelerator chip. Now, more than a year later, the two companies have announced the chip is ready and will ship in volume this year.

The PowerVR takes a different route from other 3D chips; it eliminates the Z-buffer entirely.

The PowerVR is a single-chip solution designed to be used in graphics cards or built into motherboards. It combines texture-mapping, shading, and image synthesis on a single chip with a PCI local bus interface. Rather than having a built-in VGA circuit, the PowerVR accesses the VGA card through the PCI motherboard, making it compatible with most existing 2D graphics cards.

The major advantage of the PowerVR is its reduced bandwidth requirements. Three-dimensional graphics drawn on a screen are slowed by the presence of an extra piece of information: in addition to the conventional x and y coordinates that define two-dimensional graphics, there's the "z" coordinate that gives a 3D image its depth. This extra information is stored in a "z-buffer," slowing down the process of drawing and animating graphics. The PowerVR chip eliminates the z-buffer, doing the work in its ISP, or Image Synthesis Processor.

Another major advantage, and probably a large reason for the partnership, is NEC's extensive capability to manufacture large quantities of new chips.

The PowerVR supports Microsoft's new games and graphics APIs: Direct3D and RealityLab. That means any game in the future that is written to Microsoft's standard will be enhanced by the new chip.

On the day the PowerVR was announced, no specific deals with manufacturers of add-in cards or motherboards were announced, but don't be surprised to see the PowerVR by the end of the year. Similar chip solutions are also being offered to arcade game makers, while a PowerVR for videogame consoles is being prepared for 1997.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was the first SF novel to really bring today's computer technology home, with its vision of high-tech, low-life criminals, and gritty, neon-lit streets. These ideas have been recycled in many other books and movies — as well as computer games like *Johnny Mnemonic*, *TekWar*, and *Burn Cycle*.

Enter Viacom New Media's version of the Metaverse, in this new PC game based on Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*.

Snow Crash

Not since *Neuromancer* has a cyberpunk novel been so talked about. Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* is especially noteworthy for its depiction of an online world of the very near future, where users wander around in a three-dimensional space, represented by Avatars.

Now Viacom New Media is developing *Snow Crash* as a computer product, a 3D real-time action game. It will be your job as the player to stop Snow Crash, the deadly computer virus from the book's title. To do so, you enter the brightly-lit world of the Metaverse, battling enemies with everything from samurai swords to automatic weapons. You'll also have access to programming tools, using them to build your own "daemon programs." The game should be out at the beginning of summer.

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CHOOSE
YOUR
WEAPON
Actually, you'll need
them all where you're going.
TIME
COMMANDO™
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Great News for Gamers

Intel adds multimedia features to Pentium

One of the most important companies in the PC industry is Intel, but to most gamers they're just those annoying guys who keep making processor chips that are faster and cheaper than the one you just bought. However, Intel's new MMX technology is not some new speed-demon chip; it's a significant enhancement to their entire line of CPUs.

MMX is a set of new instructions for CPUs designed specifically to speed multimedia applications on the PC. Intel is calling it the most significant upgrade to their processor architecture since the introduction of the 386 processor, claiming speed can be improved from 50 to 400 percent, depending on how much an individual application takes advantage of the MMX instructions. The types of programs that will benefit are the high-bandwidth, processor-intensive kind, such as two-way video communications, 3D graphics, and virtual worlds, such as those written in VRML for the World Wide Web.

It will also allow multiple channels of data to be open simultaneously. "PCs that use MMX technology will help make it possible for users in the next few years to dial up friends, relatives or colleagues on the Internet with video-conferencing equipment, share applications, and watch full-length movies with stereo sound all at once," said Fred Pollack of Intel.

What this means for gamers is that games can run with 24-bit color depth — more than 16 million colors — at a high frame rate.

"As an action game developer wanting to push performance limits, we're very excited about Intel's MMX technology," said Mark Rein, vice president of Epic Megagames. "By taking advantage of the MMX instructions, we're able to achieve a four-times improvement in graphics handling that allows our action games to utilize ultra-realistic 16.7 million-color modes where previously we could only use 256 colors."

The MMX instruction set will first be incorporated into a new 166Mhz Pentium called the P55C. The chip should be available towards the end of this year, while the first Pentium Pro chips to incorporate the new technology will appear in 1997. Additionally, Microsoft announced that its Direct3D API and new ActiveMovie video technology will support the Intel hardware.

A $500 Computer?

Oracle challenges the PC

Oracle, one of the world's largest software companies, continues to push ahead with its vision of a network computer (NC), a device they believe can be a direct rival to the PC and the Intel-Microsoft axis that dominates the industry.

The network computer is essentially a stripped-down PC — like a network workstation, it lacks such basic features as a hard drive, CD-ROM drive, and other key components, but it wears a correspondingly modest price tag. Because most PCs, particularly those in offices, are used primarily for E-mail, word processing and database work, Oracle believes there is no particular reason for every office worker to have a complete PC.

The same principle applies to using a network computer to access the Internet. If you need a computer only for E-mail, newsgroups, and web-surfing, you don't need a $2,000 home PC, either.

Oracle envisions a low-cost computer that could bring the masses to the Web.

The network computer should sell for less than $500 — it includes a RISC CPU, a few megabytes of RAM, and a network connection. There is no hard drive and no monitor — the home version attaches to your television set the way a videogame console would.

But what about games? There's no need to worry — PCs will remain the dominant computer gaming platform for several years, at least. If high-bandwidth connections become commonplace — in the form of cable modems or ISDN — and versions of the best PC games can be played live across the Internet, a network computer may be able to play quality games.

On the other hand, companies like Sega are developing technology to turn their systems into inexpensive web browsers — an idea very similar to the network computer, but with good gaming technology built-in.

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The Genre Series

One company committed to bringing science fiction to the PC is Cyberdreams, who've brought us Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* and the Dark Seed titles. Their upcoming adventure, the latest in the Genre Series, *The Shrinking Character* also draws from this well, clearly inspired by the classic SF flick, *The Incredible Shrinking Man.*

This incredibly shrunken character will have to use his wits to keep away from that larger-than-life ant in *The Incredible Shrinking Man.*

Suddenly tricked into drinking a shrinking potion, players will find themselves in a strange environment where everyday objects become larger than life. The game engine will have to keep growing the rendered polygons of the game world larger and larger as the character shrinks, so it should be quite interesting to see how that is done, even apart from the actual gameplay.

Cyberdreams' *Reverence* presents a rather daunting situation for the gamer: angry gods are bent on destroying humanity. You'll have twenty weapons and spells in this *Doom*-style action game, as you oppose Osiris, Freyja and their friends.

Those titles will both be out this year; games slated for 1997 include *Species*, based on the movie of the same name and featuring the artwork of H.R. Giger, and *Princi-*

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Sounds Serious

Yamaha's new power speakers for the power user

If you're serious about sound, high-end speakers for your PC are a must. One option is the recently released Yamaha YST-M15 multi-media speaker system, a top-performance option for the high-tech connoisseur. The YST-M15 features Yamaha's active servo technology, meaning the amplifier, enclosure and cone interact to create extra-low bass sounds.

Also nice are the dual stereo inputs that let you a hook up a portable CD or cassette player for background music without having to disconnect the speakers from your PC. Tired of the same old MIDI track in your favorite game? Turn the game's music off, and play some of your favorite real music on the side, while keeping the sound effects going in the same game — nothing's more stirring than a game of *Terra Nova* played to the tune of Pink Floyd's "Dogs of War."

The YST-M15 speakers should retail for less than a hundred bucks, but for another $150, the true audiophile will want to check out the YST-MSW10 subwoofer. This thing adds 25 watts of bass punch to your system, so not only do you *hear* the scream of your IndyCar engines; you'll *feel* them, too.

The YST-M15 speaker system (shown here with the YST-MSW10 subwoofer, center) uses Yamaha's active servo technology for deeper bass response.

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The Space Bar

A new title coming up from Rocket Science is *The Space Bar*. No, it's not that thing on your keyboard, but a science fiction pub. Designed by Steve Meretzky, whose credits include *Leather Goddesses of Phobos, Zork Zero,* and a text adventure based on *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* it promises to be a humorous graphic adventure in an alien watering hole, with eight complete adventures rather than just one. The characters will be designed by Ron Cobb, who created many of those wonderful aliens in the *Star Wars* movie cantina.

Ganymede

Another horde of alien invaders menaces Earth in

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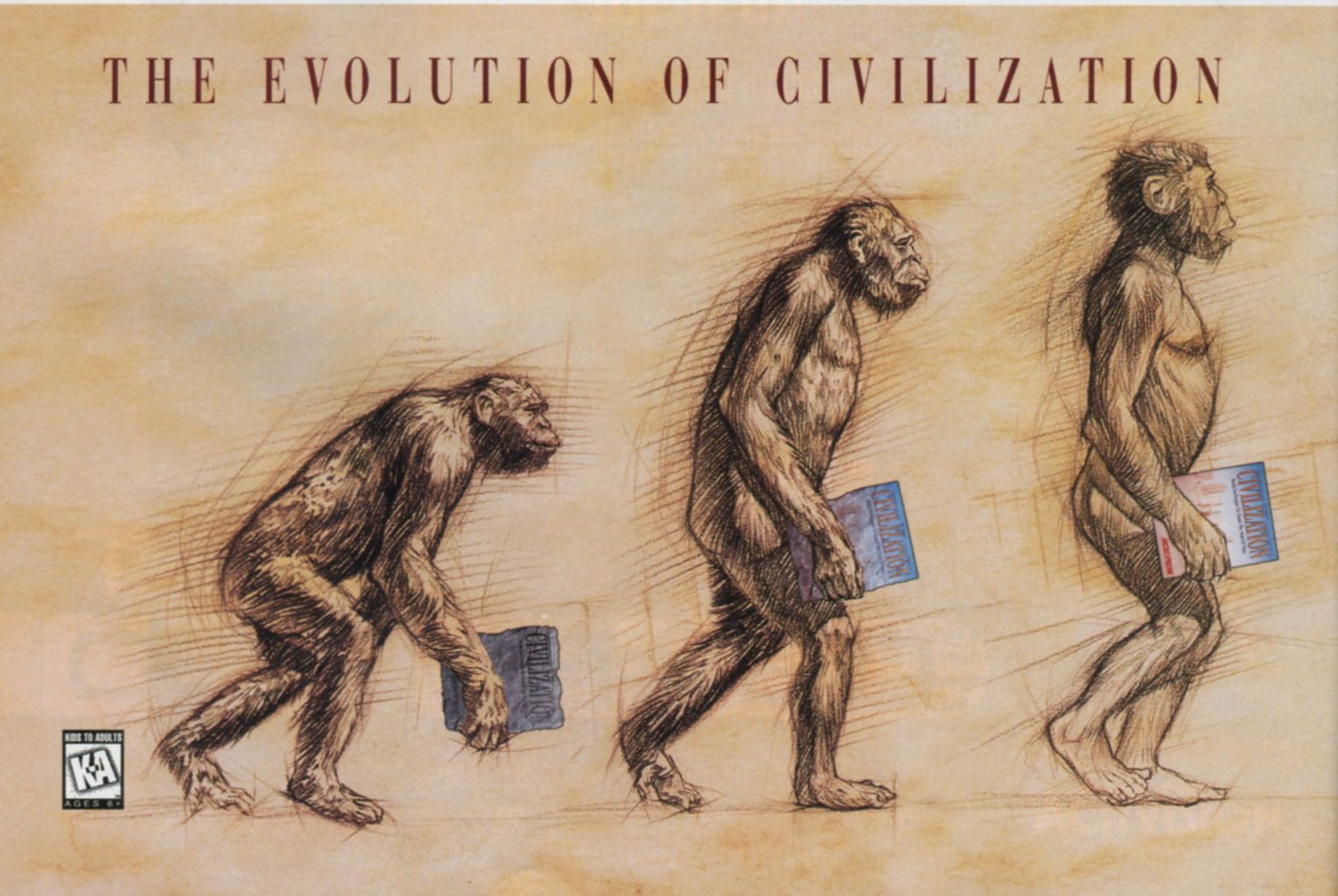

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ples of Fear, a horror adventure being developed with Wes Craven, director of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

This is the malicious God of Fire, one of the four elemental deities you must defeat in *Reverence*.

Cyberdreams is also developing an interesting action/strategy title, code-named "Avalon," that sounds like a cross between *Command & Conquer* and *Doom* — you manage your resources and troops in an isometric view, and then you can jump in to a first-person perspective when the battle begins. Now *that* sounds like a cool idea!

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3D Audio Hits the PC

Binaura puts the sound in surround

With all the talk of 3D video accelerator cards these days, you might not have heard that PC sound is quietly undergoing a revolution of its own. Thanks to the new Binaura Universal circuit, existing audio sources from PC games and CD audio can be enhanced with a surround sound effect, whether the source is in stereo or even mono.

Although their name may not be well-known, Binaura's audio enhancement technology is used in some of the most popular cards on the market today, including Creative Labs Plug and Play Sound Blaster 16, SB32, and SB32 AWE, as well as the Diamond 3D Edge and the sound cards found in Diamond's 4400 and 8000 Multimedia Kits. In fact, the Binaura circuit appears in 70 percent of the multimedia kit upgrade market.

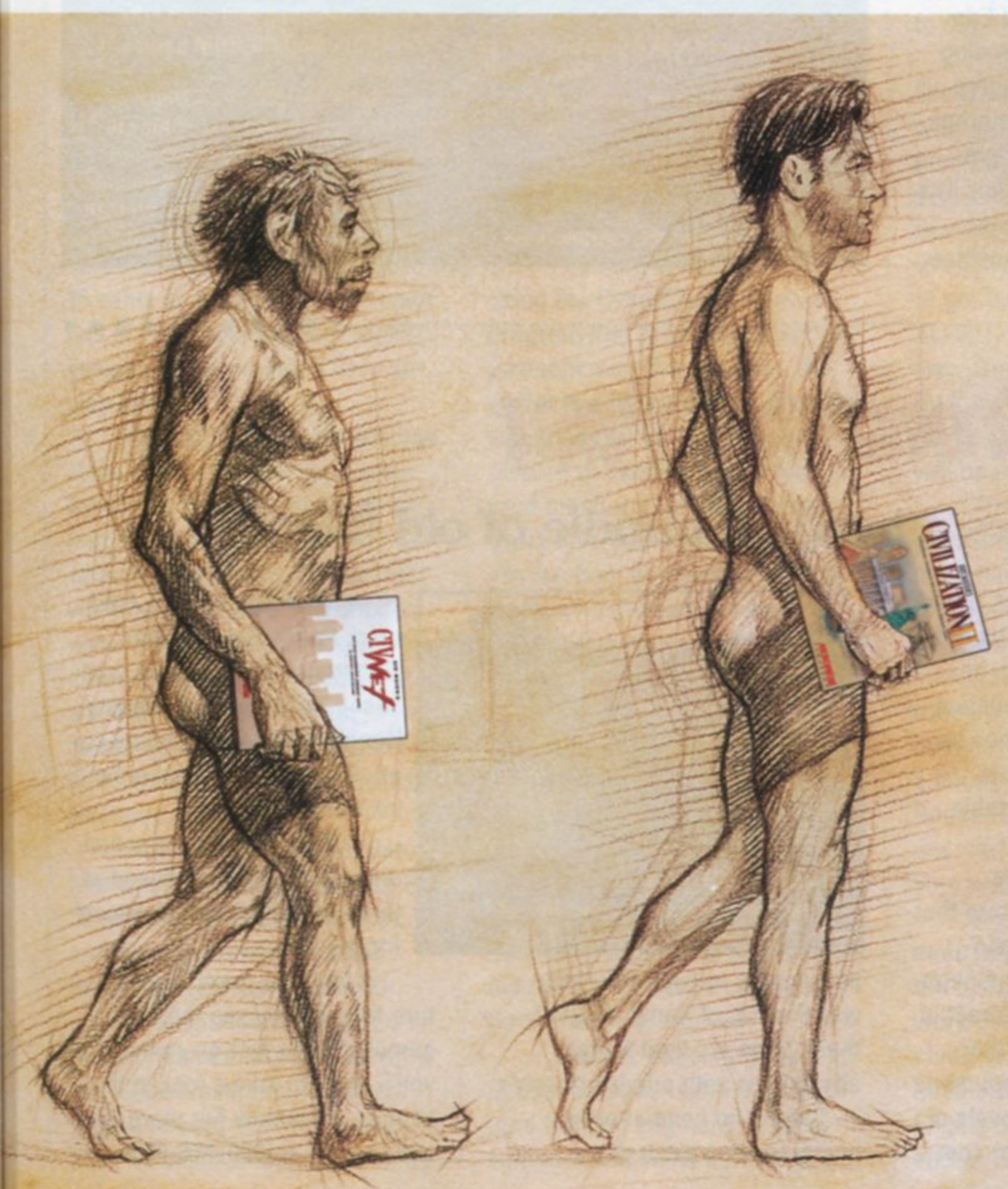
The Binaura Universal circuit automatically enhances any original audio source, restoring its spatial content by minimizing speaker "crosstalk" without the need for special speakers. Crosstalk occurs when sound waves from the left speaker, meant for the left ear, reach the right ear, or vice versa. This causes the masking of spatial content in recorded music. The closer together your speakers are, the more crosstalk occurs, so the problem is particularly pronounced with desktop speaker systems.

Stereo "crosstalk" occurs when two speakers are put too close together and the spatial effect is lost.

The crosstalk reduction created by the Binaura circuit occurs automatically, dynamically handling both stereo and mono sound without the user having to access any control panels, although software control is possible.

Binaura is also working on a software development kit, so that programmers will be able to position sounds in space around the player, knowing that a sound card with a Binaura circuit will be able to reproduce the effect. This promises an exciting future for sound in PC games, where a monster behind you will sound like it really is *behind* you.

Although PC multimedia is the first market to enthusiastically adopt the Binaura circuit, the company has even bigger targets in mind, including the home audio and electronics market. If their audio-enhancement technology proves itself in the fast-paced, highly competitive PC marketplace, the Binaura circuit could eventually make its way into radios and stereos everywhere.



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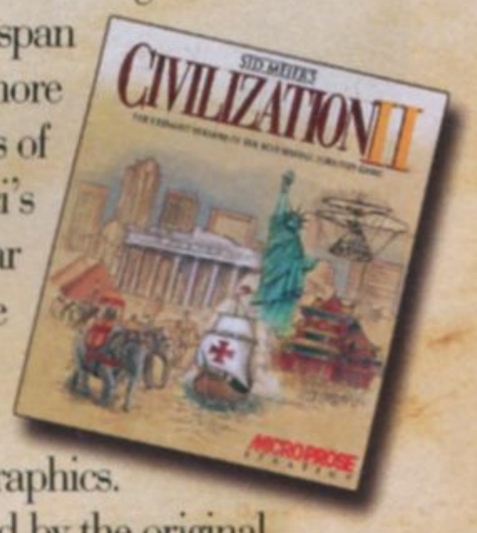

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Product Information Number 132

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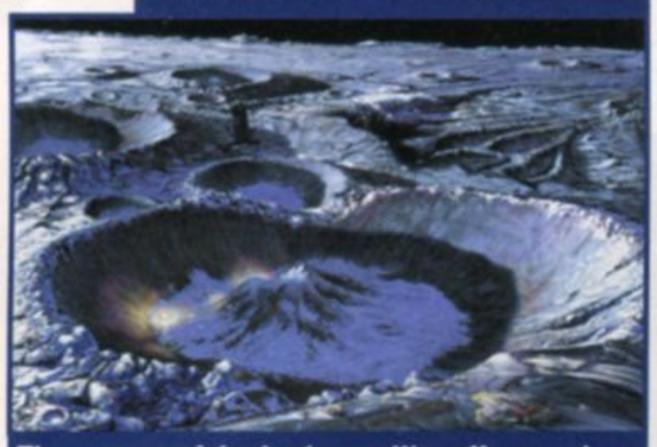

The craters of Jupiter's satellite offer rough, broken terrain to battle for in *Ganymede*.

Rocket Science's *Ganymede*, set for release in early 1997. Although the plot may not be original, the gameplay sounds solid and fresh: you pilot a laser-powered hover sled with lots of thrust and little friction across the broken terrain of Jupiter's moon. Leaping over ridges, dodging craters, and racing across the frozen methane seas should provide a real challenge, and you'll be free to explore the entire game world each time you play.

Sunny stadiums and flying javelins remind us that summer and the Olympics are on the way.

Decathlon

Just in time for the summer Olympics, Interactive Magic is releasing *Bruce Jenner's World Class Decathlon*, a Windows 95 game based on and endorsed by Jenner, the famous gold medal winner. The Decathlon is a series of ten track and field events, including the discus-throw, pole-vault, long jump, hurdles, several foot races, and the ever-popular javelin throw. Because there are so many events that utilize so many different skills, it is a real challenge for any athlete to succeed. The game depicts this by having you build an athlete first,

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Zork On TV?

Activision markets classic adventure universe

The original *Zork* was one of the most popular computer games of all time. A landmark of gaming history, this text-only adventure introduced millions of wanderers to the Great Underground Empire. Through the years, *Zork* has grown and prospered, making the transition from text to graphics and multimedia in *Return to Zork* — and the release of this year's *Zork Nemesis* will mark fifteen years in the Empire.

Now, *Zork* may be ready to leap even beyond the computer and into popular culture. Activision has announced an agreement with Threshold Entertainment to develop the Zork universe for television and other media. Threshold, among its many projects, is the company that created the *Mortal Kombat* movie.

But Activision insisted on retaining some control of how the Zork world will be used. "We didn't sell the rights," said Eric Dandridge, director of licensing at Activision. "We've an agreement to jointly develop the property in visual media, and right now that looks like television. The reasoning is that we have an ongoing interest in the franchise. We want to be actively be involved in how it's fleshed out and developed. We have extensive controls and approvals at every stage in the process."

Although it's too early to say what form a *Zork* television show might take, Dandridge mentioned "Hercules" and "Xena" as the kind of live-action, fantasy adventure shows that are growing in popularity. Another possibility is an animated series.

This deal is still in the very early stages, so the earliest we might expect to see a *Zork* show would be in late 1997 or early 1998.

Zork is not the only property Activision would like to see in film and television. "There's been a lot of interest in *Spycraft* from several major motion picture production companies," Dandridge said. "*Pitfall* is another property with mass-market potential."

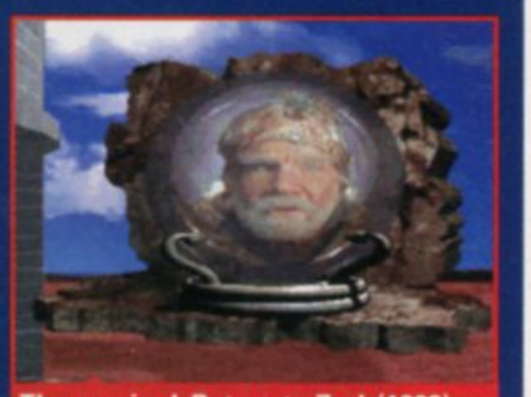
The Great Underground Empire

```
West of House
You are standing in an
open field west of a
white house, with a
boarded front door.
There is a small mailbox
here.
>
```

That's how the longest running computer game series in history began, and without further ado, you were typing in commands like "go west" and "open mailbox" and being slowly drawn into the world of *Zork*.

The game began in 1977, when a team of MIT computer scientists created a mainframe-based game called *Dungeon*. Too large to distribute to home PCs of the time, the developers broke the series into three adventures: *Zork I*, *Zork II*, and *Zork III*, released beginning in 1981.

By 1987, text adventures were quite out of date, so *Beyond Zork* and *Zork Zero* brought graphics to the Zork universe for the first time. Long before the current flood of multimedia titles, *Return to Zork* (1993) broke new ground by bringing live-action video, CD-quality sound, and an unprecedented depth to the *Zork* line. It went on to become one of the best-selling and most critically acclaimed CD-ROM games of all time.



The seminal *Return to Zork* (1993) was one of the first CD-ROM adventures to feature full-motion video.

Now, in 1996, *Zork Nemesis* brings all of modern technology to bear, making this the richest *Zork* title to date. But gamers will decide if the series is still alive and well, or if it's better left a thing of the past.

Blast From the Past

Legend offers a bargain bundle of old friends

Legend Entertainment, one of the most respected names in adventure gaming, has recently released a compilation of eight of their older games on PC CD-ROM, titled *The Lost Adventures*, at the unbeatable price of $30.

Eric the Unready is a humorous graphic adventure that puts you in the shoes of one rather unsteady hero as he negotiates his way through a forest of hilariously bad puns. Another fantasy adventure is *Companions of Xanth;* based on the novels of Piers Anthony, it's the first computer game to explore of the weird world of Xanth. Both of these titles are light fantasy adventures with puzzles to solve — there's no combat or hit points to keep track of.

The humorous *Eric the Unready* is just one of eight adventure games bundled in Legend's *The Lost Adventures* CD-ROM.

Not forgotten are *Frederick Pohl's Gateway* and *Gateway II: Homeworld*, both based on the award-winning Heechee Saga created by science fiction luminary Frederick Pohl.

Other games in the bundle include *Timequest* and all three of the original *Spellcasting* games.

If you're a graphic adventure fan who missed these games in their first go-round, you'll want to take a look at the Legend collection. For more info, call Legend at (800) 658-8891.

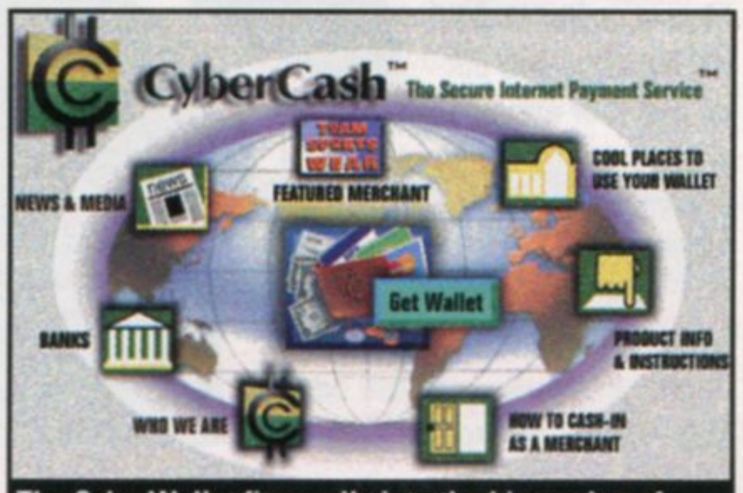
The Internet Arcade

25 cents a game!

Visit the Rocket Science web site, *http://www.rocketsci.com*, where you can play classic, Atari -style games with the Shockwave plug-in.

With more and more game companies realizing that the Internet is the best marketing tool they've ever had, there's been a mad dash to put games online. In the process, companies have tried a variety of new business models, from the try-before-you-buy shareware approach pioneered by Apogee and Epic Megagames, to full-blown online gaming networks, modeled after CompuServe and America Online.

Now Rocket Science Games has taken a different approach, in which gamers do not need to subscribe to a monthly service to play games, nor download demos and shareware. Instead, they're offering a pay-as-you-play web site, with 25-cent games.



The CyberWallet fits easily into the hip pocket of your hard drive. It aims to make small, secure payments over the Internet simple.

"What we're doing is trying to take the seven billion dollar arcade business and port it over to the Internet," said Jim Wickett, chief operating officer of Rocket Science, "by providing classic games and letting people pay for them 25 cents at a time. By the second half of 1996, over twenty classic games will be available from our web site."

Rocket Science already has some games on their web site, which are currently playable for free, but that's just a taste of what's in the works. The games work by using Java and Shockwave, two new technologies that download programs to your PC and then run them without installing them on your hard drive. Obviously, the more RAM you have, the better.

Naturally, this kind of venture could not work if you had to fill out a form and send in your credit card number to some remote server every time you wanted to spend a quarter. So Rocket Science has teamed up with CyberCash, Inc., to handle simple, secure Internet transactions for small amounts of money.

Payment is handled by using the CyberCash Wallet, a program that provides for secure payment over the Internet. The wallet is a free software program you install on your computer. Instead of sending your credit card number over the Internet every time you make a purchase, you keep an account with CyberCash, who thereafter handle all your payment transactions, sending the encrypted information for you. It acts as a secure gateway between traditional banking networks and the Internet, and it's compatible with VISA, MasterCard, Discover, American Express, or your checking account. If the technology catches on, it will be usable not only on the Virtual Arcade, but throughout the Internet.

Another ongoing project for Rocket Science is the V3 Distributed Gaming Engine. This web software will allow gamers to create and play in 3D real-time worlds online, using a tool similar to VRML (Virtual Reality Modeling Language). This is a very promising concept, bringing the kind of customizability and creativity you find in paper roleplaying games to the net.

"The game will be much like Dungeons & Dragons, but with a different game angle, probably a crime-type game," said Wickett. "To make the game more fun, the player will be able to click on the CyberCash icon to get better weapons, hints, possibly play different characters. They'll be able to make their own customized environments in a which a larger game will be played."

One example of how the game might work: if your environment had some doors in it, a visitor to your web site would be able to click on the door and hotlink to another site or another room. Or you could design your own new weapons or props from a library of objects provided by Rocket Science, and then allow users to download them from your web site.

Players may compete with each other as they try to solve the overall mystery, or they can work cooperatively, trading clues. Rocket Science expects to have the V3 Distributed Game Engine up and operating at the end of 1996 or 1997.

Continued from page 52

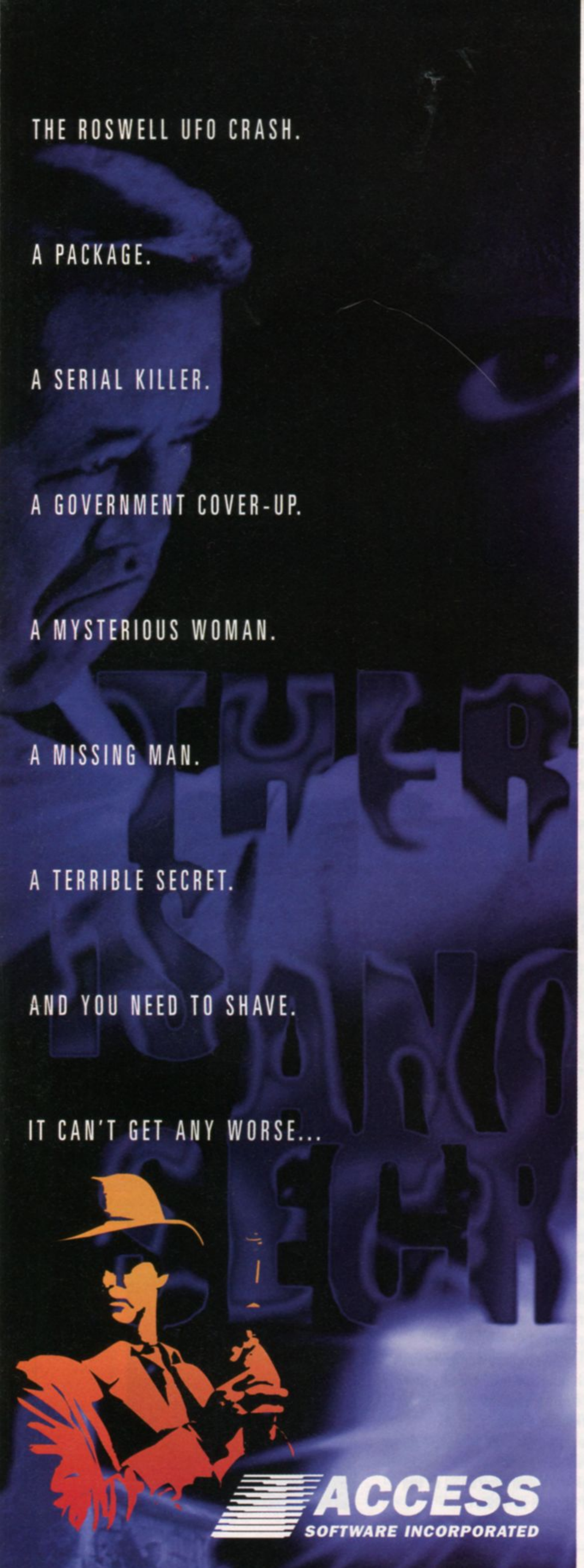
allocating points for skills in various abilities as well as choosing your body type — slender and quick, stocky and strong, and so on. Bruce Jenner appears as a personal coach for the player, offering tips on how to succeed in the various events. You will also be able to customize your competition, which is a nice touch.

Into the Shadows

One of the games that is often mentioned in the same breath as *Quake* and *Prey* is *Into the Shadows*, the upcoming debut from Scavenger. It will be a fighting game in the style of *FX Fighter*, but with graphics and movement that are simply beyond any other fighting game — or any other kind of game, for that matter. Apparently written mostly in assembly code by two guys from Sweden, *ITS* will feature twenty characters in a rich, medieval castle, which you can wander around freely. Using dynamic lighting and 3D-rendered enemies, it promises to be as much a visual feast as a fighting game.

Behold the future of gaming: *Into the Shadows* and its kin may just raise the bar for game companies everywhere.

The finished product will debut in May at E3, although there's a rolling demo available throughout the Internet (we save the space on our CD for fully playable game demos, but you can check out the *ITS* movie — as well as id's *Quake* deathmatch level test — on the *PCG* web site at *http://www.pcgamer.com*). PCG



Stomp & Click

NoHands Mouse moves your feet

In these modern days of graphical interfaces, a mouse has become as important as a keyboard, but it's not without its problems. Finding room on your desktop for a mousepad is not always easy, and mouse cords can give you fits, particularly if they're constantly entangled with that rat's nest of wires behind your PC. And constant mouse-clicking can even lead to repetitive stress injuries — those pains that shoot up and down your forearm or settle in your wrists. Who could blame you if you sometimes want to throw that mouse on the floor and step on it?

Well, now you can. A new gadget from Hunter Digital, the NoHands Mouse, is just that. It's a mouse you put on the floor and operate with your feet. No more tangled mouse cords, and no more grimy mousepads.

The NoHands Mouse has two pedals; one pedal is a 360-degree pressure-sensitive pad that lets you control the speed and direction of the cursor. The second pedal acts as the clicking device, replacing the buttons of a standard mouse.

"There is virtually no learning curve with the NoHands Mouse," said Dr. Aaron Sones, president of Hunter Digital. "To operate it, you simply use the muscle-memory you naturally developed when you learned to walk."

Hunter Digital's team of doctors and engineers developed the NoHands Mouse after studying ergonomics and carpal tunnel syndrome, searching for a way to improve efficiency and reduce workplace ailments caused by repetitive stress injuries.

You can turn tedious point-and-click games into foot-stomping adventures with the new NoHands Mouse.

The NoHands Mouse is compatible with Windows 3.1, Windows 95, OS/2 and Mac mouse drivers. For more information on the NoHands Mouse, contact Hunter Digital at (310) 471-5852.

Back It Up!

SyQuest releases EZ 135 drive

You probably know someone like this: They lie in bed, late at night, tossing and turning with worry. "I didn't back up my data," they whisper fearfully, "Please let it still be there in the morning!"

Not everyone is so obsessed about safeguards, but it's true that the most important maintenance you can perform for your computer is managing your hard drive: defragmenting it; deleting useless files; and, above all, backing up that irreplaceable data.

So if you've ever considered getting a second hard drive, or you've been contemplating a slow, old-fashioned tape back-up system, you might look instead at a cartridge-based solution. Once the province of computer graphics professionals, cartridge drives have begun to fall in price, and one of the most affordable is SyQuest's new EZ 135 drive.

The EZ 135 comes in both internal (IDE) and external (SCSI) versions, the internal one fitting inside any standard drive bay. To use it, you simply insert one of the 135MB data cartridges, and you have rapid access to file archives, and its 13.5ms seek time is pretty close to that of your average hard drive. It'a also affordable, with a suggested retail price of under $200, and the 135MB cartridges average about $20 dollars each.

SyQuest offers a two-year warranty on their drives and five-year warranties on the cartridges. For more information on these products, contact SyQuest at (800) 245-2278, or visit their website at *http://www.syquest.com*.

Power Steering

Newcomer offers budget PC wheel

SC&T International has begun shipping its low-cost PC driving wheel, the PER4MER. That's good news for gamers, since it is priced affordably at less than $90. This is the first competition Thrustmaster has had in the area of low-price steering wheels; Thrustmaster's Formula T1 and T2 wheels have long been the only real option for gamers who wanted a driving controller but couldn't imagine spending $300-$400 or more for a high-end wheel.

The wheel features 50 degree rotation and a self-centering function, much like the wheel in a Formula One racing car. It's a one-piece item that doesn't need to be bolted to your desktop in order to use, making it convenient to take a quick break from work and clock a few quick laps.

The PER4MER Turbo Wheel offers gamers desktop steering without leaving a hollow feeling in their wallets.

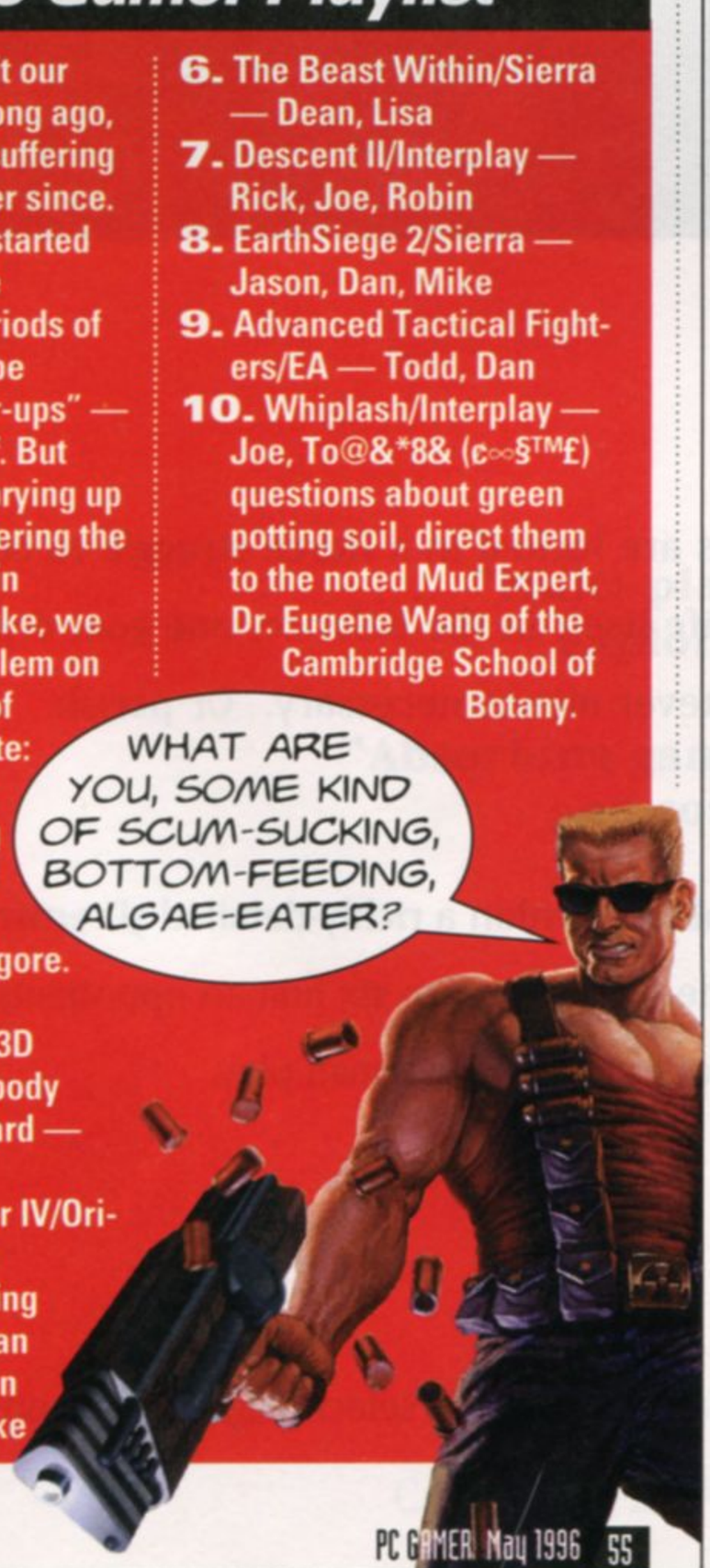
Although currently there are no pedals to go with the PER4MER, SC&T plans to release pedals soon. The wheel does come bundled with *Mega Race*, Mindscape's slick arcade racing game.

For more information on the PER4MER, including pricing and availability, you can contact SC&T International at (602) 470-1334, or visit their site at *http://www.platinumsound.com* on the World Wide Web.

The PC Gamer Playlist

Duke Nukem 3D hit our network not so long ago, and we've all been suffering from shell-shock ever since. At first, when Dean started hiding near the Coke machine for long periods of time — claiming to be "guarding the power-ups" — we could laugh it off. But when Mike started prying up manholes and wandering the local sewer system in search of the Holoduke, we knew we had a problem on our hands. By then, of course, it was too late: We tried to stop, but we couldn't. Nothing matters now, except reducing each other to twitchin' pools of gore.

1. *Duke Nukem 3D*/3D Realms — Everybody
2. Warcraft II/Blizzard — Everybody
3. Wing Commander IV/Origin — Mike, Dan
4. Terra Nova/Looking Glass — Todd, Dan
5. CyberMage/Origin — Joe, Todd, Mike
6. The Beast Within/Sierra — Dean, Lisa
7. Descent II/Interplay — Rick, Joe, Robin
8. EarthSiege 2/Sierra — Jason, Dan, Mike
9. Advanced Tactical Fighters/EA — Todd, Dan
10. Whiplash/Interplay — Joe, To@&*8& (¢∞§™£) questions about green potting soil, direct them to the noted Mud Expert, Dr. Eugene Wang of the Cambridge School of Botany.



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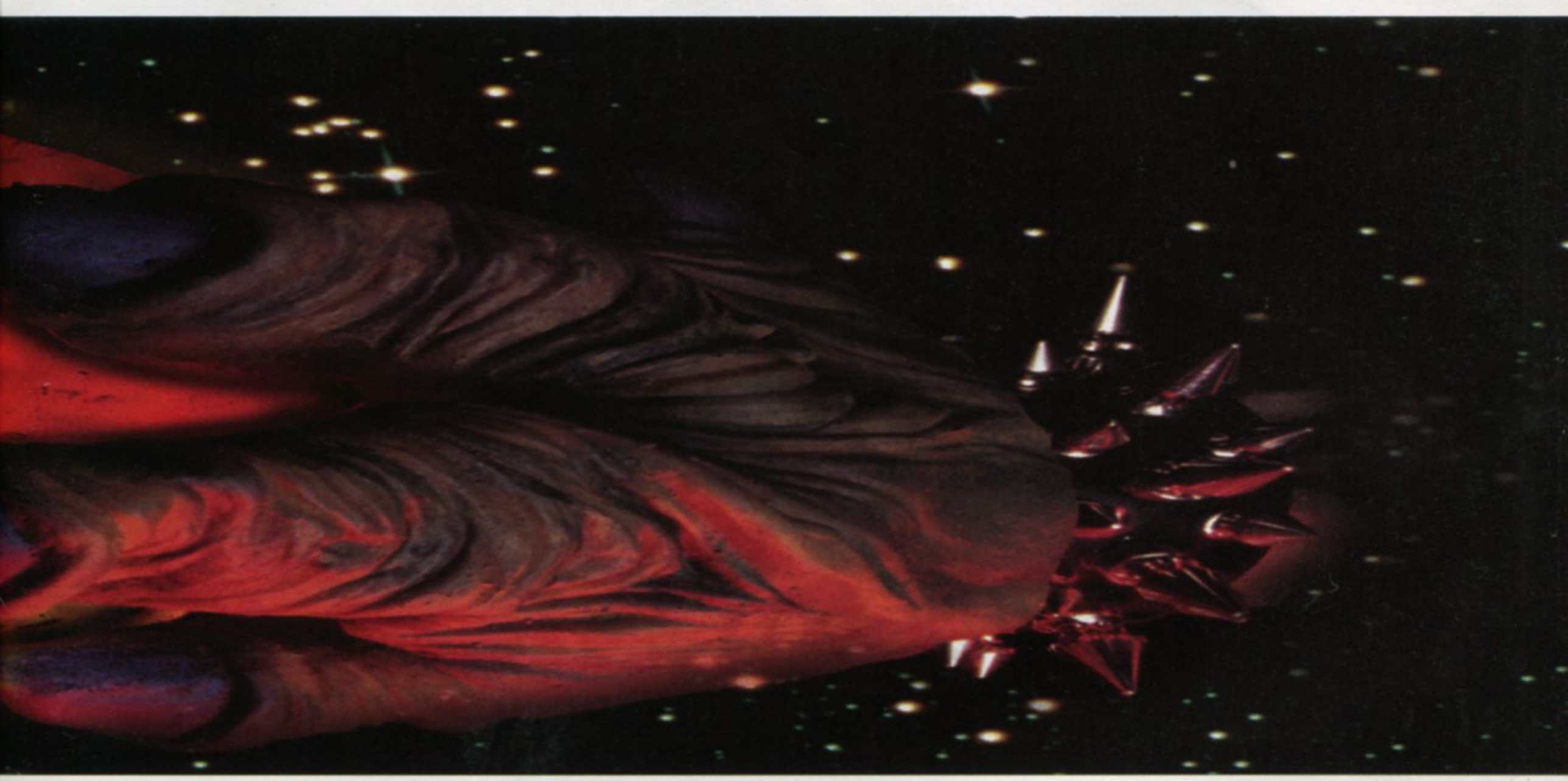

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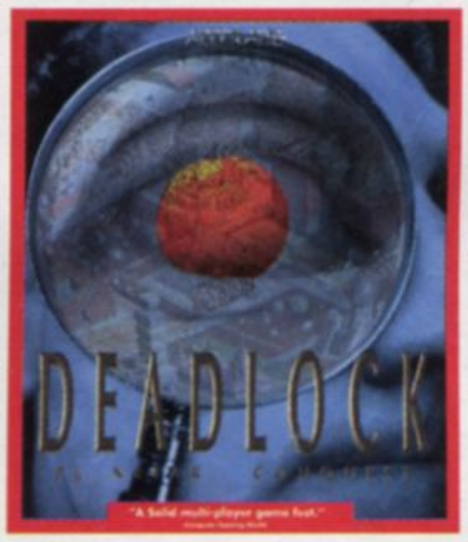

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Computer Gaming Review

"A great game. A sleek, fast moving combo of MOM and WLII".
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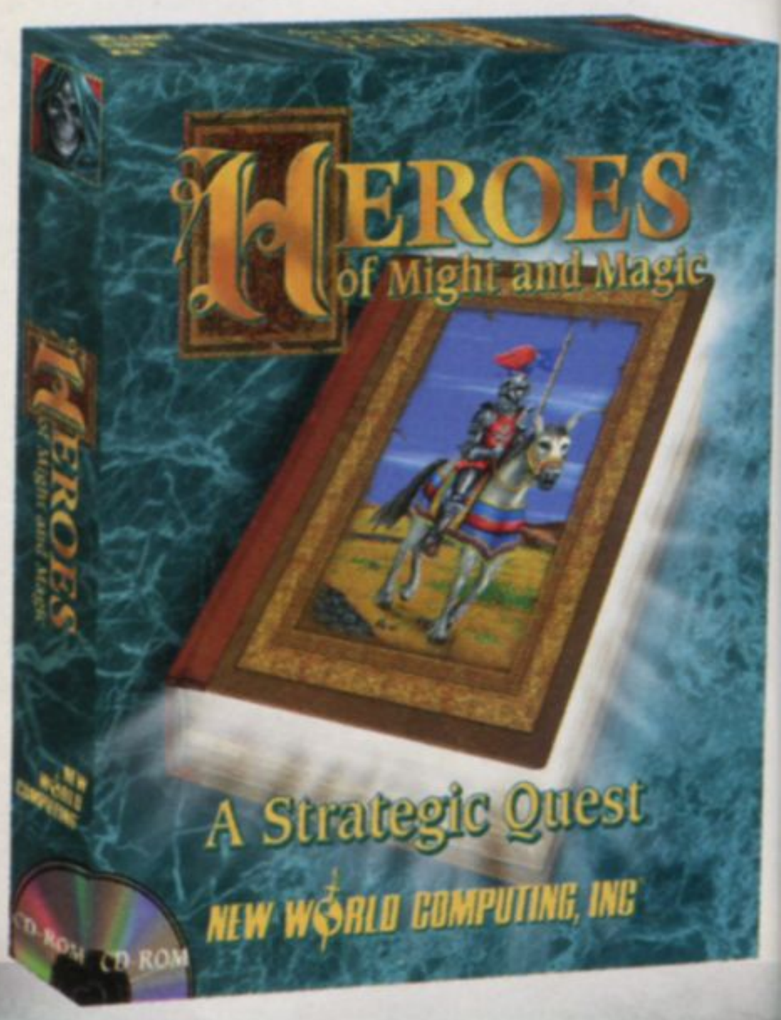

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The Future of Gaming

The PC gaming airwaves are buzzing about two of today's hottest trends: Virtual Reality and Online Gaming. We'll help you separate the signal from the static.

Playing It On The Line

Major online services like America Online and CompuServe have offered a handful of multi-player games for years — but they've always left something to be desired for hard-core PC gamers. Now, with the Internet becoming more popular and accessible every day, some new faces are entering the picture — and they're all promising better service and the same games you already love to play. Chess, checkers and bridge are being replaced by *Doom*, *Command & Conquer*, and *Duke Nukem 3D* — and no matter how good you are at 'em, the gamer who can beat you is out there, waiting on the other end of the line. Multi-player gaming is about to get a whole lot more interesting.

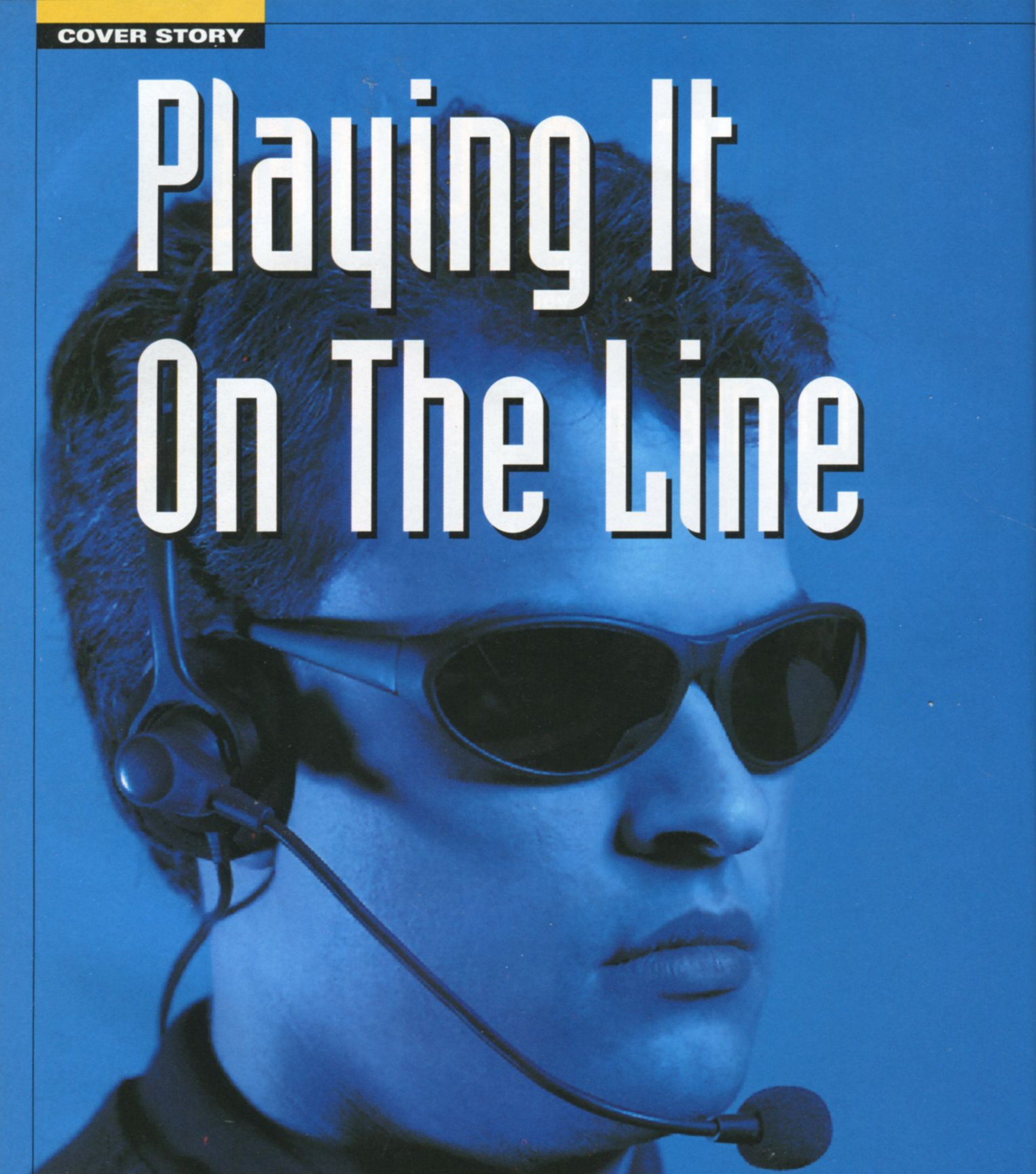
p.62

Virtually Real

You've already seen this stuff in the movies — you just strap on a VR headset, and you're plunged into an incredibly realistic cyber-world that can fulfill your wildest dreams of action and adventure. Well, as you might have guessed, Hollywood was exaggerating just a touch. Until you can have all five senses beamed directly into your brain, you're probably not going to find anything that really makes you believe you're flying a high-tech jet fighter with Claudia Schiffer in the back seat — but the first virtual reality gear is finally here, and it's a tantalizing taste of things to come.

p.76

Playing It On The Line



By Steve Poole

Photography by Aaron Lauer

Multi-player gaming isn't anything new for PC users. For years, games have supported head-to-head action at the same computer, and games with modem and network options for connecting two or more computers have been around for quite a while.

But it wasn't until the arrival of *Doom* that multi-player gaming and network support began to be thought of as crucial components of a successful computer game. Entire offices suffered drops in productivity as workers frittered away important business hours fragging their buddies in *Doom*, and after-hours deathmatches replaced meeting at the local fern-bar for a drink and some buffalo wings.

Now, nearly every publisher is focusing on network play. *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness, Hexen, Command & Conquer, Duke Nukem 3D* — games like these prove just how vital multi-player support can be in making a game a hit. There's just one problem: What about the millions of gamers who don't have access to a network? Sure, there's always head-to-head action via modem, but not all multi-player games have modem support, and if you have to call long-distance to hook up with another gamer, you'll soon be looking at the mother of all phone bills. And modem-play can't support more than two players, ruling out the huge multi-player games that got the whole craze rolling in the first place.

There's nothing like the multi-player action in *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*. Because of the success of such titles, publishers are incorporating network options in to many new games.

Now that "Internet" is a household word, the solution is obvious: dial-up networks. With a dial-up network, several players from around the country can meet in cyberspace to fight it out in their favorite games. And with the incredible growth the Net is experiencing, finding opponents should be easy. That's what's behind the arrival of several new online gaming services, all aimed at giving you the chance to easily and conveniently hook into some intense multi-player action. Over the next few months, no less than three brand new services will appear on the scene — four, if you count the overhaul of The ImagiNation Network to be accessible from the Net — and each one is hoping to tap into the incredible market that is multi-player gaming today.

The Big Four

All those newcomers have good reason to think they can draw a large market in a short period of time; until recently, few of the major commercial online services have put much effort into supporting cutting-edge, real-time multi-player games. Companies like DWANGO, TEN, XBAND, and Mplayer GameWay must be thanking their lucky stars that well-known services like CompuServe, Amer-

How They Stack Up

Which service is right for you? Take a look at this chart to find out which ones fit your budget and — more importantly — whether or not they support all of the games you'd like to play online. Remember, listed rates are based only on minimum monthly subscription charges, so contact the service provider for info on additional usage rates. Also, keep in mind that many services will be announcing new games — check their web sites listed at the bottom of the chart to stay up to date.

	AOL	GEnie	INN	DWANGO
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION RATE	$9.95/5 hours	$23.95/9 hours	$9.95/5 hours to $99/95/50 hours	$7.95/5 hours
NO. OF GAMES (currently supported)	15 plus	25	30	6
MAXIMUM CONNECT RATE	28.8kbps	28.8kbps	14.4kbps	57600
GAMES INCLUDE	NeverWinter Nights, Gemstone III, Strike-a-Match, Federation, NTN Trivia	Air Warrior, Cyberstrike, Gemstone III, Island of Kesmai, Federation	Red Baron, FPS: Football Online, 3D Golf, The Ruins of Cawdor	Doom (all titles), Heretic, Terminal Velocity,
WEBSITE	http://www.aol.com	http://www.genie.com	http://www.inngames.com	http://www/dwango.com

Please see STACK UP *on page 65*

SCREAM AT EACH OTHER AT THE TOP OF YOUR LUNGS AND RUN YOUR BEST BUDDY INTO THE WALL AT TURN 4.

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"OH, #$@!+."

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GEnie's Windows-based Game Launcher has an integrated, user-friendly appearance — until you discover that many of the games require you to exit Windows and launch the game manually from DOS.

ica Online, and Prodigy simply don't offer — or, in some instances, *can't* offer — the type of multi-player action PC gamers crave.

On Prodigy, for instance, about the only game you can play in real-time against a remote human opponent is, believe it or not, checkers. Checking out CompuServe's current crop of multi-player games will send you on a trip down memory lane: You'll find golden oldies like *Air Traffic Controller; MegaWars1* and *3* (galactic exploration, trading, and conquest); *Sniper!* (a WWII squad-level combat sim); *British Legends* and *Island of Kesmai* (drink the grog, kill the ogres); and *You Guessed It* (quiz show). Of those, only *ATC*, the *MegaWars* games, and *Sniper!* have graphical front-ends — and that's using "graphical" in its loosest sense.

America Online's multi-player games represent a step up from what CompuServe has to offer — but they're still not up to the standards most PC gamers expect. *Gemstone III* (fantasy roleplaying), *Federation* (sci-fi roleplaying adventure), and *Modus Operandi* (role-playing) are text-based adventures that are somewhat easier to get into than CompuServe's offerings, but at their core, they play in much the same way — still, they're also very popular. At any given time during the day, you'll find hundreds of *Gemstone* fans and sizable numbers of *Federation* players. AOL's quiz and game shows, such as *NTN Trivia, ABC News Quiz,* and *Strike-a-Match,* are simple but entertaining affairs — but unless you're really into trivia, they're time-killers at best.

AOL's most famous multi-player offering is the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game, *NeverWinter Nights.* Based on the now-antiquated Gold Box fantasy adventures from SSI, *NeverWinter Nights* sports rudimentary graphics — but, like *Gemstone III,* it has a surprising number of fans. You might have trouble getting the AD&D front-end up and running under Windows 95, but if fantasy's your thing, then *NeverWinter Nights* is probably worth the effort.

For years, GEnie was the only major online service to put a real emphasis on multi-player gaming, and games are still a big draw to the network. GEnie currently offers 25 multi-player games, and they have plans to add three more: *Descent, Armored Assault* (first-person tank combat), and *Dragon's Tale* (first-person fantasy role-playing). GEnie multi-player games run the gamut from board and card games to text-based adventures (*Island of Kesmai, Gemstone III, Modus Operandi*) and graphical simulations like *SVGA Air Warrior* and *Cyberstrike.*

Just as on AOL, GEnie's text-based adventures have large and dedicated followings, mainly because these games never really end — most of the fun lies in interacting with other characters. Players looking for games where the emphasis is more on victory and less on chit-chat will head for *SVGA Air Warrior, Cyberstrike, Multi-player Battletech,* or *Harpoon.*

But that doesn't mean GEnie is necessarily the service for you. Just printing out the manuals for two or three of the more complicated games will put a strain on your printer-paper budget; many of the games (*Harpoon, Hundred Years' War,* and *Stellar Emperor,* to name a few) are too complex to appeal to large groups of players; and the GEnie Game Launcher software, designed to make playing games simple, tends to do exactly the opposite. It looks like an integrated front end, but don't be fooled — many of these games require you to configure each separately, with phone number, user ID and password — and some have different memory requirements, forcing you to set up multiple configurations or use a boot disk.

Which brings us to the main problem with commercial online services: They weren't originally designed as a home for high-end, multi-player games, and they can't offer the games that have really made multi-player gaming a minor national craze.

Use Your ImagiNation

Unlike the major information services, The ImagiNation Network was designed from the ground up with games in mind. It's an online community dedicated to gaming and other online leisure activities. Gamers who log onto INN will find a long list of classics like Stratego, Euchre, Spades, Hearts, Backgammon, Checkers, Reversi, Chess, and others, but that's not why most PC gamers come to INN — it's for games that more

Stack Up (continued from page 63)

	TEN	XBAND PC	MPLAYER GAMEWAY	INTERACTIVE CREATIONS
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION RATE	TBA	TBA	TBA	$2/hour
NO. OF GAMES (currently supported)	15	7	N/A	1
MAXIMUM CONNECT RATE	ISP-dependent	ISP-dependent	ISP-dependent	ISP-dependent
GAMES INCLUDE	Duke Nukem 3D, Top Gun, Panzer General, SimCity 2000, Master of Orion II, Net Civilization	Ultimate Doom, Doom II, HardBall 5, Hexen, MechWarrior II, Super Street Fighter II	TBA	Warbirds
WEBSITE	http://www.ten.net	http://www.xband.com	http://www.mpath.com/mpath-home.html	http://www.icigames.com

closely resemble what they've been playing at home for years.

Though the graphics are clearly dated, fantasy roleplaying games like *The Fate of Twinion* and *The Ruins of Cawdor* draw sizable online crowds every night. The multi-player version *Red Baron*, the classic World War One air-combat sim from Dynamix, is another hot ticket, as is the head-to-head network version of *Front Page Sports: Football*.

Toss in a few other fun diversions, like *Paintball*, *Mini-Golf*, and *3-D Golf*, and you can see how it would be easy to wind up spending a lot of time on INN — especially when you consider that the software for all the games is fully integrated into the service's front-end program. For example, instead of launching a separate *Red Baron* program, then logging onto the service as you would with *SVGA Air Warrior*, you simply log onto INN, click on the *Red Baron* portion of the menu, challenge another gamer, and start dogfighting.

But in spite of all it has going for it, the ImagiNation Network hasn't really taken off. Maybe that's because of the numerous changes in rate structures; maybe it's the limited amount of high-speed access numbers, crucial for *Red Baron* and *Football Online*; or it might be the too-cute-for-its-own-good interface. Whatever the reason, INN's membership has hovered between 50,000 and 70,000 for two or three years.

That could very well change shortly, though. In February of this year, INN announced that it was completely revamping its service. The new service, named Cyber Park, will feature a 3D environment with high-resolution graphics and fully animated on-screen characters. And that's not all: Cyber Park will feature Windows 95 support and will be accessible through the Internet (there are also plans to make the new service available through other services, like CompuServe and AOL, and eventually cable television).

To be fair, Cyber Park isn't an entirely original concept. With its city-like design, animated characters, and social gathering spots, it sounds very much like Worlds Away on CompuServe. But where Worlds Away focuses almost entirely on social interaction in cyberspace, Cyber Park will also offer what gave the ImagiNation Network its appeal: games, and plenty of 'em. INN has rights to first-refusal of any game from Sierra, so *Red Baron II, Trophy Bass, Front Page Sports: Baseball, Mission Force: Cyberstorm*, and *The Incredible Machine III*, as well as a slew of traditional board and card games, should make Cyber Park a place gamers will want to check out. Look for it to go online by the end of this summer.

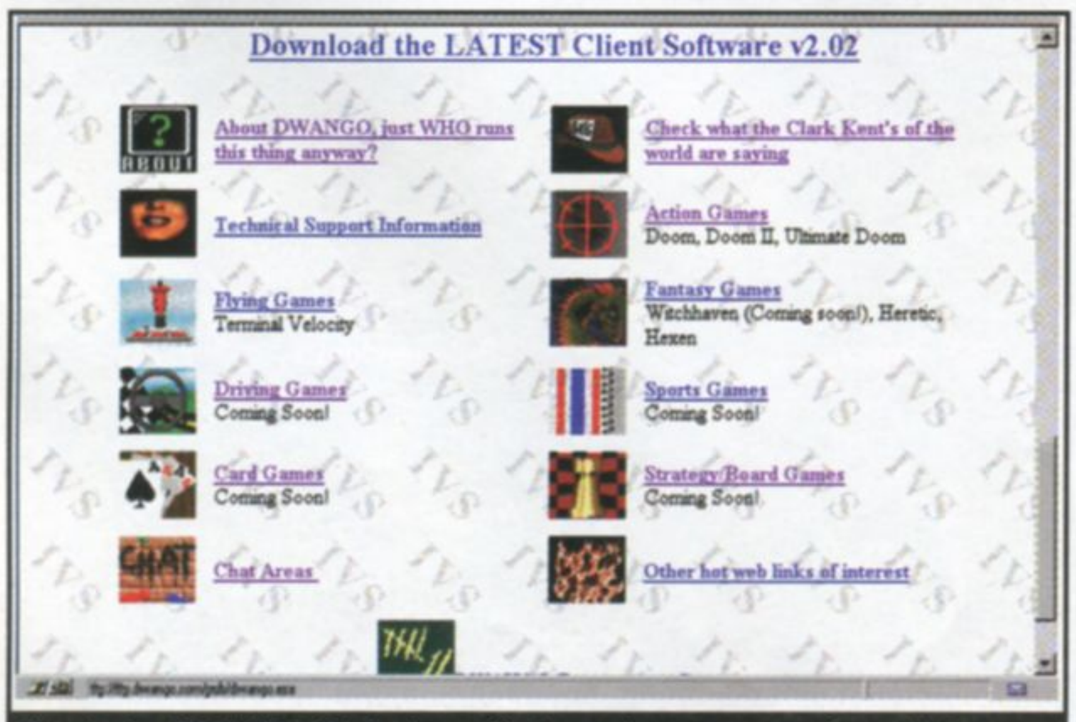
Cyber Park, the revamped version of INN, will feature high-res graphics and a 3D virtual reality environment.

That DWANGO Thang

DWANGO, the Dial-Up Wide-Area Network Gaming Operation, works on a pretty simple principle: Set up high-speed servers that support the bare-bones DWANGO client software, then let users dial in to play other people in games that support the software. And these games are real heavy-hitters in the multi-player ballpark, like *Doom, Doom II, Heretic, Hexen*, and *Terminal Velocity*.

Here's how it works: After configuring the DWANGO client software, you connect to a server (there were 23 nationwide as of last December, with many more being added) and enter a chat room, where you can talk to opponents and set up matches free of charge. You need the appropriate version of each game — the original version of *Doom II*, for instance, won't work on DWANGO — and a modem with a 16550 UART chip, but once you have those, you're ready for some pretty intense action.

The level of competition on DWANGO is high: A lot of these guys know the games inside out, especially when it comes to *Doom* .WADs, those custom files that add new levels to the original game. Fortunately, you can check a "frag count" feature to see who's been dealing death the most, and hey — you can always practice the levels off-line!



Check the DWANGO Web site to find out about new versions of the client software, as well as any new games the service supports.

Probably the best thing about DWANGO is its quick response time: the company says its compression/decompression technology results in gameplay as good or better than you'd get on a local-area network — and it only takes one trip online to verify that they're not kidding.

The rates for DWANGO are about what you'd pay for one of the major online services. $7.95 gets you five hours of game time, with additional game time purchased in blocks that run at rates between $1.50 an hour for 40 hours and $2.00 an hour for 10. If you don't live in a city with a DWANGO server, you'll obviously have to add long-distance charges to the cost.

That brings up one of the major problems with DWANGO: Even if there were 50 or 100 DWANGO servers in the U.S., a huge portion of potential DWANGO customers would be faced with long-distance calls to log on. And currently, you can only play against people dialed into the same server (although DWANGO hopes to eventually link all the servers, so you could conceivably compete against anyone in the world).

There's also some question as to what *new* games will be supported on DWANGO. The company has been promising additions for the past year, but the only new game that can be played on DWANGO so far is *Hexen*.

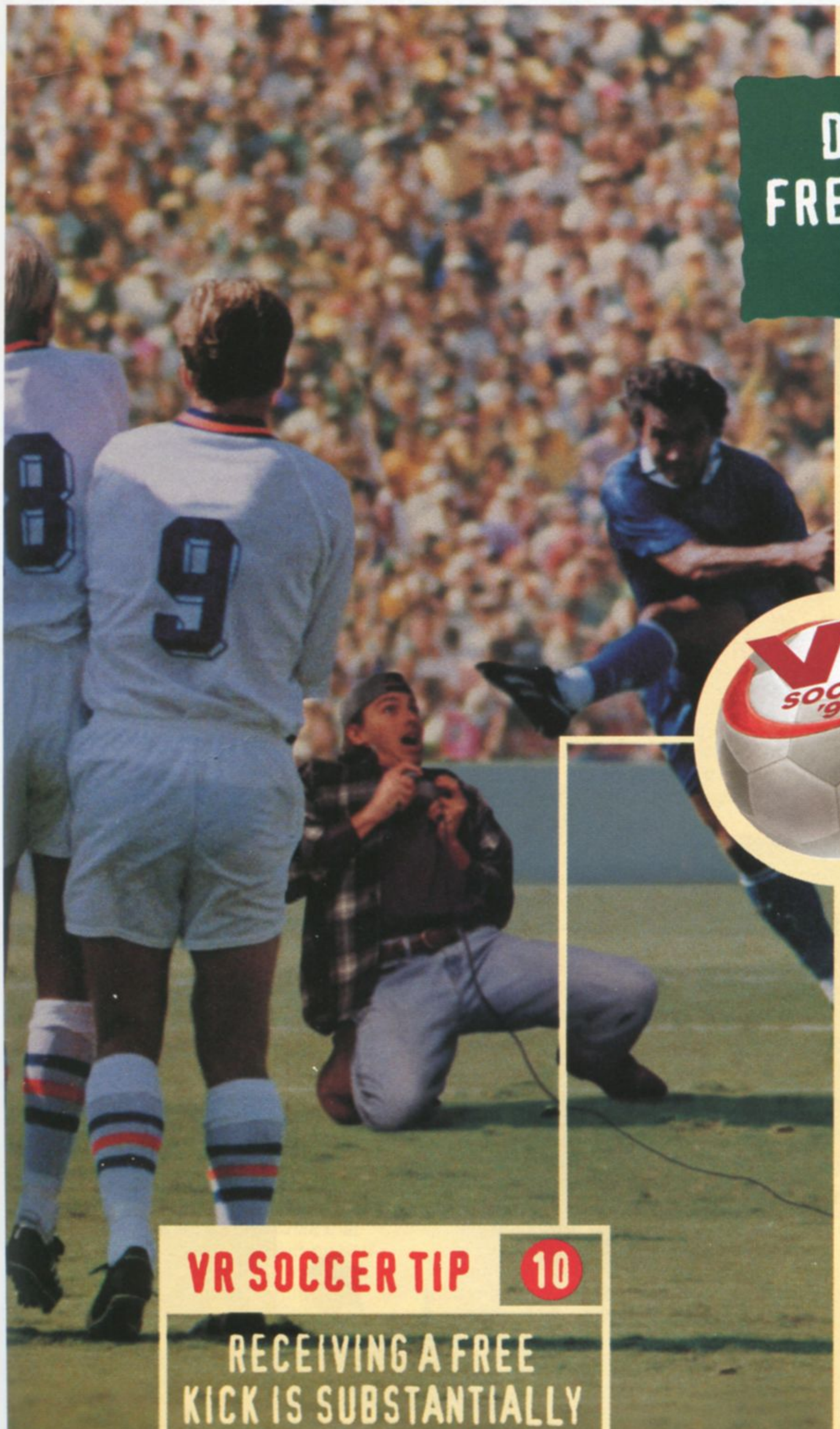
It would be a shame if DWANGO wasn't a success, though, because it offers gamers a level of response that many of the upcoming Internet-based game services won't be able to match for a while.

Enter the Internet

There's an obvious solution to the problem of setting up individual servers around the country: the Internet. Millions of people already know and use it, and a good portion of them play computer games. Better yet, if you designed such a network to work with games people were already buying and playing, you'd have a built-in user base.

TEN

One of the first companies to consider using the Internet as a delivery platform for multi-player DOS games was the Total Entertainment Network, or TEN. TEN was born as the result of a 1995 merger between Outland, a Macintosh-based multi-player Internet service, and



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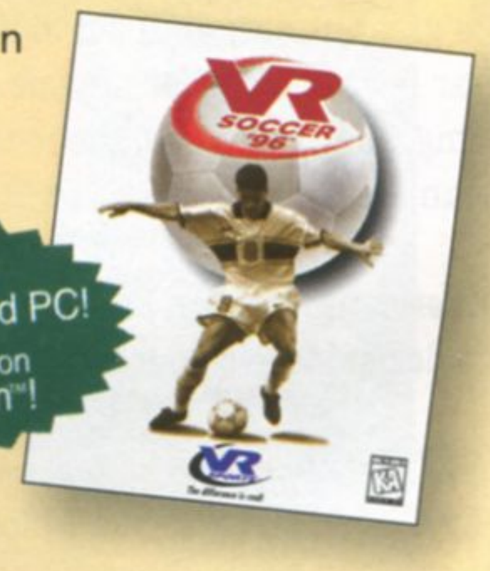

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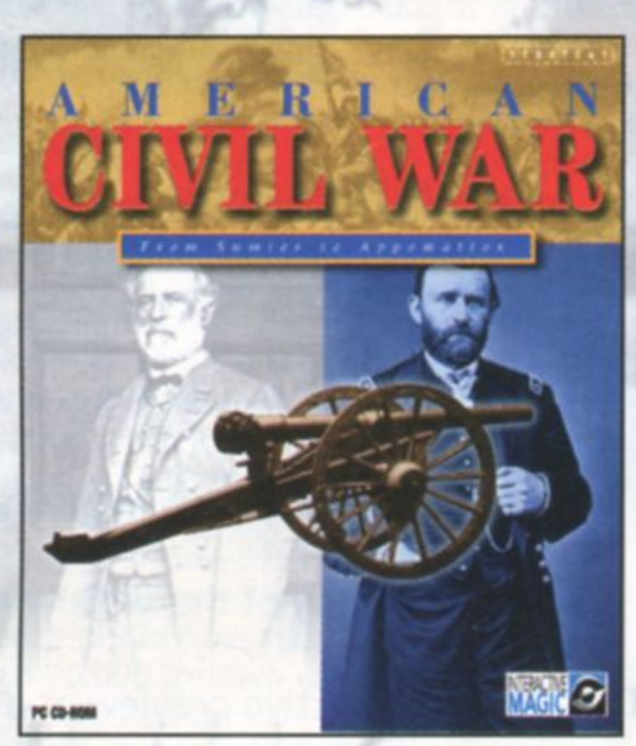

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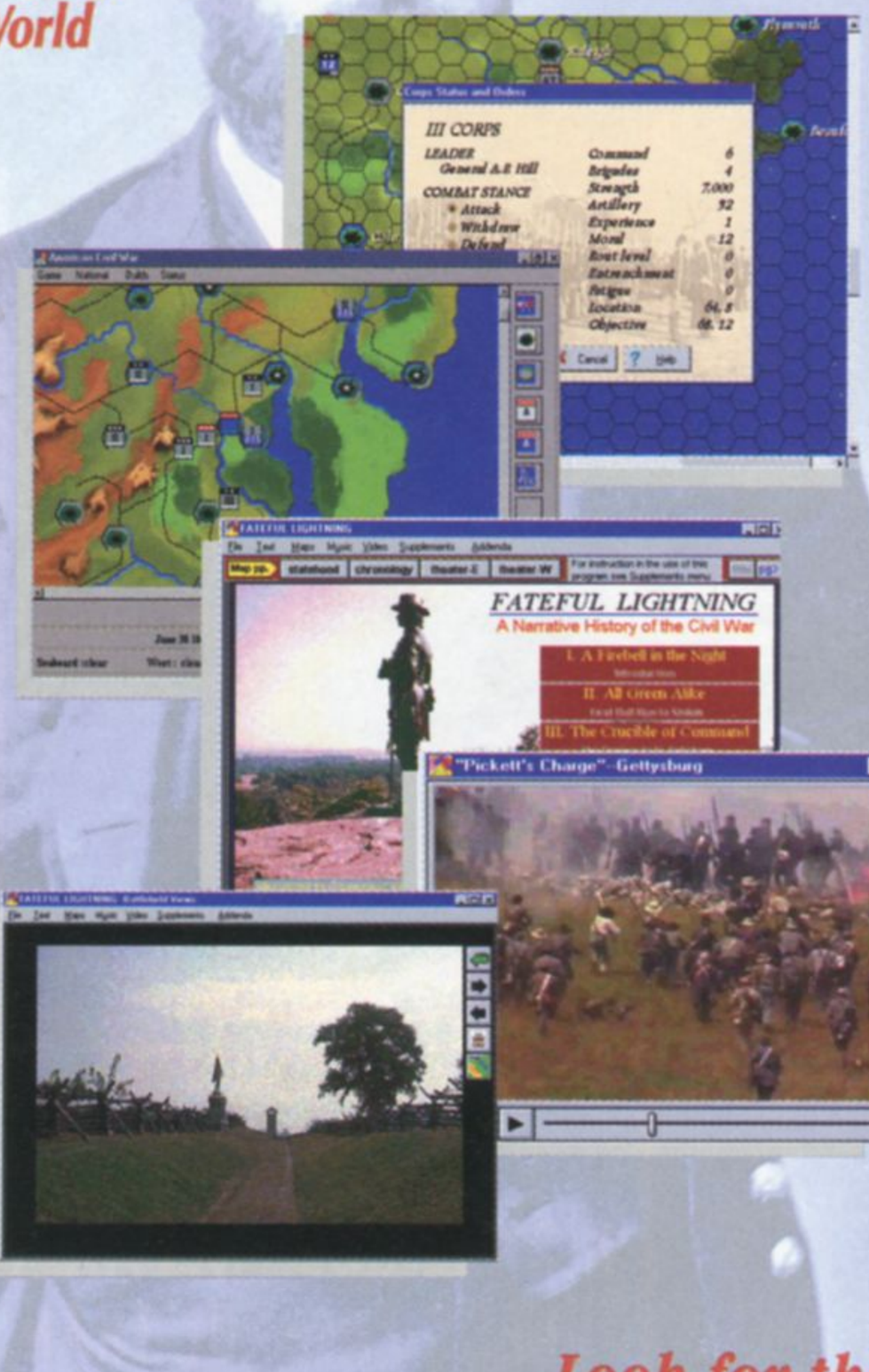

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Designed by: Frank Hunter
Published By:
INTERACTIVE MAGIC

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TEN (Total Entertainment Network) has scored some major content providers, including *Duke Nuken 3D*, the hottest game since *Doom*.

Planet Optigon, described by TEN Content Director Janice Linden-Reed as a "medieval societal simulation."

And things have moved — well, rapidly since that time. In addition to going through several rounds of investment capital financing (the last round brought in more than $12 million), TEN has lined up an impressive list of content providers, most notably via exclusive agreements with Spectrum HoloByte (*Falcon 4.0*), SSI (*Panzer General, Renegade II*), and Apogee. That last one is pretty important, since it means TEN will have exclusive rights to *Duke Nukem 3D*, the hottest multi-player game since *Doom*.

Duke Nukem 3D is good enough on its own to support an entire multi-player network for a few months, but TEN has lined up a host of other hotly anticipated titles. By the end of the year, TEN members will be able to go up against other players in *Grand Prix II, Top Gun, CivNet, SimCity 2000, Master of Orion II, Magic: The Gathering, Shadow Warrior, Blood*, and *SpaceTraders: 2525*. And those are merely the games for which agreements have been signed at press-time: by the time you read this, that number could have increased by half again, or even more.

How will users get online with TEN? Probably the most common method — and one of the most innovative — is by simply buying games at retail outlets. Any game that can be played on TEN will have a "Play It Online" TEN sticker: When someone loads up, say, the full version of *Duke Nukem 3D*, one of the options built into the game will be to play *Duke 3D* on TEN. Users will also be able to download TEN software from TEN's Web site (*http://www.ten.net*). As TEN Vice President of Business Development Greg Harper points out, "TEN is a both a platform and a distribution channel — it's a new paradigm for online games."

Anyone familiar with the Internet knows that configuring new Internet applications can often be quite confusing, but TEN President and CEO Daniel Goldman says a lot of effort has gone into making it as painless and as simple as possible.

"We put a lot of effort into making it easy — we spent months with a kickass programmer and a bunch of other support people refining a one-button install program," Goldman says. "And the fact that our software runs under Windows 95 also helps with the Internet connection issue.

"It seems that getting on the Internet can be a real bitch for a lot of people, and that's what we've addressed with the TEN software," Goldman says. "The TEN install routine pulls in all the necessary Windows 95 components automatically; after that, you could either connect to your Internet provider to log on to TEN, or choose a TEN number."

Which brings up another point: performance. The Internet can be a slow and glitchy beast, so how can TEN ensure that latency — the inherent delay created as data travels back and forth between all the players — is low enough to keep games like *Duke Nukem 3D* playable? One method is for TEN subscribers to use one of more than 200 TEN dial-up connections: it'll cost more than if you connected to TEN through your Internet provider, but you'll be assured of little or no "lag time" during play.

Other solutions proposed by TEN include rating Internet providers by their gameplay performance and giving the fastest providers a TEN "seal of approval;" the company is also looking at rating modems in much the same way. If you do log onto TEN and your connection isn't fast enough to support some games, you might be blocked from playing those games. Finally, there'll be arenas dedicated to users with *very* fast connections: a user with a 14.4kbps modem may not be able to join a game in which everyone else has an ISDN connection.

One thing's for certain: You won't be able to blame TEN directly for any problems in performance. TEN's connection to the Internet is the equivalent of three T3 lines — that means the service can handle around 155 megabits per second of data — and Vice President of Engineering Chris Torkildson says that 90 percent of the code on the servers is dedicated to error recovery. Multiple backup systems mean that the only time TEN should go down is if — heaven forbid — a major earthquake hits the San Francisco area, where TEN's systems are based.

Warbirds

When it comes to air combat online, two games have ruled the roost for the past few years: GEnie's *SVGA Air Warrior* and INN's *Red Baron*. But now *Warbirds* is up and running, and while it's not for everyone, one thing's for sure: it plays almost as smoothly online as it does in its standalone incarnation.

Developed by Interactive Creations, Inc., *Warbirds* is a World War Two air combat sim that the company claims can accommodate hundreds of players simultaneously. We don't know if that's an exaggeration or not, but we've been online with 60 or 70 other players and experienced little or no degradation in frame rate or performance.

What makes this even more incredible is that *Warbirds* will run acceptably on a 486/66MHz machine (with a fast video card) at 640x480 resolution with 256 colors; on a very fast 486 or a Pentium, you can run the game at an amazing 1024x768 and still get more than 20 frames per second. For players tired of squinting at the tiny specks that are the planes in *SVGA Air Warrior*, this is a welcome relief.

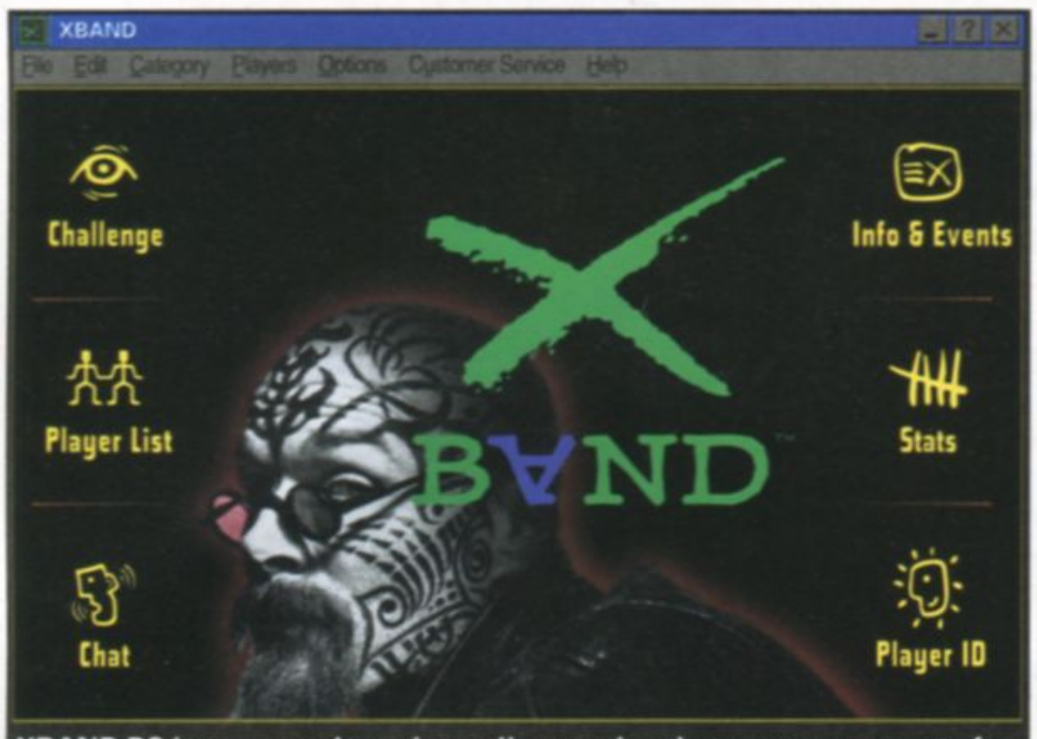
The flight models in *Warbirds* have received accolades from real pilots for their realism — which is one reason the game may not be for everyone. Players who've grown accustomed to the forgiving planes in games like *Aces Over Europe* will have their hands full learning how to keep their fighter in the air and on course. Thankfully, the manual goes into quite a bit of depth on how to do that, and there's also a Training Session once a week to help newbies get the hang of things and up in the air in no time.

If you've got a fast 486 or a Pentium, you can play Warbirds online in resolutions up to 1024x768 and still get a good frame rate.

You can access *Warbirds* either from DOS or Windows; in either case, you can get to the service by logging on to your Internet provider and using a Telnet program to reach icigames.com (if you choose Concentric Research Corporation, or CRIS, as your provider, you'll get better rates, but CRIS may not offer 28.8kbps access in your area). Membership is $10 a month for five hours of dogfighting; additional hours cost $2.00 each ($1.75 through CRIS).

If you decide you'd like to try *Warbirds*, check out their World Wide Web site at *http://www.icigames.com*. One word of warning, though: get ready for some major download time before you go online. The minimal program and art files run somewhere around 10MB, and if you want to play in 1024x768, you can double that figure.

Of course, if you want to take the easy route and you have Windows 95, load up this months PC Gamer CD to check out *Warbirds*. We've got the artwork for nine different airplanes, and you can start playing by either hooking up online immediately, or flying solo.



XBAND PC is an up-and-coming online service that gamers can go to for multi-player action. Gamers can download XBAND from their web site.

Because this is the "Total Entertainment Network," TEN will offer a lot more than multi-player gaming. "We've designed the service to be a singular, cohesive entertainment experience," says Linden-Reed, and subscribers can look forward to web-based magazines on music, underground comics, and pop culture. Another area is GameScape, which will have files, news, previews, and other content related to gaming.

The TEN software also includes a fully integrated web browser, an E-mail system (currently just for TEN mail, though), various chat features, and a newsgroup.

TEN is slated for rollout in April; to find out more, check their web site at *http://www.ten.net*.

XBAND PC

TEN won't be the only spot on the Internet for multiplayer action, though. One of its biggest competitors, in fact, has already had around 18 months of experience in matching players for head-to-head action — except it hasn't involved PC games.

Catapult Entertainment is the company behind XBAND, a national online service designed for owners of Sega Genesis and Super NES videogame consoles. The way XBAND works with these systems is simple: using a special modem hooked up to their console, XBAND users dial into the service and look for an opponent who lives in their local calling area. If they find one, they're automatically disconnected from the service, and one of the players' machines calls the other's (also automatic); if not, they can choose to play someone outside their local calling area at long-distance rates of around six cents a minute, or simply sign off the network and not have that session billed against their account (XBAND bills on number of matches, not hourly usage).

XBAND PC, however, will work more along the lines of the TEN model: Users will be able to access XBAND PC through their current Internet providers, where they can meet and play games like *Doom, Doom II, Hexen,* and others. Just as with TEN, users will find the XBAND software bundled in retail games, or will be able to download it from the XBAND web site (*http:\\www.xband.com*).

Also like TEN, not everyone will be guaranteed of being able to play every single game on XBAND. "There are really three classes of games," says V. David Watkins, executive VP of sales and marketing.

"'Twitch games,' like *Super Street Fighter II,* typically require less than 100 milliseconds for the data to make a round trip," Watkins says. "Any higher than that, and the game becomes unplayable. Then there are the 'point-of-view games,' such as flight simulators, that require a latency of between 150 and 250 milliseconds to be playable. Finally, there are turn-based games, which are the least demanding of all."

What this means to users is pretty simple: Almost everyone will be able to play turn-based games on XBAND PC just fine through their current Internet provider, but gamers hoping to get in on multiplayer *Doom* or *Hexen* will need an Internet provider who can ensure low latency — between 120 and 175 milliseconds.

Catapult's approach to achieving that level of latency is to set up a network of game servers around the country, then establish high-speed connections between the servers and various Internet providers. Of course, there'll be ultra-fast connections between the game servers and the XBAND PC system housed in Cupertino, CA.

But even with such a network, there's no way to achieve latencies low enough to allow games like *Super Street Fighter II* or *HardBall 5* to work over the Internet — and that's where the company's experience with videogame networking comes in.

"What we'll do for low-latency games like *Super Street Fighter II* is to match you up with a local opponent — we'll act as 'game brokers'," says Watkins. "Our experience with the 16-bit XBAND network is an invaluable asset in that regard: We probably know more about dial plans and what's a local call than the phone companies do."

Besides letting you tap into XBAND PC, the Windows 95-based XBAND software allows you to customize your online persona with a digital images and sounds, as well as keep track of individual stats, rankings, and more. There's another reason why XBAND PC software is attractive: "We chose to use a stand-alone piece of software because our basic feeling in looking at browser technology is that

Check out the Kali home page at *http://www.axxis.com/kali* to download the software and find out which of your favorite games will work with it.

Do-it-Yourself

Free Multi-Player Gaming on the Net

While TEN, XBAND PC, and Mplayer GameWay have all said that their usage rates will be extremely competitive, wouldn't it be nice if you could play multi-player games on the Internet for free? Believe it or not, you already can. The Internet Head-to-Head Daemon (IHHD) and Kali are two software packages that allow you to compete against a live human opponent using your current Internet account.

IHHD — Where to Find it, How to Use it

You'll need a full-fledged Internet connection to get set up with IHHP. After logging on to your Unix shell account, use Unix commands to create an IHHD subdirectory on your provider's server, switch to that directory, then FTP to *cactus.org* and retrieve the file *dialer1.6.4.shar*.

Copy it to the IHHD directory you created, then log off from the FTP site and unpack and compile the IHHD daemon. If Unix commands are a foreign language to you, you can find a step-by-step rundown on how to use IHHD at *http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Play/Multiplay*; for more information on IHHD's development and how it works, check out *http://cactus.org/~knutson/IHHD/IHHD.html*.

After you've found an opponent (most IHHD aficionados join an Internet Relay Chat channel such as *#descent* to find opponents), just type the appropriate command to dial or receive. Once connected, exit the communications program and launch a null-modem game of *Descent, Falcon 3.0, Command & Conquer, Terminal Velocity, Virtual Pool,* and others.

Gamers who've used IHHD claim that it works very well, but it has a couple of drawbacks, the biggest being that you won't be able to even try it out if your ISP doesn't allow you to compile programs on its server. I wasn't able to find documentation on whether or not IHHD supported more than two-player games, but from all the instructions I could dig up, it seems that the software will only work when you start a multi-player game in serial link mode (i.e., a null-modem connection) — no eight-player games with IHHD.

Last but not least, some games don't seem to work well with IHHD; the instructions for *Descent II,* for instance, say that gameplay over IHHD is not recommended.

Hello, Kali!

Kali, on the other hand, is a package that nearly everyone can use. It s a network driver which allows games designed to support the

(Please see DO-IT YOURSELF *on page 72)*

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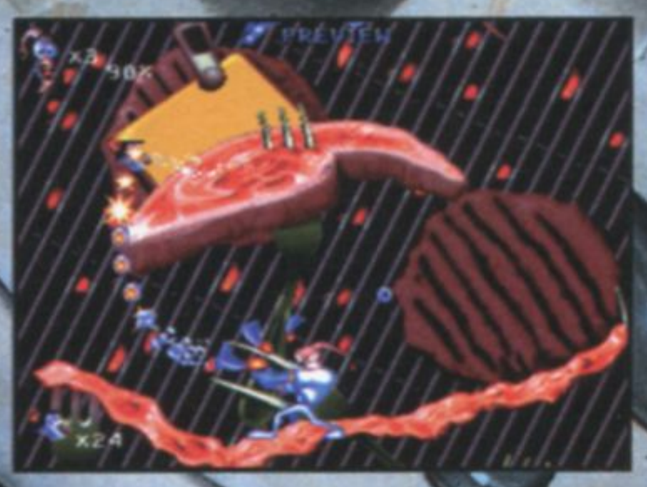

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Product Information Number 142

Mpath Interactive will introduce its Mplayer GameWay service later this year; in the meantime, check out the company's web site for late-breaking news.

gamers don't want to wait on HTML pages to download," says Watkins. Amen to that!

In addition to *Doom, Doom II, and Hexen*, Catapult has already signed agreements with Accolade, Capcom, and Zombie to support XBAND PC — a good lineup, but at present not as impressive or varied as the games TEN currently boasts. Still, while they weren't able to divulge further details, it's a good bet that other major publishers will come onboard in the very near future. And that's good news for gamers everywhere.

Mplayer GameWay

TEN and Catapult aren't the only new companies eyeing the Internet with the idea of using it as platform for multiplayer games. The most recent entrant in the online gaming sweepstakes is Mpath Interactive, who has chosen a different route to overcome the problem of latency. For their gaming service — called Mplayer GameWay — they're teaming up with PSINet, a national Internet service provider, to ensure that gamers will get the best response times possible. Like TEN and XBAND PC, gamers will find their way to Mplayer GameWay by two routes: Using the Mplayer software bundled in retail games, and by surfing to it on the World Wide Web.

It's true that PSINet is a very fast network, and its users probably will be able to play many games over the Internet that require low latency times. But this brings up the same question facing TEN and Catapult: will potential users with existing Internet accounts drop their current providers in order to get better gameplay over the Net?

Brain Apgar, founder and head of game design at Mpath Interactive, believes they will. "We think that gamers, especially those who enjoy state-of-the-art games, don't mind buying good equipment. Gamers have had a very large role in driving Pentium sales over the last year — and those users won't mind switching to the Internet provider who has the best infrastructure for gameplay."

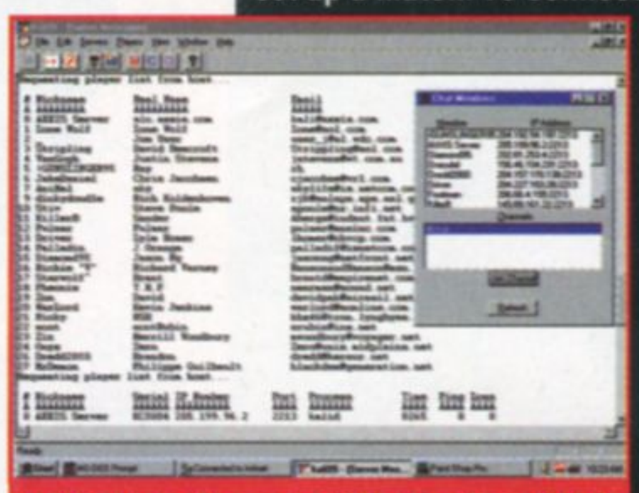
And Apgar points out that Mplayer GameWay users won't necessarily have to use PSINet as their provider. "We partnered with PSINet because it's part of our strategy — with users coming in through PSINet, we can guarantee the quality of gameplay. But the truth is that the play should be fine for users coming in on other major networks," he says. "We've tested gameplay over several of the major providers, and found that many of them offer more than adequate performance. The most important thing is that the provider prioritizes traffic — E-mail messages should obviously get much lower priority than gaming traffic, for instance — and that's exactly what we have with PSINet."

In addition to multiplayer games, Mplayer GameWay will feature chat rooms that support digital speech through voice modems. The speech will only be half-duplex (meaning gamers will have to take turns speaking), but it should make arranging games and deciding on gaming parameters a much faster process.

Mpath is being hush-hush on some of the particulars, such as what games will be supported and what the exact subscription rates will be. But Apgar did say that Mpath has currently lined up ten developers to produce a total of more than 15 titles for the service. He also said that all users will pay the same rate regardless of how they access the service, and that Mplayer GameWay rates will be competitive with other gaming services.

When asked if Mplayer GameWay would offer gaming libraries with bug patches, shareware, user-created scenarios, reviews, and so on, Apgar chuckles slightly. "We think there are a lot of great places on the web where you can go for that stuff, and we'll certainly offer links to them. Right now, though, we're focusing on a single goal: providing the best possible online gaming experience."

PCG



A Windows 95-compatible version of Kali should address problems of memory and modem initialization strings.

Do-it-Yourself

(continued from page 70)

IPX protocol to be played over a TCP/IP network — i.e., the Internet. Kali's been successfully tested with *Descent, Descent II, Warcraft II, Command & Conquer, Rise of the Triad, Virtual Pool, Doom, Doom II, Heretic,* and many others, although the performance of the id games can be pretty horrible if you don t have a direct connection. It costs $20 to get the registered version of Kali (IHHD is freeware), but once you get it up and running, you'll be amazed at how well it works.

After retrieving the KALIPPP.ZIP file (you can find it at *ftp://ftp.internexus.net/pub/kali* and *ftp://ftp.mpx.com.au/mirror/kali*, among other locations), just unzip it into a Kali directory, then follow the directions in the documentation; you can even set Kali up to automatically dial your ISP and log you onto a PPP connection. Once you've established the PPP connection, you can either log onto a Kali server (there are more than 20 in the world, with the vast majority in the U.S.) or connect directly to another person on the Internet.

Once on a Kali server, you can either start a multi-player game such as *Descent*, or *Command & Conquer* and wait for others to join, join a game someone else has started, or chat with other players on the server to set up a match. To connect directly with another person on the Net, just type "KALI" at the DOS prompt; your IP address will be displayed, allowing another Kali user to log on to your PC the same way they would log on to an official Kali server.

Like anything involving the Internet, Kali isn't foolproof. Because Kali needs to load several drivers into memory, you might have to modify your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files to ensure you have enough conventional memory to run a particular game. If you forget to use the correct modem initialization commands, you'll find yourself rudely kicked out in the middle of a game. Fortunately, Kali creator Jay Cotton is busy at work on Kali 95, a Windows 95-compatible version of the program that's currently in beta-testing, and it looks as though it will eliminate both memory and modem initialization problems.

More than anything else, though, the performance you get under Kali depends on the quality of your Internet connection. If you don't have 28.8kpbs access or if your provider's system isn't up to snuff, you can run into a variety of problems during gameplay, ranging from choppy animation (annoying) to lost data packets (which can result in opponents not actually taking damage in games like *Descent*).

To learn more about Kali, check out the Kali home page at *http://www.axxis.com/kali*. If you're interested in learning more about multi-player gaming over the Net, a good place to start is *http://www.teleport.com/~caustic/internet.shtml*.

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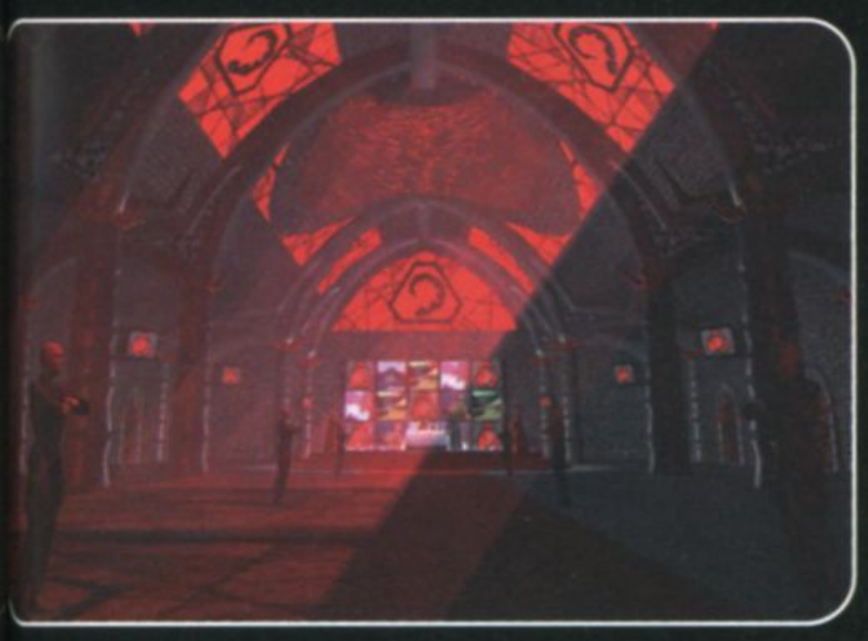

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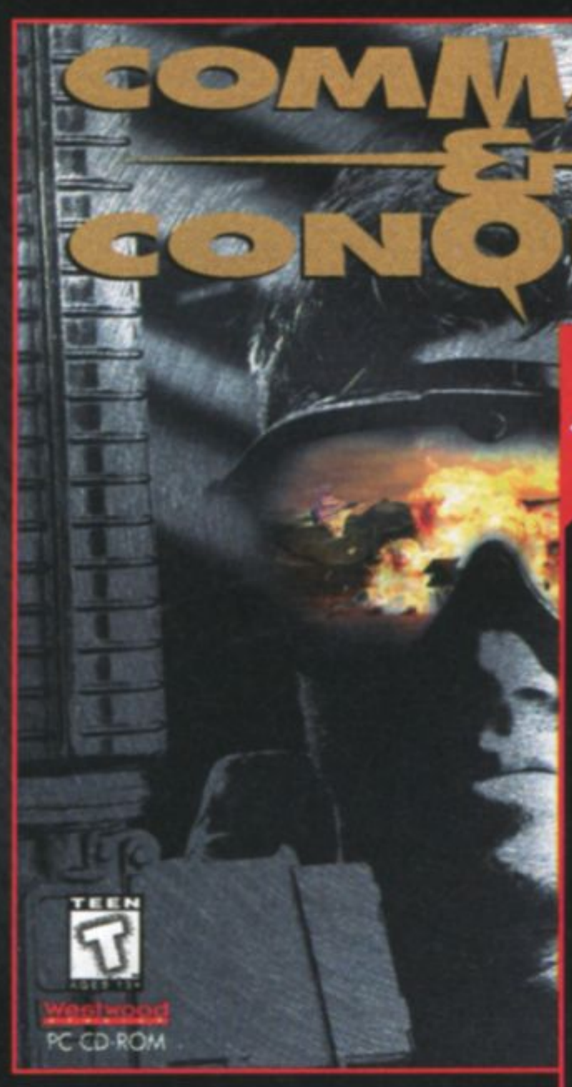

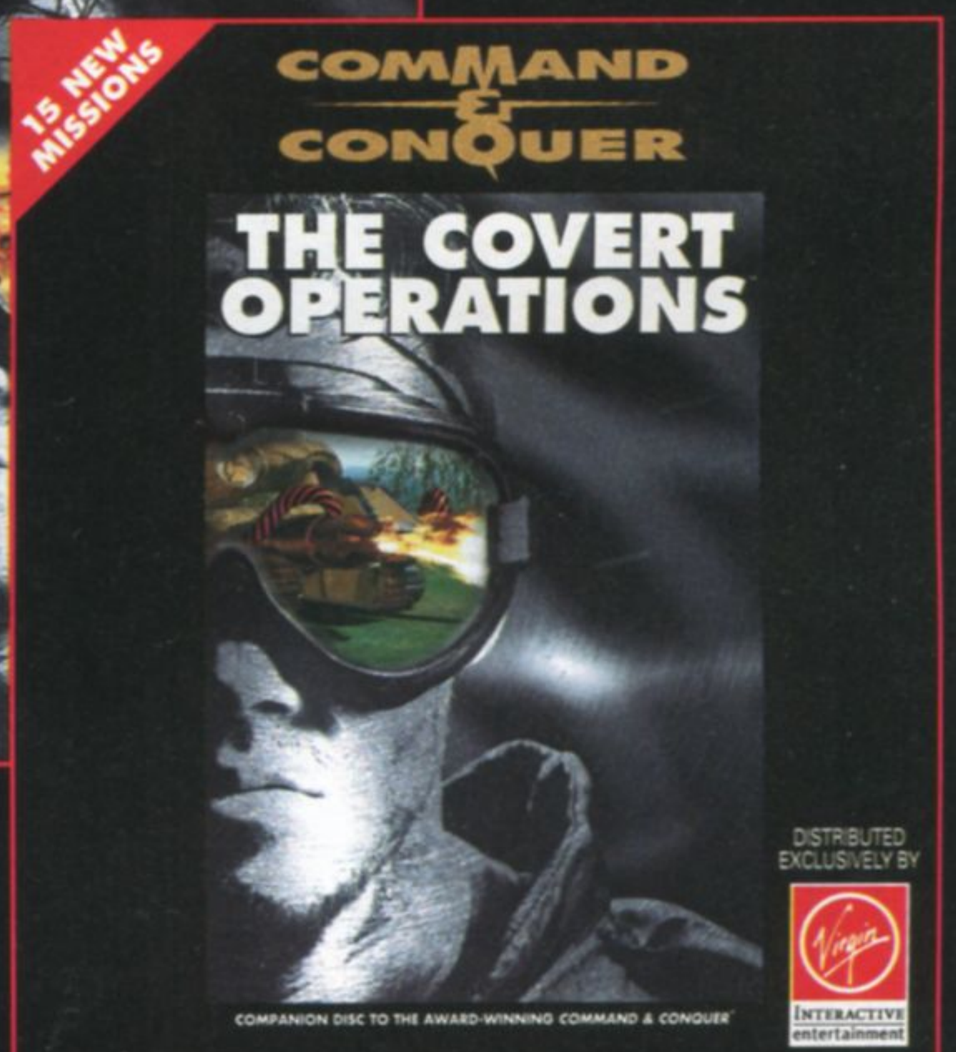

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Product Information Number 162

Virtually Real

By T. Liam McDonald

VIRTUAL REALITY

If you're planning to invest in a VR headset, make sure you have a copy of *Dark Forces* on your shelf. Playing this stellar game in 3D is what virtual reality's all about.

In classical mythology, Damocles climbed to the throne only to find a large sword suspended from a single strand of horsehair hanging over his head.

In 1966, a different kind of sword hung over the heads of researchers at MIT's Lincoln Laboratory. Developed by computer pioneer Ivan Sutherland and nicknamed "The Sword of Damocles," this amalgam of hardware and computer monitors hung suspended above a user. Its tremendous weight prevented it from being worn on the head, but the "head-mounted" display was in fact the first VR helmet. Sutherland's goal in creating his "sword" was to break down the barrier between the user and the computer, to immerse people in an artificial environment.

When Sutherland joined forces with David Evans, the two began working on "scene generators" to be used in flight training. Until then, flight simulators had used video cameras moving over scale models of terrain to give the pilot the feeling of flight. But Evans was able to *create* these real worlds in the computer — however crudely — thus improving the simulation of reality and the effectiveness of the training. Thomas Furness later took this a step further with the VCASS (for Visually Coupled Airborne Simulation System) helmet, which used a system called "Polhemus" to track the pilot's head movements and pan the view of his simulated surroundings accordingly. Polhemus did this using electromagnetic pulses that were picked up by a sensor mounted in the helmet.

This all began coming together at the NASA Ames facility in the 1980s, when Michael McGreevy and his team slapped a couple of Sony Watchman monitors on a frame designed to be worn like a scuba mask. Using two video cameras photographing the same object independently for each eye, they were able to create a stereographic image that had some feel of depth to it. The whole system, dubbed VIVED (for Virtual Visual Environment Display) cost only $2,000 to build. Later, the NASA team combined VIVED with the Polhemus tracking system to create a responsive, computer-generated world.

Others added data-gloves and suits, sensors designed to read body movements and more data and feedback in virtual environments, and companies like Kaiser, Fake Space, and others created smoothly-operating, lightweight, integrated virtual reality helmets with prices soaring close to six digits. Although the extreme cost of these early systems limited their use to serious research and training, everyone involved in consumer-level technology saw the potential for these "VR" helmets to be used for entertainment. The challenge became clear: create an affordable, yet effective, VR system for home use. It was a pretty tall order.

VR Issues

There are a number of factors at work in virtual reality and in bringing virtual reality to the consumer marketplace.

On the Hunt for a Headset? Here are the facts...

The following chart includes not only technical specs, but also subjective impressions, rated from poor to excellent. (There are gaps in the SimulEyes column because these are "flicker-glasses," not true VR headsets.) Some explanation is in order for a few of the categories:

- **EASE OF INSTALLATION:** How much do you have to mess with your machine to make it work? In this case, the installation of a single card for the VFX-1 was easier than the snaking cables and system reconfiguration necessary for the i-glasses! and the CyberMaxx.
- **IMMERSIVENESS:** How completely does the headset's design shut out the outside world and immerse you in the game?
- **HEADACHE FACTOR:** This is how big a headache you'll have after using the headset for 15 minutes.
- **DOOFUS FACTOR:** How stupid do you look wearing it? The VFX-1 looks pretty cool, while the CyberMaxx looks like a torture device.
- **OVERALL DESIGN:** How well the various central features — video quality, comfort, ease of use — are integrated into a functional whole.

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COST	$799*	$889	$995	$179
WARRANTY	90 days	90 days	1 year	90 days
PC INTERFACE	Serial port, plus monitor and audio pass-through	Serial port, plus monitor and audio pass-through	Half slot, 16-bit interface card	Monitor pass-through

* Virtual i-O plans to release a new model with similar features for around $599.

Please see HEADSET FACTS *on page 79*

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VIRTUAL REALITY

The technology issues involved — and the ones we'll run into in this article's evaluation of the major VR-type headsets, are 3D imaging, video resolution, design, and head-tracking. These are the fundamental components of a head-mounted display (HMD). (One product, SteroGraphics' SimulEyes, provides only 3D imaging, but is included as a point of comparison and because it offers some interesting features at a much lower price than even the cheapest VR headset.)

The major issue with any of these HMDs is financial. Bringing one to the marketplace means aiming for a "consumer" price of under $1,000. In reality, this price needs to be more than halved to make it realistically within the reach of the average consumer, and each manufacturer is trying, through strategic alliances with display makers, to lower the price point while raising the quality of the image. That's where the challenge comes in.

The video monitors in each head-mounted display feature resolutions far below the high-res 640x480 mode, or even the standard 320x200 mode, that game users have come to expect in their games. The reason is simple: money. You *can* get small, lightweight, high-resolution liquid crystal display (LCD) monitors that fit into a HMD, but they'd cost about $1,000 *each*. There goes the consumer market.

On the other hand, you can get lower-res monitors cheaply enough, and then hope that the added features (head-tracking, immersiveness) compensate for the hit you're taking in the visual clarity department. That's the tradeoff all the headset manufacturers are making today, and whether or not it's an acceptable compromise is something each gamer has to judge for himself. Frankly, the thousand bucks you might spend on a VR headset will also get you a really nice 21" monitor; sit close to it, and you're pretty damned immersed in whatever game you're playing.

But then, that wouldn't really be VR, would it?

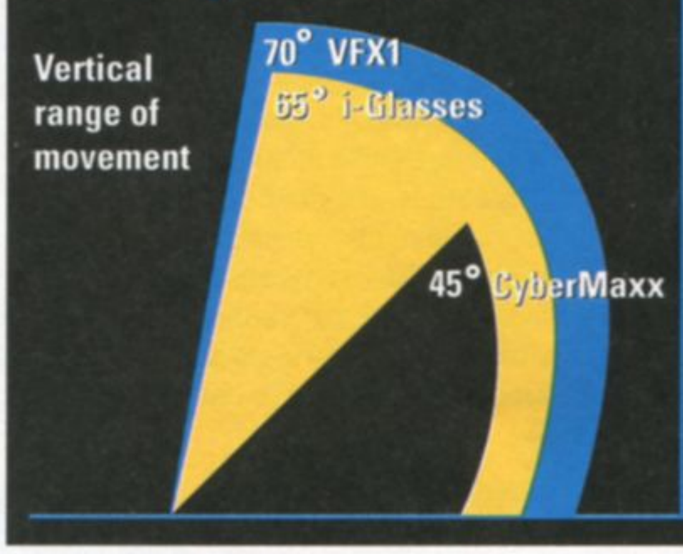
The other visual element is stereographic imaging. This is what creates the 3D effect in games that support it, giving sprites and environments an almost tangible quality of depth. When it's done well, the images positively pop off the screen, but it's only rarely done that well. The way it works is a simple matter of optics: Unlike fish and birds, you and I are naturally "binocular," in that we see any given object from both eyes. Each eye sees the object from a slightly different angle, and when the brain compares the two slightly different images, you're able to perceive things like depth and distance. As an example, try holding your finger in front of your face (no, not *that* finger; people will stare). Look through one eye, then the other; each eye sees a slightly different angle of your finger.

With flat images, you can't do that. What you can do, however, is create the illusion of depth by splitting a flat image into two slightly different images, then switching rapidly between them. When you see them without special equipment, they tend to flicker or look blurry. But if each image is seen by only one eye, the two images knit together in the brain into one that *feels* three-dimensional. This is often accomplished by goggles that place shutters over each eye and open and close them very quickly, alternating eyes in time with the alternating images and tricking your brain into unifying the images into a single 3D picture. This is how "flicker glasses" like StereoGraphics' SimulEyes work. It's effective, but it's also very stressful on the eyes, ultimately leading to eyestrain and headaches after use. Ah, the prices we pay for a little bit of entertainment!

Head-mounted displays create 3D images in a more straightforward, but much more expensive, way, placing a separate little LCD screen over each eye and sending a slightly different image to each eye. This eliminates the need for flickering shutters — but HMDs can have their own ways of generating headaches for the users.

The third big element of HMDs is head-tracking, which is what gives virtual reality its dynamic, immersive feel. With an effective HMD, you can enter an environment and look up, down, left, and right. It tracks the movement of your head through 360 degrees horizontally, and about 50 degrees vertically. The way HMDs do this varies from one headset to the next; and manufacturers tend to call it "proprietary" (meaning, "We're not going to tell you how we do it"), but traditional methods include electromagnetic (using low-frequency radio signals), optical (infrared trackers), ultrasonic (sound pulses), and inertial (gyroscopes) sensors. Most commercial sets use electromagnetic pulses and sensors. An initial reference check sets the

Head-tracking Comparisons



Though the methods differ from manufacturer to manufacturer, one common feature among all the virtual reality headsets we tested is head-tracking. Head-tracking — the ability to look up, down, left and right in a game with full freedom — is a defining feature for true virtual reality and gives 3D games a truly immersive feel. Currently there are only a few games, such as *System Shock* that effectively integrate full-on head-tracking. But as the popularity of VR peripherals grows we suspect more and more games will take advantage of head-tracking. Currently all the headsets use full 360-degree horizontal movement, but the amount of vertical movement varies widely. In this chart, we've listed the vertical range of movement (not a mechanical limit, but the amount of head movement) tracked by each of the headsets.

Headset Facts *(continued from page 77)*

	i-GLASSES!	CYBERMAXX 2.0	VFX1	SIMULEYES
EASE OF INSTALLATION	Fair	Fair	Good	Very Good
DISPLAY	Dual 0.7" active matrix LCDs	Dual 0.7" active matrix LCDs	Dual 0.7" active matrix LCDs	N/A
VIDEO QUALITY	Good	Fair	Good	N/A
VIDEO RESOLUTION	80x225	300x200	260x230	N/A
VIDEO SIGNAL INPUT	NTSC conversion	NTSC conversion	Direct RGB-RGB	N/A
UPDATE RATE	250Hz	75Hz	60Hz	N/A
FIELD OF VIEW	30 degrees	56 degrees	45 degrees	N/A

Please see HEADSET FACTS *on page 80*

"zero" point — head level, facing forward — and then feeds the computer new numbers as your head moves.

Games written to support head-tracking get positional information from the headset, then provide the proper image in response, such as the view out the left side of a simulated jet fighter's cockpit. The challenge here comes from "latency," which is the time-lag between the movement of your head and the corresponding movement onscreen. If the lag time is too long, the image falls behind the head-movement, and disorientation quickly arises (along with your lunch, if you're susceptible to motion sickness).

Because of latency, you also can't expect quick responses when, for instance, you whip your head around rapidly; the software just can't keep up. Also figuring into the head-tracking equation is the update rate, or how many times the headset updates the visual image. A lot of data is flying back and forth from sensors to software and back to the LCDs in the headset. It can easily become a bottleneck and slow down, creating quite an unpleasant experience. It's simple: if your head turns left, but your eyes don't give you the proper visual feedback that *says* you're turning left, your brain says, "Whoa, momma, I'm outta here" and up comes that pasta primavera.

When it works, it's pretty damned cool, but few games can really make the best use of this feature. (See the sidebar on VR-Ready Games.) Head-tracking means that, in a game like *System Shock*, you can look up and to the left for a monster, look down to scan the ground for objects, and so on. "Viewing" the world is the best use of these headsets, so a game has to offer the full range of head motions (look up, look down) to really work. That's why *Doom* isn't a very good game with these headsets: it wasn't designed to let you look around your environment.

Okay, now that we know the Virtual Reality basics, let's look at four peripherals that offer VR-like experiences on your PC right now. These four are the Forte VFX1, Virtual i-O's Virtual i-glasses!, VictorMaxx's CyberMaxx 2.0, and StereoGraphics' SimulEyes. The accompanying chart details the various features of each.

VFX1

Certainly the most impressive looking headset on the market, the VFX1 also boasts an overall quality and comfort that put it ahead of the pack. The design is flexible enough to allow users of all sizes in shapes to find a good fit (although Forte admits about 2-5% of the population won't be able to use the headset) and the variable focus of the displays allows even eyeglass wears to get in focus. In addition, the flip-up visor allows you to manage the more mundane tasks of setting up your game. Yet, even though it's the most comfortable of the group, you'll have a hard time using the VFX1 for extended periods.

The VFX1's twin LCD displays use variable focus much like a microscope, allowing users who normally wear glasses to fine tune the display to their liking.

Forte VFX1

Coming from the team that created the superb *UltraSound* board for Advanced Gravis, it was no surprise that the VFX1 led the pack to market for VR headgear. Two years ago, when I visited Forte's offices in Rochester, New York, the VFX1 was hot new technology that still had some rivers to cross. When I tested a very early prototype, I found that the image quality (I think it might have been something like 220x180) was poor enough that it couldn't compensate for the comfortable design and responsive head-tracking.

A strategic partnership with LCD manufacturer Kopin has allowed Forte Technologies to upgrade the quality of their displays to 260x230, while keeping the $1,000 price point. The result is a solid headset that clearly is the finest

Headset Facts *(continued from page 79)*

	i-GLASSES!	CYBERMAXX 2.0	VFX1	SIMULEYES
3D METHOD	Frame-sequential stereoscopic imaging	Field-sequential stereoscopic imaging	Field-sequential stereoscopic imaging	Liquid crystal shutters for stereoscopic imaging
FOCUS	Fixed	Variable	Variable	N/A
CAN BE WORN WITH GLASSES	Yes	No	No	Yes
HEAD TRACKING	+/- 65 degrees vertical 360 degrees horizontal	+/- 45 degrees vertical 360 degrees horizontal	+/- 70 degrees vertical 360 degrees horizontal	N/A
TRACKER LOCATION	Back of head	Front of head	Top of head	N/A
TRACKING	Good	Good	Very good	N/A

Please see HEADSET FACTS *on page 83*

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among the current crop of units.

The chief distinguishing element of the VFX1 is its slick design, which encompasses the whole head. The sturdy plastic form distributes the weight far better than any "face-hugger" design, allowing for easy wear. And since the unit isn't tightly strapped to the head, Forte was able to give it what they call a "Smartvisor," which simply means all the optics are set into the front of the HMD on hinges, and can be flipped up and out of the way for easy switching between virtual reality and the real world. This isn't a minor feature: You'll be flipping between the two with some frequency, and the VFX1 is the only one that lets you do it so easily.

The VFX1 is also different in installation; it comes with its own interface card, which takes up a 16-bit slot in your PC. While it is the only HMD that requires you to open your computer and give up a slot, it is far easier to deal with than the snaking cables of the i-glasses! or CyberMaxx, and it doesn't require you to surrender a serial port. The card, called the VIP (for VFX1 Interface Protocol) allows for the connection of as many as 125 other peripherals as well, and Forte is starting to produce these in quantity.

The HMD jacks straight into the card, and software installation does the rest. The VFX1 is the only unit that requires software drivers in resident memory for support. In the initial release, this meant three separate drivers loaded each time, but the latest version of the software (2.0) combines these into one relatively small driver.

One last part of installation is the peripheral included: the Forte CyberPuck. This plugs either into the HMD itself or the VIP card, and works as a kind of virtual joystick — in theory, anyhow. In practice, I found it a completely untenable controller. The puck (shaped — well, like a hockey puck) has three buttons, no base, and is designed to fit in the palm of your hand. You move along the various axes to control your in-game movement, but after an hour of trying to maneuver and steer with it, I gave up in frustration. It's far too sensitive, and keeping it straight and level is too difficult during the heat of gameplay. I'll stick with my keyboard and joystick, thank you very much.

The unit itself is very comfortable, and the various features are quite effective. Binocular-style eyepieces let you focus on the pair of fair-quality monitors mounted in the front (they also keep you from wearing glasses with the VFX1). Tracking is the best among the competition, with good responsiveness and range of motion within the limits of the technology.

The image is clear enough to play and enjoy, but of course is inferior to a traditional monitor. Nevertheless, I had some great moments in *Dark Forces*, where I was able to home in on enemies above and below me and nail them better than in traditional play. I found the immersiveness *did* compensate for the reduction in image quality. The audio is clear and features full 3D sound where supported, although the unit would benefit from an onboard volume control.

Forte's VFX1 is the most widely supported and best made among the headsets, with a good design and enough features to distinguish it. The CyberPuck will double nicely as a chew toy for your dog.

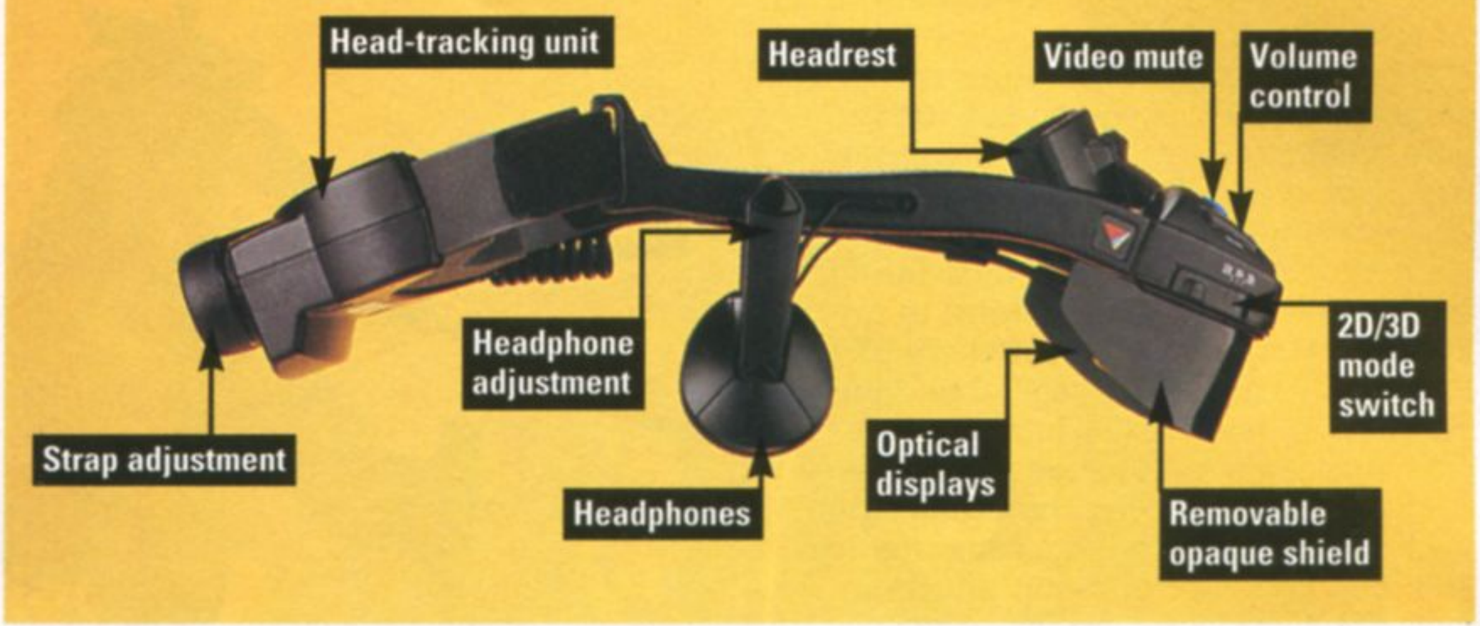
i-glasses!

Developed by Virtual i-O, which seems to have some weird thing for lower-case letters, the i-glasses! headset runs second to the VFX1 in sheer PC gaming quality. It does, however, have other features which the VFX1 lacks. Paramount among these are price (at $799, it's about $200 cheaper, and a new version will soon carry a list price of $599), TV support, and no software drivers to load. You can also wear your glasses with it.

Unlike the ergonomic, whole-head design of the VFX1, the i-glasses! headset is a "face-hugger." That's right, just like in the movie *Alien*. It fits around the back of your head, with the monitors located in a light-weight front casing. A knob on the back of the unit ratchets

The fixed focus displays of the i-glasses! yield good field of view and strong images with the opaque shield in place.

The lightest of the group — at 8 ounces — and adjustable enough for the largest of heads, the Virtual i-glasses! differs from the VFX1 and Cybermaxx 2.0 with its fixed focus LCD displays and non-immersive design. Even with its tinted blast shield up, you'll still have peripheral vision of your surroundings using the i-glasses!. Though its light weight makes it comfortable initially, your forehead will quickly begin to sweat under the headrest.



Headset Facts (continued from page 80)

	i-GLASSES!	CYBERMAXX 2.0	VFX1	SIMULEYES
COMFORT	Fair	Poor	Good	Fair
ADJUSTABILITY	Good	Good	Good	N/A
TV COMPATIBILITY	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
WEIGHT	8 oz.	14 oz.	14 oz.	2 oz.
POWER SOURCE	9v power pack	9v power pack	PC	4 AA batteries
PERIPHERALS INCLUDED	None	None	CyberPuck	None

Please see HEADSET FACTS *on page 84*

tightly to your head, with foam padding to help keep the unit (mostly) comfortable. I found, however, that after a few minutes of gameplay, it began to slip unless it was strapped to my forehead *really* tightly. I mean, so tightly that it cut off circulation.

The i-glasses! setup comes in both TV-only and TV/PC versions. Opening the TV/PC kit lets loose a Pandora's box of wires, cables, connectors, and power packs. It can all get pretty confusing, actually. The TV support means you can jack the headset into the AV outlets on your television or VCR and view all that 3D programming the networks run (kidding aside, the package comes with a tape that features about five minutes of such video; after that, your 3D TV experience pretty much ends).

After I finished trying it on the TV set, I tried to hook the i-glasses! to my Pentium. Here's where the benefit of Forte's VIP card made itself abundantly clear. With Virtual i-O's headset, you have to extensively change your cable configurations, passing the signal from your video card through a separate box and then into your monitor, attaching the helmet, and hooking the head-tracker to a serial port. It only comes with a 9-pin connector, which meant I had to remove my mouse from my PC or scrounge up a 24-pin adapter so I could use the secondary serial port. As the documentation for the CyberMaxx (which has a similarly annoying hookup) helpfully pointed out, I won't need my mouse much for VR-type gaming, anyway. Gee, thanks. Installation was irksome, but not overly challenging.

The visual quality of the image itself is top-notch, and very clear for its resolution level. The 3D effects are good, and a switch on the visor itself lets you choose between a couple of 3D modes. The earphones were easily adjustable, and the onboard volume control was a welcome feature after a few sessions with the VFX1. Tracking was generally good, although I found the VFX1 somewhat more responsive.

The i-glasses! are the prime alternative for people who want TV as well as PC support. The visor-like design doesn't swallow your whole head like the VFX1, but it also doesn't stay put as well, either. In the end, it's a fairly well-designed peripheral from a company that looks strong enough to be in this for the long haul. As with Forte, Virtual i-O is working to improve image quality while reducing price, and is positioned to be able to pull this off in the next couple of years.

CYBERMAXX 2.0

The Cybermaxx is the most primitive of the three headsets, starting with its crude, ineffective system of adjustable straps and knobs designed to hold the headset firmly in place on the wearer's head, and nose-heavy combination display/head-tracking unit. Cybermaxx 2.0's display quality is also the poorest of the units.

The variable focus design of the Cybermaxx doesn't match the simplicity of the VFX1. Using a crude system of dials and knobs, you'll spend most of your time trying to find a setting that works.

CyberMaxx 2.0

Thus ends the coverage of the good head-mounted displays. Now we come to the CyberMaxx 2.0, and all sorts of problems. This is from a smaller company which seems to be struggling now, and I hate to kick 'em when they're down, but....

The CyberMaxx 2.0 (this is the second incarnation of this HMD) looks like a cross between a medieval torture device and those wrap-around retainers orthodontists inflict on teenagers to pull their molars up into their skulls. It's about as comfortable, too. The basic design is a wrap-around visor, but unlike the i-glasses!, the CyberMaxx 2.0 also features an extra plastic strap going over the crown of the head. At the back and the top of the head are big, ugly torque knobs for tightening the thing in place. These, coupled with the bulky, front-heavy design make the CyberMaxx 2.0 look appalling and feel quite uncomfortable; it actually *hurts* to wear it.

The monitors are mounted in the front section of the headset, but they bulge out past the plastic casing *and* the foam cushion. Every time I put the headset on or took it off, I smudged the lenses and had to clean them. Plus, the head-

Headset Facts *(continued from page 83)*

	i-GLASSES!	CYBERMAXX 2.0	VFX1	SIMULEYES
DOCUMENTATION	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
DRIVERS	None	None	One (25K)	None
VOLUME CONTROL	Onboard	On belt-clip	None	N/A
AUDIO	20Hz-20kHz headphones	20Hz-20kHz headphones	20Hz-20kHz headphones	N/A
MICROPHONE	Available separately	None	Onboard	None
VIDEO INCLUDED	How-to & short 3D scenes	3D scenes	No	No

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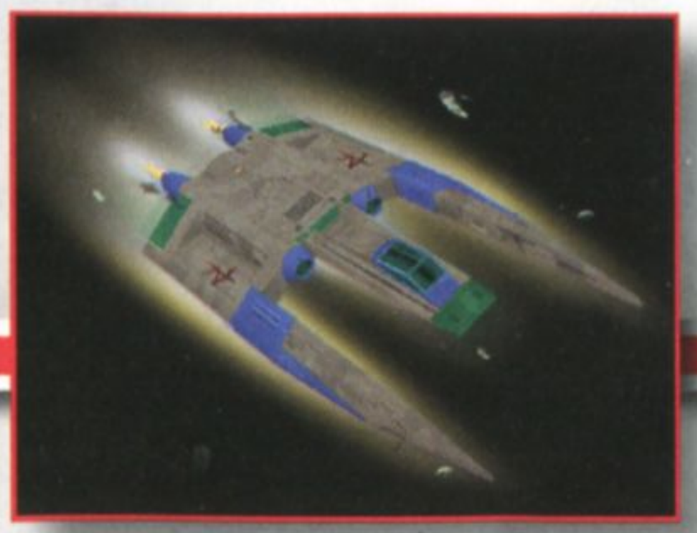

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phones are mounted in the rigid plastic strap and are nearly impossible to align with your ears. The documentation looks like it was Xeroxed down at the local drugstore. From a sheer design standpoint, the CyberMaxx 2.0 scores an F.

Things don't get much better with rest of the package. Installation is a mess, due in no small part to a single, short octopus cable with *nine* connectors. Threading this thing together took far more effort than it was worth. The headset itself is connected by a rigid cable to a belt-clipped power pack with a volume control. This headset features brightness and tint controls (the only one to do so), as well as a switch for changing between standard video and 3D modes.

The image quality is substandard at best. The images are hard to focus and tend to be washed out and fuzzy around the edges, no doubt due to the inferior optics used. I found the head-tracking and update rates so far below par as to be unusable. Serious response lags and flickering images caused headaches and queasiness. In tracking, optics, and design, the CyberMaxx 2.0 is altogether inferior to its competition.

SimulEyes

Stereographics' SimulEyes is not a head-mounted display; it does not have monitors, head-tracking, or audio. What it does offer is a pretty good 3D effect on the few titles it supports, at a fraction of the cost of a true VR headset.

SimulEyes is a good alternative to true VR headsets if you're looking for the 3D effect at a fraction of the cost of high-tech units.

The SimulEyes unit looks like a pair of bulky, Yoko Ono sunglasses. It plugs straight into the video card port with an adapter, and the monitor itself plugs into this. A battery-operated power supply gives power to the unit, which you wear like goggles (even over glasses). Up to four units can be connected to the same power back, and installation couldn't be easier.

SimulEyes uses liquid crystal shutters to alternate rapidly between separate images for each eye; this is what creates the 3D effect. You look through the glasses at your own monitor, so there's no real loss of video quality. The package comes with special versions of *Descent: Destination Saturn*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, and something called *Virtual Slingshot*: the only titles I know of that support it.

Surprisingly, the 3D visuals in *Descent* were more effective with the SimulEyes than with any of the HMDs, probably because there was no loss in image quality. Things really look sharp through them, but there's a price: the flickering shutters gave me terrible headaches and eyestrain after only short use (the shutters also tended to "stutter" every thirty seconds or so, probably the result of not being perfectly in sync with the video output).

Not many titles support SimulEyes now, which undercuts their value unless you're a nut for *Descent*. If they can get wider support and improve the headache problem, SimulEyes would be an affordable option for 3D PC gaming.

Be Patient

The fact is, virtual reality is still emerging technology. We're at least two years away from VR equipment that's sharp enough and cheap enough to make a real splash in the home marketplace.

In the good systems, at least (the VFX1 and i-glasses!) the added features of 3D imaging and head-tracking will cancel out the image-quality problems for many users. If you're in that crowd, have at it: these are well-made, well-designed systems, limited only by the current state of technology and the marketplace.

Me? I think I'll spend my next grand on that 21" monitor.

PCG

VR-Ready Games

Before a game can work well with a VR headset, it needs to let you change your viewpoint along at least two axes. This simply means you must be able to stand still in the game and look up, down, left, and right. Plenty of games that claim to support the headsets *don't* offer this, and the player is expected to use the headset to turn his entire body in the game instead of just moving his point of view. That usually means standing up in order to get a full range of motion in the game.

When you do this, of course, you get the cable wound around your body, trip, bang into furniture, and are unable to reach the keyboard in order to control the game itself.

A perfect example is the VFX-1's support for *Doom*, which defaults to having you turn your space marine left and right by moving your head. When you're deep in a space station with a VFX1 on your head and a Baron of Hell behind you, forget about spinning around quickly to pop off a shot. It ain't gonna happen. The tracking doesn't move fast enough, and the whole process is ungainly and unstable.

Here are a few games that support most of the VR headsets, and how each works:

Dark Forces: Hands-down the best game for use with these headsets. When you crane your head around and spot that stormtrooper up on a high ledge, you begin to feel it was worth the $1,000 bucks you spent. This is the way it was meant to be played, with hands on the keyboard for fire and movement, and a headset tracking the visuals. Sweet.

System Shock: Gives you much the same freedom of movement as *Dark Forces*, but the reduced visual quality of the VR headset's LCD display greatly effects this dark game. There's also plenty of onscreen text that's unreadable because of the low visual quality.

Descent: Benefits most from 3D effects: those ships really pop out at you. Head-tracking is another matter, since there are so many ways to move your ship in *Descent* that you quickly get disoriented and lost (then again, I've never played *Descent* when I *didn't* get disoriented and lost).

Doom: A great game, but lousy for VR unless you want it just for the immersiveness factor. Since you can't look around without turning your whole body, head-tracking is useless.

Magic Carpet: Some good 3D effects, but again, head-tracking isn't a very good way to control your carpet..

MechWarrior II: When it works, the head-tracking is superb, but *Mech2* was meant to be played in high-res SVGA, so the deep cut in visual quality almost negates this benefit.

Headset Facts (continued from page 84)

	i-GLASSES!	CYBERMAXX 2.0	VFX1	SIMULEYES
SOFTWARE BUNDLE	Shareware/demos: Heretic, Descent, Ascent, VR Slingshot, plus drivers and utilities	Shareware/demos: Flight Unlimited, CyberBikes, Doom, Heretic, Locus, ROTT, Tekwar, VR Slingshot, plus drivers and utilities	Shareware/demos: Heretic, Descent, Zephyr, Magic Carpet, CompuServe, plus drivers and utilities	Descent: Destination Saturn, VR Slingshot, Wolfenstein 3D
IMMERSIVENESS	Fair	Fair	Very good	Good
HEADACHE FACTOR	Two aspirin	Four aspirin	One aspirin	Six aspirin
DOOFUS FACTOR	Medium	Very high	Low	Medium
OVERALL DESIGN	Good	Fair	Very good	Good

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Product Information Number 105

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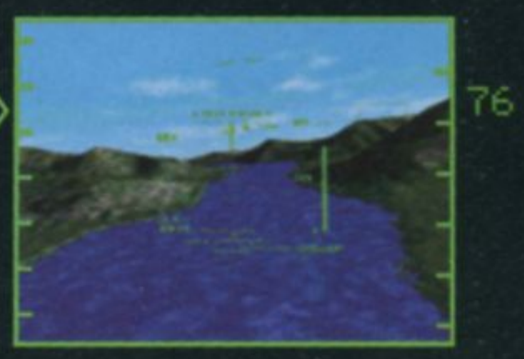

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Product Information Number 99

Stop Poking Me!

This month, we're going to introduce you to *PC Gamer*'s newly acquired web-master, Jason Bates. Jason's hard work on our World Wide Web page has blown us all away. But little is known of the man himself: his hopes, his dreams, his visions for the future. He's the quiet sort, a product of years of soulless pursuits on that mysterious entity known as the Internet. So to get Jason talking, we've pulled our favorite interview tool — a sharpened stick — out of retirement, to prod, ever so gently, beneath the surface of his stony facade.

PCG: Hello, Jason! Why don't you tell us a little about yourself?
Jason: Sure. Um, why are you holding a stick?
PCG: Never mind the stick. Just pretend it doesn't exist.
Jason: It, uh — it looks pretty sharp.
PCG: That's because it's a sharpened stick. Now answer the question.
Jason: Why do you need a stick?
PCG: Please, just try and forget the stick.
Jason: O.K.
PCG: Good. Why don't you tell us what jobs you had before you were brought aboard our happy little magazine?
Jason: Well, after a couple of years of — Good Lord! Why are you poking me?
PCG: Don't be afraid to answer, Jason. We won't laugh.
Jason: I think you broke the skin!
PCG: You know, you shouldn't be ashamed of your past. We've all done things we're not proud of.
Jason: Well, as I was *trying* to say — Ouch! Hey! That's annoying, you know!
PCG: O.K. O.K. Calm down. You're obviously not comfortable talking about your background. Why don't you tell us about your favorite game?
Jason: Are you going to poke me?
PCG: Ha! Ha! Ha! Hmmm. So what is it? An adventure game, or strategy?
Jason: I'm not saying anything until you put that stick down. These splinters are starting to hurt.
PCG: You're shy, aren't you? That's so cute! But you have to be serious now. We need to finish our interview.
Jason: Oh, all right. I guess my favorite game is — Ow! Oh, for the love of God, please stop! This is a lousy way to do an interview! Ow!
PCG: Hmmm.

At this point the interview had to be cut short. Jason's uncooperative, combative nature only left us with more unanswered questions. And, on a sad note, the sharpened stick was put back into retirement, a reminder of the outdated and sometimes barbaristic journalism techniques from days gone by. Ah, beloved pointy stick — though you may not have a place alongside our high-tech computers and tape recorders, we shall never forget you.

Hardware Requirements

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

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
These are pretty good games, which we would recommend to fans of the particular genre — although it's a safe bet that 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 that keep it from earning a higher rating.

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 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 Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn the Editors' Choice, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PC Gamer* Editors' Choice logo on a game at your local software shop, you can bet it's among the best of the best.

NBA LIVE '96

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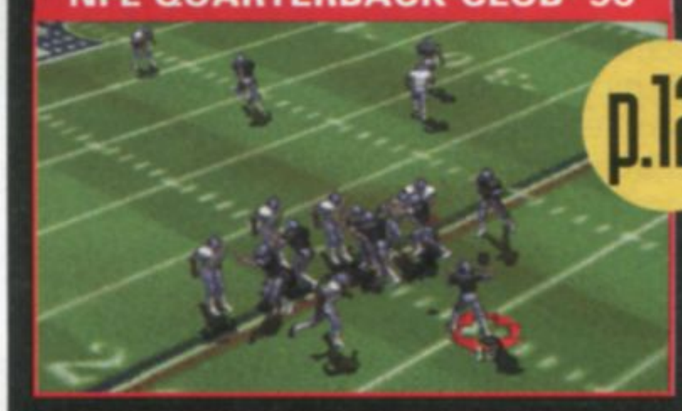
NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB '96



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TERRA NOVA

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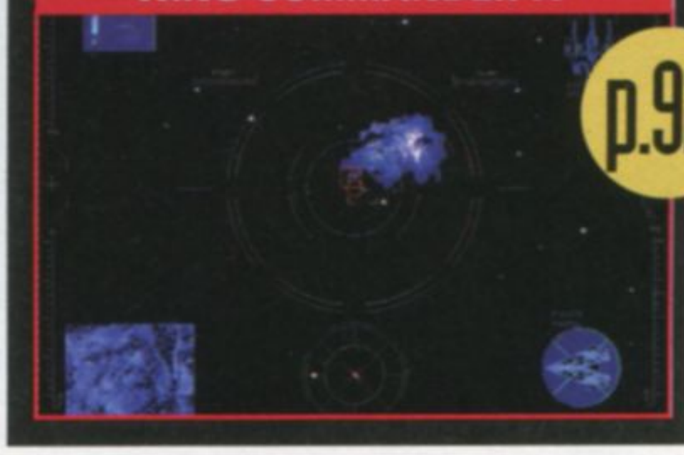
WING COMMANDER IV



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Wing Commander IV

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Action

Developer: Origin

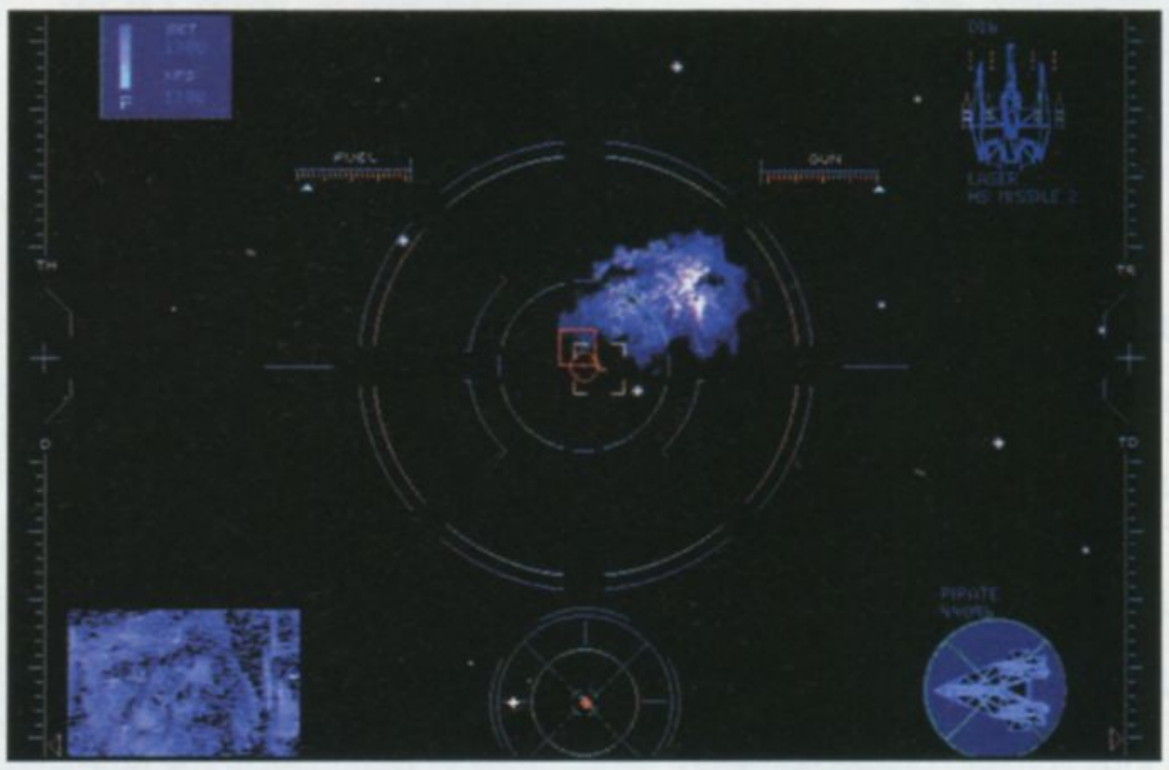
Publisher: Origin Systems, 5918 W. Courtyard Dr., Austin, TX 78730 (800) 245-4525

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/75; 8MB RAM; 30MB free hard-drive space; Local-bus Super VGA card; Joystick or mouse	Quad-speed or faster CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; Sound Blaster 16 or supported 16-bit sound card

Origin's latest science fiction spectacular is even more impressive than its predecessor.

How you feel about *Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom* is going to depend a lot on how you felt about *Wing Commander III* and the direction the series seems to be headed in.

When the original *Wing Commander* came out, it was a series of incredible, state-of-the-art space combat sequences, tied together with occasional animated cutscenes. Today, *WCIV* seems more like a series of incredible, full-motion video cut-scenes tied together with occasional space combat sequences. You can see the shift away from gameplay and toward multimedia flash in one of the ads for *WCIV*; seven of the eight little "bullet-points" that list the game's impressive new features are devoted to improvements in the quality of the video. Only the last point says anything about actual gameplay. If the tail's not wagging the dog yet, it's getting close.



The action sequences in *WCIV* are basically unchanged from those in *WCIII*; aside from a few new ships, this full-screen heads-up display is about the only new element.

It's true, though — the cinematic sequences *are* vastly improved, even over the impressive cutscenes that graced *WCIII*. Origin's new video playback engine allows for sharp, high-resolution images with 16-bit color (that means tens of thousands of colors, as opposed to the usual 256) and 16-bit stereo sound. All the footage for *WCIV* was shot on film rather than videotape, and actual sets on Hollywood soundstages took the place of *WCIII*'s computer-generated backdrops. The advantages of all these technical improvements are right there on the screen, as they say in the movie biz — *WCIV* looks and sounds incredible.

The acting is professional-quality, too. In addition to *WCIII* alumni Mark Hamill, Malcolm McDowell, Jason Bernard, Tom Wilson, and John Rhys-Davies, a group of talented newcomers rounds out the ensemble cast.

But what about gameplay? This *is* a game, right?

Even the computer-generated sequences look great in *WCIV*. Here, the damaged carrier *Intrepid* makes a desperate hyperspace jump to safety.

Sure it is. And there *are* some improvements to the space combat portions of *WCIV* — just not as many as you might've expected. The 3D, texture-mapped graphics look a little sharper than those in *WCIII*, and there are a handful of new ships and weapons to play with.

Missions in *WCIV* are a little more complex and varied than before; victory isn't always a matter of flying from one waypoint to the next, destroying every enemy ship you encounter before you move on. There's plenty of straightforward, search-and-destroy action here, but you'll also be flying reconnaissance missions where your goal is to photograph enemy positions; espionage missions that have you delivering fellow soldiers to the bad guys' installations — even hostage-rescue missions. There will be times when killing all the bad guys is precisely the *wrong* thing to do — instead, you'll follow them at a safe distance to learn the location of their base, or you'll achieve your objective, then turn and run. That variety adds a nice touch of believability to the action, and it allows the story told in the sit-and-watch portions of the game to be much more closely tied to actual gameplay.

The story, by the way, is a major break with Wing Commander tradition; with the Kilrathi all but eliminated, there are no kitties to shoot at. This time around, the threat comes from within; something sinister is going on in the Confederation Council, and before it's all over, you'll have to choose which side to

take in a full-blown civil war.

And the decisions you make in this game really do matter. Unlike many games that use full-motion video extensively, *WCIV* doesn't pretend to give you a choice, then send you down the same plot thread no matter what option you picked. Pivotal decisions can put you on a completely different track, with video sequences you may never see unless you play the game through more than once (that's one of the reasons it spans six CD-ROMs, even though it's not appreciably longer than *WCIII*). And the way you treat people you run across in the very first video sequence can affect the way a mission plays out halfway through the game.

The one significant problem with *WCIV* is the one that has plagued every Wing Commander game since the first; steep hardware requirements. The game is playable on the minimum system Origin suggests — if you play in standard VGA resolution and lower the graphic detail — but you'll need a relatively fast Pentium, 16MB of RAM, and a quad-speed or better CD-ROM drive to get the full experience. Even Origin admits you may want to crank the detail back to get a good frame-rate in the more complex ground-attack missions.

And even with a very fast machine, you'll run into an occasional snag. For some reason, the designers opted to load all the in-flight speech from the CD-ROM during combat (perhaps because the higher-quality, 16-bit speech files were too big to install on the hard drive or read into memory at the start of a mission). That means the game will freeze for a second or two any time your wingman or an enemy pilot speaks — it's a small thing, but it can throw your aim off when you're leading a target. And even a Pentium 166 with 16MB of RAM and an 8-speed CD-ROM drive will pause from time to time.

On the up-side, gone are the long delays that tried your patience in *WCIII* while a mission loaded. On a reasonably fast machine, you'll be up and flying in a matter of seconds.

For all its cosmetic improvements, though, *WCIV* feels just a little hollow. I can't help thinking about what the fourth Wing Commander game might be like if the series had moved in the opposite direction, making huge improvements the actual gameplay, rather than spending more and more time and effort on the stuff in between.

Still, *Wing Commander IV* is an excellent game wrapped in a very impressive package, no matter how you approach it. If you liked *WCIII*, you'll flip for the sequel.

—Dan Bennett

A "gameflow map" in *WCIV* shows you the places you can visit between combat sorties and points out conversations you haven't had yet. Check it frequently to make sure you don't miss any of the optional video sequences.

The tough, lumbering Avenger torpedo bomber is one of the new fighters you'll fly in *WCIV*. The gadget on the left is also new: the MIP (Manned Insertion Pod) is used to "shoot" soldiers into enemy installations, James Bond-style.

New Blood

No Wing Commander game would be complete without some new comrades-in-arms. As you uncover the sinister plot threatening to tear the Confederation apart, you'll meet:

Jacob "Hawk" Manley (Chris Mulkey): Hawk lives up to his name; he's an old-fashioned soldier, with no compassion for the enemy and no time for soul-searching. You might recognize actor Chris Mulkey from David Lynch's bizarre TV show, "Twin Peaks."

Col. Tamara "Panther" Farnsworth (Elizabeth Barones): Despite her call-sign, Panther is the mirror-image of her long-time combat partner, Hawk. She's the new-age soldier who agonizes over the deaths of civilians and enemy pilots.

2nd Lt. Troy "Catscratch" Carter (Mark Dacascos): You're bound to like Troy; he's the same kind of talented, naîve rookie you were back in the original *Wing Commander*. He's out to make a name for himself, but he's going to die trying if you don't teach him a thing or two.

1st Lt. Velina Sosa (Holly Gagnier): The communications officer on the starship *Intrepid* breaks all the rules for beautiful women in PC games: she's intelligent and resourceful, and — believe it or not — she's *not* the hero's love interest.

Captain Hugh Paulsen (John Spencer): Paulsen is the gruff commander who steps in when Capt. Eisen mysteriously leaves the *Lexington*. He's the classic C.O. you love to hate.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Incredible video sequences with Hollywood production values; greater variety in combat sequences.

LOWS: Not much new in terms of gameplay; very demanding hardware requirements.

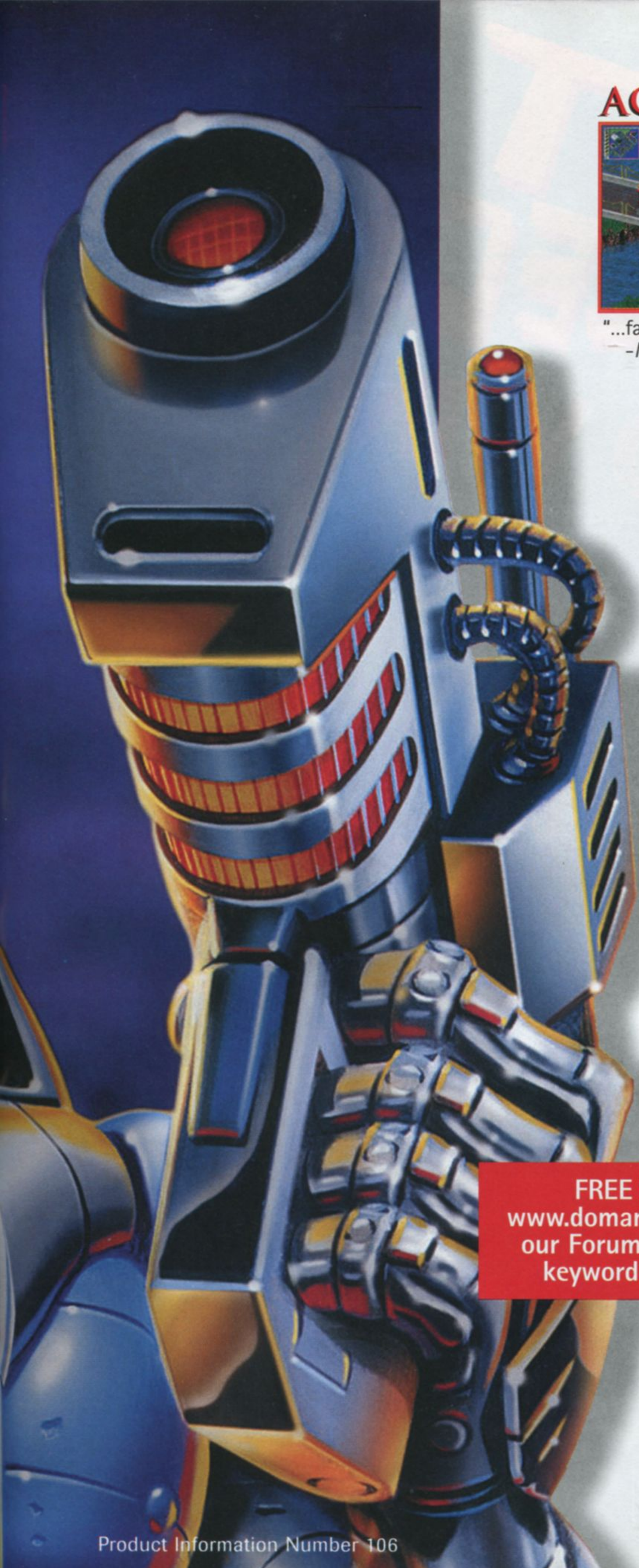
BOTTOM LINE: *WCIV* is a great science fiction movie that also happens to be fun to play.

WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU MIX CYBORGS & BIG ASS GUNS...

TOTAL MAYHEM

HEAD TO HEAD
NETWORK PLAY

CINEMATIX



ACTION.

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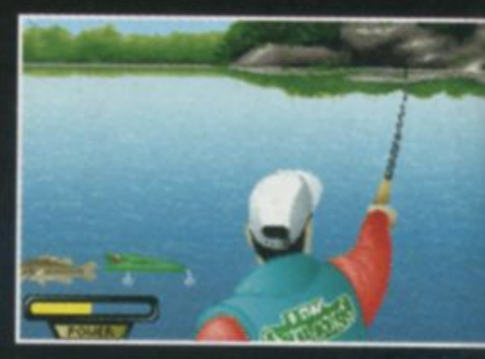

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AGES 6+

Product Information Number 93

NBA Live 96

Category: Sports Simulation

Developer: EA Sports

Publisher: Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA (415) 571-7171

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 3MB hard-drive space; MS-DOS 5.0 or higher; Local-bus SVGA video card	Pentium; 16MB RAM; 16MB hard-drive space; Supported sound card; Gamepad or Advanced Gravis GrIP; Mouse

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

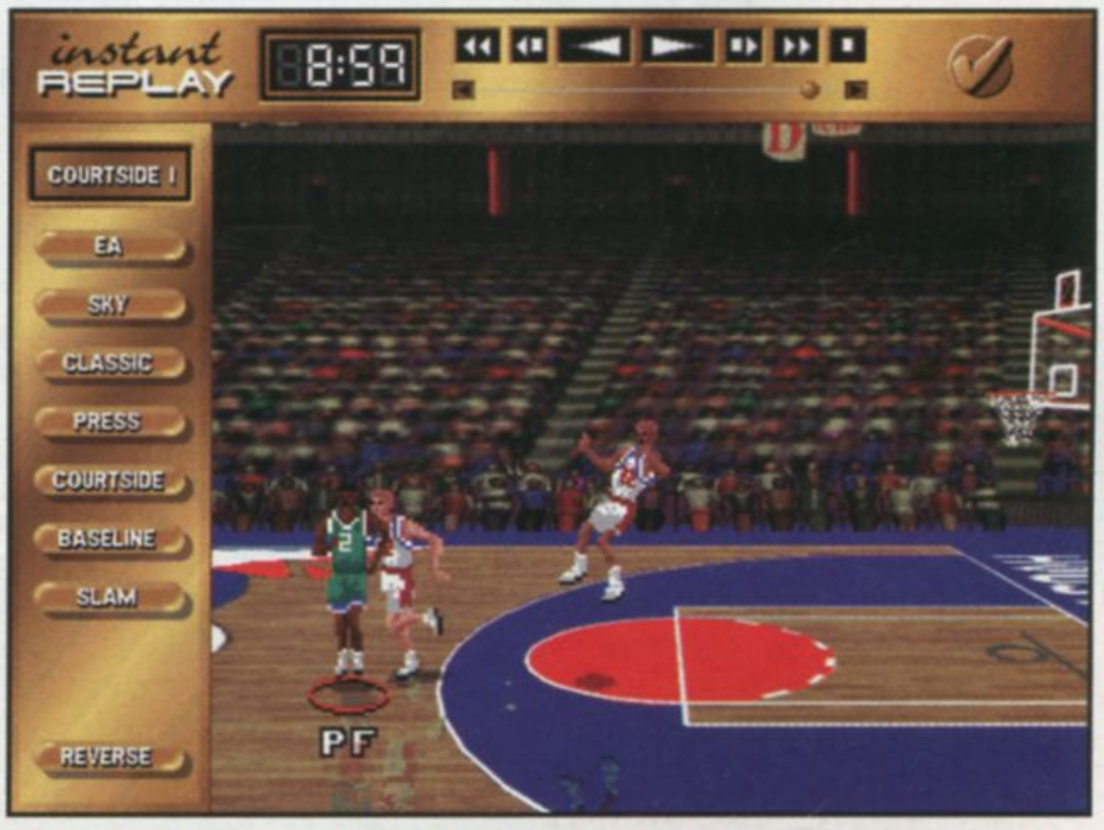
There's no doubt: This is *the best* PC pro-hoops sim; but is it a substantial improvement over *NBA Live 95*?

This is sure to sound like one of those fortune cookie sayings, but after looking at Electronic Arts' 1996 update of their pro basketball simulation *NBA Live 95*, it becomes clear that one of the toughest things to do is surpass your best effort.

NBA Live 95 was a huge hit for pro hoops fans across the globe, and though there were a few desired elements left out, countless fans haven't grown tired of it. So the real question is this: is *NBA Live 96* better than *NBA 95*? And if so, is it worth the price to upgrade? The answer to the first question is an unqualified yes; to the second, a definite maybe.

On the plus side, *NBA Live 96* has everything its predecessor offered, and more. Every NBA team is represented, including expansion franchises Toronto and Vancouver. With the exception of Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, and Magic Johnson, every pro player who was slamming the boards at the start of the season is represented, and a Create Player option makes it simple to add any player who signed up once the season was underway (created players always start out as rookies, but someone's already come up with an unofficial player editor that lets you create veterans, too).

Another big change is in the way you view the game. *NBA Live 95* only had two graphics modes — an up-close VGA screen that sometimes didn't show enough of the court, and an almost-full-court SVGA screen with teeny-tiny players. In *Live 96*, though, you can not only play in three graphics resolutions — 320x200, 640x240, or 640x480 — but also view the game from a whopping 17 different perspectives (34, if you consider that each of those can be viewed from the opposite side). EA has also added reflections and shadows to the graphic mix, but unless you've got a Pentium and a very, very fast video card, you'll probably need to turn those off if you want smooth animation at the highest resolution (alternatively, you can shrink the viewing window, a la *Doom*, to increase the frame rate in SVGA).



Use the Instant Replay to check out the acrobatics that can result when two big men collide on the court.

These new camera angles are interesting, but it might take you a while to find one to your liking. Some of the perspectives, such as the Baseline-Cam or the Courtside-Cam, are practically worthless except when you're checking out a cool play with the game's Instant Replay feature, and even the more functional views can present problems. The Sky-Cam, for instance, gives you a great view of the entire court, but consequently the players are fairly small; the Press-Cam (my favorite) gives you a good, TV-style view of the action, but makes it all too easy to pass the ball to a player off the screen — and then commit charging or run out of bounds as the camera scrolls desperately to catch up with the action. Eventually, though, you'll settle on the viewpoint you like best and begin to really appreciate the variety the game offers.

A number of *Live 96*'s features benefit from major improvements. Calling plays, for example, has been greatly improved. In the previous version of *NBA Live*, you had to hit the Escape key to call up a strategy screen every time you wanted to call a play or set your defense, even if it was something as commonplace as setting up a three-point shot. *NBA Live 96* fixes that by letting you choose as many as four plays or offensive sets that can be called on the fly by pressing a function key (or by hitting the appropriate button on an

Whoomp, there it is! There's nothing quite as satisfying as pulling off a power slam like this one.

Advanced Gravis GrIP controller — more on that later). Good move, EA.

You can play a single exhibition game, a season (28, 56, or 82 games), or jump in at the start of the playoffs. Regardless of your choice, there's a trade option that lets you pick up the players you want at any time (except during a game). The trade option is essential for realism, but it needs a little polish. As it stands, there's no limit on who can be traded for whom, making it a simple matter to dish off a bench-warmer for a franchise player. I like being able to build an unbeatable team as much as the next guy, but there really ought to be an option to place some sort of restriction on trades — players could be given trade points, for instance, and you couldn't acquire a player unless you offered an equal or greater amount of points for him.

And adding something along those lines probably wouldn't be too hard, considering how many statistics *NBA Live 96* already tracks throughout a season — only a sports bookie would want access to more stats than this game offers. There are over 25 categories based on statistics from the 1994-95 season, and each player receives a percentage rating in 16 additional areas, including strength, speed, 3-point shooting, dunking, dribbling, offensive and defensive awareness, and many others.

NBA Live 96 also features animated play diagrams and new animations for dunks and ball handling, but these are merely gravy when compared to one other addition: support for the Advanced Gravis GrIP controller. I usually don't get too worked up about gamepads or joysticks, but with the GrIP support, four gamers can play *NBA Live 96* on the same machine — and, as with most PC games, the more human players there are, the better game is. If you're into sports games, this little baby is a must.

Although *NBA Live 96* boasts an amazing variety of perspectives, few of them are conducive to gameplay. This baseline angle is good for an instant replay, but playing from this view is almost impossible.

But amid the new features are a few drawbacks, too, and a couple of glaring omissions. The most noticeable is the lack of a player editor and a draft utility, both of which are advertised on the game box. You can use the game's Create Player feature to do some of the things a good player editor would, but the process is involved and cumbersome. Someone has already come up with a player editor you can download from the Internet or one of the major online services, but EA should have made it a point to include a more functional editor in the game, particularly since that was one of the few criticisms leveled at *NBA Live 95*. Another weak spot is the lack of modem or serial-link support for multiplayer games, especially when you consider that this game was developed by the same team that brought us *NHL Hockey 96* (which included both modem and serial-port play).

Other problems include stat updates that pop up onscreen and obscure your view during the action, often when you're trying for a rebound. There are also far too many blocked shots, as well as an inordinate number of passes that sail out of bounds. You can still gang up on an opponent and literally drive him out of bounds to take possession of the ball; and, just as in *Live 95*, there's no such thing as a touch foul — nearly every infraction looks and sounds like a brutal mugging. Then again, this *is* the NBA....

The bottom line is that NBA fans with fast systems will appreciate the new features and probably accept the shortcomings. There'll be some players who slag *Live 96* for its poor performance on 486s, and you should take that into consideration — but it's hard to fault a game that's as much fun as this just because it requires a lot of computing muscle. Add modem support and a full-fledged player editor and draft feature, and you've got an almost perfect NBA sim.

— Steve Poole

And the CPU Predicts....

NBA Live 96 **delivers a lot of action out on the court, but for stats nuts, it's the hundreds of games you *don't* play during the course of a season that really count. Fortunately, *NBA Live 96* generates very believable results, at least for the dozens of games that I checked out, so I decided to run a little test to see who the program thought stood the best chance of winning this year's NBA crown.**

I'll be the first to admit my little endeavor was nowhere close to being scientific. For the computer to come up with its most accurate predictions, I would have had to enter the appropriate data for trades, free-agent signings, and other day-to-day variables that affect the outcome of each game. Instead, the results below are based on ten entire seasons played with the rosters as they stood on February 24, 1996. One interesting tournamnet tidbit: None of the championship series went to a seventh game.

TEAM	CHAMPIONSHIP APPEARANCES	CHAMPIONSHIPS
Orlando Magic	6	5
Chicago Bulls	4	3
San Antonio Spurs	4	2
L.A. Lakers	4	0
Seattle Supersonics	1	0
Sacramento Kings	1	0

PC GAMER **FINAL VERDICT**

88%

HIGHS: Brings expansion teams, a player-creation feature, on-the-fly play-calling, and multiple camera angles to an already great game.

LOWS: Too many blocked shots and out-of-bounds passes; tricky to find a good camera angle; steep hardware requirements

BOTTOM LINE: A great simulation that can be enjoyed on a variety of levels.

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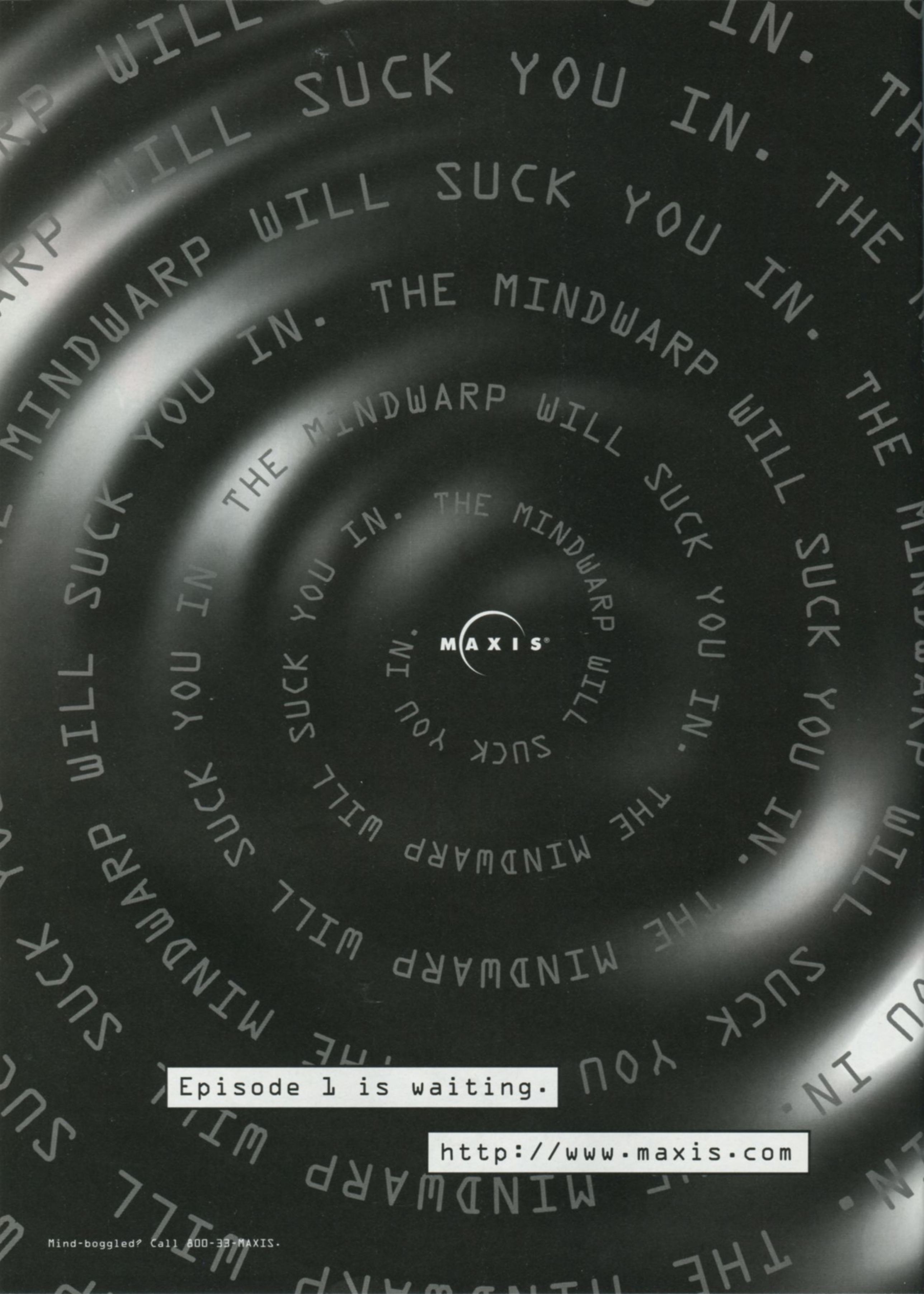
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Top Gun: Fire at Will

Category: Flight Simulation

Developer: Spectrum HoloByte

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte, 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, CA, 94501 (510) 522-1164

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 486DX/33; 8MB RAM; DOS 6.+ or higher; 36MB hard drive space; SVGA	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; Joystick

If you like the idea of a cutting-edge fighter sim, but you're scared off by their reputation for complexity, *Top Gun* may just be your game.

Flight-sim aficionados are to PC gaming what opera fanatics are to ordinary music-lovers: they write and converse in a special argot — call it "simspeak" — that, to the uninitiated, can seem like a religious service being conducted in a foreign language. They talk about flight envelopes, beaming, and variable geometry wings; their terminology bristles with acronyms: HUDs, TARPS, AOAs, ILSs, IFFs, ROEs, and TACTs.

Yet the allure of their specialty is powerful indeed: imagine being at the controls of an aircraft as beautiful, as powerful, as potentially lethal, as the F-14 Tomcat. Imagine being able to put such a machine through its paces with confidence and style; imagine taking on a formation of MIGs and dog-fighting rings around them — wow! As the real-life jet jockeys like to say, "It's the most exciting thing you've ever done with your clothes on!"

Top Gun packs plenty of that excitement, but this game has intentionally been designed to be attractive to the newcomer, the PC owner who's irresistibly drawn toward this kind of high-velocity simulation, but who may until now have hesitated to take the plunge (maybe he looked at a copy of the manual for *Falcon 3.0* and experienced an intellectual blackout).

Top Gun can be as easy or as hard as you want it to be. The "Quick Start" chapter gives you a clean, easy-to-understand primer on the F-14's controls — just enough to get you started and give you a minimal chance of survival in the "Instant Action" scenarios (there's even a "Turkey Shoot" tutorial, in which the enemy planes don't shoot back), and then leads you gently, step by step, into the deeper, more technical, levels of knowledge required to truly master the aircraft.

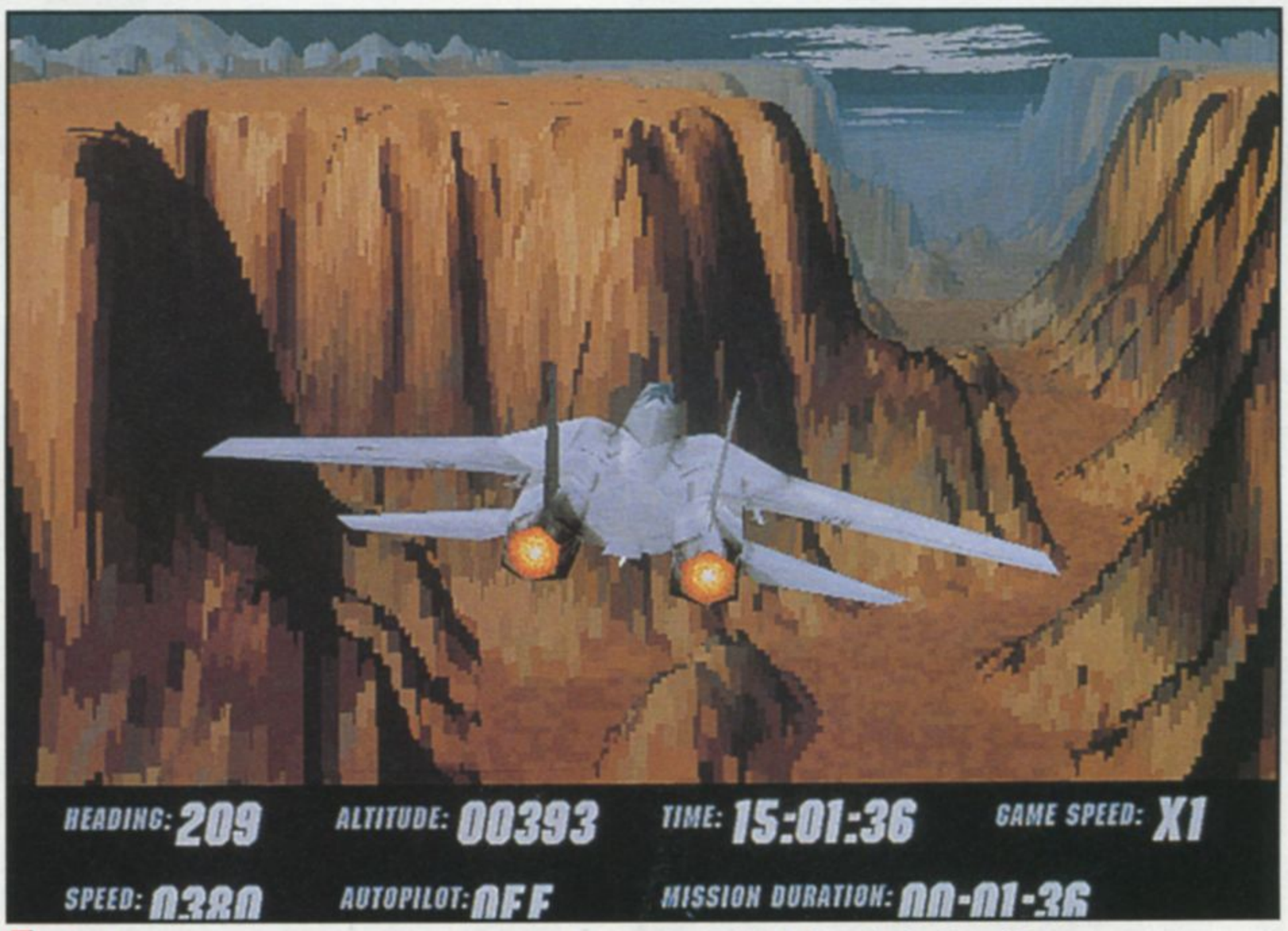
The game's manual is a paradigm of completeness, clarity, and good design: it assumes you're coming into the world of modern flight sims cold and tremulous. Veteran sim players can, of course, skip large chunks of this material, but if you want it all laid out for you from scratch, it's here, it's well-written, and it's puppy-dog friendly.

It's hard to imagine that even a novice gamer, once he or she (the game is not nearly as sexist as the movie of the same name, which was made back when there was no such thing as a female fighter pilot — two of the best dog-fighters you'll

Live-action video clips give the dogfighting action both context and human interest.

To Protect and Serve

The top priority mission for the Tomcat is protection of the fleet, especially the super-carriers that form the heart of a task force — this MiG got a little too close for comfort!



One of the hairiest training missions involves a low-altitude flight through the Grand Canyon.

External views provide vivid depictions of what happens to a pilot who takes a missile hit from behind.

NICE GUYS WASH-OUT FIRST (but only if they get careless...)

Failing to make the grade at any time during the Top Gun course is an ego-blow, but washing out because you can't hack the very *first* mission is enough to drive you to virtual depression. Actually, the first mission is designed to do some fast winnowing-out — it's not nearly as straightforward as it looks. You're supposed to take out four drone jets (one with gunfire, the other three with missiles), and you're sent aloft with one each of the F-14's most commonly mounted weapons: the AIM-7 Sparrow, the AIM-9M Sidewinder, and the AIM-54 Phoenix.

The first A-6 is a piece of cake: just close in, line up the gun — don't forget to lead the target — and give it a squirt until it's toast.

Now cycle through your radar range scales, and you'll observe the other three drones lined up like shooting gallery ducks. What your instructor hasn't told you, though, is that you only get one pass at them, and if you don't get at least two out of three, you may find yourself on the next bus home.

The secret is to act quickly. Each drone is within optimal range of one of your three missiles, so as soon as you get a lock, fire and cycle to the next missile, from Sparrow to Phoenix. With good timing, you should bag all three targets.

Next comes a little one-on-one dogfight with the instructor, Hondo, but he's in a good mood today and won't make it too tough for you to tag him with your guns.

Smugly pleased with yourself, you head back toward the base, when suddenly you're jumped by a lady pilot, call-sign "Igno." This is a little surprise addition to the mission, just to see how wide-awake you are. The instant you know she's there, hit the afterburners, evade wildly, and try to break her lock. If she misses you with that first attack, you stand a fair chance of turning the tables on her. Do that, and you win extra points (even if you failed to bring down all three missile targets), as well as her respect — which will come in handy later in the game.

The inset "lock window" may not be part of a real aircraft, but it does give you a good view of the damage you inflict on enemy planes.

of the last DOS-based monster games, but I found both installation and configuration to be silky-smooth. On my Pentium 66, I did have to set the terrain detail to "medium" in order to optimize flight performance, but that was the only concession I had to make, and it in no way detracted from the fun and excitement.

Speaking of terrain, however, it must be said that the view of the world below is one of *Top Gun*'s graphic weak spots. The Super VGA jet fighters are beautifully detailed and realistic, but the terrain is often a blurry, wavering muddle of big pixels; compared to the rest of the game, it looks as if it were grafted on from an older flight sim. Since the F-14 Tomcat has no ground-attack role, terrain detail isn't vital — but that doesn't keep the terrain in *Top Gun* from being a disappointment.

There are lots of first-rate flight sims either on the market (Ocean's *EF2000*, for example) or in the pipeline (Electronic Arts' *ATF*), and hard-core air-combat fans will undoubtedly prefer their greater realism and complexity. *Top Gun* has more in common with the Wing Commander games than with those games; in fact, if you're looking for a truly *realistic* simulation of the F-14, you'll probably do better with MicroProse's *Fleet Defender*.

But *Top Gun* has name recognition and a real dose of user-friendliness to give it an afterburner boost. If you've hesitated to take the plunge into the rarified air of high-tech flight sims, delay no more: *Top Gun* delivers all the excitement and challenge you could ask for, and it does so in a very user-friendly manner. This one is definitely a winner.

—William R. Trotter

fly with are women) gets a taste of the impressive graphics and intense action, would not be motivated to achieve mastery of this hot, sweet, deadly-as-hell aircraft.

To achieve that goal, and to reach the intense campaign scenarios that allow the F-14 to show what it can *really* do with you at the controls, you'll need to pass the Navy's ultra-demanding Top Gun course at Miramar, CA.

The purpose of the Top Gun course is as simple as it is deadly: to turn out masters of dog-fighting. A running score is kept of every training mission (points added for success, deducted for failure or mistakes), and at the end of the course — if you survive the cut — the flier with the highest score gets the coveted Top Gun trophy, signifying the "best of the best."

Veteran character actor James Tolkan reprises his movie role as the CO.

Each mission teaches you something more about your aircraft and its capabilities, more about dog-fighting tactics, more about the tactics of the enemies you may have to fly against, and more about teamwork. Borrowing a technique from the *Wing Commander* games, there are lots of between-mission scenes involving live actors — you make friends, banter with rivals, discuss tactics, exchange pointers, and sometimes gain insights that will prove valuable in combat.

If you've got the right stuff to pass the course, you move into the game's elaborate campaign mode, where success or failure of one mission influences the course of the big picture. Set in contemporary global hot spots ranging from Cuba to portions of what used to be the USSR, these campaigns are straight out of today's (or tomorrow's) headlines.

Graphics, sound effects, and terrain detail can all be adjusted to suit your taste or your hardware. This may well be one

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

87%

HIGHS: Nice full-motion video; slick tutorial missions; novice-friendly manual.

LOWS: Hardware requirements are pretty steep; full-on graphic detail requires a premium computer; pixelicious terrain graphics.

BOTTOM LINE: A gentle introduction to flight sims that can still provide some punch for veteran flight jocks.

Product Information Number 133

Terra Nova: Strike Force Cen

Category: Action

Developer: Looking Glass Technologies

Publisher: Looking Glass, One Hundred Cambridge Park Dr., Cambridge, MA 02140 (617) 441-6333

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 60; 8MB RAM; 30MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90 or better; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

Deep, rewarding, and countless hours of fun, *Terra Nova* blends strategy, adventure, and action in one explosive package.

Using the zoom controls of your PBA (Powered Battle Armor), you can get a closer look at an enemy's camp without drawing fire.

If you're a regular reader of *PC Gamer*, you know we've been eagerly awaiting Looking Glass' *Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri* for more than a year. Maybe it's just the computer geek in us, but the concept of first-person, squad-level combat set in a science fiction universe is just too tempting to be ignored. Even so, we got a lot more than we expected.

Like *System Shock*, the amazing first-person adventure Looking Glass designed for Origin, *Terra Nova* is one of those games that defies categorization and simply demands to be played. On the surface, it's one part *Wing Commander*, a high-energy, mission-based action game with an overarching story line and tons of things to shoot and destroy. But after playing just a few missions, you'll realize it's much more than that. There's a good deal of tactical thinking involved, an original and well-crafted story to drive it all, and all kinds of little details that help create a fully-realized game world and pull the whole thing together into a thrilling package.

To put it another way, it's like *X-Wing* meets *Doom* meets *Wing Commander*. Sound like fun? It is. And unlike so many games that try to set a mood or tell a story with a mountain of video, then fall apart when the game actually starts, *Terra Nova* delivers its most dramatic punch during its finely-honed gameplay, not from its cutscenes.

That's not to say that the story isn't interesting. *Terra Nova* takes place in a future where Earth is ruled by the oppressive Earth Hegemony, who centuries earlier nearly succumbed to a costly revolution. The Hegemony agreed to fund the relocation of its dissident citizens to habitable planets in the Centauri star system. In the years that followed, the Centauri built a thriving culture consisting of proud clans, and they achieved technological parity with the Hegemony. Since that time, the Centauri clans have kept an uneasy peace with the Hegemony, still feeling the tug of centuries-old oppression.

As you enter the game, there's more immediate trouble at hand; bands of ruthless pirates have been invading Centauri space, disrupting deliveries of goods, creating widespread chaos among the clans, and just generally stirring up dissent. To give the Centauri a more unified defense a new military unit is created: Strike Force Centauri is made up of the top soldiers from each of the twelve Centauri clans. You begin the game as the strike force's commander, Nikola ap Io.

From here, you'll begin to perform strike missions against the pirates using the Centauri PBA — Powered Battle Armor. These highly advanced suits of armor are straight out of Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel, *Starship Troopers*, and they come equipped with enough firepower, technical resources, and life-support equipment to level a small town while keeping their human occupants safe and sound. Each of the enemy forces has versions of these PBAs, with sometimes subtle, sometimes radical, variations in strength, abilities,

There's little in *Terra Nova* that can't be destroyed, and with its use of dynamic lighting effects, you'll witness startling explosions that will have you running for cover.

tauri

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

The sometimes blocky-graphics may not appeal to demanding gamers, but the gameplay certainly will.

weaponry, etc.

Using a smooth-scrolling, first-person perspective, you'll maneuver your PBA over a wide variety of terrain types in missions that often culminate in short, intense firefights. Getting around won't be a problem to anyone familiar with *Doom*; in *Terra Nova*, there are just a few extra keystrokes and mouse-clicks to remember in order to look up and down, jump, crouch, etc.

While the movement interface is very intuitive, you'll need to spend a little time getting accustomed to the powerful features of your PBA's onboard systems. You'll be able to access a wide variety of features and functions, like a mission map; weapons selection; targeting; and communications with your squadmates. This part of the interface, as in *System Shock*, is handled using the mouse or a combination of mouse and keyboard, and it works flawlessly once you get the hang of it.

Most important among these functions are the squad-level commands. In order to make it through the whole game, you'll need to develop a sense of what each mission entails before you actually start shooting. Is it enough to send your troops headlong into battle, or should you split up and use a little tactical finesse? These decisions become increasingly complex as you take into account each team member's special skills, which can range from weapon handling and demolition expertise to reconnaissance and electronics.

On the downside, the artificial intelligence for your squadmates can be a little weak at times — like during heavy exchanges with the enemy, when you'll frequently have to avoid shooting your squadmates in the back as they charge headlong into battle. When a little stealth is in order, you'll have to remember to give your buddies very specific orders, or they'll go nuts and blow your cover as soon as they see the bad guys.

You start out simply, alone or with just one squadmate and a limited supply of weapons and tools at your disposal. As you complete some of the early missions, you'll gain access to new kinds of battle armor (there are three types in all); more powerful and specialized weaponry; and accessories like land mines, grenade launchers, missile launchers, and detonation packs.

Graphically, the game may disappoint those who've come to expect 640x480 resolution in nearly every game they purchase, even if it bogs the gameplay down to a crawl. Some impressive graphic effects help make *Terra Nova*'s environments seem real (reflections in pools of water, dynamic lighting effects, snow and rain), but the game supports only two resolutions — 320x200 and a sharper 320x400.

That might turn off those who want the most bang for the buck, but the tradeoff between speed and resolution was a wise one; the result is gameplay that's fast and furious, if occasionally blocky. Enemy soldiers can sometimes be hard to distinguish from the background, and friendly fire is all too common in heated exchanges where your squadmates tend to blend into the crowd. But once you've grown accustomed to the look of the game and started dealing with the missions at hand, you'll be too absorbed in the action to worry about little things like resolution.

Once you've completed the mission objectives (or just the primary goal), you'll call your dropship in to bring you home.

What's more, *Terra Nova* comes complete with its own scenario builder, which lets you create your own missions, ranging from free-for-all shoot-'em-ups to defense and capture missions. Add to that the planned multiplayer pack, which will let you add human-controlled players to your squad, and you're talking major fun. If you're willing to stick with it long enough to learn all of its complexities, you'll be rewarded with one of the most interesting and addictive action games around.

—Todd Vaughn

THE ABCs OF THE PBA

With its wide array of features and options, getting to know the ins and out of your PBA can be tricky. Here are a few handling tips that should help you manage your squad and keep the enemy off your back.

SCOUTING: When scouting with other squadmates, be sure and give them specific orders to hold their position until called for. It's a little-known fact that more SFC soldiers are killed by overeager weapons officers blowing their cover than by pirates.

DRONES: When entering a mission that doesn't require a scout suit, use your PBA's built-in drones to scope out potential weak points in the enemy's defenses. Sometimes the best way into an enemy camp isn't the most obvious one.

WEAPONRY: When outfitting your team for a heavy assault, make sure to limit the use of railguns to only the most experienced soldier (you). It's great against soft targets (like enemy soldiers), but not too handy against vehicles and installations. More often than not, your squadmates will use it at the most inappropriate times.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Multi-faceted gameplay, slick interface, and built-in mission builder.

LOWS: Occasionally chunky graphics; some missions are extremely tough.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got a thirst for first-person combat in a different vein, *Terra Nova* really delivers.

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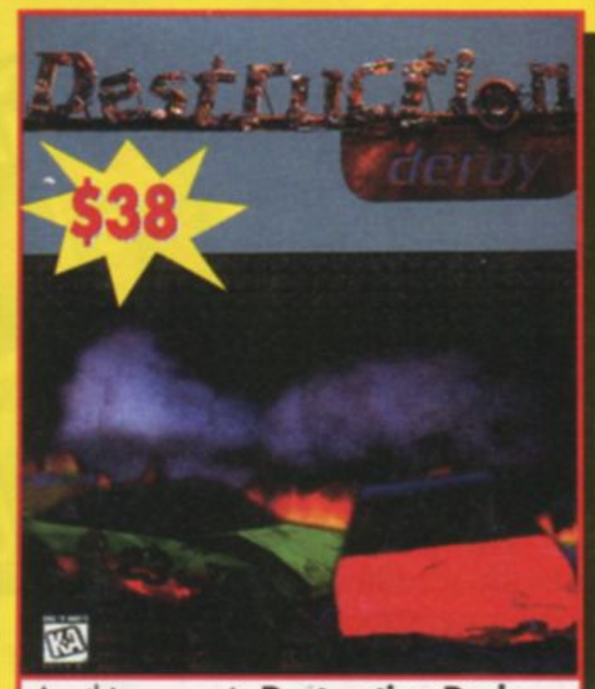

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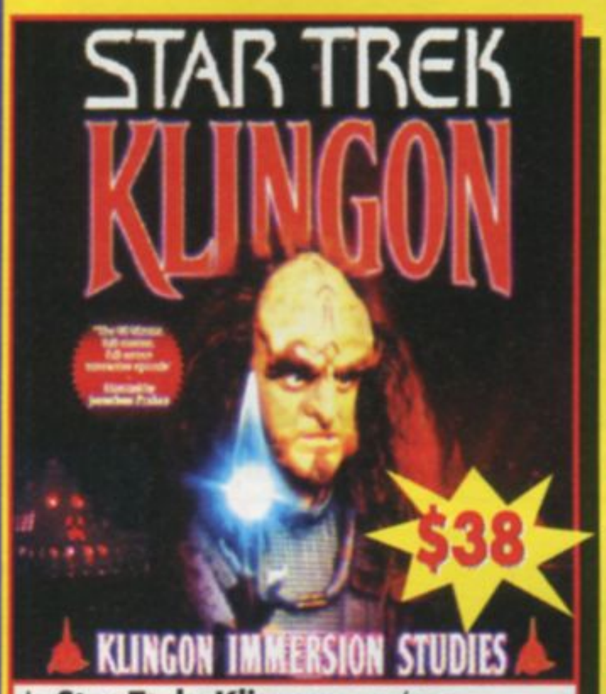

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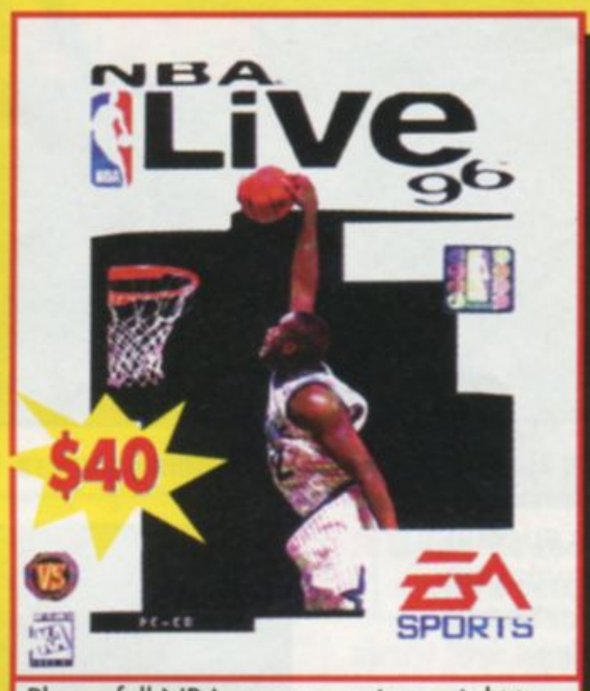

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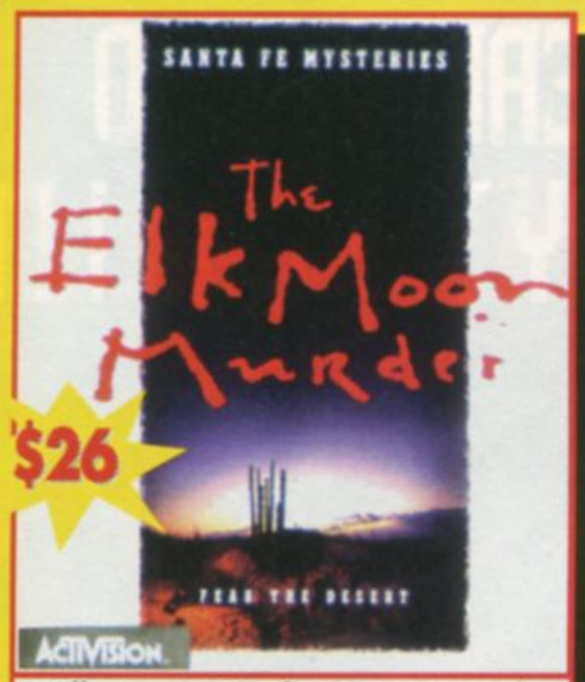

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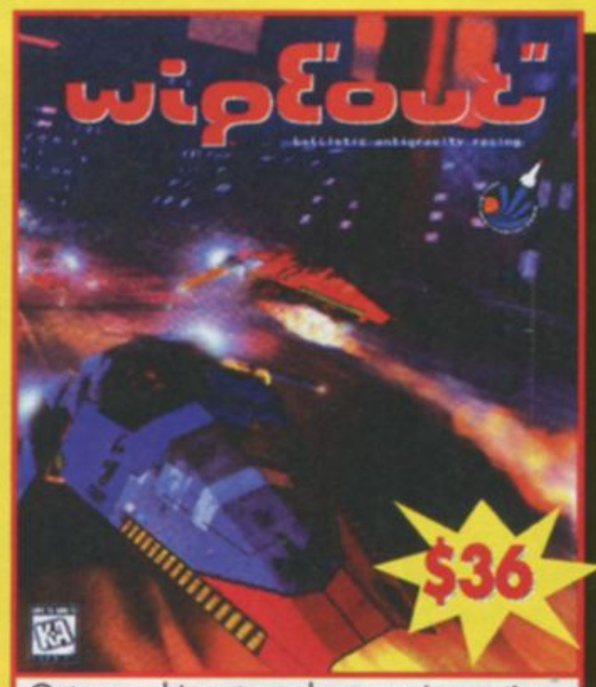

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<<RESURRECTION>>

Ripper

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Take 2

Publisher: Take 2 Interactive, 1004 Ligonier St., Latrobe, PA 15650 (412) 472-2000

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX/50; 8MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

Mix *The 11th Hour* with a touch of *The Hive*, then splice in a healthy portion of the Hellraiser films, and you've got *Ripper*.

You can't help having mixed feelings when you fire up a game like *Ripper*; it's a cross between anticipation and a bit of dread.

Anticipation, because of the game's promise of a thoughtful and evocative story line backed up by an all-star cast; dread, because it is, after all, an interactive movie; a term that sends shudders down any gamer's spine. Titles like *Quantum Gate* and *The Psychotron* have made a bad name for interactive movies. Still, each time a new one comes along, there's always hope that this time, just maybe, it will be different. While *Ripper* isn't the perfect interactive movie gamers are looking for, it's still a whole lot better than most of its predecessors.

As *Ripper*'s near-future story begins, you play Jake Quinlan, a hard-edged investigative reporter, who arrives at the scene of a gruesome murder, the latest in a series of Jack the Ripper-style slayings. After poking around the crime scene, you receive a message from your partner and current love-interest, Catherine, who tells you she's going to meet someone related to the Ripper case. When you try and track her down, she's already had a violent encounter with the Ripper, and she's now in a deep coma. From here, you begin the search for the identity of the Ripper, which leads you to the police detective working the case, the doctor taking care of Catherine, and a cyberspace jockey who's a legend in his own time.

Even though the subject matter is heavy stuff, conversations are handled pretty conventionally — choose your question, and watch the answer.

Once you've absorbed the narrative elements, you'll be treated to some of the most attractive graphics around. The 3D-rendered backgrounds are gorgeous, and the full-motion video is crisp and sharp. But as you explore further, you'll run into a few of the more common interactive movie shortcomings — starting with the almost comical overacting by the big-name stars.

When Christopher Walken's (*The Deer Hunter, Communion, Pulp Fiction*) character — the aggressively irritable detective Magnotta — comes on the scene, it's obvious that not everyone is taking this adventure as seriously as the plot would suggest. The goofy looks he aims directly at the camera and the constant undertone of mirthful self-ridicule seem out of place in a game with such weighty subject matter. This isn't Christopher Walken the critically acclaimed actor; it's Walken doing a bad, overwrought imitation of himself. It's a complete counterpoint to the game's story of mysterious, gruesome murders and a dark future society.

Fortunately, the game does redeem itself with an interface that

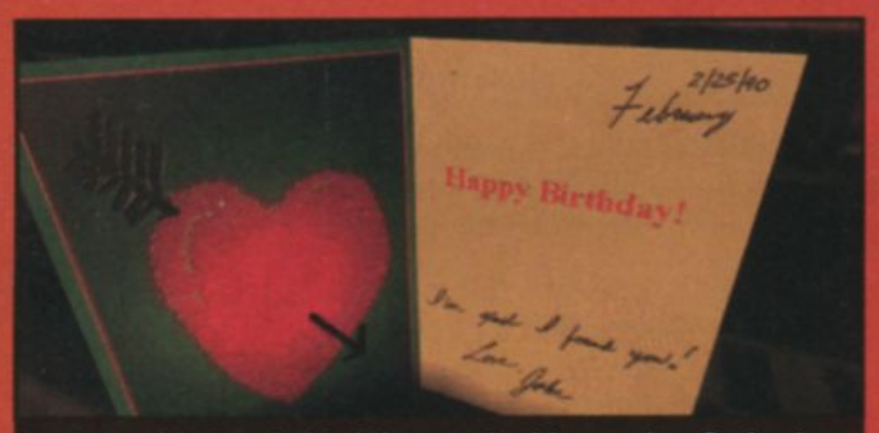
The poor man underneath the sheet knows what it's like to be a victim of the Ripper.

You'll have to battle all sorts of ICE (Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics) during your sojourns into cyberspace. This police robot is just one of the more challenging examples you'll find.

Ripping Through Ripper

The puzzles you'll find in *Ripper* are definitely not easy; you'll need to think in really convoluted and abstract ways in order to figure out what to do next. To help you along the way, here's the solution to one of the toughest puzzles you'll encounter.

When you start exploring Catherine's apartment, you'll stumble on this strange-looking puzzle. There are thousands of possible combinations, so you'll need to find some clue about how to arrange the crystals in the squares.



Look for this lovely birthday card addressed to Catherine. Take note of the date — February 25th.

If you're into the field of astrology, or you happen to have a birthday in late February, you'll know that someone born on February 25th is a Pisces (there's nothing in the game that tells you this directly). Take note of the shape of the constellation on this poster (#12).

To solve this convoluted puzzle, you'll need to put the crystals in the squares in the shape of Pisces. Once you succeed, you'll find a valuable clue.

If you're squeamish, you may want to have some smelling salts handy, since the murder scenes all have one thing in common — lots of blood.

couldn't be simpler. As in Legend's *Mission Critical*, you move through most scenes from a first-person perspective. Unlike in *Mission Critical*, though, you can't bypass the movement scenes by clicking the mouse or hitting escape. The painstakingly rendered backgrounds and sets are great to look at when you're exploring new places, but when you're in a hurry to get somewhere through locations you've already seen, it really slows down the gameplay. And since all of these tasty high-resolution graphics mean a lot of disc space (*Ripper* comes on six CD-ROMs), get ready for some heavy-duty CD swapping as you travel from place to place.

As in most interactive movies, you spend a lot of time watching instead of playing. But this interactive movie has something the others have always lacked — a true variety of puzzles. For example, to enter somebody's cyberspace WELL (a sort of personal domain), you might have to battle a computerized robot in a mouse-driven action sequence, or you might have to solve an abstract tile-sliding puzzle reminiscent of those found in *The 7th Guest*. Or you might have to read someone's journal entries for obscure phrases such as "two cents worth" to find the combination to a safe.

For all their variety, though, some of the puzzles are just too hard. Unless you've been blessed with mountains of patience, the frustration level can rise quickly. There *are* difficulty settings, but they only affect a few of the obvious challenges; they don't do anything for the *really* hard part — knowing where the clues are, and how they relate to the current puzzle. If you don't know the astrological sign for someone born in late February (Pisces), you might never finish Act I of the game.

One thing is certain — this game is *not* for the whole family. The dialog is racy, with plenty of expletives. *Ripper* has its fair share of horror-movie gore, too

You get messages and keep track of your acquisitions through your WAC, a palmtop computer. This is Catherine, your love-interest.

Hey, I like Jimmie Walker as much as the next guy, but his over-acting went over the top.

— if that kind of stuff makes you queasy, you might think twice about purchasing this one.

As a graphic adventure, *Ripper* has all the elements that make for an exciting and challenging game — an intriguing story line, a friendly interface, and a variety of tough puzzles. But the low level of true interaction, excessively difficult puzzles, and over-the-top acting keep it from going beyond what gamers have come to expect from an "interactive movie."

—Michael Wolf

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

72%

HIGHS: Great graphics, a challenging variety of puzzles, and a simple interface.

LOWS: Puzzles can be too tough; there's a lot of over-acting, even from the professionals; it takes forever to get from one place to another.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got tons of patience and love tough puzzles, you'll probably have fun with this one. Otherwise, make sure you pick up a hint book when you buy the game.

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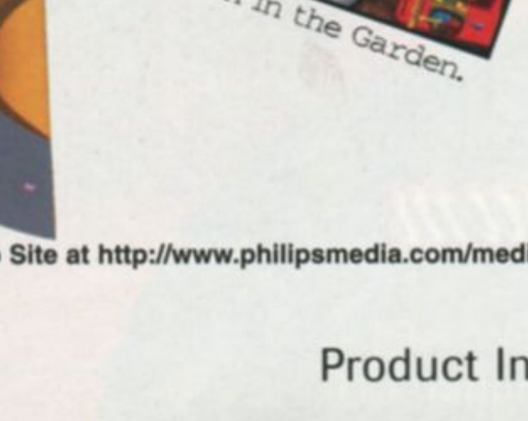

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Foxhunt

Category: Adventure

Developer: 3Vision

Publisher: Capcom 475 Oakmead, Sunnyvale, CA 94086 (408) 774-0400

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1 or higher; SVGA; Mouse; Supported sound card	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM

The comedy stylings of *The Naked Gun* and *Ace Ventura* come together in this spy thriller, but it doesn't make up for the thin gameplay.

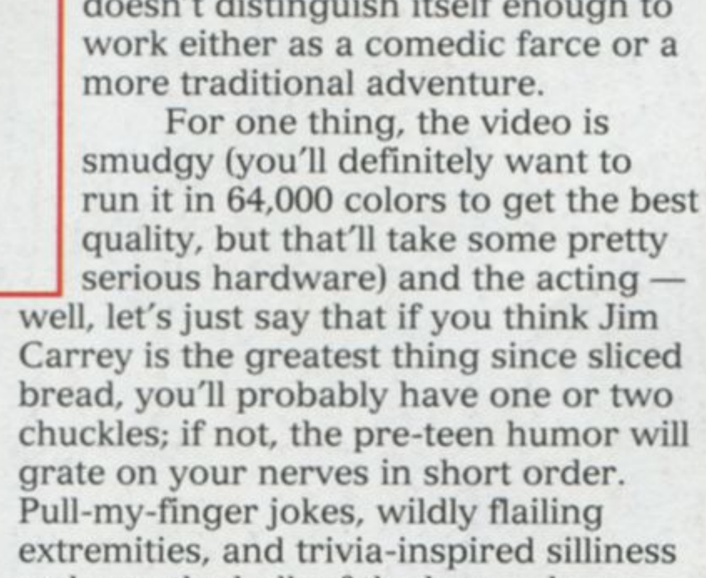
Foxhunt's premise is funny enough: Sometime in the early 1970s, the USSR (the beefier and more unpredictable ancestor of the kinder, gentler Eastern European states we know today) hatched a secret plan to undermine America's freedom-loving democracy by infiltrating America's quality TV programming and replacing it with mindless drivel (which would explain a lot, really). The plan was to reduce Mr. and Mrs. America to mindless couch potatoes, so the Soviets could step in to rule the world while no one was looking. Their plan, however, backfired miserably. The Americans gratefully embraced these TV shows, and the man who scripted all those wonderful shows — known only as the Fox — was kicked out of his post in the KGB.

Jump to the present day, where the Fox — seeking credit from the Hollywood producers who failed to recognize his genius in the 1970s — gains control of Russia's last remaining nuclear weapon with plans to hold Hollywood hostage until his royalty checks come through. That's where you come in. You're Jack Fremont, a student of all things trivial — especially when it comes to television — and you've been abducted by the CIA and offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to save the world from the Fox. You'll face down stereotyped bad guys, get the girl, and have the option to explore as many as ten alternate endings.

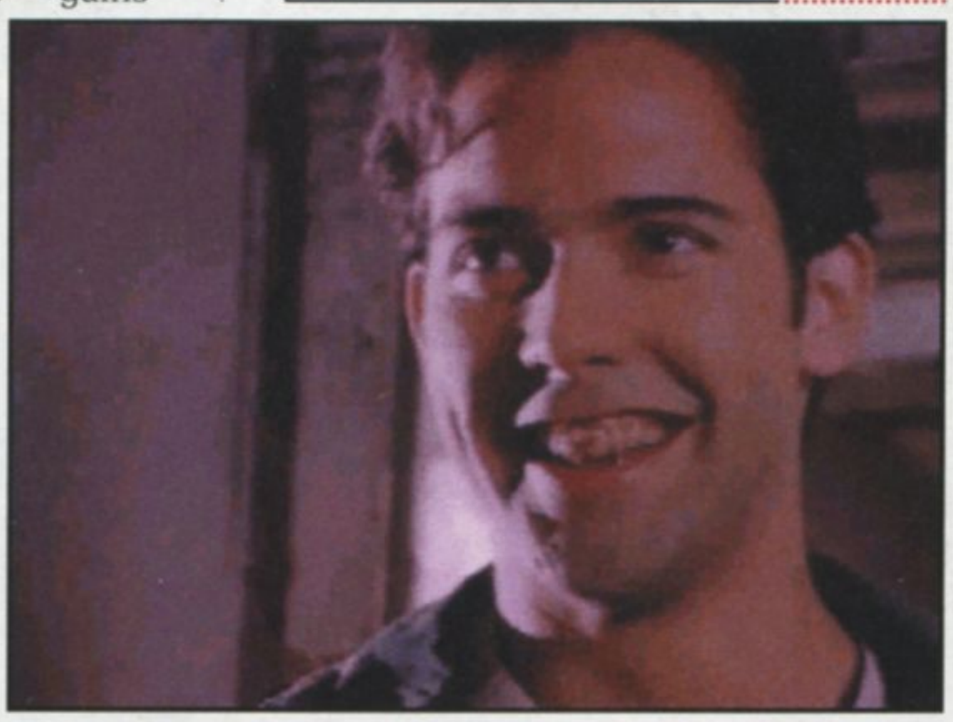
Spoofing the frequently grim plots of today's games sounds like a great way to make the whole "interactive movie" thing work; unfortunately, *Foxhunt* doesn't distinguish itself enough to work either as a comedic farce or a more traditional adventure.

For one thing, the video is smudgy (you'll definitely want to run it in 64,000 colors to get the best quality, but that'll take some pretty serious hardware) and the acting — well, let's just say that if you think Jim Carrey is the greatest thing since sliced bread, you'll probably have one or two chuckles; if not, the pre-teen humor will grate on your nerves in short order. Pull-my-finger jokes, wildly flailing extremities, and trivia-inspired silliness make up the bulk of the humor here.

Take away the weak humor, and gameplay is decidedly average, with point-and-click searches for useful objects (you'll often click the same screen half a dozen times before you uncover something really handy);



The sometimes smudgy video can hamper your enjoyment of the non-interactive sequences.



The Jim Carrey-esque antics of the lead character evoke some low-brow chuckles. Here, he discovers that chocolate on your face equals comedy.

In a spoof of typical interactive-movie mazes, you'll have to guide this rocket-propelled wheel chair through the strangely labyrinthine halls of a hospital.

Dragon's Lair-style action sequences (move left or right at just the right time to avoid danger); and lots of video-watching as you try to figure out what exactly is going on.

It's here that the game takes its most serious stumble, providing limited and often pointless puzzles and action sequences to move the story along. Occasionally, you'll be treated to subtle spoofs of typical interactive-movie gameplay — during one scene, you pilot a rocket-propelled wheelchair through a hospital — but sequences like this don't make up for the overly simplistic nature of the game. You'll endure these sequences if you're interested in seeing more of *Foxhunt*'s brand of comedy; if not, you'll quickly grow tired of the constant bombardment of clichés and one-liners and move on to something else.

And that's a shame, because with the right balance of puzzling and comedy, *Foxhunt* could have been a treat. As it is, the humor is really the game's only saving grace, and unless you're a huge fan of low-brow slapstick, that's not enough reason to bother with *Foxhunt*.

—Todd Vaughn

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

57%

HIGHS: Slapstick comedy and antics make the non-interactive sequences worth watching.

LOWS: Bad video; long load times; little interaction.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're starved for low-brow entertainment, *Foxhunt* will do in a pinch, but if gameplay is your thing, you'll be disappointed.

Panzer Dragoon

Category: Arcade

Developer: Sega of Japan

Publisher: Sega of America, 255 Shoreline Dr., Redwood City, CA 94065 (800) USA-SEGA

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66 with PCI local bus; 8MB RAM; Diamond Edge 3D Multimedia accelerator; Mouse	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM; Gamepad

With help from a 3D accelerator, a heavy hitter from the console market makes its debut on the PC only a little worse for the wear.

Despite the use of the Edge 3D card, *Panzer Dragoon* is a mixed bag of high-resolution creatures and backdrops plus jumbo-sized pixels that fill the screen.

Despite the power of our beloved PCs, home computers simply haven't been known for top-notch conversions of must-have arcade and console games. For years, designers have tried to bring titles like *Street Fighter* and *Outrun* to home computers, with results that vary from very good to very bad — but more often than not, we're left with products that merely hint at the fun available elsewhere.

If you believe the marketing people, though, that's all about to change. Several companies are now marketing 3D accelerator cards that give PCs the dedicated graphics hardware they need to deliver games that are as good as (if not better than) their console counterparts. One of the first titles to take advantage of one of these cards (the Diamond Edge, specifically) is *Panzer Dragoon*, a PC conversion of one of the most popular titles available for the Sega Saturn. The results are a mixed blessing.

Panzer Dragoon is, at its heart, a rail shooter. The player is basically along for the ride, sitting on the back of a giant dragon that follows a predefined course, hunting down the denizens of a strange world before they can cause enough damage to end the game. Enemies include *Alien*-style face huggers, giant sandworms, and flying drakes that assault the player with both close-up and long-range attacks. The player attacks by moving a targeting cursor around the screen and firing whenever something passes under the crosshairs.

While this might sound like fairly run-of-the-mill stuff, *Panzer Dragoon* adds several entirely new elements that take it beyond games like *Rebel Assault II* and *Wetlands*; it lets you view the action from four angles (forward, back, left and right), and it gives you some small amount of control over the movement of your dragon.

***Panzer Dragoon* offers more freedom of movement than titles like *Rebel Assault II*, allowing you to pick your targets better.**

This additional level of interaction is put to good use; as players fly through the game, enemies attack from all sides, so you have to keep a close watch on your radar and continually shift viewpoints to stay alive.

Panzer Dragoon's graphics and animation are its greatest strength, and — in the case of the PC version — its greatest weakness. All of the enemies in the game are portrayed in beautiful texture-mapped polygons that move fluidly around the screen, even when the player is fighting multiple enemies and firing continuously. Unfortunately, unlike in the console versions of the same game, objects become seriously blocky as they draw near, spoiling the effect.

Another problem becomes obvious after only a few minutes of gameplay; every now and then, the computer can't handle the incoming graphics information and freezes gameplay for periods as long as three seconds, right in the middle of the level. These jarring delays completely destroy the suspension of disbelief, not to mention making it tough to stay in sync with the action.

The Diamond Edge 3D Multimedia accelerator necessary to run this game costs about $300 and takes a fair amount of time and effort to install and configure correctly. A brand new Saturn costs about $300 and takes about two minutes to set up. With these figures in mind, it's very hard to recommend the PC version of *Panzer Dragoon* to those who are willing to take a sideways step into the console arena. Eventually, the all-important "killer application" that makes 3D accelerators a must for PC gamers will probably come along — but *Panzer Dragoon* isn't it.

—Trent Ward

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Great looking graphics (at a distance); more interaction than most rail-shooter games.

LOWS: Graphics get blocky at close range; frustrating delays on all but the fastest PCs.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've already got the Edge 3D, *Panzer Dragoon* is a good addition to its lineup.

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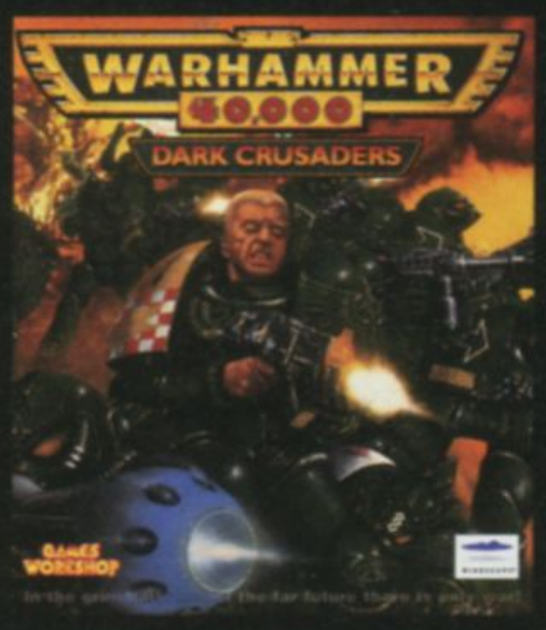

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Product Information Number 134

Extreme Sports

Category: Action/Arcade

Developer: Sony Interactive

Publisher: Sony Interactive, 919 E. Hillsdale Blvd., 2nd Floor, Foster City, CA 94404 (800) 438-7794

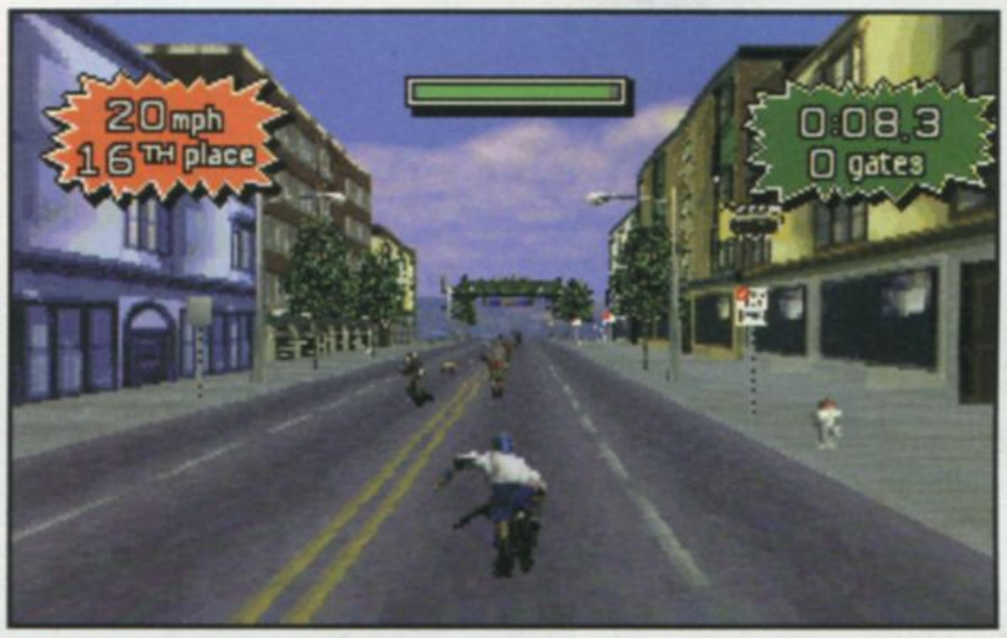
Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33; 8MB RAM; Mouse	486/66; Supported sound card; Gamepad

Sony takes to the streets with some biking and rollerblading action, but what this game really needs is some gas to get it going.

Whether you consider it a happy coincidence or a not-so-subtle reminder that the world doesn't revolve around videogames, the makers of the highly touted PlayStation are making good on their promise to bring all of their console titles to the PC.

For the most part, Sony has given us a pretty decent lineup, with games like *Destruction Derby*, *WipeOut*, and *Lemmings 3D* making the transition from PlayStation to PC with nice results (even a couple of Editors' Choice awards), but if *ESPN Extreme Sports* is any example, not everything from the consoles is going to find a home on the PC.

Extreme Sports is based on the ESPN cable show of the same name, which highlights strange and often dangerous sporting activities like high-speed mountain biking, in-line skating, skateboarding, and street luge. You'll experience the thrills of being on the edge, being one with nature, and beating your friends to the finish line. After picking one of the four modes of transportation, you'll test your reflexes as you barrel down the trolley-laden streets of San Francisco or the sun-baked roads of South America, battling and bumping your opponents for the top spot in tournament-style competition.



Wait for me, fellas! Keeping up with the pack in *ESPN Extreme Sports* can be hard until you get the proper equipment by scoring high and winning races.

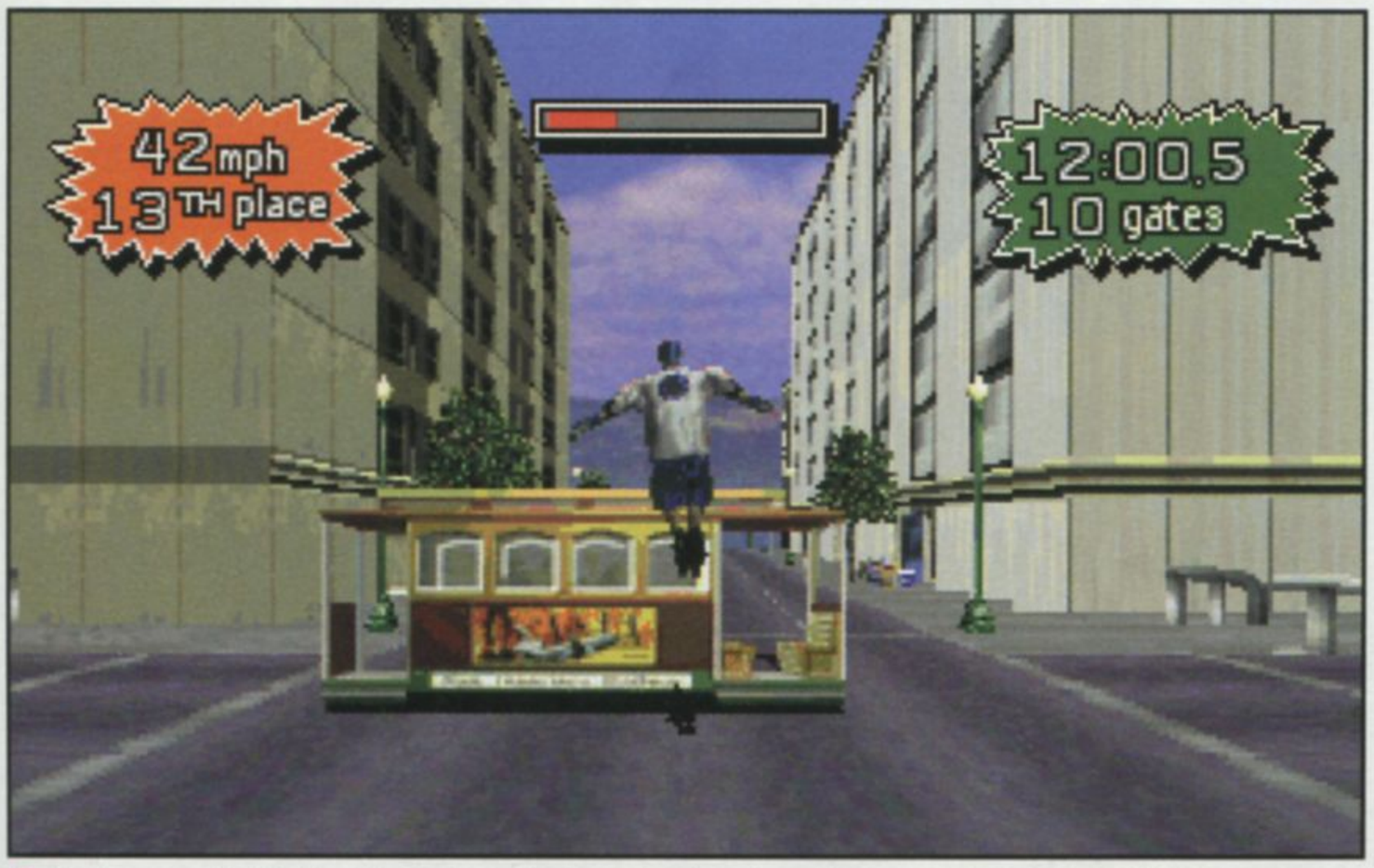
You start with the cheapest, lowest-quality equipment you can get; as you progress through the game, you'll use your winnings to buy new and better gear for improved handling and performance. It's a clever twist on the old *Road Rash* idea (an early Sega game), replacing motorcycles with mountain bikes, but *Extreme Sports* never makes the most of the situation.

The first problem is that there are only six regular courses, and each of these is needlessly long. Combine this with the less-than-high-octane nature of the human- or gravity-powered vehicles, and you'll spend anywhere up to a leisurely 15 minutes rolling down these tracks. If there were a real sense of speed, it might be worthwhile, but there simply isn't. The scenery slips by at a modest pace, and the opponents seem to be the only ones who can really move. Sure, you can distract yourself a bit by avoiding obstacles (barrels, mailboxes, bales of hay) and bumping your opponents (they'll bump you as well), but if you have any hopes of winning the race and scoring that elusive race-ready equipment, you'll probably want to just coast and pick up speed, catching your breath after peddling or skating your way up a hill.

The other major problem lies in the graphics; although the box-copy cites photorealistic visuals, the look and feel of *Extreme Sports* isn't all that thrilling — in fact, it's pretty dull.

In the end, *Extreme Sports* is a less-than-fast-paced sports game that never pushes the envelope as far as it should. If you really have to have this sort of action, try and find yourself a copy of *Road Rash* — you may have to buy a Sega, but at least you'll have fun.

—Todd Vaughn



Each course is filled with a variety of obstacles, but the rush-hour traffic of the trolley cars on the San Francisco course makes it one of the toughest.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

62%

HIGHS: Unique idea; varied gameplay; good controls.

LOWS: Limited replay value, too few courses, and less-than-stellar graphics.

BOTTOM LINE: *Extreme Sports* is a limited diversion from the usual sports game. Just don't expect more than a few hours of fun.

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Product Information Number 120

Return of Arcade

Category: Arcade

Developer: Microsoft

Publisher: Microsoft, 1 Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052-6399 (206) 637-9309

Required	We Recommend
486/33; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA; Mouse	486/66; Supported sound card

You might want to forget everything you've heard about Microsoft's recent push into gaming, because with titles like *Return of Arcade*, it's obvious that established game publishers have nothing to worry about.

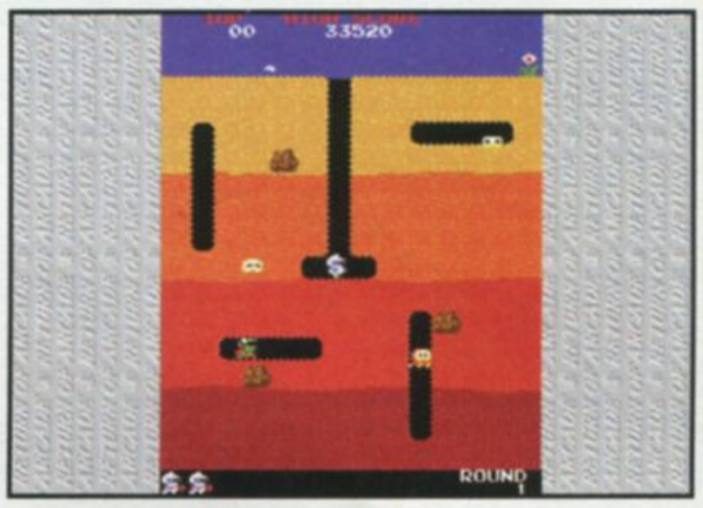
This is another in the endless stream of nostalgia-driven videogame collections that have been bombarding store shelves since Microsoft's original *Microsoft Arcade* came out in 1994. That title brought early-1980s classics like *Asteroids*, *Tempest*, and *Centipede* to the PC in all their (former) glory, and was one of the few truly entertaining games you could get for Windows 3.1. The sound effects were digitally sampled from the actual arcade machines, the screens were exactingly recreated, and the gameplay was as addictively mindless as it was in the originals.

But even then it was a bit thin, giving only the most dedicated arcade fan a real bang for the buck. Now Microsoft is back with *Return of Arcade*, a collection of more old videogames: *Dig Dug*, *Pole Position*, *Pac-Man*, and *Galaxian*. Like the original *Microsoft Arcade*, each of these games has been painstakingly converted to the PC to ensure that nothing looks or feels out of place.

But as painstaking as the conversion to the PC was, these games pale in comparison to the originals. The problem lies mainly in display size; even when running in full-screen mode, the playing area must be squeezed to retain the perspective and dimensions of the arcade machines, which all used monitor screens that had been turned sideways for more vertical space. When you're playing *Dig Dug* on a 15" monitor, for example, it's reduced to about a fifth of the original game's size. Needless to say, it's hard to bring back those arcade memories when you're looking at a postage-stamp representation.

Other than that complaint, however, *Return of Arcade* is exactly what you'd expect. Each game plays as it did in the arcade — which means no special options; no multi-player features; no high-res, 256-color graphics — just simple action that might provide a few hours of fun before they go back on the shelf. If you're a fan of any or all of these games, and you want the look and sound of the originals, *Return of Arcade* is a good choice, but don't let nostalgia trick you into expecting more than you're getting.

—Todd Vaughn



***Dig-Dug* is just one of four classic arcade games that makes the transition from coin-op to PC in *Return of Arcade*.**

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Dead-on representations of classic arcade games.

LOWS: Four classics just aren't enough; these games don't stand up to today's best titles.

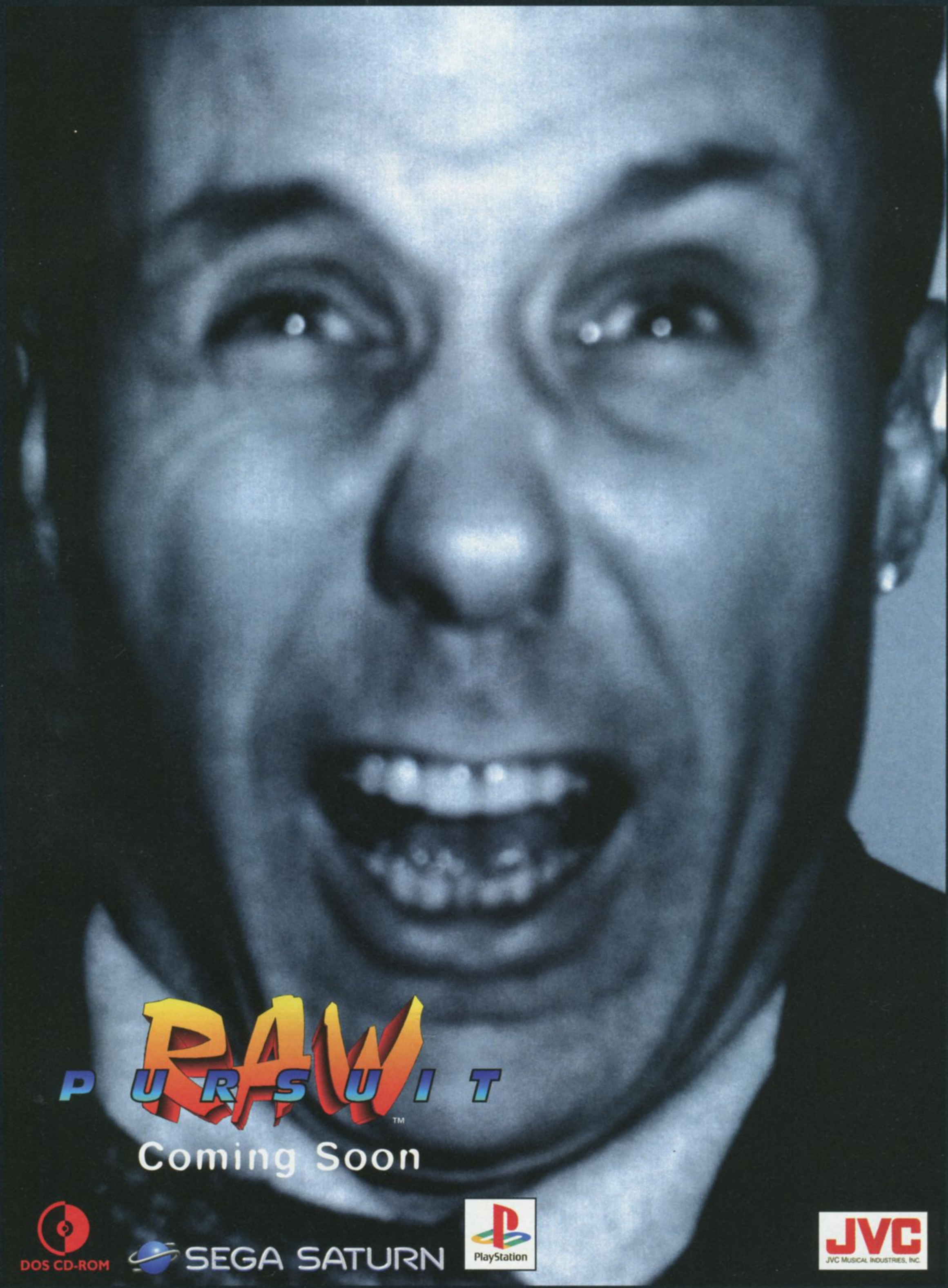
BOTTOM LINE: If you just want a quick break in between printing spreadsheets, *RTA* is great.

69%

Product Information Number 150

This person is: a. Flying down a waterfall in the Amazon

b. Being shot at by terrorists in hovercrafts c. Crashing into innocent tourists on a gondola



d. All of the above

Product Information Number 128

NFL Quarterback Club '96

Category: Sports Simulation

Developer: Iguana Entertainment

Publisher: Acclaim Ent., 1 Acclaim Plaza, Glen Cove, NY 11542-2777 (516) 656-5000

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66MHz; 8MB RAM; 4MB HD space; SVGA	Pentium; 16MB RAM; PCI video card with 2MB RAM; 30MB HD space; Supported sound card; Game-pad or Advanced Gravis GrIP

This game takes to the gridiron in style with tons of options and challenging action.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

For years now, a small but determined group of football fans has been waiting for a PC game that offered the intense on-field action of the John Madden videogames instead of the more strategy-oriented simulations of the Front Page Sports series. When Electronic Arts announced they would be releasing a Madden game for the PC sometime around the start of the new year, many thought their years of patience would finally pay off.

As I write this, *Madden '96* still hasn't shipped — but I'm not bummed in the least. That's because Acclaim has released *NFL Quarterback Club '96*, and it delivers the smoothest and most realistic on-field action I've seen in a football sim. It has some rough spots around the edges, but there's so much to do here that you'll overlook them as easily as the refs miss Michael Irvin's offensive interferences.

The "cowie-cam" puts you right on top of the action. It's not the view you'll use all the time, but it does make for exciting replays.

Unlike Sierra's Front Page Sports: Football series, *NFL Quarterback Club '96* puts the emphasis on action, not grand strategy; you won't find any options for trading, drafting players, or diagramming plays. What you will find, though, is an extensive offensive playbook, a more-than-adequate array of defensive sets, and unprecedented freedom in controlling the players on the field.

You can choose from four different types of games: Preseason, Regular Season, Playoffs, and Simulation. In Simulation mode, you select from 50 NFL games known for tight finishes (most of them are historical games, but a couple of them are fictional games that take place in the future) — then take the snap and try to lead your team to a last-minute victory.

You'll probably be familiar with a lot of these games — the incredible Giants-Bills Super Bowl in 1991; the 49ers-Bengals Super Bowl that made Joe Montana a living legend, and others — but some will come as a real surprise. Vikings fans, for instance, will love the inclusion of the 49ers-Vikes match-up in 1977 that saw rookie Tommy Kramer lead the Vikes to victory from an almost insurmountable deficit at the start of the fourth quarter. And if those games aren't challenging enough for you, you'll be able to create a custom game that'll really test your skills.

There is one disappointing thing about the historic simulations, though: the players are all taken from the 1995-1996 season. I was a little shocked when I saw what I thought was Tommy Kramer being tackled, only to read a message that said "Warren Moon was sacked for a loss of four yards." To be fair, it would probably take a couple more CDs to include data for all the teams represented in the historic simulations, at least if you rated them accurately; here's hoping Acclaim and Iguana can try to include such a feature in the next version of the game.

But regardless of the type of game you choose to play, once the whistle blows to signal the kickoff, *NFL QB Club*

The animations in *QB Club* are some of the best ever seen in a sports sim. Watch closely and you'll find all sorts of treats, like the snap of the quarterback's wrist as he releases the ball.

comes blazing to life like few games before it. As you watch the teams collide, you'll see that every player is animated realistically, and you'll be able to pull off a stunning number of moves. Once you've got the ball in your hands, you can spin, juke, dive, stiff arm, hurdle, summon a burst of speed — you can even break away from a tackler who's draped all over you. Better yet, the animations for all these moves are dynamic and believable — just watch what happens when a defensive back slams full-speed into a wide receiver who's gone vertical to make a catch!

On offense, you can play as quarterback or try a stint at running back, wide out, tight end, or even lineman. *NFL QB Club* lets you do just about everything a real field general can — call audibles, put men in motion, pump fake, or throw the ball away if the defensive pressure's too great. Suit up as a running back or receiver, and you can use an extra burst of speed to fly past a defensive back or put a juke on an oncoming linebacker that'll leave him lying in the dust.

Defensive action is just as satisfying, where you can perform spins, jukes, and speed bursts to blow past offensive linemen and crush the quarterback. Don't feel confident on the defensive side of the line? Just call the defensive set and sit back — if you don't touch the controls, the computer will handle player control for you.

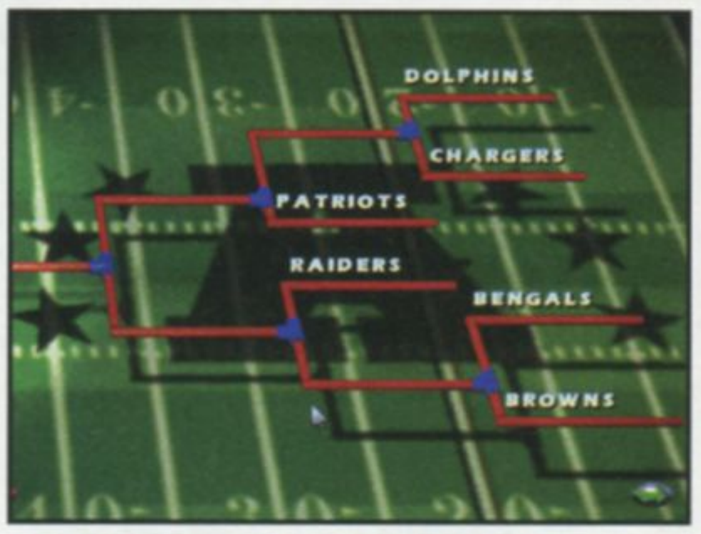
Other features include variable quarter length (1, 2, 5, 10, or 15 minutes); realistic or user-defined weather; fatigue; accelerated or realistic game clock; a toggle for normal tackles or power shucks; and an outstanding lineup of camera angles, many of which can be rotated to any of eight different positions. I've always found it hard to find a really good camera angle in games like the FPS: Football Pro and Unnecessary Roughness series, but as soon as I chose the crowd-cam in *NFL QB Club*, I knew I'd found a truly functional viewpoint.

As I mentioned earlier, *NFL QB Club* does have a few weak spots. After failed long-pass plays, the computer team can easily get to the line of scrimmage with more than 30 seconds remaining on the play clock, while the player-controlled team is still struggling to get to the lineup. And all the options you set up before and during a game — quarter length, difficulty, weather, stadium type, audibles, fatigue, etc. — default back to their original values when you exit the game. It's pretty annoying to have to go through changing all those parameters to your favorite settings every time you load a new season.

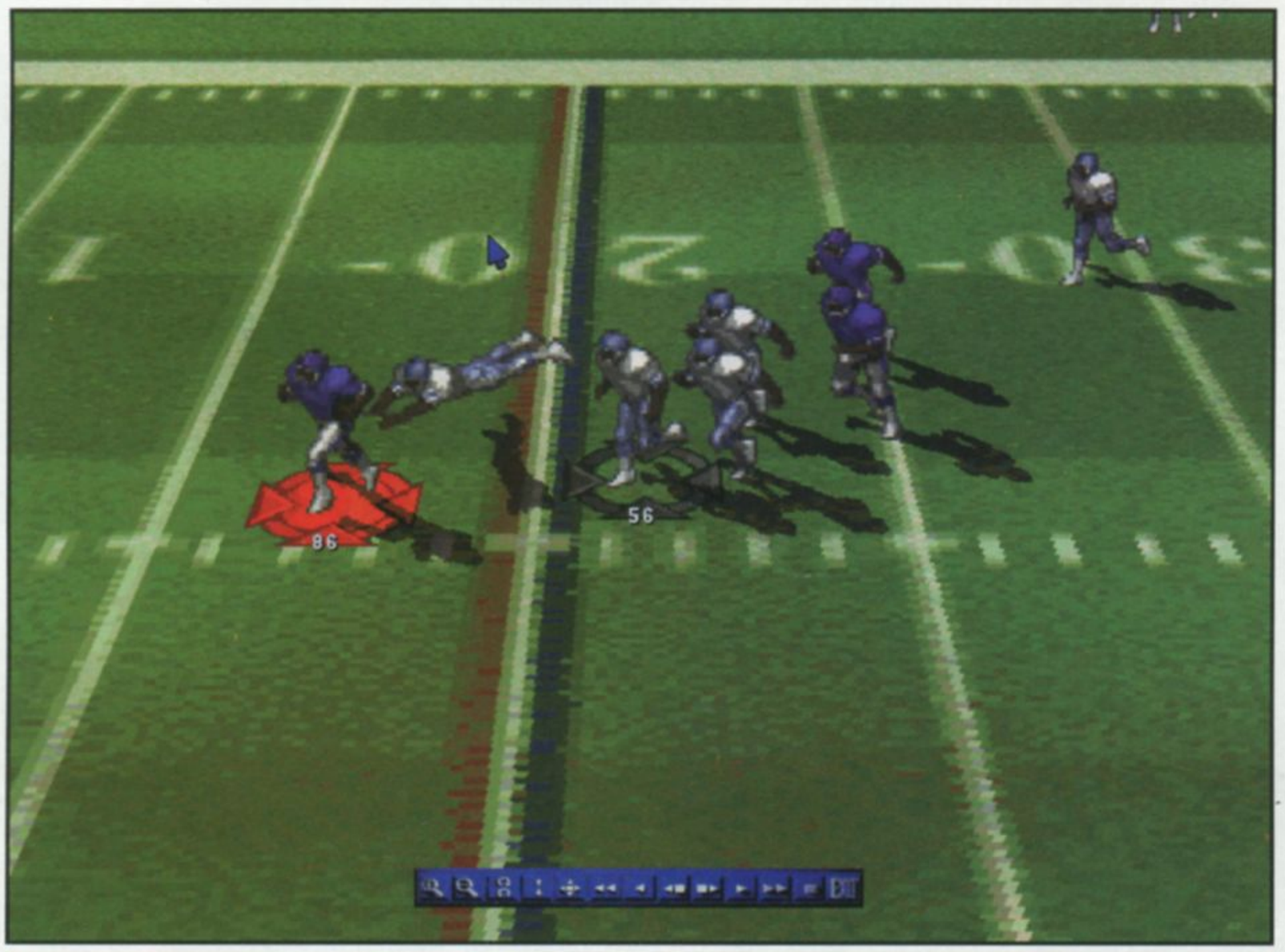
But apparently it's not all *that* annoying, because I'm still playing *NFL QB Club 96* every day. And I'll probably keep on playing it, at least until I get my hands on John Madden for the PC.

— Steve Poole

Choosing the right play is a breeze in *Quarterback Club '96* — just pick a formation, choose whether you want to go short, medium, or deep, then scroll through the easy-to-read play diagrams.



If you're not up for the rigors of a full season, try hopping in at the start of the playoffs and guiding your team to a Super Bowl championship.



Call up the instant replay to savor those special moments, like Minnesota's Jake Reed running away for a score against the Cowboys.

Getting a GrIP on the Action

If you like sports games, do yourself a favor: take a look at the Advanced Gravis GrIP. It will change your life.

Well, O.K., it won't change your life, but the GrIP — a system consisting of a Gravis MultiPort interface box and two GrIP gamepads — makes multi-player titles designed to support it a helluva lot more fun. Using special digital technology that allows players to overcome the 4-axis, 4-button limitations of a standard joystick port, you can now open up your games like never before.

In the past, if you wanted some multi-player action on the same computer, you'd need to use a traditional Y-splitter cable to hook up two standard joysticks or gamepads, giving each player only two buttons and two axes to control their on-screen counterparts. With the GrIP, however, as many as four players (each using a GrIP controller) can play at the same machine, with virtually no limitations.

The difference a GrIP makes for *NFL Quarterback Club '96* is astounding. Four players can perform every single move in the game, from jukes and spins to hurdles and dives. The difference between playing with two-button controllers and with the GrIP is simply incredible.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Unprecedented degree of control on the field, coupled with great animations and an extensive playbook, make for instant gratification.

LOWS: Lack of trades or a draft; simulations of historic games only support one player.

BOTTOM LINE: The best action-oriented football sim yet.

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Product Information Number 160

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Product Information Number 158

PBA Bowling

Win95

Category: Sports

Developer: Bethesda Softworks

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks, 15235 Shady Grove Rd., Ste. 100, Rockville, MD 20850 (301) 926-8300

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95 or Windows NT; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/DX33; 4MB RAM; 14MB hard-drive space; Mouse	Pentium; 8MB RAM; Supported sound card

Forget those sticky, pre-worn shoes and wrist braces; now you can bring the quiet majesty of the lanes home to your PC.

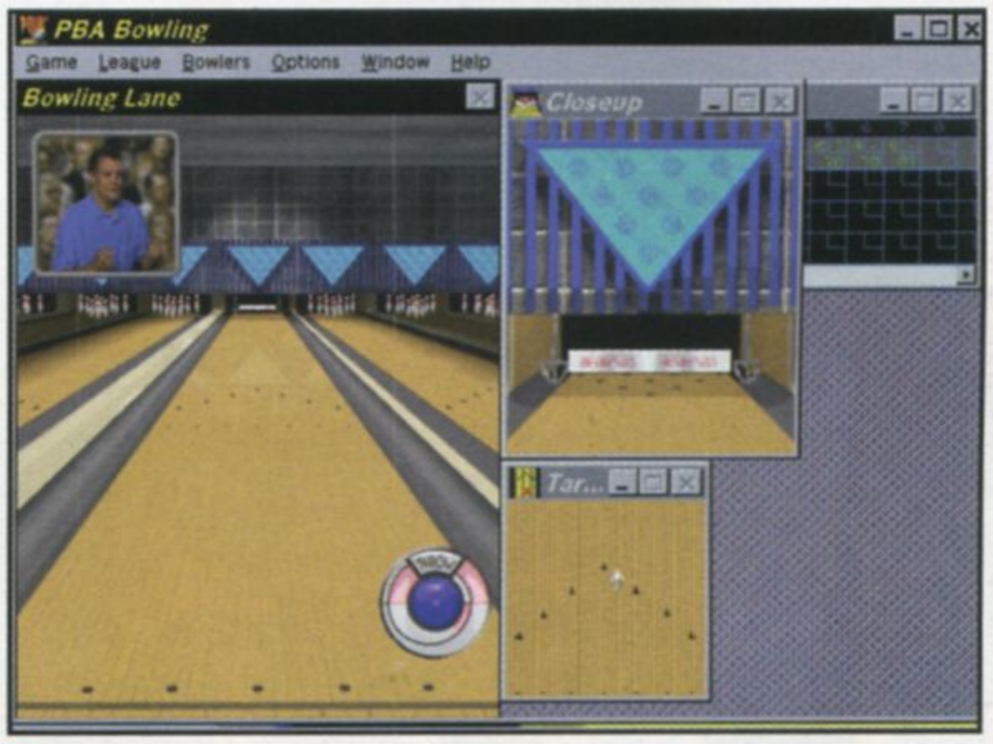
Okay, I'll admit this up front: I don't think bowling is the most exciting sport in the world. Despite such well-known aficionados as Homer Simpson and Fred Flintstone, bowling suffers from a bit of an image problem. You know: beefy, blue-collar guys and bee-hive gals, corndogs, Polish sausage, and beer.

But — wait a minute — that sounds like fun! And that's what bowling is all about. Friday night at the lanes with your buddies, laughing it up and knocking down a few pins in between brews. That's where *PBA Bowling* comes up short. Bethesda Softworks has certainly come up with a fine bowling simulation — but they left out the camaraderie and competition that are a big part of the fun.

That's really the only flaw in *PBA Bowling*, but it's a significant one: There are no network or modem options. There's a nice league-bowling option, with teams, standings and statistics. Trouble is, there are no computer opponents to match strikes with. This is strictly a solo game, unless you know a few bowling buddies who wanna come over to take turns at the mouse.

A little modem play could've done wonders for this sim, and bowling would seem an ideal candidate for multi-player action — not to mention tournament play, but the developers didn't include that feature, either. No computer opponents, no tournaments, no modem play.

So instead of going up against computer-controlled bowlers or hooking up with a modem buddy for a night at the lanes, you're on your own, trying to beat your best score. That's fine for solitaire, but not for a competitive sport in which team and league play are essential ingredients.



Ho-hum, another strike. *PBA Bowling* is challenging, especially at the hardest of the three difficulty settings, but it's a little too easy to get into a groove and bowl a perfect game.

What *PBA Bowling* does offer is very realistic bowling, with lovely graphics and sound effects. The mechanics are very similar to a computer golf simulation: You control the direction, velocity, and spin of the ball using a circular meter. You can position your on-screen bowler, line up the roll, and decide how much of a hook you want to throw. There are several player animations, including left- and right-handed bowlers and female players. You can even set the lane conditions and choose the color and weight of your bowling ball.

PBA Bowling offers just about every feature you could want in a bowling simulation, except for the most obvious one — competition. If you're a real bowling fanatic and don't mind playing alone, you won't be disappointed with *PBA Bowling*. The bowling is realistic and fairly challenging. But the curious lack of modem play or computer opponents steers this game into the gutter.

—Lee Buchanan

Multiple screens make it easy to line up your bowler and aim the ball. Once you've got the ball where you want it, you can watch the pins fly in an optional close-up view.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Great bowling action; intuitive interface, nice graphics.

LOWS: Lack of multi-player options or computerized opponents.

BOTTOM LINE: PBA is a one-of-a-kind simulation, and great fun for fans of the sport — but you may tire of the solo action before the beer frame.

Space Bucks

Category: Economic Simulation

Developer: Impressions

Publisher: Sierra, 3380 146th Place S.E., Suite 300 Bellevue, WA 98007 (800) 757-7707

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX33; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA	486/66; Supported sound card

Crippled by poor economics and unrealized potential, this futuristic "buy low/sell high" game quickly goes bankrupt.

From Pohl's and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*, to Han Solo's smuggling, to Star Trek's infamous penny-pinching Ferengi, the romantic image of the space merchant is a time-honored cliché of science fiction. But, for the most part, science-fiction based PC games focus on spaceships blasting each other into ashes.

So an economics sim with a science fiction setting, like Sierra's new *Space Bucks*, sounds like a long-overdue idea. Take the addictive detail and micromanagement of a *Transport Tycoon* or *Capitalism*, and put it in a universe of strange aliens, space pirates, and powerful interstellar megacorporations, and you've got the makings of a great game. But *Space Bucks* comes up short of the mark.

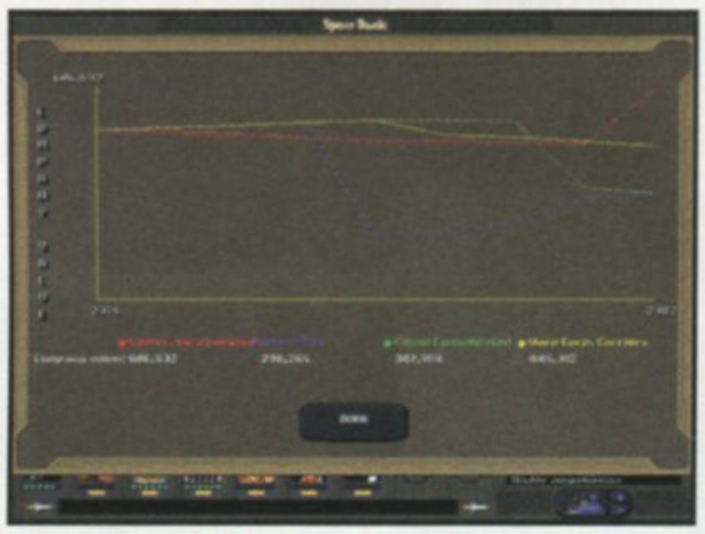
The game begins with the rediscovery of faster-than-light space travel, a technology that had been lost for many years. Human colonies, and those of four alien races, have been isolated for all that time, and as the founder of a start-up transport company, it is your job to reopen the trading routes between these planets. You and your competitors all start in the same boat, with one ship and one planet each.

Mastering the cumbersome interface is your first mission in *Space Bucks*. From here, you study the layout and access the planets.

This blurry woman winks and nods when the pirates you hire do bad things. If nothing else, it does help break up the monotony.

Your first task is to negotiate the right to land on a neighboring planet by selecting one within a couple of light years of your homeworld (at the beginning of the game, your ships don't have much range), clicking on it, offering a bid, and then waiting. Assuming no rival company outbids you, you will invariably win the rights to land on the planet.

From here, you build a route from your home planet to the new planet, and your starship will automatically start shuttling back and forth along this route. You configure your starship's cargo bay, telling it what cargo to take on each leg of the journey. Then it's time to buy another ship, negotiate more landing rights, and begin the process all over again.



At the end of the fiscal year, the game shows you all the charts normally accessible through the menu, in case you haven't been looking at them.

And that's it. No space battles, no interesting aliens, and absolutely no science fiction involved — these planets might as well be airports or harbors on a 2D grid, and your spaceships could just as well be moving vans delivering furniture.

Eventually, you'll arm your spaceship with weapons and shields, but this is merely to protect them from enemy attacks. You don't actually control a spaceship in combat, and you cannot land on a planet for which you have no rights. Fair enough, you might say; it's not a galactic conquest game, it's an economics trading sim.

But is it even that? The main problem with *Space Bucks* is that there is no direct competition with your opponents; each planets can only be landed on by the player who holds its landing rights. You bid for landing rights against your opponents, but each of you gets only two bids. This is hardly the stiff competition you'd expect on such an enormous scale of trade.

As a result, you're never in a real price war with your enemies, which is the essence of a good business sim. Which is too bad, because the game's sabotage and piracy options could have added a lot of fun in a more open-market, free-for-all atmosphere. The truth is, there are any number of better games available for business-sim fans (*Transport Tycoon, Railroad Tycoon,* and *Capitalism*, to name a few).

—Jason Bates

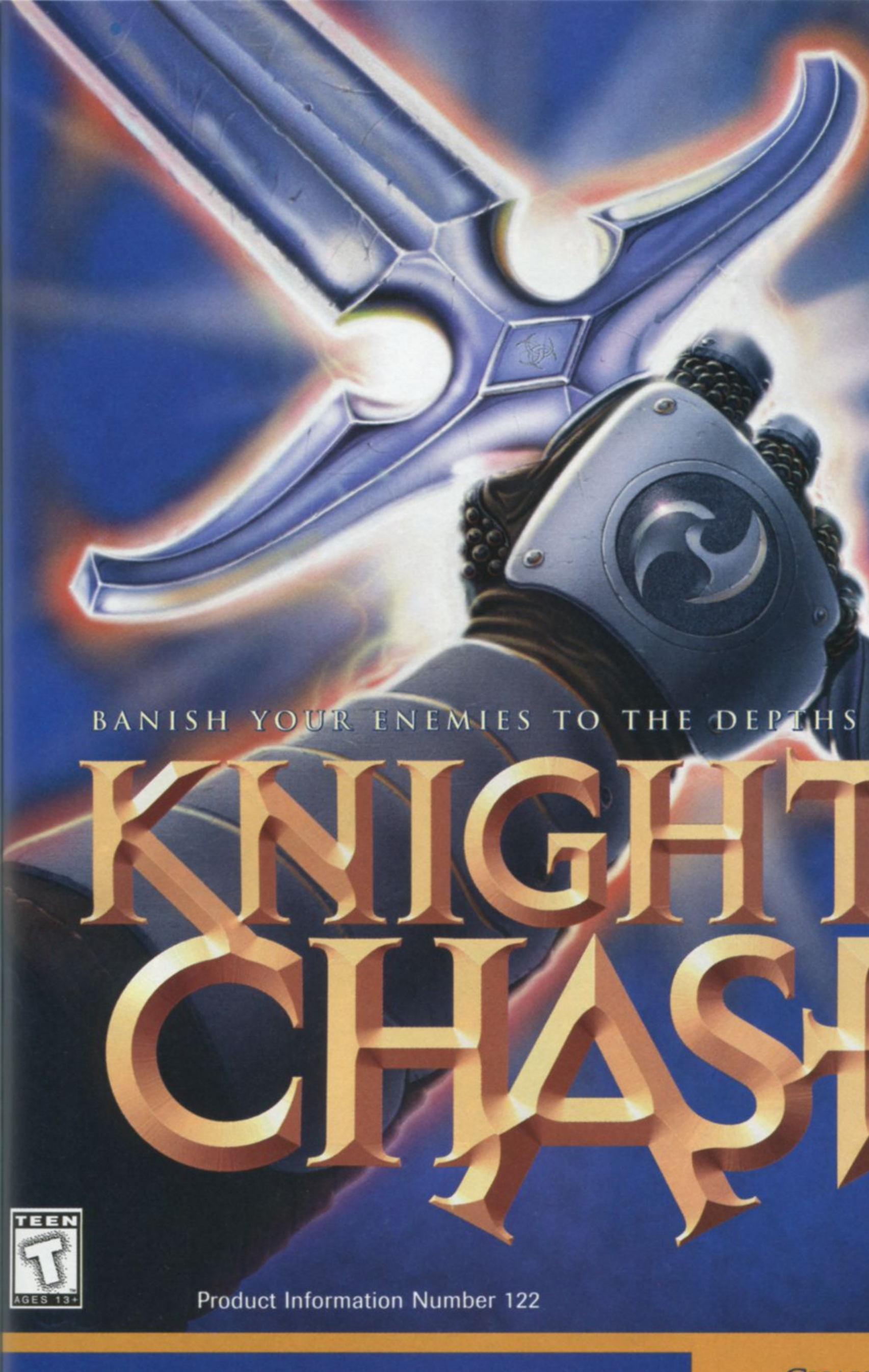
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

59%

HIGHS: Good concept; clean, high-res graphics.

LOWS: Economics model too basic for serious fans; puzzling interface takes getting used to.

BOTTOM LINE: Sim fans who demand detail, customizable options, and realistic economics, will be greatly disappointed.



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Battle Isle 2220

Category: Strategy

Developer: Blue Byte

Publisher: Blue Byte Software, 33 S. Roselle Rd., Ste. 210, Schaumberg, IL, 60193 (708) 539-7950

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.11; SVGA; Mouse	Quad speed CD-ROM; Pentium; 16MB RAM

Here's the latest in one of the quirkiest strategy series ever devised; it's a monster of complex details that you'll either love or hate.

This is the third, and by far the most elaborate, edition of the Battle Isle series of strategic-level wargames to come from the talented German team of Blue Byte Software.

The *Battle Isle* series has a decidedly sci-fi flavor: combat takes place in the 23rd Century on remote worlds that are constantly being fought over by an Evil Empire and its stalwart opponents. But the particulars of this story aren't important — it's all pretty silly and irrelevant, as you can tell from the interminable introductory "movie" that sets the stage. Something, I promise, you'll only want to watch once.

But as anyone who's played the previous games knows, that's all par for the course. These games have always been noted for their eccentricity — the rules are complex and seem to be a melange of input from an equally eccentric design team. Previous versions have been criticized for their infuriating pick-and-shovel interfaces, which require an odd and frequently counter-intuitive combination of keyboard and mouse controls.

But this one's undergone a metamorphosis of sorts. The Windows-based interface, while still amazingly complicated, is a vast improvement, even though you'll spend considerable time figuring it out. Windows 95 users should find installment a breeze; 3.1 users will have to do some major tinkering, since it requires Win32s (due to its 32-bit mode) to run (and in my case, at least, the creation of a 20MB swap file).

Once it's up and running, though, it's a wildly imaginative, colorful, and challenging game. The player can deploy *64* different kinds of weapons, factories, shops; there are full naval and air elements, vital in many scenarios, and each one has its own peculiarities that must be learned in order to achieve victory. As many as *400* units can be maneuvered on a single campaign map, affording the player virtually limitless options.

While the interface in *Battle Isle 2220* appears (and is) quite complex, it's a great improvement over that used in earlier games in the series.

Fortunately, Blue Byte has provided a (perhaps unprecedented) series of *eight* tutorials, each carefully graduated to ease the player into more and more features and complexities (as well as interesting battles in their own right). By the time you've mastered all eight scenarios, you'll be ready to start the full-scale campaign, which includes more than an hour of digitized video sequences that help explain what's going on.

The weaponry is incredibly exotic and varied, the objectives range from

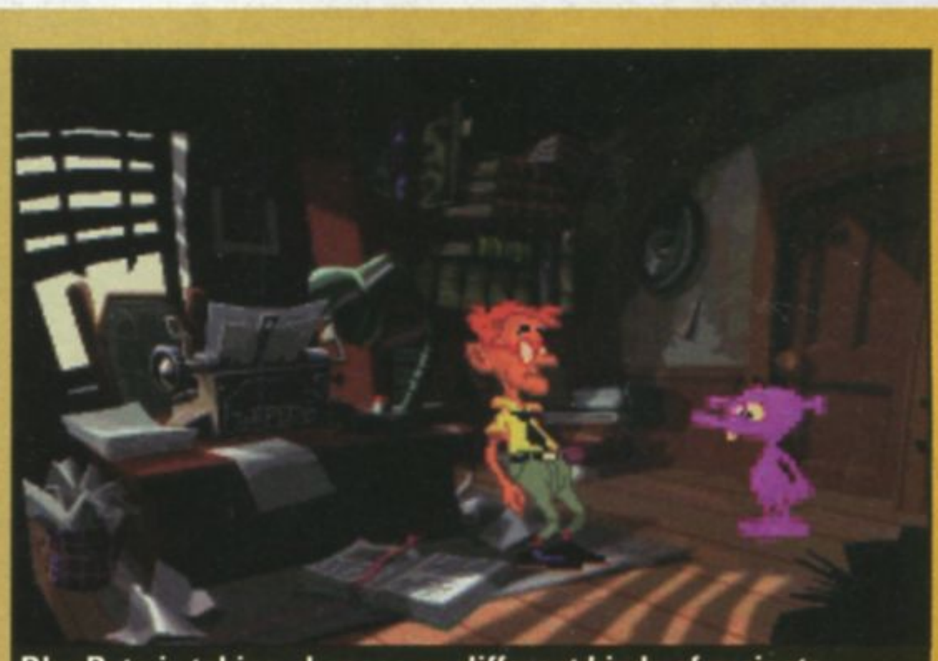
Just who are these guys, anyway?

All too often in a world filled with mega-publishers like Electronic Arts, Sierra, and Spectrum HoloByte, we fail to acknowledge the front line troops that knock out consistently good, though sometimes unpolished, games that are often more innovative than their mass-market counterparts. Blue Byte Software is certainly one of those unheralded publishers. Recently this German company (headquartered in Mülheim) decided to expand from their haughty little 'burg in the Fatherland to open offices in Schaumberg, IL, a prosperous suburb of Chicago, and in the U.K.

But despite their new presence on American shores, Blue Byte has so far successfully resisted the temptation to expand beyond reason (you know the logic: "We made a million dollars last year by producing three games, so this year we'll staff-up and release *thirty games* and make *ten million*!!!"— a recipe for corporate disaster if ever there was one), preferring to concentrate on making a small number of distinguished games and putting its profits into marketing and distribution. As a result, the corporation's logo is more widely known than its relatively small catalogue of releases would lead you to believe.

Among the hits: *Pro Tennis Tour*, *Serf City*, the Battle Isle series, and *The Great War*. Growth has been steady, and now Blue Byte has one of the largest in-house development teams in Europe, including its own recording studio and video post-production facility.

Now, with the opening of their new American headquarters, the German company is contemplating cautious expansion with titles that range from the bizarre adventure game *Chewy: Escape from F5* (part LucasArts-style adventure, part Star Wars and Star Trek spoof), to the roleplaying game *Albion*, which promises many twists and surprises for the RPG fanatic.



BlueByte is taking chances on different kinds of projects, including the bizarre adventure game, *Chewy: Escape from F5*.

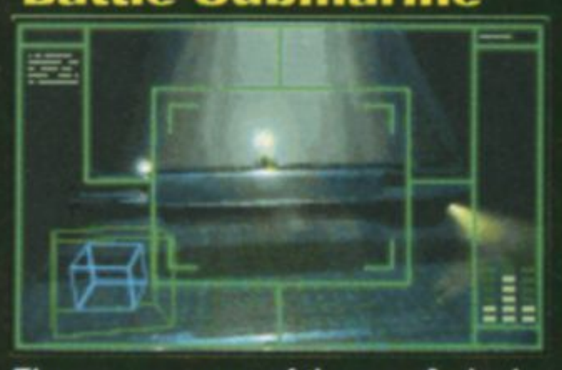
Bold and Exotic Weapons

The original *Battle Isle 2200* introduced many of the combat units you'll command. Here are a few new destructive toys that any good sci-fi commander can't do without.

Battle Robot

Devestating against any other robots, plus they have surface/air missles.

Battle Submarine



The new scourge of the sea. A single shot can sink a full destroyer group.

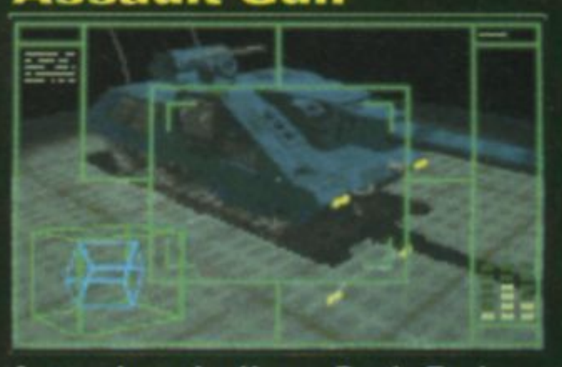
Rocket Tank

Massive firepower, great mobility, and they can strike at a distance.

Flying Fortress

May be the single most deadly unit in the game. Keep it in top shape.

Assault Gun



As tough as the Heavy Battle Tank. Perfect for spearheading an assault.

simple annihilation of the enemy to bold, sweeping penetrations designed to capture his shops, factories, and headquarters, and the animated battle graphics are a delight.

Much attention (perhaps *too* much attention) is paid to supply and repair. As in *Panzer General*, your "core" units gain experience and effectiveness as they move from battle to battle. With this in mind, you'll find that one of the keys to success is knowing when to pull them out of action for repair and refueling, so you can keep them intact. The most powerful units burn fuel and ammo like a NASCAR racer with nitro boosters, so you're constantly forced to monitor them, withdraw them, or send highly vulnerable gas and ammo-carriers out to service them. This is the one aspect of the game that seems unbalanced and, at times, vexatious.

Perhaps the most curious quirk in the game is that victory often depends less on conventional strategies — however bold and imaginative — than on figuring out the underlying *puzzle* that unlocks the key to victory: the one gimmick, out of dozens of possible choices, that will throw the remarkably cunning AI off balance. Players used to more conventional strategy games may at first find this disconcerting, even irritating, but the more I played, the more I came to appreciate this novel and brain-stretching element. I became obsessed with *outsmarting* the game, and that's often tough to do.

These little guys aren't very tough, but when placed in a speedy transport, they can take over buildings and cost very little to produce.

I'll say this for the *Battle Isle* series: it's creative, it's distinctive, and it's packed with strange and unconventional "rules." The learning curve, even with the eight tutorials, is very steep. The battles often take a long time to play, but once you get the hang of the game's oddities and off-the-wall conventions, you may find yourself hopelessly addicted.

This is truly one of those love-it-or-hate-it titles that will become, at the very least, a cult classic. Count me as a member of that cult.

— William R. Trotter

The animated battle scenes are very attractive and add considerable visual excitement to the game.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: A truly unique strategy game packed with fascinating details and subtleties.

LOWS: Steep learning curve; oddball rules and conventions will be a turn-off to players who find the mass of detail overwhelming.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the most eccentric games of its genre, but also one of the most imaginative. If you can get into it, it can be quite addictive.

Product Information Number 100

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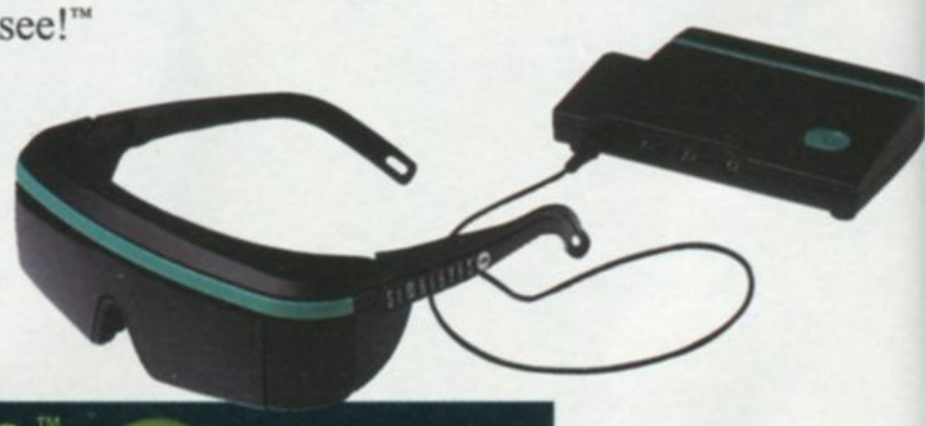

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Product Information Number 151

The Hive

Win95

Category: Action

Developer: Trimark

Publisher: Trimark Interactive, 2644 30th St., Santa Monica, CA 90405 (310) 310-2000

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM; 486/66; 8MB RAM; SVGA; Mouse	Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

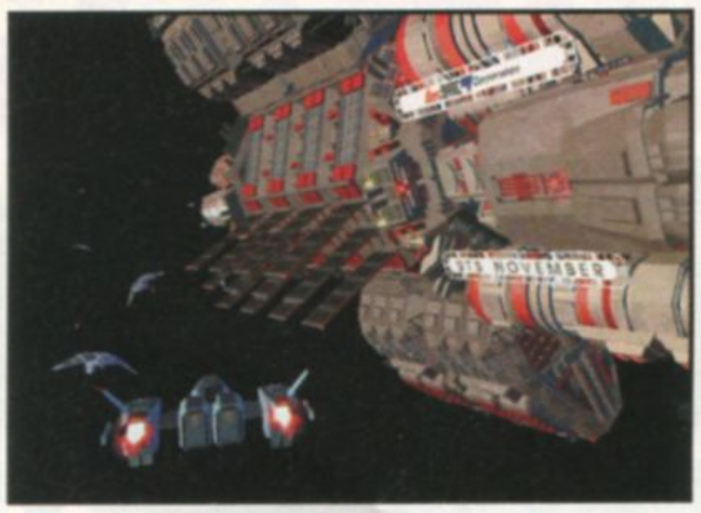
Call me silly, but I've become spoiled by the extra bit of depth you find in a PC computer game when compared to the mind-numbing simplicity found in the videogame console market. And as a side-effect, I've come to expect a certain amount of thoughtful interaction in just about everything I play.

This doesn't mean every game has to be *Capitalism*, but there should be *some* level of strategy, even to a simple arcade game. *Duke Nukem 3D*, for example, is a simple action game that's a blast because there's a real variety of things to do, places to explore, and weapons to blow things up with. You are in complete control of the way you interact with the game world.

But the success of *Rebel Assault* and its ilk has sullied this unspoken rule a bit. These are simple rail-shooters: games in which you move through the world along a set path as if on rails, and click around the screen to fire a weapon. *Rebel Assault* and *Rebel Assault II* were slightly buoyed by good video and the lure of the Star Wars universe, but they got boring right away.

The Hive is more of the same, although it's a *little* closer to something I'd like to play. It doesn't have slick video or recognizable characters, but in many ways it's much better than the *Rebel Assault* games. There's a greater diversity of gameplay, for one thing. You're on a rail again; right from the start you're slapped into a turret that you can rotate through 360 degrees as you move along the track, picking off incoming ships. Pretty cool, at least for a little while.

As you progress through the game, though, you'll encounter only subtle variations for another 19 levels. The action is always the same: move the mouse around and click to fire a weapon. Aside from the turret (the highlight, frankly), there are simple space shoot-outs and ground shoot-outs. In between, you get nicely animated bits of the game's story (you're exploring a bioweapons facility that has created bug-like weapons called Hivasects) to keep you going.



***The Hive*'s impressive visuals can't make up for the very basic and repetitive nature of its gameplay.**

But none of the pretty wrappings can compensate for the simplistic, redundant, and frustrating (you can't save in the middle of a level) gameplay. If *Rebel Assault* was just your bag of java, you'll find *The Hive*'s cup floweth over. Me? I'd rather be playing *Duke 3D*.

—T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

66%

HIGHS: Gorgeous visuals and lots of button-pushing action.

LOWS: Thin gameplay, rail-shooter design restricts interaction.

BOTTOM LINE: Pretty to look at, occasionally fun, but ultimately repetitive.

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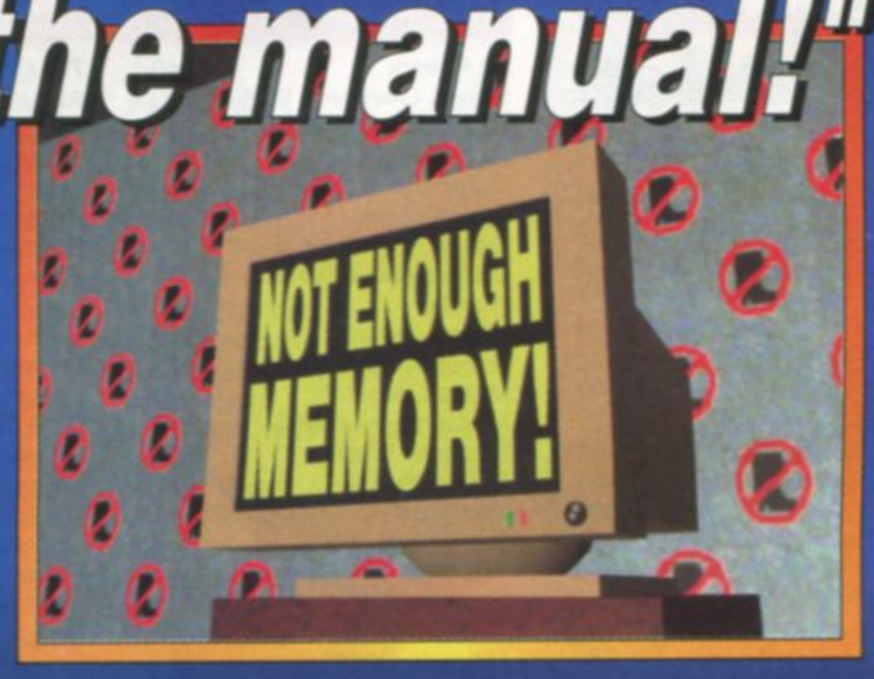

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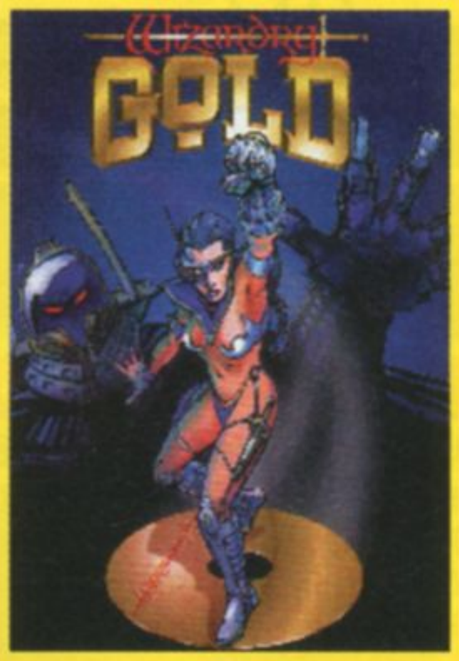

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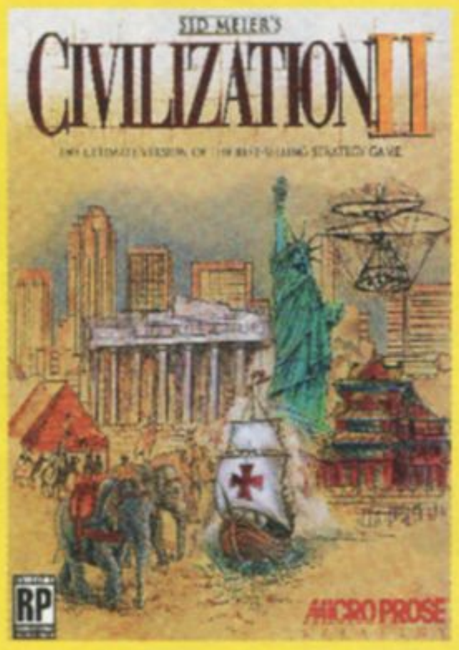

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Shadow of the Horned Rat

Win95

Category: Strategy

Developer: Mindscape

Publisher: Mindscape, 88 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945 (415) 897-9900

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66; 8MB RAM; 25MB hard-drive space; SVGA	Pentium; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

Mindscape's adaptation of the Games Workshop Warhammer miniatures system is a thoughtful and challenging strategy game.

If you approach *Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat* with images of *Warcraft II* or *Command & Conquer* in your head, forget about it. While all three titles involve real-time warfare in fantasy settings, *Warhammer* is more a sophisticated tactical wargame than an action/strategy bloodfest. Based on the detailed Warhammer Fantasy Battles miniatures system, *Warhammer: SOTHR* takes a new approach to wargaming that is completely entertaining despite a few flaws.

The premise of this strategy game centers on the conflict between the forces of the Empire and its allies and those of monstrous Chaos horde. In particular, the threat of the Horned Rat, dark god of the tough, rat-like Skaven, looms large as the Chaos forces gain possession of the potent warpstone. You're thrust into this world as Morgan Bernhardt, mercenary and leader of the Grudgebringer cavalry. While many battles are mercenary missions-for-hire, each is tied to the central narrative line of the game and the defeat of the Horned Rat.

The game begins with the Grudgebringer cavalry and a unit of Grudgebringer infantry setting out on small escort or defensive missions. If these are successful, other mercenary units become available, from archers to artillery, Dwarves, knights, gyrocopters, and wizards. The tide turns from mercenary expeditions to full-blown warfare, culminating in an insanely difficult siege. Along the way, your units gain valuable experience (if they survive), as well as magic items found on the battlefield.

Put it all together, and what *Warhammer* offers is a detailed, well-wrought tactical miniatures wargame. The battlefield is rendered in 3D, with each individual unit modeled and in formation. You can zoom in or out of the battlefield from a slightly angled perspective, or rotate 360 degrees to view units from any side. It's an amazing perspective on the action, and you can get in close to see some pretty detailed bloodletting. No other game has ever replicated the feel of miniatures wargames as effectively as *Warhammer*.

The interface is somewhat less impressive, if only because the myriad buttons needed to control units are often confusing. This makes gameplay feel cumbersome until you've been through a few battles and get the hang of it. Once you've gotten it down, however, you'll have a great deal of control over individ-

Paymaster Dietrich briefs you on each mercenary mission and manages the gold you'll use to hire troops.

Each unit, such as the core Grudgebringer cavalry, has a wide variety of statistics, such as leadership, attack, and toughness, that determine its abilities in the field.

In this close-in 3D view, the cavalry falls upon a unit of Goblin stickers, and the bloodfest begins.

Take that, you rat bastids! Your troops' thirst for battle is heightened as they pursue a routed unit of wolfriders. But if you want to redirect their efforts, you'll find that getting control of units hot on the trail of a weakened enemy is a challenge in itself; they're a bloodthirsty lot.

ual units (usually 10-16 troops). You can determine their facing and formation; designate targets manually or let the AI handle it; set movement paths; wheel a unit around; regroup; retreat; use magic items; and order ranged attacks where appropriate. And at the end of a successful battle, you can scan the battlefield for the magic weapons and items that can give an edge in future combat.

The Grudgebringer calvary charges against the Chaos horde in one of the game's more demanding missions. But you'll find that *SOTHR* is filled with demanding missions.

Certainly one of the standout aspects of *Warhammer* is the artificial intelligence of the battlefield units. Enemy and friendly forces are smart *and* tough. Levels of complexity, in both the narrative and combat, also add greatly to the game. When some units have their blood up, they'll pursue a routed enemy right off the map no matter how many times you tell them to stop. Some squabble amongst themselves, or flee in fear; most, however, seem to work together in coordinated, timed attacks.

As a matter of fact, the AI is almost too good. This is one of the toughest games I've ever played, and many scenarios require half a dozen attempts before they're won. This is a great challenge, but it's also a failing, since there's no way to adjust the difficulty. Getting your butt kicked repeatedly is also a real problem because of a design flaw in the game's reinforcement track. Replacements for lost units are doled out in such a parsimonious fashion that major victories for almost every battle are essential to even finish the game. This, coupled with the fact that you *can't* finish the game with under-strength units, was one of the big factors that kept *Warhammer* from an Editor's Choice Award.

As for the comparison to *Warcraft II*, there is none. This is formation-based tactical warfare, which will appeal more to hard-core, dedicated wargamers than those who were attracted to *Warcraft*. One thing that has to be acknowledged, however, is the debt *Warcraft* owes to the Warhammer universe. With due respect to Blizzard (admitted fans of the Warhammer miniatures game), good chunks of *Warcraft* were inspired by *Warhammer*, from the look of the races, to many of the individual units (the Orcs and the Gyrocopters of *Warcraft* seem lifted right out of Warhammer). To create a more readily playable game, *Warcraft* simplified *Warhammer*'s complexities, making the two games very different. While *Warcraft II* is much more playable, *Warhammer* is more detailed.

A minor disappointment is there is no head-to-head play, nor will there be, since Games Workshop considers the miniatures version their head-to-head game. But in the end, this is a great game with some small rough patches. Many people are tinkering with editing unit values, and this will make it a more accessible game to many. You won't find a tougher AI or a more challenging set of battles (40 in all) anywhere else. This, combined with a good story line and the first successful miniatures-style computer game, makes *Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat* a winner.

—T. Liam McDonald

WARHAMMER WORLDS

The Warhammer miniatures games, developed by British-based Games Workshop, is the most intricate and successful fantasy miniatures system going. It's been around at least since the mid-eighties, when I remember pushing figurines around a lunch-room table in high school. It's grown into a complex series of games, models, and books that have a loyal following of fans worldwide and even their own Internet newsgroup (*rec.games.miniatures.warhammer*).

The original system, Warhammer Fantasy Battles, features a traditional melange of fantasy combatants such as Orcs, Dwarves, Undead, Elves, Humans, and other monsters, while the extremely popular *Warhammer 40,000* brings the battles into the far future with such titles as *Space Hulk* (which also made it to PC) and *Space Marines*. All these are supported by an extensive, impressive array of plastic and metal miniature figures by Citadel and supplemental books for each army. There's even a magazine, *White Dwarf*, dedicated to the GW games.

The end result makes for a insidiously addictive hobby: You collect and paint an army of miniatures, create battle scenarios, build elaborate table-top battlefields, and then play the battles out using the system rules. It's a very detailed, well-designed set of rules and combatants, with modifiers for everything from bickering to fear, and a battlefield filled with flying monsters, siege warfare, nautical craft (in *Man O' War*), and magic-wielders.

If you're intrigued, swing by Games Workshop web site at *http://www.games-workshop.com*.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go paint an Orc.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

86%

HIGHS: A solid wargame with a good fantasy background.

LOWS: Fuzzy interface, no difficulty options, and sluggish gameplay on anything less than a Pentium.

BOTTOM LINE: Some of the best fantasy wargaming out today, but only if you have the system and the patience to make the most of it.

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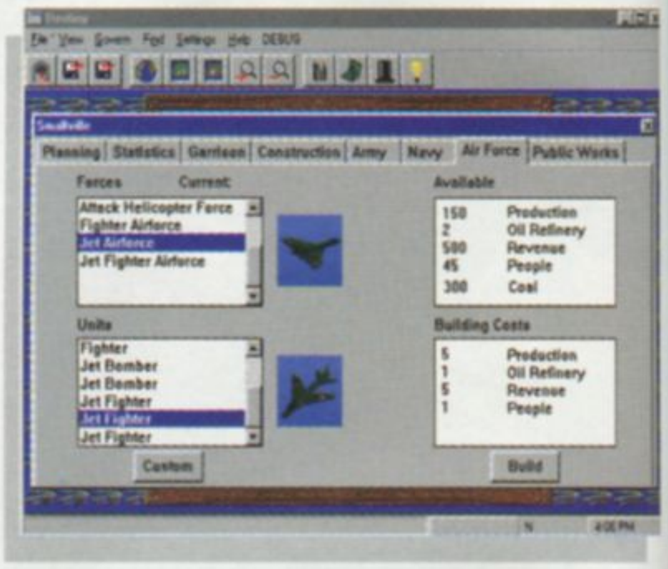

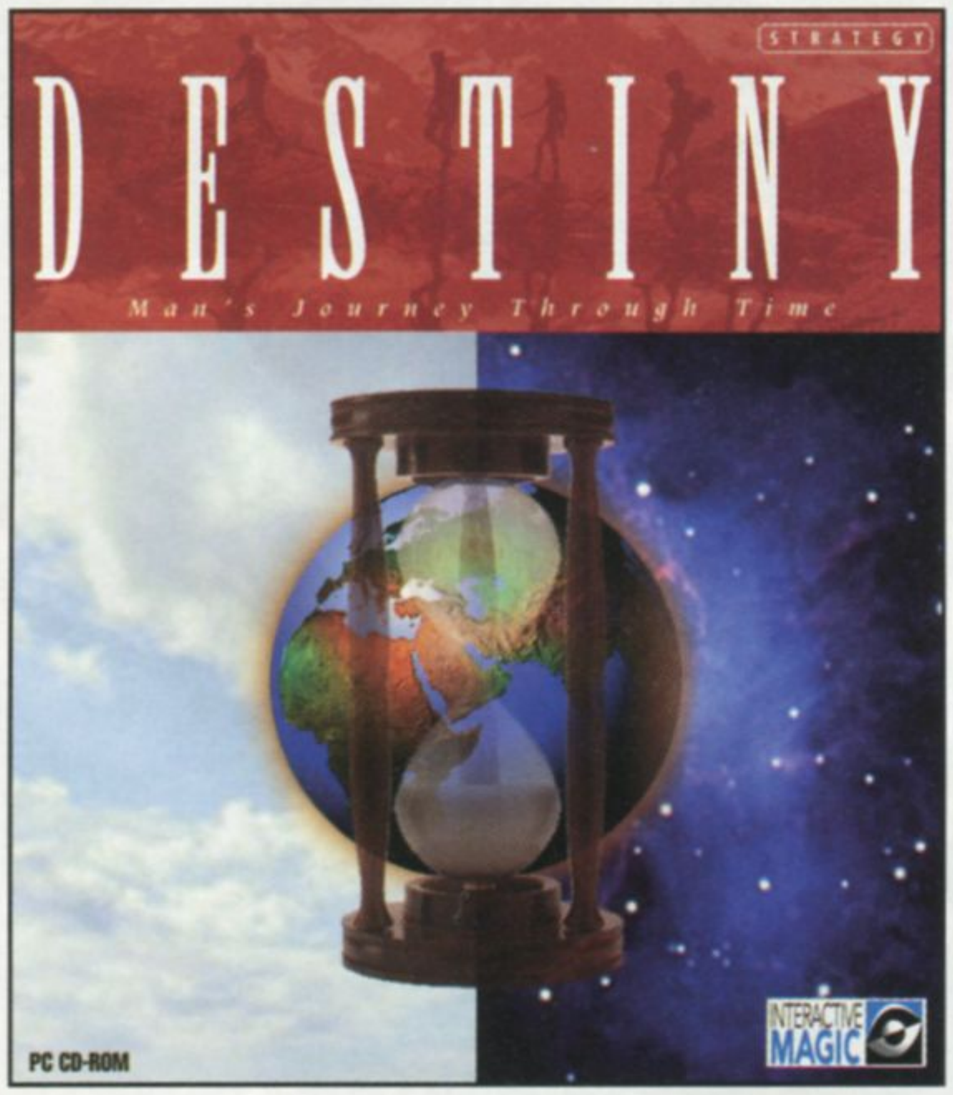

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Darkseed II

Category: Adventure

Developer: CyberDreams/Destiny

Publisher: CyberDreams/MGM Interactive, 2500 Broadway, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (310) 449-3000

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1; SVGA; Mouse	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

This fumbling sequel to the troubled *Darkseed* puts you hot on the trail of an ancient alien race.

A few years ago, when CyberDream's debut project, the wildly over-hyped adventure/horror game *Darkseed*, was released, many were taken by its dark, perverse thrills, stylish presentation and eerie mystique. But the truth of the matter was, as a game, it was a painful trek in many ways. Painful primarily because, through the miasma of bad programming and design, there was always a hint that something great *could* have been done with the source material. In this case, the material was the creepy artwork of Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger. His distinctive biomechanical art, melding flesh and machine in a disturbingly sexual and necrophiliac manner, distinguishes several books, as well as the design for the movies *Alien* and *Species*.

There were glimpses throughout *Darkseed* of this art, which was used as the basis for the alternate-reality Darkworld and its evil minions. Unfortunately, the art alone could not carry a game loaded with maddening time-sensitive puzzles, seemingly endless backtracking, bad controls, and twitchy animation.

Apparently, CyberDreams has learned little from their first offering, and within moments you'll see the trouble spots have returned as the hero from *Darkseed* — Mike Dawson — twitches his way across the screen during the introduction of this pointless sequel.

Darkseed II picks up shortly after the events of the original game. Hack sci-fi writer Dawson has recently recovered from a breakdown, and he returns to his home town only to find his old girlfriend murdered and himself the prime suspect. Of course, it's all traceable to the alternate nightmare-reality of the Darkworld, where some type of ancient creatures have nothing better to do than mess with Mike's sorry life.

Once you've gotten the story out of the way, you'll find *Darkseed II* is a conventional adventure game in which Mike wanders around town and the Darkworld, talking to people and using the objects he finds to solve puzzles. Yet, despite CyberDreams' success with *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*, in *Darkseed II* they seem to grapple with even the most elementary adventure game techniques. First, it's a pixel-hunt of the worst kind, where you have to run your mouse over *every single inch of every screen* to make sure you don't miss anything valuable. Then you have to visit locations repeatedly, and often find that nothing is changing, simply because you haven't scoured every screen and located whatever pixel serves as the trigger to get things rolling again.

As you begin to explore the Darkworld setting, you'll find that Giger's artwork lends itself to some impressively creepy game environments.

Paramount among the sins of *Darkseed II* is the writing and voice-acting. The dialog must set some sort of record for laugh-out-loud stupidity and insipidness. Worse, it's largely pointless, with excruciatingly long dialog trees.

You use this screen to travel to different locations in town. Unfortunately, it's something you'll do quite often.

This all aggravated by some of the worst voice-acting since the early days of CD-ROM. I finally turned all the sound off and just read the subtitles — but they were somehow worse printed across the screen. Much was made of hiring real writers John Shirley and Keith Herbert to polish the design, but if they contributed anything of substance, it's been lost.

Characters sputter across the screen, and the video sequences seem to run at about one frame per second. There's also no way to skip many of the animations. When one of Mike's bone-headed friends — shoulders slouched, thumbs hooked in his belt — moseys (as if he were walking in tar) across the entire screen just to leave the scene, *there's no way to skip it*. And this is probably one of the longest screen-moseys in history; the minute it was over, I wanted to stop playing.

Taken as a whole, *Darkseed II* should've had everything it needs for a great adventure — and yet, from start to finish, these little flaws simply chip away at any hope of enjoyment, leaving the story, the creepy art, and production values empty and hollow.

—T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

45%

HIGHS: Giger's artwork and backgrounds provide a menacing atmosphere.

LOWS: Bad dialog, bad animation, bad puzzles.

BOTTOM LINE: It's not nearly as troubled as the original *Darkseed*, but it's certainly not a good way to spend your gaming dollar.

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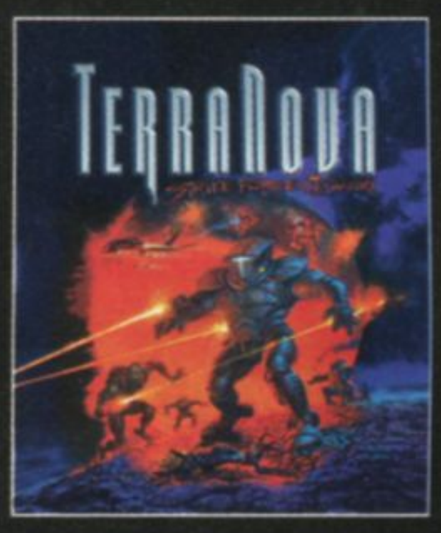

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ROTTK IV: Wall of Fire

Category: Strategy

Developer: Koei

Publisher: Koei Corp., 1350 Bayshore Hwy, Ste 540, Burlingame, CA 94010 (415) 348-0500

Required	We Recommend
CD-ROM drive; 386; Windows 3.1; 8MB RAM; 12MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Windows compatible sound card; Mouse	486/66; Double-speed CD-ROM drive

This latest version of a PC classic proves, if nothing else, that gaming blood-lines can run thin and degenerate over time.

When I played the very first *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* game way back in 1987, it was a revelatory experience, providing strategy on an epic scale, a cast of vivid historical characters from ancient China — each with his own personality — and an economic and political sub-game more subtle than anything on the market. This richly developed and compelling game world had me instantly hooked, and since then I've spent many, many hours playing each of first three versions of *Romance*, not to mention the equally enthralling offshoot, *Bandit Kings of Ancient China*.

Cao-Cao, Dong Zhou, Liu Biao...after years of playing the Romance games, I feel like I *know* these guys by now, and have been royally entertained by becoming immersed in their ancient, colorful, half-mythic culture.

But enough is enough, already. Koei's last go-round with the Romance series — *Romance III* — took the concept about as far as it could go, adding lots of new commands, greatly improved graphics, new weapons, and even magic. It was a huge game, enormously complex in its representation of causes-and-effects, with a near-perfect balance between brute force and subtlety.

Is there anything this new game could possibly add that makes it worth the investment, even for a confirmed series-addict like me?

Well, that's a poser, friends. Koei *has* added lots of new characters, including more than 100 you can create to your own liking; 38 rulers (eight of whom can be custom-created); new weapons, such as automatic crossbows (!), catapults, battering rams, and several new fire variants; spiffy new SVGA graphics; and a new Windows-based interface.

The first of many interface screens, from which you access detailed information about cities, officers, and regional politics — if you can figure out what does what.

But the basic game remains the same: you start off with one city as your base of power, develop your economy, train and equip your armies, make and break alliances, and eventually, through a combination of skilled statecraft and canny generalship, attempt to unify all of China under your rule.

But there's a mood of weariness that hangs over this new version, and a sense that details have been piled on just to make it different from the last, without much regard to whether or not those details actually enhance the gameplay.

The online manual is okay, but without printed illustrations to guide you through the Byzantine maze of commands and options, windows and buttons, the interface is initially quite baffling, even for someone who knows the game inside-out. It takes a *long* time to become comfortable with the game's flow and to learn what to click on and when. I wanted, very much, to love this game with the same passion I felt for its illustrious predecessors; instead, I found myself constantly irritated by the interface and by the seemingly arbitrary complexity of the "new stuff."

While both the castle and field battles are handsomely rendered, don't watch the other rulers' campaigns unless you want to spend the rest of your life playing this one game.

It boils down to this: is this new version better, or just more complicated, than *Romance III*? That's a very subjective question, and I am sure there will be plenty of gamers who'll like all the tweaking Koei has done here. I, however, am not one of them.

If you've never played one of the Romance games before, I suggest you begin with the third; it seems the logical culmination of the series, and is certainly a rich gaming experience, whereas this newest version seems forced and unnecessary. Too often, I felt burdened with chores-to-be-done; gone, for the most part, was the sense of becoming immersed in a vast and vibrant world of intrigue and violence.

In short, as we say in my part of the country, "this dog don't hunt no more," and it's time for Koei move beyond past glories.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

60%

HIGHS: The best graphics yet in the series; sieges are beautifully rendered.

LOWS: Confusing interface; sad air of ennui hangs over the whole thing.

BOTTOM LINE: Koei should have stopped while they were ahead; this new version adds no luster to a classic series.

Angel Devoid

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Electric Dreams

Publisher: Mindscape, 88 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945 (415) 897-9900

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX2/66MHz; 8MB RAM; SVGA; Supported sound card; Mouse	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM

Angel Devoid has its flaws, but at least it's one interactive movie that puts the emphasis on interaction.

When you finally meet the real Angel Devoid, you're faced with a tough decision: letting him live or taking him out. Both choices have dire consequences.

Angel Devoid, Mindscape's adventure/interactive movie, adds full-motion video to the usual graphic adventure formula and puts a new spin on just how interactive an "interactive movie" can be.

The game's plot is more intriguing than standard adventure-game fare, too. You're cast in the role of the good guy, Jake Hard (a cynical cop with an honest heart), who has an accident and wakes up in the hospital with the face of the bad guy (Angel Devoid, an ex-cop who is now a deadly criminal).

Angel Devoid has a mysterious, sinister mood, setting its innovative story in a futuristic metropolis that mixes classic Gothic architecture with sparse, art-deco neon. After environmental disasters kill billions of people in the 21st century, the Terran government begins mining on Mars. Eventually, the Martians declare their independence. A conflict ensues, of course, but it is stopped by Terran forces who destroy the Martian colonies. Angel Devoid, a Martian rebel, ends up as a cop on Terra, but eventually becomes a terrorist criminal.

How you handle an old friend in a shady bar (by choosing aggressive, normal, or passive mood) is a tricky affair. The wrong approach means certain death.

You start the game in a hospital, the unwitting recipient of plastic surgery that makes you look exactly like Angel. After barely escaping security forces, you set out to find Angel and recover your real identity. Throughout the game, you'll not only have to evade the cops who want Angel at any cost, but steer clear of Angel's shadier enemies, too.

The game makes extensive use of high-quality full-motion video, but unlike the watch-and-wait gameplay of *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Angel Devoid* makes interaction a priority. Unfortunately, much of the game's early action consists of a lot of trial-and-error, as you desperately try to pick out a path that won't get you killed.

But as you get deeper into *Angel Devoid,* it becomes more of a standard adventure, where you'll find an interesting twist on the old question-and-answer dialog tree; rather than choosing exactly what you'll say to the people you encounter, you choose what "mood" to take — either aggressive/angry, normal, or passive/sympathetic.

The approach you choose affects the way people react to you, and it's never an easy choice. You start to realize that you can't behave the way you'd expect Jake Hard, the cop, to act; you have to act like Angel Devoid, the criminal whose face you're wearing, if you're going to survive.

Unfortunately, that often means more trial-and-error — if you take one tack, and you end up dead, you know you did it wrong, but that's just about the only way to find the right way to do things. You'll die so many times, you'll probably start to take it personally.

Another problem with the game is purely technical; it has conflicts with some common SVGA cards, and it runs painfully slow on a 486/66 with 8MB of RAM (the required hardware listed on the box). The audio and video aren't always in sync, and the load times for extended video sequences are long. Consider a Pentium with 16MB RAM as standard equipment to get the most out of *Angel Devoid*.

Angel Devoid is just one of the many games hitting the market this year that use new, improved full-motion video technology. And although it's not a great graphic adventure, the level of interaction and the sheer production values at least mark it as a step in the right direction.

—Lisa M. Howie

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

78%

HIGHS: Good use of video technology and a good story line.

LOWS: Compatibility problems; less patient gamers may have hard time sticking with it.

BOTTOM LINE: *Angel Devoid* isn't a perfect full-motion video adventure, but it's encouraging proof that "interactive movies" *can* be enjoyable games.

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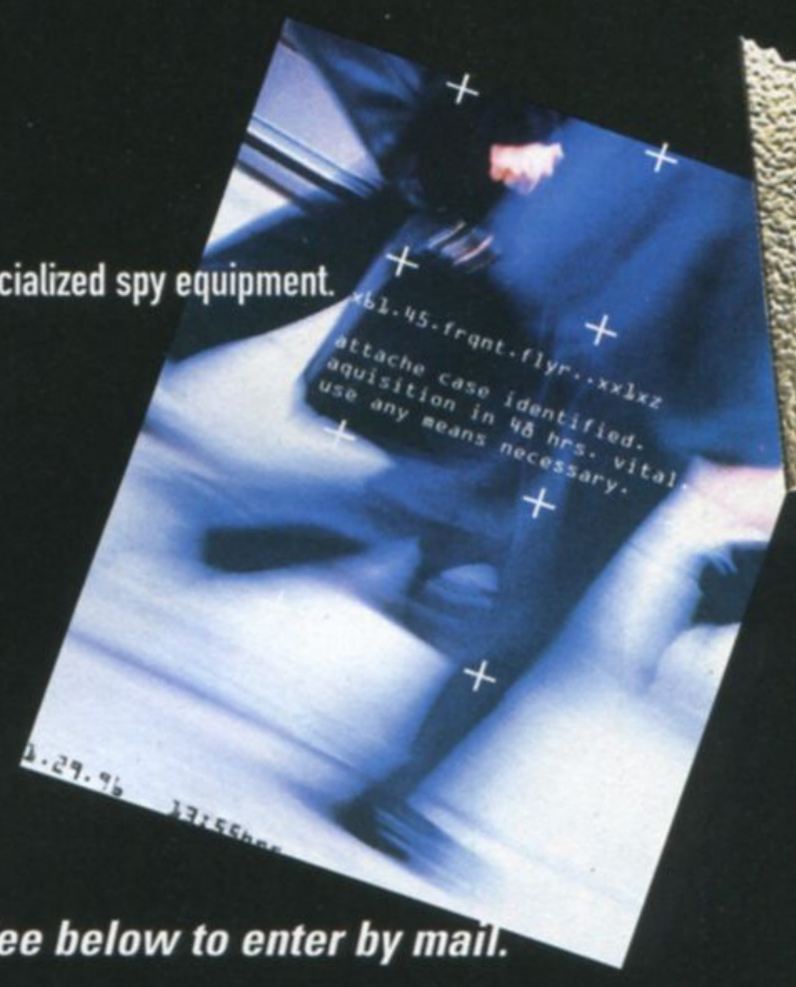

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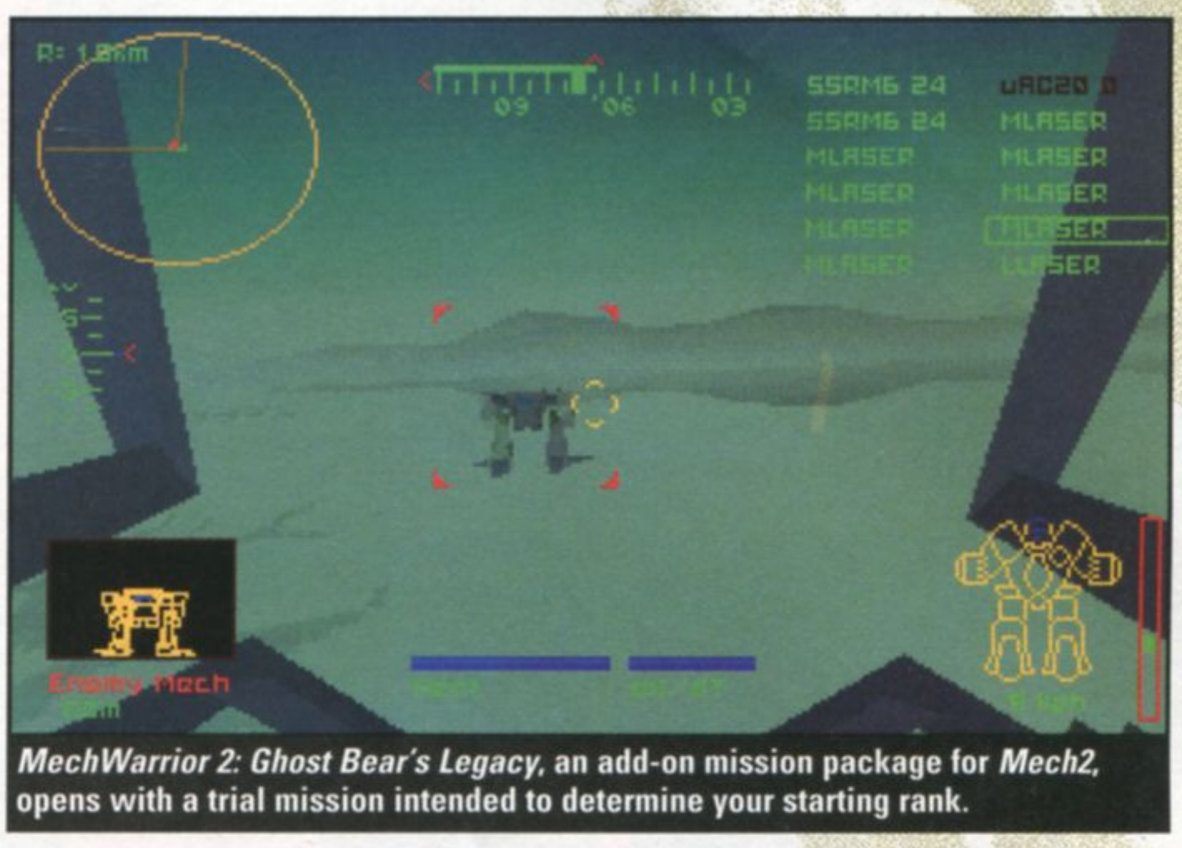
Mech My Day

Mech Warrior 2 is one tough game. It's also full of some of the best gaming action in town — and if you get adept at it, that action ends all too soon. Having spent so much time and money on their mechs, Activision wasn't going to let the license pass to MicroProse without squeezing out some much-needed add-ons. The most requested and highly hyped is, of course, *NetMech*. Fans were irate that it wasn't included in the original game, except as a demo. And they're even more irate now that, at press time, it still hasn't materialized as an add-on to the original DOS version of *MechWarrior 2*, although it may well be available as you read this.

What *is* available is *MechWarrior 2 for Windows 95*, also known as the *Pentium Edition*. Because it was developed for the new operating system, whose DirectPlay API makes it easier to add multi-player options, *NetMech* is included in this package, allowing gamers to hook up via modem, direct connection, or LAN.

MechWarrior 2 for Windows 95 is a true Win 95 program, with AutoPlay, easy installation, and all the rest. On my P60, the full-screen animations seemed choppier than they did in DOS, and there appeared to be no appreciable frame-rate gains. Joystick support seemed OK, despite Win 95's failings in this area — although it's still unusable with my CH Throttle. The manual is gone, replaced with an online version: not exactly a gain, there. It's a fair port to Win 95, and it runs better than *MW2* does in a DOS session under Windows, but I expected a more noticeable difference in quality from this port.



***MechWarrior 2: Ghost Bear's Legacy*, an add-on mission package for *Mech2*, opens with a trial mission intended to determine your starting rank.**

Of course, a lot of people will buy it just to get their hands on the *NetMech* bundle, but they may have trouble making it work. Modem connection failed completely when a friend and I tried to hook up; he saw my mech doing things I wasn't, and vice versa. Other attempts resulted in hard crashes or my buddy's mech blowing up the second it initialized. As with most head-to-head games, this is bound to vary from player to player, and many gamers have reported good connections and games on LAN and modem. The varieties of gameplay certainly are appealing, with team games like Capture the Flag, Steal the Plans, and Scavenger Hunt, as well as free-for-all, last-mech-standing slug-fests in cities, canyons, and other locations.

The front-end for *NetMech for Win 95* lets you set a number of parameters, pick your mech, and even customize the mech so it's just the way you like it.

Good news for fans of Activision's *MechWarrior 2* comes in two flavors: a Windows 95 version and a collection of new mechs and missions.

Also aimed at stretching the life of *MW2* is the mission expansion pack, *Ghost Bear's Legacy*. Featuring 14 new mechs, about a dozen new missions, and the new Ghost Bear clan, it offers a good extension to the *MW* universe, but it's not without its problems. First, it's a "standalone," DOS-only product. What this means is that the entire program is on the new disk, and during installation, it asks to check your original *Mechwarrior* disk. Once done, it installs *GBL* in its own directory, taking up a sizable amount of space, and doesn't make it a part of your old *MW* load. Since I'm using *MW2 for Win 95*, this was a nuisance.

Ghost Bear's Legacy is, overall, a good package. New cut scenes introduce the Ghost Bear clan, and the opening scene of the new Kodiac mech bursting out of the ice is almost as good as the original game's intro. As a cadet in Clan Ghost Bear, you begin with a trial to set your starting rank. After that, you're sent on a dozen missions in a particular sector, linked by a thinnish story about retrieving the clan's

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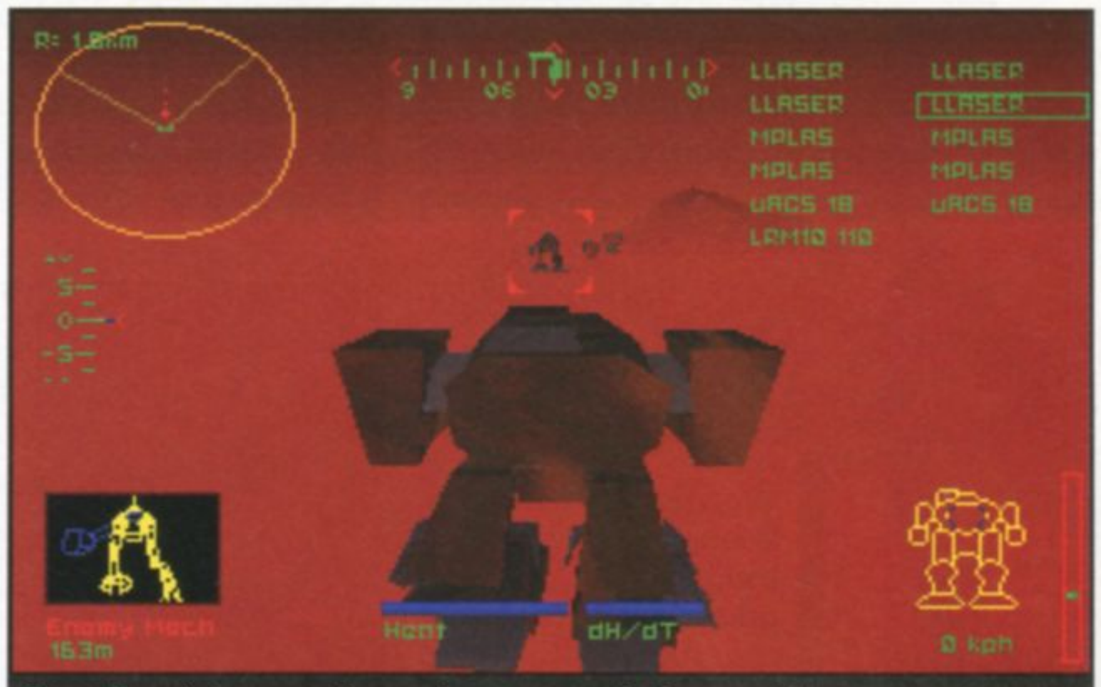
stolen genetic heritage. These missions are top-notch, including some deep penetrations in which you need to use the same mech for several battles in a row. The attempt at diversifying missions is mostly successful, with some tricky information-gathering forays. There's even at least one underwater battle, and though it's a nice idea, it doesn't go beyond feeling like *MW2* with a bluish filter. Same goes for the "forest" combat, which has some interesting challenges, but is visually boring.

More interesting are the new mechs (such as the Grizzly, Incubus, and Linebacker) and even some new weapons (torpedoes, anti-missile systems, inferno missiles, and others). While all this is very good, there should have been more. A dozen missions is pretty lean, and other features, such as a mission builder, would have made the price seem more reasonable. Nonetheless, this is a good add-on that expands the mech world and will no doubt be snapped up by fans who burned through the initial missions. Along with *MW2 Win 95* and *NetMech*, they give the mechwarrior some more heavy metal action.



Ghost Bear's Legacy **offers a dozen new missions and 14 new mechs on a wide variety of terrain. It also introduces gamers to the Ghost Bear clan, a group trying to retrieve its stolen genetic heritage.**

Other News

Access just put out a CD-ROM enhanced version of their superb *Mauna Kea* course for *Links* and *Microsoft Golf*, featuring narrated flybys and an intro. If you already have it, there's probably not enough in the CD version to warrant buying it again, but it's still their best course to date. Also for *Links* is a new course on CD: *Cog Hill*'s course number 4, "Dubsdread." Featuring some tight fairways and weird slopes, as well as enough bunkers and water to keep you on your toes, *Cog Hill* is a good challenge and a beautiful course.

Next month, we have a slew of new battles for *Steel Panthers* coming from NovaStar. Stay tuned.

PCG

Bug Patches

Allied General **v.1.01 (SSI):** All Win95 display resolutions are now supported, auto-scroll has been added, and some E-mail bugs fixed.

Battleground: Gettysburg **(TalonSoft):** Various fixes and enhancements.

Capitalism **v.1.2 (Interactive Magic):** Fixes the factory layout plan as well and problems with presidents.

Command & Conquer **v.1.18 (Virgin):** Fixes various crash bugs.

Crankit **Sound Update (Access):** For problems with low sound output.

Crusader: No Remorse **Sound Update (Origin):** Improved Sound Blaster support, as well as Gravis UltraSound and Ensoniq native support.

Day of the Tentacle **Sound Update (LucasArts):** Fixes digital sound and speech on the CD version.

Doonesbury Election **Update (Mindscape):** General maintenance patch.

Flight Unlimited **v.2.4S (Looking Glass):** Fixes non-recognition of joysticks and joystick calibration, divide overflow error, minor FBO bug, and support for Matrox video card and Virtual iO headsets.

Grand Prix Manager **v.1.01** ***(MicroProse):*** General maintenance patch.

Great Naval Battles III **v1.2 (SSI):** Fixes various crashes.

Harpoon Classic for Windows **v.1.55d (Alliance):** Fixes General Protection Fault problems and adds the Windows Scenario Editor.

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis **(LucasArts):** Fixes digital sound and speech on the CD version.

Steel Panthers **(SSI):** Several patches are out for this, the latest at press time being the 1.13 Beta Update, which is still in testing. There is also an unofficial v.1.12.

Stonekeep **v.1.2 (Interplay):** Fixes some crashes.

Tanks **v.1.30, unofficial (SSI):** New refinements to the battle engine.

TIE Fighter **CD Joystick Update (LucasArts):** Addresses problems with Sidewinder 3D Pro, Suncom Raptor, and other sticks.

Unnecessary Roughness '95 **ATI Mach 64 Fix (Accolade):** Fixes problems with this Windows accelerator card.

World Series of Poker Deluxe **v.1.0.6 (Masque):** For bugs in Baccarat, Caribbean Stud, Craps & Let It Ride, as well as in tournament play, where taking a break can cause the blinds to be reset.

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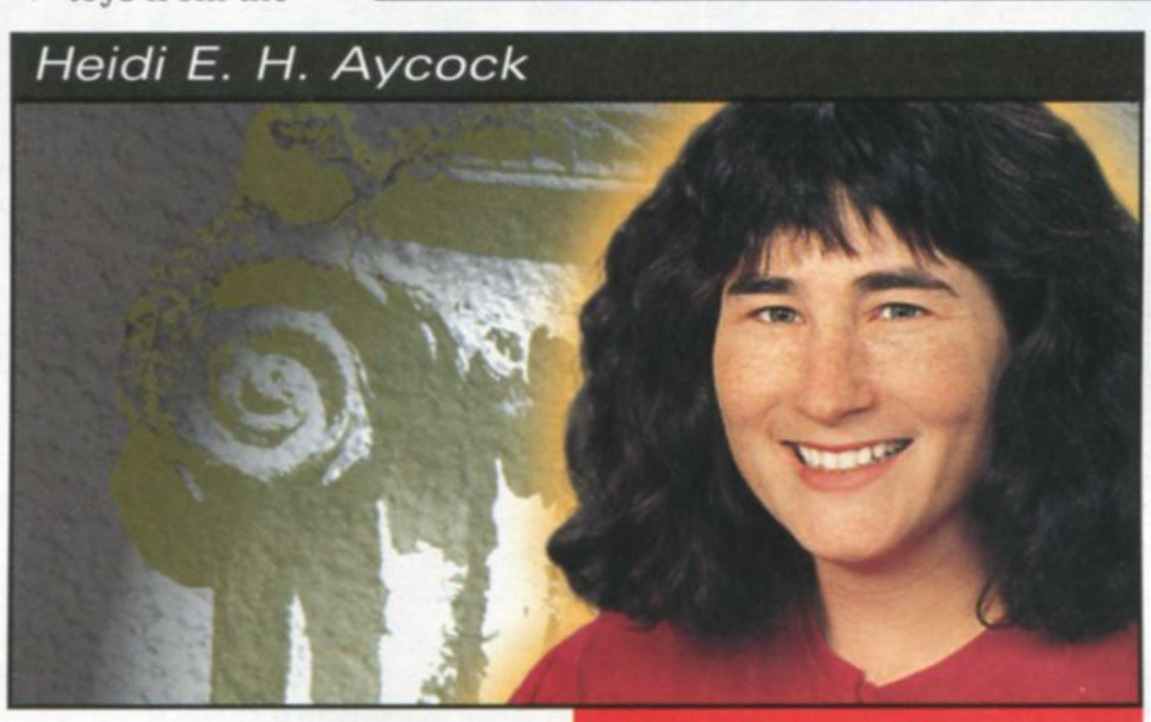


Looking for information on the World Wide Web is like looking for an open course at college registration; there are lines for most sections of most classes. Sometimes, you wait and wait, only to find "Popular Culture 101" is closed, requires a pre-requisite, or — worst of all — you actually get into the class, and it bores you to tears.

Other times, however, you glance across the gym and find a table with no line. You resign yourself to "Myth, Dream, and Metaphor," and your life is reshaped by a semester of provocative, eye-opening discussion.

On the Web, you never know what you'll find at the end of the line.

Toy Story and Other Folk Tales of the 1990s

Stand in line at *http://www.toystory.com*, and you'll find a rewarding site. Designed primarily for kids and adult fans, the *Toy Story* site is packed with trivia about the popular movie. You can read biographies of the characters or the actors who played the characters. You can read about the intricate animation process that built the *Toy Story* look, or you can read about the history of computer animation in general. Written brightly and succinctly, these text passages are informative and friendly.

At this site, you can also rummage through the Toy Box, which is filled with sound and video clips, Windows wallpaper, and icons. Peruse Bo Peep's advice column for a playroom soap opera, or print coloring book pages for off-line activities.

Whatever else you do, though, download the *Toy Story* Memory Game. Loosely based on the Concentration paradigm, the game consists of 24 tiles decorated with characters from *Toy Story* — Buzz and Woody, of course, but also the Tarantula Baby and the squishy green toys from the arcade. Many of the tiles feature sound bites from the movie too. Mr. Potato Head says, "Way to Go, Idaho." The little green alien blissfully announces "I have been chosen."

If *Toy Story* atmosphere was all this game had to offer, it would be enough for my kids, but not for me. What really shines in this little gem is the game design.

On the first level, it plays like any other memory game; you choose pairs of tiles, looking for matches. On the second level, though, things get trickier, as you are challenged to choose three tiles in search of three-of-a-kind. And on the third level, the programmers have thrown in a turbo-charged monkey wrench: choose three tiles, and if they don't match, the tiles switch places. Recall joins forces with reason on this level.

The *Toy Story* pages are only good for a few visits. The information is fairly static, and the memory game is the best feature offered. But don't miss this site, and follow the link at the top of the *Toy Story* pages for a trip to Disney in cyberspace.

Downloaded from the *Toy Story* Web site, this memory game tosses in a few variations on the old Concentration theme — triple matches and shifting tiles.

Australia's Science Scene

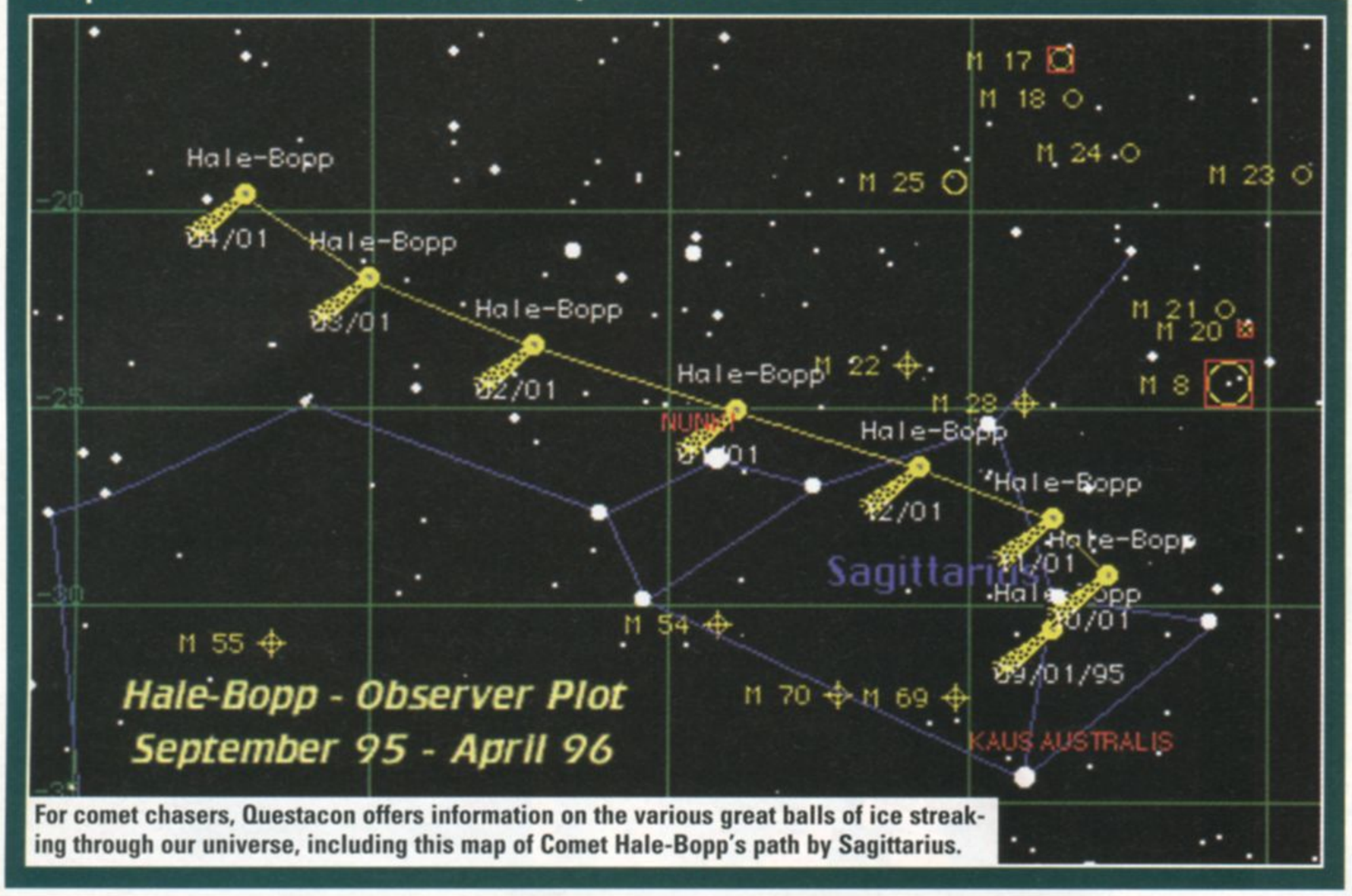
The *Toy Story* site is mostly fun; what you learn is mostly fodder for party conversations and trivia contests. Questacon is mostly fun, too, but what you learn is pure fuel for your mind.

Questacon, at *http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/Questacon*, is part of the National Science and Technology Center in Canberra, Australia. The Web pages are like a hands-on museum annex, directed at kids but interesting to adults as well. Many other museums publish Web pages, too, so if you like Questacon, find an index to other Hands-On Centers World Wide at *http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~mwm/sci.html*.

At Questacon, try the Hands-On Zone, where you'll find simple experiments illustrating basic scientific priniciples. When it warms up down here in the frigid Southeast, my oldest son and I will use the water rocket experiment we found to explore actions and their equal and opposite reactions. The instructions are clear, and the page includes ques-

The World Wide Web isn't quite the mother lode of valuable information it's cracked up to be, but a little patience while waiting in line can unearth some real gems.

http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/Questacon



For comet chasers, Questacon offers information on the various great balls of ice streaking through our universe, including this map of Comet Hale-Bopp's path by Sagittarius.

tions to lead you farther down the path of inquiry. Other experiments include growing seeds in salty soil to study an important threat to Australia's environment, and scattering pepper over water to uncover the mysteries of surface tension.

For more advanced science, head for Comet Central. You'll find information about a wide assortment of comets roaming the universe. For example, Hale-Bopp is one hot comet right now; rumor has it that this newly discovered comet is heading straight for Earth sometime in April 1997, but Comet Central firmly dispels that myth. Then there's Comet Hyakutake, also recently discovered, which looked like it would put on a bright show for Earth at the end of March 1996. Especially for kids, Comet Central's Starship Discovery includes a recipe for making comets at home. All it takes is dirt, water, and some dry ice. The instructions include safety tips, too.

At times, I felt a little overwhelmed by the scientific data I found. But Comet Central kindly directs amateurs to a newcomer's guide to comets. Following that link, I landed at Sky Online, another fine site to explore.

Astronomy for Everyone

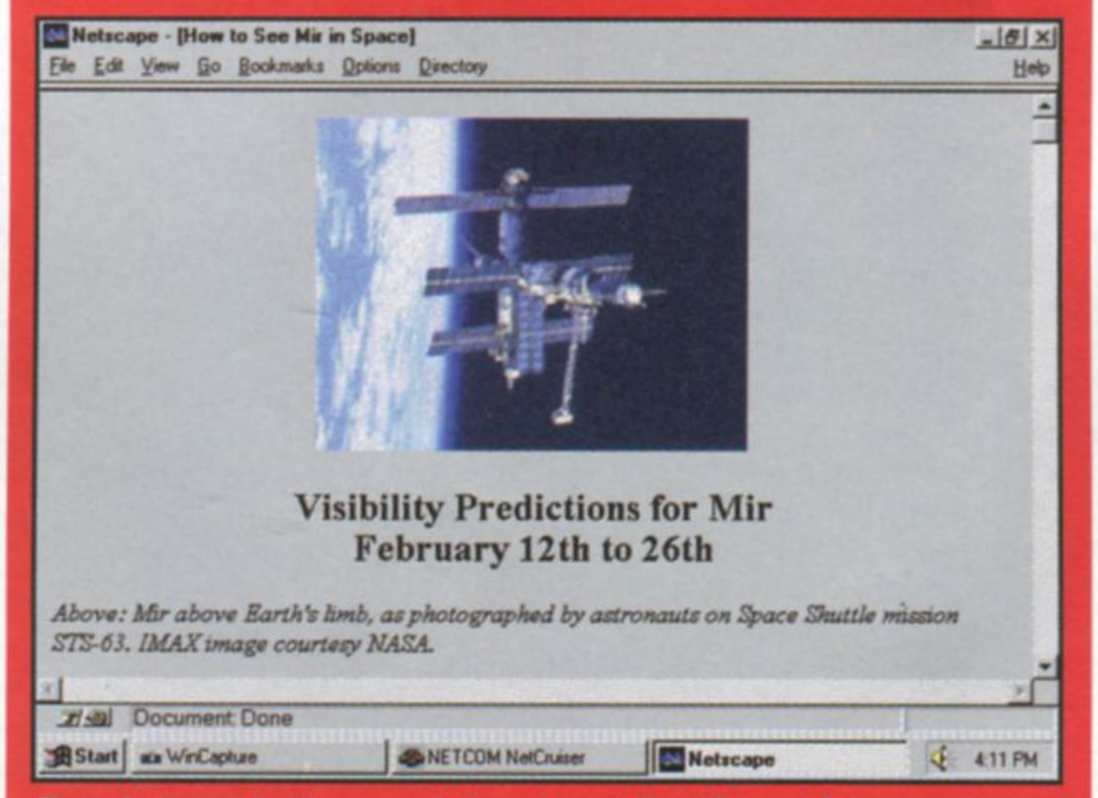
Sky Online, at *http://www.skypub.com/index.html*, comes from the same people who publish *Sky and Telescope* magazine. Like the magazine, Sky Online offers a friendly introduction to stargazing, as well as useful information for seasoned astronomers.

The articles, reprinted on the Web, are clearly written and interesting. I especially like the collection of Tips for Backyard Astronomers; it explains how to start exploring the night sky with your naked eye. Much is visible that way, and you learn more about how the sky is laid out. It's also cheap. Other articles explain how to use maps and charts, as well as when to invest in your first telescope. To find out what stars, constellations, comets and planets sparkle in the night sky each week, click on What's Up in the Sky. It appears to be updated regularly with a schedule of astronomical events.

Sky and Telescope also publishes program listings in BASIC, and these are available in machine-readable form from Sky Online. For anyone who used to type in programs from computer magazines in the past, these listings should bring back memories. Luckily, the Internet does all the hard work now. With these programs you can compute the dates of lunar eclipses, flights of meteors, the extinction of starlight, and the age of the universe since the Big Bang. You can create models of star clusters, spiral galaxies, and mountain shadows. Other programs crunch more complex concepts that only an astronomy buff will understand.

Sky Online is the most dynamic of the three sites I'm covering this month. In many ways, it's like a news service for the heavens. And, of course, it provides links to as many other astronomy sites as possible.

http://www.skypub.com/index.html



Brought to you by the same folks who publish *Sky and Telescope* magazine, Sky Online features informative articles, BASIC programs, and photographic images of space.

In the Library

As I said before, waiting your turn on the World Wide Web can be frustrating. During the lulls, consider what the Internet really is for you. I used to think it was like a gigantic library, filled with infinite and immediately accessible resources. It appeals to my curiosity, and I thought it would patiently indulge my fickle interests.

But when I look back at a year's wanderings on the Web, I am convinced that the library metaphor is a myth. The Internet is more like a great, graffiti-covered wall. Some of the graffiti is eloquent and lyrical; some is intellectually provocative and mentally satisfying; some is entertaining and humorous — but some is false and garbled. No one can control what is published on the Internet any more than anyone can control what's written on a wall. You can't stop offensive graffiti by painting over it; it just comes back. You can't hide the wall or guard the wall; it's too big. You can't tear down the wall; it's too valuable.

All you can do is raise your children to be critical consumers of the Internet — and *all* information sources, for that matter. Help them judge the value and function of information until they can do it for themselves. People who post on the Internet should be more responsible, too, considering the effect of their words. But you can't count on that. All you can count on is what you teach your kids.

PCG

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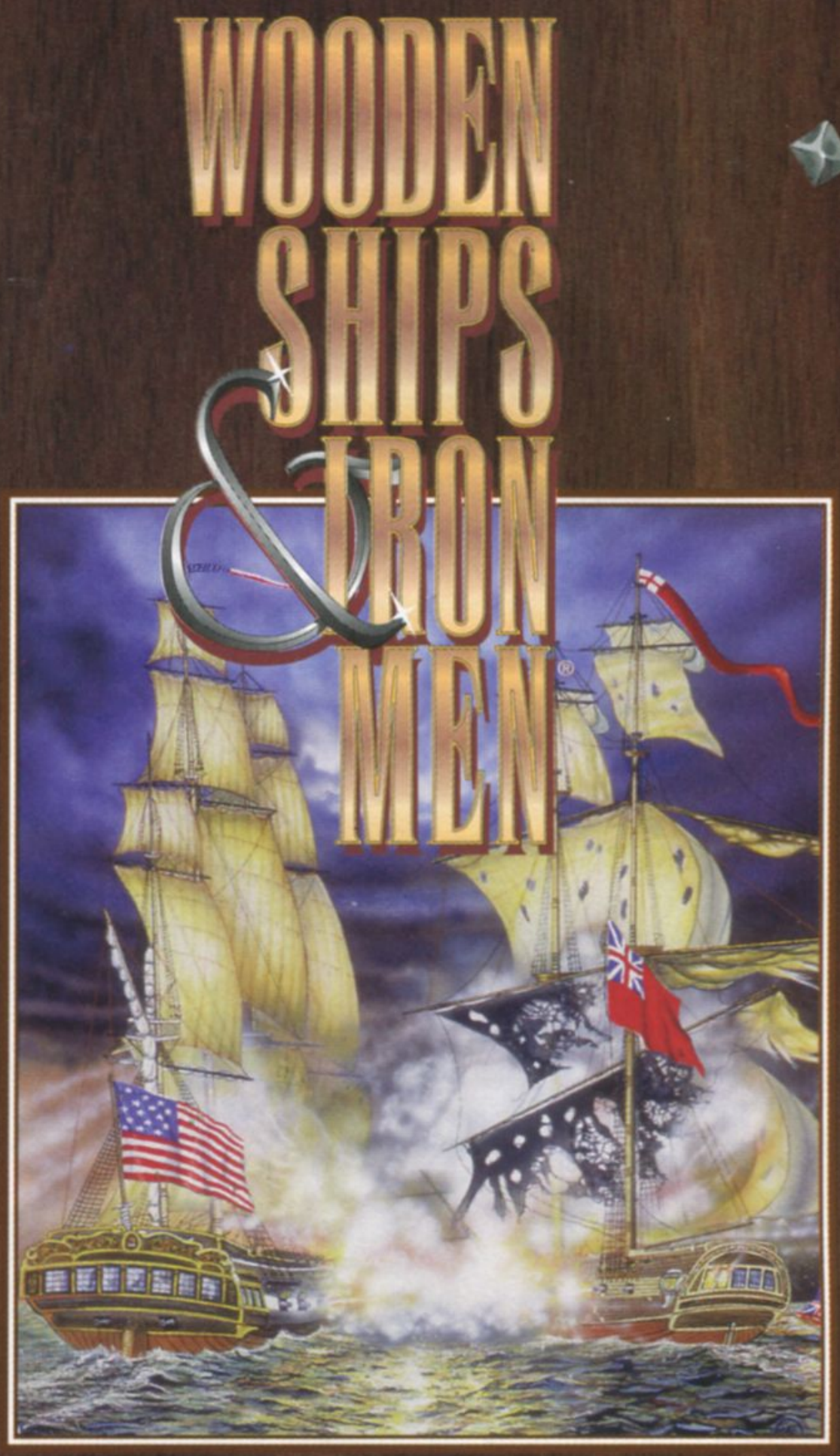

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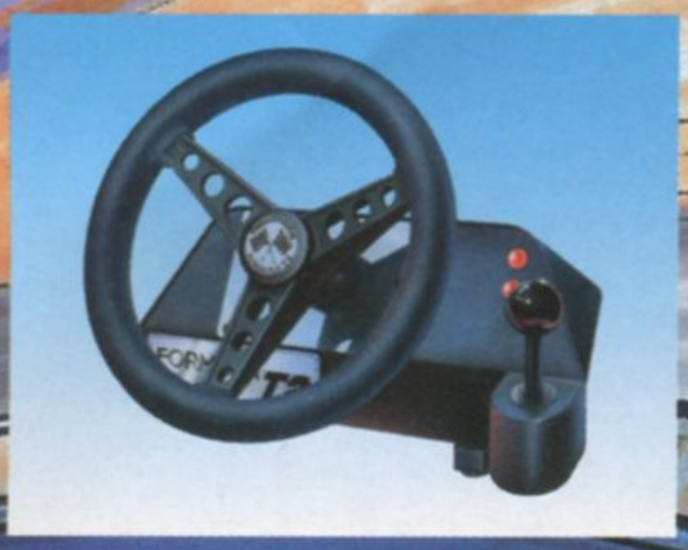

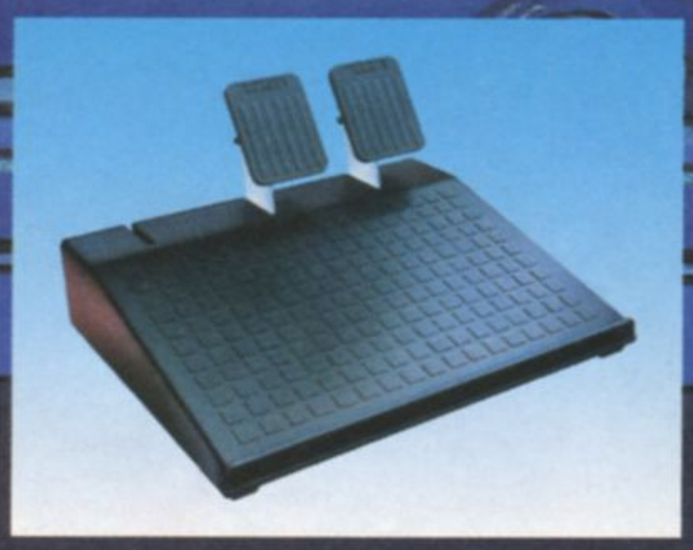

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The Big Upgrade, Part I

People who've been playing PC games for more than a couple of years can be divided into two groups: those who have already upgraded their systems at least once, and those who will upgrade their systems as soon as they can afford to.

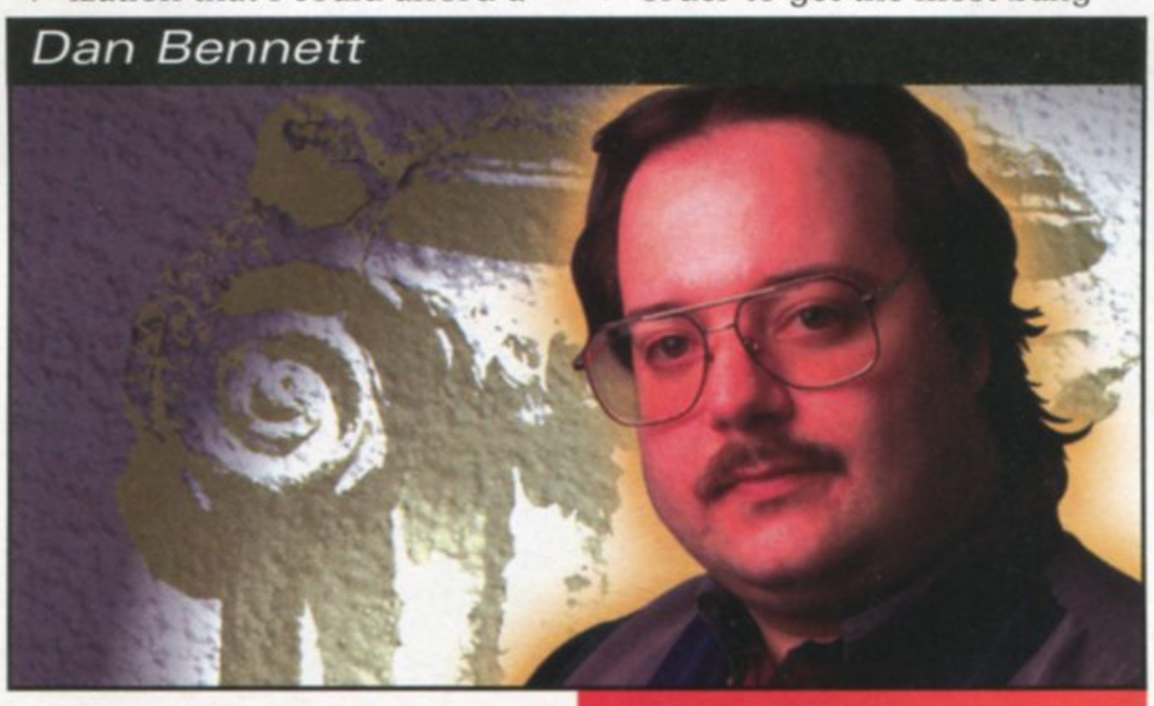
A PC doesn't seem to last much longer than that these days. The 66MHz 486 I upgraded to just a little more than two years ago — and which seemed so incredibly fast, compared to the 386 it replaced — is now listed as the bare minimum in the hardware requirements for about half of the new PC games today (and everybody knows that the words "Minimum Requirements" usually translate into "Lotsa Luck, Buddy").

And the real bleeding-edge games, like Origin's *Wing Commander IV* and Looking Glass' *TerraNova*, don't list a 486/66 as even a *minimum*. (Of course, Origin has always led the pack in terms of games that require the latest hardware to even be playable — but the rest of the industry never takes long to follow suit.) Clearly, the world has moved on, leaving a lot of us in a wasteland of choppy animation and lengthy load times. And if I've learned anything in almost ten years of PC gaming, it's this: once the high-technology genie is out of the bottle, there's no putting it back. I found myself spending more and more time at the office, using the 120MHz Pentium on my desk to play games that ran poorly or not at all on my home system — and counting the days until I could afford something nicer.

I started out thinking I'd buy a complete system, if only because I still remembered my do-it-yourself motherboard upgrade from 386 to 486 of a couple of years back — which had been so incredibly frustrating that I was sure I was going to have a stroke before it was done. I figured I could land a Pentium 120 or 133 system for around $2,500, which I could just barely swing if I dined on canned beans for a few months.

But just as my savings neared that magic figure, and I started looking at the magazine ads for the big mail-order computer dealers — Gateway 2000, Dell, etc. — two things happened.

The first was Intel's release of the Pentium 166 chip; the second was my realization that I could afford a whole lot more power a whole lot sooner if I was willing to go the motherboard route again, rather than buying a complete system.


Dan Bennett

So I did it. I shopped around a bit (that was a revelation in itself; computer parts turn out to be the only things that are cheaper in the Silicon Valley than in the rest of the country), I bought just the bare necessities for the upgrade — a motherboard, a processor chip, and some memory — and I grabbed my meager set of tools and went to work. In the end, I spent around $1,700 and ended up with just about the fastest PC possible. I thought it might be useful to other gamers to know how it went, so here goes:

For the motherboard, I went with an Intel Endeavor. There are cheaper MBs on the market, but I wanted to be sure I got one that supported a pipeline burst cache and the new, faster Enhanced Data Out (EDO) RAM — word has it that a Pentium 75 with these new technologies can actually be faster than a Pentium 90 without them. Also, I knew the brand-name board's built-in hard-drive controller and serial and parallel ports would eliminate a lot of potential compatibility problems (on the other hand, I learned that some built-in features can cause problems; more on that in Part II).

The processor I chose was the 166MHz Pentium — I figured that if I was going to do the upgrade myself in order to get the most bang for my bucks, I ought to get the fastest thing going. The only problem was finding a dealer that had a P166 in stock, since the chip was so new. (As it turned out, my CPU was dated the day before I bought it — I guess, like fish, computer chips don't come any fresher than they do here on the Northern California coast.)

The memory was the easiest decision; I knew I needed 16MB to get the most out of today's hottest games, and I figured it had to be fast to do justice to the P166. So I went for two 8MB SIMMs (Single In-Line Memory Modules) of EDO RAM (four 4MB SIMMs would've worked, too, but that would've left me with no room to expand later without tossing some of the existing memory).

I bought a new case and power supply, too — not because it was strictly necessary for the upgrade, but because the case that had been home to my 386 and 486 through three cross-country moves was just about shot. I chose a good-sized tower case, so I'd have plenty of room for multiple hard drives, floppy drives, CD-ROM, a tape backup — and whatever else might be invented in the next several years.

I knew I'd need a new video board, since the generic VESA local bus board in my 486 wasn't going to work with the Pentium's PCI local bus slots. I thought I could save a little cash by using a Matrox Impression PCI board that had been sitting around the *PC Gamer* offices for months — but that turned out to be another problem. It was a really nice board, with a whopping 4MB of fast video RAM and fantastic Windows performance — but I learned the hard way that the fastest Windows accelerator isn't always the best choice for gaming.

More on that next month, along with the other problems I ran into during The Big Upgrade. If you're thinking about taking the plunge, stay tuned....

PCG

There's nothing like a little do-it-yourself if you want to save money — but a major undertaking like a motherboard upgrade can take a lot of thought and more than a little patience.

Cans Opened, Worms Everywhere

Well, I wish I could report that things are quiet on the western front; that freedom of speech, expression, and a harmonious agreement to disagree were flowering alongside the startling influx of newbies on the net. But, no — the status quo of petty squabbling and spiteful intolerance is alive and well and thriving like a filovirus in the prematurely putrifying tissue of a commercial online service near you.

You'd think that after CompuServe's brief and ill-advised blackout of adult-related newsgroups, they'd steer way clear of any similar controversy, but a little-known policy forbidding the posting of URLs (Internet addresses) in the Flight Sim Forum recently reared its ugly head and had a small but vocal group of freedom-loving sim pilots ready to pull the ejection handle on their CompuServe accounts and punch out for good.

Many of CIS's gaming forums are run by seperate entities (like The Electronic Gamer) under the aegis of CompuServe, which profits handsomely from the amount of time subscribers spend there. The policy dictated by FS Forum's elusive sysop, Nightshift, discouraged any reminder that a world outside the forum — let alone the Internet itself — existed.

If some helpful subscriber offered up a web site where solid strategies, a much-needed patch, or even some nice aviation art were available, it was promptly removed from public view and put on display in the sysop's area — rather like the demolition plans for Arthur Dent's house in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* — where "on display" really meant "not bloody likely to be seen by anyone actually interested in the information."

Following this arcane logic, German CompuServe subscriber Heinz-Bernd Eggenstein offered up a scathingly satirical policy revision whereby any indication of a world outside of the forum — mentioning a wife, or sunshine, for example — would be punishable by a fine and suspension from the forum.

After several of my own posts were removed, I suggested that a conference be held to air all grievances. Lo and behold, two days later, members of the FSF were informed that the despised policy had been changed, allowing outside URLs in forum

Scott Wolf

posts during an unspecified re-evaluation period. My input notwithstanding, the pressure from otherwise loyal CIS subscribers was considerable, not to mention well-stated and logical, and as of mid-February the Flight Simulation Forum was a much more democratic place to be.

Meanwhile, the Microsoft Network has raised eyebrows (and a few hackles, as well) with its refusal to pay Apogee a $5,000 distribution fee (or charge per download) for the right to have 3D Realms' outrageously entertaining *Duke Nukem 3D* available online.

Battle lines have been drawn between shareware enthusiasts appalled at what they see as highway robbery on Apogee's part and those who see MSN's position as yet another manifestation of Gates and Co.'s unbridled avarice. (*Ed. Note:* Of course, if you bought the CD edition of this issue, you can bypass all the controversy and check out *Duke* right now. This is the same CD shareware version the software stores are charging you actual money for, so enjoy.)

It's no secret that a significant segment of the shareware-downloading public not only never register their downloads, they refuse to buy the full versions and spend an inordinate amount of time trying to hack the shareware versions to access features of the full game. 3D Realms worked long and hard on *Duke*, and they deserve compensation for their efforts.

And speaking of the Duke, a whole 'nother debate has been sparked over the appearance of scantily-clad female humans in the game, which — while admittedly sexist — adds an unexpected and welcome element of humanity to the sci-fi scenario.

Numerous online whiners have taken time out of their uptight schedules to complain about this, despite the game's Parental Lock feature, which renders the whole argument moot. Some are troubled teens who see nothing wrong with splattering alien guts all over the place, but gag at the sight of babes in bikinis. Others are self-absorbed boomer parents who caved to their children's every Nintendo need and now can't be bothered to monitor those kids' computer time.

One of these weenwappers even pleaded for the computer equivalent of the frightening V-Chip. If you think that having the government decide who should watch what is a good idea, perhaps you'd be more comfortable in one of those countries where that wish is a daily reality, and punishment for noncompliance is swift and brutal. For God's sake, Lumpy — take some *parental responsibility* and just say "No, you can't play this game until you're older." Then pray that your kid doesn't become pen pals with the Menendez brothers.

The only upside to President Clinton's new Communications Decency Act is that the ban on "patently offensive" material should keep most Republican — What? Oh, jeez — they're bugging me for web sites. Here are a few good ones; go nuts.

- ***http://www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk*** — The Bitmap Brothers, British designers of *Z* and the *Speedball* games.
- ***http://www.rebelradio.com*** — Heavy metal radio through your RealAudio player.
- ***http://monkey.hooked.net/monkey/m/hut/deadman/deadman.html*** — Dead Man Talkin'; dispatches from Death Row.
- ***http://www.brokenarrow.com*** — Cool movie site, if it hasn't already crashed and burned in the wake of the film.
- ***http://www.thex-files.com*** — Come on! Jump on the official bandwagon! PCG

The big CompuServe controversy is fortunately in the distant past, but more bizarre, annoying online policies are still ticking off subscribers everywhere.

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Product Information Number 117

Gripes and Good-byes

Don't you just hate those guys who sit back and complain about how much better things were when they were starting out? If so, you might want to turn the page, because I'm about to do just that. This is my last column, and I've got a few things I want to get off my chest, so I'm indulging myself in a little bit of complaining on my way out the door.

In the beginning, roleplaying games were unbelievably addictive, because they offered gamers several things that they couldn't get anywhere else. Over the last few years, each of these elements has been watered down to the point that even die-hard RPG fans have a hard time really getting into a game. These days, the basic goal that drives RPG designers seems to be getting roleplaying gamers to convert to a new style of play, rather than giving them the meaty adventures that brought them into computer gaming in the first place.

The defining characteristic of a roleplaying game — and the thing that sets it apart from a standard adventure game — is a character or characters that change and grow in capability over the course of a game, based on decisions the player makes. In standard adventures like those in the *King's Quest* series, the lead character may change, but the transformation is a predetermined one that the player is left to discover.

In a true RPG, like the *Might & Magic* and *Wizardry* games, players gain experience and skill in a chosen field based on their actions. They choose the individual weapons they'll walk into battle with; they choose the skills they want to concentrate on improving. They choose the spells that are important to them, and they attempt to gain more experience in their use.

There are usually many different solutions to any given problem in an RPG, so the game has a very personalized feel. If two players discuss the way that they went about solving the same graphic adventure, they'll probably tell each other exactly the same story. But with a good RPG, those same two players will tell two different tales about their experiences. Sadly, though, the amount of time and effort it takes to design a completely open-ended game is prohibitive in today's gaming climate, and the line between standard adventures and RPGs is disappearing — in favor of the adventure game.

Realms of Arkania gave RPG fans the stats they crave, but didn't invite new gamers into the fold.

Most of the major RPGs of late are still giving players a chance to make superficial changes to their characters, but gamers are being forced into a straight-and-narrow story line that forces them to tackle problems one at a time in a predetermined order, so every game plays out exactly the same for every player, with the only variations showing up during combat. Which brings me to my next complaint....

Combat engines in the early '80s were little more than random number generators, only slightly more sophisticated than flipping a coin, and yet they offered players scores of different monsters to fight, hundreds of spells, and loads of weapon options. Then designers decided to add megabytes upon megabytes of slick visuals. Since each weapon required a different picture in combat, each spell a different graphic representation, and each monster an entire set of animations — all consuming more and more precious disk space — companies began to downsize their games in order to keep the graphics within a reasonable storage range. Games started bragging about "dozens" of different monsters, "tens" of spells, and a handful of weapons. As good as it was in most other respects, no less than *Betrayal at Krondor* went a step further by restricting players almost entirely to swords, creating an unlikely universe where combatants had never lifted an axe, club, or spear.

This phase of computer roleplaying would have been acceptable if games had opened up again with the advent of the CD-ROM and its vastly increased storage capacity, but instead of creating games that used the new space to deliver great graphics in an epic tale, developers concentrated on making their worlds even more visually oriented, keeping games short and sweet ... and — more importantly — profitable.

Finally, the interface and genres of games are changing design in a way that is distracting players from gameplay rather than enhancing their enjoyment of it. In an attempt to make their games appeal to more than one kind of gamer, companies are turning their backs on straight, statistic-heavy roleplaying, instead preferring to add a fantasy disguise to an action game, or to give an adventure-game character a hit point rating — rather than creating a truly engrossing RPG that will stand up to play for more than a week or two. The difference is readily apparent; it took me an entire summer at eight hours a day to finish *Ultima III*, and it took me a full year to hack my way through *Might & Magic II*, but no game in the last year has taken me more than two weeks to solve.

So, that's it. Having once and for all gotten off my chest what's wrong with the RPG field, I'll step aside and quit complaining about it. It's been fun, folks...but it could be *more* fun....

PCG

Trent bids *PC Gamer* a reluctant farewell — but not without some parting shots and thoughts on what's ailing today's computer roleplaying games.

Sumter to Appomattox: Third Time Lucky?

The first time I played — or *attempted* to play — the original, home-grown version of *From Sumter to Appomattox*, I gave up in despair after two miserable days. The manual was written in a language only vaguely approximating English; the interface was a hopeless muddle; the chunky graphics on the strategic maps were ugly and unreadable; and the miniatures-style battle scenes were laughable. The editor of the magazine I was writing for (*PC Entertainment*, the predecessor to *PC Gamer*), agreed with me, and told me in no uncertain words: "This is crap — don't waste magazine space even reviewing it."

So I didn't. Neither did I review the improved sequel that came out three or four years ago, figuring that no amount of tinkering, tweaking and upgrading could turn this particular sow's ear into a silk purse.

I began having second thoughts, though, when a knowledgeable colleague, writing in the pages of another magazine, praised the revision highly enough to conclude that it was "the only strategic-level Civil War game worth playing." Strong words, indeed.

Now that I've been to Interactive Magic's headquarters and seen the *third* version, I'm sufficiently impressed to admit to a major attitude adjustment: *Sumter to Appomattox III* may actually *be* the best strategic-level Civil War game yet devised.

Like its predecessors, the game is the brainchild of Frank Hunter and Adanac Command Systems, a small independent outfit based up north in Vancouver, B.C. It has long been Hunter's obsession to design a game that would cover the American Civil War primarily from a strategic level, factoring in everything from industrial development and blockade runners to enlistment bounties and the personalities of almost 200 Union and Confederate commanders.

Given the scope of such ambition, it's not surprising that several unsuccessful "drafts" were necessary before improved technology, coupled with hundreds of suggestions from the small but intensely loyal following of gamers that played the second version, made it possible for Adanac to realize its original dream; this is the gaming equivalent of writing *War And Peace*, and I have a great amount of admiration for Hunter's persistence.

William R. Trotter

Now, with the high-powered support of Interactive Magic, beautiful Windows-based graphics, and a smooth, logical interface that bears no resemblance whatever to the antediluvian mess of the original DOS version, the game is shaping up into a Civil War buff's dream.

It's turn-based, each turn representing a week of real time, and the player may elect to re-fight the entire war or any year-long segment he or she desires. The artificial intelligence has been refined and improved to the point where one gets an uncanny sensation of playing against the real, historical opponents. Politics and diplomacy have been given their due, without unduly slowing down the gameplay. Naval strategy and coastal defenses (either neglected altogether or weakly implemented in previous Civil War games) have become a strong element in their own right.

Logistics — always a thorny problem in other CW games — are cleanly integrated into the game-flow. Victorious Confederate units, for example, can now incorporate captured Union ordnance or even embark, within reasonable limits, on research and development programs of their own.

Battles are integrated into the system much as they are in *Caesar II*: you can opt for a quick, plausible computer-dictated outcome, or exercise limited tactical control. Most battles play to resolution in a 10 to 15 minute time period, which gives the overall game a nice sense of tempo.

Most impressive of all, perhaps, are the effects of leadership. Each commander is rated for aggressiveness, inspirational value (how quickly he can rally or maneuver his units), initiative, and combat ability. You can play two different ways: either you can have full historical knowledge of the actual leaders, or you can opt for a Fog-of-War situation in which the enemy leader's capabilities are gradually revealed by his actual performance on the battlefield.

Supplemental to the game will be extensive online reference material concerning leaders, tactics, weapons, and so forth.

After discussing the game with its design team, I could find no weak spots in its overall concept. It appears to have all the detail a Civil War fan could ask for, given its emphasis on strategic rather than tactical scale; it is respectful of historical reality, yet it also offers plenty of room for changing history — which is what a good Civil War game is all about, when you get down to the nitty-gritty of it.

And it gives the South a fighting chance. As a historian who's never had a lot of respect for some of Jeff Davis's more blockheaded and obstinate policies, I find that aspect of the game to be very tantalizing indeed.

I also find it admirable that Adanac has pursued their original dream with such perseverance and determination. Now, finally, they'll have a chance to show how good a game they can deliver, and from what I've seen so far, *Sumter to Appomattox III* looks mighty good indeed. I salute them and congratulate Interactive Magic for having the vision to bring this enormously ambitious project to its full fruition.

PCG

Back in 1989, the first version of this Civil War game was unplayably bad. Now, after six years of dedicated re-working by its creators, it looks like a champion-in-the-making.

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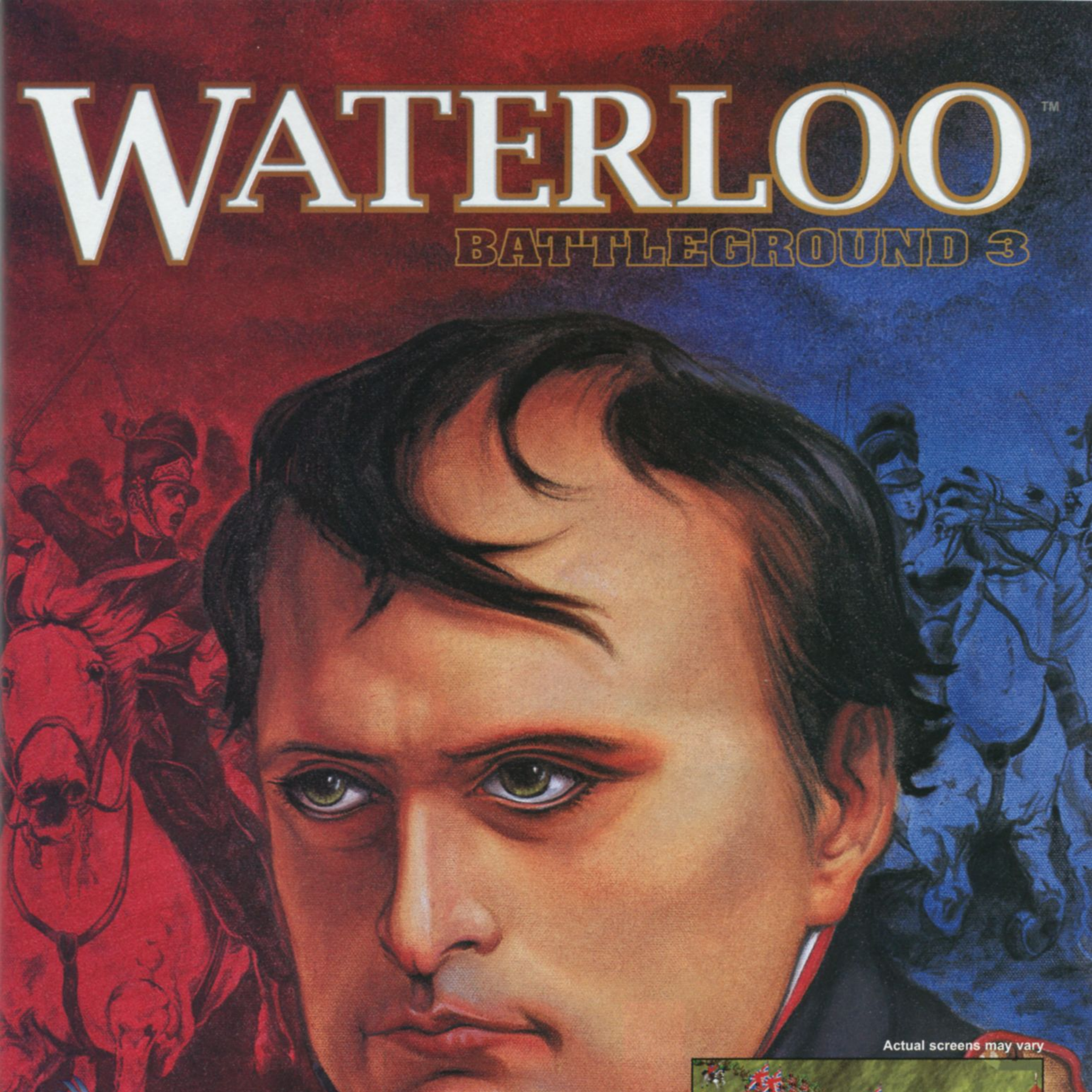
BATTLEGROUND 3



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Reach Out and Frag Someone

Head-to-head modem play has been a standard feature of PC games for a few years now, but head-to-head isn't the same thing as face-to-face. When your modem's using your only phone line, there's no way to critique each others' performance or inflict verbal abuse. And being able to communicate matters even more when you're playing cooperatively, when you want to discuss strategies, feed tips to a less-experienced partner — or just tell your buddy to duck at the right moment.

Until recently, the only solution to the problem was to get another phone line; one for the modem and one for voice. But a better answer might come from a promising new modem technology called "Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data" (DSVD). In an ordinary phone call, the audio signal uses up the entire bandwidth of the phone line. A typical 28.8 kilobit-per-second (kbps) DSVD modem would convert your voice into a digital bitstream, then use data compression to scrunch it into less than 10 kilobits of data per second, leaving almost 20 kbps available for computer communications at the same time.

If you're talking to a friend on the phone and you decide to play a game together, initiating a DSVD connection is just a matter of starting up the game and telling it to connect via the modem. The game won't have to dial the phone or wait for an answer, so the connection happens quickly, but other than that the process is about the same as using an ordinary data modem. If a data or fax connection is already going, both modems will switch into voice/data mode when you pick up the phone handset.

Of course, this really only works if everyone's modem uses the same set of commands and signalling tones. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is developing the V.64 standard for DSVD modems, but it won't be ready for several months yet. Meanwhile, a group of companies has come up with a cooperative specification, led by Intel and also including Hayes, U.S. Robotics, Creative Labs, and modem chipset maker Rockwell International. But even within this group, some are using the DSP Group's True Speech compression algorithm, while others favor Rockwell International's DigiTalk.

Even without a firm DSVD standard in place, several major modem companies have introduced DSVD modems, including U.S. Robotics and Cardinal Technologies. Creative Labs has announced two DSVD products: the Modem Blaster 28.8 DSVD, which connects to most recent Sound Blaster sound cards, and the Phone Blaster 28.8 DSVD, which includes the equivalent of a Sound Blaster 16 card onboard, complete with IDE CD-ROM drive interface.

But Eiger Labs' HeadOn modem has attracted the most attention in the PC games world, due to its low price, its easy-to-use PlayLink software and the low latency time of Phylon Communications' PHY2000 modem chipset. (Phylon originally planned to sell modems under its own name, but decided to leave the manufacture and marketing of end-user products to customers like Eiger Labs.) The HeadOn modem works with any DOS or Windows game that offers "serial port" or "null modem link" as choices on its setup menu. The menu-driven PlayLink software initializes the modem with the optimum communications settings for each game and lets you dial the number for a voice call to your opponent before you start up the game.

Latency, or delay time, was once a problem in long-distance voice phone calls. It took about a half-second for one party to hear the other's words, and their reply would be delayed by another half second on the way back, slowing down the repartee enough to make each person think that the other must be slightly dimwitted. Latency can also distort time in disturbing ways in games, leaving you shooting at opponents who are already dead, or letting an enemy shoot you before you even see him enter the room. Any modem operating at 28.8 kbps has an inherent delay of at least 100ms, while Phylon claims 17ms end-to-end latency for the PHY2000, about half of what a standard data-only modem can do even at lower data rates.

The HeadOn currently has a maximum data rate of 14.4 kbps when used as a standard data or fax modem, with no error correction or data compression available. Phylon points out that games don't move much data in head-to-head play, and several publishers recommend connecting at 9600 bps with error correction and data compression disabled anyway. These choices keep the latency time down, and they also keep glitches from interrupting in gameplay, when static or some other noise on the phone line would force the modems to renegotiate their connection settings at higher speeds.

Phylon and Eiger Labs promise to support standards like V.34, V.42, and V.42bis via software upgrades, as well as other features like the Voice AT command set used by answering machine and voice-mail software. Phylon also plans to add V.64 support when the DSVD standard is finalized, but only for communicating with other brands of modems. When connected to another HeadOn modem, they'll still use Phylon's proprietary protocol for better game playing. But buying anything on the promise of future software upgrades is a risk — despite the best of intentions, a lot of companies have had trouble delivering these kinds of upgrades to existing hardware. Fortunately for Eiger Labs, the HeadOn modem is an interesting product based solely on what it can do right now.

PCG

Tim Victor

They're the hottest letters in modem-speak today: DSVD. But what does Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data mean for PC gaming, and when should you upgrade?

NCAA Meets GTE

Software companies have pretty much succeeded in their obligation to create simulations of all my favorite sports. Let's see, there's auto racing, pro football, baseball, pro basketball, hockey, soccer, golf, and horse racing — all recreated with sims that range from decent to great.

There are sims that give you the chance to try your virtual hand at virtually any sport — a shot at glory for those of us who are too old, too lazy, or too uncoordinated to do the real thing.

It's true, I'm a fan of just about every sport. I even spent a few minutes watching some bowling the other night — that should satisfy my bowling fever for a few years, at least.

Outside of NASCAR racing, college hoops tops my list of favorite sports. But except for Bethesda's *NCAA: Road to the Final Four* — an ambitious sim that turned out to be a bit of a disappointment — no one's tried to simulate the intensity of college basketball.

Granted, basketball is a challenging sport to simulate on the computer. You've got ten guys on the court, all doing their own thing, running plays and guarding each other. It must be pretty tough for a programmer to pull all that off and keep things running smoothly.

Still, it can be done; Electronic Arts showed us that with *NBA Live 95*, a slammin' and jammin' sim of pro hoops. For my money, though, the pros can't match the electric excitement of the college game.

First, the good news: GTE Entertainment is touting *NCAA Championship Basketball* — you've probably seen the ads — and boy, does it look like the total package. Now, the bad news: You've probably noticed the game still isn't on the shelves. That's because its original ship-date of February has been pushed back —and I mean *way* back. They're now saying the game won't be released until October. The stumbling block, apparently, is the artificial intelligence of the players. Still, if GTE Entertainment can get it right, I don't mind waiting.

The action gets fast and furious in GTE's *NCAA Championship Basketball* — and I can't wait!

Lee Buchanan

And an early look at this sim gives me yet another reason to live. *NCAA* will feature the 64 tournament teams, 3D graphics with real home courts, more than 100 individual player moves, players who mature during their four years at college (no word yet on whether or not some will turn pro early), and modem play. There will also be regular-season play, although it's unclear how the game will simulate conference play with only the 64 tournament teams included.

There's a 4MB demo available for download from GTE's web site at *http://www.im.gte.com*. It's not an interactive demo, but it will give you a taste of some delicious graphics. For me, though, it's too painful to look at these screen shots — I wanna play this game *now*. Oh well; we hoops fans can now look forward to a little October madness. Go Tar Heels!

In a recent column, I discussed some concerns that gamers have over Sierra On-Line's acquisition of Papyrus, the makers of *NASCAR Racing* and *IndyCar Racing*. The fear was that Papyrus's track record of excellence would somehow be compromised under its new, much larger, corporate parent.

Not to worry, says Sierra: We're big, but we're not bad. Sierra's Rebecca Buxton points out that some of the companies that Sierra has purchased might not have survived on their own, and some of the fine games they created would never have seen the light of day. So if you enjoy flying in *Red Baron* or *Aces of the Pacific*, driving for the winning score in *Front Page Sports: Football* (all Dynamix-developed games), or conquering Rome in Impression's *Caesar II*, give Sierra some credit for bringing these products to us.

PCG

Finally; college hoops on the PC. GTE's basketball game has all 64 tournament teams.

The NBA is great, but it can't match the electricity of NCAA basketball — and, come October, college hoops fans will have another reason to be excited.

Play Head to Head via modem

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Product Information Number 153

STRATEGY CENTRAL

SOLUTIONS • TECHNIQUES • QUICK TIPS

Welcome to another action-packed edition of *Strategy Central*, with tips and cheats for 3D Realms' explosive *Doom*-style shooter, *Duke Nukem 3D*. We'll also take a walk in those monstrous 'Mechs from the *MechWarrior 2* expansion pack, and dig deep to find cheat codes for Ocean's action-strategy game *Worms*.

Write to us at:

PC GAMER
150 North Hill Dr.,
Brisbane, CA 94005
or
E-mail:
peeceegee@aol.com
74431,3433@compuserve.com

Duke Nukem 3D

You gonna pull those pistols, or whistle Dixie?

If you've checked out the *Duke Nukem 3D* demo on *The CD* or the *PC Gamer* web site, you've probably noticed it's the closest thing to *Doom* since — well, *Doom*. And just like *Doom*, *Duke*'s fast action and multi-player options have resulted in more lost productivity at the *PC Gamer* offices than a major earthquake. So when it came time to compile a few tips and strategies for the shareware version of *Duke*, it wasn't hard to get the strategy crew fired up for some action. Here are a few of our favorite techniques and secret hiding places for the first two levels of *Duke* (which are great for multi-player games, by the way), and as always, we've got a supply of handy cheat codes, too.

Instead of relying heavily on not-so-secret doors, *Duke Nukem 3D* often puts its hidden goodies behind impressive scenery like this movie screen. Just watch for large cracks in the walls, and give 'em a blast with a rocket launcher or pipe bomb to see if you can uncover a secret.

Getting started

As you enter Level One, you've narrowly escaped a terrible crash that has left your rocket cycle in ruins, and now you've got to grope your way through a strange city full of aliens with only a pistol for defense. Even for a top-notch action hero like Duke Nukem, that's a daunting task. Fortunately, we can point you in the right direction and get you the firepower that'll have you blasting baddies with ease (and along the way, we'll show you how to find those secret areas you've been missing).

The basic *Doom* techniques work well with *Duke* — strafing, running from danger, and saving your game frequently are high on the list of life-saving procedures. But Duke has a few more tricks up his sleeve than the legendary Space Marine — like the ability to fly, jump, duck, look up and down, and even scuba-dive. Keep those in mind — limiting yourself to the moves you mastered while playing *Doom* can be fatal in *Duke Nukem*.

Uncovering the secrets

Unlike in *Doom*, the old Use/Open control won't always uncover secret rooms. Instead, you'll need to watch for cracks in the walls, which you can turn into doorways through the judicious application of a rocket launcher or pipe bomb. Other secret passages are hidden behind posters on the wall or windows that look solid. A great way to gather clues about secret areas is to check the security cam-

INVENTORY

HEALTH PACK

This handy carrying case provides you with health whenever you're feeling beat. Keep it selected in your inventory, and give the Enter key a smack to use it during those close encounters of the worst kind.

STEROIDS

This tiny bottle contains all the nutrients a buff superhero could ever need — and as a side effect, it gives you blinding speed for a short period of time. It's great for evading monsters or heavily armed Dukematch partners.

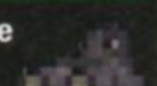
HOLODUKE

This clever piece of technology lets you generate a carbon copy of your character, which can confuse the hell out of your enemies if you use it right. Like the pipe bombs, the Holoduke is tailor-made for Dukematch action.

JET PACK

Soar through the sky with the greatest of ease. Well, it *is* pretty easy once you get the hang of it, and it's the only way to reach some secret areas.

NIGHT VISION GOGGLES



Pierce the cold black of night with these stealthy and fashionable goggles from 3D Realms. You'll be the envy of all your friends as you shuck shotgun shells in complete darkness while they scurry for cover.

SCUBA GEAR

Later in the game, Duke will have to get his feet wet to uncover the evil behind the sudden increase in the marauding-alien population. The scuba gear kicks in whenever you dive underwater and lets you swim safely, but it has a limited lifetime.

PROTECTIVE BOOTS

Wouldn't you know it? Those aliens have begun polluting our rivers and streams with radioactive sludge that can give a man a really rotten case of athlete's foot. Grab a pair of these boots to make the trip a little easier.

The cash register inside the movie theater lobby holds a secret of its own; just press it using the Use/Open key to reveal a secret room.

eras located throughout each level; if you spot a location that looks unfamiliar even after you've discovered the end-level switch, chances are you're looking at a secret area you haven't visited yet.

Weaponry

Now you've got the moves down, and you're uncovering the secrets — but are you making the most of your firepower? If you could use a few tips on getting the most out of your limited supply of ammo, read on.

PISTOL: Against all but the weakest enemies, Duke's standard-issue pea-shooter should be considered a weapon of last resort, but its high rate of fire and nearly limitless ammo does make it perfect for special uses like triggering distant switches to unlock doors, or turning those annoying organic turrets to pulp.

SHOTGUN: Ah, now this is more like it! The shotgun is the best choice for those close-quarters fire-fights against tough foes like the Pig Cops or those teleporting kitties.

CHAINGUN: Wanna spray lead like water from a hose? This is your weapon of choice, useful for mowing down crowds of fiendish aliens or picking off moving targets like those pesky Pig Cops on their flying bikes. Dig 'em a hole, and pass the ammunition!

ROCKET LAUNCHER: This is the biggest gun you'll find in the shareware version of *Duke 3D*, and like the rocket launcher in *Doom*, the RPG in *Duke* is a double-edge sword. It's certainly the right tool for the job when you're taking out large groups of bad guys from long range or blowing holes in walls, but its dangerous backwash makes it deadly if you use it close-up, so be careful where you point it.

You can score yourself a rocket launcher very early in the game by jumping on the large crate near the start of the first level, then hopping up onto this nearby ledge to reach a secret location.

PIPE BOMB: The perfect anti-personnel weapon, the pipe bomb can have you blowing apart baddies even when you're far from the scene. With their throw-now-and-blow-later design, you use pipe bombs to create an explosive trap for those alien goons. To drop several bombs in the same spot without setting them off, press the 6 key after each one to switch from the detonator button to another pipe bomb. When you're ready for the fireworks, blowing the last bomb you dropped should set them all off. By laying a network of pipe bombs, you can engulf big chunks of real estate in massive explosions. This trick has its uses against the computer-controlled opponents in the single-player game, but it's infinitely more satisfying in multi-player Dukematch action.

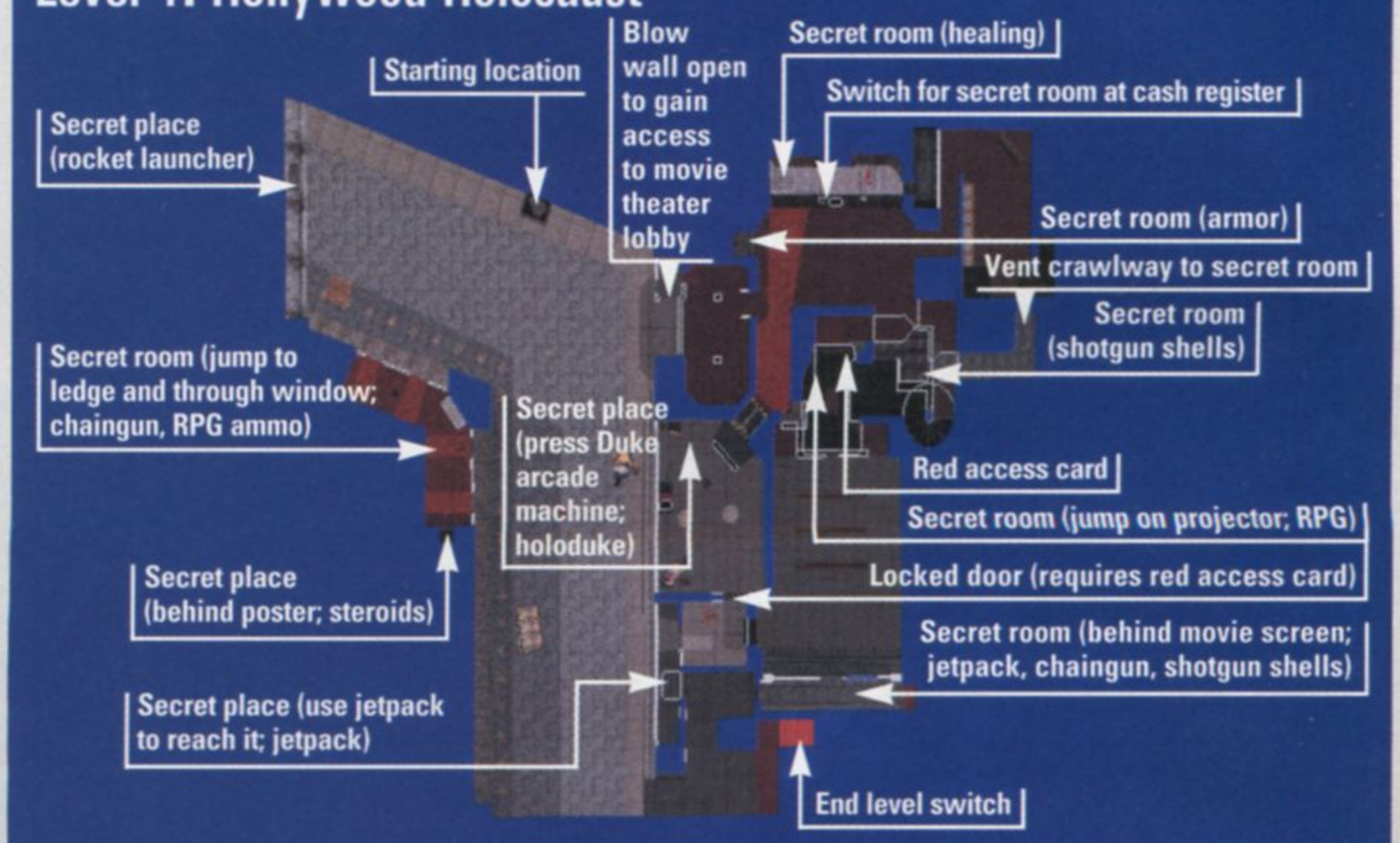
COME GET SOME!

If you're still having trouble, never fear, we've cracked the codes to give you God Mode, weapons galore, and those special inventory items. To activate the cheats, just type the code during the game. Note: If you have reconfigured the keyboard controls from their default layout, you may have trouble getting the codes to work properly.

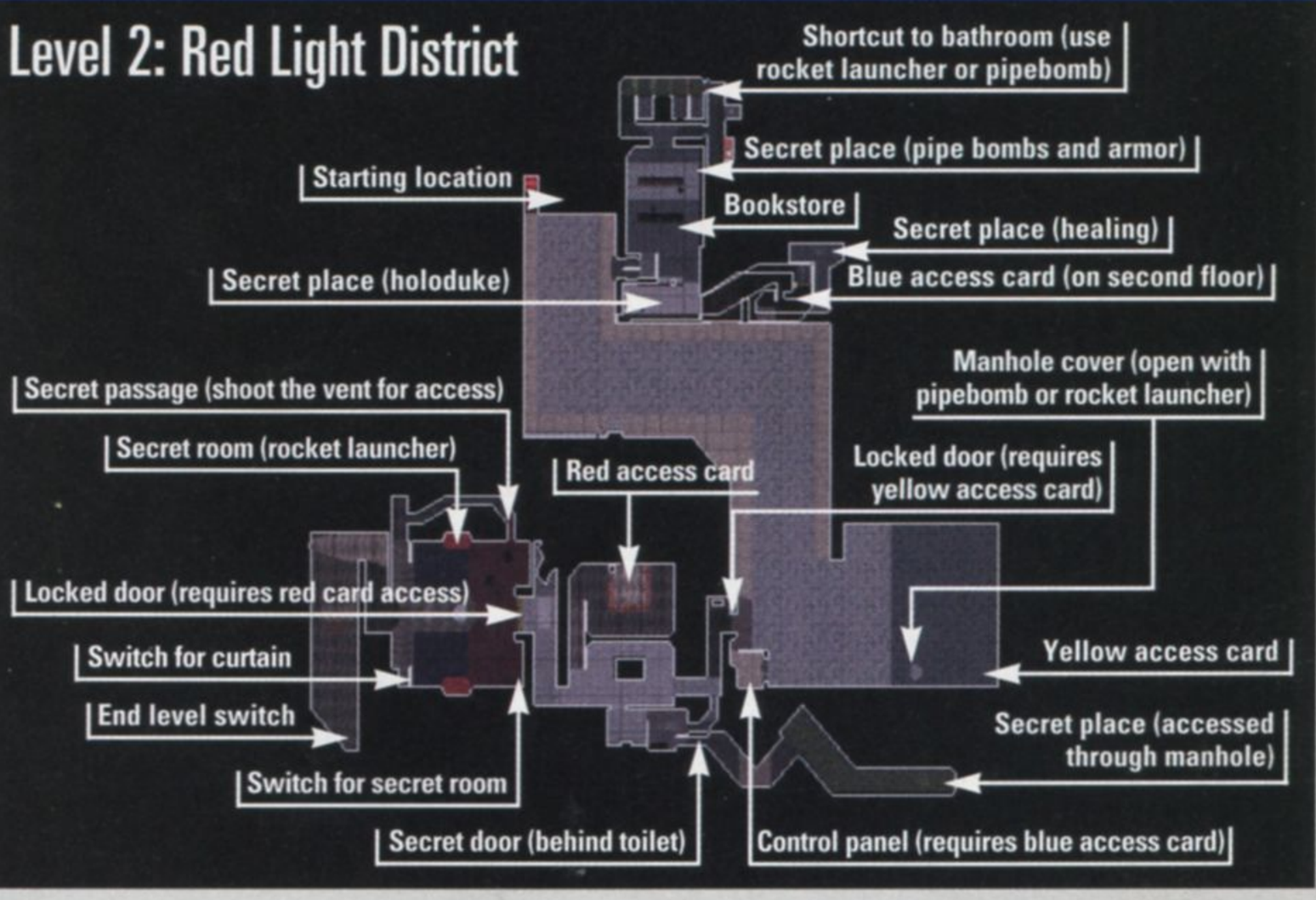
DNCORNHOLIO or DNKROZ — God Mode
DNSTUFF — Gives you all inventory items, weapons
DNVIEW — Gives you a view of Duke from behind (same as F7)
DNCASHMAN — Every time you push the USE/OPEN key, Duke throws out some cash
DNITEMS — Gives you inventory items
DNSCOTTY — Level warp. Type in the code, followed by the episode number, then the level number. For example, type DNSCOTTY13 to warp to Episode One, Level Three.

FINDING YOUR WAY

Level 1: Hollywood Holocaust



Level 2: Red Light District



MechWarrior 2: Ghost Bear's Legacy

Cheat your way through the demanding missions in the Mech 2 expansion pack!

Activision's eagerly awaited expansion pack to *MechWarrior 2, Ghost Bear's Legacy*, has been a big hit with die-hard 'Mech fans who couldn't get enough of the original game. But unless you're an experienced 'Mech driver, the new and more powerful 'Mechs in *Ghost Bear's Legacy* are both a blessing and a curse. Not only do you have to learn the controls of these new machines, but now you're faced with much stiffer opposition as well. And since the cheat codes for the original *MechWarrior 2* don't work with *GBL*, novice drivers can be left out in the cold. Help is on the way, though; we've got the cheat codes that will give you an edge when facing down those menacing 'Mechs.

To activate the cheats, just type them while holding down the Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys.

KENT — Invulnerability
CLARK — X-RAY Vision (wireframe view)
KABOOM — Destroy All Enemies (must have Invulnerability activated)

Stand your ground with confidence as you battle the new 'Mechs in the *Ghost Bear's Legacy* expansion disk for *MechWarrior 2* with these killer cheats.

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Worms

A cheat guaranteed to make you feel all crawly!

With the help of Team 17, Ocean of America brought us their humor-filled action/strategy title, *Worms*, one of the strangest and funniest little games we've seen in a while. With its random map generator, user-definable character values, and options galore, the simple and addictive gameplay of *Worms* is a welcome change of pace after a days of hard-edged gaming with the likes of *Command & Conquer* or *Warcraft II*. While we haven't run across any cheat codes to make it easier to beat the devilishly tough computer AI or to give you an edge against human opponents, we did unearth at least one hilarious and functional cheat that's at least good for a laugh. Type BAABAA at the weapons options screen, and each team of worms will have access to two deadly new weapons and one new tool. The first weapon — the exploding sheep — replaces the standard land mine. Once released, this furry critter bounds cheerfully around the battlefield until its timer runs out, then explodes in a hail of haggis, leaving deadly mines behind. The other is the banana bomb, which turns the ordinary grenade into a shower of banana-shaped projectiles that rain down and explode over the battlefield.

As for the new tool, you'll now have 360 degrees of movement on the ninja rope, letting you swing your way over danger.

The banana bomb gives the battlefield action an even more twisted feel as it rains exploding peels.

Now you have full 360 movement on the ninja rope. Perfect for assaults from above.

In addition to the already bizarre weapons and tools included in *Worms*, this clever cheat lets you destroy your enemies with the help of fluffy white exploding sheep. Very bizarre.

What you fear, you will covet.
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What you ravage, you will rule.
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Find Yourself in One Hell of a Game!

PC game companies are always promising to put you "in the game," but how many really come through with the goods? The folks at Blizzard, creators of the incredible *Warcraft II*, are ready to deliver. Their latest game, *Diablo*, promises to be a multi-player roleplaying spectacular worthy of the Blizzard name — just imagine how proud your mother will be when your name appears right there on the screen!

Win the contest, and Blizzard will put your name in the game — as a monster, a weapon, or a magical item. You'll also get an original, honest-to-goodness, one-of-a-kind *Diablo* sculpture to add a touch of class to your own dungeon or den, an autographed copy of the game, and some painfully cool Blizzard stuff — like t-shirts, baseball caps, and Blizzard's legendary giant mouse pad (a favorite in the *PCG* offices). Ten runners-up will get Blizzard stuff, too.

To enter, just write your name and address on a postcard and shoot it out to:

The Diablo Contest
P.O. Box 18077
Irvine, CA 92713

The big drawing will be held at the 1996 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles the weekend of May 16, so be sure to mail your entry right away (just one entry per person, please)!

• No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. One entry per person. For a complete set of rules, write your name, address, age, and telephone number on a 3"x5" card and mail it to: *PC Gamer* Diablo Contest, P.O. Box 18077, Irvine, CA 92713. All entries must be received by May 9, 1996. The first randomly selected entry will win the grand prize; the next ten will be runners-up. The editors' decisions are final. •

Diablo, Blizzard's first venture into the roleplaying field, blends traditional fantasy gaming with gorgeous graphics and multi-player action.

LETTERS

Since we got such a big response to our last few reader questions, we've decided to hit you with another. Multi-player games are becoming more common, but not all of them have support for modems or serial links. So we're wondering: How many of you have access to a local-area network for multi-player games? And if you're playing on the office network, what game is eating most of your time at work?

Let's Hear From You!

Write to:

PC Gamer Letters
150 North Hill Dr.,
Brisbane, CA 94005

or E-mail to:

peeceegee@aol.com
74431,3433@compuserve.com
http://www.pcgamer.com

Caution: Coffee is Hot

Dear PC Gamer,
I was sitting down to a nice Sunday cup of java, when I came upon "*PC Gamer* Leftovers" in March 1996's edition, and began reading with interest. I was laughing fairly hard when I took a big swig of coffee, and continued on into the review of "Lawn Darts '96: The Deadly Game." To put it lightly, I never made it through the rest of the magazine. Coffee coursed through my sinuses, and I murmured "night sweats..." for hours.

Thanks for the levity,
Blitzen641
via AOL

Sorry about that, Blitz. We know how painful a case of Nescafe Nose can be. We're all wishing you a swift recovery — and, more importantly, we hope you didn't get coffee on the magazine.

Some Hate Mail

Dear PC Gamer,
I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!! So far you guys have cost me over $300 and countless hours of otherwise productive time! First it was *Thunderscape*, then *Dark Forces*, then *Capitalism*. Now you've gone and hit me with *Warcraft II*! Stop it already! If it weren't for you, I'd have a fatter mutual fund, a closer relationship with my girl, and a promotion. Instead, I have bags under my eyes, empty pockets, and orcs swamping my camps from morning to night.

Please, I beg of you, let me get some sleep. Stop writing good, accurate reviews. Get rid of that darn "Editors' Choice" tag, and most of all, *don't* send out any more demos on your CD. For the love of God, *stop it*!

Deranged, but yours,
Dan Terrill
Oxford, CT

That's a novel suggestion, Dan. At first, we rejected it outright, but then we got to thinking it certainly would be a lot less work if we stopped writing good reviews and putting together a CD full of interactive game demos every month. Frankly, that stuff has been taking up more and more of the time that we normally spend playing Duke Nukem 3D *over the office network.*

Your plan was starting to sound really good to us, but we ran it by our publisher, and he nixed the whole thing pretty darn quick. Apparently, some of our readers actually like *good reviews, previews of the latest games, and interactive game demos! Now get outta here, you crazy kid!*

Just like our readers, we know how tough it can be to *stop* playing good games such as *Thunderscape* (pictured above).

Switching into OverDrive

Dear PC Gamer,

I have a couple of questions concerning hardware: First, I have a 486DX2/66Mhz with 8MB of RAM. The motherboard accepts both five-volt and 3.3-volt processors. I am looking into getting an overdrive processor for it — either a DX4/100 or a Pentium OverDrive 83Mhz. I have talked to several people about which one is a better processor for running DOS-based games and Windows 3.1 applications. Two out of the three prefer the Pentium OverDrive, but what do you recommend?

Second, which sound card produces better sound, in your opinion — the Gravis Ultrasound Max or the Sound Blaster AWE 32 PnP?

Your Loyal Subscriber,
John Caneday
via AOL

Good question, John. Since the Pentium OverDrive uses a lot of the original Pentium's technology (including superscalar architecture, branch prediction, and a faster math coprocessor), it should give you a bigger performance boost than the DX4, even though it runs at a slightly slower internal clock speed. You'll want to make sure the Pentium OverDrive will work

Yes, It's a Real Letter

Dear PC Gamer,
I recently saw the name P.C. Gamer from Boulder, Colorado. My name is Raymond F. Gamer, and I come from Wisconsin. My father's name is Henry Gamer, and my mother's is Hattie (Holtz) Gamer. My relatives lived around the Colorado area, and some came from Germany and Poland. Maybe you know of them?

Thank you,
Raymond F. Gamer

Well, Raymond, it's a little-known fact that PC Gamer was named after Phineas Carrington Gamer, who founded the magazine in the 1930s as a livestock journal. While Phineas never lived in Boulder, he was a well-known naturalist, and frequently visited Colorado to ski and fish. When he retired from publishing in the late 1940s, Gamer settled in Pine Nut, a small town not far from Boulder, where he raised a small family and eventually went irretrievably insane.

with your system; you can call Intel at (800) 525-3019 for the latest copy of their Upgrade Guide. As for the sound card question, Deputy Editor Todd Vaughn has tried both, and he says the Ultrasound Max sounds a little better than the AWE32. But if you've already got a Sound Blaster 16, and you're just looking to upgrade to better synthesized sounds, you might want to check out the add-on wavetable cards from Roland and Yamaha.

Switching into OverDrive: Are you wondering about the performance of the Pentium OverDrive? We've got the answers.

It Came from the Third Dimension

Dear PC Gamer,
Bravo! I've been waiting for months now for a reliable computer magazine to give us the inside scoop on the 3D graphics acceleration arena. Until now, I've been forced to access web sites, fax-back services, and E-mail from multiple 3D vendors, trying to compile the very information I found in "Gaming in the 3rd Dimension" (January and February 1996 issues). To think I spent all those weeks compiling only a fraction of the information you provided for us in minutes!

I was especially impressed with the comparison charts. For the first time ever — for any hardware products reviewed by any magazine — I felt that the comparison charts were actually complete! (No further questions, your honor!)

Please tell me that you will revisit 3D accelerators when more cards become available, like those that will be based on ATI's 3D Range, and the PCI version of Creative Labs 3D Blaster. Hopefully, Direct3D will be released soon, and the next wave of comparisons will include "standard" 3D benchmarking as well. Keep up the great work, and keep those great articles coming!

Sincerely,
Joe DeFuria
Baton Rouge, LA

Glad you liked the feature, Joe — you just made all the work that went into it worthwhile. But if we learned anything in putting it together, it's that we're just seeing the beginning of the 3D acceleration wave. The second generation of 3D graphics boards is just around the corner, and it promises to be even more exciting than the first. Naturally, we'll keep you posted.

Your Wish is Our Command

Dear PC Gamer,
Are you planning on implementing AutoPlay for Win95 on your CD? Other than that, the new CD format is very good. As far as I know, putting AutoPlay on would only require the addition of a small .inf file in the root directory of the CD.

Thanks,
M. Cheu
via AOL

We thought you'd never ask. Actually, we've planned from the start to make The CD an AutoPlay disk — and if you bought the CD-ROM edition of this issue, you've got the first one in your hands right now. Just pop it in your drive, and watch it go!

Dear PC Gamer,
I am a big fan of your magazine, but there is one area where I've found your coverage to be lacking — online, multiplayer gaming. Thus far, your coverage has been limited to large online services such as GEnie, INN, and DWANGO.

While I think these services are great, they are somewhat expensive, and playing more than a few hours per month will put kind of a strain on any gamer's budget.

I would love to see some coverage on Internet gaming using programs like *Kali*. *Kali* is an amazing little shareware program that lets you play IPX-compatible network games across the Internet using a standard modem and a SLIP or PPP account.

There are several *Kali* servers up and running all over the country, and with over 5,000 registered users, there's never any problem finding willing and able opponents. It only costs $20 to register for *Kali*, and access to the *Kali* servers is free.

Your readers deserve to know that there are online gaming alternatives to melting down you credit card by using INN or DWANGO!

Sincerely,
Dave Baril
Pawtucket, RI

Funny you should say that, Dave. As you may already have noticed, we address Kali and a lot of the other new options for online gaming — as well as the bigger services — in this month's cover feature. We aim to please!

PCG

Second Opinions

Each year we pick our *PC Gamer* Award winners, and each year we get bins of mail telling us just how wrong our choices were. Since our readers' opinions count just as much as ours, here's a selection of what you had to say:

"In your March issue, you chose *Warcraft II* as the game of the year instead of *Command & Conquer*. I don't think so. I would hate to be in your shoes when the mail comes in."
Darren Coleman
via the Internet

"Look, I know that *MechWarrior 2* is a good action game, but how could you not give the award to *Dark Forces*? It has all the cool tie-ins with the Star Wars universe, not to mention the fact that it's a very kick-ass game."
Roland Flay
Dayton, OH

"We're rude, we're crude, and we *deserved* adventure game of the year, you dill-hole!"

"I have just read your Awards issue, and I must take one exception with one of your picks, which happens to be in my favorite genre: adventure gaming. Your choice of *Beavis & Butt-head in Virtual Stupidity* was, well... stupid."
Mark Washington
Washington, D.C.

"Why didn't you pick a roleplaying game of the year? I know that pickings were scarce, but come on, it wasn't that bad a year: *The Legend of Kyrandia: Malcolm's Revenge*; *Jagged Alliance*; the list goes on and on."
Ken Jamison
Springfield, IL

"Hey, I love *Warcraft II* as much as the next gamer, but I think you all went overboard. It received game of the year honors, as well as best multi-player game. I think one award is enough for Blizzard; you should have recognized the efforts from other excellent game companies like Virgin, Origin, and LucasArts."
Sophia Purvell
Eugene, OR

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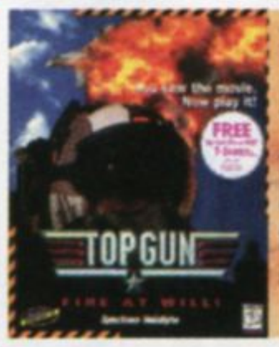

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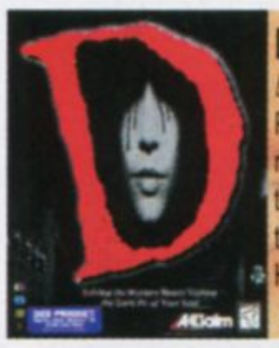

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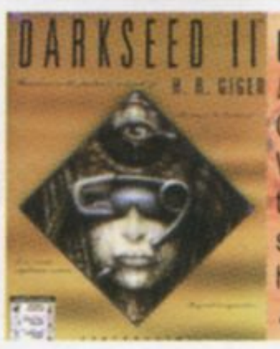

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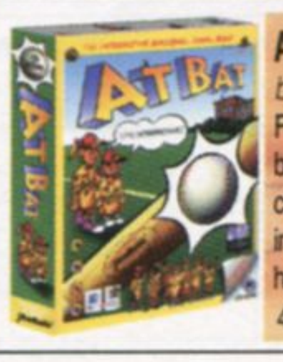

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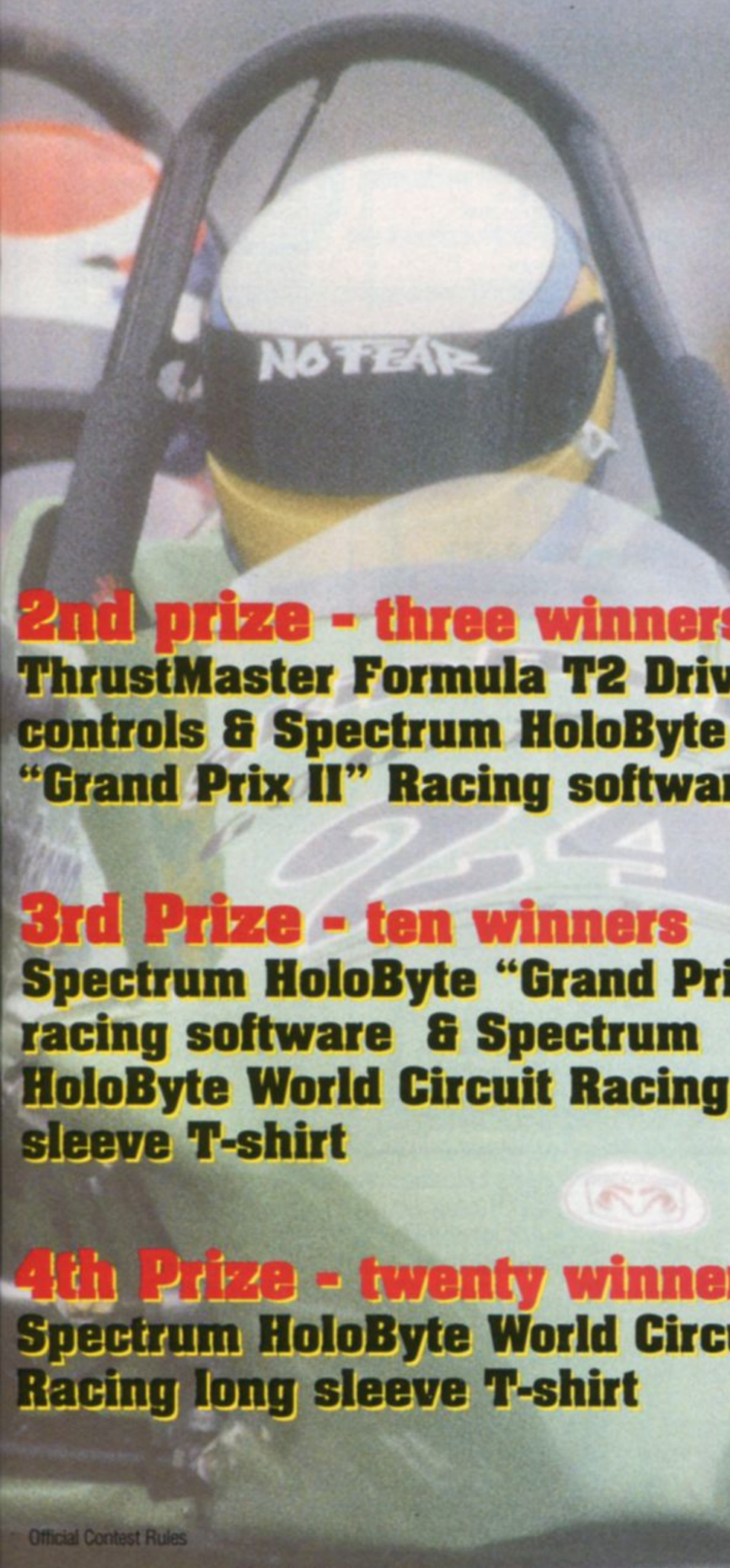

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3. Drawing: Winners will be determined in a random drawing from all eligible entries on or about August 5,1996, by ThrustMaster Inc. whose decisions are final on all matters relating to this contest. Winners will be notified by mail on August 15, 1996. Grand prize and Runner up prize winners will be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility and a liability/publicity release within 14 days of notification or prize will be forfeited. In the event of a non-compliance, an alternate winner will be selected. Unclaimed prizes will not be awarded. Sponsor's are not responsible for non-delivery of prize notifications by the U.S. Postal Service.
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5. General: By entering, participants release Sponsors from all liability with respect to use of the prizes awarded herein, to be bound by these rules, and consent to the use of their name and likeness for advertising and promotional purposes without additional compensation, except where prohibited by law. Contest void where prohibited by law and subject to all federal, state and local laws and regulations.
6. Contest Winners Responsibilities and Obligations: Winning participants in the Skip Barber Racing School are subject to all rules and regulations outlined by Skip Barber Racing in accordance with their racing programs. The two winning participants will receive a gift certificate equal in value to the five day competition course, valid for one year from date of issue. Winners will be responsible for selecting the location and attendance dates by September 30, 1996, with a minimum of 30 days notice to contest organizers. Winning participants are responsible for arranging any and all insurance and liability coverage with Skip Barber Racing Schools.
7. List of Winners: For the names of winners, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Contest Results c/o ThrustMaster Inc. 10150 S.W. Nimbus Ave. Portland, OR 97223, no later than October 1, 1996. Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of winners lists.
8. Sponsors: Imagine Publishing, Inc 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Suite 210, Burlingame, California, 94010. Spectrum HoloByte, Inc. 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, California, 94501. NEC Technologies, Inc. 339 North Bernardo, Mountain View, California, 94043-5223. ThrustMaster Inc. 10150 S.W. Nimbus, Portland, Oregon, 97223. Skip Barber Racing School, 29 Brook St., P.O. Box 1629, Lakeville, Connecticut, 06039.

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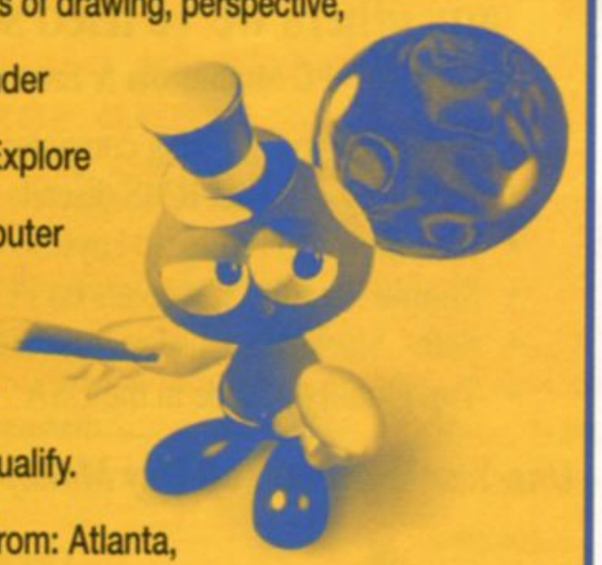

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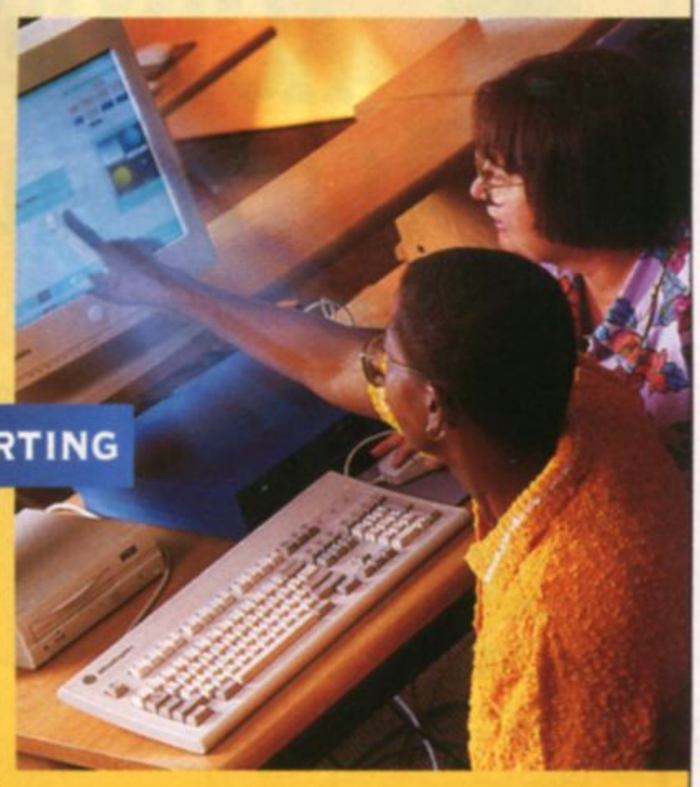

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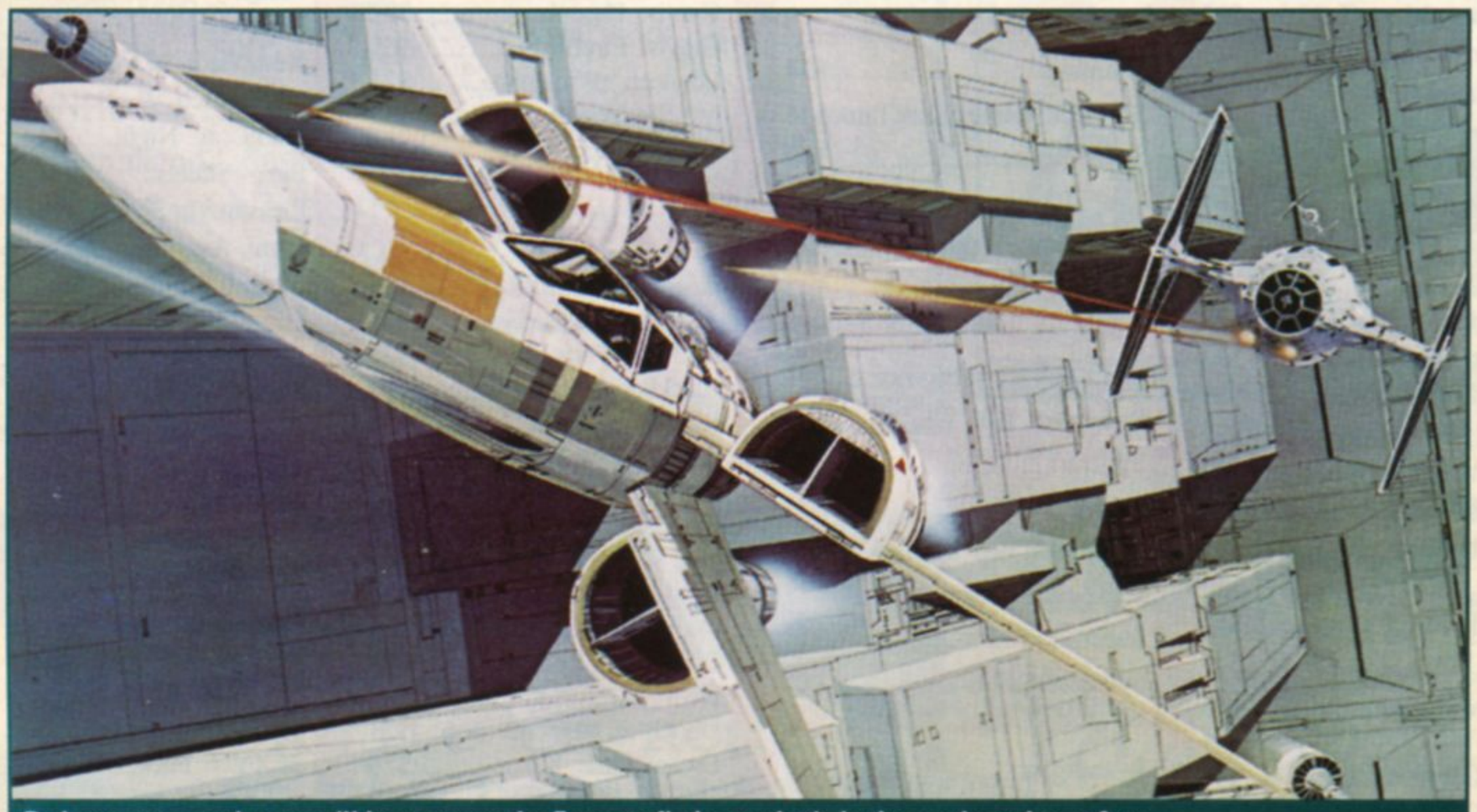
NEXT TIME...

Every month, we sacrifice a young goat and examine its entrails to predict what will appear in the next *PC Gamer*. Here's what poor little Billy said we'll bring you in June....

Vol. 3 No. 6 Goes On Sale May 14 Don't Miss It!

Return of the Jedi

If you love LucasArts' games — from *X-Wing* to *TIE Fighter* to *Dark Forces* — you've *got* to be here next month for our exclusive, inside story on the new wonders LucasArts has in store for us. There's some really exciting work going on at LucasFilm Ranch — and we're not just talking about the next Star Wars movie. You won't find it anywhere else, so camp out today at your mailbox or newsstand to wait for our exciting June issue!



Be here next month, or you'll have to use the Force to find out what's in the works at LucasArts.

Reviews Index

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Quick! Which graphic adventure got the highest rating in the last six months?

Some of our readers could answer that question in a heartbeat — but that's because they're dangerously crazy, and they commit every issue of *PCG* to memory. All *you* have to do is check the latest installment of our Reviews Index in the June *PC Gamer*.

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As the familiar aroma of cow manure wafted up through the rafters into Stearns' nostrils, Stearns took a cautious step toward the pigeon. He carefully manuevered his gun, trying to make as little noise as possible. If he startled the pigeon, he knew his chance at winning the town shooting contest was slim. He was only one bird away from breaking Clarence Johnson's record of 40 birds in a week, and he didn't want to blow it. The pigeon shifted and stared at Stearns, as though it knew Stearns was about to waste it. Stearns got a bead on the bird, took a deep breath, pulled back on the trigger, and ... BAM! Suddenly Stearns broke through the floor, plummetted through the air, and landed in a deep pile of bovine pie. He immediately felt two painful sensations — one in his head and one in his behind. Blood was streaming into his eyes from his forehead, and as he put his hand up to stop the blood flow, he began vomiting. When the nasuea passed, Stearns lay back in the manure, gasping for breath. Then he noticed that the excrutiating pain in his butt had not gone away. He reached back and pulled the grapefruit spoon — his *favorite* grapefruit spoon — out of his ass. His mother always told him not to carry it around...

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